Using the Enemy's Vocabularies: Rethinking the Origins of Student Anti-State Nationalism in 1980s Korea

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This study explores how anti-colonial discourses of student anti-state nationalism in the 1980s were influenced by the state nationalism during the Park Chung-Hee era. With few exceptions, studies on Korean democratization have exclusively focused on the growth of civil society, independent from the authoritarian state government. Nevertheless, this trend in research overlooks the simple historical fact that student protesters in the 1980s had been heavily indoctrinated by the state discourses of nationalism to the point of having to recite the National Charter of Education in elementary schools. This study investigates the symbolic structure of student anti-state nationalism in the 1980s and its connectedness with the state nationalism of the 1970s and argues that the force of nationalism produced both domination and resistance in those two decades.

Keywords: Student movement, Korean nationalism, democratization, Yushin, June Struggle, the National Charter of Education

In the summer of 2008, City Hall Square and Sejong Boulevard in Seoul were filled with thousands of demonstrators protesting against the South Korean government's decision to relax regulations on importing American beef. While I was strolling through the crowd, which extended over a mile, I quickly noticed that the nature and composition of the crowd were radically different from the protesters who had filled the same place in June of 1987—the high point of the 1980s South Korean democratization movement. Whereas the absolute majority of participants—and the only well-organized ones—in the June 1987 protest were college students, it was virtually impossible to see any commonality within

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the diverse multitude that congregated there during the summer of 2008.

In the middle of the square, I suddenly paused to listen to an unexpected two-decade-old protest song, the Marching Song for the National Committee of College Student Representatives (*Jeondaehyeop jingunga*). The lyrics of the song are as follows:

> *We, young students, rose up to liberate the nation*
> *We gathered under the flag of Jeondaehyeop while standing shoulder to shoulder with each other*
> *You are trampling on our gangcheol daeo*[1]
> *Hit us more until the edges (of our swords) are sharpened up*
> *Ah, Ah, Jeondaehyeop, our pride*
> *Let's go, let's struggle toward the only road for winning*

Despite their legendary reputation as pro-democracy fighters, the presence of former chondaehyop members (now in their late 30s and early 40s) and the lyrics of the song seemed an anachronism, yet the march, with its combative and nationalistic content, drew the attention and curiosity of other protesters. As some of the studies of the recent protest suggest, participants in the candlelight vigils were diverse and largely motivated by 'life politics' (*saenghwal jeongchi*) that emphasize issues of everyday life, such as food safety, environment, college tuition, etc. (Hong 2008:25-26). The sudden re-emergence of the 1980s symbolism and discourses of resistance forced me to rethink a simple question: How can we interpret the grandiose nationalistic discourses of the 1980s when the politics of domination and resistance have fundamentally shifted to a different direction?

During the last two decades, both scholars and journalists have used the binary image of Korean society to describe the long process of Korean democratization. For both progressive and conservative scholars, Korean democracy has been achieved through the continuous struggles between the succeeding dictatorial regimes of Rhee Syngman to Roh Tae-Woo (or Chun Doo-Hwan) and the incessant resistance from Korean civil society, which has even grown since Korea's independence, though, of course, scholars and writers

1. *gangcheol daeo* literally means steel line. It refers to a formation in demonstrations and also strong commitment to the movement.

produced different lineages of 'dictators versus resistance' depending upon their ideological and theoretical frameworks. Nevertheless, almost all the studies on Korean democratization, especially those in English, have exclusively focused on the institutional and structural nature of Korean civil society without placing proper emphasis on the complex evolvement of resisting ideology, which has always been the product of intensive interaction with the ruling discourses of Korean society.[2] I maintain that the social discourses of democratization (especially those of college students) in the 1980s were actually the product of Korean society's interactions with state nationalism as the ruling ideology.

This paper is a preliminary attempt to draw a new genealogy of resisting ideology in Korean society without relying on existing binary images of state/society or dictatorship/democracy in modern Korean history. I suggest that research on Korean democracy should pay proper attention to the role of nationalistic discourses and shifting historiography to understand the dynamic relationship between ruling and resisting ideologies. As this paper later argues, the 1980s South Korean college students' passion for anti-imperialism and resisting nationalism and their strong affinity with the North Korean *Juche* ideology were the unintended consequences of the massive nationalistic campaign of the Yushin Regime in the 1970s. In terms of discursive structure and grammar, the student activists of the 1980s inherited more from the authoritarian regime under which they received primary and secondary education than the remote democratization discourses of the April Revolution generation.

Hegemony/Power/Resistance

A commonsensical interpretation of Korean democratization, which focuses on the binary image of dictatorship and democracy, often romanticizes the resisting ideology as a genuine consciousness of the people's will that refuses the banal and empty slogans of the authoritarian regime. Nevertheless, the symbolic or discursive relationship between domination and resistance is not always oppositional but is in many ways mutually shaping. To highlight the delicate discursive relationship between domination and resistance, I suggest conceptually separating hegemony and domination.

2. Exemplary works in this tradition are Kim 2000; Koo 1993; Armstrong 2002.

For many, hegemony is a social situation in which subaltern or oppressed people submit to the ruling elites through forged consent (Williams 1983:145). The urban working class or rural peasants, for example, vote against their own politico-economic interests and instead for the interests of industrialists and landlords in liberal democracies because of the proactive function of hegemony that makes the subaltern groups believe that their own interests are the same as their rulers'. Nevertheless, James Scott, whose concept of 'hidden transcript' profoundly reshaped social science research on domination and resistance, argues that hegemony is an ineffective concept precisely because it does not presume the social space of resistance, that is to say, the hidden transcript (Scott 1990:90-96). For him, subaltern groups creatively defy the ruling ideology by finely calculated deception and production of hidden transcription in a normal society. Therefore, if hegemony means a complete discursive and epistemological domination of a society by ruling elites, the concept might be rather ineffective since scholars of domination/resistance usually do not assume a society without a 'hidden transcript.'

Recently, a group of anthropologists revived the concept of hegemony through a delicate modification. For instance, Comaroff and Comaroff suggest that hegemony operates in the realm of fact, not value, while clearly differentiating the concept of hegemony from that of dominant ideology (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990). In general, an ideology expresses itself in the form of normative statements with clearly defined moral and political imperatives. Depending upon the primary focus of an ideology, the utmost target of an ideology can be the workers' utopia, an unfettered market society, or a homogeneous nation state. For these terms, ideological expressions presume the quality and desirable forms of working class, market and nation state. On the contrary, hegemony governs the factuality of those concepts. For example, if ideological debates on market economy are centered on the proper relations between market and state or reasonable marketization of social life, hegemony in a capitalistic society considers the market to be a natural being, without making a proactive statement regarding a desirable type of market. In a similar vein, hegemony of the nation state reveals itself in the universal assumption of nation as a natural political unit, whereas nationalistic ideology produces a number of different normative statements on an ideal form of nation state.[3]

3. Nationalism scholarship in the United States tends to miss this point since their perspectives

Simply speaking, ideological discourses use 'must,' 'should,' and 'have to' while hegemony is enforced whenever a person uses 'is' in a statement.

If we conceptually differentiate hegemony and ideology as stated above, we achieve a very useful conceptual tool to understand domination and resistance. When studies of resistance or civil society reify the autonomous realms resistant to ruling power, they frequently fail to question the autonomy of the ruling class from the dominant discourses. For instance, when the Yushin Regime (1972-1979) and the Fifth Republic (1980-1987) preached the value of national unity against democratic chaos, how calculating and instrumental were the rulers in implementing and enforcing various social and political measures? In other words, did they really believe what they preached? From the subaltern's perspective, this question might be meaningless since the style and degree of oppression might be the same regardless of the above question. Nevertheless, if the rulers genuinely believed the factuality of the nation and drew the political value of national unity from this genuine belief, we can carefully separate the ruling ideology from the hegemony of post-war Korea, the supremacy of nation state as the target of political loyalty. In a similar vein, I also argue that public dissent against the ruling ideology need not be the same as the epistemological independence from hegemonic discourses of the nation state in Korea. Rather, as shown later in this paper, both domination and resistance are the products of hegemony in a society.

Rethinking the National Charter of Education

If we agree with Benedict Anderson's constructivist interpretation of the modern nation state, a nation exists in the realm of collective subjectivity. In that sense, the degree of nationhood depends upon the breadth of the political collectivity

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have recently been shaped by the monumental work of Benedict Anderson (1991). Anderson's constructivist argument on nationalism has anointed the American refusal of 'nation state' and accelerated value-laden research focusing on demythifying existing nationalism. Hence, nationalism scholars often fail to provide analytical tools to interpret the hegemonic status of the nation state outside of America. For this problem, Michael Herzfeld offers the most valuable insight: "Distrust of essentialism in social theory should not blur our awareness of its equally pervasive presence in social life" (Herzfeld 1997:26). He suggests that we need to recognize the reality that nation states exist in the modern world as a "fact" in order to analyze their roles in shaping contemporary political and social processes.

that recognizes a nation as the ultimate objective of political loyalty. Hence, it might be a futile discussion to detect exactly when the Korean nation emerged in the modern era. Though modern nationalism became hegemonic discourses in early twentieth-century East Asia, and nationalistic intellectuals in Korea emerged as early as the late nineteenth century, the completion of the process of nationalism is virtually impossible to detect precisely because that process is naturally infinite.

In this essay, I do not intend to offer a comment regarding recent debates on Korean nationalism led by a number of postmodernist/constructivist theorists that try to de-mystify the absoluteness and historicity of Korean nation.[4] Rather, my question here is: When did the Korean nation reach its zenith through near-complete nationalization of the population in the Republic of Korea? In other words, when did the Korean nation defeat all other social and political communities, such as clans, class, and regions, in its attempt to establish ultimate political authority in every strata of the society? Of course, we have plenty of evidence that Korean nationalism has been a hegemonic force among Korean intellectuals and independence activists/fighters regardless of their ideological and political orientations. However, the concern here is the nationalization of the populace in general, which is possible only through firm control of a nation state's discursive and symbolic control of neighborhoods (Appadurai 1996:190). For that purpose, a nation state needs at least two well-organized apparatuses: first, strong state institutions, especially educational, that can transfuse discourses and symbols to the whole populace, and second, a coherent ideological system that provides a homogenization of the imagined community across the territory.

From this perspective, the Korean state's capacity to carry the mission of mass nationalization was questionable as late as the final years of the 1960s. In addition to the strong surveillance apparatus inherited from the Japanese colonial state, the post-colonial South Korean state was rather "fragmented, underdeveloped, and powerless" (Moon and Rhyu 1999) in the field of ideological control. Though anti-communism (anti-North Korea) was a strong ideological apparatus of the authoritarian state, the First Republic's (1948-1960) heavy reliance on McCarthyism is evidence of a weak rather than strong state in the realm of ideology since the use of such ideology proves the inability of the

4. Critiques against Korean nationalism have gained substantial academic support in South Korean academia, especially in the early 2000s. Exemplary works are Yi 2001; Im 1999; Shin 2003.

state to create its own tenets. While the six years of compulsory education rule was implemented from the beginning of the First Republic, production of national subjects through a national education system usually takes decades, so the first Korean generation that received compulsory education emerged as adult citizens in the 1960s. Furthermore, penetration of compulsory education into marginalized sectors of Korean society, such as mountainous areas and urban ghettos, was not accomplished until the late 1960s.[5]

In that sense, I argue that we have to pay full attention to the constitutive power of the Korean state in the 1970s. Massive campaigns, such as the New Village Movement, and the expansion of the state apparatus into the streets and town corners by *Bansanghoe* (Neighborhood Associations), which were reaching out to the marginalized realms of society at unprecedented levels, indicated that the capacity of the Korean state had reached its zenith since liberation. In addition to those institutional expansions, more impressively, the 1970s Korean state, usually known as a developmental state, invested substantial time and energy in managing the discursive realms of the society[6]. For instance, the New Village Movement and the Bangsanghoe were not solely control and surveillance systems, but also ideological institutions through which the Korean state could claim moral and ethical supremacy over the pre-modern and non-state organizations.

Of those attempts by the Korean state, the promulgation of the Charter of National Education in 1968 provides us an important prism for understanding the so-called 386 generation that led student activism during the 1980s. The charter reads as follows:

We have been born into this land, charged with the historic mission of

5. Interestingly, I found that this aspect of Korean society is best described in an art form: the cartoon. Choe Kyu-Suk's *Daehanminguk Wonjumin* (Indigenous People in the Republic of Korea), a collection of weekly cartoons published in the magazine, *Hangyeore 21*, cleverly expresses how ordinary people in South Korea were not national citizens (subjects) until they received intensive public education in the 1960s and 1970s. His observations supersede many social scientific works in that he suggests that children, before experiencing state brainwashing through public education, are inherently "indigenous" rather than national (Choe 2008). He accurately observes that a nation state exists only as a process in the sense that nationhood should be incessantly imposed upon the populace and a nation state can cease to exist as soon as that process stops.
6. Woo, one of the best-known Korean political economists, also agrees with the significance of ideology in running a developmental state. See Woo 1999:20.

regenerating the nation. This is the time for us to establish a self-reliant posture within and contribute to the common prosperity of mankind without, by revitalizing the illustrious spirit of our forefathers. We do hereby state the proper course to follow and set it up as the aim of our education and arts, developing the innate faculties of each of us, and overcoming the existing difficulties. For the rapid progress of the nation, we will cultivate our creative power and pioneer spirit. We will give the foremost consideration to public good and order, set a value on efficiency and quality, and, inheriting the tradition of mutual assistance rooted in love, respect and faithfulness, will promote a spirit of fair and earnest cooperation. Realizing that the nation develops through creative and cooperative activities and that the national prosperity is the ground for individual growth, we will do our best to fulfill the responsibility and obligation attendant upon our freedom and rights, and to encourage the willingness of the people to participate and serve in building the nation.

The love of country and fellow countrymen, together with a firm belief in democracy against communism, is the way for our survival and the basis for realizing the ideals of the free world. Looking forward to the future when we shall have the honorable fatherland unified for the everlasting good of posterity, we, as an industrious people with confidence and pride, pledge ourselves to make new history with untiring effort and to develop the collective wisdom of the whole nation.

Park Chung-Hee
President
The Republic of Korea[7]

Immediately after its promulgation, the Korean state apparatus, especially through educational institutions, actively promoted this historic text. After the establishment of the Yushin Regime (1972-1979), virtually all students in elementary, middle and high school were forced to recite the full text of the charter regularly. The procedures and manners for reciting the charter were meticulously directed by the guidelines established by the Ministry of Education

7. Translated in Korea *Journal*, Vol. 9: 8 (August 1969:5).

(Kim 2005; Shin 2005).[8] At the same time, school curriculums actively reflected the charter by increasing the time spent learning morality, national ethics, and national history. The most interesting and noticeable of curricular changes in this period, however, is the intensified sense of self-reliance in history textbooks. Newly revised history textbooks in the mid-1970s introduced a number of anti-colonial activities that had been largely neglected in public education. For instance, the history of independence fighters in Manchuria and the sole leadership of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea (1919-1945) were introduced in history textbooks, while emphasizing independence movements as the most significant cause of liberation and discounting the role of the Allied Power (Shin 2005:227-228).

There are few disagreements regarding the ideological orientation of the charter and the new curriculums under the Yushin Regime.[9] In addition to the Cold War rhetoric of anti-communism, the charter discounts liberal democratic tenets, such as individual freedom, and openly praises state-centered nationalism and collectivism.[10] Nevertheless, as briefly noted above, the emergence of anti-colonial nationalism through the inclusion of independence movements as the core part of national history education is noteworthy especially in its relation to the 1980s resisting ideology. Political historians within and outside Korea have discussed the significance of international environments, symbolized by the Nixon Doctrine and President Carter's dissatisfaction over Park Chung-Hee's human rights violations, in relation to the strong sense of "self-reliance" during the Yushin Regime (Oberdorfer 1997; Kim 1999). Furthermore, the consolidation of North Korea's *Juche* ideology, with its heavy emphasis on anti-imperialism, forced the South Korean government to produce its own version of nationalism beyond a simple reiteration of the Japanese nation-making process.[11]

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8. The author attended elementary school in the late 1970s and vividly remembers the recital of the charter as a seriously performed ceremony. Collective recital of the charter in front of the school principal or commissioners required repeated practice so that students could perform the recital with grandeur and harmonious rhythm and tempo.
9. In 2005, a number of scholars published a special issue of *Yeoksa munje yeongu* (Critical Studies on Modern Korean History) on the Charter of National Education. Based on the author's limited knowledge, this special issue is the most comprehensive and updated collection of research on the charter. See Yoon 2005; Kim 2005; Hwang 2005; Kim 2005; Shin 2005.
10. This essay will not go into further detail of the discursive nature of the charter. Hwang's work (2005) offers a comprehensive review of the charter's contents and their relationship with Park Chung-Hee's personal beliefs.
11. In that sense, I argue that the South Korean ideological works of the 1970s, symbolized by the charter, are much more than a mere copy of the Japanese Imperial Edict on Education.

Yoon Hae-Dong meticulously contrasts the Japanese Imperial Edict on Education and the Korean Charter of National Education and concludes that the latter is a prolonged form of the former since both unanimously conflate individual ethics to national ethics (Yoon 2005:93). Despite the striking similarities between those two texts, the charter has two significant phrases: *Jaju dongnip ui jase* (a self-reliant posture or attitude of self-reliant independence) and *tongil joguk* (unified fatherland), both of which undoubtedly represent the situation of a divided postcolonial nation. Regardless of the political motivations or international environments that forced the Yushin Regime to instate the anti-colonial or post-colonial terms found within the powerful Yushin propaganda, it is important to note that the so-called 386 generation recited the charter hundreds of times throughout their primary and secondary education. Of course, I do not suggest that the Yushin indoctrination of the state-led nationalism was successful in making the children of the 1970s into right-wing nationalists permanently. Rather, analysis of the 1980s student activists in the next section requires us to rethink the complex relationship between the ruling ideology and the resisting discourses, which suggests that they easily rejected the Yushin regime as a desirable political system but subscribed the nation state as the ultimate target of political loyalty while repeating the vocabularies of self-reliance and unified fatherland.

Continuation and Discontinuation of Korean Student Activism in the 1980s

The Yushin regime ended abruptly. Though the direct cause of its catastrophic demise was the unexpected assassination of President Park by his associate, situational and structural causes of the event are open to various interpretations that drastically differ by political and ideological positions. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that opponents of Park Chung-Hee were not ready to take over the heavily fortified state apparatus, and the subsequent military coup by General Chun Doo-Hwan, in retrospect, was not an unthinkable consequence of the sudden death of the dictator. Though many readers of modern Korean political history tend to analyze the series of political events occurring between the late 1970s and early 1980s (events that eventually led to the democratization of Korea in 1987) through a teleological lens, I believe that historical narratives of this turbulent period are still unsettled. Nevertheless, few would disagree that there was no social or political force strong and mature enough to fill the

political vacuum between October 1970 and May 1980 and prevent the establishment of yet another military dictatorship.

A teleological interpretation of history is very difficult to avoid in any historical writings. Particularly, modern history writings presuppose a historical subject, such as the nation state or people, that exists beyond natural geographic and temporal limits. At the same time, the necessity of uninterrupted narration of historical subjects forces historians to suppress inconsistencies and disconnectedness between series of events and, at the same time, to hide the differing relationship between the historical subjectivity and events being narrated (White 1973; 1990). When we construct a resisting political genealogy, linearity is presumed not through resistors' ideas and organizations but through the linear history of dictators. In that sense, the Korean Democratic Party (Hanmindang),[12] Bong-Am Cho,[13] Jun-Ha Chang,[14] Dae-Jung Kim, Yong-Sam Kim, and Moo-Hyun Roh are listed in the same genealogy of dissents though there are few ideological and structural commonalities among them. If we reject a teleological interpretation of modern Korean history, we can find a fresh perspective to understand the emergence of a new political/historical consciousness in the early 1980s, mainly from Korean college students. From the end of the Spring of Seoul in April and May of 1980, when the streets of Seoul were filled with demonstrators demanding the immediate democratization of political systems, and the 1987 June Struggle, the culmination of the democratization movement, discourses of political dissent evolved at an unprecedented pace. In particular, the ascendance of resisting nationalism among activists was innovative and radical enough to disconnect itself from any earlier resisting discourses in the 1950s and 1960s that were by and large based on ahistorical claims of democracy and freedom.

During the Spring of Seoul, the dissenters' primary concern was the end of the Yushin Regime, lifting marshal law, and removing military power from

12. A right-wing political party based on landed class (1945-1949). Since founders of this party later became opponents of Rhee Syng-Man, historians regard this party as the origin of Korean oppositional parties under authoritarian regimes.
13. The head of the Korean Progressive Party, executed in 1959 for being a communist. He served as Minister of Agriculture under the Rhee Syng-Man regime. He had associated with both the communist groups and the fascist party (Liberal Party: Jayudang) but never worked with Hanmindang.
14. A right-wing nationalist/intellectual that stood in resistance against Park Chung-Hee. Many believe that the Yushin Regime is responsible for his death in a suspicious accident in 1975.

politics. Optimism after the death of Park Chung-Hee was immediately replaced by skepticism and pessimism due to prolonged marshal law and the suspicious rise of General Chun Doo-Hwan in the mass media. In May, college students began to organize themselves and demanded the resignation of Yushin bureaucrats/politicians, such as Shin Hyun-Hwak, and reinstatement of the democratic election system. On May 15th, over one hundred thousand students gathered at Seoul Railway Station Square to demand immediate political reforms. The following statement made during the apex of the Spring of Seoul clearly indicates college students' political consciousness:

> *Once a dictator falls down, the privileged groups under the dictatorship will look for a way to prolong their own power unless they are fully defeated by democratic force... At a certain point, they will bury Kim Yong-Sam and deploy McCarthyism against Kim Dae-Jung... They would not avoid dismissing the National Congress.*
>
> *It is time to affirm the splendid tradition of struggle against the June Third Marshall Law,[15] the 1971 Garrison Degree,[16] and the 1974 Death Penalty Threat.[17] Aren't torture and a three year's jail sentence all they can do?*
>
> *If we cannot prevent their rule, the day of national unification will be delayed. What would be the inspirational meaning for unification without democratization? Since they are the core of anti-unification, they are the greatest barrier of the current unification movement.*
>
> *We need to struggle against the remnants of the Yushin Regime, ask for*

15. Against the government's attempt to normalize the diplomatic relationship between Korea and Japan, college students staged massive demonstrations in 1964. Marshall Law was imposed to suppress those demonstrators.
16. Garrison Degree allows military forces to replace police in maintaining public order. When the anti-government protests were intensified in 1971, the government first promulgated the Garrison Degree to suppress student demonstrations.
17. To curb massive protests against the Yushin Constitution, the Korean Central Intelligence Agency allegedly revealed an anti-government underground organization named as the National Alliance of Democratic Youth in 1974. Seven among the one hundred eighty indicted were sentenced to death. While all indicted were pardoned in 1975, the Yushin Regime, in the same year, executed eight dissenters for being wirepullers of the National Alliance of Democratic Youth.

> *resolution of democratic forces, demand reflection of the oppositional party including Kim Yong-Sam regarding their unclear posture [toward the Yushin remnants], and ask for determination of broad democratic forces including Kim Dae-Jung.*
>
> *Let's go out and fight! Then, destroy the dream of revising the dark age of Yushin! It is time to act and to win.*
>
> *"Let's fight to lift Marshall Law"*
>
> *Committee to Struggle against the Remnants of the Yushin Regime, Yonsei University, May 7, 1980*[18]

In this statement, the Yonsei student activists clearly define the enemy as the legacy of the Yushin regime. Hence, their struggle is described in the history of resistance against Park Chung-Hee's rule, such as the June Third Movement (1963) or the Alliance of Democratic Youth (1974). Students differentiated themselves from politicians, such as Kim Yong-Sam and Kim Dae-Jung, not for their ideology but for their reluctance to start a hawkish attack against the government. Though national unification was mentioned as one of the urgent tasks, the students clarified that democratization is a prerequisite for unification. Overall, the statement indicates that student protesters in the Spring of Seoul were not ideologically nor politically different from other politicians in the opposition party or civil society democratic activists.

In the early 1980s, however, student activism went through a remarkable transformation. Separated from oppositional political parties or so-called *jaeya*[19] activists, college students along with a number of progressive intellectuals started to produce discourses that aimed at fundamental social and political transformation—or revolution. Compared to the Spring of Seoul discourse that simply pursued liberal democratic systems, underground activist groups started debates and controversies regarding change of the social system. The culmination of those debates was the confrontation between the NL (National

18. Cited from Pyeonjipbu 1988a: 20-25.
19. *Jaeya* literally means 'out of office.' In Korean political history, jaeya activists refer to prominent civil activists who refused to be incorporated into formal politics and resisted against the authoritarian regime.

Liberation People's Democratic Revolution) faction and the CA (Constituent Assembly) faction in 1986.[20] Activists' theoretical debates between 1980 and 1986 had been focused on finding the real contradictions of Korean society. After the establishment of the Fifth Republic, another military regime, some dissenting activists diverted their focus from formal political process to fundamental social change, believing that liberal democratic tenets could not bring democratization, and eventually unification, to Korea. Hence, the so-called 'social scientific consciousness of Korean society' became the key phase of the activists' discussion. In 1985, dissenting students and activists produced discourses of sammin[21] revolution. The nature of the Fifth Republic, or authoritarian Korean state from the beginning of the republic, was determined as 'anti-national,' 'anti-democratic,' and 'anti-people.'

Nevertheless, activist groups were immediately divided into two major factions, NL and CA, since they could not agree upon designating the primary target (or enemy) of their movement. For the CA faction, Korean society is governed by state-monopolized capitalism with a dependency upon imperialism. While recognizing imperialism as the main enemy of social transformation, the CA faction saw the fascist state as the ultimate target of the people's revolution. In that sense, the CA faction, compared to its rival, could be referred to as a form of traditional Marxism. On the contrary, for the NL faction, all socio-political contradictions originated from national divisions, since it had always provided excuses for authoritarian rule. They characterized Korean society as a neo-colonial society ruled by American imperialism. Hence, the fascist state in Korea was seen as almost the same as the Japanese colonial state before liberation.

These two very different understandings of Korean society produced radically different road maps for social revolution. The CA faction argued for the destruction of the Korean fascist state and the summoning of a constituent assembly to establish a new republic based on the working class and peasants. On the other hand, the NL faction argued that an anti-colonial revolution against American imperialism was the prerequisite for any social or political revolution. More interestingly, the two groups' definitions of 'minjung'[22] were radically

20. For complete discussions on ideological and theoretical debates among activists, see Pyeonjipbu 1988a; 1988b.
21. *Sammin* literally means three 'min,' referring to *minjok* (nation), *minju* (democracy) and *minjung* (people).
22. *Minjung* can be literally translated as 'people.' Nevertheless, as this term was used in South

different. As the CA faction considered the source of all socio-political problems to be capitalistic development itself, the concept of minjung was strictly based on capitalistic class relations, and included only the proletariat and peasants. On the other hand, the NL faction interpreted 'minjung' as any social and political forces, including national bourgeois, intellectuals and even the military, that were resisting or fighting against imperialism

Though heated theoretical debates among activists continued throughout the 1980s, the NL faction was rapidly dominating college campuses and civil society organizations. Starting from early 1987, the NL faction was able to broaden its organizations through Seodaehyeop (Committee of College Representatives in Seoul) and Jondaehyeop (National Committee of College Representatives). It also played a leading role in the massive mobilization of students during the June Struggle in 1987. Many factors can be attributed to the ascendance of the NL faction over other transformative theories in the early 1980s.

When underground activist organizations recruited new members through campuses, the first-year college students, largely from a middle-class background, would find the NL theory of anti-colonialism less alienating than that of the CA, which excluded middle class and intellectuals from the concept of minjung. The NL activists were easily able to hide their political goals and slogans behind the nationalistic discourse that had been omnipresent partly due to Park Chung-Hee's promotion of self-reliance, whereas the CA's slogans based on orthodox Marxism sounded more dangerous and alarming from the perspective of South Korean authorities. More importantly, I would suggest the different underground curriculums utilized to recruit and educate new activists played an important role in creating an imbalance between the NL and CA. The CA faction's curriculum largely consisted of underground publications of orthodox Marxism that were centered on economics and required intensive reading. On the contrary, the NL's underground curriculum, instead, focused on national history.

Here, we need to remember that the Yushin Regime strengthened national history education based on anti-colonial struggles under Japanese rule, and college students in the early 1980s were the first cohort to receive the intensified nationalist education. Though the nationalistic education of the 1970s was to justify and legitimize the Yushin Regime as the savior of the nation from the backwardness of traditional Korean society and the dangerous international

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Korea throughout the 70s and 80s, it came to mean 'the people suffering under the authoritarian rule.' For a complete discussion on this concept, see Lee 2007.

environments—including the Nixon Doctrine and the mounting pressure from the United States regarding the Yushin Regime's human right violations—the discourses of national redemption were powerful and persuasive, as seen by the societal approval of the Saemaeul movement. The narratives of national suffering and redemption and the formation of the structured nostalgia that presume an untainted national past are components of any well-constructed nationalism (Herzfeld 1990).

According to a recent survey of Korean intellectuals, *Understanding History before and after the Liberation* (*Haebang jonhusa ui insik*: UHL) was selected as the most influential book in South Korea since 1987 (Gyeonghyang Sinmun 2008:63). The book was, as many 386ers[23] recall, the first book in any NL-oriented underground curriculum. Though the reliability of the survey is questionable with only seventy-four responses, it is a noteworthy outcome since the scope and contents of the book are surprisingly narrow and delimited to the three years of history between the end of the Second World War and the foundation of the Republic of Korea. Indeed, the book played an important role in filling the gap in the Yushin discourse of suffering and redemption. Whereas the state-led nationalism of the Yushin Regime was well focused on why the Korean state should be the savior of national suffering from underdevelopment and national division, its description of 'suffering' was vague and abstract. The UHL, however, confronts the cause of national suffering in a straightforward manner: The nation was suffering because of a national division and the division was caused by the remnants of pro-Japanese collaborators and the Americans that had little interest in recognizing the anti-colonial struggles of the Korean people.

Increased attention to the process of division between the liberation in 1945 and the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948[24] vitiated the official historiography of South Korea profoundly. The Cold War discourses embedded in the National Charter of Education and other key political texts during the Yushin Regime presume that the initial invasion by North Korea in June 1950 was the source of all historical problems. The prolonged national division was

23. In the late 1990s, Korean mass media started to use '386 generation' to refer to a reform-oriented generation that has lived through the democratization movement. The first number, three, means that those student activists entered their 30s in the late 1990s. Eight and six indicate that they received college education in the 1980s and were born in the 1960s.
24. In the mid-1980s, research on this period became an independent field, called "the historical study of the three years after liberation" (*haebang samnyeonsa*).

attributed to Chinese interference in the Korean War. Nevertheless, the newly emerging historiography centered on the process of division fundamentally vitiates the official historiography by diverting attention from the Korean War to the division itself. Simply speaking, the Korean War would not have occurred if historical 'villains' had not forced the national division. Studies of the process of the national division proliferated in the 1980s precisely because it was broadly assumed that an investigation of the mid-1940s would reveal the true villains that caused half a century of national suffering.

In this logical flow, the historical subjectivity is quickly constructed in a new fashion. The subject of suffering is the Korean nation, which did not have the form of nation state in 1945. Therefore, the new historiography constructs a radical demarcation between the Korean nation, the true historical subjectivity, and the South Korean state, which is now seen as a collaborator of the national division. Here, let us look at an exemplary text during the June Struggle.

> *Amid the modern history of foreign invasions and despotic suppressions, we, the Korean citizens (gungmin), had carried out struggles to protect the national pride by keeping up with the splendid traditions of the Gabo Peasants' War, the March First Movement, the April Revolution and the Gwangju People's Struggle, and to build up a harmonious world of democracy.*
>
> *While inscribing the lesson that only brave nations (minjok) can yield the fruits of democracy in our heart, we inaugurated "the National Headquarters for Resisting the Current Constitution and Winning a Democratic Constitution" (hoheon cheolpye minju heonbop jaengchwi bom gungminundong bonbu) to overcome the unprecedented difficulties of the country and to open a bright road toward democracy. We are standing at very important historical crossroads while being earnestly watched by the whole nation and observed by the world; a crossroad which will determine whether we will celebrate the self-esteem of the nation by removing the military dictatorship or remain as slaves of such horrible brutes.*
>
> *Our fatherland's democratization can be achieved only by our hands, our struggles, love and sacrifice. Now, to realize the leap toward the nation's bright and hopeful future, we solemnly swear in front of history and the*

> *nation that we will organize and undertake actions for achievement of a democratic constitution by concentrating all the people's will to democratize.*
>
> *"Let's achieve a democratic constitution and establish a democratic government!"*
>
> *National Headquarters for Resisting the Current Constitution and Winning a Democratic Constitution, 1987. 5.28*[25]

Let us read the above text along with two other texts introduced earlier, the National Charter of Education and the Yonsei University students' statement in 1980. In the latter text, the collective subjectivity of democratization is seriously under-defined. For instance, "we" asks for resolution of democratic forces and demands reflection by the opposition party. Who does "we" refer to in this text? The writers drew upon the tradition of students' struggles against authoritarian rule from the June Third Struggle (1964), or the Anti-Yushin Struggles, but did not contextualize them within the broader modern Korean history. In that sense, "we, the people" is an ahistorical entity with universal claims of democratic rule. On the contrary, the National Charter of Education clearly defined "we" as the historical being, or the subjects of the Korean nation. The narrative of suffering and redemption automatically gives "we" the historical mission of regenerating the nation. In that sense, the historical subjectivity constructed through the charter presumes the separation of state and nation in its narration while the Yushin state is considered to be the savior of the nation.

In contrast to the earlier two texts, a reading of the last text, "Let's achieve a democratic constitution and establish a democratic government!" provides us with a prism to see how dissent discourses in the 1980s had evolved through intensive interactions with the dominant ideology of nationalism during the Yushin regime. Though contemporary political history writing in Korea associates the prior two texts without hesitation, the narrative of suffering and redemption in the last text is the extrapolation of the first text rather than the second one considering how historical subjectivity is constructed. In the last text, the concept of "we" is well historicized in the context of colonialism and

25. The leaflet above is from the author's personal collection.

subsequent authoritarian rule. Democracy is not a citizen's universal right but the historical mission of a nation to escape from a long history of suffering. Therefore, the people's will to democratize the country should be presented in the form of a solemn oath in front of history and the nation, just as individual growth is possible and meaningful only through national growth as put forth in the National Charter of Education.

Conclusion

This essay is a preliminary attempt to seek the discursive continuity between Yushin state nationalism and the resisting ideology of the early 1980s. Though I do not disagree with the traditional interpretation of Korean democratization that emphasizes the growth of Korean civil society based on the emergence of the middle class and the evolving discourses of human rights and democracy under the authoritarian rule, I suggest that readings of modern Korean history require further attention to the interaction between ruling and resisting ideologies. The prevalence of nationalistic discourse among student activists in the 1980s especially needs to be explained in its relationship with the Yushin Regime's effort to use nationalism as an ideological tool to justify their rule.

Though further examination is needed, my study suggests that the evolution of Korean nationalism can be seen as an exemplary case of the paradox of a successful ruling ideology creating the context for its own demise. Havel's analysis of the Eastern European system under the late phase of communism suggests that cynicism or living a lie in a system sustained by empty and meaningless rituals is exactly what the authoritarian state intends to produce to sustain its prolonged rule (Havel 1987). In other words, slogans and campaigns by dictators are not supposed to be believed by their subjects. Then, what if people really believe those empty slogans? Slavoj Zizek answers this question in a straightforward manner: "The greatest catastrophe for the regime would have been for its own ideology to be taken seriously and realized by its subjects" (Zizek 2001:92). Discourses of 1980s dissident students in South Korea indicate that they actively subscribed to the Yushin Regime's discourses of national suffering and redemption in its form, if not contents. Through proactive processes of appropriation of state-led nationalism, indoctrinated students were able to produce their own version of nationalism that fundamentally denies legitimacy of the South Korean state, the original indoctrinator. In that sense,

nationalism in South Korea functioned as hegemony, rather than ideology, since it produced both domination and resistance.

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