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Asiatic Mode of Production as Method: The Discourse of Democracy and Modernity in Korea¹

1. Between Stagnation of Critique and Inflation of Alterity

Is there an alternative path to modern democracy? What insights may we gain into redefining the process of social transformation or modernization based on the Meiji Restoration's Social Darwinist backdrop, Chinese capitalism initiated at the impasse between continuous or permanent revolution, or Korea's widespread integration of colonial modernist heritage and the American modernization agenda into a passion for democracy, despite the country's anti-communist division? Is the Asian "experience" a legitimization of modernity and democracy? Or is it an "exception" that demands a new theory of transformation and change?

In a sense, these questions address whether transformations in Asia have appropriated or overcome the classic historical development model of Euro-American theory through a certain "vernacular" political practice and historical rewriting. For long periods during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the classical historical development theory held that Asia was incapable of change by its own volition, and that European intervention and imperialism alone was the singular path to modernization. As the representative example of the divergence between European theoretical perspectives and the Asian historical experience, Marx's theory of the Asiatic Mode of Production (hereafter AMP) garnered a global debate the scale of which is incomparable. Marx's theory of historical materialism reported an enormous transformation. Yet simultaneously, Asia was reflecting on why it, too, could not change in the manner of the West. How did Asia's rev-

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olutionaries, politicians, and intellectuals (re)adapt the Euro-American universalist metaphor to their own vernacular historical context?

Around 1850 Marx noticed that his historical development theory displayed coherence, but only in certain societies within Europe. Therefore, he created a term to designate the discrepancies and differences that arose from within his theory, which came to be called AMP. In order to explain outliers in his theory Marx formulated the AMP and disarticulated the Asian from the European experience, the former path characterized by East Asian absolutism, civil works such as central government-directed irrigation and state control of land, a small number of large urban centers and the concentration of populations in scattered rural areas marked by strong county and prefectural organization, and a feudal system of underdevelopment and paltry commercial activity, all of which combined to create centuries of “long stagnation” throughout Asia². In nearly all non-European societies, including the Islamic world, Russia, China and East Asia, South Asia and Latin America, Marx’s theory of historical progression does not apply based on relations of ownership, political institutions, and forms of industry. The theory of this difference is none other than the AMP. Regions that do not fit into Marx’s five stages of history are referred to as “the Asias.” Though the highly impoverished theoretical framework encompassing nearly every nation outside of Europe was constantly challenged when confronted with matters of developmental region and developmental history, Marx’s theory of “development” and “change” survived until the late twentieth century, despite the fact that Marx himself had little faith in the possibility of independent change in Asia.

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For example, the decades-long debate between Korea’s internal development theorists advocating an historical development model parallel to Europe, and colonial modernization theorists arguing that imperial intervention was an indispensable factor in modernization, may be seen as a contemporary example of a debate over the existence of the AMP and historical attribution. Euro-American philosophy has cited the adjective “Asian” and its various applied concepts from the dual perspectives of tyranny and alternative, while post-colonialism and cultural studies have resurrected AMP as a metaphor for the Third-World

² Joshua Fogel, “The Debates over the Asiatic Mode of Production in Soviet Russia, China, and Japan” in: *The American Historical Review* 93, 1988, pp. 56–79.

subaltern geo-body in a critique of global inequality and injustice. Ironically, an AMP that attempts to theorize exception has become one of the most active agendas for the past century in both Asia and Europe. At times it has been used as an instrument of domination to prove the legitimacy of colonial subjugation, at other times adapted to invoke the historical urgency of a transition to communism, while simultaneously serving as the source of capitalist territorialization and the mantle on the backs of the global subaltern. Unexpected lessons may be gleaned from this battlefield of discourse.

The twentieth-century Asian experience, despite being theorized as an “alternative” to the European experience aiming at the same vision of modernization and communism, is now associated with an Asian revivalism since the 1980s and an alternative historical trajectory toward modernity. Sensitive to the question posed by Dirlik³ of how to salvage the demands for social equality and political justice which emerges from the attempt to advocate alternative and multiple modernities, I now turn my attention to a reexamination of the “global” theory of AMP and its attempt to theorize exception.

2. First as Governor-General, Then As Revolutionist

In 1853, Marx began to focus his research on Asia, particularly India. It can be inferred that social theory relating to Asia began to be formulated through the correspondence of Marx and Engels. These were a series of writings emerging from an atmosphere of present urgency, and the article that is regarded as Marx’s clearest articulation of his Asian social theory appears in the June 25, 1853 edition of the *New York Daily Tribune* under the title “The British Rule in India.”⁴ In this article, Marx’s description of Indian “little republics” emphasized stagnation in Asian society. In this way, Marx again confirms that destroying the village community is an inevitable condition in the Europeanization of India.⁵ It is therefore apparent that underlying such statements was the so-called capital-centered “restrictive stage theory”⁶ postulating that, following Asian

³ Arif Dirlik, “Thinking Modernity Historically: Is ‘Alternative Modernity’ the Answer?” in: *Asian Review of World Histories* 1, 2013, pp. 5–44.

⁴ Karl Marx, “The British Rule in India” in: *New York Daily Tribune* 3804, June 25, 1853, p. 5.

⁵ Yi Seyōng, *Han’guksa yōn’gu wa kwahaksōng* (Sōul: Ch’ōngnyōnsa, 1997), pp. 147–56.

⁶ Ho Duk Hwang, “Stairs of Metaphor: The Vernacular Substitution–Supplements of South Korean Communism,” *The Idea of Communism* 3, Slavoj Žižek and Alex Taek-Gwang Lee

society's subsumption into the capitalist world order, socialism could only be achieved by passing through the capitalist stage of production.

The focus here is not on a critique of Orientalism, which is in continuity with Marxism. More importantly, the root of such thinking is that there exists a unilinear and progressive historical stage theory related to so-called productivity and modes of production, and that this stage is premised on properties that cannot be bypassed or compressed. Revolution does not occur suddenly, but must ripen over time. In order to proceed to a capitalist society, Asian society lacking feudalism must endure colonialism.

The idea that intervening in Asia was necessary for the purpose of historical development and transformation was being propagated among Japanese economic leaders in the span of mere decades. That is, it was justified as “scientific and theoretical,” as demonstrated in the following thoughts expressed by the early Japanese Marxist Fukuda Tokugawa:

In today's Korea [...] on this issue of land there is only a vague concept of public ownership. [T]he concept of land ownership is completely absent. Landlords, too, are non-existent. If one were pressed to find an owner, there is only the crown; though, in truth, this is an empty appellation.⁷

Fukuda's argument is straightforward. The nominal national ownership of land and hence the lack of private estate ownership—in other words the absence of the feudal system—was the ultimate cause of underdevelopment in agricultural production, and as a result the “merchant could not exist in Chosŏn”. In like fashion Fukuda concludes, “commerce as well is moribund, and there is no social division of labor that is worthy of the label ‘industry’. The only thing that exists is temporary wage labor [賃仕業, *Lohnwerk*], while domestic work [domestic industry] does not exist”. As evidence, Fukuda points out that such merchants were regarded as “handicraftsmen,” a kind of occupational identity much more despised than general villagers. Fukuda held that the rural village in Chosŏn Korea was a place where primitive community, one in which com-

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(eds.), (London: Verso, 2016), pp. 191–211.

⁷ Fukuda Tokugawa, “Kankoku no keizai soshiki to keizai tani,” (1904), quoted in Moritani Katsumi, *Ajiateki seisan yōshikiron*, Ikuseisha, Tōkyō 1937, p. 267.

munal village autonomy based on hereditary social control, was stubbornly protected. Despite Fukuda's scientific approach, his desire to explore Chosŏn society from its earliest history through its disintegration and to examine evidence of its "stagnation" permeates his entire research project. Fukuda, who studied at the University of Munich from 1898–1900 under Lujo Brentano, one of the premier scholars of German socialism, published "Die gesellschaftliche und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in Japan" in 1900, which was also edited by Brentano.⁸ Here Fukuda asserted Western/Japanese isomorphism, in the process invoking Chosŏn as an example of deviation from general laws. "Korea," as a "special case among special cases," was judged to be a prime example of Asia's heretical image.⁹

Fukuda wrote a work titled "The Status of Korea in Indices of Economic Development," the result of a two-week sojourn through old Korea in 1902, in which his central thesis was that the feudal system, an essential precondition for the formation of a national economy, had never emerged in Korea. In other words, the modernization of Korean society would be impossible through its own initiative alone. Fukuda's influence was tremendous. His representation of Korean history and society had a decisive impact on several of the architects of late Chosŏn's modern economy such as Kawai Hirotami (河合弘民), Shiogawa Ichirō (鹽川一郎), and Wada Ichirō (和田一郎), and became an important foundation for the land survey project conducted in Korea and northeast China.

A Government General's office well read in Marxist theory? According to the colonial historian Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn, until the late 1920s the official position of the Government General of Korea was that, "in terms of Chosŏn agriculture, vast tracts are left stagnant in the 'manner of Asia', there is 'an endless division of means of production and the isolation of producers, extraordinary waste in human capacity, progressiveness in conditions of production and appreciation in the means of production', according to 'unavoidable laws'. Under these conditions, 'the development of labor's social production, capital's social accumulation, commercial livestock farming and the application of scientific progress

⁸ The Japanese edition was published in 1907 and translated by Sakanishi yoshizō. Moritani Katsumi, *Ajiateki seisan yōshikiron*, Ikuseisha, Tōkyō 1937, pp. 268–71.

⁹ Sanjun Kan, "Fukuda Tokuzō no Chōsen teitai shikan: Teitairon no genzō" in: *Kikan sanzenri* 49, 1987, p. 84.

are eliminated”¹⁰. When considering the intrusion of distorted Marxist theory into the office of the Governor General, the issue could only depend on what transition or theory of transformation would this understanding of “Asian” come to redefine?

The clue to this transition came from the Soviet Union. The AMP debate was held in Leningrad in February 1931, jointly hosted by the Leningrad Oriental Association and the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences. The prevailing theory there was put forth by M. Godes, which was reignited by discussions on Japan and China, and from around 1935 gained even more momentum with the combination of Tōyōron (東洋論), the discovery of oracle bone inscriptions, and the Korean Studies movement (*Chosŏnhak undong*). Korean scholars of the 1930s meanwhile considered AMP theory to be an “Asian perversion of feudalism,” and advanced a strong critique of the synthesis of colonialism and Marxist political economy. Cross-referencing occurred among Korean, Chinese, and Japanese intellectuals, and the debate intensified. From examples such as the Chinese writer Guo Moruo (郭沫若 1892–1978) reading theories on history advanced by the Korean writers Yi Pungman and Yi Ch’ōngwŏn, and the Korean writer Kim T’aejun reading Guo Moruo, we can perceive that the debate over AMP was setting the regional tone throughout (East) Asia, and spreading beyond these boundaries as well. For example Paek Namun and Yi Ch’ōngwŏn considered the connections being drawn between AMP, Asian stagnation, the theory of Chosŏn particularities, and racial discrimination to be a form of cunning guile:

There are those who insist that feudalism did not exist in Chosŏn society. In particular, Mr. Fukuda Tokugawa contends that the maladministration of Chosŏn government was due to the absence of feudalism (*kangjehak yŏngu*). However, he is not aware of the many differences between Western feudalism and the Asian/Chosŏn system, and the myriad differences within the same base economy. This is because he only considers a system identical to that of the West to qualify as feudalism. The so-called Asiatic Mode of Production is not itself an autonomous economic tool, but has come about merely because the same

¹⁰ Myŏnggyu Pak, “Nalgŭn nollŭ ŭi saeroun hyŏngt’ae: Miyajima Hiroshi ŭi *Chōsen tochi chōsa jigyōshi no kenkyū pip’an*” in: *Han’guksa yŏngu* 75, 1994, pp. 157–84. Ch’ōngwŏn Yi, “Ajia teki seisan yōshiki to Chōsen hōken shakaishi” in: *Yuibutsuron kenkyū* 30, 1935, p. 276.

economic foundation has been transformed and shaded by racial, geographical, and historical conditions.¹¹

That the AMP was not an autonomous mode was an official tenet of socialism that had been expressed in various forms, but up until the Kapo reforms (1894) Chosŏn society was based on a system of slavery, and the contention that feudalism had never existed was maintained in the academic discourse of Moritani Katsumi (森谷克己) and other government scholars through the 1930s. Paek Namun in his universal theory is well known for avoiding as much as possible usage of the adjective “Asian”:

No matter how ‘Asian’ the developmental history of the Chosŏn people, the internal development tenets of the society itself belong completely to world history. Whether it be the slave society of the Three Kingdoms period, the Asian feudal society from the late unified Silla, or the transplanted capitalism of today’s Korea, our history’s recorded overall development stages are universal in nature, but with each possessing unique aspects.¹²

Paek Namun and Yi Ch’ŏngwŏn shared a common consciousness of the issue in that they each rejected the connection drawn between AMP, Asian stagnation, and the theory of Chosŏn particularities. This is because for Yi Ch’ŏngwŏn “the Asiatic” meant a “unique economic social structure separate from the realm of world history,” while Hirono Yoshitaro (平野義太郎), Aikawa Haruki (相川春喜), Moritani Katsumi, and other scholars of the metropole argued that viewing this as a “unique economic social structure” was to deny Asia’s inclusion into global history.¹³ However, Yi Ch’ŏngwŏn had a more radical view of history than Paek Namun, who focused on the solidarity among bourgeois forces which formed during the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Yi Ch’ŏngwŏn contended that feudalism was established only in the last half of the fourteenth century in Chosŏn, and that this historic delay created a highly stratified society of contradictions, a system marked with temporal compression preceding violent release. In summary, an Asia with an autonomous mode of production did not exist, but only unique Asian elements within the framework of world history;

¹¹ Yi, “Ajia teki seisan yōshiki to Chōsen hōken shakaishi”.

¹² Namun Paek, *Chōsen shakai keizaishi* (Tōkyō: Kaizōsha, 1933), p. 9.

¹³ Yi, “Ajia teki seisan yōshiki to Chōsen hōken shakaishi”.

what remained was the “Asian” contradiction, and through the accumulation of this contradiction the pressure building to revolution became even greater.

There is no need to restate the various criticisms here.¹⁴ The important point is that this debate included a decisive agenda, that revolution could be carried out any time, in any way, by anyone. In stipulating the character of modern society, the remnants of the Asian production mode had to be considered, namely the matter of a lack of feudalism and transformation, and how these related to the question of who constituted the subject forces in determining revolutionary strategies in various parts of Asia. In the case of the Soviet Union it proclaimed the priority of the bourgeois democratic revolution, and officially declared its alliance with the nationalist front through the Comintern. On the other hand, in China and other non-European societies this issue implied the urgency or revolution and the charting of a new course. In other words, if the particularities of AMP are more generally acknowledged, then the Asian bourgeoisie is incapable of carrying out the bourgeois democratic revolution, requiring the socialist revolution to be led directly by laborers and farmers. If Asia was different from Europe, it should not take, nor could it take, the same historical path as Europe. Was it not possible to simultaneously replace “non-capitalist development” and “revolution” with “mode of production”?

Yi Ch’ōngwŏn, who, through AMP theory, insisted on the multi-layeredness of Korean history (through an accumulation of contradictions), was criticized by Moritani in the following way:

In his book *The Asiatic Mode of Production and Chosŏn Feudal Society*, although merely an imprudent, strange outlier, Yi Ch’ōngwŏn’s representation of the ‘AMP’ is distinct from that of Marx, who was referring to a primitive community. This being the case, we are obliged to test this theory. Where on earth did this problem arise? According to Mr. Yi, AMP is understood to be a standard part of primitive communities, and therefore this is akin to drawing a line to distinguish the earliest historical epoch. However, at the same time Mr. Yi writes that the ‘feudal system of Chosŏn’ and the irregular feudal system of East Asia ‘is the

¹⁴ For a monumental work on Korean internal development within AMP, refer to Hong Sunkwŏn, “1930nyŏndae Han’guk e Malsŭ chu’i yŏksahak kwa Asiajŏk saengsan Yangsingnon nonjaeng” in: *Tonga nonch’ong* 31, 1/1994, pp. 35–64.

AMP described by Marx and Engels,' and so according to this logic it seems that the AMP is not a social economic structure that needs to be drawn as an historical epoch. Thus, Yi's argument unfortunately makes no sense whatever to the reader. Moreover, Mr. Yi refers to me in the text as a literalist and claims that he is not adhering to the letter of Marx but rather to the spirit of him. My question to Mr. Yi would be, rather, where is your spirit?¹⁵

Where was the "spirit" of Yi's theory when he was moving from disenfranchised activist to theorist of the Materialism Research Society? The AMP had to be a system of slavery imposed on the land, a feudalism performed in a state of "remaining," in other words a perverted form of Chosŏn (Asian) feudalism. Yi Ch'ŏngwŏn, who was neither a staunch universalist nor an Asian particularist drawn to literal interpretations, was forced to employ both a universalist historical narrative alongside Paek Namun along with Moritani's theory of "agricultural community" remnants, and thus ran the attendant risk of seeming to vacillate between the two poles. For example, Yi evaluates the land survey project by the GJK in much the same way that Marx had assessed British domination of India. "While being 'liberated' from land ownership itself and 'becoming free,' at the same time they were converted to the nationalist system and the vast avenues of proletarian and quasi-proletarian identities opened up before them"¹⁶. In other words, the destruction of the agrarian community by "transplanted capitalism" and the emergence of the proletariat class on a large scale compressed the time frame for socialist revolution. The last portion of *A Chosŏn Social History Reader* (Chosŏn sahoesa tokpon) reads thusly:

Although one major question is the origin of Chosŏn's semi-feudal land ownership *Aufheben*, another question concerns the difficulties with global capitalism in this present century, which groans under the prevailing wave of global economic depression. Moreover, as part of the 'Asian mode as stagnation' theory Chosŏn's rural areas are also affected, and finding a solution is now a vexing problem.¹⁷

¹⁵ Moritani Katsumi, *Ajiateki seisan yōshikiron* (Tōkyō: Ikuseisha, 1937), p. 77.

¹⁶ Ch'ŏngwŏn Yi, "Ajia teki seisan yōshiki to Chōsen hōken shakaishi" in: *Yuibutsuron kenkyū* 30, 1935, pp. 126–149.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

The problem was the stratified nature of history and the fixity of its contradictions, while the method was to escape from economic decision-making. For Yi, the central issue was that the stages of Asian history—ancient, feudal, and transplanted capitalist Asia—were simultaneously fixed to contemporary colonialism.

The only form of resolution was to represent deformed, transplanted, and multi-layered capitalism as semi-feudal Japanese capitalism within the Asian stagnation model.¹⁸ Yi's call for popular scholarly analysis to determine the existence of feudalism as the presence of an "Asian or non-Asian" mode of production was deeply significant. Yi wrote: "Following this logic, the political conclusion would be that because there existed no feudal system in Asia, its current political process is not civil but rather proletarian".¹⁹ By the mid-1930s, an alternative path of historical development was already being envisioned: if feudalism had indeed not existed, Asia should behave as though it had, and consider an historical task a task at hand.

The fractured and heterogenous leadership Marx had written about that prevented ultimate resolution of the mode of production question was discovered to be colonialist and imperialist forces. Emphasizing the tendency of history itself and the historical tendencies of social constructs, economism and technicism were critiqued, while economic evolutionism (historical stage theory) was extricated from progressive ideologies. Following Louis Althusser, this may be called the discovery of "overdetermination," or of "contradiction" according to Mao Zedong.²⁰ It goes without saying that the Asian/Chinese revolution, realized at the level of the peasant and proletariat rather than at the economic level, has risen beyond the civilian level to provide decisive inspiration to socialism in other regions. What did "Asia" and the AMP mean to modern Korean theorists? We may only say this: Asia was not a geographical category, but rather a coordinating instrument for realizing historical tasks and grasping social compositions, and also a contradictory concept and ideological framework for combating colonialism through a program of historical development.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 254.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 52–57.

²⁰ Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Verso, 1996).

3. Anti-Oriental Alterity and Asiatic Globalization – The Globe as the Asiatic

Today, there are few who explain Asia's history or stage of economics through the framework of the AMP. Perry Anderson wrote in 1974 that the socialist revolution and experimentation within the non-European world had reached its climax. Anderson writes that such comparisons between Islamic and Chinese civilizations “preclude any attempt to assimilate them as simple examples of a common ‘Asiatic’ mode of production. Let this last notion be given the decent burial that it deserves”²¹. Even when observing ancient wooden tablets (*mokkan*), family registers from the Silla Dynasty, or Chosŏn-era *yangban* agricultural management, there are few who harbor any illusions about salvaging the concept of AMP. On the contrary, there are international scholarly trends toward village communities in pastoral societies and the Chinese bureaucratic system based on the civil service examinations, and scholars arguing that “alternative modernities were lost” through abundant social welfare and revolutionary concepts, such as the California school advocating for “new world history”²².

But if we are to lay to rest such theory, according to whose standards shall we do it? It was the Indian post-colonial feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak who resurrected this buried theory and reexamined it in the new millennium. It is Spivak's contention that rather than as a spirit, as a heritage or value, the AMP may still become the subject of theoretical or practical contemplation. If we observe Marx's thinking on so-called “species life” and “species being” this will become clear. Spivak reminds us that from a young age Marx distinguished between the natural world, or “species life,” and the human world, or “species being.”²³ If species life is life *an sich* or, to use Benjamin-Agamben terminology, a *bloßes Leben* (bare life) confined to nature, then species being is linked to

²¹ Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolute State* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 548.

²² Alexander Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Hiroshi Miyajima and Hangsöp Pae (eds.), *Tong Asia nŭn myöt siinga?* (Söul: Nömö puksü, 2015); Hiroshi Miyajima and Hangsöp Pae (eds.), *Tong Asia esö sigye rül pomyön* (Söul: Nömö puksü, 2017); Miyajima Hiroshi and Pae Hangsöp (eds.), *19segi Tong Asia rül ingnŭn nun* (Söul: Nömö puksü, 2017).

²³ Gayatri Spivak, *P'ost'ü singmin isöng pip'an*. trans., T'ae Hyesuk, Pak Misön (Söul: Kalmuri, 2005), p. 128; *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 78. Okhüi Im, *T'aja rosöüi Sögu: Kayat'üri Sŭp'ibak üi P'osüt'üsingmin isöng pip'an ilkki wa ssügi* (Söul: Hyönamsa, 2012).

the domain of political economy through the process of historical development. However, for Marx, who aspired to a free, and ideal plane of species being, the social inequality of species life prevented the natural progression of species being and represented its greatest obstacle. The prime example of species life as the historical present was none other than the Asian populace under the AMP. What were the conditions that prevented humans from making the leap to species being in Asia? Marx's line of questioning has been of lasting import to Spivak. In Spivak's view, the AMP was a rather desperate attempt to identify the discrepancies exposed within Marxist theory and explain them through a culling and categorization of such questions.

Spivak seems to contend that AMP theory, while no longer in vogue, may still provide the tools to grasp the division of species life and species being, as well as the mechanism of that division, for several reasons. First, within AMP theory is inscribed the Marxist Asian phylogeny, containing a profound legacy. Thus, it is still necessary to reinvent AMP theory in order to explain historical narrative and theoretical differences and introduce "values" of inequality and injustice. Second, in a globe unified by financial capital, AMP theory offers a framework through which to interpret not only the global financial system through development and economic restructuring but the issues of economic migration centered on Europe. In short, the AMP provides clues as to the reinterpretation and deconstruction of what Samir Amin has called the global tributary system, whereby subalterns pay tribute to an imperialistic system through debt-bondage entities within a global system of unequal international trade. Externalities that convert capitalism to imperialism and quash revolutionary momentum, such as the relationship of debt-bondage maintained on the backs of subjugated women of the Third World, may be reinterpreted through AMP, and thus reach the realm of artificially-enforced life. For Spivak, the AMP is akin to a mode of thought that constantly circulates "externalities" that allow capitalism to be converted to imperialism.

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Although Marx formulated the concept of AMP as a kind of necessary discrepancy or residual theory of the "Other" to explain the discrepancies laid bare in his own theory, it is suggestive that this theory of difference and residuum is being reevaluated as a mode of critique in the context of "Asianization of the globe", where migration and global management have created a condition of ubiquitous subalterity. However, what is more important is that these "remain-

ders” have functioned as sites for redefining the histories of individual Asian societies and attempting to outline present challenges. For example, in South Korea the theoretical lessons and perceptive ability learned through such a theory, and the enduring concept of the future led us to interpret colonial Japanese theories deconstructively. Had AMP theory not been suggested, East Asian histories grounded in scientific periodizations and revolutionary discourses based on modes of production and fluctuations in social structure would not have emerged. As suggested by Spivak, rereading AMP theory from a Marxist axiological dimension, post-colonial thought is merely a political economy and cultural research project combining capitalism and imperialism that supplements the “spatio-temporal” gap between the historical development stages.

Conversely, the theoretical residuum created by Marx’s AMP entered Western European theory from the reverse direction. In their work on capitalism and schizophrenia from *Anti-Oedipus*, for example, Deleuze and Guattari reawaken the example of strong territorialization of great Asian nations in order to formulate a mechanism of state reterritorialization and, more concretely, to explain the Oedipal relationship between agriculture and the state that depends on a relationship of debt and repayment. Critiquing the original and abstract nature of the state by means of a reterritorialization that cannot or will not perform any action other than to guarantee the private ownership of the ruling class, what they had in mind was the perception of the continuing and original experience of pre-existing Asian countries, the AMP, feudalism and capitalism.²⁴ In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari reaffirm the original nature of absolute monarchy and the concept of the state as an “apparatus of capture,” again alluding to “Asian structure” and mode of production. Not as a king in the role of priest or judge under contract or agreement, but as a ghastly emperor, existing in royal captivity and regal bondage—the Asian nation-state. In order to elicit an imperial/tyrannical extreme, again the old code of the agricultural community is invoked to recode the Asian absolutist state.²⁵

²⁴ Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 108.

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Angtti Oidip'usú: Chabonjuüi wa chöngsin punyöljüng*, trans. Ch'oi Myöngwan (Söul: Minümsa, 1994), p. 298.

Interestingly, in *A Thousand Plateaus* the opposite concept of a “society against the state” is envisioned, and as a theoretical foundation, draws on Pierre Clastres’ work of the same name on the subject of Latin America.²⁶ For example, Indian or nomad societies that resemble societies composed of primitive communities are not state relocations but rather societies composed of refugees of the state. Unlike in an absolutist state, the village chief in India does not possess any special authority, and in that sense this does not constitute a relationship of dominance and subordination rooted in economics and capital. Whether nomadism or its opposite, historically speaking it is the theoretical source of the residual shape or difference that is “Asia”. (It is unclear whether the AMP, which was originally conceived based on conditions in the Bengal region of India, may be applied to Latin America. However, the geopolitical differences between India, the Islamic world and China are not important in this theory, which is envisioned as a way to incorporate differences that arise when assigning regions outside of feudal Europe to the framework of historical development). Stagnant Asia, Asia deviating from universal history, and overterritorialized or coded Asia became the material of alternative life or theoretical adventure of escape or nomadism within Deleuze and Guattari’s taxonomic analysis.

East and West AMP discourse was a complete theory that included the residuum. “Asianness” in both the East and the West functioned as a serious metaphor for stagnation and regression, as well as transformation and development. By extricating the particular spatio-temporality of Asia from the fantasy and depicting it in the form of “mode,” “system” and even “contradiction,” the “remainder” within this theory was able to clarify not only difference but the tasks of individual regions. Asia has understood the urgency placed on regional limits of time in AMP theory to mean a demand for time’s “revolutionary” compression, while Europe has established Asia as a source of imagination about the “task” of its own society. At issue is discovering the fate of species being, and reinventing a path forward. This is the reason that Spivak and Deleuze-Guattari were able to read AMP so “arbitrarily,” so autonomously.

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Ch’ŏn’gae ūi kowŏn: Chabonjuŭi wa punyŏljŭng 2*, trans. Kim Chaein (Sŏul: Sae mulgyŏl, 2001), chapter 13; Pierre Clastres, *Kukka e taehanghanŭn sahoe: chŏngch’i inyuhak nongo*, trans., Hong Sŏnghŭp (Sŏul: Ihaksa, 2005).

In our age, the delineation of inequality and injustice is not a matter of geography but rather topos. Not an alternative in wealthy parts of Asia, it rather dwells in the inequality, corruption, and bureaucratism that constituted “Asianness” in the past century. These exist as well in Europe. The political-economic inequalities inscribed within the world’s infinite topoi are not a relationship between states, nor are they the task of “globalizing Asia” of the last century, but rather they indicate that “global Asianization” is the true issue of our times. Are inequality, fascism, corruption, and inequality marks of Asianness? This may be the case, and it may not be. If the former, then so be it, for it means that there is work to be done.

4. Theory by Asia?—Against Korean Woodside(s)

In 1989 when it became clear that socialism was collapsing, Arif Dirlik argued that AMP applied to China and Asia, and that the theoretical debate surrounding AMP eventually opened up two new paths. First, that the pluralism of historical development implied in AMP burst wide open in East Asia. Second, the development of this theory has made possible both an assurance of a unified and universal historical development and a systematic understanding of regional difference and distinct characteristics of each society that exist within history. That is, “difference” here refers not to uniqueness, but is closer to “distinct traits”. In short, the “pluralism” implied in AMP theory was the most important characteristic within the context of Marxist historical theory.²⁷

For the next decade or so Asian history seemed to sing the eternal victory praises of the capitalist mode of production, perched at the pinnacle of a four-stage development hierarchy bereft of socialism. However, with the rise of China and East Asia in the last twenty years the main trend seems to be theories of decisive difference and assurances of the universality of particular histories, for example plural theories, multiple modernities, and confirmations that the centrality of such plurality is possible. No longer socialism with Chinese characteristics, the thesis that “China is different” has become a truism. It seems that economic development without democracy is possible, and perhaps this way of thinking has proceeded to the point that the current belief or fear that traditional sources

²⁷ Arif Dirlik, *Hyōngmyōng kwa yōksa: Chungguk Marūk’ūsūjuūi yōksahak ūi kiwōn 1919-1937*, trans., Yi Hyōnbok (Pusan: Sanjini, 2016), p. 229.

of power or differing modernities are still functioning is not comparable with the atmosphere that spawned the Asian axiological debates of the past between the Asian particularist Lee Kwan Yew (李光耀) and the universal global history advocate Kim Dae Jung.²⁸ These are alternative global histories, supported by the effect of post-colonialism and the multiplicity of economies, or a global history inspired by “elements” within Asia.

Woodside, who reappraises the bureaucratic system in East Asia as a system of rationality that ensured the civil service examination based on meritocracy, writes that “there must be an acceptance that many of those forms [of creativity]—Athenian democracy, Roman law, the east Asian mandarinates provide examples—could develop independently of the timetables of capitalism and industrialization,” while Sebastian Conrad queries “What time is Japan?”²⁹ Not surprisingly, in AMP debates of the past, the examination system and the administration apparatus it supported were the root of stagnation that hampered the development of feudalism and stifled capitalist maturation. Despite concerns that the paradox of Chinese capitalistic development without democracy may result in the selective reappraisal of current Chinese and past Third World oppression, there is bound to be some perplexity over how to interpret the concepts of “multiple” or “lost modernities”. To take this further, how are we to understand the substitution-supplementation of systematized democracy with multiple modernities, or the explicit combination of economic reductionism and the assertion of traditional legitimacy that makes the pig of the present the Socrates of the past?

Is it possible to make an “abridged progress” on the superstructure without the support of the substructure? Among inter-layered elements of modernity such as political equality, capitalism, individualism, and industrialization, is

²⁸ Dae Jung Kim, “Is culture destiny? The Myth of Asia’s Anti-Democratic Values” in: *Foreign Affairs* 73, 1994.

²⁹ Woodside, *Lost Modernities*, p. 36. This is in fact a strange question in that, if multiple modernities exist, then multiple “times” must too exist. Asking “What time is Japan?” is, in a distorted way, subverting the passion for transnational and universal history embodied in opposing the theory of Japanese exceptionalism and Emperor-based chronology in favor of “lost alternative modernities” or “plural modernities.” See Sebastian Conrad, “What Time Is Japan? Problems of Comparative (Intercultural) Historiography” in: *History and Theory* 38, 1/1999, pp. 67-83.

it acceptable to single out meritocracy (bureaucratism, accountability, the civil service examination) and conceive of this as a mark of modernity? In arguing for particularities in history, Woodside cites Walter Benjamin's historical philosophy, that the exception (of Asian history) may become the rule (of global history), resembling the recent query "What time is East Asia?" This is a seemingly conscientious and reciprocal discussion in the context of the significations and critiques of Western society, but in Korea and the rest of Asia the reactive response such a theory evinces evokes a deep sense of worry. If the "exceptional" development of colonialism, division, and protracted dictatorship in twentieth-century Korea's tortured history can become a "rule," is this a "value" that can justify itself?

A series published recently in South Korea on the so-called long nineteenth century titled *What Time is Asia?* is an example of this.³⁰ The critical approach that governs the methodology of this project, which begins with "The Debate over Privileging Modernity" and opens with the epigraph "Do not write that everything was invented in the modern age," is the critique of Euro-centrism and modernism, a strategic equivalency and symmetrical comparison between pre-modernity and modernity, change and continuity, and the West and Asia. Rather than drawing theoretical drive or utility from the discrepancy or difference between the two, it draws on the subject, historical reality, and even historical pride, which in itself is not worthy of criticism. Korea, a post-colonial state having just thrown off the mantle of Japanese imperialism and in becoming a developed country through US-mediated modernization, then entered the ranks of prominent capitalist societies in which theories of "internal development" and "colonial modernity" entered into competition with one another. In the G20 era this would seem to be a reevaluation of Korean history as an example of alternative modernity in its own right. But how is this carried out? What if the reason is some positive aspect of the past, a distinguished, independent, and even (different) modern element? In this case, national history and world history would be dismissed, replaced by East Asian (comparative) history and pluro-centric global history. Thus, Confucian modernity or alternative modernity relativizes Western modernity, and a new mission or task comes into relief.

³⁰ Hiroshi Miyajima and Hangsöp Pae (eds.), *Tong Asia nŭn myöt siinga?* (Söul: Nömö puksŭ, 2015).

Simultaneously, as a special site within the topos of East Asia and Korea, the “discovery of difference,”³¹ the overcoming of “teleological and developmental awareness formulated by Western Europe,” and the conquering of “the economic perspective that disdains culture and institutions” become part of the agenda, and the exciting proposition that “combining the pre-modern and the modern is possible” comes into view. If the examination system itself may be evidence of precocious modernity, this demands not a universal historical approach, but an internal approach. As may be seen from discussions on “medieval modernity” or “medievalness in modern times,” within the argument that “modernity” and “medievalness” coexist to some extent, we may read the ubiquity of historical elements, but I cannot help but interpret the anachronistic nature of the elements themselves. Indeed, how might the critique of civil rights indices do harm to the current issues of global modernity or internal inequality?

The list of Asian values set for revision by scholars of the so-called “long nineteenth century in Asia” continues to grow. Much like the examination system, genealogies (*chokpo*) were not a matter of noble lineage, but something that made it possible for anyone to be a progenitor in a society based on individual ability. It was precisely the spread of Confucianism rooted in an interest in politics and national history that made the Meiji Restoration possible, hence the existence of Confucian modernity. The growth of East Asian society through an entanglement of meritocracy and caste, as well as small-scale agricultural self-sufficiency and tribute trade, the cosmopolitanism of *Hanmun* (same-script consciousness) and its modernity, these have been selectively reevaluated within the project of overcoming Euro- and modern-centric historicity. Particularly within the “long nineteenth century in Asia” project, Confucianism and gentry society, Confucian judicial tradition, and small-scale farming that refrained from large-scale commercial agriculture have been reevaluated as evidence of Confucian modernity or advanced organic societies. Depending on the case, the West and modernity are often considered as strategic equivalent measurements, as dogmas of the past century that must be resolutely overcome. But for what purpose?

The peripheral country of Korea is being considered a singular topos mediating between East Asia and the West. Naturally, the critique of Euro-centrism pos-

³¹ Ibid.

sesses political, economic and ethical potential. Here, it cannot be said that the legacy of anti-colonial and post-colonial movements of the past half-century is not reflected. That is, as long as multiple modernities theory can become a stronghold for criticizing the developmentalism and productionism which implies a singular and homogenous concept of time. However, is it not still an urgent task for Korean and East Asian theory to dismantle the spatio-temporal combination of modernity and Western Europe? There is a need to contemplate to what extent Euro-centrism and multiple modernities have been critiqued in today's East Asia and especially Korea, which has become one of the major agencies behind neo-liberalism perverted into imperialism.

For what purpose are we to relativize the West and modernity? Within the framework of "anti-theory by Asia," Western-centrism and modernity-centrism are regarded as public enemies. What is needed is not theorizing *in* Asia, but rather envisioning Asia *as* theory. However, theory is on the one hand explanatory, and on the other revolutionary. What sort of *change* is desirable?

There still remains something that must be defended, and that is the legitimacy of modernity. Claiming to critique Western-centrism, we question the modern from pre-modern positions; criticizing the unrest of capitalist society, we evaluate highly the good, simple peasants of agrarian societies founded on slave labor; acknowledging the examination/bureaucratic systems, we cannot re-fashion modern timetables to fit the Chosŏn Dynasty lineage. Rather than a life in which the exception is the rule—the Asian, male, patriarchal, literati, administrative, conscientious/alternative modern life—what must be salvaged is the subaltern of today's Third World who exists in a new tributary system of inequality. What is it that we can rescue? If not change itself, then what?

The epoch of modernity and Euro-centrism may be necessary as a fervent value for some (Asian/male/patriarch/Mandarin intellectual). Yet, what actually seems more important to me is the question of whom, what, and what sort of future these epochs represent. This may be the reason that Gayatri Spivak formulated her initial research on the subaltern based on female Korean factory workers of the 1980s and the Indian practice of sati, and thus restored the con-

temporaneity of AMP.³² On the opposite side of Asia, the nomadic life conceived by Delueze and Guattari is today hyper-actualized in the form of migrant labor and refugees, while the illocutionary act that begs our attention in subaltern research continues to demand the reinvention of an alternative and revolutionary “Asian theory”.

The temptation of Asian exceptionalism has always existed on the theoretical horizon of Asia. The unequal development of the economy has also been reproduced as an unequal site of theoretical production and application. The attraction of adjectives or methodologies such as “equivalent,” “plural,” “different” and “equal” is understandable. However, what must be confirmed through these adjectives cannot be an equitable pluralism of a single country, region, or civilizational unit because the equivalence between civilizations actually conceals some inequality between nations and regions and blocks the theory of transformation driven by the theory of difference. The enormous inequality created by global modernity can never be counterbalanced by calling for a high degree of equivalence between civilization, regions, or countries.

³² Gayatri Spivak, “Feminism and Critical Theory” in: *Women’s Studies International Quarterly* 1, 1978, pp. 241–46.