FORUM

From Western History to Miscellaneous History and Memory Activism in Postcolonial Korea – An Interview with Jie-Hyun Lim[1]

No, not Finland. In whichever way you look at it, it's beneath, yes, beneath Finland. Can I not put it this way? To those to my east I come from the west, but to those to my west, I come from the east.
Sławomir Mrożek

What did "Western History" mean to you as a historian trained in the South Korean / East Asian context?

I'm listed under the "Western history" section in the Korea Researcher Information (KRI) webpage. So one may say my area of specialization, branches into "East European history," "Western contemporary history," "Western historiography," and "history of Western thought."[2] Whether Eastern Europe is deemed part of the "West" remains a question, but East European history is placed as a subcategory of Western history un-

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2 http://www.kri.go.kr/kri2/ (visited on Juni 6, 2017).

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der the current disciplinary structure of history in the Korean academia. As the Polish dramatist Slawomir Mrożek displaced East and West wittily in the above, Koreans who are to the Poland's east tend to think Poland belongs to the West. When I published a review of the book *Vergangene Grösse und Ohnmacht in Ostmitteleuropa: Repräsentationen imperialer Erfahrung in der Historiographie seit 1918* (2007), in a Korean journal, Frank Hadler, one of the book's editors, confessed to me they were bewildered that a journal named "*The Western History* Review" published a review of their book on Central-Eastern Europe. I found Hadler's remark to be a good indication of the fluidity of East and West in the imaginative geography of historical writing.

When I look back, I think the meandering course I took as a historian was a path of escaping from "Western history" as a discipline. Originally I chose "Western history" as my field after grappling with how to narrow the historical gap between the West and Korea. The West as the universal model of historical development had to be explored to understand the particularity of the Korean course. Thus the origin of my academic journey was lodged expressly in Eurocentrism. I have not entirely failed to unsettle the rigid identity of Western history, though. I have escaped from the Eurocentrism inherent in Western history by identifying myself as a transnational historian with a focus on Eastern Europe and East Asia, but still I am wondering if I overcame the strange discipline of "Western history" or was overcome by its disciplinary power. A couple of years ago, I wrote a paper to answer the question put forth by the Korean Historical Association (KHA), that is, "what is a historian's identity in Korea?" But I tweaked the question a little.

Instead of treating one's identity as a fixed status, I wanted to investigate the identity as a process – "when," "why," and "how" such a (self-) identity was formed and deformed. If you were to ask Korean historians to identify their occupation, nine out of ten times, they will provide their answer in line with the tripartite classification of "national history," "Oriental history," and "Western history." It's embarrassing to witness that historians tend to let their identity dictated by this tripartite configuration. However, a historian's identity is a product of interaction between the institutional identity framed externally and what the self-identity engendered internally. In inquiring about one's identity as a historian, it is more suitable to conduct a genealogical analysis of *identification* rather than to stop at the essentialist understanding of identity. While the question of identity leads historians to accept the tripartite identity of national history, Oriental history, and Western history as a fixed attribute, the notion of identification questions the process of historians' constructing identities.[3]

Can you explain a little bit further what do you understand by identification in contrast to identity?

3 I was inspired by Frederick Cooper's superb argument spurring on the transition of the focus of historical analysis from identity to identification. F. Cooper, Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 59-90.

Identification entails a complicated endeavor to probe the political dynamics of the process wherein the tripartite division of national history, Oriental history, and Western history constitutes a historian's identity. In explaining the emergence of history as a modern discipline and historians' self-identification in East Asia, we can point out the ideological complicity of a nation-state and historiography, the co-figuration of world history and national history, the establishment of "Oriental history" as a Japanese version of Orientalism, the confrontation between, and the cross-penetration of, colonial historiography and nationalist historiography, and the advent of postcolonial historiography as an amalgam of colonial, nationalist, and Marxian strains.[4] Identification as a process demands an effort to delve into the political nature of relations that make a researcher's personal positionality and the structural force of the discipline correspond, combine, conflict, and confront with each other.[3] The interaction of the structural force of the discipline and the agency of an individual historian identifies who is who.

My journey as a historian is closely interwoven with a postcolonial critique of the Korean historiography. It all starts with the belated awakening that my disciplinary position of Western history in the Korean academia identifies who I am as a historian. Am I a "Western historian"? Does my work on the transnational history of Eastern Europe and East Asia, belong to the Western history in Korea? If not, is it subsumed under the rubric of East Asian history, which deals with the modern East Asian historiography? Or, is it part of "postcolonial history of the Korean academia," an heir to imperial Japan's tripartite disciplinary division of national history, Oriental history, and Western history? Rather, is it not best described by "miscellaneous history," which can be none and all at the same time?

What has been your intellectual journey so far to make you a "miscellaneous historian"?

I attended college in the late 1970s when the developmental dictatorship was at its peak. Back in the 1970s, most universities maintained a unitary system of history department with the exception of the Seoul National University where history department was divided into the tripartite structure of national, Oriental and Western history. I remember some senior academicians at SNU such as the late professors Seok-hong Min and Byeong-wu Yang claiming in the mid-1980s that the "departmental division" was intended to assure the establishment of "national history department" as an independent entity. According

4 For an analysis of the political dynamics of identity regarding modern historiography, see S. Tanaka, Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); P. A. Cohen, Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); P. Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation-Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); J.-H. Lim, "The Configuration of Orient and Occident in the Global Chain of National Histories: Writing National Histories in Northeast Asia" in S. Berger et. al. eds. Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media and the Arts (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp. 288-305; J.-H. Lim, "Historicizing the World in East Asia" in: D. Northrop (ed.), A Companion to World History (Chicester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 418-432; J-H. Lim and S. Lee, Kuksaŭi Shinhwarŭl Nŏmŏsŏ (Beyond the Myth of National History) (Seoul: Humanist, 2004); For European historiography and its politics of identity, see Writing National Histories, a 9-volume series published by Palgrave Macmillan UK.

to them, the regime's original plan stipulated the binary division of national history and foreign history but when it ran across strong pushback from the so-called "miscellaneous (non-national history)" historians it settled for what is currently known as the tripartite departmental system. The "Yushin (Regeneration)" as the ideological backbone of the dictatorship in Korea in the 1970s had been implemented through the "nationalization of masses." This included the proclamation of the "Charter of National Education," the reinforcement of activities of "national ceremony' by introducing, for example, saluting the national flag, the strengthening of "national subjectivity" and "education emphasizing national identity," and the emergence of the state-designated official national history textbook. The safeguarding of the independence of national history in terms of departmental formation was most urgently needed to bolster the national subjectivity with an aim to confer the legitimacy on the nationalist mobilization by the dictatorship regime.
The formation of a unitary history department that most universities maintained was not much different from the tripartite departmental formation. The difference mattered only at the undergraduate level. Once admitted to the graduate program, students first had to select a spatial compartment among national history, Oriental history, and Western history. Then, they were to narrow down their field by period in a given spatial compartment, such as ancient Oriental history, medieval Western history, and contemporary Korean history, or by thematic, such as Korean socioeconomic history, Oriental intellectual history, and Western women's history. This disciplinary formation was originally modeled after imperial Japan's curricula. In its tripartite division of history, "history of the Orient" rendered Korea and China into objects of a Japanese Orientalism, whereas "national history" was an ideology invented to justify the historical exceptionalism of Japan, which argued for the departure from Asia and the submersion in Europe. In this view Japan had achieved a western-style modernization unlike other stagnated Oriental societies.
Since majoring history in college, I had been unremittingly interested in the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Korea. Korean society at the time seemed like an exact representation of the process of primitive capital accumulation described by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*. Naturally, Marxism appealed to me as a persuasive framework for interpreting Korean society at the time as well as because of its *narodnikist* sympathy for the oppressed. The way capitalism unfolded in South Korea, fueled by developmental dictatorship, looked to me patently different from the classic path of Western capitalism. It almost assumed the status of a credo at the time to think that the "Prussian path" of capitalist development would aptly explain the peculiarities of South Korean capitalism as exemplified by stubborn vestiges of colonialism and feudal system, political weakness and semi-feudal traits of the bourgeoisie, violent political machinations of developmental dictatorship, the working class deprived of basic labor and social rights and thus remaining inert as "class in itself," frailty of parliamentary democracy, presence of overbearing warden-like state, immaturity of modern individual subjectivity, and so forth.
This strand of thinking has been directly passed on to some leftists in Korea today. As can be seen in the examination of the 2012 presidential election based on Antonio Gramsci's

"passive revolution," it is still used as a framework for analyzing the current political topography of Korea. According to an analysis, for instance, unlike the revolutionary bourgeoisie of France, but much like the Italian bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century who contented themselves with bringing about passive transformation in cahoots with the conservative force, the vulnerable state of the South Korean bourgeoisie tilted toward conservatism led to the electoral victory of the extremely conservative Saenuri (New Frontier) Party.

So, the original interest was understanding the particularities of a Korean path to modernity?

Yes, my interest in capitalist transition in Korea generally sprang from a question of what constituted the particularity of Korean history that set apart the Korean process from the classic path of Western capitalist development. The underlying idea was that the problems entrenched in Korean society in the 1970s and 1980s, such as underdevelopment, dictatorship, and division of the Korean peninsula, could be ascribed to the particularity of Korean history of capitalist development. This idea hardened into a conviction as I took in theoretical nourishment from Maurice Dobb's *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, the debate on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, also known as the Dobb-Sweezy Debate, Japanese Marxian studies of economic history led by the *Kōza-ha* (Lecture's faction) Marxist faction and Takahashi Kohachiro, and the *Sonderweg* thesis in postwar German historiography. A common thread to all these discussions, seemingly disparate from one another, was a comparative historical approach that established the capitalist development of England as a universal model against which the backwardness or particularity of capitalist development in Japan, Germany, Korea, China, India, the Middle East, South America, Africa, and "other miscellaneous" non-Western parts of the world was investigated.

In the *Sonderweg* debate in German historiography, Ralph Dahrendorf's question, "Why was Germany not England?" is a sterling example of directly demonstrating the comparative historical framework of universality-particularity dichotomy. Lurking around the edge of this question is a mental attitude intended to explicate the particularity of German history that went through an abnormal and fascist deviation in the light of the history of England as a model democracy. It presupposes the history of capitalist development in England as the hegemonic mirror of German history. As it turns out, the question raised by Dahrendorf can also be found in a narrative tendency of Eastern European history to assess one's particularity (backwardness) on the basis of its distance from the model development path of the West or in Japan's modern history of thought to construct the discourse of Japanese particularity by positing the Japanese identity or nationality in terms of the gap between Japan and the putative West. Monika Baar has demonstrated it very convincingly for East-Central Europe and Naoki Sakai for Japan. This tendency is not just limited to the historical narratives of both regions. I feel the

discussions on the particularity of Korean history, too, may have set forth the hegemonic mirror of Western history as an epistemological underpinning.

But there are differences between the various Sonderwege, when looking from the West or looking from the East, right?

The trouble is, the minute a non-Western society reflects itself on the hegemonic mirror of the West, singularity of its history is conflated with particularity as shown by Gavin Walker in his 2011 essay on Marxist interpretations of Japanese capitalism. As a consequence, a historical difference, neither superior nor inferior to another difference, becomes incorporated into the hierarchy of historical development with the West on the top and subsequently assigned a rank according to the extent of deviation and distance from Western universality. The dichotomy of "universality and particularity" is formulated into the antipodes of the West-universal-American path and the East-particular-Prussian path in the mainstream Marxist historiography. The statement "countries that are more industrially advanced only show to the less developed the image of their own future" in the preface to *Das Kapital* encapsulates the crux of Marxian "historicism." The unilinear schema of historicism, according to which world history follows a unitary path of historical development, has the effect of temporalizing space by arranging all histories of the world in a global linear time axis. From this it follows that the spatial differences between the West and the East are morphed into the evolutionist temporal differences marked by forwardness and backwardness.

What does that mean for historians?

I think that non-Western historians mired in historicism are bound to strive to spot in their history the hallmarks of Western development, such as rationalism, scientific progress, liberty and equality, middle class, development of cities, human rights and political franchise, and, above all, capitalist mode of production. It is a sort of struggle for recognition to prove that the non-West is as much "peoples with history" as the West. In the Korean historiography, this struggle can be exemplified by the thesis of "sprouts of capitalism," endogenous capitalist development, and the school of *Silhak* (Practical Learning) as a native modernist Enlightenment. However, this struggle devolves into a narrative of tragedy because the chasm between the West and the East can be narrowed somewhat but never bridged. The qualities that one manages to find akin to those of Western history after combing through one's history only have the semblance of sameness but can never be identical to them. The more closely one looks at the so-called similarities to the universal history of the West, the more striking the disparities between the original and fakes become.

In this historicist scheme the gulf between the advanced West and the backward non-West is doomed to perpetuate. From a postcolonial perspective, the struggle for recognition, an effort to evince that a former colony is able to usher in modernity on its own and to earn proper recognition of such development, set off from the outset with a

consequential Eurocentrism engrained in it. This is an illustration of the contradiction of non-Western nationalism in which it becomes increasingly Eurocentric as it intensifies. In retrospect, I feel that, when I chose to focus on Western history at graduate school, my epistemological foundation may have come closest to a naive form of Eurocentrism, as I thought I could investigate Korean society by gaining solid understanding of the West as the hegemonic mirror. In order to prove the thesis of sprouts of Korean capitalism, my thinking went, the understanding of the history of capitalist transition in England should be attained as prior condition. Or queries on the modernity of *Silhak* should be preceded by further investigation of the Enlightenment. Western history was to provide a rationale for national history in Korea.

In terms of theoretical abstraction, I failed to break loose from Eurocentrism lodged in the unilinear schema of Marxist historicism and red Orientalism. When I decided to major in Western history in a bid to gauge the deviated modernity of Korea for its distance from the model modernity of the West, my concern itself was framed by Marxist historicism. An interesting wrinkle that cropped up, however, was a striking coincidence between Marxist historicism and a Whig interpretation of history in which the history of England was a manifestation of an ideal of capitalist development. This is exactly what Geoff Eley pointed out in his critique on the German *Sonderweg* discourse years later as the hermeneutical complicity of Marxism and the Whigs in explaining bourgeois revolution.

Marxian historicism and Eurocentrism had dominated my PhD dissertation in 1988 too. My dissertation was spurred by the idea that a coherent understanding of the NL (Nationalist Liberation) – PD (People's Democracy) debate, which had engulfed the Korean left-wing movement in the 1980s, could be achieved by going back to Marx and Engels's theory of nationalism. In my dissertation of *Marx and Engels on the National Question* I enlisted a newly coined word, "capitalo-centrism," to advocate the Marxian Eurocentrism. As long as the advent of socialism required the material basis of mature capitalism, Eurocentrism would be an unwanted companion to capitalo-centrism. Confronting Marx and Engels's conception of colonial modernization, which, to my great perplexity, gave a nod to colonial Britain, France, and America from a viewpoint of progress of civilization, I accentuated capitalo-centrism as a theoretical rationale. I had been roaming in the orbit of Marxist historicism, consequential Eurocentrism, and self-Orientalism.[5] As a matter of fact, postcolonialism, post-Marxism, and postmodernism were not found in my history recipes as yet.

How have things evolved then?

The passage quoted at the opening of our interview is part of a character's lines quoted from *Kontrakt* (*the Contract*), a play by the Polish playwright Sławomir Mrożek. Bereźnica Wyżna, the hometown of one of the characters, is a hamlet with a little fewer than three

5 J.-H. Lim, Markŭs.enggelsŭwa Minjongmunje (Marx-Engels and the National Question), (Seoul: Tamgudang, 1990) and "Marx's Theory of Imperialism and the Irish National Question," Science & Society 56 (Summer, 1992).

hundred people, nestled in the Carpathian Mountains stretching through the border zones of Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine. This tiny village, not widely known to even Polish people, has salient features of floating identities in the typical *kresy* (borderland). No other evidence is as intriguing as the Polish census of 1931. Asked of their ethnicity, many *kresy* respondents identified themselves as *tutejszy* (we are from here), but as neither Polish nor Ukrainian or Belorussian.

As indicated in his fictive figure from neither the East nor the West but from both, Mrożek is masterful in disconcerting the complacency of our common sense with the implement of his pithy, biting lines. From a macro perspective, this play can be appraised as a text of intellectual history, testifying to the discursive location of Poland, a country that can belong to neither the East nor the West and yet both at the same time.

What brought you to Poland?

It was Rosa Luxemburg, a Polish-Jewish Marxist exalted as the most brilliant mind since Marx, who lured me to Poland. While reading Rosa Luxemburg, I came to learn about the fierce debates on the national question amongst Polish socialists at the turn of the twentieth century. The way the "PPS" (Polish Socialist Party) with Polish independence as its platform locked its horns with the "SDKPiL" (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania) looking to the Russian Revolution for the resolution of the Polish question, in many respects, reminded me of the aforementioned NL-PD debate that was framed in the dichotomy of national and class struggles with national reunification and social revolution in Korea set as their respective priority in the 1980s.[6] Throughout the decade of the 1990s, I flew to Poland whenever I could – including my first sabbatical. A first-hand experience of the locus of really existed socialism in Poland made me ponder over the surreal absurdity of socialism as a historical reality, which contributed to adjusting my critical gaze on Eurocentric Marxism, red Orientalism, and Marxist historicism. Probably, it was from that moment that I started to cross over the boundaries of the discipline of Western history by criticizing Marxist historicism. Without the fall of the Cold War, none of this would have happened.

What have you been impressed by most when visiting Poland?

As I became conversant with Polish local affairs, my interest in Polish history became far broader in scope. Before I embarked on a book entitled, *Kŭtaetŭlŭi Chayu*, *Wuritŭlŭi Chayu – P'ollandŭ Minjokhaepangwundongsa* (*For Your Freedom and Our Freedom – the*

6 The following studies resulted from that period: "Rosa Luxemburg on the Dialectics of Proletarian Internationalism and Social Patriotism," Science & Society 59, no.4 (winter, 1995/96); "The 'Good Old Cause' in the New Polish Left Historiography," Science & Society 61, no.2 (winter, 1997); "Labour and the National Question in Poland," in Nationalism, Labour and Ethnicity 1870–1939, eds. S. Berger and A. Smith (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1999); "'P'ollandŭ Sahoetang (PPS) gwa P'ollandŭwangguk Sahoeminjutang' (SDKPiL)ŭi Minjongmunjenonjaeng – Ch'angdangsiki (1892–1894) rŭl Chungsimŭro (The Debates on the National Question between the PPS and the SDKPiL – focused on the period of establishing the parties [1892–1894])," Yŏksahakpo 134-135 (September, 1992).

History of Polish Irredentist Movement) (1999), I had a chance to extensively read the modern and contemporary history of Poland. Along the way, I often found myself viewing the history of national movement in Korea through the prism of Polish history. It was an experience quite different from the conventional comparative history which examines the particularity of the Korean national movement history in comparison with the Western universality. I was able to make critical reassessment of nationalist narratives of Korea and Poland by making the two different historical "singularities" of peripheries collide on a leveled ground of comparison. This experience – critical understanding of Polish national movement that prompted more thoughtful reflection on Korean nationalist narratives and, in turn, critical engagement in the Korean national historiography that led to deconstruction of Polish nationalist narratives – was certainly a novelty. From this critical interaction resulted a paper, which I presented in the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Oslo in 2000 to expound on how the party historiographies of People's Poland and North Korea were nationalist narratives masqueraded as socialism.[7] "A Critical Examination of National Narratives in the Korean Historiography," published in *Historical Criticism* (summer, 1994), was another product stemming from the critical examination of Polish historiography. The paper was not entirely free from the grip of Eurocentrism or red Orientalism, but I think it may have differed, albeit slightly, from the existing comparative historical studies that reflected the particularity of Korean national movement on the West's hegemonic mirror. The paper attempted to defy the nationalist narrative of Korean historiography by means of alluding to similar historiographical context of Eastern Europe more than theoretical criticism of cultural studies or postcolonialism. But the self-defensive reactions from the Korean historical academia brought home to me the implacability of the wall between Korean history and Western history once again.

You moved then on to labour history and the history of the workers movement?

Yes, my studies of Polish socialists' debate on national question began to make progress by degrees. It was around this time when I first participated as part of the Polish delegation in the International Conference of Labor and Social History (ITH) held annually in Linz, Austria. I still remember, like it was yesterday, the delightful journey I took with some of the prominent Polish experts of labor history and socialist movement and the deep friendship I forged with them. Amid this excitement, I was shaken by an incident which made me realize once again the presence of Eurocentrism deeply etched on my mind. After publishing the paper on Rosa Luxemberg and the national question in *Science and Society* in 1995, I was asked to contribute a section on Poland to *Nationalism, Labour, and Ethnicity 1870–1939* (1999), a book project edited by Stefan Berger and Angel Smith. Among the comments I got as feedback on my draft I was frightened by

7 J.-H. Lim, "The Nationalist Message in Socialist Code: On Court Historiography in People's Poland and North Korea," in Making Sense of Global History: The 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences Commemorative Volume, ed. S. Sogner (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001).

Smith's. He asked me point-blank if I still believe in the validity of the German *Sonderweg* thesis. He was referring to the part where I epitomized the historical peculiarities of the Polish labor movement as the Prussian path of capitalist development. Right at that moment I became fully aware that the major Polish historiography I had consulted is the Polish version of the *Sonderweg* thesis.

When a British historian of the Spanish Civil War pointed out that my interpretation of the Polish labor history reiterated that thesis, I was at a loss for what to express about the oddity and the heft of my shock. I suspect that Smith's keen sensibility toward the *Sonderweg* emanated from his scholarly focus on the history of Spain, another "Orient" of Europe. In retrospect, a crack in the thesis opened by the clashing of concrete experiences of Spain, Poland, and Korea was indeed a way out of the tyranny of Eurocentrism. And yet, what astounded me more was his far-reaching perspective that enabled him to move beyond his focus on the Spanish Civil War and use the *Sonderweg* thesis as a lever to ferret out the very problem of the dominant narratives of the Polish historiography.

At the time I still found it difficult to fully reflect the implication of his feedback in my writings on the Polish labor history. It was because I lacked, above all, the insightful knowledge to invalidate the prevailing interpretation of Polish historiography by formulating an alternative narrative.

What have you found appealing beyond the Sonderweg thesis?

Years after the awakening of the Polish *Sonderweg*, I had a chance to talk about the possibility of extending the approach of subaltern studies to the Polish historiography by the invitation of the Japanese Society for Eastern European History. I was able to think of such a thematic thanks to Smith's critique which induced me to a wide-ranging transversality of historical thinking beyond regional borders and historical specificities. One thing that figured clearly in my mind, though, was an idea of tackling modern and contemporary history of Central and Eastern Europe from a postcolonial angle. "A Postcolonial Reading of the *Sonderweg*: Marxist Historicism Revisited" (2014) was my very much delayed attempt to finally do the age-long homework given by Smith.[8]

Another precious outcome from a history lab of Poland was that I came to view "West", "East", "Europe" or "Asia" as imaginative geography, a politico-historical construction. The geographical categorization of Polish studies, designated as *Ostforschung* (Eastern Studies) in Germany, and German studies, labeled as *Studia Zachodnie* (Western Studies) in Poland, carries imaginative geography tellingly. When national history is placed in the global chain of historical thinking, say, France-Germany-Poland-Russia, the fluidity of the East and the West as imaginative geography becomes clearer. In German historical consciousness, in which German *Kultur* was pitted against French *civilisation*, France was deemed as the West, whereas it was Germany that took the position of the West in

8 J-H. Lim, "A Postcolonial Reading of the German *Sonderweg*: Marxist Historicism Resivited," Journal of Modern European History vol. 12, No. 2 (2014).

German *Ostforschung*, i.e. Orientalist studies on Poland. In contrast, Poland as a German East considered itself as the West in relation to "Asiatic" Russia, which was denigrated as Tartars by the West and which in turn claimed the membership of the West vis à vis its Asian neighbors. In the wake of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan went so far as to treat its northern foe as part of the Orient, positing itself as the West.

Far from being a geo-positivist fixations, "West" and "East" are the liquid concepts flowing and shifting according to its discursive location. My understanding of the fluidity of the East and the West at the intersection of Korea and Poland may have come from my being able to investigate Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and East Asia in conjunction with one another.[9] The unique status of Polish socialist movement as a bridge between the pragmatism of German Social Democratic Party's reformist platform and the radicalism of the Bolsheviks' revolutionary voluntarism can be understood in the same vein. Stuck between Russia and Germany, Polish socialists could not but feel alienated as they perceived Germany's reform policy to be unrealistic, while not bothering to conceal their strong self-assurance in the face of Lenin's "Tartar Marxism." It is by no means a coincidence that a body of excellent studies on the insoluble dilemma of Polish socialism was published under the title of *Między wschodem a zachodem* (*Between East and West*) in 1995 by Pawel Samuś and Andrzej Grabski. Seen from "between the East and the West," their parameters that appeared unyielding were, in fact, only imagined boundaries that were constantly in flux.

What did Poland mean to a Korean leftist intellectual who confessed to me that he had felt odd at the sight of white people living in such dire poverty during his East European trip after the Fall? Was it the East? Or the West? How disparate was his perception from the mindset of a Nazi who flatly referred to Ukrainians as "white Negros"? What were the feelings that came across Japanese soldiers when they confronted Russians in the conflicts such as the Russo-Japanese War and the Japanese Siberian Intervention? What to make of Polish intellectuals' entreaties to use the appellation of Central Europe or Central Eastern Europe instead of Eastern Europe? As the delimitation of West and East that seemed like an obstinate geographical reality began crumbling down in my mind, perhaps I was able to move on to the perspectives of "global history," "transnational history," "histoire croiseé," "border history," and so forth. In the 1990s, though, I still had to grope my way around in the dark.

How have you moved out of that trap?

What I experienced in the 1990s while grappling with Polish history was dear to me in many ways. I was lucky to live through the illusion of the transition from capitalism to socialism under the developmental dictatorship in Korea and witness a "reverse transition" from socialism to capitalism in Poland after the Fall of 1989. Not many historians

9 J.-H. Lim, "Displacing East and West: Towards a postcolonial reading of "*Ostforschung*" and "Myśl Zachodnia" in www.trranseuropeennes.eu/en/articles/354/Displacing_East_and_West.

would be fortunate enough to experience the two divergent courses of transition in such a short interval. Having experienced the opposite transformations in Poland and Korea, I could not but seize upon the question of historical transformation. My wishful thinking that a society would change for the better if a social revolution were driven by a good hegemony such as that of the Bolshevik Revolution was too naïve. Social revolution and system change, even in its fundamental sense, would not simply usher in a new world. The purview of Marxist paradigm of revolution seemed confined within the realms of relations of production and related institutions, thus lacking critical understanding of the domination and exploitation of power in everyday life. The worst outcome of such failure was to let the party nomenklatura legitimize their power.

A great deal of reflection and soul-searching led me to put together a special issue of *Tangtaepip'yŏng* (*Contemporary Criticism*), a Korean journal of criticisms on social, political, and economic issues, and compose an essay titled "Reading the Code of Everyday Fascism." Unless accompanied by democratization of everyday thinking and practice, the process of which goes beyond modification of legal and institutional aspects, I contended, the democratization of Korean society would not be free from everyday fascism.[10] It came from my reflection on the history of the People's Poland. In formulating everyday fascism, I got a lot of methodological inspiration from "new cultural history" including Lynn Hunt's writings on the French Revolution. Upon reading new cultural history of the French Revolution, I formed an opinion, though inchoate, that this method could be directly applied to the Bolshevik Revolution. Unfortunately, however, the new cultural history, once introduced in Korea, was misunderstood by scholars engaged in the conventional style of social history as a conservative political agenda in a new cloak that would leave a social structure intact. At the same time, much to my regret, it was those bringing the new cultural history to Korea that may have ended up "depoliticizing" the topic. Though I am not an expert in the field, it still grieves me that the lack of understanding from both sides of the argument brought to naught the transformative potential of the new cultural history.

You then went on to the analysis of mass dictatorship. What is meant by this term and what has been the motivation behind that move?

The thesis of "mass dictatorship" was an attempt to apply the issue of everyday fascism to scholarship on dictatorships in the twentieth century.[11] In formulating mass dictatorship, I was inspired by the thought-provoking essays on People's Poland in *ofiary czy współwinny* (*Victims or Accomplices?*) (1997) that criticized the martyrdom-view of history steeped in people's sublime sacrifices and heroic struggles. Its argument that the mass could be not only the victims of dictatorship but also its accomplices was still

10 J.-H. Lim et al., Uri Anŭi P'asisŭm (Fascism in Us) (Seoul: Samin, 2000).

11 The Mass Dictatorship series is the 5-volume project published by Palgrave Macmillan and dealing with "gender politics," "modernity," "cultural imagination," "politics of memory" and "history of everyday lives". In addition the Palgrave Handbook of Mass Dictatorship has been published more recently.

more of a hypothesis, but Copernican enough. Then I was stunned yet another time by the social memory of the developmental dictatorship under the rule of Park Chung-hee. The controversy set off in 1999 by the project of building a memorial for the dictator Park under the Kim Dae-jung government was an outright testament to the nostalgia for Park's reign deeply rooted in the public memory. Reading news articles and reports that an overwhelming majority favored a memorial project of Park Chung-hee and that he was ranked as the top historical figure to emulate in a survey of students at the leading universities in Seoul, I had to reassess the conventional way of thinking about dictatorship – that is, a form of government in which a few bad men rule innocent people through the apparatus of coercion and violence.

Parallels to German debates come to mind again …

Indeed, it was an interesting coincidence that the Center for Contemporary History (ZZF) in Potsdam, Germany, presented a body of research interpreting GDR's really existed socialism and Nazism as a "welfare dictatorship" (*Fürsorgediktatur*) and a "dictatorship by consent" (*Konsensdiktatur*) respectively. Studies on fascist Italy with an emphasis on "consent" from below further propelled me to revisit the very assumptions of dictatorship in the twentieth century. In 2000, a year after raising the issue of "everyday fascism," I published a historico-political essay titled "War of Position and Dictatorship by Consent in Fascism" in *Tangtaepip'yŏng*. However, the essay drew severe reactions from both the left and the right. The former could not stomach the idea of popular endorsement of Nazism or the Park Chung-hee dictatorship, whereas the latter was indignant over the indication that Stalinism and the Kim Il-sung regime were maintained with the support of the masses. Still, I strove to press ahead with the debate, since I thought that, instead of simply accepting the belief in the moral righteousness of people, gazing directly in "dictatorship from below" enabled by grass-roots support could be a first step in making critical memories about the dictatorship's past.

Interestingly, there is an uncanny symmetry between Polish right-wing critics' reaction to Victims or Accomplices? and that of Korean leftist intellectuals to mass dictatorship. The baseline of their thinking was the moral inconceivability of popular support, whether in Poland or in Korea, for such evil regimes as real socialism or the Park's developmental dictatorship. Through this transnational experience, I was able to understand dictatorship, leftist and rightist alike, as a response to global modernity – a perception that subsequently developed into a view treating mass dictatorship as a transnational social formation. As I came to note the continuity of colonial practice and violence between Western colonialism and mass dictatorship, I could challenge commonsensical categorization of world history in which democracy and dictatorship are equated with such dichotomies as the West and the non-West, the modern and the premodern, or normality and aber-

ration. Western liberal democracy and non-Western mass dictatorship were not so much historical opposites as both sides of the same coin called global history of modernity.[12]

But the turn towards world history and the critique of national history writing went hand in hand?

In the meantime, I launched a joint criticism of "national history" at a regional level of East Asia by organizing the East Asian History Forum for Criticism and Solidarity. This move was met with harsh reactions that warned against the perils of disarming Korean nationalism at a time when the tide of historical revisionism and nationalist reactionary tendency was rising high in Japan. On the contrary, the East Asian History Forum's critique of national history, which simultaneously engaged Korea, China, and Japan, stemmed from the need of deconstructing an "antagonistic complicity" of nationalisms. I was convinced that a critical appraisal of Korean nationalism would break the links of the antagonistic complicity and it would constitute a fundamental rebuke to Japan's historical revisionism. Underneath my conviction lay a suspicion that a holy alliance between the Japanese left-wing intellectuals and the Korean nationalist intelligentsia with the aim of criticizing Japanese imperial nationalism ended up justifying nationalism of the Korean peninsula and, in turn, reinforcing and validating that of Japan. The Japanese partners at the History Forum kept the criticism cautious even on Korean nationalism, compared to "conscientious intellectuals" who lambasted their country's nationalism while showing a boundless generosity for their neighbor's nationalism.

Why at that point your interest in the culture and politics of history and memory started anew and focused now on the educational system and East Asian textbook quarrels?

It is intriguing to notice that *Sankei Shinbun*, a conservative Japanese daily newspaper that fully supported the revisionist Japanese "*New History Textbook*" (*Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho*), published a peculiar series of articles analyzing South Korean history textbooks in 2001. While clearly the stance in the Korean textbooks on Japan's colonization of the Korean peninsula differed markedly from the neo-nationalist Japanese account, the tone of the articles was not negative at all; indeed, Korean history textbooks were praised by the *Sankei Shinbun*'s Seoul correspondent for their firm basis in ethnocentric national history. In dozens of articles dedicated to the analysis of Asian history textbooks, the *Sankei* correspondent justified the *New History Textbook* by referring repeatedly to ethnocentric Korean history textbooks. In comparing Korean and Japanese history textbooks, he located a master narrative common to both, one in which "our nation" is the subject of history. Korean history textbooks thus confirmed his conviction that history textbooks

12 See J.-H. Lim, "Series Introduction: Mapping Mass Dictatorship: Towards a Transnational History of Twentieth-Century Dictatorship," in Jie-Hyun Lim and Karen Petrone (eds.), Gender Politics and Mass Dictatorship: Global Perspectives (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1-22.

should teach children of all nationalities "national pride" and "love for our own history."[13] This seemingly ironic episode helps to illuminate the topography of competing national histories in East Asia. Leaving aside some obvious falsehoods, distortions, and intentional silences, the history textbook conflict in East Asia appears not as a question of "right or wrong" to be proven by objective facts, but as the inevitable collision of conflicting nation-centered interpretations. If reality is a cognitive construction, then historical facts – in this context at least – may be said to be constructed by the nationalist *episteme*; that is, the reality of the past is constructed by the present idea of the nation. I named this a "nationalist phenomenology" because nationalism not only informs, but actually determines the construction of historical narratives in East Asian history textbooks. The methodological naivety of closing eyes to the nationalist episteme undergirding both Korean and Japanese national histories is not helpful at all. A critical assessment of the epistemological logic of the *New History Textbook*, the scope of which goes beyond mere positivistic criticism, would be compelling only if it were followed by criticism of the epistemological basis shared between the concrete historical narratives of the Korean state-approved textbook and the Japanese textbook. That was the starting point of the History Forum.

The controversy over the history of Kokuryŏ between China and Korea, triggered by the Northeast Project in China, transpired under similar circumstances. It only seemed a matter of time before the framework of the Chinese history textbook delimiting the current territory of People's Republic of China as the spatial category of Chinese history were bound to clash with that of the Korean history textbook equating the spatial category of Korean history with the historical space of Korean people. Both sides shared the same *episteme* of "national history" that tried to appropriate Kokuryŏ by applying the concept of modern nation-state's border to a distant past. I convened the international conference of "Frontiers or Borders?" in 2004, with its slogan of "Kokuryŏ History to Kokuryŏ People!" By introducing the frame of the reference of border history, I tried to rescue the history from nation by presenting "border history of cross-cultural diversity, complexity, and dynamics" as the alternative to national history.[14] The Lithuanian historian Linas Eriksonas's response still reverberates in my memory when he was asked to talk about the issue of frontiers and borders in Eastern Europe. I remember being embarrassed by his remark that Eastern Europe had long been done with such puerile debates and that it was just amazing to see East Asia still engaged in them. Come to think of it, though, European history, too, was strewn with countless controversies akin to those concerning Kokuryŏ history. Among the examples of the arguments are the dissensions between Germany and Poland over Gdańsk / Danzig and over Śląsk / Schlesien or the disputes between Poland and Lithuania over Vilnius / Wilno, or between Poland and Ukraine over L'viv / Lwów. The discord over history of

13 Sankei Shinbun, 25/06 and 26/06/2001.

14 Jie-Hyun Lim (ed.), Kŭndaeŭi Kukkyŏng, Yŏksaŭi Pyŏn'gyŏng – Pyŏn'gyŏnge sŏsŏ Yŏksarŭl Parapoda (Frontiers or Borders – History Seen from Borders), (Seoul: Humanist, 2004).

the "Visigoths" that had embroiled historians of Spain and Norway, the countries not even sharing borders but separated thousands of kilometers from each other, sounds more interesting. Visigoths had settled in the today's Spain after departing from southern Scandinavia. The history of historiography in a broad perspective shows that disagreement on the history of Kokuryŏ is a contention endemic to ways of thinking about national history rather than an indication of the particularity of East Asian history. The "Frontiers or Borders?" conference was organized as an effort in search of an alternative beyond mere critiquing of national history. Obviously, Western history or Eastern history could not be an answer. "Comparative history," "history of civilization," and "world history" each came up short to be an alternative to the national history paradigm. What helped relieve me of these concerns over an alternative was my first-hand observation of a large-scale history project sponsored by the European Science Foundation, "Representation of Past: Writing National Histories in Europe," as I participated as an outside expert. In the course of the project, I was impressed by the efforts of these European historians to shift away from the convention of "history of international relations" to the novelty of "border history," "entangled history," "overlapping history," "transnational history," and "global history" – particularly by the sheer scale of the organization and financial support for the project, as well as the research methodology and other substantial aspects of their studies.

What were your contacts with the global history movement – if there is one and not a multitude of approaches?

One of the formative experiences in my academic growth was when I was fortunate enough to take part in "Global History, Globally" – a project led jointly by Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier. It gave me an opportunity to think about and discuss global history or transnational history as an alternative to national history. The most beneficial takeaway for me was that global history carries with it a political agenda of the "globalization from below" instead of capital-led globalization from above. The project made it clear that global history is a way of the periphery challenging the metropole. It also emphasized global history, whose ambition had been nourished with dependency theory, Subaltern Studies, Marxian theory of world system, and feminist theory, as a non-Western alternative to the way the West thinks of history. When one examines the post-nineteenth century history of modern historiography from a global perspective, it indicates that the so-called national history, originated from Europe's modern nation-states, spread to the peripheries along the paths of colonialism. From a postcolonial perspective that views the resistance nationalism as the mirroring effect of colonialism, the periphery's national history is an exact reiteration of Eurocentric or colonial discourse under the cover of nationalism.

How would you describe your position between the professional historian and the memory activist?

In an essay written in the waning years of his life, Raul Hilberg asked, "[Then] is it not equally barbaric to write footnotes after Auschwitz?" Even the title of the essay, "I was Not There," is not ordinary.[15] The question that reads certainly like a variation of Adorno's dictum about poetry and Auschwitz is surprising, even more so when it is raised by a pioneering historian known for his rigorous and solid empirical studies on the Holocaust. It is difficult to imagine that a historian of his standing posed such a question in order to negate the duty of a historian to come to grips with historical facts. To me, instead, he appears to emphasize that finding the truth about the Holocaust, an endeavor which often needs to rely on survivors' testimonies and memories alone, is different from a general process of examining historical facts on the basis of visible evidence and written materials. Since the accuracy of testimonies, as deposits of memory, is often called into question, they are destined to be put at a disadvantage as compared to written records in a truth game of history that requires representation of facts.

Then, a situation, where the perpetrators / oppressors monopolize narratives and history with the victims / oppressed left only with experiences and testimonies, poses a grave ethical problem in representation of history. After all, Hilberg's query, posed as if asking back whether stories told, however "inaccurate," would not be more important than "accurate" evidence, converges toward an issue of how to define the nature of relationship between the episteme of history and morality. For now, I think an answer to Hilberg's question can be found in the "aporia of Auschwitz." The epistemological task given to a historian by the Auschwitz experience is to choose which position to take in the face of the irresoluble contradiction between fact and truth.

For instance, when one female Holocaust survivor, while recollecting the armed uprising by some of the Auschwitz inmates, said, "[W]e saw four chimneys going up in flames, exploding," her testimony was adjudicated as false by the historians testifying to the fact that there was only one chimney in the crematorium in her camp. In defense of the testifier, however, Dori Laub, a Jewish Romanian psychologist, pointed out that her memory became inevitably exaggerated in relating the unbelievable event she had witnessed. While "intellectual memory" is compatible with fact, "deep memory" such as trauma tends to be contrary to fact in the swirl of stirred emotions. It is nevertheless hard to deny that deep memory is regarded more authentic as memory than intellectual memory. When our attention is turned on East Asia, a view driven by crude positivism, as it tries to paint the Comfort Women's testimonies as lies on the ground that they cannot be verified, clearly fails to understand the "aporia of Auschwitz."

Whenever I read testimonies of Holocaust survivors or comfort women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese army, I realize that it is not that the subaltern cannot speak (as Spivak's famous article suggests) but that historians cannot listen. The duty of the historian, when the victim of the trauma of genocide or sexual slavery speaks, I think, is to listen as a "memory activist" to their deep memory – precisely because of, not despite,

15 Raul Hilberg, "I was not there," in Writing and the Holocaust , ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), pp. 17, 20, 25.

their words being inconsistent with fact – and help recover the authenticity of their memory, rather than as an "interrogator" subject their memory to a polygraph test by wielding the much-treasured sword of written hard evidence. The transposition from a historian to a memory activist, for me, is primarily a corollary of what the episteme of memory entails, but at the same time a conclusion I have reached after thinking over the role of a historian in East Asia's history wars that are becoming increasingly pitiable. The historian's work is to construct social memories of the past, and in this sense they are memory activist whether they want it or not.

More recently I realize that after having shifted my position from a Western historian to a historian, I have been attempting another change--from historian to memory activist--since embarking on the "transnational memory" project.[16] When I confront East Asia as a warring memory space, I have to make clearer my position as a memory activist. This invites to think about the possibility of maintaining a critical tension between history and memory studies. Is history beginning to change? Or am I the one to simply leave history behind? And is this transition desirable academically, politically, and morally? What are the conditions that enable the historian and the memory activist to hold both identities in healthy check and nurture each other?

These questions, with no ready answers, can be frustrating, but I think that solutions are all the harder to find for the desperation with which the queries are raised. One thing that I hope for is that should I find these answers in years later, I will be able to talk about how my identity as a historian has been changing and what were the circumstantial delimitation inducing and constructing each of my multiple identities and its political implication.

16 In the following writings on "transnational memory," I tried to articulate my stance as a "memory activist" who thinks about history beyond national boundaries: "Second World War in Global Memory Space," in Cambridge History of Second World War, eds. M. Geyer and A. Tooze (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); "Victimhood Nationalism in Contested Memories-Mourning Nations and Global Accountability" in Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories, eds. A. Assmann and S. Conrad (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).