

NEW NATIONALISM AND NEW DEMOCRACY: ASSESSING AN JAE-HONG'S LEGACY

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Abstract

To provide a glimpse into this period and ideas prominent at the time, the article explores the ideas of the Korean intellectual An Jae-hong, a scholar-gentleman whose career spans the nation's colonial period and was entwined with debates over Korean nationalism. Natalia Kim channels and develops the insights from her work on the period and her book, *South Korea, 1945–1948: A Political History*. Focusing specifically on An's cultural nationalism, as revealed in his work, Dr. Kim demonstrates how An's thoughts on the Korean nation and the ideal political type (his 'new nationalism' and 'new democracy') were influenced by the historical experience and global political realities of his day.

Key words: An Jae-hong, Korean nationalism, nation-building, political conflict

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The 'era of liberation' (*haebang sidae*, 해방시대, 解放時代)¹ is critical to understanding the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the Republic of Korea and the subsequent political development of that state. The liberation of Korea from Japanese colonialism in 1945 ushered in unprecedented political activity amongst Korean people in the zone controlled by American occupying forces; Koreans had never before enjoyed such freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. As a result, liberation catalysed the rapid creation of a large number of political and public organizations, stirring a violent competition among them for political power.

Though Korea was liberated by the Soviet Union and United States, and its future depended mainly on the will of the Great Powers, the role of the Koreans themselves within the liberation was disputed: Korean nationalists could not officially agree to no local role in the liberation. Many of those who called themselves nationalists and actively participated in South Korean politics after the liberation were former Korean collaborators during the Japanese colonial period. For example, the leadership of the Korean Democratic Party (*hanguk minjudang*, 한국민주당), one of the most influential political parties in the period of liberation, included famous Korean collaborators (Jang Deok-su, Gim Seong-su, etc.). Officially however it was not politically acceptable for them to agree to having done nothing to support liberation from Japanese colonialism.

With regard to this perception of the liberation, Korean nationalists as well as communists engaged actively in the political struggle for the implementation of their own projects and nation-building strategies. Thus, political contradictions between the rightists (nationalists) and the leftists in South Korea during the era of liberation can be understood as a struggle for the implementation of a single, specific model of nation-building and governance.

An Jae-hong (안재홍; 安在鴻, 1891–1965) was a prominent Korean nationalist who was well-prepared to expound his own concept of nation-building following liberation. In 1914, after graduating from the Department of Political Economy at Waseda University in Japan, he returned to Korea and subsequently joined the Korean national liberation movement in the 1920s. Under Japanese rule, An Jae-hong

served in various executive roles at the *Joseon Ilbo*. Having been arrested several times for his anti-Japanese activities, he spent a cumulative total of eleven years in prison between 1919 and 1945. An Jae-hong was a moderate rightist whose name was rather well-known in the Korean national liberation movement due to his executive position in *Singanhoe* (신간회; New Korea Society), a single and unique united front of nationalists and radicals in the colonial period. Having spent the entirety of the years between 1914 and 1945 in Korea, his background would serve him well in the political environment following liberation.

In September, 1945 he created the National Party (*Gungmindan*, 국민당), whose political program was based on his theory of New Nationalism and New Democracy (*Shinminjok juui-sinminju juiron*, 신민족주의-신민주주의론). In order to understand the rhetoric of the program, or its appeal to Koreans in the liberation environment, it is necessary to establish the root doctrines underpinning it and to which An would appeal.

An Jae-hong's concept of 'New Democracy' and Doctrines of Korean Nationalism

Korean nationalism emerged in response to the rapidly changing international environment at the end of the 19th century: colonisation of the East and Southeast Asia by the Western powers, imposition of unequal treaties on China, and Chinese–Japanese rivalry over Korea. All of these developments required flexibility in the domestic and foreign policies of Korean politicians, and skillful adaptation to the ongoing situation. At different stages of Korea's development, the nationalists set related but sometimes different tasks for implementation. What these tasks consisted of was contingent upon the international situation around Korea and the domestic policies of its government.

The international environment created challenges to the preservation of Korean statehood and sovereignty, while the nation's internal political situation in the late 19th century impeded the construction of a modern national state. Differing conceptions of the international challenges at hand, and of issues relating to internal development, resulted in various approaches to government reform. As Michael E. Robinson noted, 'among Korean intellectuals nationalism was not a fixed idea but was subject to a rich variety of differing interpretations.'²

The Japanese colonial regime challenged the unity of Korean nationalists. Having been influenced by the sophisticated cultural policy of Japanese authorities, many Korean nationalists inside the country in the 1920s gradually re-evaluated their attitudes towards the current regime and the steps that they should take toward national independence. Instead of promoting narratives of fierce and continuous

struggle against Japanese colonialism, Korean nationalists formulated the idea that cultural self-improvement and spiritual self-cultivation of the Korean nation were preconditions for achieving national independence. As a result, it led to the formation of the ideological phenomenon in Korean nationalism, cultural nationalism, which had various interpretations of the current tasks of the Korean national liberation movement.

An Jae-hong's ideas propounded in the 1920–1930s may be described as a moderate cultural nationalism. In 1930s, An took an active part in the different movements for promoting knowledge of Yi Sunsin's and Tasan's heritages, the spread of Korean language, and the *saenghwal kaesin undong*, or life renewal movement (생활 개선 운동, 生活改新運動).

An Jae-hong's cultural nationalism was strongly criticised by the Korean socialists, who labeled all the activities of cultural nationalists as reformist and fascist. An Jae-hong thought that the Korean nation, beset by its complicated and seemingly insurmountable historical conditions, had to strengthen national unity and internal power through promoting its cultural heritage and spiritual self-improvement, rather than following the precedent of the Bolshevik Revolution. He wrote that, in order to survive in the current international arena, the Korean nation would need to demonstrate its eagerness to purify itself both by promoting its national culture and by developing extensive exchanges with the most progressive cultures of the modern world. Therefore, An Jae-hong strongly advocated nationalism to preserve the Korean people from total destruction and, at the same time, to further progressive development.³

Opposing the international spread of communist ideology as promoted by the leftist wing of the Korean national liberation movement, An emphasised the national importance of action based on the following criteria: unity of blood (*kungminui tongil hyeoltong*, 국민의 동일 혈통), cultural legacy, common conscience, and unique affinity with one another. Combined with cherishing the best in national culture, the Korean nation, An argued, ought to learn from progressive cultures to become an equal partner in international relations. Thus he wanted to point out that the path toward true globalization, or internationalisation, opens not through abolishing national differences based on class, but through encouraging national self-purification together with the effective assimilation of progressive experiences with foreign cultures. This is so-called *minsejuui* (a shortened form of *minjok segyejuui*, that is, 민세주의 and 민족세계주의, respectively), a concept that connects the coexistence of an exclusive nationalism with a growing interconnectedness of different cultures in the development of humanity on a global scale.

The liberation of Korea from Japanese colonialism in August, 1945 raised two central questions for the nationalists regarding the furthering of Korea's development, namely: (1) the nation's future form of governance; and (2) the necessity of preventing

any national divisions. Trying to resolve the first issue, many Korean nationalists (i.e., the moderate rightists) shared the concept of the three principles of equity (*samgyun juui*, 삼균주의) immediately following the liberation, thus demonstrating their support of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea.⁴

This concept was elaborated by Jo So-ang (조소앙, 趙素昂, 1887–1958), a member of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea acting in exile since 1919. Appearing in the second half of the 1920s in an attempt to subdue the ongoing ideological divisiveness within the Korean national liberation movement, Jo So-ang elaborated a nationalistic doctrine that comprised ideas of Western liberal democracy and social democracy. The theory of *samgyun juui* remained an ideological platform for the Provisional Government throughout its history (1919–1948). In November, 1941, the Provisional Government adopted a ‘Program for Establishing the Republic of Korea’ (*Taehanminguk gongguk gangnyeon*, 대한민국 공국강령), which declared the principles of *samgyun juui* an essential basis of nation-building.⁵ It is important to note that the Constitution of the Republic of Korea in the 1987 revision clearly states the continuity of the South Korean statehood with the legislative activity of the Provisional Government.⁶

When An Jae-hong put forth his own doctrine of New Nationalism and New Democracy in September 1945, he had also been much affected by Jo So-ang’s idea of three principles of equity. Thus, he demonstrated the theoretical continuity of a Korean nationalistic ideology and its autonomous development. As the reader will have seen, *samgyun juui* contained the fundamental principles of democracy. An Jae-hong thought that democracy was a model of development worldwide at that time, and was to be applied to Korea while taking national context into account. In answer to the question, ‘What is New Democracy?’ An Jae-hong said:

This is so called *samgyun juui*. In other words, New Democracy is a harmonious system of governance, in which all people in a state participate in the governmental process (만민공화대중공생)⁷ based on the principles of *samgyun juui*.⁸

In a situation of intensifying political opposition between the rightists and the leftists and increasing US influence on South Korean domestic politics, An Jae-hong attempted to keep a balance between two competing models of nation-building—capitalism and socialism. Though the American model of nation-building inspired many Korean nationalists on the right before, and especially after, the liberation of Korea, An Jae-hong thought that in a heightened state of international tension it would be too risky to choose just a single strategy of governance. He perceptively noted that a choice in favor of a single model of development could result in the Korea’s further dependency on the USSR or the United States. Their fear at the loss of their long-awaited national independence provoked some Korean nationalists, like An Jae-hong, to seek a way out through ideological compromise with leftists’ ideas,

which, incidentally, had wide popularity among Korean workers and peasants after the liberation. An Jae-hong pointed to the equality of economic conditions under socialism as the major advantage of this system. Though one can find An Jae-hong's statement rather disputable today, he was sure at the time that economic equality was guaranteed to be better by the socialist system than the capitalist one. Meanwhile, he pointed to political equality as a particular advantage of the 'capitalist democracy' (*jabonjuui minju juui*, 자본주의 민주주의) of the West.⁹

An Jae-hong's proposal to nationalise former Japanese property as well as the largest industries can be understood as a manifestation of his inclination toward the social-democratic model of development. But most Korean political leaders, from the rightists to the leftists, shared the view that the largest industries must be nationalised. In this sense, An Jae-hong's position did not put him in contradiction with other rightist nationalists—and, incidentally, it did not tie him politically closer to the leftists. An Jae-hong did not support the idea that Korean communists would confiscate the lands of the large Korean owners over a fixed size without compensation and would distribute them among the peasants for free. Instead, he suggested that the government reimburse the costs of confiscated lands but distribute them among the Korean peasants for free. This kind of solution to the land issue was widely supported by the Korean centrist parties after the liberation.

What's New about An Jae-hong's concept of 'New Nationalism?'

An Jae-hong's concept of New Nationalism arose as a response to the ideas spreading widely amongst Korean leftists surrounding the internationalisation of class struggle and the creation of a new global society without national borders. An Jae-hong was strongly convinced that a theory of class struggle cannot be applied to an analysis of the socioeconomic conditions of Korea after liberation. He wrote in *The New Nationalism and New Democracy* that, under tough Japanese colonialism, the entire Korean nation was a subject of disgrace and exploitation. Moreover, the entire nation was of a lower class, and at the moment of liberation it constituted an underclass. The historical task of post-liberation Korea was to establish a united nation-state using the concerted effort of the whole of this lower class, and to achieve complete national liberation and independence.¹⁰

Although the social structure of Korean society after liberation was very fragmented and had all the trappings of economic inequality, An Jae-hong believed that stressing class differences in current political and international conditions would inevitably destroy the Korean national unity, preservation of which was necessary for the future establishment of the nation-state. In attempting to protect the entity of the Korean nation, An Jae-hong found it politically important to encourage Korean nationalism based on the unity of blood and cultural heritage. He thought that a nation cannot

be divided or stratified by the application of class principle, or any other principle of division. Assuming that a nation undergoes change in the process of historical development, especially under the influence of the most progressive cultures, An Jae-hong argued that it remains immutable in its essential characteristics—indivisibility and irreducibility.

An Jae-hong's views on the nature of Korean nationalism following liberation are connected to his ideas propounded in the 1930s—that is, to *minse juui* (민세주의). The question that arises, then, is what exactly was new in his perception of nationalism. First, he pointed out that Korean nationalism must differ from German nationalism and Japanese nationalism, both of which were very aggressive, self-righteous, and based on ethnic and racial exclusiveness. Both German and Japanese nationalism failed in their efforts to conquer the world and subdue other nations.¹¹ Contrary to this type of nationalism, Korean nationalism must firstly uphold universal values of mankind while at the same time preserving national self-esteem. Second, earlier manifestations of Korean nationalism were based on the exclusive rights of the rich, powerful (clan or ancestry), and intellectually influential. Thus, wealth 부, 富, intellect 지, 智, and power 권, 權 of a privileged class were fundamental principles of governance, and which were the cause of either economic or political inequality in the society.¹² The New Nationalism ought to be based on equality of human rights, which were conceptually reflected, as An Jae-hong thought, in the theory of three principles of equity. It has become clear that New Nationalism and New Democracy are dialectically connected concepts in An Jae-hong's nationalistic doctrine: a rise of New Nationalism performe entails New Democracy, and vice versa.

Conclusion

An Jae-hong's political views allowed him to build a relatively successful career under the American Military Government (AMG). Occupying the post of Civil Administrator in the AMG, An Jae-hong had managed to sustain close ties with both American military authorities and the extreme rightists, who rapidly gained clout in domestic politics after the liberation. Unlike many Korean nationalists among moderate rightists, An Jae-hong supported separate elections to the National Assembly on May 10, 1948, and pursued his political career in the Republic of Korea. Unlike other moderate rightists An did not go to the joint meeting of the rightists and leftists that was held in Pyongyang, in April 1948. It was Jo So-ang's who went with Gim Gu and Gim Gyu-sik to Pyeongyang by invitation of Kim Il Sung (Gim Il-seong) and Gim Du-bong. After his return to Seoul, Jo gave an interview to some South Korean journalists where he conveyed his impressions of North Korea.¹³ He said that he wanted to see Jo Man-sik, a leader of Korean Democratic Party, who had been arrested due to his opposition to the regime of trusteeship, but he couldn't meet

him. Also, he said that they had no freedom of movement in North Korea, he and the others, who came with him from South Korea, were always accompanied by the representatives of North Korea. The latter just brought them to where the appointed meeting might be held. Moreover, he noted that he didn't read any newspapers there, and didn't hear any news. In Seoul, he even said that this was the first time after his return from North he could hold a newspaper. But ironically he escaped to North Korea after the Korean War started. He was found dead in September, 1958 near the Daedonggang River and assumed that he had committed suicide.

In the midst of Korean War, An escaped (officially, he was abducted) to North Korea and never came back to the South. Though there is not much evidence regarding his life in North Korea.¹⁴ It is known that he died in 1965 and was buried as a patriot who struggled for a reunification of the Korean nation.¹⁵

An Jae-hong was buried in the cemetery of Korean patriots who had escaped from South to North Korea, called the—*jeabuk insadeul-ui myo* (재북인사들의묘), while Gim Gyu-sik, Jo So-ang were buried in another cemetery, the cemetery of outstanding Korean patriots (*aeguk yeolsareung*, 애국열사릉).¹⁶ According to Russian archives, though An Jae-hong participated in the public and political life of the DPRK as a member of the Council for the Promotion of Peaceful Unification of Korea, consisting of the former political and public leaders of South Korea who know lived in the north (재북평화통일촉진협의회), his activity was politically insignificant. In July, 25, 1960, during the conversation between Kim Il Sung and an ambassador of the USSR to the DPRK, A. M Puzanov., the North Korean leader was asked about activity of a group of the former members of the ROK's National Assembly, who had escaped to North. An Jae-hong was among the members of this group. Kim Il Sung answered that they had no any activity due to their old age.¹⁷

I consider An Jae-hong's views on the nature of the Korean nationalism to be relevant in the present and to the current tasks of South Korea's national development. Although unity of blood and Korean ancestry have been gradually re-evaluated as so-called irreducible attributes of the Korean nation, due to the process of globalisation (and thus some of An Jae-hong's ideas require updating today), it remains a pressing task to preserve Korean nationalism in order to prevent falling into deep dependence on external powers. For An Jae-hong, true nationalism implies both national self-respect (the cherishing of cultural heritage and national independence) and recognising a growing interconnectedness of all nations in order to thereby foster mutual prosperity and well-being.

Notes

1. The European of Korean Studies generally uses the McCune-Reischauer system of Romanization. In this particular article we have used, for convenience the Revised Standard system of Romanization.
2. Michael E. Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920–1925* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2014), 11.
3. Park Chan-seung (박찬승), *Minjok, Minjok juui* (민족, 민족주의) (Nation and Nationalism) (Seoul: Sohwa, 2010), 183–192.
4. *Samgyun juui*, or the theory of the three principles of equity, can be provisionally divided into two parts: the first part contains a program of actions for achieving national independence and re-establishing the Korean state, and the second provides the essential principles of governance. These principles are the principles of equal economic rights, equal political rights, and equal rights to education. Though they are the fundamental principles of democracy, and definitely didn't add anything new to the existing perceptions of democracy in the West, including in Soviet Russia, their implementation had a critical meaning for the historical development of Korea. According to Jo So-ang, the enforcement of the three principles of equality would destroy the long-lasting Confucian tradition with its strict social hierarchy, thus facilitating the development of Korea as a nation-state on the basis of new principles of national unity. Some ideas of *samgyun juui* clearly indicate its social-democratic orientation: namely, requiring state ownership of land and the largest industries, and the obligation of the government to cover expenditures of the citizens on education. In general, *samgyun juui* was an idealised (statist) program of nation-building which is more reasonably understood as an ideological framework for some actions than a set of practical initiatives. See more in. Jin Deok-kyu (진덕규), *Gweollyeok gwa jisigin haebang jeong-gukeseo jeongchijeok jisiginui chamyeo nollli* (권력과 지식인 해방정국에서 정치적 지식인의 참여논리) (Power and Intellectuals: the Rationales of Participation of Intellectuals in Politics after the Liberation) (Seoul: Jisik saneopsa, 2011), 310–317.
5. The Program for Establishment of the Republic of Korea (대한민국 건국강령) is available at <http://blog.daum.net/didakfaos>.
6. See the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea (1987) <http://www.law.go.kr/lsEfInfoP.do?lsiSeq=61603#0000>.
7. In the original text An Jae-hong used the term '*manmin konghwa taejung kongsang*' (만민 공화대중공생; 萬民共和大衆共生) to describe in whole a democratic governance. This term derives from the Confucianism and was often used in An Jae-hong's text instead of the term 'democracy.' 'Manmin konghwa' was to stress a harmonious participation of all the members of society without class distinction or discrimination in the state governance.
8. An Jae-hong (안재홍), *Yeoksa wa gwahakkwa ui sinminjok juui* (역사와 과학과의 신민족주의) (The New Nationalism of History and Science) in *Minse An Jae-hong seonjib* (민세 안재홍선집) (The Complete Works), Vol. 2 (Seoul, Jisik saneopsa, 1983), 235.
9. Kim Jeon (김전), 'Haebang hu An Jae-hong ui sinminjok juuiron gwa kongsan juui bipan (해방 후 안재홍의 신민족주의론과 공산주의 비판) (*An Jae-hong's Theory of New*

Nationalism and the Critics of Communism after the Liberation), *Hanguksa hakbo* (한국사학보) (Bulletin of the Society of Korean History) no. 12 (2002): 208–210.

10. An Jae-hong (안재홍), *Sinminjok juui wa sinminju juui* (신민족주의와 신민주주의) (The New Nationalism and New Democracy) in *Minse An Jae-hong seonjib* (민세안재홍선집) (The Complete Works), Vol. 2 (Seoul, Jisik saneopsa, 1983), 49.
11. *Ibid.*, 22–28.
12. An Jae-hong (안재홍), *Yeoksa wa gwahakkwa ui sinminjok juui* (역사와 과학과의 신민족주의) (History, Science and New Nationalism) (The New Nationalism of History and Science) in *Minse An Jae-hong seonjib* (민세안재홍선집) (The Complete Works), Vol. 2 (Seoul, Jisik saneopsa, 1983), 241–242.
13. *Pyeonghwa ilbo* (평화 일보) 07.05.1948.
14. 민세안재홍기념사업회 http://www.minse21.or.kr/xc/index.php?mid=minse_year.
15. http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0070073.
16. <https://namu.wiki/w/%EC%95%A0%EA%B5%AD%EC%97%B4%EC%82%AC%EB%A6%>.
17. Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, fund 0102, inventory 16, file 85, case 7.