

The Various Perspectives of Colonial Rule in Korea and the Possibility of “Historical” Reconciliation

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Comparative studies of the history of each country in Northeast Asia will primarily be a basis for improving mutual understanding among the countries. This paper will analyze the causes of the not-so-peaceful history of invasion, war, and violation of human rights by reflecting on the Northeast Asian past and provide guidelines for a peaceful future for the “Northeast Asian community,” thereby settling conflicts and troubles and creating the basis for a “historical” reconciliation. Given the reality of the often rather tense historical conflicts in Northeast Asia, joint development of history textbooks has a huge significance, although undertaken at the non-governmental level. Despite these achievements, one can say that joint research in Northeast Asia is still in its infancy. More such concrete research should be conducted, adopting the comparative approach in various fields in the future. Historical events and facts in Northeast Asia have historical value only when they bear desirable fruit for the future of Northeast Asia

1 Introduction

Many people ardently hoped that, with the end of ideological conflict and the Cold War, a peaceful world order would emerge in the twenty-first century. In academic circles, one hears voices arguing an attitude of “forgiveness” and “reconciliation” regarding the past in relation to certain countries.¹ The proposed reconciliation includes various forms, such as co-existence, change in attitudes and beliefs, and development of partnership with the former-enemy country. This could also involve the establishment of long-term peace between former mutually hostile countries with the help of supranational institutions, not subject to the influence

¹ See John Paul Lederach, *Building peace : sustainable reconciliation in divided societies* (Washington, D.C. : United States Institute of Peace Press), 1997 ; Stephen Rock, *Why Peace Breaks Out : Great Power Rapprochement in Historical Practice* (Chapel Hill, NC : University of North Carolina Press; Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (edited), *From conflict resolution to reconciliation* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2004.

of the concerned nations and states.² However, the former hostilities continue to linger, and national competition and racial conflicts cause frequent wars and terrorist acts across the world.

Northeast Asia also suffers from the legacy of its past—the dispute over Dokdo between Korea and Japan, the dispute over the Senkaku Islands between China and Japan, the dispute over Goguryeo between Korea and China, the Japanese army’s “comfort women,” and the Japanese prime minister’s visit to the Yasukuni shrine. In Korea, in particular, which experienced Japanese colonial rule, nationalism based on hostility against and a sense of rivalry with Japan has taken root. Bad blood between the two countries runs deep, due to the deep scars left by Japanese colonial rule. It is necessary to share historical awareness in order to overcome the legacy of bloodshed and solve the problems of history. Sharing perceptions should be accompanied by historical understanding that the contestants share, and by responsible choices about the present situation and future. At present, the three countries in Northeast Asia make little effort to restrain their nationalism and objectively recognize the other’s feelings. Hence, the large difference in their “memories.” A long-term effort will be necessary for developing a common and consensual perception of history.

The first step in the effort to develop a common perception of history should be to heal the injuries that the Japanese invasion has inflicted on its neighbor countries in the process of their modernization. Publication of nationalistic Japanese history textbooks, and their sanction by the Japanese government’s censorship even in the twenty-first century, generates controversies not only in Korea and China but also in Japan.³ To understand dispassionately and criticize the problem of Japanese history textbooks is not interference in the internal affairs of Japan, but is a basic requirement of achieving peace and reconciliation in Northeast Asia, including Japan. Thus, not only Korea but also civic groups in Japan argue for a transnational coalition to solve the problem.⁴ Most Koreans continue to bear animosity toward Japan due to the Korean experience with Japanese colonial rule and are very sensitive to Japanese perceptions of the colonial era.

2 Lily Gardner Feldman, “The Role of History in Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation : Principle and Practice, *Opening Historical Reconciliation in East Asia through Historical Dialogue* (Seoul, NORTHEAST ASIAN HISTORY FOUNDATION), 2008, pp.16-17.

3 Conservatives have leveled three extensive criticisms against Japanese history textbooks in postwar Japan. In 1955, The Democratic Party of Japan published a pamphlet entitled “Textbook problems we should be worried about” criticizing Japanese textbooks. This is known as the first textbook attack. In October, 1980, the Liberal Democratic Party established “A Subcommittee on Textbooks” and issued a statement, “Middle school textbook full of questions”. This is known as the second textbook attack. In 1995, Nobukaz Hujioaka, a professor of education at the University of Tokyo, launched the Association for the Advancement of the Liberal View of History. In 1996, he questioned the introduction of the issue of “Japanese army’s comfort women” in the history textbook for middle-school. This is known as the third textbook attack. Nobukaz Hujioaka, Dakao Sakamoto, Yosinori Gobayasi, etc. not only attacked textbooks, but also announced that they would themselves publish a middle-school history textbook. In January 1997, they organized a “Meeting for a New History Textbook” and actually published the history textbook. The textbook obtained the approval of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology in April 2001, provoking controversy. Cho Dong-Geol, “Hanilganui Yeoksabunjaenggwa Jeonmang”, *History Education Review Vol. 32*, 2004, pp. 3-10. Of course, textbook problems are not confined to Japan. Korea has claimed to stand for the universality of world history and specificity of Korean history as the goal of its history education, but national perspectives have been dominant in the perception of history in Korea. The fact that Korean people cannot perceive Japan objectively and have a general aversion against Japan has an influence on history education.

4 Yang Mi-Kang, “Dongasiaui Hwahaereul Wihan Siminsahoewi Yeoksadaehwa”, *Dongasiaeseo Yeoksainsigui Gukgyeong Neomgi* (Seoul, Sunin), 2008, pp. 137-154.

The Korean people are proud of their 5000-year legacy of civilization. This pride explains their deep humiliation by the occupation and colonization by a Japan that was industrially backward compared to the West and, that also occurred in the early 20th century, when the worldwide process of decolonization had begun. Unless the pain associated with the Korean people’s memory of the colonial era is assuaged, historical reconciliation is impossible. Reconciliation begins only when aggressors admit their misdeeds and make a heartfelt apology. Japan should “officially” admit that they harmed the Korean people during the colonial era even if they did so without “intending” to, and unambiguously apologize for their faults. Japan should recognize that this is the precondition for reconciliation. Unless it attaches due importance to the memories of neighboring countries that suffered aggression and injury, Japan will inevitably remain isolated in Asia, let alone achieving reconciliation.⁵ On this premise, I would like to explore the possibility of bringing about a “historical” reconciliation.

2 How should one view the colonial era?

2.1 Controversies over the concept of colony and Japan’s “annexation of Korea”

Before we discuss how one should define the history of the colonial era, we need to understand the concept of “colony.”⁶ Originally, a colony meant a society that a people or nation established when they left their homeland and migrated to a new land. Most Western colonies were formed in non-European continents by mass murder of the natives and settlement by the colonizers. This is generally known as a “settlement colony.” Then, there were “maritime colonies,” where specific areas were seized to serve as a logistics base or an economic infiltration base. The term “colony” also refers to areas deprived of their sovereignty, exploited economically, and used strategically by an imperialist nation. These are known as “exploitation colonies.”⁷ The countries that became independent as nation-states after the Second World War are described as “neo-colonies” in that they have a politically, economically, or militarily subordinate relationship with their former colonizers or other powers. As observed above, the concept of colony changed with the change in the international relations of imperialist nations over a long period.

In Korea, the term “colony” has been used until recently with the implication of “the loss

5 It is well known that Willy Brandt, chancellor of Germany, knelt in pensive apology in front of Warsaw’s Monument of the Ghetto Heroes when he visited Poland for the first time, in 1970. There were fierce territorial disputes over the eastern area of the Oder-Neisse River between Germany and Poland. West Germany finally gave way and it had great influence on “historical” reconciliation between the two countries. The German people expressed enormous anger over the response of Japan toward the Japanese army’s “comfort women.” The German press, in particular, recited the opinion that the Japanese people were nationalist to the core, and they were obsessed with a fixed idea, and failed to extricate themselves from the shadow of their imperialist past. Kim Seung-Ryeol, “National History from ‘Deux Points de Vue’ : History Textbook Work between Germany and Poland”, *Crossing the border of Historical Understanding in East Asia* (Seoul, Sunin), 2008, pp. 167-169. Bodo von Borries, “History Education for Historical Reconciliation : Some Theoretical Considerations and Practical Experiences from a German Perspective”, *Opening Historical Reconciliation in East Asia through Historical Dialogue* (Seoul, NORTHEAST ASIAN HISTORY FOUNDATION), 2008, p. 200.

6 There has been much research on this. See Asada kyoji, *Nihon Shokuminchi Kenkyushiron* (Tokyo, Miraisha), 1990.

7 J. Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers), 1997. pp. 10-12.

of national sovereignty, exploitation, and suppression by Japan.”⁸ North Korea also argued that it was in “a state of war” during the colonial era and engaged in fierce armed struggle against Japan.⁹ This view is accepted by some Japanese researchers, who argue for the “forced annexation theory by conquest” as war responsibilities of Japan are magnified as a social issue. There are also some researchers who uphold the theory of a 50-year war, which accepts Japan’s responsibility while attending to the issue of “sex slavery” through the “comfort women” system.¹⁰

Opposing the prevailing view that the “annexation of Korea” was illegal, a Japanese scholar shocked Korean academia by arguing the “legitimacy of Korean annexation.” The scholar argued that several treaties pertaining to “Korean annexation” followed international law or practice at that time. Therefore, the annexation was legally legitimate.¹¹ However, other research proved that the treaty was legally invalid; in the process of examining original materials connected to the treaty, this research uncovered that a Korean leader was coerced into giving approval and that the apparent formal legitimacy was a sham.¹² This has given rise to intense arguments among historians and scholars of international law in Japan and Korea. It was also asserted that the discussion over the validity or otherwise of the treaty pertaining to the Korean annexation is of no great significance from the legal perspective. This is because the international law, which is the criterion of judgment on validity, is unjust.¹³

The question of how to define the concept of “colony” has emerged as an important issue through this argument. In Korea, that the colonial rule was an illegal occupation by Japan is the official view. By contrast, in Japan, it seems the accepted view is that one can call a territory a colony when there is a legal contract according to international law between the suzerain state and occupied region or country. However, in the discipline of history, the term “colony” is commonly used as a term critical of the practices of an imperialist nation, and is not used on the premise that it followed legal procedures. As the concept of colony has been challenged afresh, new perspectives have emerged regarding defining the characteristics of colonial rule and many studies on the matter have been carried out.¹⁴

While most expansionist policies of Western imperialism were the product of their own liberal stage of development, Japan developed an expansionist policy characterized by mili-

8 Most short books on the Japanese colonial era published in Korea uphold this view.

9 See Korea Institute for National Unification, *‘Joseonjeonsa’ Haeje* (Seoul, Korea Institute for National Unification), 1994.

10 See Song Yeon-Ok and Kim Yeong, editors, *Gundaewa Seongpongnyeok* (Seoul, Sunin), 2012.

11 See Unno Hukuju, *Kankoku Heigoshi no Kenkyu* (Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten). 2008. Unno does not think that the colonial rule was justified because the treaty was legally legitimate. Unno argued that one could show that the annexation of and colonial rule over Korea had legal legitimacy. Nevertheless, the annexation of and colonial rule over Korea were unjust.

12 See Lee, Tae-Jin, “1904~1905 Hanguk Gukgwon Chimtalgoyakdeurui Jeolchasang Bulbeopseong”, *Hangukbyeonghapgwa Hyeondae: Yeoksajeok Gukjebeopjeok Jaegomto* (Paju, Taehaksa), 2009.

13 Park, Pae-Keun, “Hangukbyeonghapgwallyeon Joyak Yumuhyoronui Uiuwa Hangye”, *Ilbonui Hangukchimnyakgwa Jugwonchimal* (Seoul, Gyeonginmunhwasa), 2005, p. 158. International laws can be transformed in any degree according to dynamics of international relations. For example, the concept of “crime against humanity” first appeared in the international military trials in Nuremberg and Tokyo after the Second World War. Matsuba Syoichi, “Indojeok Gaeip’gwa ‘Indoe Daehan Joe’”, *Yeoksainsik Nonjaeng* (Seoul, NORTHEAST ASIAN HISTORY FOUNDATION), 2009, p. 337.

14 See Park Chan-Seung, “Iljeui Singminji Jibaejeongchaek Yeongusa”, *Ilje Singminjibaeui Gujowa Seonggyeok* (Seoul, Gyeonginmunhwasa), 2005.

tary aggression, but with no concomitant liberal social changes. Therefore, Japanese colonial policy was different from long-distance colonial rule of European imperialism, which partially allowed liberal space. The Japanese colonies served as a military base for Japan’s imperialistic political and economic invasion. Among these, the Korean Peninsula functioned as a geopolitical bridgehead for Japan to advance into the continent. Therefore, the Japanese imperialists strengthened the military- and police-controlled governing system in the Peninsula, while attacking Western imperialist powers or resisting their invasion of Asia.

The study of a Japanese colony should involve a deep understanding of international environment at that time, the domestic situation and socio-economic trends in Japan, and people’s resistance and socio-economic situations in the colony. Moreover, the governance structure and policies of the colony should be examined in relation to the characteristics of Japanese imperialism. The contents and operation of colonial policies might change with change in the power-relationship between the colonizers and colonized. Therefore, one can explain the governance structure of the colony only when one considers the interaction between the imperial power and the colony. Only then can one delineate the relation between Japan and its colony organically and completely. However, studies hitherto have tended to be segmental, for they have focused on case studies and certain sectors, thereby shedding light on certain facts and truths.

2.2 Evaluating the colonial rule

A history of colonial experience is a discussion of the past that is also related to the present in one form or another. The question of how to define the colonial era naturally leads to the question of how we view the present. Most perceptions of the colonial rule among Korean historians and scholars hitherto were close to the “colonial exploitation theory.”¹⁵ The basis for this theory can be organized as follows:¹⁶

The Japanese Empire appropriated the land of countless Koreans when they established a new system of land ownership through the Land Survey Project in colonial Joseon (an appellation often used during the Japanese colonial rule to denote Korea). The Japanese exploitation of forests hurt the farmers badly. The colonizers created vast “national forests” through a “Forest Law” and “Forest Survey Project” and most of them were loaned to Japanese people in various ways. Japan undertook the improvement of upland cotton, cow, rice, and silk cocoons in order to transform Korea into a supplier of food and raw materials. Native rice species, in particular, were replaced by Japanese ones for export to Japan.

In the 1920s, Japan implemented the plan for increasing rice-production to transform Joseon into a source of food supply as it carried out a rice-price policy and a food policy to maintain the low wages essential for the existence of Japanese capitalism. This resulted in the increase in the flow of Joseon rice into Japan and the reinforcement of the colonial landlord system. The Korean farmers suffered chronic food shortages, as the amount of rice flowing from Korea to Japan much exceeded the increase achieved by the implementation of a

15 See Korean History Research Association, editor, *Hangugyeoksaimmun Vol. 3* (Seoul, Pullbit), 1996.

16 See Kim Un-Tae, *Gaejeongpan Ilbonjegukjuuiui Hanguktongchi* (Seoul, Parkyoungsa), 1998.

plan for increasing rice production. Thus, the consumption of rice by the Korean people decreased. The irrigation association, which was central to the land improvement project, centered on landlords. Medium and small landowners, farm owners, and tenant farmers were excluded from agricultural credits, and suffered from irrigation association fees, a high burden of farm rent, and high interest rates, while Japanese and Korean big landowners reaped benefits.

The industrialization policy in the 1930s resulted in the industrialization of Joseon and caused expanded industrial production and the reconstruction of industrial infrastructure. This had a great influence on Joseon's economy at that time, but was focused on creating a logistics base for the invasion of the continent. Furthermore, Japanese people controlled the capital and technology in the industrial sector, and industry developed asymmetrically without the interdependence of its various segments. After the Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese rulers reorganized Joseon's economy wholly for military purposes and established a coercive labor mobilization system to mobilize the public and workers for the purpose of war. The military goal and necessity determined the coercive exploitation of human resources in general.

We cannot deny that this viewpoint has historical significance and a positive aspect in that it implies a practical will to attach importance to the context of and justification for the national independence movement during the Japanese colonial era. However, many arguments advanced from this view had a strong emotional slant, e.g., all Japanese police personnel were "deceptive" and oppressed the people of Joseon, and, hence, the people suffered.¹⁷ This approach has also drawn critical fire from the theorists of "colonial modernization" because it did not provide an objective analysis of colonial exploitation in the period of imperialism, which must be distinguished from "pre-modern" exploitation.

Each proponent of the theory of "colonial modernization" advocates a different view. However, and as is well known, the basic point they share is that Japanese colonial rule cannot be understood only in terms of negative aspects, such as exploitation and suppression, but that the positive aspects such as development and benefits should also be considered. They partially acknowledge the reality of "exploitation and plunder" by Japanese imperialism, but consider "development" as an important object of analysis. This is why their view is also called the "colonial development theory."¹⁸ The crux of the colonial modernization theory is as follows.¹⁹

Colonial modernization theorists harshly criticize the theory of "embryonic capitalism," which is a common view in the discipline of history in Korea. The colonial modernization theorists argue that the theory of embryonic capitalism is nothing more than a fiction created from a nationalist perspective after the 1960s. They criticize the theory of economic growth in the Late Joseon period, which the Korean historians have advanced, and try to prove that economy in the Late Joseon period was stagnant. By contrast, they consider the colonial pe-

17 Sin Yong-Ha declared that some wearing the guises of "professor" and "scholar" kowtow to Japan, providing sham statistics to prove the pro-imperialist theory of "colonial modernization." Sin Yong-Ha, *Ilje Singminjijeongchaekgwawa Singminjijeundaehwaron Bipan* (Seoul, Moonji Publishing), 2006, p. 31.

18 See Kwon Tae-Eok, "Geundaehwa Donghwa Singminjiyusan", *The Journal of Korean History Vol. 108*, 2000.

19 See Ahn Byung-Jik, "Hangukgeunhyeondaesa Yeonguui Saeroun Paereodaim", *Changjakgwabipyong Vol. 98*, 1997 ; Park Sub, Jung Tae-Hern, Park Hyunmo, Kim, Yong-Jick and Chung Yoon-Jae, *Singminji Geundaehwaronui Ihaewa Bipan* (Seoul, Baeksanseodang), 2004.

riod as a period of “modern economic development,” characterized by a rate of economic growth surpassing the rate of population growth on a continuous basis, due to increased productivity. Thus, they view Japanese imperialism as causing economic development in the colony. Through statistical analysis, they show that Japanese imperialism developed the colony by constructing social facilities and introducing modern systems and achieving economic growth through industrialization. Further, they argue that, inspired by the development promoted by Japan, the people of Joseon actively accepted modern technology and systems and acquired modern competence, which enabled them to achieve independent self-development.

In other words, they focus on the efforts and entrepreneurial experiences of Joseon’s capitalists as creating an important value system favorable to economic development and consider this to have contributed to Korean economic development after independence. This perspective is related to subsequent research that viewed the main purpose of Japanese economic policy in Joseon as not the suppression of Joseon’s capitalist enterprise but the development of Joseon’s economy, and Joseon’s capitalists succeeded in accumulating capital under the auspices of the Japanese Governor-General of Korea.²⁰ In this perspective, although there were some institutions in which Japanese people discriminated against Koreans, the Korean workforce developed to the level required to assist the higher skills and applications of the Japanese employees. Gradually, the Korean workforce diversified into skilled workers and laborers, technicians and engineers, and laborers and managers after the 1930s, and especially around the end of the Japanese rule.²¹

Further, the colonial modernization theorists criticized studies showing that living standard of the Korean people deteriorated during the Japanese colonial rule, and tried to demonstrate that the living standard of the Koreans actually improved. Acknowledging social and economic inequality between the Japanese and Koreans, they argued that the quality of life of the Korean people improved because real income per capita increased with increased overall average income and accordingly real consumption also increased. While acknowledging the decreased consumption of grain, for which there are objective statistics, they argue that living standards of the Koreans under Japanese occupation cannot be said to have been poor because calorie intake per capita did not really decrease when the added calories are taken into account.²²

This perspective is an extension of the arguments put forward by the Japanese colonizers. They emphasized how remarkably the Korean economy developed after the “annexation of Korea.” In favor of this, they presented statistics that Japan cited to justify their colonial rule right after the liberation of Korea on August 15, 1945. The Japanese scholar who argued in favor of Japanese colonial rule right after the liberation of Korea argued that although Japan had committed “trivial” mistakes in its colonial policies, the colonial rule by Japan was fundamentally different from that by Western powers, as its goal was the development of the colony. He also admitted that although the purpose of the Japanese policies was good, the poli-

20 See Joo Ik-Jong, “Iljeha Pyeongyangui Meriyaseugonggeobe Gwanhan Yeongu”, Seoul National University, 1994.

21 See JAhn Byung-Jik, “Gungminjigeomneungnyeoksingoryeongjaryo’ui Bunseok”, *Geundaejoseongonggeophwau Yeongu : 1930-1945* (Seoul, Ilchokak), 1993.

22 See Joo Ik-Jong, “Singminjigi Joseoninui Saenghwalsujun : Nonjaengui Jaegomto”, *Saeroun Hangukgyeongje-baljeonsa: Joseonhugieseo 20Segi Godoseongjangkkaji* (Paju, Nanam Publishing House), 2005.

cies harmed the Korean people. Therefore, Japan's rule was a "misgovernment of good intentions."²³

Studies of colonial rule from postmodernist points of view are also being published. They criticize the colonial exploitation theory and colonial modernization theory, arguing that these are based entirely on the premise of modernity, view history as a consistent process, and try to link the purposes together to support the results of these purposes.

These new studies attempt a sociological analysis of the colonial rule by focusing on how Japanese imperialism controlled the public through everyday organizations such as schools, factories, medical treatment, and the military, and do not focus on analyzing modernization at the level of politics, economy, and institutions.²⁴ However, critics of this approach have questioned how far historical research that ignores country, nation, and class could contribute to overcoming the ills of the modern era and point towards a better future.²⁵ There are also some studies that investigate the correlation among colonialism, nationalism, and modernity while critically examining the "nationalistic" paradigm and trying to understand various levels such as class, sex, region, rank, etc. along with the nation.²⁶ One can see that these studies expose the relative weakness of the traditional criticism of colonial policies and suggest a sharper and more comprehensive critique of colonial modernization from various levels.

Unlike the earlier approach of the "colonial modernization theory," at present, historians in Korea suggest a reconsideration of the methods of research and criticize colonial modernization theory in terms of its overemphasis on "development." This approach is now gaining ground in the academia.²⁷ Colonial modernization theory bases its arguments (for economic development having occurred in the colonial period) on statistical analysis and does not undertake an overall analysis of the problems of subjectivity, the role of various classes, the nature of colonial capitalism and development, and the quality of life. The main agents of Japanese colonial rule were Japanese. Some Koreans who had become Japanized also participated in the governance. The colonial modernization theorists consider that the discussion of the sufferings and sacrifice of so many Koreans is unnecessary because exploitation is a "common-sense" of colonial experience. Drawing on statistical estimates, the theorists argue that the life of common Koreans improved under colonial rule. However, much evidence proves that most Koreans led a life of poverty and hardship. The reason for the continuous decline in the rate of per capita food consumption in colonial Joseon was the outflow of rice into Japan, as shown by existing studies. There was an attempt to prohibit the outflow of Joseon rice into Japan as it became problematic after the opening of a port, but it was not possible to imple-

23 See Suzuki Takeo, "Chosen Tochi no Seikaku to Jisseki-Hansei to Han-hihan", *Nihonjin no Kaigai Katsudo ni kansuru Rekishiteki Chosa*, vol. 11: *Chosen*, no. 10 (Tokyo: Okurasho Kanrikyoku).

24 See Kim Jin-Koon and Jung Keun-Sik, editors, *Geundaejuchewa Singminji Gyuyulgwollyeok* (Seoul, Munhwagwahaksa), 1997 ; Kong Jae-Wook and Jung Keun-Sik, editors, *Singminjiui Ilsang : Jibaewa Gyunnyeol* (Seoul, Munhwagwahaksa), 2006.

25 See Chung Jae-Jeong, "Hangukgeundaewa Singminji Geundaeseongnon", *Hanguksayeonguimmun : Saeroun Hanguksa Giljabi Vol. 2* (Paju, Jisik-sanup Publishing Co. Ltd.).

26 See Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, editors (trans.by Do Myoun-hoi), *Colonial modernity in Korea (Hangugui Singminji Geundaeseong : Naejaejeok Baljeonnonngwa Singminji Geundaehwaroneul Neomeoseo)* (Seoul, Samin), 2006.

27 See Jung Tae-Hern, *Hangugui Singminjjeok Geundae Seongchal : Geundaejuui Bipangwa Pyeonghwagongjonui Yeok-sahak Mosaek* (Seoul, Sunin), 2007.

ment the prohibition during the colonial period.²⁸ “Development” and “exploitation” are not separate issues, and it is important to show the link between development and exploitation whenever one discusses development. The colonial modernization theory argues that the Koreans developed into a modern nation while accumulating knowledge, technology, and management skills during colonial rule, notwithstanding the concomitant oppression and discrimination. However, without the development of an independent national consciousness, all that “advancement” could only lead to the internalization of pro-Japanese feelings.

Colonial modernization theory urges a fundamental reconsideration of obsolete ways of thinking about the history of Korea that prevails in Korean academia. It is time for Korean historians to consider with an open mind the criticism that their consciousness of history lags behind changes in reality. It is necessary to realize that development and exploitation are not separate issues but two aspects of the same reality. If one stresses only development and ignores exploitation, this would be no different from the theory of “colonial dispensation.” On the other hand, if one emphasizes the aspect of exploitation only, one would not be able to escape the criticism of having a disparaging view of the colonial period as a history made by strangers. Thus, Korean historians should overcome both colonial exploitation theory and colonial modernization theory and establish a new vision of history.

3 What is the plan for ‘historical’ reconciliation in Northeast Asia?

3.1 The necessity of a new paradigm and approach of comparative studies

The collapse of the socialist bloc in the Soviet Union and East Europe at the end of the 20th century has been a reason for changes in the international political order and capitalist economic system and for the collapse of a paradigm for understanding the modern world. This caused confusion across the board, from the common person to intellectuals, including those in the humanities and social sciences. In particular, with the collapse of the international counterbalance provided by the socialist bloc, the rampant wave of neo-liberalism centering on the hegemony of the US gradually finds its way into the academia and the economic and military sphere.

The dominant polarities of twentieth century historical thinking, e.g., imperialism versus anti-imperialism (nationalism), liberalism versus totalitarianism, and socialism versus capitalism, have been severely challenged. The ideology of neoliberalism projected itself as errorless science as postmodernism spread and circulated among intellectuals, and the collapse of the socialist bloc was understood as the victory of “liberal democracy” against socialist ideology, represented by Marxism-Leninism. The search for future-oriented alternatives and new paradigms of long-term human development has not disappeared. However, while adhering to the basic principles of democracy, peace, and humanitarian principles, the attempt to develop a local- and community-centric theoretical framework that looks beyond the existing framework of the nation-state would appear to be important in the process of this search. This search

28 See Song Kue-Jin, *Ijehawi Joseonmumyeok Yeongu* (Seoul, Research Institute of Korean Studies), 2001.

should appropriately culminate in the quest for a new present-centered and future-oriented paradigm of history, which would appear to be the proper foundation for historical studies.

If the historical studies properly reflect the present and views the past from an awareness of the reality and concerns of the present, then the results of historical research would act as a compass in deciding the direction of future society. It is necessary to reconstruct the modern and contemporary history of Northeast Asia from this perspective into a history of an organically related regional world. An approach of comparative historical research that aims at limited generalization based on historical facts is useful for generalizing about the causes and course of each historical event for properly understanding the continuities and discontinuities in terms of time and the universality and specificity of a specific region in terms of space. Moreover, comparative historical research encourages organizing and systematizing the theories of history into a science of history and organizing theories in social science disciplines, including sociology and political science, as having their roots in history. This would be beneficial for both history and social science. In other words, the approach of comparative research that emerged with the realization of the shortcomings of *ahistorical* social theories is a device to combine the specificity of historical science with the abstract nature of social science.

It was in the 19th century that *comparison* emerged as a method of seeking knowledge. At that time, comparative approaches began to gain ground in the field of linguistics, anthropology, psychology, law, sociology, and political science. Despite this general trend in social science, historical studies did not immediately accept the comparative approach.²⁹ However, after the First World War, historians began to seek ways of contributing to peace through critical review of their own nation-oriented historical perspective. As a part of these efforts, the Fifth International Historical Conference was held in Brussels on April 9, 1923. Henri Pirenne, a Belgian historian, pointed out in the opening speech, “About comparative approach in historical studies,” that warring countries conscripted two sciences, namely, history and chemistry, during the war. While chemistry provided explosives and poison gas, history provided grounds and pretexts, thereby encouraging racial and ethnic prejudices. In other words, he suggested comparative history as a method of criticizing and moving beyond the prevailing historical practice and approach and argued that we should transcend nation-oriented history, declaring that, in that period, the discipline of history had lost its essence, namely, “criticism and fairness.”

Since Otto Hintze and Marc Bloch attempted comparative analysis under the influence of Durkheim and Weber, comparative studies have revived.³⁰ One can divide comparative historical research into two classes—individual research and joint research. If comparative historical research focuses on the relationship between only two countries or regions (personal and material exchanges, influence of ideas, etc.), then individual research is possible. Although it is extremely unlikely for a single researcher to be equally familiar with two areas, there is the advantage of a consistent point of view. However, comparative approaches focusing on several countries or regions need joint research in order to be effective. Joint research is especially

29 Ulrich Weisstein, *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory*, 1973, p. 167.

30 Peter Burke, *History and social theory* (Cambridge : Polity Press), 1992, pp. 23-24.

effective when analysis is being conducted on how a specific variable (culture, economy, thought, etc.) has developed in different countries or regions. Success or failure of comparative historical research depends on the organization and conduct of joint research; mutual learning for a certain period is essential for the success of joint comparative research. Comparative history research would be more successful if one sets up a general framework and guidelines, and research in each country takes place on the basis of this framework and guidelines.

Some might be skeptical of the belief that comparative historical research will help one to escape from ethnocentricity, correct and expand one’s historical awareness, and point the way toward complete or universal world history based on objective awareness of the past. They may be skeptical, and to an extent, legitimately, about seeing comparison as a “magic wand” or as a method to enable one to discover new things and new perceptions.³¹ Nevertheless, the comparative approach does produce reasonable knowledge about historical phenomena, enables one to develop a critique of historical phenomena, to identify similarities and differences among them, and to investigate the causes of those similarities and differences. Two themes underlie all historical phenomena and facts: “the specific” and “the general.” Comparative studies create the possibility of the convergence of these two. In other words, comparative studies seek to discover regularities based on trans-historical generalization on the one hand, and they tend to investigate the differences based on knowledge about historically contextualized facts on the other.

Therefore, comparative historical research may be a very useful method for organizing modern and contemporary history of Northeast Asia based on historical universality. This will guarantee the objectivity of perception about each country’s history. The advantage of comparative historical research is that we can escape from narrow-minded nationalism. This is because something that was misunderstood as universal within one “closed” region may be corrected through case studies in other countries. The comparative research method is urgently required to create a peaceful community in Northeast Asia where realistic problems such as territorial disputes may easily lead to exclusivist nationalism.³²

3.2 Producing a joint history textbook through comparative historical approaches for shared historical consciousness

With the free movement of capital, commodities, and human beings and the development of information technology-based communication, nongovernmental exchanges, and exchanges between governments are dramatically increasing in the world. Europe has evolved into the European Union through the expansion of exchanges. Although there is a limit to unity by absorption, Germany overcame the condition of division, which was the product of the Cold War in the twentieth century. Recently, the European financial crisis has created a stronger tendency to revise the initial overoptimistic predictions. However, one can reasonably view

31 Kim Taek-Hyeon, “Bigyosawa Bangbeobeuroi Bigyo: Chago, Gongyeong, Geurigo Yuryeongdeul”, *The Historical Journal* Vol. 28, Soosun Historical Association, p. 14.

32 Researchers with this sense of criticism make future prospect bright. See Kang Man-Gil, editor, *Ibongwa Seogwui Singmintongchi Bigyo* (Seoul, Sunin), 2004.

this trend towards unity in Europe to have contributed to preventing war between countries and leading towards a more peaceful global community.

The establishment of local community is also a matter of careful discussion in Northeast Asia, as governmental and nongovernmental exchanges increase. Looking at the reality of Northeast Asia, we can still see the strong influence of various frictions and cracks left behind by imperialism and colonialism and by the divisions in the Cold War era. Thus, each country in Northeast Asia is currently writing nation-centric and ethnocentric history and this is causing negative effects on mutual relationships and on the formation of a “Northeast Asian” identity. The recent territorial disputes have had great influence on the people of each country in Northeast Asia and it seems difficult to find ways toward a solution. Even if we cannot solve this problem within a short time, it is important to develop a shared and non-partisan historical awareness toward solving this problem.

For this purpose, a preliminary task is to solve the problem of distortion in history textbooks. Regarding this problem, the main target of criticism is Japan. This is not strange when one considers the influence Japan has had on the modern and contemporary history of Northeast Asia. However, the problem is not confined only to Japan. Korea and China also suffer from excessive nation-centrism and sometimes produce distortions of history based on nation-statist stances and nationalistic chauvinism. Thus, the countries of Northeast Asia should make a joint effort to solve the problem.

In this respect, it is necessary to develop a modern and contemporary history of Northeast Asia from the perspective of the local community. When the EU was formed, European history scholars advocated a joint history textbook of Europe and wrote a book called the *History of New Europe*.³³ Germany and France, in particular, entered an agreement to collaborate in compiling a history textbook to deal with the historical conflicts, and simultaneously published in the two countries *A Joint History Textbook of Germany and France: Europe and the World after 1945*.³⁴ This was the fruit of a prolonged effort. Taking notice of the influence of textbooks on the people, Europe held a textbook cooperative conference before World War II.³⁵ Taking extreme interest in history education in each country after World War II, UNESCO continuously held joint conferences on history textbooks to generate historical awareness, and encouraged and supported expanded mutual exchanges. This had a positive influence, particularly in Europe.³⁶

33 This book was published in February 1995, and a revised version was published after five years. At first, writers from 12 nations, France, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Italy, Belgium, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, Germany, and England, collaborated. A Polish historian joined in the revised version, which now involved 13 nations. This book is the product of joint research and serious discussion over a long period by researchers from the European Union. This book was simultaneously published in the language of each country. See Delouche Frederic (trans.by Yun Seung-Jun), *Histoire de l'Europe (Saeyureobui Yeoksa : Yureop Gongdongui Yeoksa Gyogwaseo)* (Seoul, Kachi Publishing Co., Ltd.), 2002.

34 This book is the first joint history textbook produced by two countries. It promotes reconciliation and mutual understanding based on serious reflections on the past. See Geiss Peter and Le Quintrec Guillaume, editors (trans.by Kim Seung-Ryeol), *Histoire/Geschichte : Europa und die Welt vom Wiener Kongress bis 1945 (Dogil Peurangseu Gongdong Yeoksagyogwaseo : 1945Nyeon Ihu Yureopgwa Segye)* (Seoul, Humanist), 2008.

35 Han Do-Hyun, editor, *Shadows of the past : reconciling accounts of colonialism in history textbooks* (Seoul, Sunin), 2009, p. 17.

36 Korean National Commission for UNESCO, 21Segi Yeoksagyoyukgwa Yeoksagyogwaseo : Hantpsil Yeoksagyogwaseo Munjehaegyeurui Saeroun Daean (Seoul, Oreum), 1998, p. 38.

The historical situation of Europe is different from that of Northeast Asia in that the relationship between European nation-states was not that of colonialism. Nevertheless, countries in Northeast Asia not only share negative but also positive historical experiences through prolonged mutual exchanges. We have to find a base for solving various problems of historical awareness that prevail at present by looking at the history of Northeast Asia not merely from the viewpoint of national history but from a wider angle of region or world. For this purpose, historians of Northeast Asia should come together to discuss theoretical grounds and methods for a universal historical awareness, looking beyond the existing division of discipline into such categories as Korean history, Japanese history, and Chinese history. In this respect, examining the historical awareness of each country with respect to the historical issues of Northeast Asia through the lens of comparative history has an important significance. It can combine the universal themes underlying the modern and contemporary history of Northeast Asia with national specificities, which scholars from the various countries of Northeast Asia will be able to provide for their respective countries. As shown in the instances from Europe, this is a task that we should gradually solve over the long term and with patience. The task of “historical” reconciliation in Northeast Asia could begin with Korea and Japan (two countries that have deep misunderstanding of each other due to the colonial past) jointly writing a textbook for sharing their history and healing the conflicts of the past.

4 Conclusion

Comparative studies of history of each country in Northeast Asia will primarily be a basis for improving mutual understanding among the countries. The time has come to create the basis for common historical awareness through the translation and publication of research results of comparative studies in the language of each Northeast Asian country. This will analyze the causes of the not-so-peaceful history of invasion, war, and violation of human rights by reflecting on the Northeast Asian past and provide guidelines for a peaceful future for the “Northeast Asian community,” thereby settling conflicts and troubles and creating the basis for a ‘historical’ reconciliation.

This is not to say that there was no effort for historical reconciliation in the past. As a result of an agreement to undertake joint research in Korean and Japanese history in the Korea-Japan summit in October 2001, the Joint Research Committee for Korean and Japanese History was started and a joint research report was published at the end of the first three-year research session in May 2005. In June 2007, the Research Committee had its first general meeting and officially started the second session of joint research in Korean and Japanese history. A “Textbook Subcommittee” was created in the second session. The committee had serious dialogue through the 12th to 17th joint sessions by subcommittee and in 5 general meetings, including a symposium. Then they published a joint research report in February 2010. However, although the research was conducted jointly by Korean and Japanese scholars, the results have, until now, been organized individually. I think that, in the 3rd and 4th sessions, they should directly examine history textbooks and jointly write history textbooks on Korean and Japanese history.

Non-governmental initiatives are producing results that are more fruitful. In the first “His-

torical Perception and Northeast Asian Peace Forum” in March, 2002, in Nanjing, China, participants from three countries—Korea, China, and Japan—decided to publish joint history textbook based on a common perception of Northeast Asian history. As the result of the activities of Korea-China-Japan Joint History Compilation Committee, *History Revealing the Future* was simultaneously published in the three countries in May 2005 (Hankyoreh newspaper report). This book created a great sensation in Northeast Asia as the first joint history textbook that Korea, China, and Japan published; it was also translated into English and Esperanto. Further, the Daegue branch of Nationwide History Teacher Research Meeting of Korea and teachers from the Teachers’ Union in Hiroshima, Japan, jointly published the *Joseon Delegation: From Invasion of Joseon by Toyotomi Hideyoshi to Friendly Delegation* (Hangilsa) in April 2005. In October 2005, Korean and Japanese women researchers and activists published *Gender perspective on modern and contemporary history of Korea and Japan* (Hanul Academy). Teachers from the Nationwide History Teachers’ Meeting in Korea and the History Educators’ Association in Japan published the *Face-to-Face Korean and Japanese History: First step toward reconciliation and coexistence*, 1.2 (Sakyejul), in August 2006. Scholars from the University of Seoul (History Textbook Research Association) and the Tokyo Gakugei University (History Education Association) published the *History of Korea-Japan Exchange: from Prehistoric times to the Present* (Hyeon) in March 2007. Especially the Korea-China-Japan Joint History Compilation Committee made an agreement in Kyoto in November 2006 to write a new joint history book for a systematic understanding of modern and contemporary changes in East Asia in relation to world history. In May 2012, they published the *Modern and Contemporary History of East Asia Written Together by Korea, China and Japan* 1.2 (Humanist).

As shown above, some historians in Northeast Asia are engaging in dialogue that transcends borders. They are making efforts through dialogue: exchanging opinions about history, discussing specific issues, sharing history texts, or compiling history textbooks jointly. Given the reality of the often rather tense historical conflicts in Northeast Asia, joint development of history textbooks has a huge significance, although undertaken at the non-governmental level. Despite these achievements, one can say that joint research in Northeast Asia is still in its infancy. More such concrete research should be conducted, adopting the comparative approach in various fields in the future.

History is created and interpreted. History is a combination of choice, viewpoint, and narrative. History should explain differences and developments until the present, and the narration of past events and changes should converge to the present point of concern. Empathy for *the other* is not easy, because the winner and loser, the attacker and victim have contrasting memories of the same events or developments. We have to discuss and compare historical narratives systematically. While collecting a greater amount of concrete data, we have to be able to take a critical position and look at our history from the perspective of other countries.

Recently in Korea, the curriculum is undergoing reform based on serious consideration of the contents and direction of history education. The History of East Asia course was created in high school education curriculum, the title “National history” was removed in middle and high school, and government-designated textbooks gave way to government-authorized ones. These changes in Korea should constitute an important turning point for Northeast Asia peace and stability. History should be taught not only to understand the past but also to con-

struct a desirable future. Historical events and facts in Northeast Asia have historical value only when they bear desirable fruit for the future of Northeast Asia.
