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Master's Thesis of Graduate School of International Studies

**Emergence, Persistence, and Limits of
the New Right's Historical Perspective**

뉴라이트 사관의 등장, 지속, 그리고 한계

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**Graduate School of International Studies
Seoul National University
International Area Studies**

Chi-Min Oh

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Chi-Min Oh

Submitting a master's thesis of International Studies

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**Graduate School of International Studies
Seoul National University
International Area Studies**

Chi-Min Oh

**Confirming the master's thesis written by
Chi-Min Oh
August 2022**

| | |
|------------|-----------------------|
| Chair | <u>Song Jiyeoun</u> |
| Vice Chair | <u>Park Jeehwan</u> |
| Examiner | <u>Park Cheol-Hee</u> |

Abstract

The book *Anti-Japan Tribalism* written by a group of New Right scholars is arguably the most controversial publication of 2019 in South Korea, due to its radical arguments that deny or downplay imperial Japan's responsibility for mobilising comfort women and forced labourers, South Korea's territorial legitimacy of *Dokdo*, the suffering of Koreans under Japanese rule during the occupation period from 1910 to 1945, and more. These arguments, based on the New Right historical perspective, are placed at an antipode to the existing South Korean nationalism which is hostile toward Japan in general. In other words, *Anti-Japan Tribalism* is an outright challenge to a common sense many Koreans share through history education at school. Hence, this paper asks the following questions: First, why did New Right scholars publish the book despite a seemingly predictable nationwide public outrage and backlash at the time? Second, although the New Right movement has been dormant since 2008, why is New Right historiography resilient despite the dominance of leftist historical narratives in Korean society? This paper argues that although the New Right was established simultaneously by various actors, the movement was not coherent, with multiplicity of organisational goals. As a result, the movement lost its political justification, whereas its intellectual and ideological side, to which a group of economic historians belong, has continued its evolution through the struggle against the Left. *Anti-Japan Tribalism* is a manifestation of the struggle and radicalisation of New Right scholars in defiance to their opponents' control over historiography that was established shortly after South Korea's democratisation in 1987.

Keyword: Anti-Japan Tribalism, New Right, colonial period, ideological polarisation

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List of Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Definition |
|---------------------|---|
| FNKD | Forum of North Korea Democratisation |
| GNP | Grand National Party |
| HFFH | Hansun Foundation for Freedom and Happiness |
| KRGAA | Korea Retired Generals and Admirals Association |
| KVA | Korean Veterans Association |
| NCUK | National Council for Upgrading Korea |
| NIER | Nakseongdae Economic Research Institute |
| NRF | New Right Foundation |
| NRU | New Right Union |
| RHL | A Reinterpretation of History before and after Liberation |
| ROK | Republic of Korea |
| UEMLD | Union of Education Movement for Liberal Democracy |
| UHL | An Understanding of History before and after Liberation |

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Introduction

This paper will explore the dynamics of New Right historiography in South Korean society. In July 2019, Rhee Young-hoon, the former Seoul National University professor of economics, published the book “*Anti-Japan Tribalism (banil jongjokjooui)*” with his colleagues, asserting that the collective memories and anti-Japanese sentiments most Koreans conceive of the colonial period have been fabricated by tribalism that has misled the citizens (Rhee et al., 2019). This book soon became a bestseller selling more than 100,000 copies in Korea, and over 300,000 copies in Japan, igniting a public debate simultaneously (Kim, 2020). In response, a group of political scientists, sociologists, and historians published several books, countering Rhee’s arguments. They point out that the authors deliberately distort fundamental facts of various issues such as forced labour, comfort women and the disputed island *Dokdo* (or *Takeshima* in Japanese) with selective and manipulative evidence (Jeong et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Jeon, 2020), while describing them as “new pro-Japanese collaborators” (Hosaka, 2020) and “historical denialists” (Kang, 2020). Despite criticisms from both the public and academia, the authors, also known as New Right scholars, published another book titled *Struggle against Anti-Japan Tribalism (banil jongjokjoouiwauwi toojaeng)* in the following year, making counterarguments and labelling critics as “Anti-Japan tribalists” (Rhee et al., 2020).

Rhee et al. (2019) argue that the authors of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* seek objective historical truth, putting aside national interests and personal emotions. A year before the emergence of the book, in order to disseminate the so-called New Right historiography for the public, along with his colleagues, Rhee has given lectures on a YouTube channel called

“Rhee Syng-man TV,” where a group of intellectuals argue that Japanese rule has had a positive impact on South Korea’s economy, attracting nearly 100,000 followers¹. Kang (2019: 121) labels a series of events followed by the publication of the book as the “Anti-Japan Tribalism Phenomenon,” which could be summarised as follows: 1) an increase in the number of book publications by conservative authors; 2) social influence by new media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook; and 3) networking and solidarity between historical revisionists in Korea and Japan. Without doubt, one can argue that there is a disparity between New Right ideology and the existing nationalism, which has been long supported by progressives who perceive Japanese rule having crippled Korea’s national pride and economy.

The controversy over New Right historiography is not a new phenomenon. In the mid-2000s, New Right scholars with their neo-conservative historical revisionism challenged the progressive force by criticising the existing historiography for its bias and distortion based on the deeply rooted anti-Japanese sentiments that have been embedded in the mindset of a vast majority of Koreans through history education at school. This challenge developed into a history war during the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye governments against the Left, who attempted to prevent New Right historical narratives from entering social and educational spheres by all means (Kim, 2020). The Left took an upper hand over historiography due to the spread of leftist historical interpretations in the 1980s among intellectuals and student activists, the democratisation in 1987, and the surge of anti-Japanese sentiments in the 1990s (Yang, 2021: 895-897). Hence, having lost their influence, New

¹ Rhee Syng-man TV, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0ddvpoS9dg3EFW062VarOA>, accessed on July 23, 2022.

Right intellectuals tried to regain control of the historical narratives that conservatives had held firmly in the pre-democratisation era.

In brief, the two different schools of thought are battling over the ‘same’ history with contrasting narratives. Through the publication of *Anti-Japan Tribalism*, New Right scholars are attempting to replace the status quo held by progressives who entered mainstream politics after successful democratic movements in the 1980s, social movements in the 1990s, and two victories of presidential election in 1997 and 2002. Based on progressivism with Marxist roots, progressives believe that they have inherited the spirits of independent fighters against Japanese imperialists and senior progressives against dictatorial regimes (Ahn, 2008). In the preface, Rhee (2019: 10) describes South Korea as “a country that is internationally known for its culture of lies,” in an attempt to debunk myths about the nationalism that antagonises Japan for its exploitation during the colonial period. Following that, Rhee and co-authors touch upon several sensitive issues such as the plundering of rice, forced mobilisation of labour and comfort women, the Treaty on Basic Relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in 1965, and more to demonstrate the root of anti-Japanese sentiments and misleading conceptions to readers (Rhee et al., 2019). Not surprisingly, scholars subscribing to the mainstream historical narratives responded by lambasting *Anti-Japan Tribalism* for its spirit of servitude, attempt to fabricate history, and ignorance of victims such as comfort women, forced labour, and many others who suffered under Japanese rule (Nam, 2019; Jeon, 2020; Kang, 2020; Hosaka, 2020). Except to a relatively small number of supporters of New Right historiography, the authors’ arguments are unacceptable for most Koreans who are more familiar with the existing nationalistic narratives championed by the progressive force.

Despite the backlash both at the academic and public level, New Right scholars, most of whom are economic historians, have made substantial academic contributions through decades of research ranging from colonial Korea's economy to South Korea's industrialisation and rapid economic growth. However, they believe that their argument that the Japanese Empire and the colonial period have contributed to Korea's industrialisation and modernisation has been overshadowed, or downplayed at best, by progressive historical views that focus more on narratives of exploitation by the colonial force with victimhood. Hence, the publication of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* and *Struggle against Anti-Japan Tribalism* is a desperate revisionist attempt to change the widespread public belief, or "leftist historical views" which are increasingly becoming "conservative."

What draws our attention here is the attempt from the New Right movement to replace the existing left-wing nationalism with its ideological self-assertion after a long period of struggle, despite the force that bashes such attempts. Benedict Anderson (1983) argues in his famous book *Imagined Communities*, saying that "a nation is imagined." According to him, nation is a social construct built by historical accounts having a powerful force that binds social groups under the banner of nationalism. Thus, the puzzling questions are: First, why did New Right scholars publish *Anti-Japan Tribalism* despite a seemingly predictable backlash from those who accept South Korean nationalism? Second, the New Right, which was initiated in 2004, became moribund as early as 2008, so why is their New Right historiography resilient in spite of the dominance of leftist historical narratives in Korean society? The argument presented here is that although the New Right was established in response to the rise of the left-wing force, the subsequent social movement was not coherent and had a multiplicity of organisational goals, with many of key members entering

politics after achieving a partial success. As a result, the movement became politicised and weakened, whereas its intellectual and ideological side has continued its evolution through the struggle against the Left. *Anti-Japan Tribalism* is a manifestation of the struggle and radicalisation of New Right scholars in defiance to their opponents' control over historiography in South Korea's contemporary history.

This paper will elaborate the process of how the New Right movement and its challenge against South Korea's historiography have evolved over time. In Chapter 1, along with a scholarly discussion about the publication of *Anti-Japan Tribalism*, two theoretical perspectives, namely "sociology of knowledge" (Mannheim, 1952) and "contentious politics" (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015), will be presented to shed light on what happens when conflicting knowledge is in dispute and how actors initiate a social movement, mobilise partisans, institutionalise affiliated organisations, and finally challenge the dominant power. In Chapter 2, historical backgrounds will be discussed to explain about who controlled and challenged nationalistic narratives followed by historical revisionism by the Left and the Right in the 1990s and the 2000s respectively. Chapter 3 will demonstrate who developed New Right historiography and how they entered the political realm while highlighting why it was controversial in the contexts of the textbook controversy from 2008 to 2017. Chapter 4 will show why New Right affiliated scholars reached the conclusion as written in *Anti-Japan Tribalism*, which diverted from what was thought to be part of the New Right movement at its beginning.

Chapter I. Theoretical Overview

1.1. Literature Review

The publication of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* brought intense criticisms. A number of scholars lambast the book as it beautifies Japanese rule (Kim, 2020) and transplants the Japanese government's arguments without academic effort or value (Nam, 2019; Shin, 2020), epitomising the post-truth phenomenon in South Korea (Kang, 2019; Yang, 2021). Kim Heon-ju (2020) argues that *Anti-Japan Tribalism* is a political propaganda which successfully popularised the concept "tribalism" as political rhetoric to challenge the existing South Korean nationalism. Although a vast majority of academics maintain critical views, some scholars observe *Anti-Japan Tribalism* from different perspectives. Kim Jeong-in (2020) argues that the publication of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* is one of the processes of the 30-year history war between conservatives and progressives after the democratisation of Korea in 1987. Meanwhile, Hong (2019) highly assesses the book's sound criticism on materialism and shamanism prevalent in Korean society. He contends that it should be ordinary people who need to be placed at the centre of historiography as opposed to the top-down perspective of *Anti-Japan Tribalism*. Overall, even though the academic consensus is critical of historical revisionism, there have been attempts to explain the publication in social, political, and historical contexts.

Anti-Japan Tribalism has its roots in New Right ideology and an intellectual struggle to replace left-wing historiography. Yang Myung-ji (2021) focuses on intellectual circles and their participation in civil society. Hwang (2020) observes *Anti-Japan Tribalism* as an attempt to explain South Korea's modern and contemporary history with the three keywords, namely

"modern civilisation," "capitalism," and "economic growth," which constitute the authors' developmentalist historiography. Jeon (2020) describes the emergence of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* as "the destination of conservative ideological turn from the 1990s" by a group of economic historians who are strongly tied to the institutions from which New Right historiography emanates. These observations reveal a combination of political and scholarly efforts, epitomised by the New Right movement and a series of related publications. Ahn (2021) evaluates two important books, *A Reinterpretation of History before and after Liberation (haebangjeonhusaui jaeinsik, RHL)* and *Anti-Japan Tribalism*, which were published in 2006 and 2019 respectively with an aim to combine conservative statism and reactionary romanticism and criticise left-wing nationalism. Ahn suggests that these publications show the devolutionary development of the New Right's ideology. Thus, there is a need to investigate the New Right as a social movement and its transition after its establishment.

The emergence of the New Right movement in 2004 was a response to the progressive turn of Korean nationalist discourse. Amid the reversal of the political map, shifting towards progressives after two conservative losses at the presidential election, like-minded scholars, politicians, and social activists were united to counter a further progressive turn while introducing reformist views such as neoliberalism, North Korean policies, and historical revisionism amongst others (Yoon, 2012; Kang, 2019; Kim, 2020). In response, several scholars commented on the emergence of the New Right and its ideological conflict with the existing South Korean nationalism. Jeong (2006) focuses on proliferation of New Right organisations and their viability as a reformist force. Park (2007) predicts that the emergence of the New Right movement would develop into an ideological conflict against

the Left due to the movement's political aspects. Similarly, Ha (2007) argues that the emergence of the New Right would intensify the history war within Korean society due to its historical revisionism regarding Japanese rule. Reflecting perspectives of the New Right, Ahn (2008) highlights the cultural role of collective memories within left-wing nationalism, which are driven by media, politicians, and symbols such as monuments, education, and commemorative ceremonies rather than by historical evidence provided by experts.

From the early 2000s, the discussion on “memory and history” became invigorated among Korean intellectuals, as the era in which the past was monopolised by authoritarian regimes came to an end with democratisation in 1987 and the subsequent pluralisation of collective memories (Cho, 2003: 159-160). Yang (2009: 2-3) argues that collective memories of history are a social construct, and history education at school is a manifestation of how collective memories are taught and established in a group of young people, contributing to the formulation of their national and social identities. In combination with political dynamics resulting from democratic consolidation and polarising views on Korea's development path and Japanese rule, the textbook controversy, as will be discussed later, began and became intensified and politicised in the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye governments. According to Tikhonov (2019), the academics of the New Right are the ones who attempted to turn South Korea's conventional historical paradigm upside down by advocating post-nationalist historical narratives based on statism rather than on nationalism. Yang Sung-ik (2021: 905) describes the resurgence of New Right narratives in 2019 as an example of the inextricable connection between historical interpretations and South Korea's political struggles, suggesting that historical legitimacy plays a crucial role in winning a bipolar political struggle between the Right and the Left.

To sum up, a wealth of literature demonstrates political and social aspects of the controversy surrounding the publications by New Right scholars who are rejected and marginalised in academia as well as by many in society. One example is the former Justice Minister Cho Kuk's remark on the book as "disgusting" (Park, 2019) without reading *Anti-Japan Tribalism* (Jeong et al., 2019). Likewise, there is a tendency in which New Right scholars and their books have been stereotyped by political logic in the absence of critical and impartial evaluation and provision of historical context such as the evolution of New Right ideology and scholars' arguments. However, despite Jeon's comment (2020) on *Anti-Japan Tribalism* as the destination of New Right scholars' conservative turn, and comparison between RHL and *Anti-Japan Tribalism* to show radicalisation and devolution of New Right historiography (Ahn, 2021), there is little literature demonstrating both a fusion and divergence of the New Right movement and New Right historiography and the rationale for the latter's longevity compared to the former. This paper will attempt to fill the gap by highlighting a historical lineage and a genealogical map of the New Right and its key intellectuals by providing theoretical frameworks. This is to demonstrate the background for the emergence of a reformist movement in the mid-2000s, the lack of in-group harmony from the beginning, comparative resilience of the intellectual side, and limits which economic historians alike have faced despite their academic contributions over decades.

1.2. Analytical Framework

So far, this paper has briefly demonstrated the hegemonic war between the conservative and progressive forces as South Korea has transformed from authoritarianism to liberal democracy. Since the democratisation in 1987, South Korea's social structure has

become more volatile and dynamic, with a number of social movements by both the Right and the Left. In the meantime, there has been a proliferation of progressive historiography as well as a rebuttal by the New Right and the 1990s and the 2000s respectively. The study of the contrasting historical interpretations on the past between two schools of thought provides an opportunity to adapt theoretical frameworks to explain the dynamics of South Korea's political map, social beliefs, and national identity. To highlight contrasting ideologies, historical understandings, political orientations between the Right and the Left, and the evolution of New Right ideology over time, this paper will employ Karl Mannheim's *Sociology of Knowledge* (1952). However, this approach has a limitation in explaining the creation, proliferation, development, and radicalisation of the New Right as a social movement alone. Thus, *Contentious Politics* (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015) will serve as another theoretical tool to help depict the interplay between the government and various organisations engaging in social movement and political contention.

1.2.1. Sociology of Knowledge

The central notion of sociology of knowledge is that multiplicity of standards, and values, generations leads to polarisation of epistemological understandings of history competing against each other in a Hegelian sense (Mannheim, 1952). According to Kecskemeti (1952: 18), the term was initially coined by Max Scheler, then further developed by Karl Mannheim, who argues that the sociology of knowledge approach becomes valid “when the political and economic development of society has reached a certain stage” in the form of “oppositional science,” in which polarisation can be seen in diverse political and socioeconomic groups. Under this condition, various philosophies coexist and the answer to

certain questions could be reached by social struggle within a society, with every group projecting their own interpretations into social spheres while seeking “to make it the universally accepted one” (Kecskemeti, 1952: 25). Therefore, this theoretical approach will shed light on the political dispute between the Right and Left as well as on the internal conflict between New Right organisations whose political goals and ideologies are different to each other.

As discussed above, the publication of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* could be understood in historical contexts by investigating the long-term interplay between conservatives and progressives. As a country which witnessed the Korean War, the 1961 coup d'état, and subsequent authoritarian rules until the democratisation in 1987, conservatism was the dominant ideology that monopolised historical and nationalistic narratives, despite protests by progressives that were oppressed by state power (Jeon, 2020). However, theoretically speaking, such monopolies of power become vulnerable when social change occurs as Kecskemeti (1952: 25) puts below:

“When social power is monopolised by one group, then one world interpretation reigns supreme; no contrary position to the officially prevailing one is allowed to be expressed. However, monopolies of power inevitably break down some time; when they do, rival theories and interpretations of the world begin to compete among each other.”

Confirming that, South Korea’s democratisation in 1987 was a watershed in that Korean politics has since increasingly become conflictual in the absence of authoritarian tools to oppress the progressive force, which could not only protest more freely, but was also able to project its beliefs into the political sphere by winning public support (Kim, 2020). Regarding

colonial issues, progressives are more willing to reflect the narratives of victims that were largely ignored by conservative authoritarian regimes. Due to this, conservatives have been attacked as a political force having a close relationship with both imperial Japan in the past and the Japanese government today, with some of the key figures labelled as “pro-Japanese collaborators” (Rhee, 2007). This “moral weakness” and the spread of leftist historiography during the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments necessitated the neo-conservative ideology that aimed to prevail over progressive narratives despite a predictable backlash and hardship to fight against the mainstream leftism.

How should we explain the denial of leftist historiography as manifested in *Anti-Japan Tribalism* and the radicalised polarisation over different historical understandings between the Right and Left? Mannheim (1952: 87-88) stresses the necessity to observe the totality when revisiting history by philosophical approach.

We no longer wish to know merely ‘what happened.’ We are interested not only in the immediate ‘why’ (the immediate causal antecedents) of an event, but we also constantly ask ourselves: ‘What does it mean?’ As we integrate the element in question (the historical fact) into a totality, indeed a dynamic totality, and thence assess its meaning, our question becomes philosophical and the special science of history as well as the contemplation of life once again becomes philosophical.

This statement implies that multiple interpretations on a historical event are possible, explaining the long debate over Korean history between New Right scholars and progressives, while urging us to see what their interpretations mean in political and social contexts by philosophical thinking.

Where does the discordance between New Right scholars and their critics come from? According to Mannheim (1952: 33-34), the multiplicity of worldview (*Weltanschauung*) causes differentiation in knowledge structure. For instance, science, art, and religion were isolated from each other and studied separately with divergence of academic cultures. Then, the isolated domains were subjected to various operations of abstraction, performed from a number of different theoretical points of view. In the case of the Anti-Japan Tribalism Controversy, when it comes to assessing colonial legacies, New Right scholars primarily focus on what affected colonial Korea's economy in quantitative terms. They argue that although the colonial rule cannot be justified, achievements such as economic growth and modernisation as indicated in their research, should be taken into account (Rhee et al., 2019, 2020). On the other hand, experts in history, women studies, sociology, and political science perceive the colonial period from contrasting standpoints. Kang (2020: 79) explicitly expresses doubts on the methodology used by New Right scholars who trust numbers, but not testimonies of war victims. Likewise, Hosaka (2009) confesses that he became fascinated in the historical issues between Korea and Japan after learning of the Eulmi Incident² which epitomises imperial Japan's strong desire to colonise Chosun. It is no surprise that different experiences lead to different knowledge and philosophical understandings of a certain phenomenon.

When analysing the knowledge gap between groups, Mannheim (1952: 226) argues that "synthesis" is a necessary process as it helps us observe what the two competing groups highlight and overlook due to their extreme stance and lack of open-mindedness towards each other as a result of divergence. By performing synthesis, one can amass the partial

² Eulmi Incident refers to the event in which Empress Myeongseong was assassinated by a group of Japanese agents under Miura Goro in 1895. For more details, see <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14482741>

perspectives of individual groups and factions to provide a broader picture of the competition and possible solutions. For instance, the New Right can be differentiated from the Old Right, due to its internal differences such as its affiliated groups' members, long-term goals, perceptions towards specific issues, and more. To elaborate subtle differences within the New Right and more apparent disparities between neo-conservative and progressive historiographies, this paper will provide a comparison and a genealogical map with an aim to indicate points of contention and conflict. Thus, the sociology of knowledge approach provides us an opportunity to investigate political, social, and academic disparities for conflictual societies like South Korea where mediation is increasingly desirable.

1.2.2. Contentious Politics

Another theoretical framework presented in this paper is Tilly and Tarrow's work *Contentious Politics* (2015), which helps us explain why contention occurs in politics. When dissident groups organise social movements and challenge the government with an aim to change the existing policies, it can be viewed with three key concepts, namely brokerage, diffusion, and coordinated action as shown below.

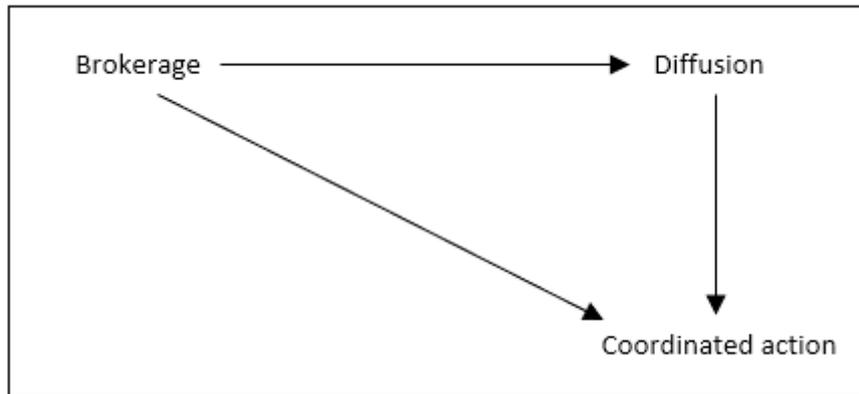


Image 1: Mechanism of a New Coordination

<Source: Tilly and Tarrow, 2015>

The first concept is brokerage, in which an intermediate actor produces a connection between previously unconnected sites. Diffusion refers to a spread of a form of contention, an issue or a way of framing it from one site to another. Third, in the process of coordinated action, two or more actors engage in mutual signalling and parallel making of claims on the same object (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015: 31). This approach will demonstrate how the emergence and development of the New Right occurred with the help of media, an intermediate actor that played a role in disseminating neo-conservative ideology to which various actors responded, making it a social movement with considerable political effects.

However, these concepts above only show how a social movement is initiated without details about how it is developed into next stages in a comprehensive way. While admitting that many social movements are short-lived, Tilly and Tarrow (2015: 36-37) argue that the additional mechanisms below exemplify a longer cycle of social movement with the intensification of contention:

- *Social appropriation*: non-political groups transform into political actors by launching movement campaigns and using their organisational and institutional bases.

- *Boundary activation*: creation of a new boundary between challenging groups and their targets.
- *Certification*: an external authority's signal of its readiness to recognise and support the existence and claims of a political actor.
- Identity shift: formation of new identities within challenging groups whose coordinated action brings them together and reveals their commonalities.
- *Competition*: social movements are seldom unified due to different preferences and different leaders of each organisation.
- *Escalation and Radicalisation*: when social movements face a backlash from counter-protesters such as the state and rival organisations, challengers often escalate their strategy and radicalise their claims.

Image 2 is a visualised form that elaborates the cycle of political conflicts between claimants and authority.

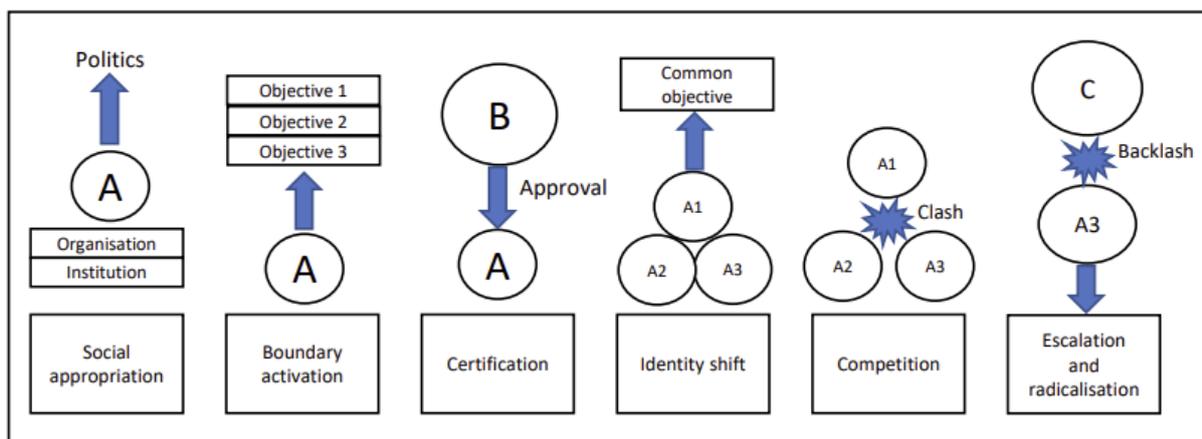


Image 2: Extended Version of Social Movement

<Source: Tilly and Tarrow, (2015: 35-36)>

This theoretical framework will help explain how the reform-minded conservatives contributed to creation of the New Right with the help of external parties at the beginning (social appropriation). As Tilly and Tarrow (2015) suggest, social movements consist of various organisations that formulate different objectives according to different leaders, goals, and ideologies, as was the case for the New Right movement (boundary activation). With

successful coordination, a social movement receives recognition from authorities like the government, which provides stimuli for further actions (certification). Despite incompatibilities among New Right organisations (competition), they mostly shared the notion that many of the progressive values in the mid-2000s need to be replaced, bringing them together to re-establish a conservative government (identity shift). However, the New Right movement could not persist as it lost its momentum. The intellectual side continued its struggle against the Left and faced a strong backlash and changed its strategy to be radicalised (escalation and radicalisation).

To reiterate, the sociology of knowledge approach will be helpful in analysing how epistemological polarisation and political dynamics have affected both conservatives and progressives as well as intellectuals, whereas the contentious politics approach will shed light on the evolution, development, and weakening of the New Right as a social movement in which the intellectual wing has remained resilient, gradually stepped into radical notions, and arrived at the destination in the form of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* (Jeon, 2020).

Chapter II. Socio-historical Context of the Ideological Struggle

2.1. Historical Revisionism by the Left

South Korea's democratisation in 1987 has had many social implications as it allowed progressives the freedom of speech, expression, and assembly that were systematically prohibited by authoritarian regimes before. Roh Tae-woo was elected President as a conservative leader, but his political orientation and authority were more moderate and smaller than those of authoritarian predecessors, so he faced many challenges from left-wing civil organisations (Lim, 1990). Consequently, a number of submerged issues from the colonial period and authoritarian era broke out during the Roh administration. On August 14, 1991, the former comfort woman Kim Hak-soon revealed that the Japanese Imperial Army ran military brothels and exploited comfort women during WWII, leading to nationwide outrage and several apologies by Japanese prime ministers in the 1990s (Kimura, 2019). In addition, the progressive force called for re-evaluation of the May 18 Democratic Uprising in 1980. The Roh administration responded by offering compensation for the victims and restoring their honour, reluctantly conceding to progressives' demands (Kim, 2020: 11). In brief, the democratisation enabled progressives to bring their agendas to the political arena without much resistance from the government.

In the meantime, the democratisation brought changes in academia with the emergence and rise of *Minjungsahak* (people's history), which had been extensively investigated by scholars who witnessed the power of social movements by labours, farmers, and poor citizens in urban areas from the 1970s. By focusing on anti-government protesters who fought against Japanese rule and authoritarian leaders like Rhee Syng-man, Park Chung-

hee, and Chun Doo-hwan, progressive scholars revisited civil movements like the March 1 Movement, the April 19 Movement, the Gwangju Uprising, and more. They published a number of books which placed ordinary people at the centre of focus rather than the state or a few political leaders. Under this atmosphere, academic achievements based on *Minjungsahak* have been reflected in history education since the mid-1990s. The successful and smooth landing of left-wing historiography on Korean society has diversified people's historical perspectives, prognosticating the clash between progressive and conservative historical interpretations in the future (Kim, 2020: 7-10).

The advent of the Kim Young-sam administration in 1993 is symbolic in that Korean society significantly changed its view on the past, synchronised with the end of the Cold War, the acceleration of democratic pluralism and the rise of social activism. As a former opposition leader, Kim Young-sam had witnessed human rights violations committed by authoritarian regimes while organising anti-government campaigns. As one of his first actions, President Kim called for a thorough investigation on the Gwangju Uprising and punishment of those responsible for the killings of civilians, including the two former presidents Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo. In addition, the Kim government also revisited the Geochang Massacre, which occurred during the Korean War, and restored the honour of victims (Kim, 2020: 10). Encouraged by the government's resolute actions, anti-Japanese sentiments, public discourse on the colonial period and further discoveries of Japan's oppressive colonial policies became more active with testimonies from former soldiers conscripted by the Japanese Imperial Army, comfort women, victims of the two atomic bombs, and forced labourers whose voices were silenced by authoritarian regimes in the past (Kimura, 2019; Jeon, 2020). In 1995, President Kim ordered the demolition of the Japanese General

Government Building, which impeded the plan to restore the *Gyeongbokgung* complex as well as national pride. Likewise, the government endeavoured to obliterate colonial legacies, to progressives' satisfaction (Rhee et al., 2019). The series of events listed above were a clear sign that conservatives were no longer able to monopolise historical narratives as they did in the pre-democratisation era.

The victory of the opposition candidate Kim Dae-jung at the 1997 presidential election was a milestone of South Korea's political history as it marked the first democratic transition from the conservative to the progressive force after the establishment of the South Korean government in 1948. President Kim implemented unprecedented policies reflecting progressive desires. In June 2000, the first inter-Korean summit between President Kim and North Korea's supreme leader Kim Jong-il was held in Pyongyang. Along with the subsequent Sunshine Policy, former student activists and democratisation activists who entered mainstream politics brought progressive agendas that were incompatible with conservative ideology. During this period, more and more citizens believed that North Korea did not necessarily have to be an enemy, but a partner with which South Korea would need to achieve reunification in the foreseeable future. This perception change was a critical blow to conservatives who had enjoyed a monopoly in terms of North Korea policies based on anti-communism for several decades (Yang, 2021: 346). Additionally, the progressive government began tackling controversial incidents such as the Jeju April 3 Incident in 1948 and the Gwangju Uprising by founding the Presidential Truth Commission on Suspicious Deaths (*uimunsajinsanggyumyeongwiwonhoe*) (Kim, 2020: 11). As a result, progressive ideologies were increasingly institutionalised and embedded in South Korea's national identity, conflicting with the existing conservative values in a gradual manner.

Following that, the advent of another progressive government led by President Roh Moo-hyun in 2003 and the victory of the ruling Uri Party at the 2004 legislative election served as stimulus for a further drive toward settlement on the historical past, and the need for a reformist shift and solidarity amongst conservatives. During his commemorative speech on Liberation Day in 2004, President Roh stated:

*“Our patriotic martyrs would be proud of us who have achieved the status of 11th largest economy in the world from the ashes of the war. They would be proud of us who defeated authoritarian dictatorship for democracy... However, it is shameful that pro-Japanese collaborators have been left unpunished and the historical truth has not yet been discovered... We must correct this distorted history. We must reveal real facts to make them historical lessons... This is to create a bright future in which our children can learn the right history to help them build the right future with justice and conscience...”*³

This speech was regarded as a declaration of war to conservatives, who believed that authoritarian leaders were the main contributors to South Korea’s industrialisation. Furthermore, the speech sounded as though progressives were the ones who helped defeat dictatorship and achieve economic growth, which was regarded as an attempt to steal historical narratives in favour of the Left. Eventually, Roh’s speech mobilised conservatives who began civil movements and social campaigns, as the progressives had done before (Kim, 2020: 11).

Overall, it is evident that there had been a progressive turn for about 15 years since

³ The Roh Moo Hyun Foundation. 2004. ‘Congratulatory speech of the 59th Independence Day. <http://archives.knowhow.or.kr/record/all/view/2046266> (accessed on 5 July 2022).

the democratisation and it largely resulted from oppression against citizens who suffered either from colonial or authoritarian rule. The conservative force was not able to effectively react to progressives' move for historical revisionism as it could not monopolise historiography anymore. From the perspective of sociology of knowledge (Mannheim, 1952), the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s were the period during which monopolies of conservative dominance over historical narratives broke down and rival theories and interpretations, progressivism, rose in Korean society for competition. Moreover, as the Cold War ended, the need for security ties between South Korea and Japan became weaker, leading them to redefine national identities. As a result, both revisionist conservatives in Japan and progressives in South Korea have produced negative images of each other with the latter bringing out bitter historical memories of the colonial period (Park, 2013). Thus, conservatives were facing a crisis both internally and externally with waning political power, allowing the rise of progressives and a subsequent bipolar struggle. It necessitated a reformist movement to prevent further domination of left-wing politics and historiography.

2.2. The New Right's Rebuttal

The emergence of the New Right dates back to around 2004, in response to the Roh Moo-hyun administration's drive to investigate abuses committed during the colonial period and the authoritarian regimes under the leadership of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan as well as the government's anti-capitalistic policies (Shin and Sneider, 2016: 69-70; Kim, 2020). Additionally, the Roh government attempted to abolish the National Security Act and enact laws related to history issues, which would reveal state-led human rights violations against citizens and political prisoners in the pre-democratisation period. From the

conservative point of view, this measure would delegitimise conservatives and dilute achievements epitomised by industrialisation and the subsequent rapid economic growth during the decades under authoritarian leadership (Yoon, 2012: 229-230). According to Kim (2020), the Roh government's incompetency in responding to recession and socioeconomic polarisation motivated the emergence and proliferation of New Right movements. It led to the decline in public approval and mobilisation of conservatives who were frustrated and threatened due to the reversal of the political hegemony from the Right to the Left. Reform-minded conservative intellectuals founded social organisations and conservative media like the *Dong-A Ilbo* kindled the movement by naming it the "New Right" for the first time and publishing a series of articles covering its emergence and development⁴. Tikhonov (2019: 13) describes the *Dong-A Ilbo* as "the cradle of the New Right," suggesting that media played a crucial role as an intermediate actor to broker social movement among like-minded claimants (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015).

As can be seen from **Image 3**, a number of New Right organisations were established from 2004 to 2006, signalling an emergence of another conservative force distinctive from traditional conservatives in several ways.

⁴ The *Dong-A Ilbo* had written articles on the New Right's campaign from November 2004 to November 2005. For more details, see https://www.donga.com/news/Politics/List_7000000000264?p=21&prod=news&ynd=&m=

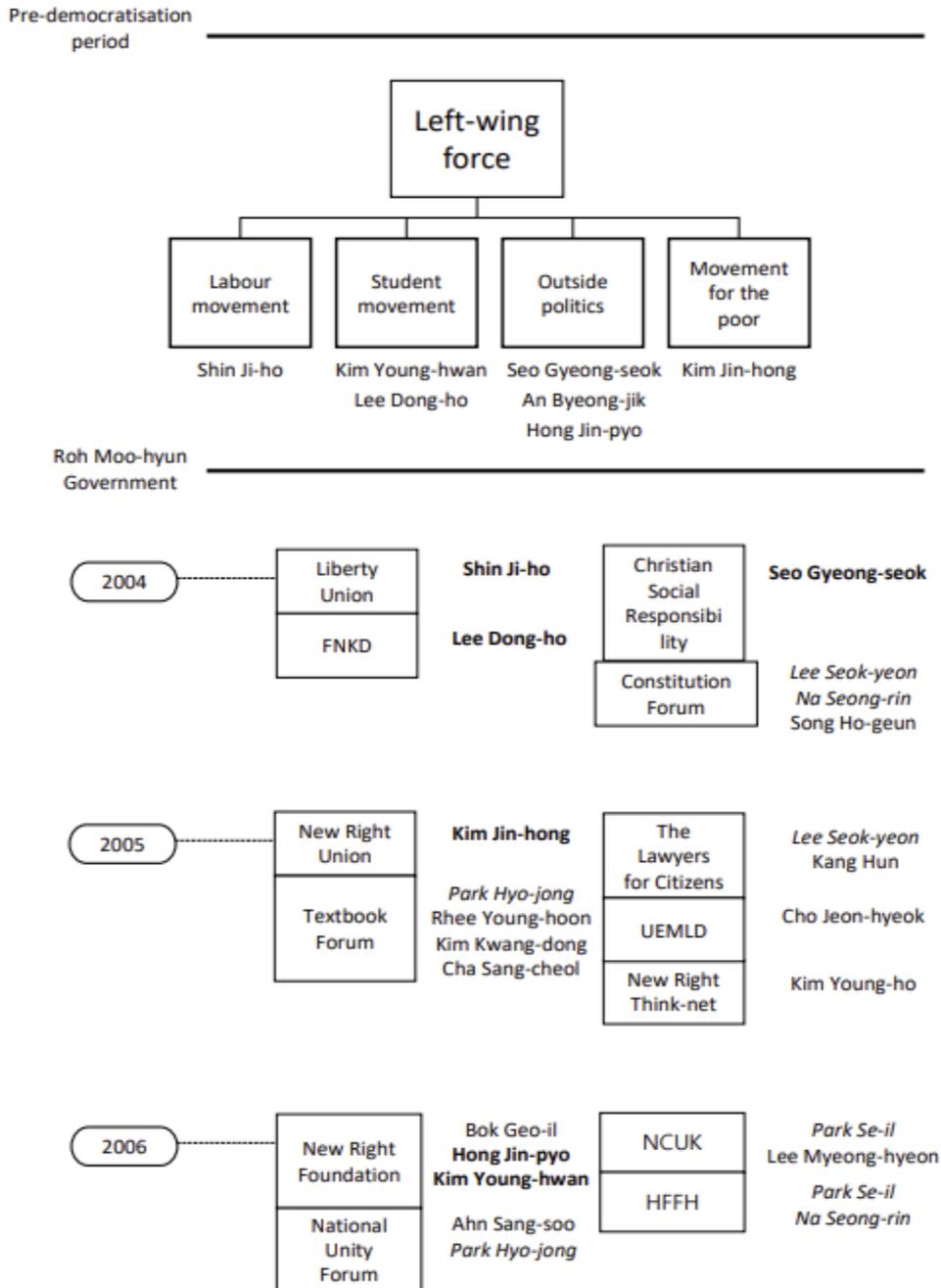


Image 3: Emergence and Proliferation of New Right Organisations⁵⁶

<Source: Jeon (2006)>

⁵ The following is a list of organisations that are indicated in acronyms: Forum of North Korea Democratisation (FNKD, *bukhanminjuhwaporeom*), Union of Education Movement for Liberal Democracy (UEMLD, *jayujuuiigyoyugundongyeonhap*), National Conference for Upgrading Korea (NCUK, *seonjinhwagugminhoiui*), Hansun Foundation for Freedom and Happiness (HFFH, *hanbandoseonjinhwajaedan*)

⁶ Those who are marked in bold are former left-wing social activists who converted to the Right. Others who are marked in italic had more than one membership.

The New Right movement came into reality in November 2004, with the foundation of the Liberty Union, which put an emphasis on liberalism based on market economy. Afterwards, many reformist intellectuals specialised in law, education, North Korea policy, and history participated in the proliferation of New Right organisations. In 2005, the Textbook Forum was founded with an aim to replace leftist historiography, which was referred to as “masochist view of history” (*jahaksagwan*) by the radical student-turned-social activist Shin Ji-ho. This is because leftist historiography’s focus on Korea’s humiliating past rather than on its successful path to become a developed nation from a poor country (Ha, 2007; Kim, 2020). The New Right Union (NRU, *nyuraiteuyeonhap*) was founded in November 2005 by Kim Jin-hong, who is a pastor and well-known progressive social activist for the poor in the pre-democratisation period. He detached himself from elite-oriented movements and engaged in a social movement that encompassed members from diverse backgrounds living across the country. The NCUK was established by intellectuals in pursuit of reformist conservatism, while maintaining distance to the political sphere. Unlike the NRU, the NCUK focused on strategic initiatives such as “acquiring the status of a developed nation within ten years,” with willingness to embrace both conservatives and progressives as long as they join this kind of project (Jeon, 2006). Additionally, the Free Citizens’ Solidarity (FCS, *jayusiminyeondae*), the FNKD, the Constitution Forum (*heonbeopporeom*), the UEMLD, etc., were founded to join the New Right movement by experts in respective areas by 2006 despite having different objectives and types of members. Hence, to apply Tilly and Tarrow’s theory of an initiation of a social movement (2015) can be shown as **Image 4**. The *Dong-A Ilbo* played a role as brokerage, disseminating the notion of the need for reformist conservative movement (diffusion) which led to the emergence and proliferation of the New Right movement by various actors (coordinated action).

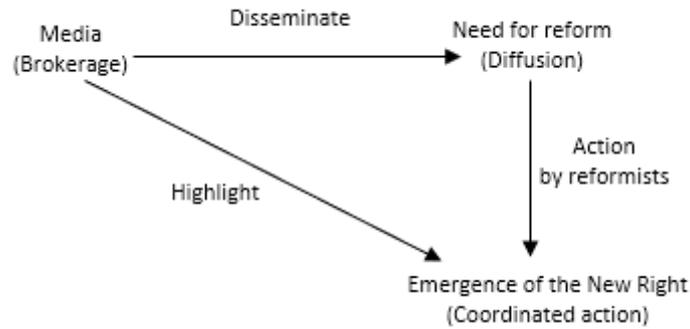


Image 4: Mechanism of a New Coordination in the Emergence of the New Right

Another characteristic of the New Right movement is a diversity of participants' backgrounds. First, several former left-wing social activists joined the New Right, mostly after being disillusioned by socialism and its collapse from the late 1980s to early 1990s. Shin Ji-ho was one of the leading anti-government student protesters in the 1980s, but later he went to Japan and received a PhD at Keio University after his thought conversion in 1992. Within the New Right, he took charge of ideological tasks, such as setting up reformist agendas (Tikhonov, 2019). Kim Young-hwan was a famous leftist in the 1980s for authoring "Steel Letter." He went to North Korea and met Kim Il-sung twice but was disillusioned by socialism and inflexibility of the *Juche* ideology during his visit (Park, 2017). After that, he converted to the Right, turned into a human rights activist for North Koreans, and joined the Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights (*bukhanminjuhwaneteuwokeu*). Despite their conversion from the Left to the Right, they were often shunned due to their past activities by other New Rightists who were traditional conservatives (Kim, 2006). This is one of the examples that shows disharmony within the New Right, unable to continue a coherent and sustainable movement in the long term.

With the 2007 presidential election approaching, the New Right movement became

more vigorous, with a concentration on the three major organisations, namely the Liberty Union, the NRU, and the NCUK. Due to the New Right's character as an emerging social movement with various identities and actors, the direct comparison between the New Right and the Old Right may seem elusive. **Table 1** demonstrates features of each organisation, including those of the Old Right.

| | Liberty Union | New Right Union | National Council for Upgrading Korea | Old Right |
|--------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Key actors and organisations | Shin Ji-ho Hong Jin-pyo | Kim Jin-hong Lee Seok-yeon Je Seong-ho | Park Se-il Lee Myeong-hyeon Lee Seok-yeon Seo Gyeong-seok | KVA KRGAA, CCK, etc. |
| | Textbook Forum | Various sub-groups | | |
| Founded in | November 2004 | November 2005 | April 2006 | 1952, 1965, 1989 |
| Ideology and goals | Liberalism National advancement Overcoming far left/right | Liberalism Market Economy | Community Liberalism Globalization National advancement | Conservatism Pro-American Anti-communism Bashing pro-North Korean leftists |
| Relationship with the GNP | Distancing Need for a reformist move | Solidarity for a regime change | Distancing | Support with criticism |
| Old Right | Exclude | Partially include | Neutral | - |
| Objective on North Korea | Improvement of human rights Democratisation | Improvement of human rights | Democratisation Halt of Sunshine Policy | Overthrowing the Kim Jong-il regime Halt of North Korea projects |
| Policies by the Roh government | Reject | Reject | Criticise | Reject |

Table 1: Comparison among New Right and Old Right Organisations

<Source: Bae (2005); Jeon (2006); Lee (2006)>

The main organisations representing the Old Right consisted of the Christian Council of Korea (CCK, *hangukgidokgyochongyeonhapoe*), the Korea Retired Generals and Admirals Association (KRGAA, *seonguhoe*), and the Korean Veterans Association (KVA, *jaehyangguninhoe*). They are nationalistic with a pro-American and anti-communist stance, a

traditional conservative ideology stemming from the Korean War and continual security threat from North Korea during the Cold War period. The Grand National Party (GNP)'s ideology was in line with this kind of old-school conservatism. Authoritarian leaders like Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan prioritised national growth at the cost of human rights, workers' rights, and egalitarianism to win over North Korea in an ideological competition. After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of North Korea's economy in the mid-1990s, the notion of competition against North Korea became weaker and even anachronistic.

Although New Right organisations agreed that conservatives needed a reformist move, their ideologies were slightly different to each other. First, the Liberty Union consisted of members of "the 386 Generation,"⁷ including Shin Ji-ho and Hong Jin-pyo. Due to their outright confrontation against authoritarian regimes in the past as radical student activists, their relationship with the GNP and the Old Right was uncomfortable. Another notable difference is that unlike the Old Right's hostile stance towards the North, the Liberty Union sought an improvement of human rights and democratisation of the neighbouring nation. The Liberty Union engaged in the ideology-building process with many of its intellectual members establishing the Textbook Forum in January 2005, criticising the existing history textbooks for bias tilted toward leftist historiography. Second, the NRU led a nationwide civil movement with a number of sub-organisations across South Korea, boasting some 170,000 members within two years after its establishment. Compared to the Liberty Union, the NRU was closer to both the GNP and the Old Right. Third, the NCUK was an organisation led by intellectuals such as Park Se-il, Lee Seok-yeon, Lee Myeong-hyeon, with a focus on

⁷ This term refers to a group of people who were in their thirties in the 1990s, attended university in the 1980s and were born in the 1960s. This generation engaged in anti-government protests and experienced Marxist ideas, state violence as well as democratisation in 1987. The term was used to describe a young political force in the mid-1990s.

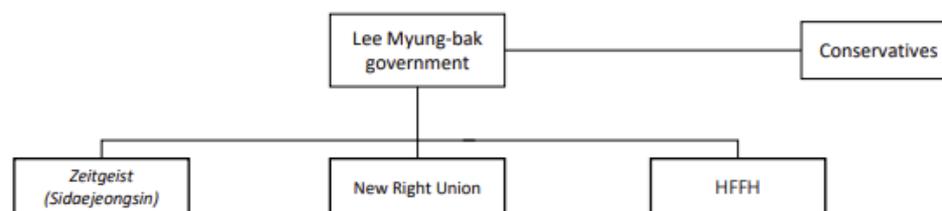
formulating goals like “entering a status of a developed country within ten years” (Jeon, 2006). The NCUK was more moderate and open-minded toward political groups of different ideologies as long as they could embrace common objectives, but it perceived the Roh government’s Sunshine Policy as an irrational strategy. Overall, it is very difficult to define the New Right’s goals and political orientation in one word due to the multiplicity of New Right affiliated organisations and leaders’ identities. Nevertheless, they were generally critical toward the Roh administration’s anti-market policies and pursuit of historical past trapped in leftist historiography, against which the New Right could share its “identity” and tolerate differences under their common goals (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015).

Apart from the proliferation and enlargement of the New Right, what was as important was to stop the Roh government and progressive force from disseminating leftist historical narratives further. Led by Park Hyo-jong, Rhee Young-hoon, and Cha Sang-cheol, who are an ethicist, an economist, and a historian respectively, the Textbook Forum played a crucial role in initiating a history war against the progressive force by bringing conservative historical revisionism to the political sphere. At its inaugural academic conference, it criticised the existing textbooks’ interpretations on Korea’s modern and contemporary history. According to the Forum, the fallacies of the existing textbooks are: 1) to downplay the value of the liberation and foundation of the ROK; 2) to deliberately neglect North Korea’s responsibility for the division of the Korean Peninsula; 3) to exaggerate side effects of industrialisation and economic growth during authoritarian regimes; and 4) to hinder democratic progress by highlighting oppression by authoritarian regimes (Textbook Forum, 2005: 35). Thus, such progressive perspectives were regarded as pro-North Korean, anti-capitalistic, and more importantly, masochistic (Kim, 2020: 13). On the other hand, New

Right intellectuals attempted to positively assess South Korea's successful development path and its traditional anti-communist policies that had been kept and fortified well until the advent of the Kim Dae-jung administration in 1998 (Yoon, 2012: 234-235). The New Right's historical revisionism was one of the pillars of the reformist conservative movement. However, as it needed to compete with the existing left-wing historiography, the social movement was bound to enter the political sphere. All in all, despite subtle differences within the group, the New Right movement had two fronts. The first was the political wing which aimed to help establish a conservative government, and the second was the ideological wing that endeavoured to take over the control of historical narratives from the Left.

2.3. The New Right's Failure after a Success

As mentioned above, although there was a political and ideological spectrum among New Right organisations, they managed to unite against their common enemy, the progressive force. The social movement succeeded with the victory of Lee Myung-bak at the 2007 presidential election. However, after the primary objective was realised, the New Right movement faced another question: what to do next? **Image 5** demonstrates divergence of the three major New Right organisations, namely *Zeitgeist (sidaejeongsin)*, the NRU, and the HFFH.



| Focus | Ideology | Social activism | Centrist conservatism |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Key figure | Ahn Byeong-jik Han Gi-hong Rhee Young-hoon | Kim Jin-hong Park Sang-ha Park Han-seong | Park Se-il Hyeon In-tack Park Gwan-yong |
| Sub-group | Liberty Union Textbook Forum New Right Foundation New Right Think-net | New Right Teachers' Union New Right Security Union New Right Parents' Union New Right Women's Union | National Congress for Upgrading Korea |
| Members who entered politics | Sin Ji-ho Cho Jeon-hyeok | Park Yeong-mo Jeong In-cheol Han o-seop | Lee Seok-yeon |
| Activity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set an ideological base of the New Right - Developed theories and policies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practiced New Right ideology on the public level - Operated nationwide network | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provided 'communal liberalism' - Clarified the theory of national advancement - Communicated with 'rational progressives' |

Image 5: Reorganisation of the New Right

<Source: Bae et al. (2007)>

It appears that there had been little change compared to the pre-election period except for the fact that the NRF changed its name to *Zeitgeist*. However, as the Lee Myung-bak government commenced, key figures of each organisation were absorbed into the government by becoming members of the National Assembly or Blue House officials. Moreover, as the goal to create a conservative government was achieved, the New Right movement lost its driving force. On November 27, 2008, Kim Il-yeong, one of the key figures of the New Right and a professor of Political Science and International Studies at Sungkwunkwan University, argued that the end of the New Right needed to be declared as the social movement had lost its founding spirits. According to him, this is because the New Right movement became politicised and power-oriented with the NRU aligning with the Lee government, narrowing

room for further movements for New Right ideology and innovative policy (Jang, 2008). In addition to the weakening of the New Right organisations due to the departure of key leaders for politics, these former New Right leaders who became members of the National Assembly in 2008, got eliminated by the GNP at the candidate nomination stage for the 2012 legislative election. In June 2012, two New Right leaders, Jeong Hyeong-geun and Kim Beom-soo, were charged with corruption, inflicting a significant damage to the New Right's morality (Baek, 2012).

Around that time, those who got involved in the New Right movement began denying their New Right membership, signalling that the New Right had lost a reason for its existence. In 2009, Hong Jin-pyo, one of the New Right leaders, argued that the decline in the trust of New Right had contributed to a drop in Lee Myung-bak government's approval rate and to a misconception by people that the New Right was politically captured the government, calling for "the second New Right movement" to no avail (Hong, 2009). Jeon (2007: 170-171) argues that the New Right as an organisational entity that arranged a reformist conservative social movement disappeared. Nevertheless, what is noteworthy is the continuation of organisations that attempted to revise history textbooks reflecting progressivism.

Whereas the political wing of the New Right could not avoid its downfall as early as 2008, the intellectual wing remained intact. A group of New Right scholars brought historical revisionism to criticise the Left's historical narratives that highlighted oppression and exploitation by imperial Japan and authoritarian regimes as well as the heroic struggle of citizens. New Right intellectuals claimed that the left-wing nationalistic historiography was anachronistic, and harmful for South Korea's successful entrance in the global market (Jeon 2007: 186). Ahn and Rhee (2007: 326-327) criticise that nationalism is based on anti-

Japanese and anti-American sentiments, which are irrational and likely to be influenced by North Korea's ideology. Indeed, the intellectual wing of the New Right remained strong, exerting significant influence in Korean society with its scholars publishing a number of books that offered alternative, but controversial perspectives. The next chapter will demonstrate New Right scholars' efforts to build their intellectual stronghold against left-wing nationalism.

Chapter III. Politicisation of the Debate

3.1. Economic Historians

Although the New Right movement lost its momentum as a social movement after being absorbed into politics, the history war between the New Right and progressives was still ongoing, with historical revisionism intact despite attacks from the Left. Behind the scenes, New Right scholars played a crucial role in providing a theoretical base for the ideological battle. Among them, a group of economic historians who belonged to the Naksungdae Institute of Economic Research (NIER) anchored the controversies of history textbook and *Anti-Japan Tribalism*. The image below depicts the genealogy of economic historians.

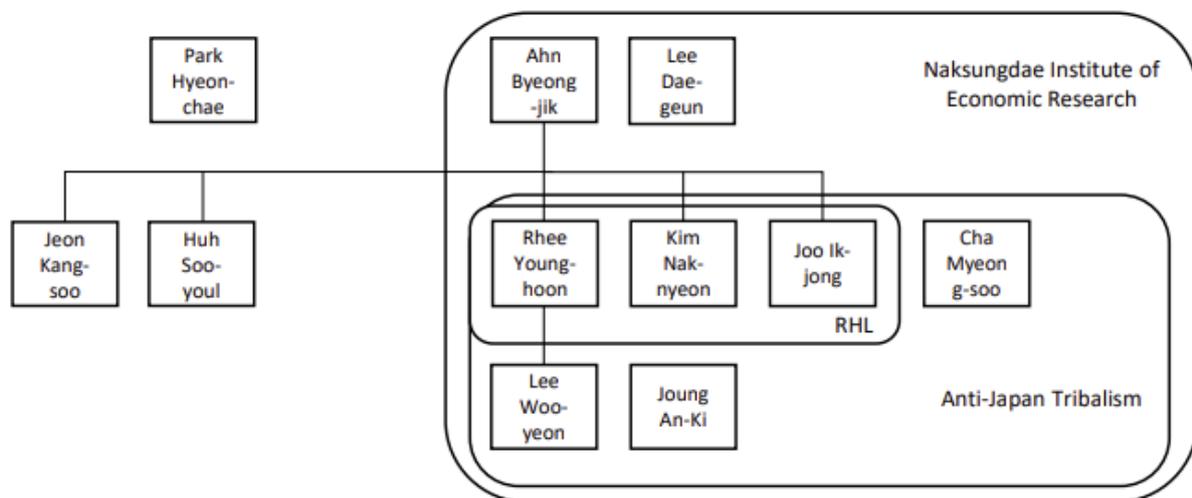


Image 6: Genealogy of Economic Historians

In the 1980s, anti-government social activists found their theoretical base from Park Hyeon-chae's Theory of National Economy (*minjokgyeongjeron*), Lee Dae-geun's dependency theory, and Ahn Byeong-jik's definition of South Korea's economy and society

as neo-colonial and semi-feudal, all of which have Marxist roots despite subtle differences among their primary focus (Tikhonov, 2019; Ahn, 2021). However, while Ahn Byeong-jik was conducting his research at the University of Tokyo in 1986-7, he was convinced by mainstream Japanese economic historians' view that South Korea's capitalism would successfully catch up with developed economies, leading him to accept the middle-advanced capitalism theory. After returning to South Korea, he founded the NIER with Lee Dae-geun in 1987 (Jeong, 2002). Since then, the NIER has focused on econometric history-based research, leading to academic achievements through group research by scholars like Kim Nak-nyeon and Cha Myeong-soo (Ahn and Rhee, 2007: 52-70). Ahn's academic conversion from pessimism to optimism changed his assessment of the Park Chung-hee administration's push for industrialisation to a positive decision that successfully brought South Korea into the global market economy. As a result, he started to argue that Japanese rule provided a basis for Korea's economic take-off from the 1960s, and this notion developed into the colonial modernisation theory, leading to an intense debate in academia as well as Korean society. In contrast, his evaluation of the late Chosun Dynasty is relatively harsh, pointing out that its financial situation at the end of nineteenth century was on the verge of collapse due to the failure to carry out a full-fledged reform which could have saved the Dynasty from colonisation (Bae and Joo, 2013). The large gap between Ahn's creed and the academic trend at the time caused a lot of controversies in the 1990s and onward.

As can be seen above, Ahn Byeong-jik has profoundly influenced second-generation NIER scholars like Rhee Young-hoon, Kim Nak-nyeon, and Joo Ik-jong. However, among Ahn's students, Jeon Gang-soo did not join the NIER as his academic interest was not identical to that of New Right scholars, leading him to distance himself from New Right

ideology (Jeon, 2020). In addition, Huh Soo-youl, although he worked as a researcher at the NIER and investigated the industrialisation of colonial Korea, his doubt in the colonial modernisation theory grew. Later on, he published a paper that criticised the theory on the grounds that the correlation between colonial Korea's development and the people's living standards is not strong enough as opposed to the connection the theory suggests (Huh, 1999). Nevertheless, Huh's view was not placed at the mainstream in the circle of economic historians.

Rhee Young-hoon, Kim Nak-nyeon, and Joo Ik-jong contributed to the two-volume series of *A Reinterpretation of History before and after Liberation* with Pak Chi-hyang, who specialised in western history, post-colonialism and post-nationalism, as well as with other scholars from various academic backgrounds (Pak et al., 2006), constructing a cornerstone of neo-conservative historical revisionism from the mid-2000s. Cha Myeong-soo and Joung An-ki were not taught by Ahn Byeong-jik, but deeply engaged in research projects conducted by the NIER, and also in the publication of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* later. Lee Woo-yeon specialised in Korean economic history and the forced labour issue. Taught by Rhee Young-hoon at Sungkyunkwan University, he wrote *Anti-Japan Tribalism* with his seniors while actively participating in one-man protests against installation of comfort women statues. Overall, it could be argued that it is the second-generation scholars who anchored the history war and the controversies over the state-authored textbook and *Anti-Japan Tribalism* which will further be elaborated later.

Image 7 demonstrates the historical lineage of publications that have been written or contributed by economic historians since the emergence of the New Right in the mid-2000s.

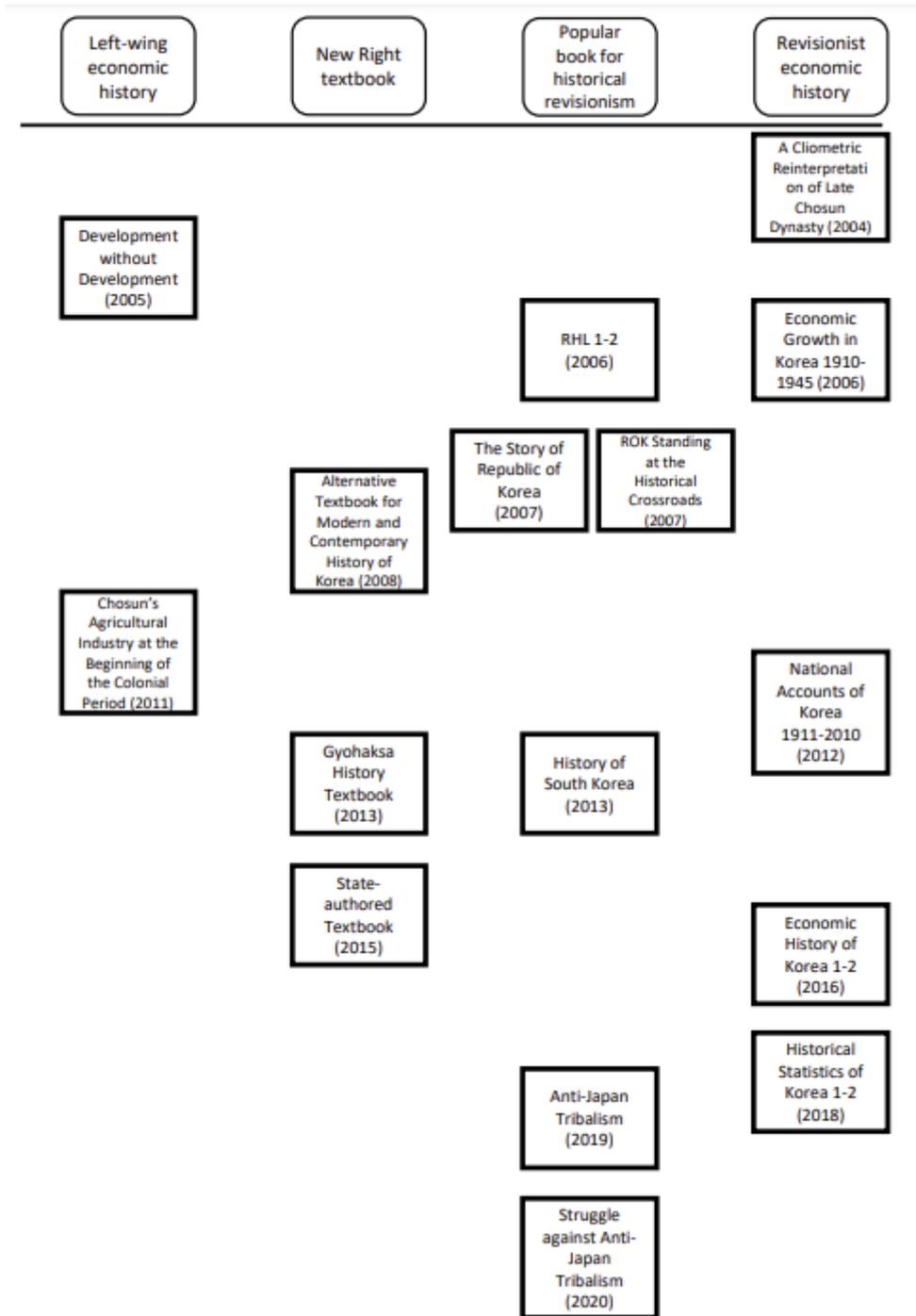


Image 7: List of Publications Written or Contributed by Economic Historians

Around the time when the New Right emerged, Rhee Young-hoon (2004) published *A Cliometric Reinterpretation of Late Chosun Dynasty* (*suryanggyeongjesaro dasi bon joseonhugi*), with an argument that the late Chosun's economy in the nineteenth century was

on the verge of collapsing with a lack of institutional tools to guarantee economic growth, suggesting that the Chosun Dynasty had no capacity to survive as an independent state in the early twentieth century. It supported the colonial modernisation theory which argues that imperial Japan had contributed to Korea's modernisation and economic growth during the colonial period. In response, after his departure from the NIER, Huh (2005, 2011) countered that theory through *Development without Development (gaebaleopneun gaebal)* and *Chosun's Agricultural Industry at the Beginning of the Colonial Period (iljehogi joseonui nongeop)*, pointing out that colonial Korea's wealth was concentrated on a small number of the Japanese residents so the economic growth during the colonial period should not be misunderstood or exaggerated as an overall benefit to Koreans. This argument led to academic debates against Kim Nak-nyeon (Huh, 2006; Kim, 2006, 2007) and Rhee Young-hoon (Rhee, 2012, 2013; Huh, 2011, 2013, 2014) in the 2000s and 2010s respectively within the circle of economic historians.

Since the emergence of the New Right, NIER scholars have written a series of books that reflect historical revisionism challenging nationalistic historical interpretations. First of all, RHL was published to counter the arguments of *An Understanding of History before and after Liberation (haebangjeonhusaui insik, UHL)*, the six-volume series published from 1979 to 1989. The latter influenced anti-government student protesters back in the 1980s including Roh Moo-hyun who said, "(after reading the books) I felt like my blood was up" (Joongang Il-bo, 2006), as the books depicted that South Korea was virtually colonised by imperialistic America after the liberation in 1945. Classifying the ROK's economy belonging to a periphery in global economic system that facilitates exploitation, the books conclude that

national unification with North Korea would be a remedy to many problems the ROK was facing. RHL rejects the notion as listed below.

| | An Understanding of History before and after Liberation | A Reinterpretation of History before and after Liberation |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Assessment on Japanese rule | Invasion, exploitation | Contribution to economic growth and modernisation |
| Colonial legacies | Settled in North Korea, but not in the South | Both the South and the North failed |
| Responsibility of the Korean War | Rhee Syng-man and the U.S. | Stalin's grand strategy |
| Agricultural reform | Incomplete with landlord-oriented system | Successful |
| Rhee Syng-man government | Caused national division, embraced pro-Japanese collaborators | Set a foundation for South Korea's overall growth |
| 1950s | Period of political turmoil | Consolidation period for parliamentary and party politics |
| Historical legitimacy | Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea, ordinary people | South Korean state |
| Major authors | Song Geon-ho, Paek Ki-wan, Im Chong-guk, Kang Man-gil, Park Hyeon-chaе, Choi Jang-jib, Lee Jong-seok | Rhee Young-hoon, Pak Chi-hyang, Kim Il-yeong, Kim Yeong-ho, Kim Nak-nyeон, Ryu Yeong-ik, Kimura Mitsuhiro, Carter J. Eckert |

Table 2: Comparison between UHL and RHL

<Source: Cho and Do (2006); Joongang Il-bo (2006); Yang (2021)>

It is clear that RHL observes South Korea's modern and contemporary history in more positive ways. First, UHL's assessment of Japanese rule is hostile, suggesting it crushed the bud of capitalism in the Korean Peninsula by invasion and exploitation, whereas RHL argues that it contributed to Korea's modernisation and economic growth. Second, the former praises North Korea's success in a settlement with colonial legacies while the South failed due to the incompetency of the Rhee Syng-man government. On the other hand, RHL contends that North Korea was no better than the ROK. Next, UHL attributes the responsibility of the Korean War to Rhee Syng-man and the United States Army Military Government in Korea whilst RHL argues that Stalin's world strategy to check the U.S. caused the war. Fourth, UHL and RHL show contrasting evaluations on Rhee Syng-man. The former lambasts Rhee and his

government for incomplete agricultural reform that benefitted landowners after the liberation. As a politician who lacked support base in Korea, Rhee relied on the upper class that had collaborated with imperial Japan. In addition, his steadfast attachment to conservatism caused a division with communism as well as North Korea. Therefore, the 1950s were a decade of political turmoil under the incompetent and corrupt government. In contrast, RHL's view is strikingly different in that the Rhee Syng-man government conducted a successful agricultural reform by redistributing arable land to farmers, which paved the way for capitalism in South Korea and the subsequent industrialisation during the Park Chung-hee government. In a similar vein, parliamentary politics and party politics were established and consolidated during Rhee Syng-man's term.

Most importantly, UHL discovers Korea's historical legitimacy from the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea and ordinary people as these two actors fought against oppressions by colonial and authoritarian regimes for the benefits of the Korean people. On the contrary, RHL recognises it through the South Korean state, which built the foundation for economic take-off, industrialisation, liberal democracy, and successful transition from a poor to rich country. Through RHL, the authors questioned progressive historiography, which was prevalent in the realm of education. As a part of the project, in May 2007, Rhee Young-hoon (2007) published a book titled *The Story of the Republic of Korea: Lectures on Re-acknowledging before and after the Liberation* (*daehanminguk iyagi haebangjeonhusaui jaeinsik gangui*). Rhee begins with an assessment of the twentieth century, summarising that South Korea made achievements in the political and economic domains, paving the way to become a "developed nation." Then he asserts that South Korea's progress in societal consciousness has relatively fallen behind, criticising the mainstream perception of Korea's

modern and contemporary history as anachronic misconception based on nationalistic idealism that is plaguing South Korean society and education and misleading future generations (Rhee, 2007: 14-28).

Six months later, through *ROK Standing at the Historical Crossroads* (*daehanminguk yeoksau giroe seoda*), Ahn and Rhee (2007) commented on South Korea's past, present, and future while pointing out chronic problems Korean society and people have alike from statist standpoints. First, they criticise that whereas nationalism plays an instrumental role in forming solidarity through independence and democratisation movements, rationalism often succumbs to emotions, especially when it comes to sensitive issues like the comfort women issue and anti-Americanism. They argue that, by overcoming grievances from the past, Koreans would be able to recognise and appreciate the path to South Korea's economic success and the necessity for the further progress. Second, they attack the Roh administration's amicable policy towards North Korea as it only recognised the totalitarian regime rather than helping North Korean citizens who suffered from the regime's tyranny. Third, they call for overcoming collective egalitarianism, which could be a barrier for the ROK's market economy, and assert that the egalitarian approach to education and job security would only lead to the spread of populism and predation of a state by society (Ahn and Rhee, 2007: 325-331).

Meanwhile, keeping a relatively low-profile compared to Ahn and Rhee, Kim Nak-nyeon has endeavoured to provide theoretical support for New Right ideology with his colleagues, publishing *Economic Growth in Korea 1910-1945* (*hangugui gyeongjeseongjang*), *National Accounts of Korea 1911-2010* (*hangugui janggitonggye: gugmingyejeong*), and *Historical Statistics of Korea 1 & 2* (*hangugui janggitonggye*) (Kim et al., 2006, 2012, 2018).

They are thought to be a significant academic achievement with vivid descriptions on Korea's economic development in the pre- and post-liberation period by econometric research, replacing similar works done by a group of Japanese economists in the past (Jeong, 2012). Kim argues that the infrastructure for free market economy was already established in the 1950s, helping South Korea benefit from advantages such as the status of a late-comer, population structure, education boom, and the economic containment of China imposed by developed economies amongst others, leading to the ROK's successful economic take-off in the following decades (Lee, 2016). Overall, the intellectual wing of the New Right showed robustness with an institutional presence of the NIER, where many of its members engaged in the establishment of the Textbook Forum, the NRF, and *Zeitgeist*. This was one of the reasons New Right scholars could continue to battle against the Left in the textbook controversy even after most New Right organisations became void.

3.2. Textbook Controversy

New Right scholars were aware that despite scholarly efforts in publishing RHL, it would be very challenging to defeat leftist nationalism as it had been strongly embedded in education. Ahn Byeong-jik argued that a hegemonic struggle was at the core of the problem, lamenting that the existing textbooks were dominated by leftist narratives. He asserted that such a bias failed to sufficiently address Korea's successful path while preventing liberals like the New Right from participating in history education (Bae and Joo, 2013). Naturally, New Right scholars were discontent with the monopoly of leftist historiography which they believed was misleading the public with a bias that would only allow citizens to see a partial picture of the entire history. This notion draws a parallel with Mannheim's description (1952)

of how intellectual monopoly is developed into fractional conflicts and polarisation with another historical interpretation emerging in society. Likewise, New Right scholars joined the political sphere and debates over history textbooks in alliance with conservative governments.

Shortly after New Right leaders entered the National Assembly and the Blue House in 2007, Ahn Byeong-jik became the director of the Grand National Party Yeouido Research Centre. He engaged in formulating policy agendas such as centrist pragmatism, intensification of national development, and denuclearisation, which became a cornerstone of the Lee Myung-bak government's key policies. In addition, including Ahn, leftists-turned-conservatives like Shin Ji-ho, Kim Yeong-hwan, Choi Hong-jae provided a theoretical base on the national foundation day, liberal democracy, market economy, and movements for North Korea's human rights from revisionist standpoints (Baek, 2012). Many of the agendas were inspired by some of the goals of New Right organisations, confirming that the New Right was losing its boundary as a social movement by being politicised after stepping into the political sphere.

In 2008, backed by the Lee Myung-bak government, New Right academics waged a history war on progressives, bringing history education into the political arena. In March, the Textbook Forum (2008) published *Alternative Textbook for Modern and Contemporary History of Korea* (hereafter *Alternative Textbook*, *daeangyogwaseo hanguk geunhyeondaesa*), offering substantially different views that emphasised the coexistence between oppression and modern civilisation in Japanese rule. Although it neither acquired an authorisation from the Ministry of Education nor entered the area of official education, *Alternative Textbook* received rave reviews from conservatives as well as Park Geun-hye, daughter of Park Chung-hee (Yoon, 2012; Tikhonov, 2019). In the political sphere, 13 lawmakers from the ruling GNP

called for a legal modification to replace the National Liberation Day of August 15 with the national foundation day, which was constantly championed by Rhee Young-hoon. Their proposal was aborted due to an outright opposition from the historians and civil organisations associated with the independence movement. In response to the provocation by conservatives, twenty-one history societies published a joint statement that the conservative force had been violating the principle of political neutrality, independence, and professional morality required for history education. Despite this, the Lee administration continued with a curriculum revision in 2009 and 2011, nearly nullifying the 2007 revision implemented by the Roh Moo-hyun government. The 2011 revision caused a controversy as the term “democracy,” originally written by the Committee of History Education Curriculum Development Policy Research (*yeoksagyoyukgwajeong gaebaljeongchaek yeonguwiwonhoe*) in its official proposal, was unilaterally changed to “liberal democracy” by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, which was responsible for the final publication of the revision (Kim, 2020: 15-16). In sum, the Lee Myung-bak government cooperated with the campaign to reconceptualise historiography and retrieve conservative historical narratives by overturning what the two previous governments implemented on colonial legacies and other sensitive issue areas in alliance with New Right intellectuals, who were now engaged in a social issue that was not only academic, but also political.

The commencement of the conservative Park Geun-hye government in 2013 heralded an intensified ideological war between New Right scholars in alliance with conservatives and the Left. From the beginning of the Park administration, the conservative force became more aggressive against leftists and North Korea. In 2013, another New Right-authored textbook was published by *Gyohaksa* reflecting historical revisionism, bringing a lot of controversies

as it depicted positive sides of Japanese rule and its long-term benefits on Korea's economic development in the pre- and post-liberation period (Kang, 2019). Furthermore, the textbook highly assessed the achievement of South Korea's industrialisation and the leadership of Park Chung-hee, while downplaying democratic movements such as the April 19 Movement, the Gwangju Uprising, and the June Democratic Struggle of 1987. In response to the backlash by progressives, the Park administration attempted to push for the promotion of the *Gyohaksa* history textbook with the authorisation of the Ministry of Education despite inaccuracies and fallacious descriptions, but the adoption rate was lower than 1% among all history textbooks (Tikhonov, 2019; Kim, 2020: 18).

Despite the failure to bring the *Gyohaksa* textbook to the realm of mainstream history education, the Blue House continued its coordination with New Right scholars by taking a more radical step to institutionalise historical revisionism. In October 2015, the Park Geun-hye government announced the revival of the state-authored history textbook which was implemented from 1974 to 2002. This would mean removal of the existing history textbooks by depriving schools and students of a right to choose history textbooks. Progressives perceived it as a devolution of the education system reminiscent of the authoritarian period. Hence, the government's move faced a severe backlash from the Left with a vast majority of nationalist historians refusing to join the state-authored textbook project (Choi, 2015). Moreover, most school history teachers were critical toward the project, as were conservative educators and historians (Tikhonov, 2019: 23-24). Nevertheless, the Park government and New Right scholars were steadfast on pushing for the state-authored textbook project. **Table 3** depicts their contrasting views.

| | For | Against |
|--|--|--|
| Existing textbooks | Written by nationalistic historians who worship North Korea | The argument that they are tilted to the Left is a far-right perspective. |
| Possibility for political use | Impossible in the democratic period | Highly likely that distortion would occur |
| Reduction of errors and ideological bias | Existing textbooks produced many errors. The state-authored textbook could resolve the problem. | The state-authored textbook has a lot of errors, and it would cause a further ideological polarisation |
| Violation of constitutional spirits | No, as students' learning right precedes teachers' right to teach. Parents entrust the former to the state | Yes, as it violates constitutional spirits which promote political neutrality of education |

Table 3: Comparison between Conservatives and Progressives on the State-authored Textbook

<Source: Lee and Jeon (2015)>

First of all, advocates of the project argued that the existing textbooks had problematic contents with favourable views on North Korea from nationalistic and biased standpoints, whereas progressives asserted that such a perspective only reflected a far-right view. Second, the government contended that the state-authored textbook had no political intention as such a view is anachronistic, whereas critics feared an influx of New Right historiography in the new history textbook. Third, the authors of the textbook pointed out that there were many inaccuracies in the existing textbooks and the purpose of the new textbook is to solve the problem. In contrast, progressives criticised that it was the state-authored textbook that had a lot of inappropriate descriptions of historical events, and conflicting information between the two types of textbooks would cause ideological and generational polarisation. Finally, whether the state-authored textbook violated constitutional spirits or not was another topic on the table. Conservatives argued that the choice of students and parents should be prioritised whereas progressives maintained that the project was unconstitutional as it would take their choices away, violating the political neutrality of education. Regardless of contention, the Park administration was ready to publish the state-authored textbook by the

end of January 2017, but in less than two months, President Park Geun-hye was impeached by the Constitutional Court of South Korea on accusations of corruption and abuse of power, signalling the end of conservatives' attempt to bring their own historiography to mainstream politics. The newly elected progressive president, Moon Jae-in, ordered the discardment of the state-authored textbook project as one of his first moves after he took office (Kim, 2020: 20-21).

There is an example that epitomises a New Right perception on the textbook controversy. The NIER scholar, Kim Nak-nyeon pointed out the existing history textbooks' descriptions for their bias and progressives' "conservative" and nationalistic stances without any willingness to seek a compromise at the time of the history war. For example, in the case of the flow of rice between colonial Korea and imperial Japan, Kim argued that although export of rice within the framework of market economy during the pre-WWII period and the mandatory requisition of rice during the war period should be differentiated, the existing history textbooks describe that the Japanese Empire exploited Korea's economy in general without much distinction (Kang, 2015). Later in 2016, he participated in the state-authored textbook project as a co-author. To the criticism of progressives on the description of Korea's economic development in the 1960s and 1970s as Park Chung-hee's achievement, Kim retorts that it was a combination of the consolidation of the liberal market economy in the 1950s, advantages as a late-comer, demographic structure and education fervour, the containment strategy against China by western powers, and more. He laments that the existing textbooks were an obstacle for the diversification of education, as nationalism and chauvinism are embedded in the leftist historicism (Lee, 2016). As Kim predicted, worrying about the sustainability of the state-authored textbook, the project was abolished in 2017.

Overall, despite New Right scholars' efforts to bring revisionist historical narratives to Korean society, their mission ended up in failure due to a strong resistance from the Left.

Considering the series of events that New Right scholars failed to impose their historiography on Korean society, one could imagine that the impeachment of Park Geun-hye signalled the end of both the textbook controversy and the intellectual wing of the New Right. The former is correct, but not quite so for the latter, proving how resilient New Right ideology is. In the midst of the conflict over the state-authored textbook, the Rhee Syng-man Academy was founded on September 22, 2016, under the mission of spreading the knowledge of Rhee Syng-man as a state-founding leader. At the beginning, New Right intellectuals, Rhee Young-hoon, Ryu Seok-chun, Kim Hak-eun, and Kim Yong-sam joined as teachers to educate North Korean defectors and ordinary citizens (Kang, 2016). Later, in June 2018, Rhee Syng-man TV was launched on YouTube, lecturing on various topics that epitomise New Right historiography, such as the collapse of Chosun dynasty, Park Chung-hee, and Koreans as a nation, intended for conservative viewers. What is noteworthy is, Rhee's lectures on Dokdo, comfort women, plundering of land by imperial Japan, and more, became more radicalised, turning into the main contents of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* (Yang, 2021: 353-354). Later, other NIER scholars like Kim Nak-nyeon, Joo Ik-jong, and Lee Yoo-yeon also gave online lectures on Korea's economic history, positive impacts of colonial rule, and forced labour issues.

As stated above, while the two conservative governments stayed in power, the New Right movement had lost its initial direction, which was to provide a reformist vision for conservatives. That is to say, at the beginning, politicians and intellectuals were united under the banner of establishing a conservative government led by Lee Myung-bak. However, once

it was achieved, the political wing of the New Right became void at the beginning of the Lee government, whereas the intellectual wing persisted. The alliance with the two governments for the mission of historical revisionism led to politicisation of the debate. The resilience of New Right historiography can be seen from the collapse of the Park Geun-hye government in 2017. The presence of the NIER, which was founded long before the establishment of the New Right, made the survival of historical revisionism possible even after the unsuccessful result from the textbook controversy and the demise of the New Right movement and the Park administration. Even without succumbing to opponents, New Right scholars' counter became fiercer starting from the establishment of the Rhee Syng-man Academy and Rhee Syng-man TV in 2016 and 2018, leading them to take a further step in 2019.

Chapter IV. Pinnacle of the History War

4.1. Debates over Anti-Japan Tribalism

In October 2018, the South Korean Supreme Court ordered Mitsubishi Heavy Industries of Japan to pay a compensation of 100 million won to 150 million won to each of the five plaintiffs who were wartime labourers, and this decision developed into a trade dispute between South Korea and Japan (Dooley and Choe, 2019). Along with the Moon Jae-in government's abolition of the state-authored textbook and decision to skip a commemoration for South Korea's 70th anniversary of state foundation, this verdict agitated New Right scholars and led them to become more anti-nationalistic and publish *Anti-Japan Tribalism*. This book caused another backlash and several books were published to denounce New Right scholars as shown in **Image 8**.

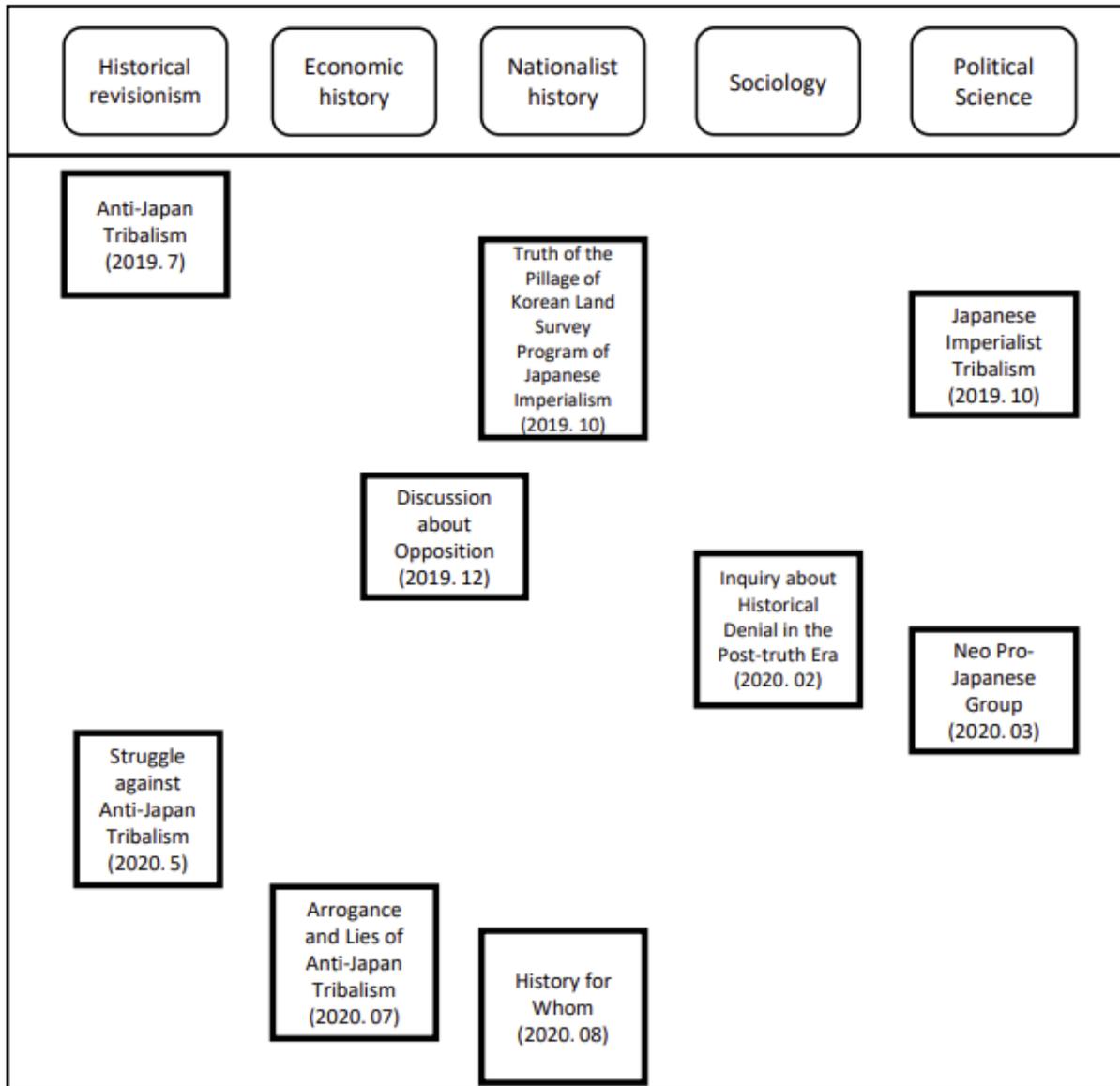


Image 8 – List of Publications after Anti-Japan Tribalism

As can be seen, *Anti-Japan Tribalism* was criticised by scholars from various academic backgrounds such as political science, sociology, nationalist history, and also economic history, which is a specialisation of NIER scholars. Three months after the publication of *Anti-Japan Tribalism*, Shin Yong-ha, a renowned historian who advocated the exploitation theory against the colonial modernisation theory in the mid-1990s, published *Truth of the*

pillage of Korean Land Survey Program of Japanese imperialism (ilje joseontojjosasaep sutalseongui jinsil). Following that, as political scientists who have professional or academic association at Dongguk university, Hwang et al. (2019) published *Japanese Imperialist Tribalism (iljejongjokjuui)* from nationalistic standpoints. *Discussion about Opposition (bandaereul nonhada)* is a book of interdisciplinary efforts, written by economic historians and nationalistic historians. Kang Sung-hyun, an expert in the comfort women issue taught by Chung Chin-sung, who is a sociologist and leading scholar in comfort women and human rights of women, joined as a critic through *Inquiry about Historical Denial in the Post-truth Era (taljinsirui sidae yeoksabujeongeul munneunda)*. Hosaka Yuji, who is a Japan-born Korean political scientist and received a Ph.D. in comparative politics specialised in the Japanese Empire's assimilation policies toward colonial Korea, Manchuria, and Taiwan, published *New Pro-Japanese Collaborators (sinchinilpa)*. Then, as a response to critics, Rhee et al. (2020) wrote *Struggle Against Anti-Japan Tribalism* in May 2020. Two months later, Jeon Gang-soo, an economic historian who was also taught by Ahn Byeong-jik, participated in criticising New Right scholars. And finally, a group of nationalistic historians made joint efforts for *History for Whom (nugureul wihan yeoksainga)* in August 2020. It would not be an exaggeration to say that New Right scholars have been surrounded by critics from multidisciplinary backgrounds.

Table 4 summarises contrasting perspectives between authors of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* and their critics in each issue area.

| | Anti-Japan Tribalism | Critics |
|---|--|---|
| Perception of opponents | Anti-Japan tribalists who see Japan an absolute evil | New pro-Japanese collaborators who deny historical facts |
| Colonial modernisation theory vs. exploitation theory | There was a fair transaction of rice between imperial Japan and colonial Korea without plundering of land. | Exploitation was practiced by systematic institution. |
| Comfort women | They worked on contract without coercion. A well-paid job with a right to quit freely | They were kidnapped or deceived. Their working condition was horrendous. |
| Forced labour | Neither coercion upon mobilisation nor discrimination between Korean and Japanese miners | Korean miners were forcibly mobilised and exposed to various types of discrimination, accident, and violence. |
| Supreme Court decision | Wrong decision in light of the 1965 Agreement between the ROK and Japan | Diplomatic claim was eliminated by the Agreement, but not for individual rights to seek compensation. |
| Disputes over Dokdo | South Korea has no right to claim the territory in terms of international law. | Dokdo is South Korea's inherent territory according to historical evidence |

Table 4: Comparison between Anti-Japan Tribalism and Its Critics

First of all, regarding the perception placed at the antipode, *Anti-Japan Tribalism* blasts those who produce leftist historiography as tribalists who perceive Japan as an absolute evil from the unrealistic worldview such as lie, myth, and shamanism (Rhee et al., 2019). In contrast, critics observe their opponents as new pro-Japanese collaborators who transcribe Japanese rightists' arguments with selective and arbitrary interpretations based on groundless statistics (Hosaka, 2020; Kang, 2020). Second, on the debate between the exploitation and colonial modernisation theories, the former suggests that the previously common claim that 40% of property in colonial Korea was plundered is nonsense. Additionally, they hold that the flow of rice from colonial Korea to imperial Japan was a result of a fair transaction (Kim, 2019). In response, opponents criticise New Right scholars, suggesting they constantly attack theory that disappeared long ago in the nationalist history community to take an upper hand in the

debate. Moreover, the movement of rice from colonial Korea to imperial Japan was a result of coercive measures by the colonial authorities (Jeon, 2020). Third, according to Rhee (2019), comfort women were not mobilised by force, but by contract in which they could earn a lot of money with a right to quit their job. On the other hand, critics counter that there was a systematic mobilisation by the Japanese Imperial Army by kidnapping and deception, arguing that they worked under cruel working conditions without any payment or chance to terminate their contract, especially for those who served at battlefields (Kang, 2020: 111-112).

On the forced labour issue, Lee (2019) contends that there was no force and discrimination on wage between Korean and Japanese miners. According to him, Korean labourers enjoyed a certain degree of freedom outside of work without the higher rate of accidents of Japanese counterparts. Hosaka (2020) rejects Lee's view that there was forceful pressure on young Koreans at the time of mobilisation, and says they suffered from a high accident rate, wage discrimination, and violence. On the Supreme Court Mitsubishi ruling, Rhee and Joo (2019) maintain that the decision was wrong, as the right to claim financial compensation was eliminated by the 1965 Agreement between the Korean and Japanese governments. Furthermore, it was the Court's mistake to accept plaintiffs' testimonies that were not likely to be true. Critics disagree with the notion as what disappeared after the 1965 Agreement was a diplomatic right to seek reparation, but not individual claims. They denounce the authors of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* for their indifference to the victims by denying their testimonies and South Korea's legal system (Kang, 2019; Hosaka, 2020). Finally, Rhee (2019) asserts that from historical perspectives, as the Chosun dynasty failed to locate the island until imperial Japan claimed it as its territory in 1904, South Korea has no right to claim territorial sovereignty over *Dokdo* in terms of international law. In contrast, critics

retort that as multiple historical documents in the Chosen dynasty recognised the islet as well as Japan, South Korea's claim over *Dokdo* is justifiable (Hosaka, 2020). Overall, the dispute between New Right scholars and their critics could be described as a clash between nationalistic and anti-nationalistic historiographies.

The radicalisation of New Right ideology is manifested in *Anti-Japan Tribalism*, compared to RHL, which also reflected historical revisionism against left-wing nationalism. On the comfort women issue, at least until the mid-2000s, New Right scholars held a critical view against the Imperial Japanese Army and the Japanese government for the latter's lack of acknowledgement of past war crimes that violated human rights. They argued that it was the Imperial Japanese Army and the Japanese Government General of Korea that are responsible for mobilising Korean women in cooperation with brokers, issuing certificates of international travel by violating international law that prohibited recruitment of female workers by force (Rhee, 2007: 139). As comfort women had no freedom in their everyday life in general, they are depicted as "sex slaves," which is contradictory to the argument stated in *Anti-Japan Tribalism*. In a similar vein, Ahn Byeong-jik also acknowledged that the comfort women issue is the quintessence of tragedy so scholars can barely discuss reality and truth about the wretched world these women had to go through (Ahn and Rhee, 2007). To approach such sensitive issues, Rhee (2007: 112) warned they should be analysed in an objective manner, as fury is an obstacle when discovering the core of truth and demanding responsibility from those who are responsible. Overall, at the beginning, New Right ideology possessed certain standpoints that would be agreed even by progressive opponents, but as New Right scholars experienced competition against the progressive force through the textbook controversy under two conservative governments, they increasingly became

radicalised. Thus, there is a need to investigate what made New Right historiography radical and unacceptable to even some conservatives after clashing with the Left.

4.2. Summary

This paper has attempted to highlight the emergence, evolution, and radicalisation of the New Right's social movement, ideology and historiography. **Image 9** demonstrates a historical lineage of the New Right as a flow to defy the Left. Reform-minded conservatives grew their scepticism toward traditional conservatives after two consecutive defeats at the presidential elections in 1997 and 2002. In synchronisation with this, the Roh Moo-hyun government's push for settling the historical past as well as anti-capitalistic policies led them to initiate a social movement by establishing organisations. The media, such as the *Dong-A Ilbo* labelled these new organisations as "New Right," resulting in the emergence and proliferation of the New Right movement. They mostly sought liberalism, market economy, and more flexible policies toward North Korea, while confronting the Roh government with an objective to win the upcoming presidential election. As the identities and ideologies were diverse, with leaders who had different social backgrounds, the New Right was restructured and concentrated into three major organisations, namely the HFFH, the NRU, and NRF, despite a lack of cohesion and inter-group solidarity. Although the New Right contributed to the establishment of the Lee Myung-bak government, as early as 2008, the social movement lost its driving force and initial goals as key members were absorbed into politics.

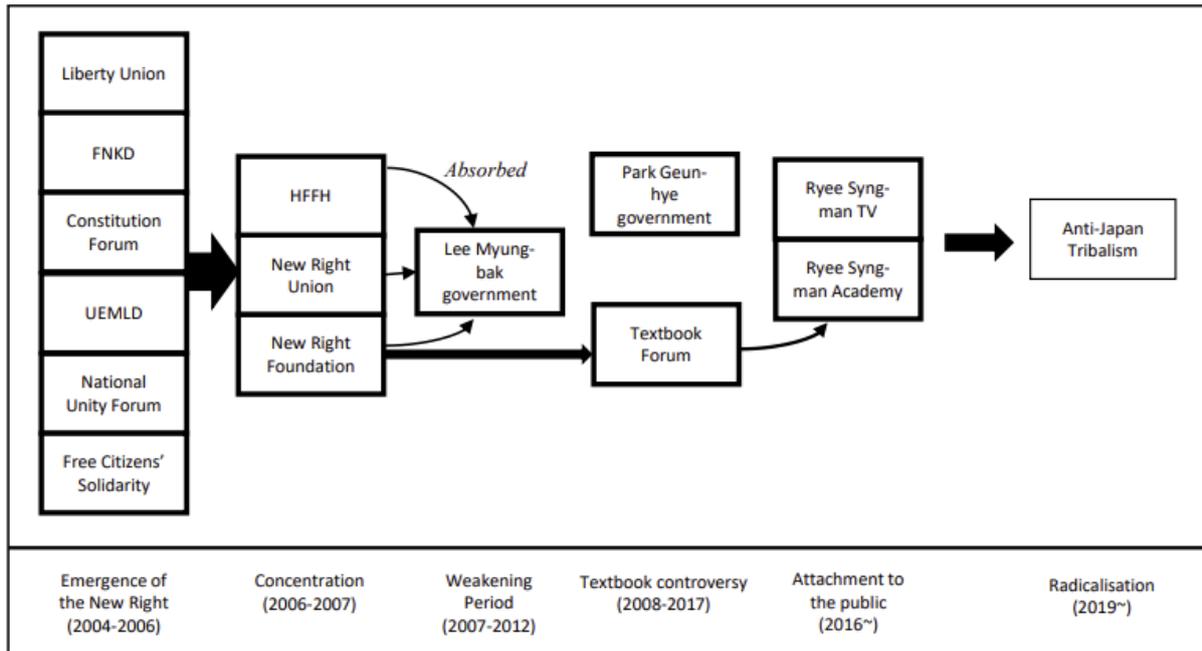


Image 9: Timeline of the Struggle by Neo-conservatives against the Left

Whereas the political side of the New Right failed to continue its mission, the intellectual side, concentrated by the Textbook Forum could go further with its long-term mission to replace leftist historiography. Although New Right academics were not able to win at the textbook controversy, they proved their resilience and adamant stances towards their own historical narratives. One of the reasons for the robustness and persistence of the intellectual struggle was because the intellectual wing had an institutional base, such as the NIER that consists of economic historians who have been connected as teachers and pupils for up to 50 years (Yang, 2021). They played an instrumental role as a backbone of the social movement, in alliance with conservative governments contributing to the publication of *Alternative Textbook*, the *Gyohaksa* Textbook, and the state-authored textbook, which nonetheless ended up with a strong opposition by progressives and a very low adoption rate. Despite the impeachment of Park Geun-hye and the Supreme Court decision on the forced labour issue, New Right scholars continued their social movement online and at various

forums to conduct a guerrilla war, which was less official than the setting of the textbook controversy in which governmental organisations and political groups were involved. Through the Rhee Syng-man Academy and Rhee Syng-man TV, New Right scholars approached the public more informally and freely, without reservation sharing their anti-nationalistic, radicalised views on comfort women issue and others, becoming a “sect-like” scholarly group (Tikhonov, 2019: 22).

Finally, the comparison between RHL and *Anti-Japan Tribalism* might be helpful in assessing the contextual difference between the New Right movement and the radicalisation of New Right historiography. RHL was published in 2006 in coordination with the New Right movement. Although several New Right scholars participated in the publication at the time, *JoongAng Il-bo* had to make a correction for its labelling on RHL as “the UHL in the New Right version,” as not all of the 28 authors were committed to the social movement (Joongang Il-bo, 2006). Along with conservative media like the *Chosun Ilbo* and *Dong-A Ilbo*, there was a collective action to broker a reformist conservative social movement (Tilly and Tarrow, 2015; Yang, 2021) without a clear definition of what the New Right meant. In this environment, the New Right movement could not be sustainable in the absence of a clear vision and leaders (Baek, 2012). On the contrary, not only has the intellectual wing of the New Right survived, but also a group of economic historians have continued to battle against progressives despite many unsuccessful missions to defeat left-wing nationalism (Tikhonov, 2019). This paper argues that the existence of the institutional base like the NIER and leaders such as Ahn Byeong-jik and Rhee Young-hoon is what made the survival of New Right historiography possible despite its limitations in entering mainstream politics. Additionally, the origin of *Anti-Japan Tribalism* can be found in most authors’ membership at the NIER,

participation in the New Right organisations and history war against the Left, and contribution to the Rhee Syng-man Academy and Rhee Sung-man TV.

Conclusion

This paper began with the question of in what contexts *Anti-Japan Tribalism* appeared in Korean society in 2019 with radicalised arguments that shocked not only progressives, but also a large proportion of conservatives. This paper concludes that *Anti-Japan Tribalism* is a product of intellectual continuity of historical revisionism whose origin can be discovered in the New Right movement of the mid-2000s. Behind the longevity of New Right historiography in spite of the collapse of the political wing around 2008, the NIER has stood resolute and constantly disseminated anti-nationalistic narratives in defiance to the leftist-oriented nationalism. The historical revisionism was at its height when key scholars like Ahn Byeong-jik and Rhee Young-hoon raised some agendas reflecting New Right historiography in the late 2000s, but at the same time, the New Right movement went beyond the boundary as a social movement, entering the political sphere. In the end, their mission to embody historical revisionism in education was not successful due to strong and uncompromising objection from the Left.

Mannheim (1952: 185-186) professes that the terms “conservative” and “progressive” can interchangeably be juxtaposed depending on the direction of social and intellectual progress. Shortly after democratisation, South Korea witnessed the rise of left-wing historical narratives that reflect the voices of victims who suffered from brutality under Japanese rule and authoritarian regimes. After successfully embedding a sense of victimhood in South Korean nationalism, the Left has endeavoured to protect and fortify its ideological stronghold from threats of the oppositional force as “historiographical conservatives.” New Right ideology has been progressive as it has constantly disseminated revolutionary narratives,

reminiscent of the way left-wing intellectuals promoted historical revisionism in the 1980s through UHL (Park, 2017).

In retrospect, the success of left-wing historical revisionism resulting from UHL, which extensively influenced young intellectuals in the 1980s and 1990s, might have motivated New Right scholars to emulate old-school anti-government struggles by the Left in the pre-democratisation era. Before the start of the New Right movement, NIER scholars focused on positive impacts of Japanese colonial rule on South Korea's economy, initiating the intense academic debate in the 1990s. Even before that, Ahn Byeong-jik inspired many intellectuals who committed themselves to revolutionary Marxist and anti-government protests until his thought conversion in the mid-1980s. This tradition of resistance against authorities may serve as a driving force with which New Right historiography could survive under a number of hardships and oppressions from opponents. With the knowledge of historical contexts such as a series of intellectual struggles against authorities, the radical language embedded in *Anti-Japan Tribalism* and *Struggle against Anti-Japan Tribalism* can be better understood. Despite relentless efforts through a social movement, lectures, and publications targeting the public, it appears that New Right scholars have failed to gain sufficient support and project their historical narratives in Korean society, demonstrating the limits of their intellectual project.

As can be seen from **Table 3** above, the worldview of NIER scholars is different to that of the Left, a majority of people who belonged to the New Right, and traditional Rightists. *Anti-Japan Tribalism* is the evidence. First, nearly all authors have a membership at the NIER. Second, some Rightists were surprised by the deviation of New Right historiography, criticising and distancing themselves from radical conservatism. In a similar

vein, Kim Nak-nyeon denies the association between the NIER and the New Right, as the former is fundamentally a research institute, which has never engaged in political activities on its name although members have political opinions (Jeong, 2012). Despite his argument, NIER economic historians are referred to as “New Right scholars” or “New Right academics” (Tikhonov, 2019; Yang, 2021). This is because, as Ahn Byeong-jik regretted, NIER members entered the political sphere during the Lee Myung-bak government. As they were engaged in policy agendas such as the revision of history textbooks, they became politicised (Lee, 2013). The labelling of New Right scholars put upon the economic historians is the cost incurred as a result of their engagement in politics.

Another finding based on what has been discussed so far is the absence of centrism in Korean society. First of all, some New Right organisations called for conservative centrism with willingness to embrace progressives whose goals are overlapped with theirs. But these centrist organisations disappeared after the demise of the New Right movement. Second, within the structure of the history war, there was no room for centrist perspectives as the struggle between the two contrasting historiographies was extremely intense and powerful. Thus, it appears that there is a powerful force to absorb centrist notions or ideology from conservatives and progressives who are dominant in South Korea. Though this paper hypothesises that the bipolar political structure is due to South Korea’s tradition of conflictual politics originating from the Korean War and more, the question of why centrism has not been able to be viable in Korean politics to date remains to be explored.

Kang (2020: 21) points out that we are living in the post-truth world where the truth is often buried and lies prevail. Ideally, to overcome radicalisation and polarisation of the debate, both sides will need to forgo emotions and focus more on philosophical and

ontological approaches to have a better understanding of why they make the claims they do about history. However, Korean society is trapped in a Hegelian struggle between neo-conservative and progressive historiographies, which fight for more recognition and an upper hand to win this ideological war in public forums such as traditional media and new media. Although progressive historical narratives are dominating Korean society now, New Right historiography will likely await an opportunity for a counterattack, especially after the victory of the conservative candidate Yoon Seok-young at the 2022 presidential election. In order to escape from the history war and achieve a satisfactory level of social harmony, an emergence of a mediating intellectual force will be needed in the face of many hurdles to overcome.

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국문초록

2019년 7월에 출간된 ‘반일종족주의’는 한국 사회의 반일 정서를 비판하고 위안부, 강제징용, 독도 등 민감한 주제를 ‘뉴라이트’적인 관점에서 해석한 책으로 출판과 동시에 사회적 논쟁을 야기했다. 본 논문은 누가 ‘뉴라이트 사관’을 정립했고 어떠한 과정을 거쳐 발전하였으며 진보적 해석과 충돌해 생기는 이념의 양극화 현상을 칼 만하임의 지식사회학에 근거해 기술하고자 한다. 대한민국은 1987년 민주화를 기점으로 경제성장과 맞물려 급격한 사회변동을 겪었으며 이러한 와중에 권위주의 시기에 제대로 다루어지지 못했던 식민지 관련 이슈가 1990년을 전후로 분출, 반일감정이 급격히 고조하는 과정을 경험했다. 한편 학계에서는 경제사학자인 안병직을 위시하여 1980년대 후반을 기점으로 낙성대경제연구소 연구자들이 공동연구를 통해 한국 현대 경제사에 대해 적지 않은 연구 성과를 거두었으나 국정교과서 논쟁, ‘반일종족주의’ 출간으로 인해 사회적 논란을 야기했다. 본 논문은 2004년을 전후로 한국 사회에 본격적으로 등장한 뉴라이트의 정치 세력과 함께 경제사학자들이 중심을 이룬 뉴라이트 운동과 이념의 발전을 분석할 것이다. 사회운동은 이명박 정부 출범 직후 급속하게 약화되어 영향력을 잃었지만 뉴라이트 역사관은 박근혜 정부 시기 2013년 교학사 한국사 교과서 사태, 2015년 국정교과서 논란을 거치며 건재함을 과시했다. 본 논문은 ‘반일종족주의’는 낙성대경제연구소 경제사학자가 중심이 된 뉴라이트 사관이 진보주의 역사관에 대항하여 도전하는 과정의 연장선상에 있으며 과거 식민지근대화론-수탈론 논쟁을 지나 보수-진보 간 이념 대결이 된 과거사 논쟁에서 원하는 목표를 이루지 못해 한층 더 급진화, 정치화되어 한국 사회에 등장한 산물이라고 주장한다. 이념의 양극화가 진행되고 있는 한국 사회에서 보수, 진보 사관을 아우르고 중재할 만한 정치 세력, 또는 학문적 시선이 문제를 해결할 수 있는 실마리로 보이거나 이러한 관점이 성장하기까지 상당한 시간이 필요하다고 생각된다.

주제어: 반일종족주의, 뉴라이트, 식민지기, 이념양극화

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