Appendix Guide

Appendix A (National Identity Survey): pp. 16-31

Appendix B (Interview Questionnaire): 17-33

Appendix C (Ahn Jung-geun Paper Draft): 34-46

Appendix D (Park Hyun-ok Interview): 47-56
Appendix A

Survey Questions: National Identity

This survey contains four short parts. In it, you will be asked a similar series of questions repeatedly.

Each time you begin a part of the survey, you will be asked to respond either as a citizen of South Korea living here in South Korea or in your former situation as a citizen of North Korea living in North Korea.

Part Ia and IIa concern your sense of identity and social integration as a South Korean, and Part Ib and IIb concern your sense of identity and social integration as a North Korean.

It will be made clear to you at the beginning of each section which identity you are being asked to adopt.

PART Ia: Identity (South Korea)

In Part Ia, please answer the following questions based on your experience living in South Korea.

Q01 How close do you feel to...
   A. Your town or city
      Very close ☐
      Close ☐
      Not very close ☐
      Not close at all ☐
      Can’t choose ☐

   B. Your county
      Very close ☐
      Close ☐
      Not very close ☐
      Not close at all ☐
      Can’t choose ☐

   C. South Korea
      Very close ☐
      Close ☐
      Not very close ☐
      Not close at all ☐
      Can’t choose ☐

   D. Asia
Appendix A

Q02. To be truly Korean, how important is it to have been born in Korea?
   - Very important □
   - Fairly important □
   - Not very important □
   - Not important at all □
   - Don’t know □
   - Refuse to answer □

Q03. To be truly Korean, how important is it to have Korean citizenship?
   - Very important □
   - Fairly important □
   - Not very important □
   - Not important at all □
   - Don’t know □
   - Refuse to answer □

Q04. To be truly Korean, how important is it to have lived in Korea for most of one’s life?
   - Very important □
   - Fairly important □
   - Not very important □
   - Not important at all □
   - Don’t know □
   - Refuse to answer □

Q05. To be truly Korean, how important is it to be able to speak Korean?
   - Very important □
   - Fairly important □
   - Not very important □
   - Not important at all □
   - Don’t know □
   - Refuse to answer □

Q06. To be truly Korean, how important is it to respect Korea’s political institutions and laws?
   - Very important □
   - Fairly important □
   - Not very important □
   - Not important at all □
Appendix A

Don't know □
Refuse to answer □

Q07. To be truly Korean, how important is it to have Korean ancestry?
   Very important □
   Fairly important □
   Not very important □
   Not important at all □
   Don’t know □
   Refuse to answer □

Q08. To be truly Korean, how important is it to understand Korean history and follow Korean traditions and customs?
   Very important □
   Fairly important □
   Not very important □
   Not important at all □
   Don’t know □
   Refuse to answer □

Q09. To be truly Korean, how important is it to follow Confucian teachings?
   Very important □
   Fairly important □
   Not very important □
   Not important at all □
   Don’t know □
   Refuse to answer □
Appendix A

PART IIa: Integration (South Korea)

In Part IIa, please answer the following questions based on your experience living in South Korea.

Q02 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

A. It is impossible for people who do not share Korea’s customs and traditions to become fully South Korean?

   Agree strongly □
   Agree □
   Neither agree nor disagree □
   Disagree □
   Disagree strongly □
   Can't choose □

B. Ethnic minorities should be given government assistance to preserve their customs and traditions.

   Agree strongly □
   Agree □
   Neither agree nor disagree □
   Disagree □
   Disagree strongly □
   Can't choose □

Q03. Some people say that it is better for a country if different racial and ethnic groups maintain their distinct customs and traditions. Others say that it is better if these groups adapt and blend into the larger society. Which of these views comes closer to your own?

   It is better for society if groups maintain their distinct customs and traditions. □
   It is better if groups adapt and blend into the larger society. □
   Can’t choose □

Q04. There are different opinions about immigrants from other countries living in South Korea. How much do you agree with each of the following statements?

A. Immigrants increase crime rates.
   Agree strongly □
   Agree □
   Neither agree nor disagree □
   Disagree □
Appendix A

Disagree strongly ☐
Can’t choose ☐

B. Immigrants are generally good for South Korea’s economy.
   Agree strongly ☐
   Agree ☐
   Neither agree nor disagree ☐
   Disagree ☐
   Disagree strongly ☐
   Can’t choose ☐

C. Immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in South Korea.
   Agree strongly ☐
   Agree ☐
   Neither agree nor disagree ☐
   Disagree ☐
   Disagree strongly ☐
   Can’t choose ☐

D. Immigrants improve South Korea’s society by bringing new ideas and cultures.
   Agree strongly ☐
   Agree ☐
   Neither agree nor disagree ☐
   Disagree ☐
   Disagree strongly ☐
   Can’t choose ☐

E. South Korea’s culture is generally undermined by immigrants.
   Agree strongly ☐
   Agree ☐
   Neither agree nor disagree ☐
   Disagree ☐
   Disagree strongly ☐
   Can’t choose ☐

F. Legal immigrants to North Korea who are not citizens should have the same rights as North Korean citizens.
   Agree strongly ☐
   Agree ☐
   Neither agree nor disagree ☐
   Disagree ☐
   Disagree strongly ☐
   Can’t choose ☐
Appendix A

G. North Korea should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants.
   Agree strongly □
   Agree □
   Neither agree nor disagree □
   Disagree □
   Disagree strongly □
   Can't choose □

H. Legal immigrants should have equal access to public education as South Korean citizens.
   Agree strongly □
   Agree □
   Neither agree nor disagree □
   Disagree □
   Disagree strongly □
   Can't choose □

Q05. Which of these statements about immigrants comes closest to your view:

   Immigrants should retain their culture of origin and not adopt North Korea’s culture. □
   Immigrants should retain their culture of origin and also adopt North Korea’s culture. □
   Immigrants should give up their culture of origin and adopt North Korea’s culture. □

Q06. How proud are you of being South Korean?

   Very proud □
   Somewhat proud □
   Not very proud □
   Not proud at all □
   I am not South Korean □
   Can't choose. □

Q07. How proud are you of South Korea in each of the following?

   A. The way its political system works
      Very proud □
      Somewhat proud □
      Not very proud □
      Not proud at all □
      I am not South Korean □
      Can't choose. □
Appendix A

B. Its political influence in the world
   Very proud □
   Somewhat proud □
   Not very proud □
   Not proud at all □
   I am not Korean □
   Can't choose. □

C. Its economic achievements
   Very proud □
   Somewhat proud □
   Not very proud □
   Not proud at all □
   I am not Korean □
   Can't choose. □

D. Its social security system
   Very proud □
   Somewhat proud □
   Not very proud □
   Not proud at all □
   I am not Korean □
   Can't choose. □

E. Its scientific and technological achievements
   Very proud □
   Somewhat proud □
   Not very proud □
   Not proud at all □
   I am not Korean □
   Can't choose. □

F. Its achievements in sports
   Very proud □
   Somewhat proud □
   Not very proud □
   Not proud at all □
   I am not Korean □
   Can't choose. □

G. Its achievements in arts and literature
   Very proud □
   Somewhat proud □
   Not very proud □
   Not proud at all □
Appendix A

I am not Korean □
Can't choose. □

H. Its achievements in political leadership.
   Very proud □
   Somewhat proud □
   Not very proud □
   Not proud at all □
   I am not Korean □
   Can't choose. □

I. Its armed forces
   Very proud □
   Somewhat proud □
   Not very proud □
   Not proud at all □
   I am not Korean □
   Can't choose. □

J. Its history
   Very proud □
   Somewhat proud □
   Not very proud □
   Not proud at all □
   I am not Korean □
   Can't choose. □

K. Its fair and equal treatment of all groups in society.
   Very proud □
   Somewhat proud □
   Not very proud □
   Not proud at all □
   I am not Korean □
   Can't choose. □
Appendix A

**PART Ib: Identity (North Korea)**

In Part Ib, please answer the following questions based on your experience living in South Korea.

Q01 How close do you feel to...

E. Your town or city  
   Very close □  
   Close □  
   Not very close □  
   Not close at all □  
   Can’t choose □

F. Your county  
   Very close □  
   Close □  
   Not very close □  
   Not close at all □  
   Can’t choose □

G. North Korea  
   Very close □  
   Close □  
   Not very close □  
   Not close at all □  
   Can’t choose

H. Asia  
   Very close □  
   Close □  
   Not very close □  
   Not close at all □  
   Can’t choose □

Q02. To be truly Korean, how important is it to have been born in Korea?  
   Very important □  
   Fairly important □  
   Not very important □  
   Not important at all □  
   Don’t know □  
   Refuse to answer □
Appendix A

Q03. To be truly Korean, how important is it to have Korean citizenship?
   Very important □
   Fairly important □
   Not very important □
   Not important at all □
   Don't know □
   Refuse to answer □

Q04. To be truly Korean, how important is it to have lived in Korea for most of one's life?
   Very important □
   Fairly important □
   Not very important □
   Not important at all □
   Don't know □
   Refuse to answer □

Q05. To be truly Korean, how important is it to be able to speak Korean?
   Very important □
   Fairly important □
   Not very important □
   Not important at all □
   Don't know □
   Refuse to answer □

Q06. To be truly Korean, how important is it to respect Korea’s political institutions and laws?
   Very important □
   Fairly important □
   Not very important □
   Not important at all □
   Don't know □
   Refuse to answer □

Q07. To be truly Korean, how important is it to have Korean ancestry?
   Very important □
   Fairly important □
   Not very important □
   Not important at all □
   Don't know □
   Refuse to answer □

Q08. To be truly Korean, how important is it to understand Korean history and follow Korean traditions and customs?
   Very important □
Appendix A

Fairly important □
Not very important □
Not important at all □
Don’t know □
Refuse to answer □

Q09. To be truly Korean, how important is it to follow Confucian teachings?
Very important □
Fairly important □
Not very important □
Not important at all □
Don’t know □
Refuse to answer □
Appendix A

PART IIb: Integration (North Korea)

In Part IIb, please answer the following questions based on your experience living in South Korea.

Q02 How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

A. It is impossible for people who do not share Korea’s customs and traditions to become fully North / South Korean?

Agree strongly □
Agree □
Neither agree nor disagree □
Disagree □
Disagree strongly □
Can’t choose □

B. Ethnic minorities should be given government assistance to preserve their customs and traditions.

Agree strongly □
Agree □
Neither agree nor disagree □
Disagree □
Disagree strongly □
Can’t choose □

Q03. Some people say that it is better for a country if different racial and ethnic groups maintain their distinct customs and traditions. Others say that it is better if these groups adapt and blend into the larger society. Which of these views comes closer to your own?

It is better for society if groups maintain their distinct customs and traditions. □
It is better if groups adapt and blend into the larger society. □
Can’t choose □

Q04. There are different opinions about immigrants from other countries living in North / North Korea. How much do you agree with each of the following statements?

A. Immigrants increase crime rates.
Agree strongly □
Agree □
Neither agree nor disagree □
Appendix A

Disagree □
Disagree strongly □
Can't choose □

B. Immigrants are generally good for North Korea’s economy.
Agree strongly □
Agree □
Neither agree nor disagree □
Disagree □
Disagree strongly □
Can’t choose □

C. Immigrants take jobs away from people who were born in North Korea.
Agree strongly □
Agree □
Neither agree nor disagree □
Disagree □
Disagree strongly □
Can’t choose □

D. Immigrants improve North Korea’s society by bringing new ideas and cultures.
Agree strongly □
Agree □
Neither agree nor disagree □
Disagree □
Disagree strongly □
Can’t choose □

E. North / South Korea's culture is generally undermined by immigrants.
Agree strongly □
Agree □
Neither agree nor disagree □
Disagree □
Disagree strongly □
Can't choose □

F. Legal immigrants to North Korea who are not citizens should have the same
rights as North Korean citizens.
Agree strongly □
Agree □
Neither agree nor disagree □
Disagree □
Disagree strongly □
Can't choose □
Appendix A

G. North Korea should take stronger measures to exclude illegal immigrants.
Agree strongly □
Agree □
Neither agree nor disagree □
Disagree □
Disagree strongly □
Can't choose □

H. Legal immigrants should have equal access to public education as North Korean citizens.
Agree strongly □
Agree □
Neither agree nor disagree □
Disagree □
Disagree strongly □
Can't choose □

Q05. Which of these statements about immigrants comes closest to your view:

Immigrants should retain their culture of origin and not adopt North Korea's culture. □
Immigrants should retain their culture of origin and also adopt North Korea's culture. □
Immigrants should give up their culture of origin and adopt North Korea's culture. □

Q06. How proud are you of being North Korean?

Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can't choose. □

Q07. How proud are you of North Korea in each of the following?

A. The way its political system works
Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can't choose. □
Appendix A

B. Its political influence in the world
Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can’t choose. □

C. Its economic achievements
Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can’t choose. □

D. Its social security system
Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can’t choose. □

E. Its scientific and technological achievements
Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can’t choose. □

F. Its achievements in sports
Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can’t choose. □

G. It’s achievements in arts and literature
Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Appendix A

Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can't choose. □

H. It’s achievements in political leadership.
Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can't choose. □

I. It’s armed forces
Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can’t choose. □

J. Its history
Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can’t choose. □

K. Its fair and equal treatment of all groups in society.
Very proud □
Somewhat proud □
Not very proud □
Not proud at all □
I am not North Korean □
Can’t choose. □
Appendix B

PART II
Interview and Focus Group Questions: National Identity
Components of Koreaness, Ranking

To be truly Korean, it is important to...

01. ... have been born in Korea.
02. ... have Korean citizenship.
03. ... have lived in Korea for most of one’s life.
04. ... be able to speak Korean.
05. ... respect Korea’s political institutions and laws.
06. ... Korean ancestry.
07. ... understand Korean history and follow Korean traditions and customs.
08. ... follow Confucian teachings?
Appendix B

PART III
Candidate images for focus group:

**Set I: pan-Koreanism**
- i. Unification Flag of Korea
- ii. March 1st movement
- iii. Logo of the Ministry of Unification
- iv. Image from the First Inter-Korean Summit (June 2000) of Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il embracing
- v. Arch of Reunification (symbol of the June 15 North-South Presidential Joint Declaration)
- vi. Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC)

**Set II: State-related**

*South Korea-specific*
- i. Chinese-Korean migrant workers (“ethnic compatriots”)
- ii. North Korean “defectors” (“ethnic compatriots”)
- iii. Nepalese migrant workers (not ethnic Korean)
- iv. Filipino migrant workers (not ethnic Korean)
- v. International marriage
- vi. Children of international marriages
- vii. Photograph of Ansan (resident city for many migrant workers; some of whom are permanent residents or citizens)
- viii. *Taekukki* (South Korea’s national flag)
- ix. Syngman Rhee

*North Korea-specific*
- i. Statues of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il
- ii. Juche Tower
- iii. North Korea’s national flag
- iv. Arch of Triumph
- v. Sino-North Korean borderlands market
**National Identity and Historical Legacies: Ahn Jung-geun in the Master Narrative**

Steven Denney  
University of Toronto  
Christopher Green  
Leiden University

****For submission to Review of Korean Studies (Winter 2016 publication)****

“National heroes” are held up as key to the formation of what is known to speakers of German as Volksgemeinschaft, a term that describes history and culture shared at the deepest possible level, as well as equality and kinship relations within a group. Anssi Paasi asserts that these are the “specific mechanisms for creating solidarity […] symbols to express the physical, social and psychological integration of people.”

In the construction and maintenance of a nation, national heroes are essential. King Sejong the Great is a good example of a Korean “national hero.” His status, partially mythical, derives from the creation of the Korean alphabet, Hangeul, a project undertaken on his watch that had far-reaching consequences for Korean national cohesion. Conversely, national hero status may be withheld even when a cogent argument in its favor can be made. Chalmers Johnson illustrated this when he wrote in 1987 that if former South Korean President Park Chung-hee had, in the early 1970s, “retired to Taegu and assumed the role of senior statesman […] he would be hailed today as the greatest Korean leader of modern times and would probably still be alive.” In Johnson’s assessment, Park’s promulgation of the Yushin Constitution in 1972 marked a turning point, one that meant he would not be eulogized as a national hero following his death in 1979. This would be so, Johnson thought, irrespective of Park’s successes in the period 1963 to 1972, when the South Korean economy developed rapidly under his guidance. So it has proven to be.

These examples reflect the point that “national hero” status is not predetermined by historical events. For every national hero who is elevated, every lieux de mémoire willed into being, there are many more who are not; people who go without commemoration despite having performed “heroic” feats. Evidently, national hero status is a contingent outcome: a combination of the ebbs and flows of domestic politics, contextual geopolitical currents, and fleeting public fancy driven by the

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demands of government and media. National heroes come to the surface, and they recede to be replaced by others.4

Referred to commonly as “patriot” or “patriotic martyr,” Ahn Jung-geun is a key historical figure in South Korean nationalism, national history, and popular discourse. On October 26, 1909 Ahn fatally wounded Ito Hirobumi, the first Resident-General of (colonial) Korea and the first Prime Minister of Japan, on a train platform in Harbin, a major city in Manchuria and capital of modern day Heilongjiang Province, China. Condemned to death for his act, the symbolism of what would come to be described as “the great patriotic deed at Harbin” hasn’t been “forgotten.” Anti-Japanese resistance was central to the greater Korean narrative then, and continues to be now.

In June 2014, Moon Chang-geuk, then a candidate for the position of prime minister in the cabinet of President Park Geun-hye, employed historical figure Ahn as a shield with which to repel partisan accusations that he is “pro-Japan,” still a serious offense in the South Korean political class. Speaking with the South Korean media as he left his office in Seoul, Moon told reporters, “Of our modern historical figures, the ones I most respect are patriotic martyr Ahn Jung-geun and teacher Ahn Chang-ho.5” On the anniversary of Ahn’s death, high-profile politician Chun Jung-bae had the following to say: “Today is the 106th anniversary of the patriotic martyr Ahn’s sacrifice (sunguk). However, Ahn’s will that ‘My body be buried in the motherland when sovereignty is recovered’ has yet to be realized. In praising Ahn Jung-gun’s spirit of independence, I will do my utmost to create a Korea where the national spirit is upright and righteous.”6 Indeed, in recent years, and in concert with changing domestic and international conditions, Ahn has appeared with greater regularity in political discourse and the cultural space in South Korea (discussed more below). Ahn is, in other words, instrumentalized as a mechanism for creating national solidarity – for better or worse.

But is Ahn just on the minds of political elites and politicians under intense public scrutiny? It is folly to assume ordinary people internalize and reproduce elite discourse. Indeed, regarding political matters, a large percentage, often even a majority, care not. Ahn -- a national hero -- is different. He is, recent polling data suggest, widely recognized across class, region, and by both males and females.

In a nationwide Gallup Korea poll conducted February 24-26, 2015, respondents were asked who comes to mind when they think about the anti-Japanese independence movement. The poll was run in the lead up to the anniversary of March 1 (Independence Movement Day in South Korea). The top three people chosen were (1)

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Ahn Jung-geun, (2) Kim Gu, and (3) Yu Gwan-sun. Notably, the demographic data for those who chose Ahn show that there is no significance difference across regions, age groups, or socioeconomic class; Ahn is, in other words, transcendent (as nationalism sometimes is, or at least portends to be).

March 1st is a public holiday that commemorates the March 1st Movement of 1919. It is a representative celebration in the era of nations and nationalism. The movement in 1919 came about in response to the repressive colonial regime and the galvanizing idea of national self-determination. Since one man (e.g., Mahatma Gandhi) or a group of people (e.g., the U.S. “Founding Fathers”) usually represent social or political movements, it is telling with whom ordinary South Koreans associate the independence movement; it is, in other words, a survey to find who South Koreans think is the most revered national hero. It stands to reason that South Koreans do not identify someone like Ahn Jung-geun as only an independence fighter; he is also seen as representing the nation itself.

South Korean national identity, much like the North Korean variant, is largely defined by an ethnic nationalism that has its origins in the colonial period. Ethnic Korean nationalism was a reaction to Japanese imperialism, specifically the colonization of Korea (1910-1945) and (disingenuous) efforts to assimilate Koreans into the greater Japanese nation. Shin Gi-wook’s work on the origins of Korean nationalism does well in proving this point. In Shin’s portrayal of the period, the Japanese imperial policy of naissen ittai – an assimilation policy built on the idea that Koreans could become Japanese – backfired; in fact, most scholars of the period argue that Japanese policymakers never actually thought Koreans could “become Japanese.”

Attempts at imperial assimilation had the effect of generating an ethnic concept of self among Koreans. Ironically, the racial politics of imperial Japan generated a racial understanding of the national self in Korea. Modern Korean national identity was founded as a reaction to Japanese imperial expansion; in other words, anti-Japanese sentiment was instrumental in the formation of a modern Korean nationalism. The anti-Japanese element of Korean national identity persists to this day and can be detected by who is elevated to the status of national hero in popular discourse. This is why the recent surge in popularity of Ahn Jung-geun is significant. Anti-Japanese sentiment and Korean nationalism are two mutually reinforcing forces. The rise of Shinzo Abe to the position of prime minister (for a second time) has resulted in a rise in anti-Japanese sentiment. This can be seen in the more recent cultural

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7 Kim was a Korean nationalist, teacher, the sixth president of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea (based in Shanghai and Chongqing), and a reunification activist (after 1945). In addition to his anti-Japanese struggles before liberation, Gu is well known (on both side of the 38th) for his efforts to reunify the peninsula after the division. Gu was assassinated in 1949. Yu was a student activist who, because of her participation in the March 1st Movement, found herself in a Japanese prison. She would die there at the age of 18.
reproductions of Ahn Jung-geun. This component of South Korean national identity is reproduced time and again by elite discourse and bottom-up processes.\textsuperscript{8}

Given the circumstances surrounding Korea’s birth as a “modern” nation (and later state), the degree of anti-Japanese sentiment embedded in Korean nationalism is understandable. Still, it certainly is not going to help mend the ideational and diplomatic rifts that seem to leave Korean-Japanese relations constantly frayed. So long as Korean nationalism is premised on anti-Japanese sentiment, that sentiment will not dissipate.

Ahn’s death has been mythologized and, as the polls suggests, widely remembered (as of late, at least), because of his “sacrifice” -- i.e., the giving up of his life for the cause of preserving national sovereignty and liberty from Japanese oppression.\textsuperscript{9} This emboldens and reaffirms his legacy as a national hero, and makes him a ready-made device to reaffirm or reproduce a particular South Korean national identity. It also ensures respect from the states of Northeast Asia, with the exception of Japan. Thus, while Koreans remember Ahn as a heroic independence activist, many Japanese will continue to see him as a terrorist. And while South Korea has by and large moved beyond the fissures of its contentious past, divisive figures like Ahn offer a stark reminder that legacy politics will continue to fan the flames of conflict in Northeast Asia and prevent a full normalization of relations between South Korea and Japan.

In this paper we will explain the significance of the story of Ahn Jung-geun as a “meta-narrative” in South Korean political discourse both today and in 1970, when Ahn was deliberately instrumentalized by Park Chung-hee. Starting with recent cultural products of Ahn and then transitioning to findings from site visits to the new memorial hall in Harbin and the older Seoul-based exhibition in Namsan Park, we will analyze and deconstruct the narrative used to “build” the Republic of Korea, and attempt to situate Ahn within it. Using the literature on South Korean nationalism, modern East Asian history, and contemporary discourse in South Korea, we will look at Ahn’s role as a figure upon whom the narrative of modern South Korea is both constructed and reproduced. We also consider the implications of Ahn’s ascendance to South Korea’s relationship with Japan, because national heroes can divide, as much as they can unite, peoples. Specifically, we will consider the integral role anti-Japanese sentiment plays in modern South Korean national identity and how Ahn’s elevated status serves as a barrier to amicable diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea.

\textsuperscript{8} The brief but illustrative back-and-forth between Japan and South Korea during the opening of the new Ahn Jung-Geun memorial hall (discussed in this paper), located at the same station where Ito was fatally wounded more than a century ago, highlights ways in which Ahn is continually instrumentalized. Built at the behest of the Park Geun-hye, the memorial (unsurprisingly) piqued the ire of the Japanese. It also highlights the transnational element of Ahn’s legacy; one thing that can unite South Korea and China (besides profit motive) is history – especially the anti-Japanese struggle.

\textsuperscript{9} There is reason to believe that the sacrifice was not for a national reason at all, but for something greater. Ahn’s prison writings suggest that his political vision(s) extend beyond Korea; he envisioned some sort of regional political order.
Anti-Japanese sentiment is reproduced culturally, that is, outside of the political realm. The movie Assassination (2015) is an example of the cultural reproduction of a national identity not supportive of Korea-Japanese reconciliation. The movie tells the tale of a band of independence fighters in 1930s colonial Korea. It sensationalizes and commodifies anti-Japanese struggle. And why not, producers might ask. It will sell tickets and it is patriotic. (It will also sell tickets because it is patriotic!) But, more than this, it is the reproduction of a national identity that is incompatible with the reconciliation of Japan-Korea relations. Assassination is just one of several recent theatrical productions that preserve, celebrate, and reproduce the kind of national identity that valorizes struggle against (Imperial) Japan.

“Hero Ahn Jung-geun” [영웅 안중근], a forthcoming film directed by Ju Gyeong-jung is another example. The film focuses on the week leading up to the assassination and the time Ahn spent in a Lushun jail afterward (where he did most of the writing for which he is known today). In a short article carried by the Busan Daily on December 17, Ju is quoted as saying that the rise of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and right wing extremism in Japan make Ahn’s deed one that “we must remember” [일본 극우 정권을 이끄는 아베 총리 남긴 한 발의 총알을 기억해야 할 것]. Chu claims that he will properly portray the reason(s) why Ahn shot Ito. The production company has rejected overtures from Chinese and Japanese companies to collaborate on the film, according to the article.

For those who want a new Ahn story but do not wish to wait, there is a play, too. “I Am You” [나는 너다] has been on throughout January at BBCH Hall, part of Kwanglim Arts Center in the Gangnam district of Seoul. It centers on Ahn’s son, Ahn Jun-saeng, and his struggle to overcome the anger he feels toward his father for leaving him. (Ahn Jung-geun was executed for the assassination.) The play tells a tale of anger giving way to understanding—an understanding of the reason why Ahn sacrificed his life: to preserve the nation. Director Yoon Seok-hwa, whose comments imply a dyed-in-the-wool Korean nationalism, noted in an interview at OhMyNews.com that Ahn Jung-geun’s selfless act was for the Korean nation. “For what did Ahn Jung-geun shoot Hirobumi, not appeal even once, and then die? It was for none other than us. In the same way, depending on how we think, we too can become martyr Ahn Jung-geun” [안중근 의사가 무엇 때문에 이토 히로부미를 쏘고, 향수한 번 하지 않고 죽었는가. 바로 우리를 위해서다. 우리 역시 어떤 생각을 하느냐에 따라 안중근 의사가 될 수 있다]. The interviewee (or the editor who wrote the piece’s introduction, at least) once again voices the notion that, with Abe coming to power in Japan and right-wing extremism (as they understand it) on the rise, the timing of the play is particularly felicitous.

There’s also I Am You (2015), a play about Ahn Jun-saeng, Ahn Jung-geun’s son, overcoming his selfish anger to realize what sacrifice for a greater good means. The point regarding cultural reproductions of anti-Japanese struggle and the assassination of Korea’s colonizers is that such efforts are social reproductions, separate from the words and deeds of officials, of a particular national identity— an identity that works against the cultivation of a “normal” South Korea-Japan.
relationship. It is precisely this seemingly insurmountable barrier to cooperation that leads some, such as Synder and Glosserman, to claim that the United States should play a more active role in facilitating the improvement of relations. Whether the U.S. can (or even should) intervene is an open question, but perhaps one worth exploring.

These cultural productions are not the first to appropriate Ahn’s story—see, for example, Yun Ho-jin’s “Hero” (2009) -- but they are the latest, and both are responses to the Zeitgeist in the same way that a film like Clint Eastwood’s American Sniper taps into the militarized spirit of modern America. Most notably, both the forthcoming movie and the play reflect the most lasting quality of South Korean national identity: opposition to, and a historically engendered fear of, Japanese rightism.

As she strode the path taken by intrepid British explorer Emily Kemp more than a century earlier, it was just such an absence that caught the attention of historian Tessa Morris-Suzuki. Rolling into Harbin, that great rail gateway to Manchuria, Morris-Suzuki explains, “I keep one eye out for a plaque or monument commemorating the assassination that took place on this spot a century ago, but there is no sign that the tangled fates of Ito Hirobumi and his nemesis Ahn Jung-geun are remembered here.”

No longer is this the case, however, for 2014 saw Ahn rise meteorically back to prominence. More than 100 years after he stepped from the crowd right there in Harbin Station on October 26, 1909 and shot Hirobumi, the first Resident-General of colonial Korea and first Prime Minister of Japan, in January the Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Hall was created in his honor at the scene of the shooting.

This is not Ahn’s first spell in the top tier of the collective South Korean historical consciousness. In 1970, still some years before President Park began to lose his luster, another memorial site to Ahn was created, this one in Seoul. As shown in these two sites of communal memory, the act of assassinating Ito is a quintessential example of what Nora calls a moment “torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded.”

Visiting the Memorial Hall

Venturing inside the Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Hall at Harbin, the visitor finds an unimposing exhibit no larger than a modest university lecture hall; however, the scale should not be permitted to deceive. Built at the behest of incumbent South Korean President Park Geun-hye with the cooperation of her Chinese opposite

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11 Harbin is best known internationally for an ice festival that takes place annually in the city between December and February. It may be that numbers of visitors to the Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Hall correlate with visits to the ice festival; however, it is currently too early to establish such a correlation.
12 Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History,” 12.
number, CCP General-Secretary Xi Jinping, it is a source of friction between China and South Korea on the one hand, and Japan on the other.

The Japanese government opposes the exhibit, calling it a “one-sided view [of history] not conducive to building peace and stability.” Chinese motivations for allowing it are not clear, though Heilongjiang Province Vice-governor Sun Yao, who spoke at the unveiling of the hall in January 2014, explained, “People have cherished the memory of Ahn for the past century,” before adding, “Today we erect a memorial to him and call on peace-loving people around the world to unite, resist invasions and oppose war.” Predictably, South Korea calls the Chinese choice “courageous.”

A bronze bust of Ahn is placed at the entrance. However, it is not the centerpiece; guided by a natural U-shaped flow, visitors pass through testimonials to Ahn’s greatness from prominent figures including Zhou Enlai and the planning and execution of the killing, before arriving at a picture window looking out onto the platform where Ahn, who had prepared the moment for a number of days, stepped from a crowd assembled to greet Ito and fatally shot him with a pistol. A handful of inconspicuous markings on the platform indicate where the shots were fired and where they found their intended target. Perhaps because this is a functioning railway station, visitors are not permitted access to the platform.

IMAGE1: platform from picture window

Thereafter, having expiated at length upon the nature of the trial that followed the killing of Ito, the exhibition culminates with Ahn’s last words before his execution. If they have been faithfully rendered, he offered ample proof of his vision for Northeast Asia:

   After I die, have my remains buried next to Harbin Park, and when our national sovereignty is restored convey them back to the fatherland. For when news of Korean independence reaches heaven, I shall rightly dance and shout “Mansei!”

IMAGE2: last words

Hereafter, a number of books are set-aside for visitors to leave messages and comments. At the time of our visit in April 2013, the exhibition hall had been open for six months, and there were already hundreds of these messages. The majority are in Korean; some of the most common phrases, such as “대한독립만세!” [lit. Long live Korean independence!], indicate a keen awareness of Korea’s contested national sovereignty. Other messages thank Ahn for fighting for Korean independence in the

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15 Ibid. The authors visited the memorial hall in April 2014.
name of the Korean nation (민족), referring to him variously as “patriotic martyr” (의사) “brother” (형), “teacher” (선생님), or “hero” (영웅).

IMAGE3: “Pioneer we will remember you so dearly. 2014.4.30

IMAGE4: “Long live the Republic of Korea! 2014.3.29. Patriot Ahn Jung-heun, we revere you.”

In one case, the writer links Ahn’s historic pro-independence actions in Harbin to the defense of Korea’s latter-day sovereign territory, which manifests in the popular consciousness today as public jousting with Japan over the status of Dokdo, a set of mostly uninhabited islets in the East Sea/Sea of Japan.

IMAGE3: “Long live Korean independence! Dokdo is our land! Please take care of it!!!”

Korean and Chinese are the only languages used in the exhibit; there are no Japanese captions at all. It is not possible to say whether this was a deliberate attempt to cut Japan from the picture, an effort to avoid enflaming controversy, or simply a matter of expedience. If one were to speculate, the concurrent absence of English captions would lend weight to the latter hypothesis.

Regardless, from the Korean and Chinese perspective the memorial has the potential to act as a uniting force, a bilateral step toward combining the power of South Korean nationalism and Korean nationhood with the increasingly dominant regional power, China, and its ethnic Korean population in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. Ahn is well suited for this role: he sits in an uncontroversial position within the Korean nationalist narrative of the last century, and is routinely championed as a hero in school textbooks despite acting as an assassin. Even North and South Korea, for whom conflict comes easily, do not have any mutual bones of contention with which to beat him.

The exhibition’s architects also do not mention any of Ito’s successes in the construction of modern Japan following the Meiji Restoration; for instance, the creation of the Japanese banking system and the country’s original constitution, which he wrote. This is reasonable given that Ito is an object of the exhibition, not its subject. Ito may even have opposed the annexation of Korea and sought to stop it.16 But this point is in any case moot in the context of a post-Russo-Japanese War/Taft-Katsura Agreement East Asia regional order.17 Japan aspired to be an imperial power

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16 This is the conclusion of Fukuju Umino in the 2004 book Hirobumi Ito and Korean Annexation. Note that even if Umino is correct in his assessment, Ito did not intend to restore Korean sovereignty; he simply felt that full annexation would prove more burdensome than protectorate status.

17 Japan’s victory over Imperial Russia is considered, in hindsight, a critical turning point in 20th century East Asian history. Japan’s unexpected victory over Russia (the first time in history that an Asian power soundly defeated in battle a European power) gave Japan’s imperial architects the green light to expand the country’s imperial reach onto the Korean peninsula and across the Manchurian hinterland. Japan and Russia had been vying for position to expand their imperial reach over these territories, especially Manchuria. See: Jukes, Geoffry. The Russo-Japanese War 1904–1905 (Osprey Essential Histories, Oxford: 2002). The Taft-Katsura Agreement was the result of high-level
and Korean intellectuals (Ahn included) knew that this would likely result in aggrandizing economic power and extending political authority by territorial acquisition. By the end of the decade, Japan’s trajectory was quite clear. Ahn, like many of his compatriots, sought to stem the tide of Japanese imperial expansion—by force. It is upon this point that the South Korean master narrative turns. South Korean nationalism in the 21st Century is rooted in the “struggle” against Japanese expansionism. As such, figures in the struggle against Japan are the rightful foundational figures of modern Korea, and so it is for Ahn.

*To Hanyang! The Actor, the Age, the Cause*

This is also the narrative of the Ahn Jung-geun Memorial Hall at Namsan Park, in the heart of modern Seoul. This much older memorial was first established in 1970, before receiving an overhaul and expansion in 2009. The refurbished hall was opened in 2010.

The museums in both Harbin and Seoul eulogize Ahn as a “patriotic martyr,” as do the commenters who choose to memorialize their thoughts on the matter; however, the Seoul exhibition is constructed with the nation-building narrative closer to front and center, prioritizing the “Ahn as early Korean nationalist” perspective. His pan-Asian anti-imperialism is in the back seat; the three-floor exhibition focuses far less on the practicalities of the assassination—the “great patriotic deed at Harbin”—and more on the significance of the age, the person himself, and the Korean cause.

In harking back to a period of imperial expansion and localized resistance, the exhibition reminds visitors that this was the world Ahn sought to help Korea navigate. The Eulsa Treaty of 1905, concluded following Japanese victory in the 1904 Russo-Japanese War, is portrayed as a decisive turning point in Korea’s relationship with Japan. Conservations between the United States and Japan after the Russo-Japanese War. The US agreed that Korea was within Japan’s “sphere of influence” and Japan agreed that the Philippines was squarely within America’s sphere. The agreement was never made an official policy, but the informal agreement is often seen as the event marking Japan and America’s entry onto the world stage as major power brokers. For more on the agreement and the controversy, see: Jongsuk Chay, "The Taft-Katsura Memorandum Reconsidered," *Pacific Historical Review* 37, no. 3 (1968): 321–326


19 The narrative of resistance to Japanese colonial rule, upon which modern South Korean nationalism is largely constructed, has been explored by Henry Em and Han Young-woo, among others. See: Henry H. Em, “Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Ch’aeho’s Historiography,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, eds. Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1999) and Han Young-woo, “The Establishment and Development of Nationalist History,” *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 5 (1992): 61-104.

with Japan, and as the spark that ignited the fire of the Korean independence movement, which was led by people like Ahn.\footnote{According to Han Young-woo (cited in a note above), the signing of the Eulsa Treaty (and the imposition of a Japanese protectorate) was the critical event that led to the emergence of a nationalist historiography. The Seoul-based exhibition begins with a brief history of the period, which focuses on the importance of the Eulsa Treaty. The description of Ahn’s reaction to the signing of the treaty reads, “Ahn Jung-Geun discussed with his father how to restore the national sovereignty of his own country. As there lived not a small number of Korean people in Shandong Province, Shanghai, and other places in China at the time, he thought that he could settle down in one of the places and continue his anti-Japan activities. In 1905, he left for China to see if Shanghai would be a proper place for his whole family and for his future plans.”}

Moreover, the site of the memorial is a spatial manifestation of modern Korea’s historical struggle. During the colonial period, the part of Namsan Park that leads to the memorial was the location of Chōsen Jingū, the central Shinto shrine constructed in 1925 and a symbol of Japanese colonial rule. With the end of Japanese occupation in 1945, the shrine was destroyed and a statue of the first president of the Republic of Korea, Syngman Rhee, was put in its place. Following Rhee’s ouster in the lee of massive demonstrations in 1960, the statue was brought down. Symbolically, the location is now occupied by a statue of Kim Gu and Lee Si-yeong, two other indigenous independence fighters and political activists who spent time in Manchuria and returned, post-liberation, to rebuild Korea. Just above the location of these statues is the memorial, in front of which stands a statue of Ahn. All play a role in the guided narrative of South Korea’s post-colonial rebirth. It is as if those responsible for maintaining this space wish to convey a simple message: it began with Ahn, and it is now complete.

Image 5: statues of Kim Gu and Lee Si-young (two photos, merged)

The specific version of the Ahn narrative conveyed here, not to mention the specificity of the location, is readily understood when placed in historical context. Ahn Jung-geun Sungmohoe, the group that built the museum, did so seven years after becoming the first civic organization to get approval for its establishment from the government of Park Chung-hee, which had come to power in a coup just two years earlier.

As Jung-hoon Lee recalls, “Park […] needed to find as many ways as he could to make up for his obvious lack of electoral legitimacy so that he could consolidate his power, govern the contentious society of South Korea, and lay the ground for industrialization.” Moreover, this consolidation would be under threat, Park was right to reason, if he didn’t move to buttress his nationalist credentials, since by 1963 it was apparent that his goal of South Korean industrialization would be extremely difficult if he did not normalize relations with Japan. Many in society, especially students, fiercely opposed the step.\footnote{Park Won-soon, “Korea-Japan Treaty, Breakthrough for Nation Building,” Korea Times, November 29, 2013. \url{http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/biz/2013/11/291_62653.html}. Retrieved on June 23, 2014.} Protests against normalization reached a high
pitch amidst fears of a sell-out, as opposition politicians decried what they saw as Park’s right-hand man Kim Chong-pil’s “one-man diplomacy.”

It was under these circumstances that Park approved the new organization dedicated to memorializing the man who had killed Japan’s first prime minister. As media of the day recount, Park then gave the organization most of the money it would need to build the museum, and even bequeathed it the land upon which to do so. Park even attended the opening ceremony, and cut the ribbon.

What elevates Ahn?

One must question whether Ahn was as central to the anti-Japanese movement as the meta-narrative would like us to believe. He certainly played a willing part in Korea’s fight for sovereignty and was very active, as evidenced by his many associations and movements through northern Korea, Russia, and China. But the same can be said of many other anti-Japanese activists. In addition to the aforementioned Kim Gu and Lee Si-young, there was Choe Hyun and Kim Il-sung, who, with a great deal of help from the Soviet Union, founded modern North Korea, Hong Bom-do, Lee Dong-hee, and Hwang Hyun, to name but a few. The only thing for which Ahn stands out is the “patriotic deed.” The high-profile assassination and martyrdom insures his legacy, because it is expedient for it to be so. In the end, Ahn’s actions in 1909 were in keeping with the zeitgeist of the 1970s and have become so once more in the present day.

In other words, Ahn has been purposefully incorporated into the narrative, and connecting the historical dots—from 1909 to 2014—is a political rather than purely historiographical exercise. This is not surprising; the manipulation of history for nation-building or nation-maintaining purposes is not unique to South Korea, it is what every nation does.

24 President Park attends completion of martyr Ahn Jung-geun museum, Kyunghyang Sinmun, October 26, 1970. 
Martyr Ahn Jung-geun museum opening on September 26, Kyunghyang Sinmun, October 23, 1970. 
Martyr Ahn Jung-geun museum opens on September 2, Dong-A Ilbo, August 4, 1970. 
26 The assassination of Ito is rendered as the culmination of the anti-Japanese, pro-independence efforts of the Donguidanjihoe, a small group of highly devoted individuals formed following the failures of the Righteous Armies’ resistance. This fact is explained to visitors of the exhibition through various mediums: short descriptions, photographs, and audio recordings.
Appendix C

But one nation’s master narrative can be egregiously offensive to a neighboring state. To some in Japan, Ahn was not a righteous independence activist but a “a terrorist who received the death sentence for killing [their] first prime minister.” Korea has elevated to the status of patriotic martyr the person who killed a man whose portrait was on the Japanese 1,000 Yen note from 1963 until 1986. When South Korea’s nation-building narrative is built partly around such a figure, one who assassinated the founding father of the country with which it harbors considerable historical baggage, genuine rapprochement grows more complicated.

Image 6: yen note with Ito’s face

On December 7, 1970 West German Chancellor Willy Brandt made one of the most important – if not the most important -- formal apologies in recent history, and he did it without saying a word. After laying a wreath at the memorial of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw, Poland, Brandt fell to his knees. The act recovered Germany’s dignity as a nation and helped the European continent move beyond the ideational rifts caused by two world wars and the Holocaust.

East Asia has yet to have a Brandt moment. No Japanese head of state has performed an equally symbolic act of penitence; the various apologies proffered over the years have been construed as disingenuous. The ideational tensions borne out of a war-torn history between Japan and her neighbors are continuously reproduced through various means, two of which are nationalism and the cultural reproduction of national “heroes.” This can be most clearly seen in the case of South Korea.

Unsurprisingly, the narrative of anti-Japanese struggle, borne in Ahn’s story, is continually politicized. Consider, for example, the use of a letter written to Ahn by his mother while he was in prison awaiting execution. In an op-ed for the Hankyoreh, the letter and Ahn’s legacy are used to remind Koreans of those responsible for Korea’s independence—and the great sacrifices they made. The author, a former Democratic Party assemblyman, uses his position to fire a shot across the bow of those who, according to himself, have an understanding of Korean history that beautifies the Japanese colonial occupation. The letter reads:

You [Ahn Jung-geun] received this sentence for doing something right. Dying honorably instead of begging like a coward is an act of filial duty. Do not leave the impression that you are struggling to live on; give your life honorably…. Your death is not of one person, but carries all of Chosun’s righteous indignation. You have come to this point for your country; do not stray and think of other things when you face death. To claim that your death penalty is unfair… means begging Japan for your life. You must be pure for Korea and die honorably.

Contemporary manifestations of Korean nationalism, which venerate figures like Ahn Jung-geun, are certainly an impediment to Korea and Japan overcoming the ideational rifts borne of a contentious past. But given the conditions and timing of

Appendix C

Korea’s birth as a “modern” nation, it is hard to see there ever being a “national hero” who is not, in some regard, similar to Ahn, Kim Gu, or Kim Il-sung (i.e., an anti-Japanese nationalist). But it is not beyond the realm of possibility, either. Heroes, like nations, are social constructs.
Talking About the Unconscious: Interview with Professor Hyun Ok Park


Standing on the hoary northeastern edges of the People’s Republic of China, observers tend to imagine the nation-state as all-powerful, and to imbue sovereign boundaries with almost mystical properties. China’s official narrative of unity certainly encourages as much — CCP power has been duly consolidated in the northeast, at the cost of much blood and treasure, and the border is daily reinforced with images of national power. China may have uncoiled a series of construction and development projects up to the very Korean frontier, but this nod toward the transnational simply reinforces how different things are on the Chinese side of the river. How curious China must indeed appear to North Koreans who are kept forcibly out. On the southern banks of the Tumen River, North Korean sovereignty has its glitches and gaps, but it, too, is seen as generally monolithic, a handful of smugglers, vagabonds, and AWOL border guards notwithstanding.

One scholar, based in Toronto, with extensive fieldwork experience in Seoul and Yanbian, sees things somewhat differently — for her, national borders delimit realms of possibility. In an extensive interview with Sino-NK Managing Editor Steven Denney, York University’s Hyun Ok Park unpacks aspects of her book, *The Capitalist Unconscious: From Korean Unification to Transnational Korea* and extends the textual provocation into new realms. Like her book, there is a generousness with length and an invitation to an argument that might just last a decade. — Adam Cathcart, Editor-in-Chief

Talking About the Unconscious: Interview with Professor Hyun Ok Park

by Steven Denney

**Steven Denney [SD]: What is the “capitalist unconscious?” Why this phrase for the title of the book?**

**Hyun Ok Park [Park]:** The exploration of the capitalist unconscious is my way of understanding what has continued to trouble and fascinate me at the same time, namely, the lack of discussion of capitalism in everyday life, let alone its critique. This is perhaps truer in North America than other parts of the world, such as South Korea of the 1970s and 1980s. In this book I tried to make sense of the ways that capitalism is imagined and experienced as the practices of democracy (including socialist democracy) and ethnic nationalism. The implications of this continuation of capitalism by other means for envisaging a new political possibility are explored in this book, for instance when leftists seek to recover the commons or communism from the deathbed of twentieth-century socialism.

The capitalist unconscious encapsulates the three pivots of my argument. 1) It grasps the centrality of capital in shaping the current mode of Korean unification and locates a new political possibility in the experiences of social relations. 2) The word “unconscious” also denotes that capitalist life, lived, embodied, and remembered is not the totalizing process suggested by the concept of reification. 3) The “capitalist unconscious” encompasses the historical unconscious, e.g., memories, flashbacks, and repetition, as a source for critiquing hegemonic narratives of historical transition.

**SD: Could you talk a bit about how you apply these ideas to Korea, or different populations of Koreans?**

**Park:** Specifically, this book historicizes the politics of Korean unification, approaching normative ethnic national sovereignty of Koreans as a historical question. During the anti-colonial struggle from Japanese colonial rule to
national division in 1948, ethnic national sovereignty of Koreans concerned not just the creation of an independent Korean state, but also the emancipation of the people — the peasantry who constituted the majority of the population — for which socialist and capitalist politics vied to change terms of tenancy, labor, and land ownership. During the Cold War, the South Korean and North Korean states respectively fixed the matter of Korean unification to the task of unifying the territory and the state, while the popular democracy movement in South Korea contested anti-capitalist revolution and national liberation as the bases for national unification. This book presents the latest mode of national unification in the post-Cold War era: the formation of transnational community by capital.

By capital do I not mean the flow of money in the form of capital investment or humanitarian aid. It refers instead to social relations, where surplus labor is extracted in the form of unpaid labor and appropriated as profit accrued to capital investment. The current social relations of Koreans on a transnational scale involve their engagement in the production of goods and services through the invocation of ethnicity, nation, and democracy.

With the concept of the unconscious, I focus on the words, corporeality and senses, and mnemonics of migrant laborers and extrapolate disjuncture among them as the state of their commodification. South Korean activists and even global NGOs mobilized these migrant workers — whether Korean Chinese, North Korean, or non-Korean — for the politics of reparation, peace-making, and human rights. The limit of these democratic politics for representing concerns of migrant workers is inscribed in their capitalist logic. These latest democratic imaginations are also discussed in light of old political imageries of capitalism during the Enlightenment, socialist revolution, and industrial capitalism.

The capitalist unconscious emphasizes the fidelity of the political and the historical. In response to pressing questions about where a new political possibility might come from and what form it might take in this era of the end of history, this book presents the temporalizing of history as the urgent political task that Walter Benjamin alerted to us. I demonstrate that a critique of power emerges from disjunctured experiences of commodification, or rather one’s confrontation with them through a critique of the notion of historical progress. Operating as a hegemonic ideology, narratives of historical transition, such as the transition from industrial capitalism to financial capitalism, from dictatorship to democracy, and from socialism to capitalism, produce consensus on neoliberal capitalism. I show how recognition of historical repetition — be it recognition of the state’s continued violence after democratization or evocation of the colonial and Cold War past — harbors a new critical understanding of the present.

SD: Your book is principally concerned with retelling “the post-colonial and Cold War history of socialism and capitalism as the history of the neoliberal present” (Preface, xi). What, exactly, is it about the neoliberal present that deserves scholarly and analytical attention?

Park: In this book, I have tried to convey the importance of history and historical thinking for critiquing two popular interpretations of capitalism: the seeming convergence of the world into neoliberal capitalism as the victory of capitalism; and the repeated, though new each time, treatment of capitalism as democracy.

The capacity to link together three Korean communities [South Koreans, North Koreans, and Koreans in China] and theorize their connectivity as transnational Korea comes from my understanding of contemporary capitalism and rethinking twentieth-century socialism and capitalism. In order to understand what global convergence on neoliberal capitalism means, and how twentieth-century history matters for the current conjuncture, I have had to expand the purview of an analytical framework of capitalist experience beyond the customary analysis of labor (e.g., the regime of production) to include the historical and philosophical frame of commodification. My analysis begins with the present condition of Korean migrants — migration, work, incorporation into democratic politics, and protests against discrimination and exploitation — and goes back to their work and life in their socialist era. That is, I have changed the conventional temporal and spatial spaces of neoliberal capitalism to include twentieth-century socialism and capitalism as its history. In this book, the history of neoliberal capitalism does not affirm the often projected transition from industrial capitalism to financial capitalism. Rather it shows that the twentieth-century history of industrial capitalism spills into the everyday experience and politics under neoliberal capitalism.
This historical temporality of neoliberal capitalism is twofold. Firstly, it involves memories of the past, as institutionalized narratives of memories and individuals’ flashbacks not only constitute important threads of the current capitalist experiences, but also enable a new politics. Secondly, it concerns how the two Koreas and China pursued rapid industrialization and material accumulation under military dictatorship and socialism, respectively, what crisis emerged with each approach, and how industrial accumulation and its crisis are being worked out in the form of neoliberal capitalism. Thus neoliberal capitalism is not a period that transcends industrial capitalism/socialism of the twentieth-century. It is a continuation of capital accumulation by other means, that is, by the adoption of new strategies and principles of capital accumulation that respond to the singular crisis in each country.

SD: Transnationalism is a concept that seems to have caught hold of many scholars and readers, but which paradoxically has not yet really been applied to Korea – could you describe your view of how this concept holds in your research on capitalism?

Park: Transnational Korea is constituted by the asynchronous adoption by the two Koreas and Korean Chinese community of neoliberal capitalism though to different degrees. Transnational Korea does not signify the victory of South Korean capitalism in its rivalry with North Korean socialism. On the contrary, it points to the crisis of its own capitalism as the foundation for neoliberal reforms in South Korea. The repeated capitalist crisis in the 1980s and 1990s offered a foundation for South Korea to think North Korea and the Korean diaspora as assets capable of reinvigorating its capitalist power and giving rise to transnational Korea.

The joining of transnational Korea by North Koreans and Korean Chinese in the form of their labor migration originates in their own crisis of socialism. As in the Soviet Union, twentieth-century socialism in North Korea and China did not overcome capitalism but rather resided within its parameters. That is, socialist construction in North Korea and China is conceptualized in my book as repeated revolution, in which each country developed a unique industrial structure and state sovereignty by incorporating key capitalist dynamics such as the prioritization of industrial development, labor exploitation, and commodity production. Seeking to understand the failure of twentieth-century socialism, scholars saw it as the twin of Western state capitalism or conceptualized the US and USSR as mirror images of industrial modernism.

I attempt not so much to reaffirm the failure of socialism as to explain the crisis of twentieth-century socialism by asking the following questions: What crisis did emerge from the incorporation of capitalist principles into socialist construction? What rationale was given, especially within the frameworks of historical materialism and permanent revolution, to such a contradiction? In what kind of crisis did the contradiction manifest and how was it addressed repeatedly? What is the logic of this repetition? What do this contradiction and repeated rationalization have to do with the adoption of privatization, deregulation of the economy, and the trail of border-crossing migration?

This historical temporality of neoliberal capitalism is skirted even by well-meaning critical scholars who seek to ascertain distinctive features of neoliberal capitalism and thus inadvertently conjure a transition away from Keynesian and industrial capitalism. It is also obscured by democratic politics under neoliberal capitalism, which I call “market utopia.” Market utopia emerges out of the crisis of mass utopia, which, as Susan Buck-Morss delineates in both the US and USSR in her book Dreamworld and Catastrophe, drew the vision of emancipation of the people from imagined possibilities of mass production, technology, and machinery during the era of industrial capitalism. In contrast, market utopia imagines an all-encompassing power of the market and is concerned with individuals’ freedom, legal rights, and protections from state violence. This incarnation of free market capitalism in the neoliberal capitalist era reconstitutes the early European liberal notion of the market as the basis of peace, as discussed in Albert Hirschman’s seminal work The Passions and the Interests, into three repertoires of democratic politics, namely, reparation, peace, and human rights.

Screenshot from a march during the June Democratic Uprising [6월 민주항쟁]. Many attribute the wave of marches that took place during this month with the Democratic Justice Party’s decision to concede democratic reforms. | Image: Revisiting History(역사다시보기)/YouTube
SD: You were an undergraduate student during contentious times in South Korea: the 1980s. How have your experiences during this time shaped your views of post-87, democratic South Korea? What is so (in)sensitive about this period in modern Korean history?

Park: Indeed, my freshman year at Yonsei University began with the Kwangju uprising and the massacre of civilians by the military. Accordingly, we were immediately swept into campus protests and organizing meetings continued late into the night, not to mention frequent school closures. At the pinnacle of the minjung democracy movement against the military dictatorship my college years were marked with haunting political awakenings, campus and street protests, and a debilitating mixture of anger, despair, hope, and fear. After graduation I came to the US primarily to study socialism and North Korea, the two prohibited topics under the dictatorship. Of course, there is the obvious irony of studying such subjects in the heartland of capitalist imperialism! Another irony is that years of my studying of socialism led to the study of capitalism, which makes sense in light of this book. Guilty of studying and living abroad, I joined street protests when I returned to Seoul for summers. On June 29, 1987, I was also in the crowd protesting in front of Seoul City Hall after marching together from near the university, when the military announced a popular presidential election in the following year.

Two things stand out from my experience of the South Korean struggle of the 1980s. The first is its radical nature and its consequent ossification by a cultural turn in social movement and academia, as in the case of radicalism of the 1960s in other parts of the world. In South Korea, the notion of the transition from dictatorship to democracy in 1987 became the basis for the split between the labor movement and soon-flourishing civil society movement. Under the progressive governments’ rule from 1998 to 2008, the 1987 transition to democracy began to be commemorated as the victory of the people’s power. The notion of the 1987 transition fueled the cultural turn in academia and the social movement sector, which substituted citizens for minjung (the oppressed) as subjects of democratic politics and focused on identity politics.

The commemoration of the struggle eclipses the fact that activists during the late 1980s warned about political liberalization without substantive socioeconomic change. Accordingly, the late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s were filled with workers’ struggles, university students’ protests, and the state’s continued repression. However, after seizing power amidst the 1997 Financial Crisis, leftist governments pushed for neoliberal capitalist reforms. The remembrance of 1987 transition as the transition to democratization justified turning a blind eye to the capitalist character of the progressive governments.

The Capitalist Unconscious problematizes such historical and cultural turns in capitalism and democratic politics since 1987, elucidating the political conversion of leftists and the disappearing distinction between the left and the right in South Korean politics as in other parts of the world. It presents concepts and methods that I find helpful in assessing the limit of liberal democracy and recognizing signs of emerging alternative democratic politics.

Secondly, the struggle of the 1980s taught me that changes come with and through the crisis. The construction of the 1980s struggle as the heroic and triumphant struggle of minjung amounts to the normalization of history. It sanitizes visions of popular emancipation, erasing contradiction and conflict, as well as contingency and uncertainty that were integral to the struggle. According to Reinhart Koselleck, the temporalization of crisis is a political and philosophical question. In the time of crisis such as the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and war, the seemingly inapprehensible present is captured by a philosophy of history that conjectures the passage from past to future. That is, “politics and prophecy” substitute for recognition of the present moment. In my book, three idioms of democracy — reparation, peace, and human rights — work as politics and prophecy. Not only do they reconstitute the notion of equality, justice, and freedom in the loosely called post-cold war era of decolonization and democratization. They also use the transition narratives of history as an explanation for the present, and create consensus about neoliberal capitalism.

SD: “First as tragedy, second as farce,” Marx wrote in the 18th Brumaire. “Repetition” plays a prominent role in your analysis, but what is being repeated and why does that matter?
Park: Repetition is a central concept in my book. This phrase by Marx captures my interpretation of the history of the Cold War and post-Cold War eras. My interpretation of these periods as “repetition” counteracts the transition theses of history, which draw two historical periods and posit them in terms of their opposition, e.g., socialism vs. capitalism, dictatorship vs. democracy, and industrial capitalism vs. financial capitalism. Of course, repetition does not mean sameness. On the contrary, it authorizes us to uncover historical specificity of each period that is obscured by the transition paradigms.

The analysis of democracy within the framework of state sovereignty is key to the transition theses of history, especially paradigms of the transition from socialism to capitalism and from dictatorship to democracy. The argument that twentieth-century socialism failed due to the dictatorship of the state and the party or factional struggles for power leads to an interpretation of the current privatization and marketization in China and North Korea as a decisive move toward democracy. Similarly, political regime change through the dissolution of military dictatorship in South Korea and consequent political liberalization are considered decisive moves toward democratization, as if once the bridge to democracy is crossed, then return to dictatorship is impossible.

If I borrow Trotsky’s term, this political democratization is the “metaphysics” of democracy. If one looks at the regulation of labor, then the opposition between socialism and capitalism and between dictatorship and democracy disappear. The relationship of state, capital, and labor is different in each regime of socialism, capitalism, dictatorship, and liberal democracy. The concept of repetition enables us to recognize the continued commodification of labor by the historically changing network of state, capital, and the regime of production. With the concept of repetition, I account for democracy in the domain of social relations, and argue that a change in the form of state does not guarantee emancipation.

When the state of socialist democracy is weighed in the realm of the social, its limit is evident in the continued extraction and appropriation of labor power that was demanded by the socialist construction’s imperative to develop productive forces. The pace of privatization and deregulation in China (and even North Korea) does not bring a resolution to the failure of twentieth-century socialism but reproduces commodification of labor in a new way. This is the meaning of repetition, which recognizes historical changes in the commodification of labor and renews the struggle for democracy.

The new struggle capable of bringing democracy to social relations exceeds a change of state or practices of a non-authoritarian structure of social movement. Seen from the experience of migrant workers, democracy requires an end to commodified social relations. Within scholarship on state’s sovereignty, Giorgio Agamben conceptualizes the seemingly swift shift in the twentieth-century from fascist to liberal democratic regimes and vice versa in terms of “contiguity” of political regimes; and he inscribes the contiguity to their shared belief in the state’s production of social life. In this book I approach the contiguity as historical repetition to highlight the ways that various political regimes reproduce capitalism and its crisis by different responses to them.

The train station at Yanji, Yanbian Autonomous Korean Prefecture. Yanbian is “home” to most of the Chinese-Korean migrant labors working in South Korea. | Image: Steven Denney/Sino-NK

SD: Throughout the book you cover at least three distinct geographical locations — South Korea, Northeast China (specifically Yanbian), and North Korea — but bring it all together in a deceptively simple thesis: Korea is already unified through capital. This may come as news to some. What do you mean already unified?

Park: The word, “already,” conveys my emphasis on temporalizing history. By analyzing the current historical form of Korean unification I want to bring alive the original and utopian meaning of Korean national unification. The efforts to unify a divided Korea are tantamount to what Walter Benjamin notes as “making whole what has been smashed” in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

What has been smashed is not the homogeneous Korean ethnic nation per se, which never existed beyond belief,
but rather the utopian ideal of emancipation of the people spoken in the language of ethnic nation. During the anti-colonial struggle leading up to the Korean War, national unification concerned decolonization: the quest for independence from Japanese rule was never separate from land and tenancy reforms for peasants who were the majority of the population; and Koreans contested capitalist and socialist forms of such reforms. Popular sovereignty, decolonization, and Korean unification were one and the same, and were irreducible to the formation of the independent nation-state. Yet, during the Cold War era, the rivalry between the two states fixed Korean unification to the task of territorial union and the creation of the single nation-state. In the post-Cold War era, Korean unification is once again transmuted, this time into the issues of righting the colonial wrongs Korean Chinese suffered and democratizing North Korea, both of which I analyze as capitalist ideology.

Benjamin calls us to find this unrealized ideal in the wreckage of the past struggles and rescue it from the modern drive to arrive at the future by transcending the past. This is not about returning to the past but performing the dialectics of the past and the present — that is, dipping into the past to recognize unrealized ideals in the past, awaken to the present reality, and engage in the struggle for emancipation. From early on in the writing of this book, memories and flashbacks of migrant workers and activists in the colonial and Cold-War pasts challenged me to find ways to understand their meanings and locate them in their histories. The exploration of repetition came out of such efforts. In that process, I wrote the history of three Korean communities not chronologically but from the present to the past. I demonstrate that the dipping into the past constitutes new political moments — dormant, uttered, or organized — which break down the hegemonic representation of the present political regime and capitalism as democracy.

**SD:** Your study is principally concerned with what some people might consider the Korean nation, or so it would appear. Chinese-Koreans, North Koreans, and South Koreans are key populations in your study. Yet, your objective is clearly to transcend the nation (and the state). How do you write a transnational history when the scope is limited to one group of people? Or, in other words, how do you avoid reifying a sense of Koreaness while only looking at Koreans?

**Park:** You are right that I present Korean history as a global and transnational history. As I pointed out in the preface, I hope this book sheds light on current crises across the globe that are marked by invasions, wars, ethnic nationalism, and large-scale displacement and migration of people. When popular and political analyses tend to decipher these current events in reference to previous occurrences of Cold War, ethnic separatism, apartheid, and civil war, I have tried to rework such historical extrapolation through the notion of historical repetition. In the book, bringing global capitalism into the analysis is essential for delineating the connectedness of ethnicity, nationalism, state sovereignty, and human displacement, and for envisioning a new democratic politics. For instance, bringing global capitalism into a central analytic framework allows us to understand the transnational migration of people beyond the conventional framework of refugees.

If I take as an example Korean Chinese who worked as undocumented laborers in South Korea until the mid-2000s as an example, their experience of migratory work appears a phantasmagoria. They speak, feel, imagine, and act in multiple strains of primordial ethnicity, national belonging, refugee discourse, and the vision of a stateless nation. Korean Chinese joined South Korean reparation politics, waging street protests, sit-ins, and hunger strikes. They expressed seemingly ineffable ethnic emotions, saying that they finally came home and were choked with emotion when they saw persimmon trees planted by their parents or grandparents. They said they could endure backbreaking work lasting 15 to 17 hours a day in South Korea since they were farmers in China; more unbearable in their view were the insults and cold-heartedness of South Koreans who treated them as foreigners. This primordialization of their South Korean ethnicity took place when, as undocumented workers, they suffered all kinds of illnesses, including sudden weight loss, kidney and heart failure, internal bleeding, insomnia, and skin diseases. Worse, this identification with South Korea prompted the Chinese state to increase surveillance and sanctions against Korean Chinese. Some Korean Chinese switched to embrace China as their true nation, saying that China is indeed their homeland because their ancestors had worked and lived there, that Chinese not only retain human compassion, but also that soon economic development in China will surpass South Korea.
Here, their switching of national identity is largely performative; South Korea and China are just different names of a community, which, as an affective transfer, distills capitalist experiences into hope for community. This switching of national identity signifies not the enjoyment of both national memberships but the otherness of their being, in Korean Chinese words, “the people without a place to go to settle” or “living in sorrow whether coming to South Korea or going to China.” In this de facto refugee condition, their ardent identification with South Korea and China is a reminder of the paradox of the human condition of the stateless under the modern nation-state system, which Hannah Arendt so painfully captured in “We Refugees” by describing Jews as being ready to become 150 percent German, 150 percent French, and 150 percent Viennese, and so on.

SD: If Chinese Koreans are neither this nationality nor that, are they stateless refugees? How should we think about or conceptualize their condition?

Park: If we bring capitalism into the picture, we can discern a different paradox from the condition of statelessness. As undocumented workers until the mid-2000s, Korean Chinese were deprived of protection from the South Korean and Chinese states. However, I call Korean Chinese not de facto refugees but transnational migrants. Their de facto statelessness as undocumented laborers is not reducible to victimhood no matter how precarious their living conditions, because it transpires an unexpected critique of the past, the present, and the relationship between the two. When I ask Korean Chinese why they came to South Korea, some began their replies with surprising references to the Chinese Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976: they said that during the Cultural Revolution Koreans killed each other; and this intra-ethnocide is an ethnic characteristic of Koreans.

This unexpected or even involuntary recollection of the Cultural Revolution in South Korea enacts an uncanny dialectics of present and past: Their construction of intra-ethnocide as specifically Korean implies their critique of intra-ethnic hierarchy and discrimination in South Korea. This critique of the present encapsulates a new understanding of their history in China. The intra-ethnocide during the Cultural Revolution denotes the broader violence against Koreans throughout the socialist period. In fact, Korean Chinese’s status and identity was and continues to be unresolved in China.

Though each instance was different, the violence against Korean Chinese during the 1958 national rectification movement, the Great Leap Forward, and the Cultural Revolution was not over their ethnicity per se. Instead the recurrent violence was a repeated response to a larger contradiction — the contradiction arising from Chinese historical materialism, or Mao’s continuous revolution in stages, which incorporated capitalist principles of commodity production and labor control as necessary for developing productive forces. In his book, Difference and Repetition, Gilles Deleuze reasons that repetition leads to repression, not the reverse; I turn the philosophical notion of repetition leading to repression into a mode of politics and history, and argue that the repeated violence helped the regime to hide contradictions of its socialism. Throughout the Chinese revolution, Korean Chinese were given all kinds of names — names of anyone or anything that was not revolutionary — including feudal remnants, colonial remnants, remnants of the Kuomintang nationalist party, local nationalists, capitalists, and spies; and when the names ran out, they were called “mixed demons” caught between this world and next.

In other words, Korean Chinese acquired non-identities reminiscent of the persecution of Jews or Armenians, which resulted not so much from their ethnicity as from contradictions in Germany or Turkey. The desire for the stateless nation renders their transnational subjectivity as liminal practices of belonging that are irreducible to membership in a state. Here nation ceases to be a political unit and instead refers to the commons or commune.

SD: Reading the book, it is clear that you spent a lot of time with people who can be considered members of the global “precariat” – documented and undocumented migrant workers in China and (especially) South Korea. What did you learn most from your engagements?

Park: Their condition of living and working made me humble about what I do. I learned that they consider their work in the way we, intellectuals, do, that is, work as the source of sovereignty, identity, and politics. My engagement with their living and death as precarious migratory workers affirmed the importance of erasing the separation of manual
and mental labor, which has been established by industrial capitalism, especially in mechanization and rationalization of factory labor. Migrant workers studied in my book desired simultaneously to accumulate wealth and step outside commodified rhythms of our daily lives. They confronted the poverty of current democratic politics for grasping their interests and experiences.

I documented some of the instances that North Korean migrants countered their objectification by human rights advocates, for instance, finding ways to create their sovereignty, e.g., gaining control over their own body and work and treating their work as sort of use-value. This attention on labor in the book carves out the “social” — rather than “the political” sphere of state sovereignty or organized social movement — as a space of emancipatory politics, whether organized or dormant.

Mixed media image from Left Turn magazine of migrant laborers protesting working conditions. | Left Turn/Flickr

**SD:** You are very critical of South Korean activists for enrolling the struggles of Chinese-Korean migrant laborers into liberal-democratic “identity politics.” What are the characteristics of these politics, and what does it tell us about contemporary South Korean democracy?

**Park:** South Korean democracy is in crisis. Since the 1990s, the social movement in South Korea has split into a labor movement and a civil society movement. The book extrapolates the limits of this dual hegemonic movement. On the one hand, the labor movement has focused on defending rights and benefits of unionized workers, while seeking to establish a national labor party. It is too centered on unionized workers to represent migrant workers and precarious domestic Korean workers who are the majority of workers. On the other hand, NGOs have advocated the rights of the discriminated, appealing to the principle of difference. The civil society movement is too focused on identity and culture to unleash attacks on rapidly growing inequality, unemployment, and unfulfilled promises of a welfare-society. A break from the dual hegemonic movement has begun over the last few years. Labor activists now call for a return to the ethos of labor activism of the 1970s and 1980s, in order to overcome the defense of narrow economic interests of the few unionized workers. NGO activists confront the reality that they have increasingly depended on the government’s project and capitalists’ contribution, and that their emphasis on expertise and professionalism come to be detached from the people they represent.

The shift from the *minjung* movement to this dual hegemonic social movement is predicated on the assumption that the 1987 dissolution of military dictatorship accomplished the transition to democracy. The book offers a critique of this historical transition, and analyzes institutional characteristics of liberal democracy in South Korea, such as the new network of the state and capital and of industrial and financial capital, the appeal to law, constitutionalism, and cosmopolitanism, and the enforcement of private property rights in the name of the rule of law. The book explains how recognition that the violence of the state after 1987 continues, though in new ways, leads one to break out of the hegemonic social movement and formulate a new movement.

**SD:** The topic of marketization is popular in contemporary scholarship on North Korea (at least in the English-language). For many, the market era signifies a transition from a socialist system to some form of capitalist-socialist hybrid. You take issue with this discourse, especially notions of a new era or of a transition in North Korea. You argue, instead, that the push for rapid and heavy industrialization in the 1950s saw the implementation of economic policies that sought to harness the power of material incentives at the levels of labor and enterprise (especially surplus value, or profit) to direct development. Obviously, this goes well beyond more recent speculation about North Korean “marketization.” What is the significance of your historical critique? Why does it matter?

**Park:** North Korea is not an exception to the twentieth-century socialist system, which integrated key capitalist principles such as commodity production and labor exploitation into its socialist construction in order to intensify the pace of industrialization. Experts of North Korean studies in and beyond South Korea regard the current marketization in North Korea as the sign of capitalist democracy. This approach strips North Korean socialism of its history. I explain industrial and institutional structures in North Korea, which since the late 1950s have incorporated
capitalist principles into socialist construction.

When seen in this light of history, what’s new in North Korea since the 1990s is not the arrival of capitalism but rather a new politico-cultural interpretation of capitalist dynamics. As observed in China during the 1980s, the liberal notion of market democracy depicts increased market activities during and after the food crisis from 1994 to 1998 as empowering the powerless. Despite risks and hardships, North Korean migrants voice pride and contentment in market trading and migratory work, because it brings wealth and freedom.

The idea of market democracy usurps mass-line policy and collective nationalism, which are kernels of Juche ideology. The regime capriciously expands and contracts marketization and even calls it an anti-socialist phenomenon. Yet ordinary people describe the regime’s failure to acknowledge the death of socialism as “the emperor’s new clothes.” The regime’s loss of moral credibility is also observed in North Koreans’ own current fascination with China and South Korea as places of abundance, morality, and order.

The ethos of market democracy hides a new reality in North Korea. This reality encompasses growing inequality, monopoly of valuable resources by powerful state sectors, competition for survival, and deepening uncertainty in social life. Social instability is suggested by the popularity of folk customs and superstition used to allay anxiety and uncertainty. With funding from South Koreans and Korean Americans, covertly proselytize Christianity by presenting South Korea’s economic miracle as God’s blessing. Migration to China and on to South Korea is another means for North Koreans to escape this reality in search of economic opportunity, justice, or true community called the nation.

Any viable step for Korean unification must go beyond the opposition of socialism and capitalism in order to understand the actual socialist construction and marketization in North Korea. An informed account of the twenty-century socialist system and its North Korean characteristics saves us from futile predictions about North Korea’s inevitable or stalled transition to capitalism. North Korea is neither a monolithic totalitarian society nor outside of the capitalist system. North Korean socialism shares with South Korea and the West an industrial modernism that envisages human emancipation from the mass scale of production and technological possibilities.

**SD: Not directly addressed, but lurking between the lines and pages is your take on the relationship between nation and capital. So as to avoid the trap of identity politics, don’t we have to understand the relationship between the commodification of labor and nation? How would you articulate this relationship?**

**Park:** I don’t consider this book to be a study of the national history of Koreans, if national history implies primordialization of Korean ethnicity. Rather it is the study of global capitalism and its construction of the Korean ethnic nation. In *Ethnicity Inc.* Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff argue that capitalism produces ethnicity, not vice versa. While emphasizing the socially constructed nature of ethnic identity and culture, they avoid economic determinism by revealing unsettling and indeterminate effects of commodification of ethnicity on political empowerment of ethnic groups. Similarly, I approach the embrace of ethnicity by South Koreans, Korean Chinese migrants, and North Korean migrants as performative politics, in which their invocation of primordial ethnic nation increases their speculative value in transnational Korea. Their desire for a stateless nation epitomizes the desire to step outside commodification. When we analyze the formation of ethnic nation in relation to global capitalism, it is possible to go beyond the space-based conceptualization of transnational as “transcendence” of the nation or “outside” of the nation.

In this book I pay attention to the temporality of their transnational migration — Korean Chinese’s switching of their national identity and North Korean’s continued migration to China and on to South Korea, and, in reality or desire, their return to North Korea or move to the US, Canada, or Europe. Border-crossing migration has the paradoxical effect of simultaneously reproducing commodification and displacing migrants from the normative order set by the nation-state. The concept of transnational migration expands the parameters of what the nation-state framework of migrants deems political, and challenges us to envision liberation outside of the time and space of the nation-state. Migrant laborers under consideration in this book see that a change of political regime would not end their displacement and commodification and express a longing beyond citizenship or refugee status. The desire to move
to a new country uncannily entails recognition that one’s liberation does not come from changing one’s identification with a nation-state. The analysis of the temporality of transnational migration offered in *The Capitalist Unconscious* points to the social as a location of the struggle for liberation.

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