

Special Section: Unpicking the Hegemonic Threads in the Production of Korean Studies in English: Eurocentrism, Cold War Logics and Questions of Authorship¹

ADAM BOHNET Associate Professor, University of Western Ontario²

VLADIMIR TIKHONOV Professor, University of Oslo³

In 2015, Adam Bohnet, one of the co-authors of this Introduction, taught a seminar course on Korea during the Cold War. At that point, Charles Armstrong's prize-winning *Tyranny of the Weak* had been out for a few years.⁴ He had no strong opinions on Armstrong's scholarship, although he had been frequently annoyed by Armstrong's attempts to link North Korea to a very vaguely understood notion of Korean "pre-modernity," a tendency that Armstrong shared with his mentor at the University of Chicago, Bruce Cumings.⁵ But within the field of North Korean history, Armstrong was certainly a known authority, and *Tyranny of the Weak* was award-winning and had generally received positive or at worst mixed reviews. Although he did not assign it as a textbook, he did lean upon it quite heavily for lively anecdotes in his lectures on North Korea, spending a certain amount of time on what seemed to be a nearly unbelievably amazing story, purportedly based on Soviet sources, of the North Koreans arresting a dissident within the Bulgarian embassy.

It was only in the following year that he discovered this incident was unbelievable for a reason—it was an event that had not happened, at least not in the form described by Armstrong. The Soviet observer who was supposed to have observed it was not in Pyongyang at the time, and the actual incident

(with unbelievable details absent), appeared in Balázs Szalontai's *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*, but based on Hungarian sources.⁶ The incident, which he had described with great enthusiasm and excitement to his students, was, as subsequent investigation and growing scandal related to the *Tyranny of the Weak* beginning in 2016 revealed, one of many cases of events that in fact originated in the Hungarian archive, had been made publicly available to English-language readers by Szalontai, that Armstrong had subsequently changed (in this and in others cases, also rendered inaccurate and misleading), while also attaching a spurious citation to Soviet or East German archival documents. While the bulk of the plagiarism was from Szalontai's work, the work of several other scholars was also similarly misappropriated, amounting to, at the most recent count, at least 98 such cases.⁷

The committee in charge of investigating these accusations of academic dishonesty at Columbia has completed its investigation, the school has finally recognized the academic misconduct, and Armstrong has gone into early retirement. Cornell University Press has taken the book out of print.⁸ Why then do we revisit this incident now? The incident riled up the Koreanist social media from 2016–2019, seemingly with no obvious solution. Social media—beginning with BR Myers's blog *Sthele Press*, the Koreanists e-mail list (the KS world list), Koreanists Facebook and Twitter—struck us as playing a vital role in beginning the discussion (it would hardly have come to light at all without the contributions of BR Myers's blog), but as insufficient for responding to what amounted to be not only a case of academic dishonesty but also a failure of peer review. Social media, with its well-known pathologies—a tendency to be histrionic, partisan, posturing, male-dominated—struck us as counter-productive so far as convincing people or bringing proper accountability for the incident went. Above all, as we waited for a conclusion, it became clear to us that what was needed was a formal record of the incident in the medium which academics accept, treat as authoritative, and take responsibility for: An article within a properly indexed academic journal. The discussions by many distinguished scholars of North Korea in *North Korea News*⁹ and the *Daily NK*,¹⁰ and the excellent student journalism in the *Columbia Spectator*,¹¹ while beneficial, could not replace a public academic response in an academic forum.

Our original purpose for first a conference (held online via the University of Oslo in August, 2020), and then a special issue was the need to provide some accountability in what seemed at times to be the desperately slow and un-transparent process whereby relevant organizations (for instance, the American Historical Association and Columbia University), responded to the problem, or even seemed to minimize the problem (as was initially the case of Cornell University Press,

which issued its “corrected edition” in 2017).¹² Open criticism of Armstrong was overwhelmingly expressed by scholars (including graduate students), located outside of North America—although we were aware that many North American scholars of modern Korea were highly critical of Armstrong in private. Even now that some accountability has been obtained, the incident itself seems to call upon us the need to reflect upon the power-dynamics of English-language Korean Studies academia, and the distortions caused by global academic hierarchies centered in prominent US universities. It is common to hear academics in both South Korea and the English-speaking world pathologize South Korean academia as “factional,” “hierarchical” and “authoritarian.” The assumed contrast to South Korean authoritarian academia has generally been US academia, and yet the development of the debate concerning fraudulent citations in *Tyranny of the Weak*—whether the defenders of Armstrong who accused Szalontai of being “jealous” of Armstrong’s success, the general caution of the majority to make public statements concerning the affair, or even the fact that Szalontai’s work had been obtained by Armstrong via Szalontai’s dissertation when Szalontai was still a junior scholar¹³—suggested a very hierarchical academic world indeed, quite similar to the friendly and jovial way that South Korean academic hierarchies generally actually form (as opposed to a cartoonish representation of the same). The hegemonic position of US universities—especially top US schools—within global academia in the Post-Cold-War era seemed also highly visible in this case, as Armstrong, a prominent professor at Columbia, misappropriated the work of a Szalontai, then a junior scholar from Central European University in Hungary.

Above all, the affair suggested a need to reflect on the complacency of English language Korean Studies. It struck us that it would do English-language Korean Studies a disservice if we exclusively focused on Armstrong (although a thorough discussion of the Armstrong affair itself is obviously necessary). We reflected, for instance, on the frequency with which South Korean “nationalism” has been the key tradition critiqued in English language scholarship on Korea, and how often the US and Anglo-American academia is treated as a disinterested outsider. Focusing on Chosŏn history, this is notable in an article in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* by James Palais, entitled “A Search for Korean Uniqueness,” in which he provides us with a summary of nationalist distortions committed by South Korean historians of Chosŏn Korea (described as an unfortunate response to the distortions of Japanese colonial scholars), followed by a parade of generally American and Japanese scholars providing solid scholarship to correct these nationalist distortions.¹⁴ What is lacking in such accounts, in which South Korean nationalism is treated as a simple response to the Japanese colonial period, is a recognition of the role of the US and of US hegemony in the formation of both

South Korean and English-language Korean Studies. Indeed, with some consistency, brief histories of Korean's "nationalist historiography" focus, like Palais, mostly on post-1894 and colonial era historians, such as Sin Ch'aeho (1880–1936), and are sparse in their analysis of the political context of scholars—Korean, American, Japanese, or otherwise—working post 1945 in the context of Japanese and South Korean academic worlds under US hegemony. In fact, we need not look far to find a representative offender!¹⁵ By contrast, the *yŏn'gusa* sections of South Korean articles are generally overwhelmingly focused on scholarship since 1945, although they will often include some initial reference to colonial-era scholarship.

Palais, of course, was not an apolitical or uncritical historian—nor did he claim to be. He used his prominence to criticize the US-backed military regimes of the 1970s and 1980s, and famously refused to take Korea Foundation money lest it limit his independence against those regimes.¹⁶ However, in "Pursuit of Korean Uniqueness," he briefly acknowledges problems with the depiction of Korea in the textbook by Fairbank and Reischauer, but, unlike the Korean nationalist historians whom he criticizes, he does not place either scholar in broader political context.¹⁷ And yet Reischauer, for all his merits, was even then an obviously political scholar with a close association with the US empire, beginning with his seemingly consequential advice on US policy to Japan in the 1940s,¹⁸ his highly open and significant role as US ambassador to Japan in the 1960s,¹⁹ his politically-oriented publications,²⁰ his role as co-signatory of the so-called Tuxedo Statement in support of the US involvement in the Second Indochinese War,²¹ and of course his use of modernization theory itself. Edward Wagner, whom Palais discusses at the very beginning of "A Search for Korean Uniqueness," participated in that early organ of US empire in Korea, USAMGIK.²² A growing body of South Korean scholarship has indeed rightly sought to explore the political context of both scholars and their relationship to Japanese scholarship.²³

Since the 1990s, especially, a degree from a top US university has gained a dominant position in South Korea, perhaps exceeding its significance in the US—as may be seen, *inter alia*, in popular publications recounting the Harvard experiences of Koreans or the Korea-experiences of American Harvard graduates,²⁴ as well as of course the boom in "Geese Parents" raising their children in the US or Canada with the hope of providing them with English-language fluency or easing their entrance into an American university.²⁵ English language scholarship, much like Korean-language scholarship, needs to be placed in a broader political and ideological context—and this should not only be true of scholarship on South Korea post-1945 (where it happens more often), but also of scholarship on Chosŏn and earlier periods (which is often not placed clearly within that context). Here, we think it is important to consider not only work by specialists on those periods,

but also the accounts of “pre-modern Korea” in the writings of scholars of the twentieth century, who, much though they may critique the US’s role in modern Korean history, often make use of a stagnant and unchanging pre-modern Korea as a foil to their scholarship on the dynamism of Korean modernity. This is not a matter of dismissing English-language scholars as representing an “American” or “Canadian” view, any more than critiques of nationalism within Korean-language scholarship should dismiss these views as “merely Korean nationalism.” But it should involve greater willingness to place the English-language scholarly tradition within its institutional and political context, and to recognize the hegemonic role of the US, and US academia, in South Korean academia post-1945.²⁶ Such critical analyses of Cold War scholarship on China and of modernization are, of course, already common.²⁷ Specialists in Chosŏn history should take the lead in critiquing problems generated by scholarship of the period during the era of the Cold War—lest it becomes the task of scholars of twentieth-century Korea who may have only a partial understanding of the subject matter being debated.

Our preparation for the initial conference, and the subsequent planning of this special issue have been delayed first by the initially controversial nature of the affair, which made us cautious to contact people whose views we did not already know, and thus excessively narrowed the scholars with whom we were initially in discussion. Secondly, it was further delayed by the Covid 19 pandemic, which overwhelmed scholars and teachers everywhere, causing many to drop out of our initial conference, and others to be cautious of spending time on producing a new publication. Because our original project reached out to a too narrow community of scholars, we reinterpret this interruption due to the pandemic as an advantage, as we hope it will open doors to the participation of more scholars, and more diverse perspectives, concerning the role of the US, and of English-language academia, in Korean studies.

This special issue resulting from the conference held online at the University of Oslo in August 2020 consists of three papers. The first one, by Robert Winstanley-Chesters (University of Leeds, Bath Spa University), offers a definitive record of the events happening between the publication of Armstrong’s *Tyranny of the Weak* on June 18, 2013 and the early retirement of its disgraced author on September 10, 2019, after an investigation by Columbia University, his erstwhile employer, found the allegation of plagiarism true. The record offered in the article by Winstanley-Chesters provides ample ground for a serious, deep-going reflection on the status of the prevailing practices inside the academic community including Korean Studies—the practices which, to put it mildly, do not necessarily dovetail with academia’s self-chosen role as a defender of reason. Especially disturbing is the unconditional support initially offered to Armstrong by a number of senior

scholars in the field—the support which puts into serious question academia’s ability to function in a truly meritocratic fashion, judging its members by the same professional standards irrespective of their institutional belonging or place inside the private networks. Winstanley-Chesters, however, goes further than simply reconstructing the course of the events in “Armstrong affair.” It questions the very concept of sole, individual authorship in the world of scholarship where *de facto* co-production by multiple actors is an increasingly dominant reality, and suggests the necessity of further perfecting the rules which would allow *de facto* co-authorship to be accounted for, when the symbolic Capital of publication credit is distributed in academia.

The article by Kathryn Weathersby (Georgetown University) focuses on the America-centric epistemology in research focused on Korea’s tragic contemporary history which partly stems from the easier availability of American documents to researchers from North America and Europe (the same, in fact, is applicable to the predominant number of Japanese or South Korean researchers as well). A careful scrutiny of American records makes, for example, abundantly clear all the failings of the American occupation policy in the southern part of Korea in 1945–48; from its suppression of the political Left, to its reluctance to cooperate with the Soviet authorities on building a unified, independent Korea. A researcher whose main source are chiefly American documents may then jump to the conclusion that the US is solely culpable for the ensuing division of the Peninsula. Soviet documents, however, make essential corrections to this rather simplistic and US-centred picture. They demonstrate that Moscow took a number of essential steps to secure its interests in North already in 1945–46, starting as early as in spring 1946 to re-mould North Korean society in accordance with its own ideas on how a Soviet-friendly country should look like. They also demonstrate a very high level of Soviet control over the operations of early North Korean (proto-)state apparatus—which was certainly one source for the (legitimate) resentment on the part of Kim Il Sung and other national leaders of North Korea, leading them eventually to complement Soviet “Marxism–Leninism” with *chuch’e* (Juche) ideology explicitly emphasizing the importance of national independence.

The third article, by Vladimir Tikhonov (Oslo University), attempts to re-assess a number of endeavours to write on Korean history by US-based historians of Korea in the 1910s–1980s as reflections of inherently self-centric picture of the world. In this Eurocentric picture, traditional Korea was locked into a historical trajectory via which “modernity” was unachievable. Tikhonov agrees that American historiography of Korea achieved a tremendously high level of professionalization by the 1960–70s. While American academics writing on Korea in the early twentieth century did not even consider it necessary to use any Korean sources, the US-based

professional historians of Korea—such as Edward Wagner or James Palais mentioned above—were following the expected historical protocols, analyzing the original Korean sources in a way hardly different from the *modus operandi* of the historical community in East Asia. Nevertheless, as Tikhonov argues, their epistemological perspectives did not necessarily catch up with the heightened levels of professional sophistication. To both Wagner and Palais, pre-modern (Chosŏn) Korea was more defined by what it supposedly was not (a society on the track towards developing the assumedly standard capitalist modernity), rather by what it was. Concomitantly to this, there was a strong tendency to see it as a *sui generis* case rather than one of the bureaucratic monarchies of early modern Eurasia, sharing a lot with its peers in, say, Europe of the absolutist age.

As academics focused on history, we have to be humble. We know only too well that modernity did not lead the world into the realm of rationality once promised by Enlightenment thinkers. We live instead in a highly hierarchical world-system, in which the perceptions of the periphery by the observers from the core—historians, as well as many other professional categories included—have been historically shaped by all the inequalities which characterize this system as a whole. As Korea was historically a part of world-system's colonial periphery, it applies to Korean Studies in the universities of North America or Europe as well—both on the level of knowledge production and on the level of academic practices, some of which, as the “Armstrong affair” demonstrated, may lead to serious distortions of scholarship. It remains to be hoped that the attempt at a post mortem of the “Armstrong affair” undertaken in this special issue, will contribute towards the long-drawn out process of de-hegemonizing knowledge production surrounding Korean history in the academia outside Korea. While “objectivity” is perhaps hardly more than an elusive dream²⁸ it is hoped for that the lessons learned through the experiences of the “Armstrong affair” may make us, at least, more self-reflective about both our own cognitive biases and the inherent inequalities immanent to and embedded in the institutional structures and construction of the Korean Studies community. This will be a step in the right direction.

Notes

1. The publication of this special section and the workshop which served to generate the research and work behind these papers was supported by the 2020 Korean Studies Grant Program of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2020-C-16). We are grateful for all the anonymous reviewers who contributed so much to improving the papers and this special section.
2. Email: abohnet@uwo.ca.
3. E-mail: vladimir.tikhonov@ikos.uio.no.

4. Charles K. Armstrong. *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950–1992* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).
5. See for example Bruce Cumings. *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York, NY: WW Norton, 1997), p. 442.
6. Balázs Szalontai. *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev era: Soviet–DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953–1964* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005). For the problems with the record of this event, see http://sthelepress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Tyranny-of-the-Weak_Table-of-98-Cases.pdf, case 71.
7. The initial discussion of this topic was on *Sthele Press*, BR Myers' Blog, in an entry entitled "Revoking a Recommendation" first published on September 13, 2016, and regularly updated with dated entries after that. <http://sthelepress.com/index.php/2016/09/13/revoking-a-recommendation-b-r-myers/>. Readers are also directed to a document, compiled by Balázs Szalontai himself, entitled "A Table of 98 Examples of Source Fabrication, Plagiarism, and Text-Citation Disconnects in Charles K. Armstrong's Tyranny of the Weak (2013)." This document is currently made accessible via *Sthele Press*. http://sthelepress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Tyranny-of-the-Weak_Table-of-98-Cases.pdf.
8. For a discussion of this, see Coleen Flaherty. "Fake Citations Kill a Career," *Inside Higher Education* Sept. 13, 2019, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/09/13/columbia-says-historians-acclaimed-book-north-korea-was-plagiarized-publisher-says#:~:text=Fake%20Citations%20Kill%20a%20Career,been%20taken%20out%20of%20print>.
9. Andrei Lankov. "Tyranny of the Weak": The Row Engulfing North Korean Studies," *North Korea News* October 5, 2016. <https://www.nknews.org/2016/10/tyranny-of-the-weak-the-row-engulfing-north-korean-studies>.
10. Fyodor Tertiskiy. "Speaking Truth to Power: The Biggest Scandal in Korean Studies should be Talked About," *Daily NK*, December 13, 2016, <https://www.dailynk.com/english/speaking-truth-to-power-the-biggest/>.
11. Notably, Khadija Husein. "Amid public allegations of plagiarism, reputation and academic integrity of Korean studies program face scrutiny," *Columbia Spectator* January 28, 2019, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2019/01/28/amid-public-allegations-of-plagiarism-reputation-and-academic-integrity-of-korean-studies-program-face-scrutiny/>.
12. The brief existence of this new edition is discussed, for instance, by Scott Jaschik. "Amid dispute, Award Returned," *Inside Higher Education* July 5, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/07/05/history-book-award-retained-amid-questions-about-citation-errors>.
13. Note that an article published by Armstrong in 2005, well before the publication of Szalontai's book, was derived in fact from Szalontai's unpublished dissertation. The article has subsequently been retracted by the journal. Charles Armstrong. "RETRACTED ARTICLE: 'Fraternal Socialism': The International Reconstruction of North Korea, 1953–1962" *Cold War History* 5.2 (2005): 161–87.
14. James Palais. "A Search for Korean Uniqueness." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55.2 (1995): 409–425.
15. Adam Bohnet. *Turning Toward Edification Foreigners in Chosŏn Korea* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), pp. 4–8, also jumps, problematically, from the colonial period to the recent present.
16. "An Interview with James B. Palais," *The Review of Korean Studies* 4.2 (2001): 306–307.
17. Palais. "A Search for Korean Uniqueness." p. 413.
18. T Fujitani. "The Reischauer Memo: Mr. Moto, Hirohito, and Japanese American Soldiers," *Critical Asian Studies* 33. 3 (2001): 379–402.
19. For a brief outline of his career, see, among others, John Whitney Hall. "Edwin Oldfather Reischauer (1910–1990)," *Journal of Asian Studies* 50.1 (1991): 225–228. Also see numerous references to his role in Nick Kapur. *Japan at the Crossroads: Conflict and Compromise after Anpo* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

20. For example, see Edwin O. Reischauer. *Wanted: an Asian Policy* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1973) and *Beyond Vietnam; the United States and Asia* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1968).
21. See Fabio Lanza. *The End of Concern: Maoist China, Activism, and Asian Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 31.
22. James Palais. "Obituaries: Edward W. Wagner (1924–2001)," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61. 3 (2002): 1137–1139.
23. An Chongch'öl. "Chuil daesa Edüwin Raishawö üi 'kündaehwaron' kwa Han'guksa insik," *Yöksa munje yön'gu* 17.1 (2013): 293–332; Chang Sejin, Raishawö (Edwin O. Reischauer), Tong Asia, 'kwöllyök/chisik üi t'ek'ünolloji—chönhu Miguk üi chiyök yön'gu wa Han'gukhak üi paech'i" *Sanghō hakpo* 36 (2012): 87–140.
24. The classic of this commercially valuable genre is Hong Chōng-uk. *7-Mak 7-Chang: Mōmch'ujī annūn salm ūl wihayō* (Sōul T'ūkpyōlsi: Samsōng, 1993). A more recent example is Emanuel Pastreich, *Insaeng ūn sokto ga anira panghyang ida: Habōdū paksa Yi Man-yōl Kyosu üi tae Han'guk p'yoryugi* [*Life is a matter of direction, not speed: Harvard Profossor Yi Man-yōl*] (Kyōnggi-do P'aju-si: 21-segi Puksū, 2016).
25. There is considerable scholarship on this phenomenon, of which two examples are Yean-Ju Lee and Hagen Koo. "'Wild Geese Fathers' and a Globalised Family Strategy for Education in Korea," *International Development Planning Review* 28.4 (2006): 533–53 and Jiyeon Kang and Nancy Abelmann. "The Domestication of South Korean Pre-College Study Abroad in the First Decade of the Millennium," *Journal of Korean Studies* 16.1 (2011): 89–118.
26. A valuable example of the start of this sort of reflection may be found in Seung-Kyung Kim and Michael Edson Robinson, eds. *Peace Corps Volunteers and the Making of Korean Studies in the United States* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2020).
27. For instance, Tani Barlow. "Colonialism's Career in Postwar China Studies," In *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani Barlow, 317–412 (New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2020).
28. Peter Novick. *That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Authorship, Co-Production, Plagiarism: Issues of Origin and Provenance in the Korean Studies Community¹

ROBERT WINSTANLEY-CHESTERS University of Leeds, Bath Spa University²

Abstract

The long controversy and struggle over Charles Armstrong's *Tyranny of the Weak* may have, for the Korean Studies community felt uniquely transgressive and offensive, but the malfeasance and academic corruption of the episode is not by far the only instance of productive difficulty in the recent history of the academic field. This paper not only attempts to think through questions of authenticity and intellectual ownership in Korean Studies' difficulties with the writer formerly known as Professor Charles Armstrong, but also to explore other moments of complexity, both historical and contemporary, in the discipline. These include questions and problems surrounding co-production and practices of shared and creative authorship in many recent North Korean defector/refugee narratives, alternative views of truth telling and notions of "truthyness" familiar in a world of #fakenews and post-truth. The paper seeks a longer, deeper historical frame for considering Korean Studies "wicked" problems of authorship, touching on complicated processes of misinformation, disinformation and re-publication from the Cold War, past visions of political and ideological realities weaponized by security agencies and actors whose agendas and ambitions have not always entirely been clear. Ultimately beyond concrete notions of truth and objectivity, the paper asks whether Korean Studies should be concerned with the origin stories and provenance of text as much as with source and citation.

Keywords: Authorship in Korean Studies, Charles Armstrong, Plagiarism, Co-Production, Provenance

When Brian Myers, specialist on North Korean ideology and political culture widely known for his iconoclastic observations (and in his work as a literary critic, known for his iconoclastic book reviews),³ uploaded a blogpost titled “*Revoking a Recommendation*” to his then new website www.sthelepress.com on the 13th of September, 2016,⁴ a storm was unleashed into the field of Korean Studies and its academic community. On September 10th, 2019, very nearly three years later, the subject of Myers’ revocation Charles Armstrong, was forced into early retirement, declared guilty of research conduct and plagiarism by his own employer, thoroughly disgraced.⁵ Since this moment Armstrong’s reputation has been further tarnished as allegations of sexual assault against him have been levelled by a former student supported by Columbia University Graduate Worker’s Union.⁶ Current events aside this paper seeks to recount, as much as possible, the narrative set in motion publicly by Myers in 2016. The extraordinary story of Charles King Armstrong and his at one time, tour de force monograph *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950–1992* and his fall from grace at the hands of what can only be described as his own academic malfeasance. This narrative of course is not recountable without describing the details of the dogged pursuit of Armstrong by the academic he had repeatedly wronged, Balázs Szalontai and a small team of colleagues who picked apart the offending book and detailed the injustices that had been done with a substantial degree of intricacy. This paper cannot possibly cover all of these details or intricacies; one of the hallmarks of the whole affair was that the level of detail Armstrong had gone into when it came to academic impropriety, is matched by the volume of detail produced by those who sought to unpick it. There is a vast body of documentary material that Szalontai and the group around him produced, itself underpinned by an equally vast body of archival material related to it which both Szalontai and Armstrong used. There is also correspondence on the matter between Szalontai and Armstrong and between Armstrong and his employer, Columbia University of New York. There is a still larger body of public comment on the matter, which spans the gap between the more closed academic world and public social media landscapes, such as the furious discussion which arose on the Korean Studies world email list (often known as the KS list), after the 15 September 2016.⁷ It would be possible to write a monograph, a weighty monograph, purely focusing on all of this material and this affair, but this paper, while obviously foregrounding the Armstrong affair aims not to focus solely on it.

Instead this paper will seek to use the experiences of 2016–2019 to explore previous moments of unsavory, unconventional or substandard academic practice in Korean Studies both historically and in contemporary times. While the Armstrong affair is a recent bright flair up, Korean Studies as a field is no stranger to such matters. This paper therefore seeks to question and consider issues of authorship, co-production and plagiarism in Korean Studies more widely than simply a highly detailed review of the issues surrounding Charles Armstrong. In order to do so the paper will have to a certain extent, define terms and concepts. When it comes to authorship or by co-production what do we mean as scholars of Korean Studies? The author of this paper is a Human Geographer by discipline, and geographers have a very specific use of the word co-production which refers to the complex and fluid way in which humans and their societies produce in tandem, the landscapes in which they live, work and place, with the ecologies, materials and eco-systems those landscapes, in their rawest sense are made from. However this is not simply a uni-directional process and so those materials and ecologies also co-produce the human beings and societies who live amongst, next to or within them. Co-production is in this sense an unconscious process which necessarily impacts both parties, remolding and reshaping them as it unfolds.⁸ When the same terminology is used by writers or creative developers in the film or television industry it has a different sense, in that they jointly create a product, franchise or product for sale, and this is I suspect closer to the sense that academic writers have of it.⁹ That co-production is akin to co-authorship an act of literary or intellectual joint creation, using a shared writerly voice.

I want to suggest that co-production in Korean Studies is at times closer to the version derived from Geography; that not only does a piece of written scholarly work get produced, but that the authors of that work through the process of the writing and the finding, or attempt to find of a unified voice, become in some ways unwittingly involved in the co-production and generation of each others' intellectual landscape, influencing and shaping the framing and conceptual networks of any work produced. No doubt for the most part this co-production involves a fair distribution of work or labor, but this paper will ask essentially can it be co-production, when one author with either native language skills, or with a higher degree of seniority, influence or professional regard holds the key either to research materials or potential for publication? Co-production therefore is not always balanced equitably or fairly, so much so that its prefix "co" may become a little meaningless. To avoid confusion and unnecessary misunderstanding, it is worth perhaps in Korean Studies, rather than Geography introducing a typological approach to the variations in form of academic co-production. These essentially range from the fully acceptable to the fully unethical: Firstly a form of

co-production based on mutual agreement and open acknowledgement (where all co-producers are named, trust each other, and don't seek to disadvantage each other); secondly a form of co-production which is also based on mutual agreement, but in which only partial acknowledgement or credit is given (where one partner, such as a research assistant, is only briefly mentioned, and the extent of their contribution is downplayed); thirdly a co-production based on mutual agreement but where there is a lack of acknowledgement or credit (where the contribution of one partner is wholly concealed, though with their consent); fourthly a form of co-production based again on open acknowledgement, but with only partial agreement between the parties (where one partner is not entirely truthful or correct toward the other); and finally a form of co-production which lacks any acknowledgement, agreement, or mutual awareness between the parties; in other words plagiarism, where the consent of the person plagiarized was never asked for and they discover the fact of the "co-production" only later.¹⁰

It is worth also in this paper considering more deeply what we actually mean by authorship, when much of the work undertaken in the field of Korean Studies is done through translation, or using translated materials. How can the voice of the author or original producer of knowledge or evidence being focused on, possibly come through in an equal manner in the work of another author whose language almost necessarily privileges their work over the original. In Korean Studies we encounter for instance many writers and scholars who write and work in the Russian language whose data and scholarship is repurposed into English by English speaking authors who are much more famous and well known than their source material.¹¹ The same is true of course of Koreans. There are innumerable Korean scholars whose work is projected and amplified into the domain of English language scholarship and publication, not by themselves, but by others who utilize their material as the raw data for their own. Who in these cases is the actual author, and who perhaps might instead be translators, transformers or *transfigurers* of the original source material? Here Korean Studies comes into intersection with the field of literature and translated literature, even with non-fiction and semi-fiction writing, which is very important in the field of North Korean defector or refugee memoirs, which this paper will seek to touch on and which have created some of the most publicly and globally famous moments in which truths become undermined or deconstructed in some way.

Mentioning truth in the preceding paragraph at the same time as talking about such ostensibly non-fiction material reminds the reader that we are writing and reading in a historical moment when truth is hugely important and contested. As much as some writers would have it that we live in a "post-truth" age, the energy revolving around popular claims and counter claims suggests that far from being

beyond truth, truth is still hugely important.¹² New terminologies have arisen in recent years to give a sense of some of the energy behind truth claims made in the public and media arenas. Something is said to have a “truthiness” about it when it feels like it is much more likely to be true, or to contain content which in spite of other aspects which might not seem so, core elements of the content certainly feel they should be true.¹³ There is a lot about the industry around North Korea defector/refugee writing which is possessed of a degree of “truthiness.” Given the sense that North Korea is a catastrophically autocratic country, content on harming, depriving and traumatizing its own people, it stands to reason for readers that horrible things have happened, almost indescribably horrible things which appear almost beyond conventional levels of horror. It is “truthy” that such things have happened, and “truthy” that those who have somehow escaped from such things bear witness to them, and will be able to recount honest and uninflated versions of them. The same in a sense is true of the writing of Charles Armstrong. For academics it seemed “truthy” that Armstrong would produce a book such as *Tyranny of the Weak*, erudite, but rooted in complex, deep readings of archival collections, even those in foreign languages. It was unlikely or “untruthy” that Armstrong could have co-opted or appropriated the work and scholarship of someone else, all the better to amplify and project his own academic authority and prestige.

At the same time as considering notions of truth or truthiness, it is worth the paper returning to our conceptualization of what is plagiarism and what is it to plagiarize the work of another. A number of readers will no doubt work in academic institutions and mark or assess the work of students. For the most part that assessment will be done in tandem with a complex and ubiquitous piece of technology known as “Turnitin” through which we feed all the material submitted to us and expect it to be able to determine what is or is not sourced correctly.¹⁴ This piece of software technology has in our own professional work become the primary arbiter of what is plagiarized and what has been attributed correctly. With *Turnitin* we obtain a percentage similarity for every piece of work and can actually track backwards, using its enormous database of inputted material, to any original source. This in part outsources our responsibility and perception of what is plagiarized, as well as redefining what is plagiarism itself. Previously what academics would have considered simply bad or incomplete attribution can become full scale plagiarism, but on the other hand, well paraphrased or reconfigured writing, even without sourcing, can pass the systems by. Likewise material which has convincing source or attribution markers can also pass the systems by.¹⁵ Thus plagiarism as we know it has become an algorithmic, technical or mechanical process. But just as it is hard for us to keep hold of our handle on

what is “truthy” or what is possessed of “truthiness,” this means that plagiarism that is more artful or creative approach can get lost. It can also be subsumed into the prerogatives and pressures of the publication and academic industry. As some presentations of the Armstrong story sought to demonstrate, we are all under enormous pressure to publish, and certain moments in academic life, tenure preparation or REF censuses (in the UK), can only amplify those pressures.¹⁶ Early on in the process of this story, it was suggested the Armstrong affair was a case when an academic’s compass on what might constitute plagiarism or appropriation of another’s work had become lost or displaced, when faced with an endless set of reference notes behind the book in question, which after many years working may not have been in the most comprehensive or coherent order. As readers will actually see, when the results of Columbia University of New York’s investigation were actually released, this was not the case at all.¹⁷

Having considered notions of authorship, co-production, truth and “truthiness” and plagiarism or appropriation the author of this paper suggests that perhaps another conceptual frame might be useful or helpful in which to locate a future approach or reconfiguration for Korean Studies, one based on consideration of origin or provenance from Art History and curatorial practices. Provenance as a term originally derived from practices of business and trade, relating to the validity of notes and accreditation documents held by a trader or middleman attesting to their creditworthiness or reliability in ages when communication was slow and it was just not possible to verify one’s credentials on the spot. Such notes had to be produced in a certain way, using particular forms such as seals and watermarks, and the validity of such documents and whether the value they bestowed on the trader before a client could really be transferred or not, this reliability was their provenance. As trading and economic practices developed and items of value became more and more specific and unique, it became particularly important that those things being traded could be verified as what they were claimed to be. This was particularly true when it came to painted fine art and sculpture as the economic structures of the art world moved from roots in patronage and direct connection to the ruling and highest classes, to one based on an “art market” through which painted, sculpted and later photographed and graphically produced works could be freely traded.¹⁸ These art and creative objects had values which were set up by this market and trading, values connected to their scarcity and more esoteric trends of desire and fashion. As the value of painted and sculptural art in particular increased in the 19th century, and as the technological revolutions, which in part generated the capital for the market, threatened to make their reproduction possible and increasingly inexpensive, strategies for accrediting their originality and uniqueness became ever more important.¹⁹

Art provenance thus became one of the key pillars of the art market and a sub-industry focused on the techniques, abilities and knowledge sets which would allow interested parties, buyers and sellers, to trace art pieces' histories and ownerships. This became particularly important in Europe after the 1939–1945 war during which Nazi Germany sought to steal and appropriate collections of art from the many countries occupied by their armed forces, as well as to appropriate culturally important (and other) property from populations marked for extermination by fascist ideology.²⁰ Following the war the remaining descendants and family members who had owned these artworks, together with national collections from liberated countries sought to recover their property (and in a number of cases are still trying to do so), from the post war West German state. To do so they had to prove by provenance that works which had changed hands and changed geography many times since they had been stolen or appropriated, had once belonged to them.²¹ Already existing strategies and practices of provenance became hugely important in this exercise, and techniques developed even further. This development with the invention of X-ray, CT scanning and MRI technology has progressed in recent years beyond matters of simple ownership to explore below the paint or plaster itself in order to interrogate the age of a painting or the chemical make up of the pigments it was produced with.²²

Moving beyond art and cultural products and production, but remaining with the world of technology, provenance has accrued another meaning or field in recent years with what is known as data provenance or data lineage. Essentially as computer systems and interlinked networks have become ever more vital to the functioning of global economic structures and social practices and needs, the links between computers, systems and databases provided by the hypertext protocol based internet become ever more intrinsic to their functioning, it becomes more and more important to be able to trace what is flowing through those links.²³ Open Source data and computing systems thus require a level of traceability of the information and data that flows within and around them, in order to establish the lineage or provenance of that data. In part this is to avoid bad data, bugs or errors to flow around the system, but in another part this to allow rights holders to establish whether their data is being used in a way which is allowed by contracts and licenses. Equally, Open Source software and data must be open everywhere and not appropriated by profit seekers, and so its free lineage becomes also vital.²⁴ In pure science research open data and data lineage or provenance are also hugely important when it comes to the requirement for reproducibility—there is an epidemic of irreproducibility in recent years in many pure science disciplines which drives even further the need for the original data to be open and clear. It is worth considering whether the Armstrong case demonstrates a real need for

both data provenance and data lineage in Korean Studies, as other elements of this paper will recall, one of the key elements of the whole affair was the complication involved in the tracing of where particular elements of the knowledge or data derived from. As such this paper considers whether Koreanists and other Asian Studies academics might gain from incorporating practices of provenance and lineage into our ethical and practical frameworks. This is of course what referencing or citation is ultimately for, however might we as an academic community take this further and consider alternate strategies to avoid such instances in the future.

Finally moving beyond provenance and lineage, but not beyond the issue which lies beneath them, namely traceability, the author of this paper hopes that readers might consider Origin as a further potential tool to connect with our disciplinary notions of authorship and co-production in order to avoid such instances of appropriation, plagiarism and malfeasance in the future. My use of the term “origin” is deliberate, and I also deliberately derive it from French property law. Ultimately I am referring to the “*Law of 6 May 1919 relating to the Protection of Appellations of Origin*,” a law which regularized in modern legal frameworks, a particularly French route to the protection of food and drink producers, rooted in the location of a producers production, the first instance of which was in 1411 when the people of Roquefort sur Soulzon in southern France were granted the legal monopoly on the sale and production of their famous soft blue cheese, now known as Roquefort, by King Charles VI.²⁵ 1919’s law gave birth to what we now know as *Appellation D’origine Contrôlée* or “controlled designation of origin” in English. This legal principle regarding food production has been translated into many different legal frameworks in Europe and elsewhere and has been used to protect not only the geographic areas in which food and drinks can be produced, but the breeds of animal involved in their production, the techniques used, and even in the case of Mimollette cheese from Lille in France, the fact that the cheese is in part aged by the use of cheese mites on its surface (though the use of fly larvae in the production of Sardinia’s Casa Marzu has not allowed the granting of a “*Denominazione Origine Protetta*,” but instead the banning of the cheese’s production entirely on health and safety grounds).²⁶ Obviously academic work and scholarship is some distance away conceptually from food production, but it is clear in Korean Studies that a lot of that work derives from access to particular places and locations, not simply for fieldwork, but also for archival and documentary collection.

Another of the important elements in the Armstrong story was the geography of the collecting of data by Balázs Szalontai, and also supposedly by Charles Armstrong. A researcher engaged with this level of research in Korean Studies

develops a repertoire of productive skills when it comes to archival research, similar perhaps to those skills of production involved in food production. Each archive has its own bureaucratic process and empirical landscape, and a researcher must know the vagaries of each. The collections within each must be harvested and extracted in a particular way, and received by the researcher in a specific format or style. Each catalogue must be searched or interrogated in its own unique manner, and in fact sometimes constructed or crowd sourced by the academic and those they might know. Also each country a researcher visits, not only has its own language and set of cultural norms, but it has its own set of academic principles and scholarly traditions—these traditions necessarily often build upon the work of generations of scholars from that country, and the writing and research done in those places is often a product not only of the scholars themselves, but of the national traditions and processes behind them. It is very possible, as was the case in the investigation of the Armstrong affair, for academic practices derived from the origin of the data and material extracted by an academic in their work of collection, to be marked by the geographical and cultural traditions of the place from where it came. This, it will become clear, made it obvious to this author, that Armstrong had never himself seen some of the sources he had claimed to have used, in situ as he suggested he had in his research process. This paper suggests therefore that collectively the Korean Studies community might conceptualize a way of taking into account “origin” as a factor or an important element in our approach and framework of authorship and production, and develop strategies perhaps to use as a tool in the investigation of future moments of plagiarism and academic malpractice.

Armstrong also examines the competition for legitimacy between the two Koreas during the Cold War. His book builds on the work of projects hosted at the Wilson Center, in Washington, D.C., and on his travels to various capitals; the result is a superb example of international history that makes use of multiple archives.²⁷

With notions of authorship, production and co-production, plagiarism, origin and provenance in mind this paper is worth returning to the book which essentially drives the interest of this paper, and so many others’ concerns. *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World 1950–1992* was published on 18 June 2013 by Cornell University Press as part of its *Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute* series. It would not be an understatement to say that at the time it was acclaimed.²⁸ Charles Armstrong’s first monograph *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950* had been well received, and he was now a tenured Professor at Columbia and an important player in much of the institutional superstructures behind Korean Studies as a discipline in the USA, sitting on many funding

committees and on the Editorial Boards of a number of journals. The very positive review which starts this section of the paper, published in *Foreign Affairs*, and still like many such statements of support for the book, in spite of what has happened, available online with no additional comment or retraction, was one of many such reviews in both academic journals and other more publicly facing media.²⁹ What is interesting with hindsight is that one of the things many of these reviews sort to focus on and praise in Armstrong's book at the time was the perception that it was especially strong in its use of archival sources and a careful reading of some highly unconventional and hard to access sources. Very quickly *Tyranny of the Weak* ended up on university reading lists, at my own institution the University of Leeds, Adam Cathcart used it as a key element of the reading list in his Korean focused modules for instance between 2014 and 2016.³⁰

One review it seems appeared in 2013 which reads like a premonition of what was to come, that by Brian Myers in the journal *Acta Koreana*, volume 16.2, which includes the pointed assertion (after having communicated with the original author), "Several pages unfold events and quotations in a sequence so similar to Balázs Szalontai's *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*" (2005) that one either starts or ceases to wonder why Armstrong was so reluctant to cite it."³¹ Szalontai had already had concerns about these similarities, had begun to investigate, and was supported by Myers to trace the collection of Russian documents Armstrong claimed to have used in the creation of *Tyranny of the Weak*.³² Concerned that Szalontai's analysis of the issues could take a long period of time, on 13th September, 2016 published *Revoking a Recommendation*.³³ In the post Myers outlined four initial points of interest, one from page 81 of *Tyranny of the Weak* which mentions North Korea's First Congress of Artists and Writers in 1953, the second from page 105 refers to North Korean Minister of the Interior Pang Hak Se's conversation with a diplomat from the Soviet Union in 1960, a third from page 156 where Armstrong discusses the North Korean response to the Prague spring of 1968 and finally a fourth instance from page 63 of the book where Armstrong considers the support Eastern European technicians and advisers gave to North Korea following the Korean War.³⁴ In all four cases Myers suggested while he understood that flaws and mistakes can get into the first edition of a book, *Tyranny of the Weak* has already been reconfigured for a paperback version and all of these mistakes continued to be in the text. More than that though, if there were mistakes in these four instances, they were a very particular form of mistake. Either, as was the case in the third example, a complete misreading of the original source material, or in the case of the first, second and fourth, misattributions of sources, which could be very much more easily and coherently found in a book by Balázs Szalontai published in 2005 titled *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*.³⁵

Myers' core assertion at this point was that these four examples demonstrated that Armstrong had utilized materials from Szalontai's book and created tenuous false attributions and citations to cover up the fact he had done so. Only four examples at this point, though enough when news of Myers' blogpost emerged a couple of days later on the Korean Studies global email list, courtesy of a brief posting by a curious and disappointed sounding Jiyul Kim,³⁶ to elicit an extraordinary outburst of rage in support of Armstrong and against the critique from Myers. Professor Donald Baker of the University of British Columbia and famous scholar of Korean religious and shamanistic traditions opening comment was "I wouldn't trust Brian Myers to evaluate someone else's scholarship"³⁷ Frank Hoffman (then moderator of the list), infuriated by Myers posting, remarked a couple of days later "No balls, no decency, no academic conduct, and swarm mentality? Is this really where we are now? Is this where we really want to go? Is this what you teach your students?"³⁸ Sir James Hoare, former Charge D'Affaires at the British Embassy in Pyongyang and connected to SOAS, University of London followed up "We all make mistakes. My PhD supervisor, a distinguished historian of Japan, apologized in one of his last books for having spelt the name of the first US representative in Japan, Townsend Harris, consistently as 'Townshend Harris' from his very first book in 1955. Footnotes are notorious as a source of mistakes. They should not happen but they do. Each of us will have to decide whether such mistakes invalidate a whole book."³⁹ It is fair to say that these exchanges on the Korean Studies list were one of the most bad tempered of recent years. The author of this paper and many others known to them felt it was extremely disappointing to read famous and senior scholars dismissing such potentially terrible academic practice so readily, and in many sense using their academic authority to close down, curtail or restrict debate and discussion on the matter.

Myers of course was not to be discouraged, and reported on 3 October that, spurred on by the intemperate discussions on the list, he had on the 21 September, 2016 sent Berlin's Political Archive a list of 17 documents that *Tyranny of the Weak* claimed to have utilized from East German collections, in order to check whether they in fact existed at all.⁴⁰ The reply from the archives to Myers was that in fact only one out of these 17 documents actually existed with the similar cataloguing numbers, but that document did not really support what was written in Armstrong's book—however Myers asserted that a re-reading of this section revealed it to be a semi-paraphrasing of writing from Szalontai in which he was commenting on a document from the Hungarian Foreign Ministry archives recounting a similar situation Hungarian intelligence had reported on the policing of embassies in East Germany.⁴¹

From this point on the issues with *Tyranny of the Weak* seemed to snowball. A group of scholars brought together by Balázs Szalontai worked together using various Google documents to essentially deconstruct the citations claimed in Armstrong's book, the initial four contentious citations or sections, grew to over twenty and at the end of the exercise comprised some 98 separate instances. Szalontai later constructed these 98 instances into a more coherent and comprehensive set of documents which partition the concerns over Armstrong's book into main categories.⁴² Firstly there were 55 instances in which a section of *Tyranny of the Weak* had used plagiarized material, but to hide this had fabricated a non-existent source. Secondly there were a further 28 cases in which Armstrong had used plagiarized material, but had sought to use a completely irrelevant source to cover the plagiarism.⁴³ There were even a number of cases in which the exercise of using irrelevant or completely fabricated sources utterly distorted the actual narrative Armstrong was writing about. Szalontai on this matter records: "In one such case, for example, the words of a Hungarian diplomat are placed in the mouth of his Soviet counterpart. In another one, the greater seriousness of which will be apparent to all scholars of diplomatic history, the North Korean security organs are said to have arrested a dissident inside the Bulgarian Embassy, when in fact he was arrested outside. In a third case, the author cites a report supposedly written by the "GDR Embassy in the DPRK" on 22 December 1953, though the GDR did not open an embassy in North Korea until the summer of 1954"⁴⁴

Ultimately Armstrong appears to have attempted to discount these concerns, claiming East German and Soviet archival documents throughout *Tyranny of the Weak* to back up his scholarship, when in fact he had used the work of Balázs Szalontai, whose writing was underpinned by archival material from the Hungarian Foreign Ministry archives. Szalontai asserted that it appeared that Armstrong somehow had had access to the materials which made up his book *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era* in manuscript for other form at some point in 2005, as material which had been in previous versions of work that became part of that book was itself part of the exercise of plagiarism. The collection of 98 instances was not exclusively derived from Szalontai's work, but also that of Sergey Radchenko, Alexandre Mansourov, Kathryn Weathersby, Barry Gills, and Rüdiger Frank. There are some fairly egregious uses of Woodrow Wilson Center translation documents, translations by Sergey Radchenko and elements of German language publications from Professor Frank.⁴⁵

Some of the material Armstrong claimed to have used was from the Russian Federation's Foreign Ministry Archives, while Szalontai and others asserted that much of this was in fact derived from material held by the Hungarian Foreign Ministry Archives and written about in *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*. While

it appears from Szalontai's careful analysis that Armstrong's claims were unlikely to be true, it was worth utilizing a quirk of Russian archival practice to confirm this. Soviet and Russian archival practice has been to organize material around the bureaucrat or employee responsible for it. Therefore documents are organized into folders, or *fondy* containing all the material relating to a particular issue that a bureaucrat is tasked with or working on.⁴⁶ When a scholar recalls such folders from the archive, the physical folder has a document attached to it which records the names and details of other scholars or archival workers who have recalled it in the past. It is often therefore possible to obtain a reasonably good idea of all of the scholars in the past who have been interested in a particular document or set of documents from these cover documents. Having used the Russian Federation Archive of the Economy and the Russian Federation's Foreign Ministry Archive in the past, this author employed a Research Assistant to check the *fondy* which Armstrong claimed to have used in order to construct *Tyranny of the Weak*. It will not surprise the reader to discover that having done so, no evidence that Charles Armstrong nor any research associate, colleague or employee of his, nor in fact anyone during the period he was supposed to have done the research, could be found on the dated cover sheets in the archive.

As the evidence and number of instances of potential source manipulation, distortion and plagiarism grew, Armstrong himself, perhaps more than his most vociferous supporters, sounded at least outwardly and initially, apologetic. His first public statement on the matter was a post amidst the florid outburst on the Korean Studies email list on the 17 September, 2016.⁴⁷ Armstrong wrote "For the errors in my own work I of course take full responsibility, which includes the responsibility to correct my errors and improve the work."⁴⁸ At the same time Armstrong sought to perhaps narrow the framing of any problems in *Tyranny of the Weak*, suggesting that "the criticism is directed to a small section of Chapter 3 of the book, basically pp. 121–123."⁴⁹ By December 2016 however Armstrong was less apologetic, and on 30 December published a post on his own (now defunct), blog www.charleskarmstrong.com which outlined the fact he had now instructed his publisher Cornell University Press to produce a revised version of the book which included corrections to make good the situation. This blog ended however with the rather provocative, given hindsight statement: "For those who find the book flawed, inaccurate, or insufficiently researched, the answer is simple: write a better book. I would look forward to reading it."⁵⁰ As well as being rather more provocative and assertive, Armstrong in this post continued to frame the issue as being rather less dramatic or extensive than appeared to be the case, and only dealt in detail with four particular incidents in the book, most of which derived from the original four outlined by Myers in his first post on the matter from September.

As the numbers of issues with the book grew into the 90s, Cornell University Press did actually work with Armstrong to publish a revised version of *Tyranny of the Weak*, including some 52 corrections. This revision, coinciding with the publication of the paperback and digital versions of the book, did not stop on the 29 June 2017, Charles Armstrong having to return the prestigious Fairbank Prize to the American Historical Association, which was a great honor for the book and author and been so much a part of its selling by the press.⁵¹ It was an extraordinary example of a revision however, really unlike any other this author had seen. Although there were 52 changes, according to Dean Smith, Director of Cornell University Press “the press reviewed the book after the corrections were made and believed that its substance was accurate and was not affected by the citation errors.”⁵² So much so that the revised version published by Cornell in July 2017 not only does not flag up on the cover that it is a revised second edition, but fails to do so almost entirely in the pages of the book, and includes only the vaguest of descriptions of the affair in the acknowledgements. Intriguingly, the date of publication of the book remains 2013, as if this of course were exactly the same book had been first published, unencumbered by any hint of scandal or concern.

Behind the scenes of course the number of instances of concern around *Tyranny of the Weak* had grown to 98, Balázs Szalontai had filed an official complaint to Columbia University, which began its own slow moving investigation and disciplinary process, and colleagues such as Professor Sheila Miyoshi Jager has resigned from the Advisory Board of the Woodrow Wilson Center in protest at Armstrong’s continued place on that board.⁵³ From a personal perspective it was clear to this author that although friends and supporters continued to advocate positively for Armstrong in public and in print, the authority surrounding him was beginning to drain away. The edited volume proposed on “North Korean Culture” whose editors were supposed to be Armstrong and ANU’s Ruth Barraclough and which I was contracted to be produce a chapter for, published of course by Columbia University Press, suddenly disappeared off institutional screens and is no longer talked about.⁵⁴ Armstrong was quietly removed from other boards and appeared on few panels and at few conferences. The University of Leeds which had purchased a copy of the revised edition of *Tyranny of the Weak* for its high demand collection, felt the book tainted to such a degree, that a special note was applied by the library to the book which recommended the reader did not use it as a scholarly reference, instead only to use it in discussions of plagiarism and academic malpractice.⁵⁵ By January 2019, even Columbia University’s own student newspaper *The Columbia Spectator* published an article concerned with the seeming lack of action and the apparent disinterest or lack of urgency on the subject.⁵⁶ Khadija Hussein’s article of January 28 2019 wrote that there was

concern about the impact on the reputation of Columbia's history department and an anonymous faculty member suggested it would be better for graduate students to not come to the department until the matter was resolved. In Hussein's article Professor Jager was quoted with a pointed assertion: "I have every reason to believe that Columbia University, one of the most respected institutions of higher education in the world, will thoroughly and impartially investigate this case. It should take appropriate corrective measure in accordance with its findings. The longer the investigation and actions are delayed and Columbia University stays silent, the greater the danger that professor Armstrong's transgression will not be seen as such."⁵⁷

The extraordinary saga of Armstrong and *Tyranny of the Weak*, concluded unexpectedly on 10 September, 2019 when Columbia's Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Maya Tolstoy, wrote an open letter to the faculty stating that investigations and inquiry had concluded that Professor Armstrong had "committed research misconduct, specifically plagiarism in his book *Tyranny of the Weak*."⁵⁸ Following this Armstrong would be retiring at the end of the 2020 academic year and would be on sabbatical until his retirement. In this statement there was little detail about what had been found by the investigations and inquiry team, however not much time later the website retractionwatch.com which focuses on issues of academic malpractice, published online a partial version of the report of Columbia's Research Misconduct committee on the issue.⁵⁹ While 98 potential issues of plagiarism certainly sounded a lot, what the report suggests was a huge surprise to followers of the whole issue, and really amplified the level of malpractice Armstrong had engaged in, as well as the span of time involved. While *Tyranny of the Weak* was published in 2013, it appeared that a substantial part of the book with a number of chapters had actually been written as far back as September 2003.⁶⁰ In part this is perhaps because Professor Armstrong had his successful tenure review on the 2 September 2003, and was required to produce material for future publication in order to support his tenure. Armstrong in fact included a number of chapters which would later comprise elements of *Tyranny of the Weak* in his 2003 tenure file, chapters which contained material apparently plagiarized from the work of Balázs Szalontai. Extraordinarily, and as Szalontai has suspected, Armstrong had obtained a copy of Szalontai's own PhD dissertation "*The Failure of De-Stalinization in North Korea: The DPRK in Comparative Perspective, 1953–1964*" (which Szalontai would only successfully defend at Central European University in Budapest in June 2003), after they had met, Armstrong making a specific trip to Budapest to meet Szalontai in 2002.⁶¹ Armstrong had either been given a copy of the dissertation either by Szalontai himself, or by Bruce Cumings of the University of Chicago, Armstrong's erstwhile

PhD supervisor.⁶² This copy of Szalontai's dissertation was actually found in Armstrong's office at Columbia by the investigation team when they searched it.⁶³ Ultimately therefore, Armstrong had originally engaged in the plagiarism of Szalontai's work as far back as 2003, and perhaps obtained his own professional tenure at Columbia on the back of plagiarized material which would later appear in *Tyranny of the Weak*. The report is fairly clear on the findings and the opinion of the committee on what had happened and when: "The Committee finds it more likely than not that around this time [September 2003] Dr. Armstrong inserted citations into chapters 2 and 3 of his book draft that he knew to refer to the documents that he never checked, and that he inserted into the same chapters that he knew he had borrowed from the Szalontai Dissertation in draft chapters he wrote in 2002–2003..."⁶⁴

When it came to the numbers of instances of plagiarism, the committee found that 61 cases in the book offered "sufficient and incontrovertible evidence of research misconduct" and that these include pure fabrication and citing non-existent or irrelevant sources in order to cover up the use Szalontai's work. The committee also rejected entirely Armstrong's various defenses and his attempt to discredit Szalontai's original complaint (Armstrong had claimed it was spurred by an academic dispute). Finally when it came to Armstrong's "state of mind" argument on the issues, the committee says: "The Committee does not find 'passage of time' to be a mitigating factor to a finding of misconduct ... Dr Armstrong's systematic erasure of Dr. Szalontai and of Hungarian sources provides further support for a finding that the misconduct was committed knowingly. It is particularly noteworthy that Dr Armstrong used an indirect citation style frequently throughout the book for documents, of which he owed his knowledge to other secondary works, but never with respect to Dr. Szalontai's work ... The pattern is too systematic to be chance error, and the committee concludes that Dr. Armstrong knowingly omitted references that would show his reliance on the Szalontai dissertation."⁶⁵

The almost total dismissal of Armstrong's defense and near total vindication of Szalontai's primary and continued argument throughout, by the report from Columbia's committee is only amplified by the unbelievable reality that the affair extended much further back in time, than anyone expected, and that perhaps even Professor Armstrong's own tenure was obtained as a part result of work generated by acts of plagiarism. Almost as an aside to the affair, not only has Armstrong lost his career and *Tyranny of the Weak* discredited to the point it will be taken permanently out of print (according to Cornell), but on the 10th of February 2020, the journal *Cold War History* retracted his article "*Fraternal Socialism': The International Reconstruction of North Korea, 1953–62*" as it had also

been constructed of plagiarized material from Szalontai's dissertation and book.⁶⁶ Brian Myers has also raised concerns about potential self-plagiarism in other works of Charles Armstrong, given the similarity of material found in his first book "*The North Korean Revolution*" and that in a chapter titled "North Korea and the Education of Desire," in a 2016 edited volume from Alf Lüdtke titled *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship* (Fyodor Tertitsky goes into similar further detail on this in an article for *Daily NK* from 2017).^{67,68} For clarity, the Armstrong case at something like its conclusion fits into the final category offered by the typology of co-production offered by this paper, namely that of pure plagiarism, where the consent of the person plagiarized is not sought, and the fact of the "co-production" is discovered only in retrospect.

While the issues surrounding Armstrong and *Tyranny of the Weak* (along with potentially many other of his publications), may seem like a florid and colorful outlier given his seniority and the rupture caused by the affair, this paper, although it has gone into great detail on the matter, does not want to suggest it is entirely an aberration. Far from it, such plagiarism and issues of authorship and unauthorized co-option of other's material is found in a number of other circumstances and at other times in Korean Studies.

In 1996 Professor JaHyun Kim Haboush, then Professor of East Asian Culture and History at the University of Illinois, Urbana Champagne, published "*The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong: The Autobiographical Writings of a Crown Princess of Eighteenth-Century Korea*" with the University of California Press.⁶⁹ This book was a translation of the diaries of Lady Hyegyöng, a noble woman born into a very prominent yangban family, the P'ungsan Hong, who married King Yöngjo's second son, Crown Prince Sado in 1744 and thus became a crown princess. Lady Hyegyöng of course experienced some extraordinary events in Korean history from her position, including the death of her husband in 1762 by execution at the behest of her own father. Her own second son would become King Jeongjo. Haboush's translation was fairly widely acclaimed, Martina Deuchler declaring in *Korean Studies* that "Haboush must be congratulated for an exemplary annotated translation that preserves the tone and color of the original texts."⁷⁰

In 1998 however a publisher in Milan, ObarraO Edizione released a volume titled *Memorie di una Principessa di Corea del XVIII Secolo*, the princess whose name in the book is Hong, is of course the very same Lady Hyegyöng as translated by Professor Haboush, only this time her diaries were, it was claimed translated directly into Italian from Korean, by a Vincenza D'Urso.⁷¹ The obvious should be said, that there are very few direct translations into Italian from the diaries of eighteenth century Korean princesses so this would certainly have been an unusual publication. Since the volume was in Italian, it would perhaps also have

not garnered quite the same level of interest in the Korean Studies community as Haboush's work. However D'Urso's publication certainly arrived in the discipline's spotlight the following year when a letter appeared in 1999's *Newsletter of the Association for Korean Studies in Europe* in which Haboush bluntly states "It has come to my attention that *Memorie di una Principessa di Corea del XVIII Secolo*, Traduzione del coreano di Vincenza D'Urso, bears a striking resemblance to my book ..."⁷² Haboush in her three tightly argued pages, recounts that D'Urso's Italian version suggested it had followed a version of Lady Hyegyöng's diaries which was the oldest available, known as the Asami text, held at the University of California, Berkeley, which explained its organization and the separation of the diaries into four separate sections.⁷³ However, Haboush continues, the Asami text, does not in fact do that at all, in fact none of the historical available versions of Lady Hyegyöng's diaries follow that pattern. Haboush asserts that in fact during the process of her translation for her 1996 book she reorganized the text and the four separate sections to best reflect the passing of time and historical events in the diaries.⁷⁴ Haboush also suggests that in the section marked in her own book as "The Memoire of 1795" there are long sections of text, descriptions and a particular structure which do not appear in the Asami version, but which are exactly the same in D'Urso's version.⁷⁵ Further to this Haboush suggests that many elements of the diaries which were excluded from her version are also directly excluded in D'Urso's translation. Fascinatingly, Haboush goes into to say Lady Hyegyöng's diaries were in their original form unpunctuated, and that adding punctuation into a translation of such a text requires a great deal of time and expertise in translation practice and no two translators agree on exactly the same punctuation style across a text; however D'Urso's approach to punctuation directly follows that taken by Haboush in her 1996 publication.⁷⁶ Finally, as is the case in many academic texts focused on Korean history and language, due to complications with language and Romanization, many names of Koreans and Korean things have become standard or common uses, despite not being exactly proper when it comes to naming and language convention. For example Park Chung-hee is known in academic publications by that spelling, when his name, if using McCune Reischauer Romanization, should be spelt as Pak Chöng hüi. Haboush suggests that to make it easier for contemporary readers to engage with and read, she utilized the names that were familiar and have become common usage in Korean Studies and Korean History in translating names in the diaries, rather than the exact names Lady Hyegyöng had used originally—Haboush uses the fact that Lady Hyegyöng refers to her own husband in the text as Kyöngmo-gung, the name of his grave shrine, as an example, and instead had used the name Crown Prince Sado which is much more commonly used—D'Urso, according to Haboush's letter,

of course uses exactly the same approach and the same reconfigurations of such names.⁷⁷

The *Association of Korean Studies in Europe*, being a collegiate and respectful organization of course allowed D'Urso right of reply, and so in the same issue of the *Newsletter* there is also a letter from the accused.⁷⁸ While this is some seventeen years previous, it is interesting to read D'Urso's letter with the defense and initial response given by Charles Armstrong in mind when confronted over the matter of his appropriation of Balázs Szalontai's work between 2016–2019. Armstrong repeatedly confirmed that of course he had read Szalontai's book, and that he respected its scholarship. Armstrong also suggested that the issues were to do with issues of publication and time, and evidence from Columbia University's own investigation of that affair suggested that perhaps the pressure of obtaining tenure and the need to demonstrate a strong future publication schedule or agenda was behind some of the impetus for what happened—equally Armstrong appeared at least to offset some of the issues onto his publishers, Cornell University Press and a need to push through with publication which perhaps meant that some stages in the review process which might have caught any issues, earlier. D'Urso is, it has to said, more florid than Armstrong when it comes to her defense. Responding to Haboush's claim that there was a "striking similarity" between her translation and the Italian, D'Urso suggests: "She is right. I adopted the same four chapter structure she proposed in her version. But how could it be otherwise?... During the translation, her book was on my desk like the Bible on the desk of a priest ... By deciding to follow her structure I meant to give credit to her work, recognize her scholarly achievements and honor her long years of research ..."⁷⁹

The rest of D'Urso's letter continues in a similarly unconvincing manner, suggesting that in fact part of the issue was down to the fact that the Italian publisher aimed for the translation of Lady Hyegyöng's diaries into Italian to be a general book for a non-academic audience and ("the book was to have no quotations, no bibliography, no academic content that could scare the reader away," that it was an apparently brand new publisher with little experience in the field.⁸⁰ Further to this, and perhaps even more unrealistically, D'Urso claimed never to have seen a copy of the final draft and was not able to fully engage with the process because she worked in Venice, lived in a different town in the south of Italy and the publisher was in Milan.⁸¹ D'Urso's assertions that essentially much of the confusion and many of the issues were down to the publisher, obviously did not go un-noticed in Milan and the *Association for Korean Studies in Europe Newsletter* for the year 2000 contains a further letter. In response to D'Urso, Maurizio Gatti, on behalf of the ObbaraO Publishing company replies: "What you have made publicly known in your letter as to facts, pieces of information

and ObbaraO commercial policy is inexact, misleading and definitely pointless to the charges raised against you by Professor Haboush ... it is in open violation of the pledge of secrecy undertaken by you in the contract with us ...”⁸² While it is fairly clear from D’Urso’s letter from 1999, that whatever the approach to publication and authorship credit she made for her Italian translation Lady Hyegyŏng’s diaries, in relation to the already existing version produced by Professor Haboush, it was not at all conventional. The story however beyond this point is not very clear, and whether either took further steps or whether the book was withdrawn or corrected is not something the author of this paper has so far been able to ascertain. It is interesting though, that unlike Professor Armstrong, in 2020, Vincenza D’Urso remained an Associate Professor at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice for sometime and continued to publish. Her offending book, *Memorie di una Principessa di Corea del XVIII Secolo*, remained in print for some time, and is still listed on ObarraO Edizione’s website (though out of stock), so perhaps some accommodation was reached behind the scenes.

Beyond these two important cases of plagiarism or appropriation, this paper finally wants its readers to consider issues of co-production and co-authorship as they effect Korean Studies and publication of Korean interest. In many ways there is a great deal about Korean Studies material and literature that is, as a Geographer would have it, about co-production. Much material and much writing around Korean Studies is necessarily in translation, either from Korean into English or vice versa, or from other languages in which much is written about Korea, for example, French, Russian, German, Chinese and Japanese, to name but a few. Many of these academic communities which write in these languages, along with English, require translation of materials, and publications in those languages are themselves translated (the work of Wada Haruki for instance which has appeared in a number of different languages).⁸³ As anyone who has ever read literature, written originally in a different language, surely can feel, translated work is necessarily a process of co-production between the original writer and the translator of their words. This co-production is sometimes fairly straight forward, as is the case with some translations of novels between closely related European languages. However, as Sho Konishi in 2013’s *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese–Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* demonstrated, translation is often much more than about words, punctuation or grammar.⁸⁴ A translator must translate an entire cultural milieu, ways of being, landscapes and lifescapes, much more than simply translating a story or a narrative, and in so doing, they may write a completely new story. Konishi as an example focused on the translation of works by Tolstoy into Japanese towards the end of the 19th century, which essentially required completely retelling into a Japanese context

in order to make sense to a Meiji era readership. That is also certainly the case when it comes to translations from Korean into English. Janet Poole's landmark translation of Yi T'aejun's colonial era essays *Eastern Sentiments* from 2013 is just such a retelling and reconfiguration of the original material,⁸⁵ as is Inshil Ch'oe Yoon's brilliant translation of Yi Chung-hwan's *T'aengniji, the Korean Classic for Choosing Settlements* from 2019.⁸⁶

Of course there is one other, and very much more famous subset of Korean literature which can be seen through the lens of co-production, and that is North Korean defector or refugee memoirs. It is worth saying at the outset of this section, that to consider or name these works as co-productions, or acts of co-authorship, and to talk about them in the same paper as issues of plagiarism, and to talk about provenance and origin in the same space as them, is to some people highly offensive. I suggest in that sense reading the work of Norman Finkelstein, on the creation, propagation and continued existence of a different sort of literary industry, related perhaps, by dint of that body of work, and North Korean defector/refugee narratives essentially being about holocausts and the importance of such events occupying a particular category of human experience or cultural importance.⁸⁷ I do not of course mean to be offensive, nor cast doubt on the events and narratives described in them, but, as has been the case with many of them, there are undoubtable issues with these stories, issues which only become multiplied and amplified as they reified and made monolithic by certain popular narratives and academic work. The first, or surely the first famous example would be 2001's *The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*, co-authored by the French anti-communist, neo-conservative historian Pierre Rigoulot and Kang Chol-hwan, a former North Korean.⁸⁸ Rigoulot and Kang's story recounts Kang's experiences as part of a family who had emigrated to North Korea because of its promise of authentic socialism, only to be incarcerated in a labor camp because of their untrustworthy background as former residents of Japan. The book's framing of personal redemption and salvation in South Korea (Kang even meets George W. Bush in the 2005 edition),⁸⁹ after degradation, squalor and misery is now highly familiar. Its familiarity was driven firstly by Los Angeles Times journalist Barbara Demick's *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*.⁹⁰ This book is a work of absolute co-production, Demick skillfully weaving together material from the stories told to her by a series of refugees from the coastal town of Chongjin (famous as the home port of many of North Korea's Ghost Ships and whose nickname is now "widows town"). *Nothing to Envy* is rightly famous for co-produced first-hand accounts of life during the arduous march, the famine period in North Korea after 1992, and many other moments of complication and difficulty. It is intriguing for giving the reader a sense of the small acts of resistance and the navigation of "absurd" and

miserable circumstances many North Koreans had to engage in to live their lives. While the writing, structure and framing may be artful and creative, of course the actual identities of the co-authors who gave Demick their lives and narratives are unknowable. Rigoulot and Kang's effort fits within the first category of this papers' typology of co-production, Demick's work on *Nothing to Envy* is surely an example of the third category.

Unknowable or unreachable co-authors are something of an occupational hazard when it comes to writing about North Korea, but sometimes their unknowability is convenient given the complexities of those co-authors and their narratives. This was especially true in the case of perhaps the most famous of all North Korean defector narratives, that co-authored by *Washington Post* journalist Blaine Harden and Shin Dong-hyuk in 2012, *Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West*.⁹¹ This work, also a direct collaborative co-production recounts Shin's childhood in North Korea's "Camp 14," a Kwanlliso (관리소) or long term labor camp⁹² and his truly horrible experiences, including the execution of his own mother and brother after he had informed on them for storing illicit rice and potentially planning an escape. Shin made his own escape from the camp with a friend "Park," who was fatally killed trying to climb over electrified wires, but whose body inadvertently served to ground them both, so that Shin himself was not killed by the electricity. *Escape from Camp 14* was hugely successful, and was translated into more than twenty languages. Its account of the brutality and misery of North Korean prison camp life spurred on much of the effort through the United Nations Commission of Inquiry, to restrict and contain Pyongyang. In October 2014, it proved too much for North Korea to not respond to and its team at the United Nations released a DVD containing a video which included footage of Shin's own father (who was not dead), speaking out against him and claiming his narrative had not been the same as the book's.⁹³ Within a year Shin Dong-hyuk had admitted to Blaine Harden that not all of their co-authored work was in fact true, and that he had not been incarcerated in Camp 14, the highest level of camp, throughout his entire life, but had also lived in the less severe Camp 18. He had also escaped before and made it to China on one occasion.⁹⁴

Early in 2015, Shin Dong-hyuk changed his story. He told me by telephone that his life in the North Korean gulag differed from what he had been telling government leaders, human rights activists, and journalists like me. As his biographer, it was a stomach-wrenching revelation.⁹⁵

As a professional journalist exploring complicated issues and difficult stories no doubt Blaine Harden had encountered discomfort in his professional life in the

past, but having the man who he co-authored and co-produced one of the most famous pieces of writing on North Korea of all time, recount to him at length that his narrative, which served as and was advertised as truth and witness against Pyongyang's regime, was not entirely true, must have been a painful experience. Harden's understated admission that Shin was, given all of this perhaps an "unreliable narrator,"⁹⁶ generous considering what he must have been feeling. Harden and Shin's complicated relationship of co-production therefore also fits within category four of this paper's typology of co-production, in which there is certainly agreement between the parties, but the truth of elements involved is not clear. While professionally embarrassing, this incident could have curtailed the momentum which has seen the privileging of defector/refugee narratives as an existentially different sort of truth about North Korea, testaments akin to the diary of Anne Frank or the video reels shot by British troops on arrival at Bergen Belsen in 1945. Truths, that although they could be not seen with one's eyes, or verified with one's own fingers, could not be argued with, and which, helpfully dovetailed with so many political opinions and aspirations for North Korea's containment or rollback. They even made superstars out of characters such as Yeon-mi Park.⁹⁷ But what power do they have if these co-productions are not the whole verifiable truth, what if they, as Harden and many others have suggested, are marked and shaped by the trauma those telling them have gone through. What if this shaping and trauma, is marked itself, by survival strategies honed in North Korean prison camps, where to cheat, lie, and obscure the truth may mean the difference between life or starvation, or being executed? Does it even matter, after all, whatever the level of reliability of these narratives and co-productions, didn't they always have a level of "truthiness" about them? Given the picture a particular approach to North Korea and North Korean studies, and its attendant ideologies and conceptual frames, paints onto the country, would it be surprising if such tales of torture, misery and degradation were true.

Returning to "truthiness," co-production and issues of authorship or attribution towards the end of this paper, it is worth, having explored some moments of translation malpractice and academic appropriation in the near present, mentioning, since so much writing on North Korea, and in fact so much that Cold War historians or historians writing about the Cold War, like Charles Armstrong, write, the situation prior to 1992. Writing on nations like North Korea of course did not begin in 1992, academics and institutions of the non-Communist or non-Socialist world had been hugely interested in nations of the Warsaw Pact and the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War, and certainly did so. However much of the academic production of these countries was simply not available to foreign or non-Communist scholars, because the two poles of the Cold War

essentially ran academic publishing industries and institutions entirely disconnected from each other. While both sides of course saw academic production and research, aiming for objective truths, as vital in the processes of statecraft and development, neither could access the output of the other in an official way. While this was not entirely the case in European Korean Studies, which saw connections between Soviet, Czech, Hungarian and Polish academics with western Koreanists as early as the founding of AKSE in 1978 (Halina Ogarek-Czof of the University of Warsaw being an early and persistent crosser of the ideological divide, who had studied at Kim Il Sung University, in Pyongyang receiving a doctorate in 1961 and actually married a North Korean at one point, before she was expelled along with her daughter in 1965),⁹⁸ academics elsewhere could not hope to gain access to the research materials and any evidential data from the other side. United States agencies such as the *United States Information Agency*, the *Joint Publications Research Center* and the *Defense Technical Information Center* had a solution to this though, translation and republication of material from the other side, without of course agreements or permissions. Journals such as *Problems of Communism* and in the UK *Soviet Studies* (published by the University of Glasgow's Department for the Study of the Social and Economic Institutions of the USSR), not only reported and offered commentary on scientific or academic matters, and reviewed books published in, the Soviet Union, they also directly translated publications from journals published in the Soviet Union and other countries, co-opting and appropriating the output of the other side in the global conflict (Volume 1.1 of *Soviet Studies* for example features a translation of Professor Dogvadov's article "Stages in the Development of the Soviet Collective Agreement" originally published in *Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (Economics and Law)*, 1948, vol 2).⁹⁹

Recent years have seen the beginning of a trend in Korean Studies focused publications, which directly reprints in translation writing from North Korean authors, though most of the instances are at the moment works of literature (Immanuel Kim's recent translation of *Friend*, by Paek Nam-nyong for Columbia University Press, is a good example).¹⁰⁰ While I am sure a conversation can be had about the dynamics of power when it comes to the negotiating of contracts and permissions with the original author in these cases, unless they become a case similar to that of D'Urso and Haboush, it is worth perhaps establishing a convention as a discipline, around these reprintings and translations, lest we repeat the ethical curiousness of the pre 1992 era. In a search for truth through direct co-option, to replace "truthiness" provided by potentially "unreliable narrators," there are other risks which have to do with both origin and provenance in our field. These are all "wicked problems" and we have literally in recent years seen them become floridly and colorfully "wicked," to the extent that they are having a substantial

impact on the way our discipline, be it Korean Studies or North Korean Studies is received by the wider public and wider academic community. As Hussein contemplated in her *Columbia Spectator* article, it is not just History at Columbia which was implicated and tarnished by Armstrong's actions over many years, but also the wider field of North Korean studies. As public and media narratives navigate the tightropes and boundary lines of the "truthy" or of "truthiness," individual academics and a wider Korean Studies community must find ways and practices to bolster our empirical truth claims and objectivity against such practices which would diminish them or negate them.

Authorship, Co-Production and Plagiarism, notions of course which are different, and which do not in many situations belong together, but brought together by Charles Armstrong and others they have been. Hopefully by taking a longer historical frame, and viewing the furor around *Tyranny of the Weak*, not simply as a one off aberration, but merely the latest example of the complicated navigation of notions of individual authorship in our discipline, this paper gives its readers lines of flight, or at least food for thought when it comes to future directions of travel, and future strategies to avoid such altercations in the future. Taking seriously the sense that, in our discipline, when it comes to archival research and research which necessarily involves the work of other authors in other languages, the idea of a single author is not tenable at times, and that we must find new ways of incorporating and regularizing notions of Co-Production, in order to better protect against malfeasance and plagiarism. Alongside a renewed and developed notion of the author or authors as co-producers of knowledge or material output, Korean Studies would do well to take into account notions of Origin and Provenance, when it comes to data and knowledge collection. The material we collect as archive delvers, or library bashers is not often found simply by our own hands, our own initiatives, but in the case of *Record Group 242* at the US National Archives (NARA) in College Park, Maryland, focused on North Korean captured documents, for example, the work of many hands, a collective of enquiry that has come before us to unpick the knotty problems of incomprehensible catalogues and misplaced data. It is the work of previous scholars we have to thank on many occasion for the ease of use of many collections of data and evidence that we use, and that eventually compile and coagulate into books like *Tyranny of the Weak*. One of the "wicked problems" of our own academic community is the myth of the heroic single archive hunter and author, and although is certainly a wicked problem, solve it, through a more comprehensive consideration of the issues raised in this paper, we must.

Notes

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2. Robert Winstanley-Chesters is a Lecturer and Visiting Fellow of the University of Leeds and Bath Spa University, and from September 1 2021, a Lecturer in Human Geography at York St John University. Email: r.winstanley-chesters@leeds.ac.uk.
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US Hegemony in Korean Studies and the Soviet Role in Early Postwar Korea

KATHRYN WEATHERSBY Georgetown University

Abstract

This paper examines some of the ways the US-centric framework of Anglophone Korean studies has distorted scholarship on post-colonial Korean history. First, an over-emphasis on the American role in the division of Korea has exaggerated the possibility that the US and USSR could have compromised to create a unified government for the peninsula. The Soviet documentary record reveals that Moscow was determined to obstruct such an outcome if it endangered Soviet security. Second, by focusing on the serious damage the American occupation inflicted on the South, scholars have understated the control Soviet occupation authorities exercised in the North. The resulting over-estimation of Korean agency in the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has obscured the driving force behind the North's Juche ideology. From the late 1950s the DPRK leadership was driven primarily by resentment of Soviet and Chinese domination. Soviet bloc documents reveal that during the war of 1950–53 both Stalin and Mao Zedong demanded that Kim Il Sung sacrifice the physical existence of the DPRK for the sake of Soviet and Chinese aims.

Keywords: Postwar Occupation, Trusteeship, Kim Il Sung, Armistice Negotiations, Juche

Introduction

It is perhaps not surprising that the United States has exerted hegemonic influence over Anglophone Korean studies, given the concentration of institutional and financial resources in the US and the country's dominant role in postwar Korea. Now, however, as the global balance of power has shifted, it is an auspicious time to examine how a framework built around American roles and perspectives has affected scholarship on Korea's modern history. This paper offers some observations about one aspect of this issue: how an over-emphasis on the US role has distorted our view of key events in the first years following liberation from Japanese rule. It looks first at the division of Korea from 1945–1947 and the establishment of a Communist state in the North. It then discusses the reasons the catastrophic inter-Korean war that began on 25 June 1950 was prolonged through two years of armistice negotiations. I argue that to the extent the United States has been placed at the center of the story of Korea's early postwar history while the role of the Soviet Union has been minimized, our understanding of these three events has suffered. Specifically, Anglophone scholarship has overestimated the possibility that the US and USSR could have compromised to avoid the division of the peninsula. In the same way, it has exaggerated Korean agency in creating a Soviet-style system in the North and has failed to apprehend the reasons the fratricidal war of 1950–53 was prolonged for two additional years after negotiations for an armistice began in July 1951.

The Division of Korea

As a singularly important event in Korea's modern history, the division of the country into two hostile states in the wake of World War II has been the focus of extensive scholarship. Until the 1990s, however, American scholars had access only to the US record of this tragedy and moreover were naturally concerned with documenting and analyzing the abundant failures of the American occupation. James Matray, for example, painstakingly lays out the convoluted process on the American side that eventually resulted in the creation of two states. However, with little knowledge of Moscow's decision-making, he assumes that the Soviets were open to cooperation on the issue and therefore overstates the possibility that the two occupying powers could have created a different outcome for Korea.¹

If we examine the Russian record along with the American one, the process that led to the division emerges as a series of hastily improvised solutions driven by mutual concerns about future security threats from Japan. The Soviets feared a Japanese or Japanese/American attack on the USSR via the Korean land bridge.

The Americans feared that Soviet control of Korea would propel the Japanese Communist Party to victory, thereby bringing Japan's latent but still considerable war-making capacity into the Soviet camp. As the two powers navigated the rapidly shifting environment at the end of the Pacific War, they took actions regarding the political settlement for Korea that were designed to forestall these eventualities.

As is well-known, at the allied conference at Potsdam in July 1945, the political settlement for Korea was not discussed but Soviet and American military leaders readily agreed that the Red Army would be responsible for defeating Japanese forces in Manchuria and Korea—the role the US had been entreating the Soviets to play since the day after Pearl Harbor. However, by the time Soviet forces actually entered the Pacific war on August 9, State Department officials had become increasingly concerned about the political consequences of a Soviet occupation of the peninsula. They feared that a Korean government subservient to Moscow, like the one the Red Army had just created in occupied Poland, would increase the likelihood of a communist takeover of Japan, thus tilting the global balance of power in Moscow's favor.² Consequently, on the day after Soviet forces entered Manchuria and Korea, Washington tried to modify the Potsdam agreement so that US ground forces would occupy the southern half of the Korean peninsula.³

While American motivations for proposing the division are well-documented, we can only infer the reasons Joseph Stalin accepted this sudden change of plans. When the Soviet leader received the lengthy draft of General MacArthur's Order Number One governing the surrender of Japanese forces, which contained the proposal to create two occupation zones in Korea, he requested only two amendments: that all of the Kurile Islands be included in the Soviet zone, which clarified the Yalta agreement that the islands were to pass into Soviet possession, and that the northern half of Hokkaido be included in the area to be occupied by Soviet troops.⁴ Stalin accepted without comment the creation of an American zone in Korea, apparently calculating that this concession would improve his bargaining leverage on higher priority issues.⁵

We can glimpse how fluid Soviet thinking on Korea was at this time from the briefing paper the Foreign Ministry prepared for anticipated discussions of the Korea issue at the Council of Allied Foreign Ministers meeting that was to open in London on 11 September 1945. The Ministry viewed the American idea of trusteeship—to which Stalin had agreed in a private meeting with President Roosevelt during the Yalta conference in February 1945—as a mechanism through which the victorious powers would gain control over desired portions of Korea, as well as of other former Japanese territories. Since Moscow wanted to secure the sea lanes from Vladivostok to Port Arthur, the Soviet delegation was to demand exclusive

control over Pusan, Inchon, and Cheju Island, using as leverage the Americans' "wish to receive for themselves strategic regions in the Pacific Ocean." Should this demand be rejected, Moscow would propose joint Soviet–Chinese control of the strategic regions, extending the arrangement already made for the Manchurian Railway.⁶

The Foreign Ministry also hoped that the joint trusteeship over Korea would make it possible to gain control over additional Japanese territory by annexing it to Korea. Thus, the Soviet delegation in London was to demand that Tsushima be transferred to Korea, on the ostensible grounds that "throughout history" it "has served as a staging ground for aggressive actions by Japan against the continental countries and in particular against Korea." To overcome anticipated American resistance to this demand, Moscow would propose that an international trusteeship be established for the Pacific islands seized by Japan that the US intended to claim: Bonin, the Volcanos, Marianas, Carolinas, and Marshall Islands. The Soviet delegation would then offer to rescind this proposal in exchange for American acquiescence to their proposal for Korea.⁷

In the end, the Soviet delegation in London never put forward its proposals regarding Korea because Stalin, who guided Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov throughout the meeting via frequent telegrams,⁸ instructed his foreign minister to press insistently for his first priority—gaining a greater role in occupation policy for Japan. Molotov accordingly continued to raise the Japan issue, persisting even after Secretary of State Byrnes refused to place it on the agenda.⁹

American intransigence on Japan at the London meeting apparently persuaded Stalin that it would be useless to try to use trusteeship over Korea as a bargaining chip for territorial gains. Instead, without rupturing the cooperation with the United States that he needed in order to secure Soviet gains elsewhere, Moscow would move with dispatch to put in place structures that would guarantee lasting control over its occupation zone. Thus, regardless of the outcome of the eventual discussions with the Americans, at least the northern half of Korea would serve as a reliable buffer against future attack from Japan, as well as a readily available source of valuable economic resources.

To carry out this goal, Stalin's personal representative in Korea, Colonel-General Terentii F. Shtykov, established a Soviet Civil Administration to supervise political and economic affairs in the Soviet zone. Bruce Cumings and Charles Armstrong¹⁰ argue that the indirect rule the SCA established, in contrast to the direct military rule the Americans established in the South, indicates that Moscow had little interest in Korea. The Russian record, however, indicates just the opposite. Because of the importance of protecting against a future attack from Japan, the Soviets quickly put in place a native administration for their zone

that would secure Moscow's long-term interests beyond the period of military occupation.

Toward this end, Shtykov identified Korean communists loyal to Moscow, selecting, for lack of a better alternative, the small group of partisans who had fought with the Chinese communists in Manchuria and taken refuge in Siberia in 1941. He then moved carefully to establish a separate communist party organization for the Soviet zone, a step Koreans resisted since it suggested that Moscow intended to solidify the supposedly temporary division of the country.¹¹ He also quickly completed the simpler job of suppressing non-communist parties, followed by the establishment of a separate governing structure in November.¹²

By early December 1945, US-Soviet negotiations over allied control machinery for Japan had ground to a halt, with Moscow forced to accept Washington's refusal to grant a Soviet veto over occupation policy. At that point, US Secretary of State James F. Byrnes suddenly proposed that a second meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers be held in Moscow in just two weeks, so that the British, Soviet, and American diplomats could discuss the issues causing difficulties among them before the United Nations General Assembly convened in January. Molotov immediately agreed, ready to turn his attention to other areas, including Korea.

The discussions that led to the infamous Moscow Conference agreement on trusteeship are well-known from US records and from published Soviet documents,¹³ but Russian archival records reveal that by this time Soviet and American aims regarding Korea had hardened into irreconcilable goals. Thus, while American scholars are correct to note that the Truman administration was unwilling to cooperate with Moscow in creating a unified government for the peninsula, examination of Soviet decision-making shows that such cooperation was, in fact, impossible.

As it prepared to discuss the Korean issue at the Moscow conference, the Soviet Foreign Ministry faced a dilemma. It considered it politically inexpedient to oppose the establishment of a unified government for Korea but found it difficult to foresee a way to unify the country without jeopardizing Moscow's essential security requirements.¹⁴ As the briefing paper prepared for the Moscow meeting put it, "if Soviet policy is directed at the destruction of the military capability of the Japanese aggressors, at the eradication of Japanese influence in Korea, at the encouragement of the democratic movement of the Korean people and preparing them for independence, then judging by the activity of the Americans in Korea, American policy has precisely the opposite goal." The paper noted that the Americans had retained the old colonial administrative apparatus, with many Japanese residents and Korean collaborators left in leading posts, and had allowed Japanese residents to enjoy political rights and economic possibilities. Thus, the

“main obstacle to the restoration of the unity of Korea is the working out and realization of a single occupation policy,”¹⁵ the *sine qua non* of which was the exclusion of Japan from Korea.

A second problem, in Moscow’s view, was that a non-communist, American-influenced government in Seoul would inevitably pose the risk that the peninsula would be used as a bridgehead for a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union. Therefore, “the question of whether Korea will in the future be turned into a breeding ground of new anxiety for us in the Far East” will depend on “the character of the future government of Korea.” The Foreign Ministry thus viewed the “multiplicity of political parties and groups” in southern Korea, “the lack of unity among them and the solicitations of the USA” as an obstacle to creating a Korean government of the character Moscow required.¹⁶

Nonetheless, the Soviet delegation had to propose some mechanism for creating a Korean government. Jacob Malik noted that the Cairo declaration promised the creation of an independent Korea, that all political and social groups within the country declare their desire to have their own government and are taking steps toward organizing one, and that the Americans support the establishment of a single governing organ, all of which made it politically inexpedient for the Soviet Union to oppose this step. Instead, Moscow should turn its attention to the composition of the government to be created, since “the character of this government will be one of the decisive factors in the determination of the future position of Korea from the point of view of our political, economic, and defense interests in the Far East.”¹⁷

The Foreign Ministry concluded that if a Korean government were created through an agreement between the USSR, the USA, and China (inexplicably omitting Great Britain), its composition would be unfavorable since the USA and China would support reactionary elements hostile to the Soviet Union. Instead, apparently confident of the strength of the leftists in the more populous South, the ministry recommended convening a Representative People’s Assembly elected through universal, secret, and equal voting, which would then create a government.

Malik elaborated a complicated set of steps the allies should take toward holding elections for a Representative Assembly. First, the four great powers (this time including Britain), must express support for Korean independence and for the creation of a provisional government elected with the participation of all social and political organizations. Given the proliferation of communist-backed mass organizations in the South, stipulating the participation of “all social and political organizations” would work in Moscow’s favor. Next, an elected provisional committee would prepare for the convocation of a constituent assembly,

which would then elect the government. To guarantee the participation of all strata of the population—the key to Moscow’s strategy—“broad democratic meetings” would be held in towns and villages and among sectors of the population, divided Soviet-style into workers, peasants, intellectuals, teachers, employees, and other groups, at which candidates for delegates and officeholders would be nominated and discussed. To control the process, a joint commission composed of Soviet and American representatives, and possibly Chinese and British, would supervise the meetings and elections.¹⁸

The Foreign Ministry also worked out plans to ensure control of the economic resources of the Soviet zone. As set forth in another briefing paper, Moscow would resume its confiscation of industrial plants by claiming as war trophies all Japanese military and heavy industry in Korea. These considerable properties were to be transferred to the Soviet Union as partial payment of reparations and as compensation for no less than “the huge damage inflicted by Japan on the Soviet Union throughout the time of its existence, including the damages from the Japanese intervention in the Far East from 1918 to 1923.”¹⁹

Since these confiscations could be imperiled if the Red Army’s closure of the sectoral border were lifted, it was necessary to deflect continued American attempts to do so, repeated most recently in a November 8 letter from Harriman to Stalin that reiterated the request for discussions on the resumption of trade, railroads, coastal shipping, establishment of uniform fiscal policies, solution of displaced persons, and other urgent matters. Viewing such issues as a matter of rival claims to Korean resources rather than an integral part of the creation of a unified government for the country, Malik recommended the creation of a Special Soviet–American Commission that would “resolve the immediate questions arising from the fact of the presence on the territory of Korea of Soviet and American troops.”²⁰

As negotiations proceeded in Moscow, Molotov responded to the initial American proposal with a counter-proposal that made use of the US formulation to ensure that the Soviet Union would be able to block any settlement in Korea it considered politically unacceptable. The Soviet proposal called first for the establishment of a provisional government that would “undertake all necessary measures for the development of industry, transportation, and agriculture,” thus allaying American concerns over the economic issues while stipulating that the creation of a government would precede rather than follow their resolution. Conflating Byrnes’ recommendation for a unified administration with the vague American formulations for trusteeship, the Soviets proposed that in forming this provisional government, the Koreans would be assisted by a Joint Commission composed of representatives of the Soviet and American commands, which,

before submitting recommendations to their respective governments, would consult with Korea's "democratic parties and social organizations"—a standard Soviet phrase that was the key to Moscow's strategy. With China and Great Britain omitted from the commission, Moscow would have one of two votes rather than one of four, and could therefore block the creation of a provisional government whose composition was not reliably "friendly" to Moscow.

Before the Joint Commission convened in March 1946, Shtykov's men moved quickly to establish the foundation for a Soviet system in the North by carrying out a thorough land reform. On March 5 the Provisional People's Committee passed a law decreeing the confiscation of land and implements belonging to Japanese, Korean collaborators, Koreans who had fled South, landlords who owned farms of a certain size or who did not farm the land themselves, and churches that owned more than a certain amount of land."²¹ Five weeks later Kim Il Sung reported to an enlarged plenum of the party's Organization Bureau that the land reform "has destroyed feudal relations in the countryside, and laid the foundation for the development of the entire economy of North Korea."²²

Having ensured that whatever the outcome of the Joint Commission meetings, at least the northern half of the peninsula would be "friendly" to the Soviet Union, the Foreign Ministry drafted a detailed description of the "democratic" state that must result from the Provisional Government that the Joint Commission was to create. After describing the administrative structure and voting procedures to be established, the directive laid out a political platform for the future Provisional Government, an ambitious socialist agenda within the Korean context: "1) Final liquidation of the remnants of the former Japanese rule in the political and economic life of Korea, the struggle against the reactionary anti-democratic elements within the country, forbidding the activity of pro-fascist and anti-democratic parties, organizations, and groups. 2) Realization of local self-government in the whole territory of Korea through the People's Committees, elected by the population on the basis of universal, direct, equal, and secret voting without discrimination by sex or religion. 3) Securing political freedom: freedom of speech, press, assembly, religion, activity of democratic parties, professional unions and other democratic organizations. 4) Securing the inviolability of persons and domiciles, securing through law the private property of citizens. 5) Replacement of the legislative and judicial organs established by the Japanese rule; democratization of the legal organs. 6) Introduction of universal free and obligatory schooling in the native language; broadening the network of state primary, secondary, and tertiary schools. 7) Development of the national Korean culture. 8) Development of agriculture, industry, and transport to raise the people's wellbeing. 9) Confiscation of land belonging to the Japanese and to Koreans who

are traitors of the people, as well as large landowners, liquidation of the fulfillment system and transfer of all confiscated land without pay to Korean peasants. 10) Confiscation of irrigation systems belonging to the owners of the confiscated land, and its transfer without payment to the Korean state. 11) Nationalization of large-scale industry, banks, oil, forests, and railroad transport belonging to Japanese and Korean monopolies.²³ 12) Creation of a network of special schools for the preparation of cadres for the state apparatus, industry, transport, communications, agriculture, education, culture and health care. 13) Establishment of control over market prices, struggle against speculation and usury. 14) Establishment of a single just tax system, introduction of a progressive tax. 15) Introduction of an 8-hour working day for workers and employees and 6-hour working day for children from 13–16 years of age; forbidding exploitation of labor of children under 13 years of age. 16) Job security for workers and employees, establishment of a minimum wage. 17) Establishment of social insurance and introduction of protection of labor in enterprises. 18) Broadening the network of medical institutions, the struggle against epidemic diseases, and securing free medical care for the poor.”²⁴

Regarding the process for consulting with democratic parties and social organizations, the directive stipulated that the Joint Commission “must not consult with those parties and groups that speak out against the decision on Korea of the Moscow Conference of Three Ministers.” Since the only party that voiced support for the Moscow decision was the communist party, which did so on orders from Soviet officials, the Americans clearly would never accept this condition.²⁵ Nonetheless, the Foreign Ministry outlined details of the consultation process, ending with instructions for rebuffing any American attempt to discuss the economic unification of Korea. In such case, the delegation was to “explain that the exchange of goods between North and South Korea will be conducted according to agreement between the commanders of both zones of military responsibility in the form of mutual deliveries.”²⁶

In keeping with this directive, when the Joint Commission opened its meetings on March 20, the head of the Soviet delegation, Colonel-General Shtykov, stated that “the task of the US–Soviet Commission is to help the Korean people create a provisional Korean government capable of fulfilling the tasks arising from the democratization and reconstruction of the country. The future provisional Korean democratic government must be created on a basis of wide unification of all the democratic parties and social organizations supporting the decision of the Moscow Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Only such a government will be able to abolish entirely the remnants of the former Japanese domination in the political and economic life of Korea, to launch a decisive battle with reactionary

anti-democratic elements inside the country, to carry out radical measures in the rehabilitation of economic life, to give political liberties to the Koreans and fight for peace in the Far East. The Soviet Union has a keen interest in Korea being a true democratic and independent country, friendly to the Soviet Union, so that in the future it will not become a base for an attack on the Soviet Union.”²⁷

Unsurprisingly, the Joint Commission deadlocked over the issue of which parties to consult in the formation of the Provisional Government. The Soviet delegation would not compromise on its demand that the Commission consult only with groups that supported the Moscow Conference decision. Since this would mean that only the communist party and affiliated groups would be eligible to participate in the work of the Commission, the American delegation refused this demand. After repeated restatements of these irreconcilable positions, the Joint Commission adjourned May 8 *sine die*. Although it reconvened in 1947 and made some progress toward agreement on whom to consult, the small compromises the two sides made fell far short of what was necessary to create a provisional government. With Moscow determined to maintain the tractable government it had established in its zone in order to provide a reliable security buffer, and the Americans determined to establish their version of a friendly government in order to protect against communist takeover of Japan, the only possibility that remained was the creation of separate states in the South and North.

The division of Korea was thus the result of an improvised series of tactical moves by the two occupying powers that were designed to protect their security interests regarding Japan. Responsibility for this tragedy must be attributed equally to the Soviet Union and the United States; an exaggerated focus on the American role only obscures the history of the division.

The Formation of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

A US-centered perspective has also distorted scholarship on the creation of the DPRK, and hence on the well-springs of North Korea’s distinctive ideology. In the context of polarized politics in both the US and the ROK, a false dichotomy took root. If the American occupation of southern Korea was oppressive and chaotic, as it surely was, then the Soviet occupation of northern Korea must have been its mirror opposite. Thus, in his first book, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950*, Charles Armstrong details the creation of Soviet-style political, economic, and cultural structures in northern Korea, while arguing illogically that this process should be seen as an indigenous revolution, with the Soviet occupation merely providing the context. Moreover, Armstrong asserts that the supposedly nationalist

origins of the founding of the DPRK explain why it has outlasted the communist regimes the Red Army established in Eastern Europe.²⁸

Armstrong's determination to present North Korea in a particular way leads to striking failures of imagination, first of all concerning his sources. He bases his account primarily on the collection of documents US forces captured when they occupied the North in the fall of 1950. Following the example of Bruce Cumings, who used the captured documents to argue for North Korean agency in initiating the Korean War,²⁹ Armstrong fails to question a striking fact about this large collection: namely, that it contains very little documentation from high levels of the North Korean government and nothing whatever of interaction with or decisions by high levels of the Soviet government. If one were to approach the documents dispassionately, one would certainly notice this huge lacuna. Moreover, the reason for it would not be difficult to imagine. Soviet officials preparing to evacuate Pyongyang as UN/ROK forces advanced into the DPRK in October 1950 destroyed important documents rather than allow them to fall into American hands.³⁰ Consequently, while the captured documents provide valuable and extensive information on the activities of lower-level governing bodies and social organizations—records Soviet officials perhaps considered not important enough to destroy—they are far from providing an adequate view of the creation of governing structures in the North.

A second reason Armstrong exaggerates Korean agency in the creation of the DPRK is that he fails to take into account the political culture of the occupying power.³¹ The Soviet apparatus of the late Stalin era simply could not have taken a hands-off approach to the occupation of a strategically important territory that they were determined to transform into a reliable buffer. It should come as no surprise that Russian records reveal that Soviet officials in Moscow and Pyongyang exercised extremely close supervision of affairs in northern Korea. They drafted all laws for the new state, as well as Kim Il Sung's speeches, the marching order for parades, and decisions on even minor issues of politics and economics.³²

A third failure of imagination concerns the skill sets of the Koreans who staffed the new governing structures in the North. Much is made of the nationalist credentials of Korean Communists who spent the 1930s and early 40s as anti-Japanese guerilla fighters in Manchuria. However, regardless of how inspiring this background may be, it hardly equipped them to create the governing, economic, and social structures needed by a new state. The records on Korea held in the archive of the Soviet Foreign Ministry include a steady stream of urgent requests from Kim Il Sung to grant permission for groups of students to be admitted to Soviet institutes of metallurgy, railroad engineering, public health, etc. Partly to fill this gap in expertise, the occupation was structured so that an experienced

Soviet officer was responsible for monitoring the work of each department and approving each decision.³³

Records from the archives of the Foreign Ministry and Communist Party have revealed much about the occupation, but since it was conducted primarily by the Soviet Army, we need records from the archive of the Ministry of Defense to get a more granular understanding of these formative years. Fortunately, the Korean War Archive project at Korea University has begun to receive documents from this vast repository. They are being translated and will eventually become available on the project website. In the meantime, we can examine a thesis that has been written on the basis of some of these documents by Vasili Lebedev, who completed an M.A. at Korea University in 2018.³⁴

Lebedev examines the creation of the North Korean police, which was the first priority of Soviet occupation officials as they sought to establish order in the chaos that followed Japan's surrender. He documents how the Commandant offices that carried out the occupation at the local level were held responsible for all aspects of political and economic affairs in their region. Given the extreme centralization of decision-making, they forwarded requests for nearly all decisions to higher levels of the Soviet apparatus.³⁵ Two months into the occupation they carried out orders to disarm and disband all of the military and paramilitary groups Koreans had formed since liberation, confiscating thousands of weapons and enormous quantities of ammunition, sometimes against active resistance.³⁶ They then created a new police force, which was required to work "in accordance with the directives of the Soviet military command, which has its representative in the department. The head of the department is obliged to execute all orders and directives of the Soviet military representative."³⁷

Some Korean communists chafed at this level of control by their "fraternal" occupiers. Future Defense Minister Choe Yong-gon, who became head of the Police Department, exhorted the new police chiefs to "cooperate with the Soviet army," even though their "interference in administrative affairs is great and their meddling in our affairs is not small."³⁸ Nonetheless, the Red Army was creating what Korean communists had long hoped for—a transformation of their country according to Marxist principles. Moreover, at that point the international communist movement was still without question headed by the Soviet Union. It was only natural that throughout the occupation Korean party members willingly subordinated to Soviet officials, even on important issues such as unifying the country. Thus, for example, when Kim Il Sung received a proposal from Kim Koo and Kim Kyu-sik in March 1948 that leaders from North and South meet to discuss a plan to create a unified government, Kim Il Sung relayed the invitation to Shtykov, who then transmitted the information to Foreign Minister Molotov.

It was only after Shtykov received Molotov's approval that Kim Il Sung sent his affirmative reply to Seoul.³⁹

This willing subordination continued even after the occupation ended. As Kim Il Sung put it when he appealed to Soviet officials in January 1950 to allow him to discuss with Stalin his urgent desire to use military force to gain control of the South, he was "a Communist, a disciplined person, and for him the order of Comrade Stalin is law."⁴⁰ I would argue that the prewar period is not where we find the origins of a distinctively Korean form of socialism. Instead, we should look at the profound transformation in attitudes toward the Soviet Union caused by the North Korean leadership's painful subjugation to Soviet and Chinese decisions during the catastrophic war of 1950–53.⁴¹

The Prolongation of the Korean War, 1951–1953

English-language scholarship on the unusually lengthy negotiations for an armistice in Korea, which lasted from June 1951 to July 1953, has detailed the slow course of the negotiations and identified the American demand for voluntary repatriation of prisoners of war as the main reason for the prolongation of the talks, after the two sides reached an agreement on the military demarcation line. The issue of POW repatriation was indeed the focus of extended discussions for fifteen months, which frustrated the American leadership to the point that the new Eisenhower administration threatened to use nuclear weapons against China to break the logjam.⁴² Western accounts of the negotiations tend to assume, perhaps naturally, that the two sides approached the talks in good faith, both wishing to reach an agreement to end the war.⁴³ However, Soviet records reveal that for the Communist side, the armistice negotiations had a very different purpose.

By January 1951, with Chinese forces having eliminated the danger that the UN command might destroy the Soviet security buffer in Korea, Stalin began to regard the war as advantageous to the Soviet Union. By keeping the Americans bogged down in Korea for another two to three years, the Soviet bloc states of Eastern Europe would have time to build powerful military forces with which to buffer the USSR against anticipated attack from the West. Consequently, the Soviet leader summoned the top political and military officials of the European fraternal states to Moscow to discuss the opportunities created by the American failure in Korea. Crowing that the US is "unable even to cope with a small war such as the one in Korea," Stalin declared that "the fact that the US will be tied down in Asia for the next two or three years constitutes a very favorable circumstance for us," which the fraternal states must use to create "modern and powerful military forces."⁴⁴

To ensure that the US would remain bogged down in Korea, Stalin informed Mao Zedong when the armistice talks resumed in November 1951 that the Soviet leadership “considers it correct that the Chinese/Korean side, using flexible tactics ... continue to pursue a hard line, not showing haste and not displaying interest in a rapid end to the negotiations.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, the North Korean and Chinese representatives at the talks refused to accept any terms advanced by the Americans. By early 1952, however, the North Korean leadership began to voice a desire to bring to an end the destruction their country was suffering from American bombing. On 16 January Foreign Minister Pak Hon-Yong communicated to Peng Dehuai that “the Korean people throughout the country demand peace and do not want to continue the war.” However, ever a loyal communist, Pak added that “if the Soviet Union and China consider it advantageous to continue the war, then the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party will be able to overcome any difficulties and hold their position.”⁴⁶

In July Kim Il Sung raised the issue of ending the war with Mao Zedong, who had concluded that the war was not only beneficial to the Soviet bloc, but also to People’s Republic of China. Kim Il Sung argued that even though the enemy’s demand for voluntary repatriation of prisoners of war was unreasonable, “we need simultaneously to move decisively toward the soonest conclusion of an armistice, a ceasefire and transfer of all prisoners of war on the basis of the Geneva Convention.”⁴⁷ Mao refused to yield, however, writing to Kim Il Sung that “when the enemy is subjecting us to furious bombardment, accepting a provocative and fraudulent proposal from the enemy, which does not signify in fact any kind of concession, is highly disadvantageous to us.” The only harmful consequence of rejecting the enemy proposal will be further Korean and Chinese losses, but since China began to aid Korea, the Korean people have been standing “on the front line of defense of the camp of peace of the whole world.” Moreover, through the sacrifices of the Korean people, both North Korea and Northeast China have been defended from American aggression. Mao declared euphemistically that “the people of Korea and China, especially their armed forces, have received the possibility of being tempered and acquiring experience in the struggle against American imperialism.”⁴⁸ The war was in fact performing the essential service of transforming the People’s Liberation Army from a guerilla army into a modern military force, as Soviet advisers trained Chinese units to use the advanced weapons the Soviets sent to Korea and created modern logistical and communication systems for the Chinese forces.

Mao further emphasized to Kim Il Sung the international importance of the war in Korea, asserting that the increased might of the Korean and Chinese people in the course of this war “is inspiring the peace-loving peoples of the whole world

in the struggle against aggressive war and is facilitating the development of the movement for defense of peace throughout the world." This international support "limits the mobility of the main forces of American imperialism and makes it suffer constant losses in the East." Moreover, with US forces bogged down in Korea, the Soviet Union, "the stronghold of peace throughout the world," can accelerate its rebuilding from World War II and "exercise its influence on the development of the revolutionary movement of peoples of all countries. This will mean the delay of a new world war."⁴⁹

With the international stakes so high, Mao Zedong admonished his Korean "younger brother" that to accept the enemy's proposal "under the influence of its bombardment" would put China and North Korea in a disadvantageous position both politically and militarily. Rather than bringing any lasting peace, it would encourage the enemy to make new provocations. Since the Koreans and Chinese would then be in a disadvantageous position, they would possibly fail to rebuff the new enemy provocations. In that case, the advantages the war has brought to the global struggle against American imperialism will be lost. Consequently, even if the enemy does not make a concession and the negotiations are further delayed, or if the enemy breaks off the negotiations, Korea and China must continue military operations until they find "a means for changing the present situation."⁵⁰

China's Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai discussed the status of the war in talks with Stalin the following month, reporting that the North Koreans were ready to end the war by accepting the UN offer to return 83,000 POWs.⁵¹ He reported that Mao Zedong believed they should hold firm in their demand that all POWs be repatriated, but the Koreans "believe that the continuation of the war is not advantageous because the daily losses are greater than the number of POWs whose return is being discussed." Mao, in contrast, "believes that the continuation of the war is advantageous to us, since it detracts the USA from preparing for a new world war."⁵²

Stalin agreed with Mao's view and dismissed the Koreans' concerns with the memorable comment that they "have lost nothing, except people."⁵³ The Chinese and Koreans do not need to accept the American terms, Stalin declared, because the US knows it will have to end the war. The communist allies must therefore endure and be patient. "Of course," he conceded, "one needs to understand Korea—they have suffered many casualties. But it needs to be explained to them that this is an important matter. They need patience and lots of endurance. The war in Korea has shown America's weakness. The armies of twenty-four countries cannot continue the war in Korea for long, since they have not achieved their goals and cannot count on success in this matter."⁵⁴

It may be that Stalin decided to end the war in early 1953, as Wada Haruki argues.⁵⁵ In any case, once the Soviet leader died on 5 March 1953 the collective leadership that took power in Moscow moved with dispatch to bring the war in Korea to an end. On March 19 the Council of Ministers adopted a lengthy resolution on the war, with attached letters to Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung outlining the statements their delegation should make to indicate their willingness to resolve the outstanding issues in order to reach an armistice.⁵⁶ The Chinese leadership had by then also decided to bring the war to an end and therefore welcomed the Soviet initiative, as Zhou Enlai communicated to his allies while he was in Moscow for Stalin's funeral.⁵⁷ The efforts of South Korean President Syngman Rhee to sabotage the conclusion of an armistice delayed its signing until July, as the Chinese leadership felt the need to respond with a demonstration of strength and secure a favorable position for the dividing line. Nonetheless, the turning point in ending the war was the decision of the Soviet leadership to finally conclude an armistice.

American demands during the armistice negotiations were certainly important in prolonging the war, as they shaped Soviet and Chinese calculations about how the war could be used to enhance the prestige of the communist side internationally, as well as build domestic support for the government in Beijing. They also affected the United States' relations with its wartime allies and its position in the larger Cold War. Scholars will surely be occupied for generations with the daunting task of understanding the catastrophic war of 1950–3. As they proceed, they will need not only to continue to expand the source base but also the intellectual framework, anticipating that very different processes may be driving the actions of the states involved.

Conclusion

This brief discussion of some aspects of the Soviet role in Korea in the early postwar years suggests some ways that a US-centric framework has distorted our view of basic issues in contemporary Korean history. It has clouded both the scholarly and public understanding of the division of the country by exaggerating the American contribution to this tragedy. The assumption that a unified government could have been created if only the US had only been more willing to cooperate with the Soviet Union fails to acknowledge the power Moscow had to obstruct such an outcome, and its determination to do so if necessary for Soviet security. The issue here is not where to place blame, but rather how to understand the combination of circumstances, perceptions, and actions that brought about the division.

With regard to the state created in the north of Korea, the US-centered approach has had convoluted and long-lasting consequences. In the context of the binary politics of the Cold War era, by keeping the spotlight on the serious harm the American occupation did in the South many scholars, as well as the left-leaning portion of public opinion in the South, have understated the control Soviet occupation authorities exercised in the North. The resulting exaggeration of Korean agency in the establishment of the DPRK has then led to a failure to understand the driving force behind the North's distinctive ideology. Thus, for example, Benjamin Young's valuable new book, *Guns, Guerillas, and the Great Leader*,⁵⁸ presents a wealth of new information about North Korea's involvement in the Third World but takes at face value the DPRK's relentless focus on Kim Il Sung's history as an anti-Japanese guerilla fighter. Young consequently depicts Pyongyang's promotion of a *Juche* ideology of national autonomy, anti-imperialism, and self-reliance as a response to the experience of Japanese rule.

A more persuasive explanation for *Juche*, I would argue, is that while the legacy of Japanese rule remained important, from the late 1950s the North Korean leadership was driven primarily by resentment of the more recent and still ongoing danger of Soviet imperialism. If we apprehend the degree to which Kim Il Sung and his circle began their time in power with a willing subordination to the communist "Vatican," then we can appreciate the intensity of their response when the Soviet leader betrayed their trust during the war of 1950–53. In October 1950, when Mao Zedong informed Stalin that they would not intervene in Korea without Soviet air support, the Soviet leader ordered Kim Il Sung to evacuate his forces from the peninsula rather than provide such support. Stalin revoked this order the following day, after learning that the Chinese had changed their mind, but he allowed Soviet air force units to protect only the Yalu River corridor, not the bulk of DPRK territory. In 1952 the Soviet leader refused the North Koreans' request to bring an end to the war that was causing extraordinary physical destruction of their country because he viewed the conflict as beneficial to the Soviet Union. He furthermore insisted that the Koreans subordinate themselves to the decisions of the Chinese leadership, who similarly regarded the continuation of the war as important to their own security. With this background in mind, it is easier to understand why Kim Il Sung described Soviet intervention in 1956 as an attempt to destroy the party from within.

In conclusion, as the field of Korean studies considers the lessons to be learned from Charles Armstrong's egregious plagiarism of Balázs Szalontai's work, we can see, first of all, the crude imperialism of a highly placed American scholar falsifying his footnotes in order to claim as his own the work of a young historian from Hungary. But we can also observe that Armstrong's extraordinary misconduct arose from his recognition that East European archival records were

essential for writing North Korea's history. An appropriate response to the scandal, therefore, would be to broaden the field by encouraging and embracing the work of scholars from a wide range of countries and academic backgrounds.

Notes

1. See James Matray. *The Reluctant Crusade: American Foreign Policy in Korea, 1941–1950* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 75–98. See also Bruce Cumings. *Korea's Place in the Sun, A Modern History* (New York, NY: Norton, 2005), pp. 186–197. These scholars have held to these interpretations despite the release of Soviet documentation, much of which has been translated into English. See, for example, the paper James Matray presented at a conference on the division of Korea held at Korea University in August 2015.
2. United States Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS): Diplomatic Papers, The Conference of Berlin (The Potsdam Conference), 1945, Volume II*, Paper no. 732, "Trusteeship for Korea" from Henry Stimson, p. 631.
3. United States Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS): Diplomatic Papers, The British Commonwealth, The Far East, 1945, Volume VI*, Records of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, "Draft Memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff," p. 1039.
4. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. *Correspondence Between the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and the Presidents of the USA and the Prime Ministers of Great Britain During the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945, Volume II* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957): p. 266. A copy of the telegram Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov sent to the Soviet ambassador in Washington on 17 August 1945, communicating to Truman Stalin's reply to the draft of General Order No. 1, is found in the Dmitrii Volkogonov Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Washington, DC, Reel 18.
5. For an excellent discussion of Soviet goals at the end of the war with Japan, see Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2006).
6. "Notes on the Question of Former Japanese Colonies and Mandated Territories," September 1945. Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF AVIPRF), Fond фонд 04311, Opis опись 1, Delo Дело 52, Папка Папка 8, Listy Листы 40–43. The author of the paper is not indicated, but the document is included in the files labeled proposals and notes of Tsarapkin.
7. *Ibid.*
8. For a well-documented account of Stalin's behind the scenes role during the London meeting, see Vladimir Pechatnov. "The Allies are Pressing on You to Break Your Will ...' Foreign Policy Correspondence between Stalin and Molotov and Other Politburo Members, September 1945–December 1946," Working Paper No. 26, *The Cold War International History Project* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars).
9. For records of the London meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, see *FRUS, 1945, Volume II, General: Political and Economic Matters*, pp. 99–559.
10. Bruce Cumings. *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945–1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Charles Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2003): pp. 52–57.
11. See the detailed and persuasive account of the creation of a separate party organization found in Hak S. Paik, "North Korean State Formation, 1945–1950" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1993), Part I, pp. 119–135.

12. Robert Scalapino and Chong-sik Lee. *Communism in Korea, Part I* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1972), p. 332.
13. See *FRUS, 1945, Volume II*, pp. 579–821; *The Soviet Union and the Korean Question (Documents)* (Moscow: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1948), pp. 7–10.
14. Jacob Malik. “On the Question of a Single Government for Korea,” 10 December 1945. Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 0102, Opis 1, Delo 15, Папка 1, Listy 18–21.
15. Petukhov, Adviser to the Second Far Eastern Department. “Soviet–American Occupation of Korea and the Question of Economic and Political Ties Between North and South Korea.” December 1945. Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 0102, Opis 1, Delo 15, Папка 1, Listy 8–10.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Suzdalev. “A Report on Japanese Military and Heavy Industry in Korea,” December 1945. Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 0102, Opis 1, Delo 15, Папка 1, Listy 22–29.
20. Jacob Malik. “On the Question of a Single Government for Korea.”
21. E.I. Shabshina. “Koreia posle vtoroi mirovoi voiny,” *Akademiia nauk SSSR. Krizis kolonial'noi sistemy, natsional'no-osvoboditel'naia bor'ba narodov vostochnoi asii* (Moskva, Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1949), p. 262.
22. Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории (RGASPI РГАСПИ), Fond 17, Opis 128, Delo 205, Str. Стр. 7–12.
23. Small enterprises and immovable property that formerly belonged to Japanese residents in Korea and was officially seized by Koreans with the approval of the Soviet and American commands after the capitulation of the Japanese armed forces will not be subject to nationalization.
24. March 13, 1946. Lozovsky to Molotov. “Draft directive to the Soviet delegation at the Joint Soviet/American Commission on the Formation of a Provisional Korean democratic government.” Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 18, Opis 8, Delo 79, Папка 6, Str. 4–11. The final draft of the directive is found in AVPRF, Fond 07, Opis 11, Delo 280, Папка 18.
25. See *US Army Handbook for Korea* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 38; Jounghoon Alexander Kim. *Divided Korea: The Politics of Development, 1945–1972* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 62.
26. *Ibid.*
27. United States Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS): The Far East, 1946, Volume VIII*, “Lieutenant General John R. Hodge to the Secretary of State,” [740.00119 Control (Korea)/3–2246: Telegram], pp. 652–654.
28. Charles Armstrong. *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950*. Kim Young Jun repeats this interpretation in *Origins of the North Korean Garrison State: People's Army and the Korean War* (London: Routledge, 2017).
29. Bruce Cumings. *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945–1947*.
30. It is obvious from the contents of the collection that this is so, but the Presidential Archive documents on the war also include a specific reference to this destruction of documents.
31. A particularly vivid example of this culture of centralized control is the thick file on Pak Hon-yong's request to visit the Lenin Library when he was in Moscow for medical treatment in 1949. The request, which one would think would be rather routine, passed

- through numerous levels of the apparatus before it was finally approved by none other than a resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
32. The records of the Korea section of the International Department of the Soviet Communist Party, held in the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, include original drafts and revisions of speeches Soviet officials wrote for Kim Il Sung, laws for the northern zone, and countless policy instructions to the Korean leadership. For specific examples, see Kathryn Weathersby. "Making Foreign Policy Under Stalin: The Case of Korea," in Niels Erik Rosenfeldt, Bent Jensen and Erik Kulavig, eds., *Mechanisms of Power in the Soviet Union* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 224–240.
 33. *Ibid.*
 34. Lebedev is preparing a condensed version of the thesis for submission in article form.
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 37. "The basic provisions on the organization and work of the police organs in North Korea." TsAMO, Fond USGASK, Opis 343253, Delo 3, List 28. Cited in Vasilii Lebedev. "In Search of Law and Order: Soviet Occupation of North Korea and the Creation of the North Korean Police Force (1945–1946).
 38. TsAMO, Fond USGASK, Opis 342253, Delo 3, Listy 43–44. Cited in Lebedev. "In Search of Law and Order: Soviet Occupation of North Korea and the Creation of the North Korean Police Force (1945–1946).
 39. March 13, 1948. Shtykov and Tunkin to Molotov. Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 0102, Opis 4, Delo 18, Папка 8, Listy 1–3.
 40. Ciphered telegram from Shtykov to [Foreign Minister] Vyshinsky, 19 January 1950. Archive of the Foreign Relations of the Russian Federation (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 3, Папка 11, Listy 87–91.
 41. See Kathryn Weathersby. "North Korea and the Armistice Negotiations," *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch*, 90 (2016): 21–46.
 42. See Roger Dingman. "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War," *International Security* 13.3 (Winter 1988/1989): 50–91; Rosemary Foot. "Nuclear Coercion and the Ending of the Korean Conflict," *International Security* 13.3 (Winter 1988/1989): 92–112.
 43. See, for example, Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); William Stueck. *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Walter Hermes. *Truce Tent and Fighting Front* (Washington DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1966); James Matray, "Progress and Paralysis: The Korean Truce Talks, July 1951 to May 1952," in Mark Wilkinson, ed., *The Korean War at Fifty: International Perspectives* (Lexington City, VI: Virginia Military Institute, 2004).
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- политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Папка 11, Delo 5, List 64. For the text of the document, see Weathersby, “New Russian Documents,” p. 72. For a more extensive discussion of the Soviet role in prolonging the armistice negotiations, see K. Weathersby “North Korea and the Armistice Negotiations.” The following discussion draws from this article.
46. Ciphred telegram from Mao Zedong to Filippov [Stalin] 8 February 1952 conveying telegram of 22 January 1952 from Peng Dehuai to Mao and 4 February 1952 reply from Mao to Peng Dehuai. Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 342, Listy 81–83. For the text of the document, see Weathersby, “New Russian Documents,” pp. 75–76.
 47. Ciphred telegram from Kim Il Sung to Stalin via Razuvaev, 16 July 1952, Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 348, Listy 65–68 and Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 4, Папка 11, Listy 40–43. For the text of the document, see Weathersby. “New Russian Documents,” p. 77.
 48. Ciphred telegram from Mao Zedong to Filippov [Stalin] 18 July 1952, conveying the telegram from Mao to Kim Il Sung on 15 July 1952 and the reply from Kim to Mao on 16 July 1952. Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 343, Listy 72–75 and Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 059a, Opis 5a, Delo 5, Папка 11, Listy 90–93. For the text of the document, see Weathersby “New Russian Documents,” pp. 78–79.
 49. *Ibid.*
 50. *Ibid.*
 51. Record of Conversation between Comrade I.V. Stalin and Zhou Enlai, 20 August 1952, Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation Архив внешней политики Российской Федерации (AVPRF АВПРФ), Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 329, Listy 54–72. Translation by Danny Rozas. For the full text of the document see “Stalin’s Conversations with Chinese Leaders,” *CWIHP Bulletin* 6/7 (Winter 1995/1996): 10–14.
 52. Record of Conversation between Comrade I.V. Stalin and Zhou Enlai, 20 August 1952, p. 12.
 53. *Ibid.* Translation by the author.
 54. *Ibid.*
 55. Wada Haruki. *The Korean War: An International History*, translated by Frank Baldwin (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014): chapter 7, “The Armistice,” pp. 257–292.
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 57. For the full text of this document, see *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 3 (Fall 1993): 15–17.
 58. Benjamin Young. *Guns, Guerillas, and the Great Leader: North Korea and the Third World* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021).

Incongruity of Nationalisms? Interactions between Korean National History and American Historians of Korea, the 1910s to 1980s¹

VLADIMIR TIKHONOV Professor, University of Oslo²

Abstract

The heuristic starting point for this paper is a critical approach to the enterprise of modern historiography per se, based on the understanding of it as inherently bound by teleological epistemology. While “Korean nationalism” is the usual vantage point for the critique of modern Korean historiography, the current article attempts to reverse this analytical perspective and re-assess a number of attempts to write on Korean history by US-based historians of Korea in the 1910s–1980s as reflections of inherently self-centric picture of the world. In this Eurocentric picture, traditional Korea was locked into a historical trajectory via which “modernity” was unachievable.

Keywords: Eurocentrism, teleology, epistemology, United States, Edward Wagner, James Palais, Andrew Grajdanzev

Introduction: pre-1980s American Historiography of Korea and its “Regime of Truth”

If the post-1980s linguistic turn and the popularity of Foucauldian theories made at all a contribution into the development of history as a discipline, it was the ultimate dismissal of the idea of historical objectivity that benefitted the field most. A “noble dream” of history becoming as objective as any science should aspire to be—as one prominent American historian aptly referred to it,³—proved to be exactly that: a dream. While simply inventing facts, documents or materials would most likely eventually put a historian outside of the profession—something that the “Armstrong scandal” of the late 2010s has proven in the end⁴—historians create their narratives inside the frameworks of the regimes of truth specific for their time and place.⁵ The overarching ideological paradigms define which facts are selected into the narrative, and how they are interpreted. History, in such a view, appears as a Janus-like creature, with two fundamental epistemological aspects inherent to it. On the one hand, in contrast to the mytho-history of the traditional societies (exemplified, for example, by the Korean myths of the dynastic founders)⁶ or the pseudo-history as a part of the modern realm of commercialized “edutainment,”⁷ the academic discipline of history is distinguished by a solid apparatus aimed at verifying the facts of the past as well as the causality of the relationship between these facts. Openly political misuses of history tend to be fiercely criticized by the academic historians. They see such misuses as encroachments of politicians or “edutainment” entrepreneurs upon their realm of specialist expertise.⁸ On the other hand, the same professional historians tend to be also painfully aware that this realm is inherently anything but neutral or objective. Indeed, an important sub-genre of the contemporary historiography deals exactly with the ways in which the modern nation state and the concept of sovereignty upon which it ideologically rests affected the business of history writing.⁹ Arguably, an essential trait of a professional historian is exactly the awareness of the degree to which history narratives are being conditioned by the world-system consisting of sovereign nation states.

In such a system, epistemological nationalism—the view of the world, which takes the historical experiences and presumed interests of the given nation as its starting points—is an intrinsic phenomenon, immanent to the ideological apparatuses of the nation states. As Michael Billig persuasively argues, in a world dominated by nation states nationalism is akin to the air we have to breathe: one divides the world into nations and accepts one’s belonging to one of them as one’s basic epistemological assumption. One also tends to unconsciously appropriate the current mainstream regime of truth inside the national discursive space as

something self-evident, as *the* truth rather than *one* of the possible epistemological frameworks.¹⁰ It is also typical that the mainstream regime of truth currently dominating the national discourse ends up claiming universality. If the nation state in question considers itself—or the historical regions it happens to belong to—the benchmark of modernity, then its epistemological self-centeredness often takes the form of modernity's teleology. History-writing, essentially, develops into a complex system of explanations on the reasons why “our” modern progress was just as inevitable as diverse Others' failure to reach the same stage (at least, without the impulses “we” provided). In the case of Euroamerican nation states, the epistemological nationalism of this kind is often referred to as Eurocentrism.¹¹ On some very basic level, its self-centeredness is an heir to the pre-modern traditions of ethno-centric epistemology: to the mediaeval and early modern view of Islam and Muslims as infidels or treacherous enemies, for example.¹²

Eurocentrism, of course, hardly ever completely disappeared from the American historiography of Korea even after the self-reflective turn of the 1980s, and later decades problematized the self-centered ways in which Americans or Europeans were accustomed to approach the history of the rest of the world. This paper, however, focuses on the American scholarship on Korean history after Korea's colonization by Japan in 1910 and until the beginning of the 1980s. It does so on the understanding that the 1980s ushered a new period in the history of America's Korean studies, historical studies included. First, the number of practitioners started to grow quickly, in harmony with South Korea's upward trajectory in the international system. Even a cursory analysis of the post-1980s historiographical trends would require a separate paper. Second, the field of Korean studies in America was becoming increasingly heterogeneous after the 1980s, as a number of South Korean graduate students with US doctorates was entering it. They were often coming with their own agendas, be they the research on South Korea's growing working class, or feminist research on capitalist patriarchy in Korea. While the continuity with the pre-existing American research on Korean history was not entirely absent in the post-1980s historical Korean studies in the USA, the diversity of their agendas, theoretical approaches and idiosyncrasies makes it necessary to research on them separately.¹³ The present article will focus on the pre-1980s American research on Korean history. It will attempt both to trace the continuity of the Eurocentric approaches, and their evolution, related, among others, to Korea's 1945 de-colonization and the growing professionalization of the Korean history field in the USA after the 1960s. It will also shed light on the incongruity between the Eurocentric approaches of the American historians and the post-1960s attempts of South Korean historians to appropriate the (intrinsically Eurocentric) teleology of modernity for their own purposes.

Japanese Colonialism as Modernization?

If we turn to the early American scholarship on Korea, the job of detecting epistemological self-centeredness is hardly too complicated: mainstream historians of early twentieth-century America, not unlike their European colleagues, were only too willing to identify their own version of industrial civilization with *The Civilization* as such.¹⁴ Civilization was predominantly used in singular rather than plural, and the history of Korea's intercourse with the US and other "civilized" nations—the primary preoccupation of the professional American historians of the 1900–1920s as long as Korea was concerned—was only too easy to conceptualize as a story of civilization's triumphal march over the Pacific. Pre-World War II American historiography did not develop an overarching, coherent grand narrative on Korea since the interest in this country was relatively marginal. Fragmented information on Korea was scattered in writings on diplomatic, military, or political history of what was then customarily referred to as "Far East." The two main sub-genres of the American historiography, which dealt more actively with Korea-related topics in the early twentieth century, were military history and diplomatic history. In the world where nation states are the main actors on both military and diplomatic field, both sub-genres were, by necessity, national narratives produced in modern academic style—with footnotes and references to the first-hand sources. An article which rather well typifies both sub-genres, was a 1910 study on Commodore Shufeldt's "opening of Korea" by Charles Oscar Paullin (1869–1944), a naval historian. That the article, on thirty pages and with copious references to the American diplomatic documents and personal correspondence between the US officers and diplomats, failed to use a single Korean or Chinese source, is perhaps expectable: Paullin was no "Oriental Studies" expert and claimed no knowledge of East Asian languages. However, in addition to that, he "forgot" to mention that Shufeldt's 1882 treaty with Korea, "giving to American consuls in Korea extraterritorial jurisdiction," failed to bestow any rights onto the Korean subjects in the United States. "Natives"—that is how the naval historian referred to Koreans throughout the text—were supposed to take their inequality with the "civilized nations" for granted. Paullin even did not bother to explain the reasons why the US government exhibited an interest in imposing a treaty upon Korea. It was self-evident that the possessors of superior civilization were supposed to be eager to bring it to the "natives" on the margins of their world.¹⁵

Yet another luminary of the American historiographical world who pioneered the Korean issues in the professional historical domain was Tyler Dennett (1883–1949), widely known for his trailblazing—and controversial—work on the 1905

Taft-Katsura Agreement.¹⁶ His 1923 article on the early US diplomacy vis-à-vis Korea was written and published after the March First, 1919, independence movement in Korea made the aspirations of Korea's anti-colonialism known to the American public. Consequently, Dennett formulates his research question in a way rather uncharacteristic of pre-1919 writings on Korea. His inquiry was to deal with the issue of whether America "betrayed" Korea and eventually left it exposed to the Japanese imperialist ambitions, failing to make good on the promise of "good services" stipulated in Shufeldt's 1882 treaty. Dennett answers the question in the negative. US diplomacy, as he saw it, ideally wished to keep Korea de facto independent, but was in no position to decisively intervene and provide Korea with the needed guarantees at the face of Chinese, Japanese and later Russian encroachments. Dennett concluded that "In the midst of ever-increasing intrigue in an Oriental court, the American Government (...) studied absolute neutrality," and made exactly these "intrigues by the powers"—rather than Korea's history per se—into the centerpiece of his narrative. Dennett does not refer to any Chinese or Korean sources, although he does use an English-language account by German-trained Ariga Nagao (1860–1921), a Japanese legal scholar. It is abundantly clear that, aside from Euro-American "great powers," it were Westernized Meiji Japanese and, to a certain degree, Chinese ("civilized" or not, China still had to be accepted as a regional power) whom Dennett accorded the status of the actors in his narrative. Koreans, by contrast, were relegated to supporting roles.¹⁷

The regimes of truth, as a form and a part of social power relationship,¹⁸ are expected to mutate in sync with the ever-changing demands of the power elites. In the mid-1920s, when Japan was hardly perceived yet as a serious threat to the American interests in Asia, praising Japanese colonial policies in Korea was a commonplace for the academic establishment on both sides of the Atlantic. Alleyne Ireland (1871–1951), a Briton who lectured on "colonial problems" at several American universities, published in 1926 a notorious paean to Governor General Saitō Makoto's (1858–1936) "just and tolerant administration." "The feelings of the anti-Japanese extremists" inimical to the Japanese rule despite all the "benefits" it supposedly brought were explained away by the militaristic "stiffness" of the Japanese government in the 1910s.¹⁹ Some American academics with stronger political influence than Ireland offered only marginally more critical opinions. Joseph Hayden (1887–1945), an academic (historian and political scientist) and a US colonial administrator in the Philippines, could offer some measured praise to the achievements of his Japanese colonialist colleagues in Korea. "Railroads, steamship lines, hotels, banks, mines, afforested mountain sides, scientific agricultural projects, schools, hospitals, and cities of stone, brick and cement" were to

be lauded as “the visible products of the marvelous mechanism of colonization which Japan has built up during the past generation”; Japan’s failure to allow the “natives” (whom Hayden compared to the “redskins” of the American West), at least some measure of self-rule was to be mildly censured.²⁰

The tone, expectedly, changed by the late 1930s, although the change was only gradual. In 1930, when Japan, under the weight of the Great Depression, was preparing to turn to the policy of autarchy and further continental expansion, Henry Burgess Drake (1894–1963), a Briton who taught English in Seoul in 1928–1930, was still telling the world—including his American readers—that lazy, lethargic Koreans were in no position to govern themselves, without the “help” of the Japanese administration.²¹ The attitudes of this sort were still persistent in US even in the second half of the decade, although with increasing number of critical caveats. Paul Hibbert Clyde (1896–1998), a historian of the “Far East” and Duke University’s professor in 1937–1961, offered serious criticisms of Japan’s bullying behaviour vis-à-vis China and some mild rebukes to Japan’s colonial policy in Korea. However, he assured the reader of his 1937 outline of “Far Eastern” history that Japan originally had no intention to invade Korea.²² Koreans, according to Clyde, brought the calamity of Japanese annexation upon themselves by assassinating supposedly benevolent Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909).²³ Furthermore, they further stubbornly continued to worsen their own lot by failing to fully cooperate with Saitō Makoto’s “tolerant” colonial policies of the 1920s.²⁴

However, as the Japanese aggression was destroying Chinese mainland, the critical evolution of the American scholarly attitudes towards Japanese imperialism—including its Korean colonial enterprise—was accelerated. Koreans were becoming increasingly visible as America’s potential allies in the battle against Japan. Korean émigré groups in the United States were seeking recognition and support, and at the later stage of the Pacific War, some Koreans were trained by the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) for sabotage behind enemy lines.²⁵ Knowledge on Korea under Japanese control was now being eagerly sought. Andrew Grajdanzev was an émigré Russian PhD in economics who subsequently worked for the US Occupation in Japan and was placed under strict surveillance as a possible “Soviet sympathizer” as the Cold War climate worsened (he subsequently Anglicized his surname to “Grad” and ended up working for a small local library).²⁶ He offered timely and fact-based criticisms of the Japanese colonial policies in Korea already before Pearl Harbor in his 1939 article on Korea’s wartime economy. Gone were the “marvelous mechanism of colonization” and all its “achievements.” A relatively progressive American scholar, writing in the time when Japan and USA were following a trajectory of deepening conflict, found in Korea undernourished peasants, development of natural resources aimed at serving Japanese rather

than Korean needs, and complete domination of the Japanese corporate capital in the industry and mining. Fluent in both Chinese and Japanese, Grajdanzev utilized a plethora of Japanese sources but no Korean ones.²⁷ In fact, throughout the 1930s, Korea's pioneering Marxists—Han Wigön (1896–1937), Pak Mun'gyu (1906–1971) and others—were actively debating the issues of rural impoverishment, growing tenancy rates, usury problems etc in the leftist journals inside and outside Korea: *Kyegüp T'ujaeng* 階級鬭爭 (1929–1930), *Pip'an* 批判 (1931–1940), *Sin'gyedan* 新階段 (1932–1933), *Sinhŭng* 新興 (1929–1937).²⁸ However, hardly any contemporary American scholar has ever read any of these journals, nor are they cited in English-language historiography. Aside from missionaries—who had to be in daily contact with their “native” converts²⁹—few Americans related to Korea via diplomatic or academic pursuits, Grajdanzev included, bothered to learn Korean at all, since all official business was transacted in Japanese anyway.

After the Pearl Harbor attack, the expertise of this émigré scholar was in even higher demand. Still, even such a thorough critic of Japanese imperialism as Grajdanzev had built his arguments mostly based on the sources produced exactly by the colonizers whom he criticized. Grajdanzev's widely praised masterpiece, his 1944 *Modern Korea*,³⁰ included, however, some references to the works in English by Korean émigré nationalists, notably Nebraska and Northwestern University-educated Henry Chung's (Chŏng Han'gyŏng 鄭翰景, 1890–1985) *Case of Korea*, published in 1921 and containing ample evidence of Japan's brutal colonial policies.³¹ Chung's book was reviewed by some learned journals,³² but entirely ignored by the likes of Hayden or Clyde. After all, it obviously did not fit the paradigm of “benevolent colonialism,” the basic framework of their colonial history research. Grajdanzev, on his part, had no trust in Japan's “benevolence.” Moreover, he prophetically warned his readers about the dangers of “class government” by the formerly pro-Japanese local elites in liberated Korea and, in much more radical way than rather moderate Henry Chung ever attempted, even proposed to nationalize the Japanese-owned enterprises after the victory and re-build Korea into a quasi-socialist state with its basis in agricultural cooperatives and strong state sector.³³

Post-1945: “Stagnant Korea,” Unable to Modernize on Itsself?

As Korea was experiencing the maelstrom of the 1945 liberation, national division, 1950–53 Korean War and separate nation-building projects in North and South, American historians of Korea found themselves saddled with several—partly overlapping—tasks. They were supposed to search for the historical roots of the

leftist “totalitarianism” in the part of Korea which now became America’s geostrategic enemy, and which was following the road suggested in general traits by Grajdanzev in 1944, but in a much more radical version. However, concurrently, “modernization” of “our” part of Korea—which preserved the privileges of the old colonial elite, something that Grajdanzev strongly advised against—was yet another pressing task. It necessitated both the search for any historical lineages of modernity in Korea, as well as the reasons why Koreans were “incapable” of achieving the feat of “modernization” themselves at earlier times. One important caveat is needed here. American historians of Korea and Korea experts in general never represented a monolithic group. Some were more liberal and critically inclined than the others. The liberals could voice relatively unorthodox opinions even during the harsher years of the Cold War. There existed, however, a clear-cut framework inside which a measure of tolerance for criticism could be expected. As long as one, in accordance with the basic tenets of the Cold-War era regime of truth, believed in the democratic credentials and underlying goodness of the Free World, one could expect some toleration for one’s criticisms of its occasional failures to be true to its essential mission. George M. McCune (1908–1948), America’s perhaps brightest Korea hand in the wake of 1945 liberation of Korea, could allow himself to rebuke the US Occupation authorities in Korea for their failure to practice democracy rather than simply preach it³⁴ without jeopardizing his career at UC Berkeley. McCune did not try to doubt the most basic point of the reigning orthodoxy: that bringing “democracy” to peripheral peoples and shielding them from what he termed “extreme leftism” was benevolent America’s task and the main meaning of its policies. “Extreme leftism,” in Korea and elsewhere, was, in turn, the professional domain of a special group of “Communism experts” who sometimes, but not always, possessed also Area Studies skills (the command of local languages etc.).

One of the first books to deal in a scholarly way with the “inimical” Korea run by “extreme leftists” was a 1959 volume by Columbia University-trained Philip Rudolph, originally an expert in “Communism,” proficient in Russian but not in Korean. Rudolph’s main research question was how the “Russian patterns of Communist takeover were applied” in the Korean case. His conclusion was that North Korea, occupied by the Soviet Army in 1945, was turned into a “Communist regime subservient to the Soviet interest” imitating the Soviet model in relatively short time. Concurrently, as Rudolph saw it, it demonstrated socialist radicalism more reminiscent of contemporary China than of relatively more liberalized ‘Soviet satellites’ in Eastern Europe. Rudolph was a careful enough observer to discern strong elements of Korean nationalism in Kim Il Sung’s rhetoric, but—even in 1959—had little doubt about him being a Soviet puppet.³⁵ On a deeper level,

Rudolph's belief that Koreans were manipulated and controlled by omnipresent "Russian Communists" appears to be congruent with Drake's postulate about Koreans' inborn inability to govern themselves, or the historical studies by Paullin and Dennett in which Korea emerged as simply an arena for great powers' rivalry. Unlike Paullin or Dennett, Rudolph, however, made some erroneous claims based on flawed sources. He believed for example, that no less than 30,000 Soviet Koreans were dispatched by the Soviets to North Korea after 1945, his reference being a sloppily written article in a middlebrow American journal.³⁶ The real number, as we know now, was much more modest—slightly above four hundred people,³⁷ hardly enough to "control and manipulate" North Korea at will.

In a Hegelian picture of the world in which benevolent America was leading the Free World, southern part of Korea included, to the teleologically predestined triumph of freedom, while "protecting" it from the "Communist threat," "modernization and development" of "our" Korea played, expectedly, an important role. The picture of the "civilized peoples" tasked with "developing and modernizing" their lesser charges elsewhere was not, indeed, an entirely new phenomenon per se. Were not the paeans sung by Ireland, Hayden or Clyde to Saitō Makoto predicated on the belief that Japanese administration was bringing development to the natives? The colonial-era language of the proverbial *mission civilisatrice* was now remolded into the modernization discourse. The colonialist discourse was not necessarily even fully discarded. David Brudnoy (1940–2004), an East Asia historian who eventually reinvented himself as a radio talk show host, could confidently praise Japan achievements as lately as in 1970: "Japan took a backward nation with one of the world's least efficient, most corrupt governments, and brought important elements of modernization." Brudnoy had no illusions about the oppressiveness of the Japanese rule in the 1910s or the economic exploitation and racial discrimination involved in this—or any other—colonialist project. However, he was still willing to give at least some credit to the avowed intention of the Japanese administrators to improve Koreans' lives and bring them closer to the Japanese "civilizational standards." He was, in his own words, seeing colonized Korea as a giant—albeit eventually failed—experiment in creating a greater Japanese nation. Otherwise, Brudnoy assessed the possibilities of Korea modernizing on itself as nearly non-existent. His judgement was unequivocal: "long years of political corruption, exploitation, and relative impotence under the Yi, coupled with an absence of strong dedicated reformers (such as the Meiji leaders), made significant reform for strengthening impossible."³⁸

Stagnant Korea incapable of modernizing itself was something most American academics dealing with Korea had agreed upon, since the days of Dennett and until the post-colonial awakening of the 1980s in the wake of the emergence

of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978.³⁹ Korea's "orientalization," in terms of it being represented as inherently unable to "develop" on itself, had affected even relatively progressive Grajdanzev. He saw Korea as a stagnant "hermit nation" and in long-term decay since the 1592–98 Hideyoshi invasion.⁴⁰ "Stagnation theory" as applied to traditional Korea was one point on which Japanese colonial historiography of Korea⁴¹ and the majority of the pre-1980s American writings on pre-modern Korea converged. The quintessentially "Orientalist" denial of any potential claim to self-induced modernity on the part of a peripheral nation outside of the established world-systemic core (Western Europe, North America, and Japan) was an obvious common ground. The earliest standard narrative on pre-modern and modern Korea from the American historical academia was Lee Chong-Sik's (b. 1931) impressive 1965 volume on Korean nationalism's pedigree (a reworked version of Lee's 1963 University of California doctoral dissertation). It pictured pre-1876 Korea as an unchanging "Confucian society" with little or no social mobility, complete social domination by *yangban* aristocratic lineages, absolute power of the intrigue-ridden and factionalized court, a closed middle stratum of technicians and self-sufficient villages. Little trade that took place in such a static society was simply purveying for the court. The prospects for the development of modernity or modern nationalism were absent.⁴² As early as in 1960, the canonical narrative by the two most authoritative scholars in the field, Japanologist Edwin Reischauer (1910–1990) and Sinologist John King Fairbank (1907–1991), judged traditional Korea nothing more than a "variant of Chinese culture pattern,"⁴³ so the search for any heterogeneous developments inside what was pronounced to have been a "model Confucian monarchy" was discouraged. Historians of traditional Korea were supposed to further elaborate on what the Korean "modification of the Chinese pattern" could imply, whereas the modern historians and political scientists were to look for the modernization possibilities in a society, which was not supposed to possess any immanent roots to such a line of development.

From "Korea Hands" to Professional Historians: Henderson and Wagner

The Korean War and South Korea's post-1953 role as an anti-Communist bulwark in East Asia brought a surge in the general interest towards (and often also sympathy with), Korea and Koreans on the part of broad American public.⁴⁴ Both public interest and strategic necessity brought a rapid institutional development of the university-level Korean studies. By the end of the 1950s, University of California in Berkeley, University of Washington and Harvard all had faculty members trained

in history, linguistics, or geography with Korea as their main field of study. In the 1960s, both Columbia and Western Michigan University introduced Korea-related disciplines, and in 1972, the first-ever Center for Korean Studies was established at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Around thirty Korea-themed doctoral dissertations were defended at the American institutions in the 1950–60s, although in most of the cases, the authors were South Koreans or Korean migrants to America.⁴⁵

In sync with the general trend towards institutionalization of the Korean studies inside the American academia, the work on Korea's traditional history was becoming increasingly professionalized throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Professionalization implied that research was to be conducted by the scholars specifically trained in the use of sources in classical Chinese and on the basis of primary materials, with secondary sources from contemporary Korea (and Japan) used as additional references. The older type of a “Korea hand”—a scholarly inclined official from the world of diplomacy or missionary work—was still in existence, but this kind of academic activity was undergoing a gradual decline. Gregory Henderson (1922–1988), known for his stints at the US Embassy in Seoul in 1948–1950 and 1958–1963, was perhaps the best representative for this category of scholarly writers. His lengthy 1958–59 account of Korean Confucian history—co-authored with Dr. Yang Kibaek (Library of Congress), and mostly based on the colonial-era scholarship of the likes of Takahashi Tōru (高橋亨, 1878–1967), but also on the pre- and post-Liberation writings of Yi Pyōngdo (李丙燾, 1896–1989), Ch'ōn Kwan'u (千寬宇, 1925–1991), Hong Isōp (洪以燮, 1914–1974) and other Korean historians—is remarkable for its meticulous and generous treatment of its subject. Henderson—contrary to much of the accepted wisdom of his day—did not squarely put the blame for Chosŏn court factional strife entirely on Korean Confucianism's door. He even acknowledged the progress which Confucian institutes and Confucian public opinion brought to the country hitherto ruled by closely-knit aristocratic lineage groups. The final judgement of America's most scholarly “Korea hand” of that time did not, however, differ qualitatively from the reigning consensus in both colonial-age Japanese and, to a large degree, contemporary Korean scholarship. As Henderson put it, “Korea's lack of swift progress in the last centuries of Yi rule, her inability to adapt herself successfully to the radical changes of the late nineteenth century or, ultimately, to retain her own freedom, are valid symptoms of the weakness and failure of the Confucian institutions of the Yi dynasty.”⁴⁶ As long as “Confucian Korea” could not achieve the Western—or at least Japanese—feet of modernization, it was to be judged a failure in the last analysis. In line with the thinking of the colonial-era nationalist savants, like Chōng Inbo (1893–1950), whom he cites, Henderson suggested elsewhere that more practically oriented *sirhak* 實學 scholars, like Tasan Chōng Yagyong (茶山

丁若鏞, 1762–1836), might have prolonged “Yi Dynasty’s” rule, although even they, according to him, were powerless to change “Confucian Korea’s (...) traditional hostility to technology.”⁴⁷

While Henderson did not have even to look at Tasan’s original works while writing an introductory article about the Chosŏn Dynasty genius, the 1960–70s saw emergence of a different professional protocol. Using the first-hand sources in the original became *de rigueur* for any serious scholar. One of the most important historians of traditional Korea of the 1960–90s—in terms of the ability to train many graduate students, forming a school of his own—was Edward Wagner (1924–2001), a Harvard professor and the founder of Harvard’s Korea Institute (1981). Wagner’s scholarship was distinguished by his thorough reliance on the standard set of the main original sources (*The Veritable Records of Chosŏn Dynasty*, examination rosters, genealogical books, local gazetteers etc.), and his collaboration with Song Chunho (宋俊浩, 1922–2003), a famous South Korean historian specializing on the sociology of *yangban* class. Wagner’s work may be summarized as an attempt to establish the basic framework for the understanding of Chosŏn polity and its ruling stratum. Many of his primary claims, in fact, did not significantly deviate from the findings of his mainstream South Korean contemporaries—at least until the late 1960s, when increasing number of historians in South Korea started to pay closer attention to the dynamic aspects of Chosŏn history and the non-*yangban* social groups. He viewed factionalism as an inbuilt element in a polity, which combined strong royal power with the prerogatives of aristocratic lineages. In such a polity, the top positions of influence were scarce and the number of potential claimants was much higher and rising.⁴⁸ He analyzed the importance of civil-service exams as both a vehicle for preserving the hereditary status of the aristocratic lineages and achieving a degree of upward mobility, at least inside the *yangban* milieu.⁴⁹ The most potentially controversial claim was that—contrary to what his South Korean contemporaries tended to believe—Chosŏn Dynasty society exhibited stronger patterns of social mobility *before* rather than after its post-Hideyoshi invasions restructuring in the sixteenth century. The claim, however, was substantiated by the analysis of just a single 1663 household register from an area of Seoul.⁵⁰ Generally, the scope of Wagner’s research was—almost selectively—narrow, disproportionately focusing on the world of *yangban* lineages rather than the lifeworld of diverse semi-elite and commoner groups, with all the dynamism they have been exhibiting in Late Chosŏn age.⁵¹ Despite improving his scholarly methods to an incomparably higher professional level, Wagner largely subscribed to the same epistemological matrix as his predecessors, Grajdanzev and Henderson. He viewed sixteenth to nineteenth century Korea as a mostly stagnant society without a significant element of internal socio-political development.

Palais: Weberian Theory Applied to Korean History

The scholarship of one of Wagner's most distinguished doctoral students, University of Washington's professor James Palais (1934–2006), signified a further professional refinement of traditional Korea's understanding in the United States. In his 1975 book on Taewŏn'gun's reform attempts (1864–1873), Palais conceptualized the Chosŏn Dynasty's institutional history in terms of an equilibrium of sorts. Royal power, propped by its centralized bureaucracy, never succeeded in practicing the sort of absolute authority which it possessed in theory. There were too many factional cleavages inside the bureaucratic power machine, and the control of the center over the village society was far from complete. Concomitantly, the aristocratic lineages whose control over the main resources (primarily, land) played a role of a check on the royal and bureaucratic power, were feverishly fighting for bureaucratic status between themselves. In this rivalry, each main contestant needed the royal house to take its side (via intermarriage with the royals etc), to secure an upper hand against the competitors. The net result of these interlocking power contests was an inability of any major contestant, central monarchical power included, to conduct the resource mobilization needed for sweeping reforms and catch-up modernization.⁵² While this picture of a fractured and complicated system of bureaucratic rule and aristocratic-bureaucratic resource control appears quite persuasive per se, one key question remains unanswered. Were the ruptures, cleavages and constant contest over resources between central and peripheral forces a unique feature of the Chosŏn monarchy? Did the contemporary centralized monarchies elsewhere in the early modern world function in essentially different registers?

It appears as if the issue of universal applicability of the pattern, which he was describing, interested Palais himself too. His only identifiable attempt at universalizing his findings were, however, references to Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt's (1923–2010) 1963 volume, *The Political System of Empires*. As Palais saw it, Chosŏn Korea closely conformed to Eisenstadt's model of an underlying confrontation for "free-floating resources" between aristocracy and bureaucracy in a centralized bureaucratic state.⁵³ Eisenstadt was a historical sociologist who worked in the tradition established by Max Weber (1864–1920) and later Talcott Parsons (1902–1979). It was Parsons' structural functionalism that enabled Eisenstadt to group together as "centralized bureaucratic empires" such mutually dissimilar societies from different epochs as Mesopotamian or pre-Columbian states on one pole and late dynastic China or European absolutist kingdoms of seventeenth-eighteenth century on the other pole.⁵⁴ As Eisenstadt saw them, these "centralized bureaucratic empires" stood somewhere halfway on the historical

trajectory from the Weberian patrimonial polities outside of Europe or European (and Japanese) feudal regimes and the modern statehood. Weberian influences appear to have reached Palais more directly as well. In a 1984 paper on the aristocratic-bureaucratic balance in Korean history, he defined the original nucleus of Korea's traditional ruling class as Weberian patrimonial bureaucracy. He even referenced Weber's *Religion of China*⁵⁵ to define what he understood as Korean Confucianism's "non-rational aspects" (preference given to heredity as opposed to meritocracy).⁵⁶ If Palais' scholarship on traditional Korea was framed by any theoretical understanding at all, it was the intellectual tradition of Weber, Parsons and Eisenstadt that influenced him most.

This tradition, of course, is far from homogeneous. Seen from today, Weber's writings on Chinese patrimonial bureaucracy belong more to the domain of (Eurocentric) ideology than fact-based scholarly research: no wonder given that the starting point of German sociologist's inquiry was the question of why "they" (Chinese, Indians, or any other non-Europeans), could not modernize, unlike "us" (Europeans and specifically Protestants). It is now plausibly argued that Weber, in his comparisons between the bureaucracies of the European absolutist monarchies and the dynastic Chinese bureaucracy, went to great lengths to over-emphasize the supposed rationalism of the former and the patrimonial traits of the latter, on a shaky factual basis. It was, after all, dynastic China rather than European states that first developed the mechanism of merit-based bureaucratic recruitment and promotion.⁵⁷ Eisenstadt, living in a different historical epoch, amidst the de-colonization upheavals, tended to build his categorizations in a much less explicitly Western-centered way. He, however, also made clear distinction between the "most differentiated type of the centralized bureaucratic societies," as represented by English or French absolutism of seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, and "Oriental" agrarian bureaucracies of dynastic China.⁵⁸ "Agrarian" in this context sounds rather awkwardly given that, as late as in 1700, Beijing's almost one million-strong population was twice the size of the population of London.⁵⁹ Eisenstadt's belief in the "collective" nature of land property in Tang China, or "restricted use" of money in the dynastic Chinese society until its end seems to be grounded in both latent Eurocentrism and his inadequate access to factual information.⁶⁰ In contemporary scholarship, the monetized market economy of eleventh-century Song China is understood to be the largest in the mediaeval world.⁶¹ Eisenstadt of the 1960s, all his effort at nominal inclusiveness notwithstanding, still associated the development of modernity almost exclusively with European (or Japanese) historical trajectory, making visible distinction between the European absolutist monarchies, on their way to predestined modern transformation, and the assorted Others of modern Europe.

It was hardly possible to expect that all these tendencies in the intellectual landscape forming the backdrop to Palais' scholarship would have failed to influence Palais' research on pre-modern Korea. They evidently did, leading the great Korea historian to mistakenly recognize as supposedly "uniquely Korean"—and, implicitly, working to inhibit Korea's prospects for modern development—these features of pre-modern Korean society that were hardly unknown to other contemporary bureaucratic monarchies across early modern Eurasia. One such feature was the relative prominence of *nobi* 奴婢—the unfree men and women owned by state agencies or private individuals. As most other Chosŏn social categories, *nobi* was a complex taxonomic unit. It consisted of several sub-categories of unfree producers. Some of them, living inside or close to their owners' residential quarters (*solgŏ* 率居), were tasked with menial or managerial services (*nobi* could, for example, manage an agricultural estate, collecting rent from the tenants on behalf of their owner). Sometimes they were even ordered to launch official appeals or petitions or conduct monetary transactions in lieu of their masters. They may be best described as bondservants. Others, who discharged their duty towards their masters by tilling their land or presenting them annual tribute while living separately from them (*oegŏ* 外居) were perhaps more akin to the serfs of absolutist-age Eastern Europe.⁶² The proportion of *nobi* in Chosŏn population peaked at ca. 30–40 per cent in late seventeenth century and then gradually receded, to the level of ca 10 per cent by the mid-nineteenth century.⁶³ The diversity of *nobi* population notwithstanding, Palais lumped together all the unfree groups of Chosŏn society as "chattel slaves" and informed his readers that Korea continued as a "slave society" throughout the Chosŏn era, even despite the visible reduction in the "slave" numbers towards the era's end.⁶⁴ Doubtlessly, no historian would fail to mention both existence and relative numerical prominence of the unfree primary producers in Chosŏn Korea. However, Chosŏn's *nobi* figures would be dwarfed by the Russian Empire of the late eighteenth century, where serfs constituted ca 50 per cent of total population,⁶⁵ more than twice as much as in contemporary Korea. The figures were lower, but still high for the rest of early Eastern and Central Europe as well, or for Ottoman Turkey.⁶⁶ They indicate that the phenomenon, which Palais regarded as "specifically Korean," was perhaps more of a general feature of many regions on the semi-periphery and periphery of the world-system immediately before and during its global transition to the capitalist mode of production.⁶⁷ It looks however, as if special conservatism of Chosŏn Korea was exactly the point which Palais wanted to emphasize, without much regard towards the world-historic context of Chosŏn Korea's development. Modernization paradigm, and the emphasis on the perceived "failure to modernize" in Korea's specific case, short-circuited impulses towards more comparative global history.

It was perhaps inescapable that world-historical contextualization would remain a weak spot of what has been developing in postwar America as “Area Studies,” with all the epistemological nationalism that required concentration on one or several specific “areas” implies. Nevertheless, the development of the historical understanding of pre-modern Korea in the US academia from the 1950s and to the 1980s was nothing short of impressive. In the 1950s or early 1960s, the likes of Henderson or Lee Chong-Sik operated with the clichés on “stagnant” Chosŏn Korea and its “failure to modernize” largely borrowed from the colonial-age Japanese scholarship. By contrast, already in the late 1960s–early 1970s, Palais was building a rather persuasive model of the Chosŏn period’s institutional history, based on meticulous study of the original sources, and in good awareness of both South (and North) Korean and Japanese secondary research. However, the idiosyncrasies inherent to Palais’ scholarship remained, via the influence of the American tradition of Weberian historical sociology, deeply Hegelian. “Korea” was approached as something essentially distinctive from the “Western” experiences, as a society the historical trajectory of which was immanently different from its “Western” counterparts. Both continuity and incremental change, both status inheritance and bureaucratic attempts to centralize resource control and promote at least some degree of meritocracy inside the administrative apparatus were usual to any early modern bureaucratic monarchy. However, Palais’ emphasis was squarely on the elements of continuity and inheritance, just as his mentor Wagner’s. Both were influenced by Reischauer’s and Fairbank’s narratives on China’s ultimate—and supposedly historically predestined—failure to modernize, and both saw Korea as slightly more aristocratic and slavery-ridden “variation of the Chinese pattern.” Both were distinguished historians whose work was meticulously grounded in primary sources. It is thus hard to establish a direct trajectory of continuity between the popular interwar clichés about “stagnant” Korea which needed Japanese to modernize, and Wagner’s or Palais’ academic work. The latter demonstrated, after all, a completely different degree of embeddedness in primary materials and intellectual sophistication. However, a deeply Eurocentric epistemology, with Korea being a priory taken as something essentially foreign to the predestined modernizing track of “West” (or Japan) remains a common thread in both cases. It was until the 1980s that this epistemology became, under Saidian influence, an object for critical reflection.

South Korea: the Quest for “Indigenous Roots of Modernity”

Not unlike their American colleagues, Korea’s domestic historians of Korea underwent their own process of professionalization. It has to be remembered that it, in fact, this process took place much earlier in Korea compared to North American “Area Studies,” mostly a post-1945 phenomenon. Already in the mid-1930s, amidst a fashion for “Korean studies” (Chosŏnhak 朝鮮學) in Japan’s Korean colony, nascent historical academia was taking shape there, institutionally as well as methodologically. Pioneering historical societies, such as Chindan Hakhoe (震檀學會, established in 1934), were putting together graduates of diverse Japanese institutions of higher learning, both Marxists and more conservative nationalists. Most of them, however, agreed that academic research on Korean history should involve both meticulous study of primary sources and attempts to approach Korean past as a part of global historical development. By the end of the 1930s, Korean history acquired a basic shape as an academic discipline in Korea.⁶⁸ After the 1945 Liberation, Marxists generally either chose North or were sidelined and silenced,⁶⁹ while the more conservative nationalist historians remained in the South and largely followed the pre-Liberation trajectory of source-based research. This research was, however, supposed now to lead to a “reconstruction” of history in which the ethno-nation (*minjok* 民族) was the main protagonist.⁷⁰ When the industrial development took speed in the 1960s, the ruling military junta felt that “excessively Westernizing” modernization might threaten the conservative “national values” and instead encourage its liberal-democratic opponents. It consequently wanted historical research to take more assertive view of Korea’s traditional past. Historians, in their turn, were sometimes more liberally minded than South Korea’s rulers, but nevertheless felt by the end of the 1960s that South Korea’s newfound industrial prominence would justify an attempt to challenge West’s and Japan’s perceived monopoly on the pre-destined modernizing trajectory of development. Such historians as Seoul National University’s (later Yonsei University’s) Kim Yongsŏp (金容燮, born 1931) started making influential attempts to prove that late Chosŏn was experiencing an internally driven modernization of agriculture. His colleagues were soon joining the flow, tracing down “proto-modernity sprouts” in the history of commerce, ideas or social system developments.⁷¹ This development was going into an explicitly different direction if measured against the trajectory of America’s Korean studies. Korean scholars’ preferred regime of truth was grounded in a dual affirmation—the affirmation of Korean tradition’s value per se and its presumed linkage to the coveted modernity. American scholarship was, however, either elusive or skeptical on both counts.

That was the obvious reason why much of the pre-1990s US scholarship on Korea was being largely omitted from the South Korean historical record. In theory, South Korean academics were interested in outsiders' view which, as they assumed, could have potentially been more objective than their own.⁷² Of course, US scholars are being dutifully mentioned when their research bring to the academic attention the previously unknown materials which South Korean historians direly need. Tylor Dennett, for example, is regularly referred to in connection with his re-discovery of Taft-Katsura Agreement,⁷³ while his work on early American diplomacy in Korea attracted much less attention. Alleyne Ireland's paean to the Japanese "modernization" of Korea was deemed to possess enough value as a historical document—with its first-hand observations—to merit a recent translation into Korean.⁷⁴ It received, however, almost no media or academic exposure. The same applies to Henry Drake's volume, translated into Korean as a first-hand record of colonial-age everyday life in the Korean capital.⁷⁵ Grajdanzev's *Modern Korea* was given an honor of being translated into Korean as early as in 1973, by Yi Kibaek (李基白, 1924–2004), one of South Korea's finest—and politically liberal—historians.⁷⁶ The book, its influence and its author have become an established subject of scholarly research in South Korea.⁷⁷ However, it was Grajdanzev's critical pathos vis-à-vis the Japanese colonial rule and his vast corpus of statistical materials, rather than his view on "stagnant" Chosŏn society that his South Korean translator and his colleagues appreciated. Likewise, Henderson's brilliant expose on South Korean society and politics of the 1950s and 1960s (which he witnessed first-hand), is translated into Korean and considered an important reference on the history of contemporary Korean political culture.⁷⁸ His views on Tasan, however, never attracted any attention in South Korea. To put it succinctly, American historical materials on modern and contemporary Korea are in constant high demand, as well as the records of personal observations by knowledgeable American participants-observers of Korea's turbulent history. The overall regime of truth, however, is the different matter, in which South Koreans tended to cling to their positions, rooted in an entirely different combination of historical dynamics and collective desires.

Post-nationalist South Korean Historiography and its American Others

These positions, of course, were bound to mutate following South Korea's own historical evolution. By the early 2000s, neo-liberal South Korea, increasingly bold global investor state with growing non-ethnic Korean population, officially embraced multiculturalism: belonging to South Korea as a political community

was no longer principally limited to ethnic Koreans.⁷⁹ In the field of Korean history, in sync with these developments, both the role of ethnic nation as the main protagonist of the historical narrative and the obsessive desire to prove that early modern Korea, no less than the “West,” was following the pre-destined trajectory towards development of modern capitalism and nationalism, were now subjected to a critical inquiry.⁸⁰ Riding the post-nationalist wave, the works by Wagner and Palais, previously mostly politely ignored or simply mentioned in passing by the majority of South Korean historians as an example of foreign-based Korean studies, enjoyed a degree of visibility perhaps unimaginable in the 1980s or 1990s. Yi Hunsang, a Pusan historian who for several decades was almost alone in his efforts to make the Anglophone scholarship on Chosŏn period better known in South Korea, published in 2007 a co-translated volume of Wagner’s papers from different decades.⁸¹ In one of the few articles which presented Wagner’s scholarship in details for professional South Korean audience, Yi Hunsang noted that Wagner’s view on the relatively stability of Chosŏn’s inherited status system anticipated the current mode of critical reflection over exceeding emphasis on supposedly proto-modern “disintegration of hereditary statuses” in the scholarship from the 1970s to 1990s.⁸² On the other hand, a leading (right-wing) critic of the nationalist search for Chosŏn period “modernity sprouts,” Seoul National University’s Professor (in the time of this writing, Professor Emeritus) Yi Yŏnghun, took an equally critical stance towards Palais’ “slave society” theory. He plausibly argued that separately living, tribute-presenting *nobi* should have been rather described as “serfs,” and that putting Chosŏn’s predominantly agricultural employment of *nobi* into the same category as chattel slavery in societies with predominantly market-oriented commercial production (ancient Athens, or the US South before the Civil War), is ahistorical.⁸³ A mainstream Seoul National University historian, Chŏng Hohun, agreed with Palais that Yu Hyŏngwŏn’s (柳馨遠, 1622–1673) Confucian vision of an ideal state where monarchy takes control over the landed property had little in common with modernity understood in Western terms. He noted, however, that Palais took Yu Hyŏngwŏn’s utopic vision of an ideal monarchy out of the seventeenth-century political and ideological context and, moreover, greatly underestimated the reformist potential inherent in Yu’s challenge to the established patterns of private (rather than public) management of most agricultural land.⁸⁴ Most South Korean historians seem to agree that Wagner’s and Palais’ skepticism towards nationalistically motivated search for the “proto-modern” elements in Chosŏn reality was at least partly justified. At the same time, their understanding of concrete Chosŏn social or ideological systems—from *nobi* ownership to iconoclastic thinkers of Yu Hyŏngwŏn’s kind—is seen as deeply flawed, lacking world-historical awareness and systematic understanding

of the main flows of political and ideological development of Chosŏn times. Their totalizing view of all Confucian thinkers as espousing essentially one and the same model of “Confucian polity” appears to be one more factor limiting their influence on South Korea’s post-nationalist historiography. After all, South Korean post-nationalism is built on critical reflections over the whole Eurocentric modernity project⁸⁵ while Wagner’s and Palais’ views on “Confucian society” or “Korean model,” seemingly immutable and lacking in dynamism and historical prospects in modern age, are deeply Eurocentric.

South Korea is a highly trade-dependent economy. It concurrently demonstrates great sensitivity to the global currents of thought and worldwide intellectual vogues. A former Marxist and now a highly influential post-nationalist literary historian, Ko Misuk (born 1960) explains Hō Chun’s (許浚, 1539–1615) system of classical East Asian medicine in Foucauldian terms of biopolitics and control over the sexual desires.⁸⁶ Her work is perhaps one of the best expressions of this sensitivity to the global trends. South Korean scholarly community’s principal openness towards foreign, included American, scholarship on Korea has been eloquently demonstrated by the importance of Robert Scalapino (1919–2011) and Lee Chong-Sik’s fundamental work on Korean Communist movement history⁸⁷ for the incipient research on Korean Communism in South Korea in the 1970s and until the late 1980s. Then, such studies were either suppressed or tightly controlled by South Korea’s military dictatorship. The American volume, its rather depreciating view on Korean Communism as a Soviet “import” notwithstanding, provided a crucially important stimulus for early South Korean research on the colonial-age Left.⁸⁸ Unfortunately, due to limitations of space, neither the influence of Scalapino, Lee Chong-Sik or Suh Dae-Sook’s (born 1931) scholarship nor the impact made by the progressive revisionist approach to Korea’s contemporary history typified by Bruce Cumings (born 1943) onto South Korean academia cannot be considered here. Suffice it to say that especially the impact made by the latter American scholarly trend in 1980s–1990s South Korea was profound, something acknowledged even by the conservative South Korean critics of Bruce Cumings’ approach.⁸⁹ Yet another topic which, due to the considerations of space cannot be covered here, is the impact of the post-1980s scholarship by US-based academics—often, but not always, of Korean origins,—on the current academic agenda in South Korea. This impact is tremendous, especially in the fields where US-based scholarship is seen as filling the under-researched niches in the study of contemporary Korea while putting Korean phenomena into a global context and suggesting progressive, forward-looking alternatives to certain particularly problematic Korean realities and institutions. For example, Vassar College-based Moon Seungsook’s (born 1963) pioneering (in both American and Korean contexts) study on the effects of South

Korean conscription system on the patterns of masculinity and femininity stereotypes, promptly translated into Korean,⁹⁰ received highly positive reviews.⁹¹ If anything, South Korea is extraordinarily receptive to the intellectual influences from the parts of the world which South Koreans commonly refer to as “advanced countries” (*sŏnjin’guk* 先進國), especially if the foreign-based scholarship directly engages with the issues of interest to Korean scholars.

In Place of Conclusion: a Possibility of Non-Teleological Universalism in Historiography?

The failure of the scholarly tradition which Wagner or Palais represented, to implant itself on the South Korean soil should be, in the end, attributed to the incongruence of modernist teleologies between the American and South Korea historians of traditional Korea in the 1960–90s. To put it in a simplistic way, whereas Wagner and Palais saw Korea’s “failure to modernize” as historically predetermined, South Korean historians were searching for the lost “sprouts” of modern developments in their pre-modern past. By the 2000s, such searches were already out of fashion, but so was also the Weberian, Eurocentric patterns of determinism on which so much of Wagner’s and Palais’ scholarship was based. The age of compulsive search for the trajectories leading to the desired modern results was over. It does not imply, however, that the over-determinist, teleological approach to history is overcome as such, and that is exactly the reason why the Eurocentric teleologies of the pre-1980s American historiography of Korea may be still of current interest. Charles Armstrong’s 2013 book on the history of North Korean diplomacy, for example—exactly the book which was found to be built on plagiarized materials triggering the scandal mentioned in the beginning of this article—was constructed on the assumption that North Korea’s “failure” was a predestined outcome of its developmental trajectory. As Armstrong sees it, the “Marxist-Leninist” attempts to charter a trajectory different from orthodox capitalism were in any case predestined to their ultimate “ignominious fall into the dustbin of history.” North Korea, in this view, was a “Third-world state” which logically ended up with “level of poverty more typical of the poorer states of southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa,” as it failed to integrate itself into the successfully developing capitalist world under the leadership of a small, closely-knit, “tyrannical” ruling elite.⁹² There are, of course, good grounds to criticize North Korean leaders for both internal oppression and diverse policy failures. However, the logic of predestined failure does little to explain North Korea’s persistent success in surviving against all odds. Nor does it explain the mainly geopolitical reasons why North Korea, unlike the fellow Party-states in China, Vietnam, Laos or even Cuba, never

managed to integrate itself into the technological and financial flows of global capitalist market, despite a number of important attempts since the 1970s (which Armstrong himself assiduously documents). Perhaps the recognition of both plurality and inherent open-endedness of the historical trajectories will provide us with better lenses to understand both the genealogy and the current topology of the world-system in terms different from rather judgements pronouncements of “success” or “failure.” On the way towards such recognition in the case of Korean history, the critical reflections over the intellectual trajectory of the historiography of Korea in the USA are essential.

Notes

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66. On slave owning in Ottoman Turkish cities, see: Donald Quataer. *Manufacturing in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1500–1950* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 20–22.
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