
Research on Korean activism and nationalism during the Japanese colonial period is often focused on elite and urban movements. This is in spite of the fact that the vast majority of Koreans at this time still lived in rural areas, even though industrialization and urbanization was changing Korean society. Much of the research on the social and political outlook of Korean activism in colonial times also centers on the importance for Korea to not only seek independence, but also to establish an industrial capitalist economy or an industrial socialist economy as the foundation of a “modern” nation-state. Organized religion also played an important role in Korean activism and nationalism, although it is often felt that its influence declined in the 1920s and 1930s. Albert Park’s book Heaven on Earth attempts to remedy this neglect by focusing on Protestant Christian and Ch’ŏndogyo agrarian activism in colonial Korea in the 1920s and 1930s. These movements emphasized the importance of agriculture as the foundation of Korea’s economy and society and called for improvements in agricultural technology and cooperative organization of Korean agriculture as an alternative to industrialization and the social upheaval that it provoked.

Park’s book is divided into two parts. The first part is made up of chapters outlining the origins of Tonghak/Ch’ŏndogyo and Protestant Christianity in Korea and their connection with social activism; economic and social changes in colonial Korea and their impact on rural society, agriculture, urbanization, and industrialization; and lastly, the origins of religious social ideology in Korea in
the 1920s and 1930s, especially as a response to anti-religious discourses that were gaining influence after the failure of the March 1919 independence demonstrations and the rise of secular socialist and bourgeois nationalist thought. Park uses the examples of Yi Tonhwa, a prominent Ch’ŏndogyo thinker, Hong Pyŏngsŏn of the YMCA, and the Presbyterian activist Pae Minsu to show how some religious activists reacted to the interactions of social and economic change and the place of religion in relation to modernity. These thinkers, in their different ways, came to the conclusion that modernization did not necessarily imply industrialization or secularization. Instead, a focus on cooperative organization of agriculture infused with religious principles would permit the majority of the Korean population to access the benefits of modernity while remaining in the countryside and thus reduce the social upheaval that came with industrial urbanization.

The second part of the book focuses more specifically on the organization of agricultural cooperatives and campaigns of literacy and education to help promote peasant self-improvement. Denmark had become the showcase for agrarian cooperatives and the Ch’ŏndogyo-led Chosŏn nongminsā, Hong’s YMCA and Pae Minsu’s Presbyterian movement all inspired themselves from the Danish model. These movements were not necessarily against capitalist modernity, but instead proposed alternative models that would protect peasants and strengthen their village organizations and more fairly distribute profits from agriculture to producers in order to improve the lives of farmers and their villages. In this way, these cooperative movements were different from traditional agrarian movements that were based on Confucian ideology and which embraced traditional village organization as a way of fighting against capitalist economics and colonial modernization programs. Cooperative financing was also important in order to compete against banks and state funding and also to give more accessible credit to farmers. Religion was important to provide the organizational and moral glue to keep these cooperatives together. In this way, religion could show itself as an important force of social change in a modernizing society, aiming to create both new humans and new alternatives of social and economic organization. All of these organizations also focused on rural education and literacy promotion and published numerous journals and educational aids. Rural youth education was particularly important so as to educate future rural leaders and also to reduce the attractions of migration to the industrial cities that threatened to weaken and destabilize rural society.

In the end, these rural cooperative movements would come to an end in the mid-to late 1930s because of the clampdown on Korean social organizations as Japan expanded its wars in the Asia-Pacific. The Protestant Christian organiz-
ations also faced some opposition within their religion by more fundamentalist leaders who saw social and political action as a distraction from what they viewed as the exclusively spiritual mission of the Christian church. In spite of this, Albert Park asserts that these colonial movements left a legacy for postwar cooperative agrarian movements in Korea and thus offer a native precedent to later movements focused on rural mobilization.

Albert Park has written an informative book about previously neglected religious social movements that focused on the majority of Koreans where they lived, namely peasant agriculturalists who lived in the countryside. The book outlines well the background to these movements, although the background to the Protestant Christian movements is stronger than for Ch’ŏndogyo. The book only gives background for Ch’ŏndogyo’s predecessor, Tonghak, without going into Ch’ŏndogyo’s actions after its foundation in late 1905. The author could have given more information on Ch’ŏndogyo’s interactions with farmers in the countryside in the first two decades of the twentieth century, especially due to the fact that Ch’ŏndogyo was most successful in rural areas. Also, it is difficult to evaluate the actual success of these movements on the ground at the time. Most of the book is spent on descriptions of the set-up of the various programs and their theoretical foundation. It is much less clear about how these organizations actually functioned and their practical impact on colonial rural society. Finding sources on this is likely challenging, but more reference to reports in journals and newspapers on the activities of these organizations would have been helpful. In spite of these couple of shortcomings, Building a Heaven on Earth is a welcome addition that better helps us to understand the place of religion and social movements in colonial Korea.

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Has the Korean peninsula unified? This is perhaps a bold question as the two Koreas seem perennially locked in constant conflict and unification appears nothing more than a dream. Yet, Hyun Ok Park, a professor of sociology at
York University in Canada, argues that the peninsula in fact has been unified by neoliberal capital and transnationalism. This is all part of a larger trend, she argues, as Northeast Asia is becoming an economic entity in its own right through flow of trade and capital.

Divided into three major parts, the book begins with an overview of capitalist democracy within the framework of historical repetition and goes over the modern opposition between socialism, democracy and dictatorship. In part 2, Park focuses her analysis on the various Chinese-Korean communities that have settled in Yanbian and in Seoul. Park uses a rich library of interviews she conducted to explore the deep links between the Chinese-Korean community in Yanbian and the Korean-Chinese community in Seoul. Most interestingly, she explores the dual nationality of Korean-Chinese in the present and in the past, arguing that the experience of rejection and violence Korean-Chinese face in South Korea mirror that which they experienced during the Cultural Revolution. While comparing the Minsaengdan Incident of 1932-36 to present-day concerns along the Tumen River Valley, Park argues that observers must ignore traditional geopolitics and understand that these communities have already been united under a capitalist unconscious.

In part 3, Park deconstructs North Korea’s marketization, the Korean unification movement and North Korean human rights movement. Her analysis of marketization in North Korea is largely nothing new, but she devotes considerable space to the Korean unification and North Korean human rights movements. She places the North Korean human rights movement squarely as part of the “U.S. strategy of reconfiguring East Asia in the post-Cold War era” and argues that Korean missionaries translate a “market fantasy about neoliberal capitalism into yet another abstract language of spirituality and decipher the formula of wealth making.” (p. 286)

Park lays out a solid thesis that while the two Koreas remain divided by traditional markers of the nation-state, notably borders, these borders are porous and their communities have become united through an unconscious capitalism. It is no secret that the two Koreas have become much more integrated economically than during the Cold War – South Korean capital is now in North Korea, for example, through the establishment of the Kaesong Industrial Complex, and North Korea is actively courting capital and trade from overseas through its “special economic zones” in the country’s northeastern region. Park traces this trend from its macro to micro level, arguing that the capitalist unconscious is a uniting factor for all Korean communities inside and surrounding the Korean peninsula.

Her work also highlights the dichotomies between these communities. She
interviews Korean-Chinese and North Korean defectors, who, while appreciating South Korea’s capitalist paradise, speak of the persecution that they feel, even from each other. Korean-Chinese complain that North Korean defectors are “liars,” while North Korean defectors feel treated like “commodities” by Korean-Chinese. These ill feelings mirror perceptions by South Koreans of both communities and highlight the ultimate difficulty of cultural and social unification. Park lays the ground for understanding the two Korea’s economic unification—the most straightforward part of the unification process, one could argue. But real unification requires much more than the act of simply uniting two economic systems. Trade, capital, money – these are things that are easy for anyone to understand, regardless of the economic system they have lived under. North Korea has seen the rapid growth of jangmadang, black markets, that have allowed the country’s citizens to more or less embrace capitalism. Cultural and social unification, which can include the unraveling of decades of contradictory history learned in schools, different understandings of citizenship and government, and other more difficult issues, will, in comparison, require much more time to be resolved.

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Religious polemics can open a window into the process of creating (and erasing) boundaries between traditions. Violent polemics have taken such a central role in the imagery of inter-religious encounters in Europe and the Middle East that we often tend to underestimate the diatribes exchanged between the relatively tolerant East Asian traditions. Nevertheless, they certainly do deserve our attention. Charles Muller’s new book puts together translations of three such polemical works from fourteenth and fifteenth-century Korea: two critiques of Buddhism and Taoism by Chŏng Tojŏn (1342 – 1398), who was a major official in the early Chosŏn period and a founding member of the Confucian Academy of Sŏnggyun’gwan, and an apologetic response in defense of Buddhism by the Confucian-scholar-converted-into-Buddhist-monk, Kihwa (1376–1433). Muller,
a veteran translator of Chinese classical texts and the editor of the *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, provides us with a smooth, easy to read English rendering of the essays, accompanied by copious notes and a well-rounded introduction. For those interested in a closer look at some of the passages the full Chinese-character texts are conveniently available in the appendixes.

The introduction can be largely divided into two sections. The first section offers the essential historical context, locating the essays within the history of the Buddhist-Confucian encounter in China, as well as within the particular Korean political situation at the time. It is the second more theoretical part of the introduction that I found especially appealing. It centers on what Muller sees as the necessary shared infrastructure that provides the common ground allowing the debate in the first place, that is the essence-function *ti-yong* (K. *ch’e-yong*) 體用 framework. In an earlier paper Muller has called this the “pivot of metaphysics and hermeneutics”¹ of East Asian thought, and here he attempts to tie this mode of reasoning to what Robert Sharf has termed “sympathetic resonance” (Ch. *ganying*, K. *kamu˘ng* 感應), in which localized phenomena and the state of the whole always influence and reflect upon each other.² Muller explains this connection using the metaphor of a perfume—the concentrated essence “is always wholly unified with the most distant permeation of its aroma” (32). To put it plainly, East Asian polemics centered on arguments regarding the question as to which teachings were the essence and which were the function, which were the root and which were merely the branches. Yet, we must remember that even the farthest branches still resonate and are perfumed by the essence of the roots.

This becomes quite clear when reading the first translated essay, Chŏng’s *On Mind, Material Force, and Principle* (*Simgiri p’yŏn*, 心氣理篇). Its argument is rather straightforward: Buddhists mistake the Mind to be the root and Taoists mistake Material Force (*Qi*) to be the root, but these are only the branches and it is actually the (Confucian) Principle (*Li*) which is the primal essence that underlies (and perfumes) both Mind and *Qi*. This is a fascinating short essay, which, although it may misrepresent Buddhism and Taoism at times, generally helps to elucidate the different foci of the three traditions. It goes on to reiterate Zhu Xi’s critique of Buddhists as being overly fearful of death, saying that both

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Buddhists and Taoists spend their lives only attempting to escape or delay death, forgetting that justice and humaneness are more important than one’s body.

Chŏng’s later essay, *An Array of Critiques of Buddhism* (*Pulssi chappyŏn*, 佛氏雜辨), launches a more vehement attack against Buddhism. It states that Buddhist masters are glib, lewd, and tricky, spreading confusion and disputation among the people, and calls for the burning of their books. Such attacks on Buddhism were somewhat common in late fourteenth-century Korea, and similar polemics were raised by Pak Ch’o (1367-1454), Kang Hoebaek (1357-1402), Chŏng Ch’ŏng (1358-1397), and others. Muller explains that Chŏng’s ingenuity does not lay in contriving a new critique against Buddhism (as most of his arguments are taken right out of the writings of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi), but rather in assembling all existing criticisms into one coherent, comprehensive, well-organized treatise. It begins with 13 chapters attacking central Buddhist doctrines such as transmigration, karma, emptiness, and the existence of hells, and ends with five dubious historical interpretations in which the acceptance of Buddhism by Chinese rulers in the past supposedly brought calamities to their kingdoms and shortened the length of their rule. Similar attempts to scare rulers away from Buddhism were in fact prevalent in eighth-century Tang China as well, perhaps first put forward by Fu Yi in 624.

The last translation, Kihwa’s *Exposition of Orthodoxy* (*Hyo˘njo˘ng non* 显正論), is perhaps the most intriguing of the three. Muller explains that it is a rather rare historical Buddhist systematic attempt to answer the kind of criticisms raised against it by the Neo-Confucians. His rearrangement of the text into subtitled sections makes for a much clearer reading. Kihwa’s main strategy in this essay seems to be to use quotations from the Confucian classics in order to prove that the Buddhist teachings conform to the Confucian ideals. In fact, in some cases he tries to show that Buddhists follow Confucian virtues more closely than the Confucians themselves actually do. Reading Mencius in a very modern way, he wonders how the gentleman, who cannot bear to see the ox slaughtered, stays away from the kitchen, but continues to eat meat. Why do Confucians keep drinking alcohol though their books point out that it causes the loss of dignity, he exclaims. Perhaps it would be interesting in the future to try and compare this essay to another near-contemporary, yet-untranslated, Korean Buddhist apologetic work, the *Treatise on Questions between Confucians and Buddhists* (*Yusŏk chiri˘u non*儒釋質疑論), which Korean scholars often attribute to Kihwa as well.

Muller’s new book is a great new resource for anyone working on Korean and East Asian religions, as well as for those interested in religious polemics in general. I would also recommend it for teaching. I have had a chance to use
translations of both Chŏng and Kihwa’s treatises in my introductory Asian Religions course, asking half of the students to go through some of Chŏng’s critique and the other half to read Kihwa’s defense, and then continuing this ancient debate in class. This resulted in an engaging class discussion on the creation of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ by religious apologetics.

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At first glance, the Vietnam War seems to be a rather unconventional topic for Korean Studies. Indeed, not a lot of Koreanists have published a book on the Vietnam War. In this regard, this book is very fresh and valuable. More importantly, however, this book raises awareness of the fact that critical aspects of history have been forgotten. Pak T’aegyun argues that while the Vietnam War is conventionally known in Korea as having been the “divine gift,” this is only part of the story. There are also controversial aspects that are not often talked about.

So what are these “unheard” stories? First, the US and Korea got themselves involved in a wrong war. Park argues there were a number of miscalculations made by the US government, which was leading the war effort. For instance, the US government believed that without intervention, Vietnam might be lost to the Chinese communists, which might then allow communism to further spread to other regions. The reality was that there had been on-going conflicts between Vietnam and China, and Vietnam, if left alone, could well have been the Yugoslavia of Asia. Instead, by striking Vietnam, the US ended up strengthening Sino-Vietnamese ties.

Perhaps the greatest blunder was overlooking the fact that the conflict in Vietnam was more between the South Vietnamese government and South Vietnamese communists; it was less about North Vietnam and South Vietnam. However, the US government decided to support a South Vietnamese government that was rampant with problems, and this drove the South Vietnamese general public further away from the US and closer to the communists. This had grave
consequences. The continued support of South Vietnam only prolonged the war and countless American and Vietnamese lives were lost as a result.

It was against this backdrop that South Korea got involved in the Vietnam War. South Korea first sent troops to Vietnam, primarily in hopes of preventing the US troops from leaving Korea, and thus assure that American security in Korea remain unchanged. As it would later turn out, this decision to dispatch troops to Vietnam produced very complicated results.

The controversial beginning was the portent of a controversial end. In the case of the US, the Vietnam War brought forth the collapse of the US-led international order, as the US economy plummeted. It was also a huge blow to America’s prestige, as the US had to pull out of Vietnam without any apparent success. In so far that it produced anything positive, one could point to the widespread demonstrations against the war, which simultaneously challenged the existing norms and injustices, such as racism and sexual inequality.

In the case of South Korea, the Vietnam War enabled the country to achieve economic advancement, as veterans sent remittances and heavy industries, including construction, were blessed with previously unforeseen opportunities. At the same time, however, there were mass killings of Vietnamese civilians by Korean combatants. Furthermore, the South Korean government neglected its own troops. For instance, when the South Korean military evacuated from Vietnam, the South Korean government first announced that there was nobody left behind. The US government records, however, reveal that this was not the case. Worse, some South Korean combatants captured by the communists were later found in North Korea. This only proved that the South Korean military did not take proper care of its own troops.

In sum, Park argues that what Koreans usually know about the Vietnam War is only part of what really happened. There were major miscalculations made by both the US and Korea, which incurred unnecessary human casualties. In Korea, these unpleasant memories of the Vietnam War are often missing in the mainstream discourse.

Perhaps the greatest value of the book is that in unraveling these truths, Park raises some very important questions. For instance, Koreans often criticize Japan for ignoring its past colonial transgressions. Do not Koreans similarly fail to talk about the civilian massacres committed during the Vietnam War? Also, Koreans point to the fact that while Koreans were suffering from battles, Japan enjoyed tremendous economic benefits by supplying the US during the Korean War. Did not Koreans also benefit tremendously from the Vietnam War, while the Vietnamese were perishing? Also, why is the government not taking responsibility for its own citizens, who were hurt or killed, even abandoned, while fighting the
war that they never decided?

Meanwhile, there are certain arguments that need to be further addressed in the future. For instance, the withdrawal of the US from Vietnam coincided with the rise of dictatorship in Korea, Thailand and the Philippines. Park examines the various developments in and out of the country to explain why this happened. It would be interesting to see more in detail what the leaders themselves had to say about the US leaving Vietnam. Did they ever say that the government had to tighten control, because the US withdrawal from Vietnam would jeopardize the regime’s stability? Also, what were the views of Korean and American conscripts? Were there any parallels or gaps between how they viewed the war? What exchanges took place between the local Vietnamese and Korean (or American) combatants? Was there any bond or animosity between the locals and these foreign combatants in everyday life? Park also argues that whatever transformation Korea went through in the 1970s laid the groundwork for present-day Korea. What exactly is this “present-day Korea,” and what are the specific parallels and differences between Korea in the 1970s and the present?

It must be acknowledged that while this book is an impressive accomplishment, it is also very controversial, as it talks about many things that people do not necessarily want to hear. However, those issues must be dealt with, as a lot of what had happened in the past went against humanitarian principles. In light of this, I hope this book will be made available in other languages as well to be read by a wider audience.

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