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The emergence and evolution of International Relations studies in postcolonial South Korea

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Abstract

This study investigates how International Relations (IR) as an academic discipline emerged and evolved in South Korea, focusing on the country's peculiar colonial and postcolonial experiences. In the process, it examines why South Korean IR has been so state-centric and positivist (American-centric), while also disclosing the ways in which international history has shaped the current state of IR in South Korea, institutionally and intellectually. It is argued that IR intellectuals in South Korea have largely reflected the political arrangement of their time, rather than demonstrate academic independence or leadership for its government and/or civil society, as they have navigated difficult power structures in world politics. Related to this, it reveals South Korean IR's twisted postcoloniality, which is the absence – or weakness – of non-Western Japanese colonial legacies in its knowledge production/system, while its embracing the West/America as an ideal and better model of modernity for South Korea's security and development. It also reveals that South Korean IR's recent quest for building a Korean School of IR to overcome its Western dependency appears to be in operation within a colonial mentality towards mainstream American IR.

Keywords: International Relations (IR) Scholarship; IR Historiography; South Korea; Colonialism; Western-Centrism

Introduction

Currently, South Korea is seen as a developed country – similar to European and North American countries and Japan – at home and abroad.[1] Although most developed countries today were either Western or imperial powers in the early and mid-twentieth century, South Korea was one of Japan's colonies. Just seven decades ago, South Korea was newly established, war-torn, and destitute. Thus, despite its recent political, economic, social, and cultural successes, South Korea is undoubtedly a postcolonial country. In fact, the name 'South Korea', not just 'Korea', – denoting the national division of the Korean peninsula – indicates that it is a post-colonial country. Nevertheless, post/decolonial research has disappeared in South Korean IR studies until now.[2] Instead, IR studies in South Korea have been a representation of American rationalist IR, as discussed in later sections.

[1]South Korea is a vibrant democracy with over fifty million people, whose economy ranked tenth in the world in 2020 and whose GDP per capita is over US $30,00. Its cultural power is on the rise, such as K-pop boyband BTS, K-movie *Parasite* (2019), and K-drama *Kingdom* (2019) on Netflix. It is also a member of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It has realised the so-called 'compressed modernity'. See Kyung-Sup Chang, 'Compressed modernity: Constitutive dimensions, manifesting units, and historical conditions', in Youna Kim (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Korean Culture and Society* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), pp. 31–47.

[2]A rare exception is Eun's recent writings. See Yong-Soo Eun, '"Marginalized" IR theory and Korea's international political issue: Revisiting IR and Korea through postcolonialism' [in Korean], *Gukjejeongchinonchong* [*The Korean Journal of*

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According to Frantz Fanon, '[d]ecolonization … implies the urgent need to thoroughly challenge the colonial situation'.[3] Kuan-Hsing Chen also argues that 'decolonization is the attempt of the previously colonized to reflectively work out a historical relation with the former colonizer, culturally, politically, and economically'.[4]

Regarding this spirit of decolonisation, this study investigates how International Relations (IR), as an academic discipline, emerged and evolved in South Korea, with focus on its peculiar colonial and postcolonial experiences. In doing so, this study examines why South Korean IR has been so state-centric and positivist (American-centric), while also revealing the ways in which international history has shaped the current state of IR in South Korea, institutionally and intellectually. In the context of Kuan-Hsing Chen's 'Asia as Method', this study develops ideas that are important for Koreans, Asians, and postcolonial readers of IR because using South Korean IR experiences in Asia as a reference point 'might be able to offer a new view of global history, and to pose a different set of questions'.[5] Related to this, the article raises pragmatic concerns that would be of interest to IR students aiming to develop more critical strands of IR studies in and from institutional surroundings inhospitable to postpositivist and decolonial IR research as they have been developed in Western contexts.

In addition, being critical of Western-centrism in IR studies, there have also been growing voices for discovering different ways of conceptualising the international.[6] These voices seem to make IR more genuinely international and equitable. By exploring the postcolonial case of IR studies in South Korea, this study may add to the globalising movement that searches for difference and equality in a still homogenous, hegemonic IR discipline. The current IR historiography has yet to appreciate the ways in which key processes that shape the knowledge and practice of IR beyond the West can tell us more about world politics as a whole.[7] By disclosing the development of South Korean IR studies *vis-à-vis* colonial and postcolonial hegemony, this study broadens IR historiography, thereby providing us with a more nuanced and holistic account of world politics. Thus, it uncovers a range of alternative stories that need to be heard, which is in line with the project of worlding IR.[8]

It is argued that IR intellectuals in South Korea have largely reflected the political arrangement of their time (for example, the peculiar nature of non-Western Japanese imperialism/colonialism,

International Studies], 56:3 (2016), pp. 51–88; Yong-Soo Eun, 'Hybrid coloniality: Questioning South Korean foreign and security policy from postcolonial theory' [in Korean], *Gukjejeongchinonchong*, 60:1 (2020), pp. 7–61.

[3]Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1963), p. 2.

[4]Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 3.

[5]Ibid., p. 15.

[6]Amitav Acharya, 'Global International Relations (IR) and regional worlds: A new agenda for international studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 58:4 (2014), pp. 647–59; Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR as Its Centenary* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019); John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Phillip Darby (ed.), *From International Relations to Relations International: Postcolonial Essays* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016); Branwen Gruffydd Jones (ed.), *Decolonizing International Relations* (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Emilian Kavalski, 'The guanxi of relational international affairs', *Chinese Political Science Review*, 3 (2018), pp. 233–51; L. H. M. Ling, *The Dao of World Politics: Towards a Post-Westphalian, Worldist International Relations* (London, UK: Routledge, 2014); Meghana Nayak and Erick Selbin, *Decentering International Relations* (London, UK: Zen Books, 2010); Chih-yu Shih and Yih-Jye Hwang, 'Re-worlding the "West" in post-Western IR: The reception of Sun Zi's the art of war in the Anglosphere', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 18:3 (2018), pp. 421–48; Kosuke Shimizu (ed.), *Critical International Theories in East Asia: Relationality, Subjectivity, and Pragmatism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019); J. Ann Tickner, 'Dealing with difference: Problems and possibilities for dialogue in International Relations', *Millenium*, 39:3 (2011), pp. 607–18; Arlene B. Tickner and David L. Blaney (eds), *Thinking International Relations Differently* (London, UK: Routledge, 2012).

[7]Yih-Je Hwang, 'The births of international studies in China', *Review of International Relations* (forthcoming), pp. 1–21 (p. 3).

[8]Emilian Kavalski and Young Chul Cho, 'Worlding the study of normative power: Assessing European and Chinese definitions of the "normal"', *Uluslararasl Ilskiler*, 15 (2018), pp. 49–65.

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the Cold War just after the Korean War, democratisation, neoliberal globalisation, etc.), rather than demonstrating academic independence or leadership for its government and/or civil society as they have navigated difficult power structures in world politics. Institutionally, the Japanese colonial state's centralised, tight control of Korea for 35 years had provided a solid foundation for statism in South Korea, whose main features were an overdeveloped state and an underdeveloped civil society before democratisation in 1987. Intellectually, Japan made a distinction between its version of imperialism *vis-à-vis* Western imperialism while simultaneously claiming its moral superiority by having universal value that other Asian people should follow. Due to this peculiar nature of Japanese imperialism, Korean intellectuals sought alternative, and presumably better, sources of modernity such as Christianity and Western knowledge. What makes postcolonial South Korea different from other postcolonial countries worldwide is the absence – or weakness – of colonial legacies in knowledge production and systems, especially in IR and social sciences. In South Korea's case, this is like twisted postcoloniality in IR.

In experiencing Japanese colonialism (1910–45), great power trusteeship (1945–8), the Korean War (1950–3), and the ensuing Cold War, early South Korean leaders/intellectuals proactively took the West/America as an ideal model for the sake of South Korea's security, development, and unification. In so doing, they rejected both the Japanese and traditional Korean knowledge systems, both of which were seen as humiliating and irrelevant. Arguably, it signifies a discontinuity of the colonial and traditional past and the quest for a Western/American future. Since then, South Korean mainstream IR has been mimicking American IR. Even South Korean IR's recent quest for constructing a Korean School of IR to overcome its Western/American-dependency appears to be operating under a colonial mentality. Moreover, South Korea's neoliberalised institutional system of education since the late 1990s has made South Korean IR studies more dependent and colonial with respect to the West/America.

In what follows, this article discusses the ways in which Korean colonial experiences under Japanese occupation (1910–45) shaped the initial formation of IR studies in South Korea. Subsequently, the article uncovers the contexts and ways in which IR studies in South Korea emerged and evolved, particularly in relation to the hegemonic West after Korea's liberation from Japan (1945). It then examines South Korean IR studies' ways of overcoming Western-centrism in its local IR studies. The last section summarises the key arguments and presents the conclusions, with suggestions to achieve a more decolonial IR.

Twisted postcoloniality in (South) Korea and non-Western Japanese imperialism: Examining the birth of International Relations studies in South Korea

No discipline in social sciences had emerged and evolved without specific social, historical, and local contexts.[9] IR studies in South Korea are no exception.[10] Regarding the trajectory of South Korean IR studies, although there are many contexts and milieus to examine, Korean colonial experiences are arguably the most critical element that influenced the birth of IR studies in South Korea. The following characterisations of Korean colonial experiences are relevant to the formation of early IR studies in South Korea.

Both Korea and Japan inhabited similar historical, cultural, and geographical space under the Chinese empire, which was the Sino-centric tributary system in East Asia. Under this Confucianism-based system that spanned centuries before the West's arrival in the Korean

[9]David Nugent, 'Knowledge and empire: The social sciences and United States imperial expansion', *Identities*, 17:1 (2010), pp. 2–44; Walter Mignolo, 'Geopolitics of sensing and knowing: On (de)coloniality, border thinking and epistemic disobedience', *Postcolonial Studies*, 14:3 (2011), pp. 273–283.

[10]Chaesung Chun, 'Why is there no non-Western International Relations theory? Reflections on and from Korea', in Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan (eds), *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and Beyond Asia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), pp. 69–91.

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peninsula, Korea's Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) positioned itself below China but above Japan. Japan was seemingly located at the borderline of the traditional East Asian Confucius civilisation. This hierarchical thinking is captured well by Joseon's Confucian diplomatic practice of *Sadae Jaso* (serving the great, caring for the little).[11] Japan was believed to be a neighbour of *Jaso*. In this context, Korea had been colonised by its similar-yet-inferior neighbour within the same civilisation. This subjugation by a similar civilisation somewhat differs from European colonisation of non-Europeans outside Europe. European imperial forces frequently occupied each other, especially in the process of warfare, but did not colonise each other, as colonisation was an event between 'the civilised white' and 'the uncivilised coloured people'. However, from a Korean perspective, Japan's colonial occupation of Korea happened between countries adjacent to each other and within the same sphere of civilisation, even though Japan saw itself as one of the European powers at the time of colonising Korea. Thus, Koreans believed that their colonial experiences were psychologically more humiliating than colonial occupation by an unconnected, unknown, and dissimilar other.[12]

Another related point is that Korea was colonised by not simply a familiar long-term neighbour, but also a 'non-Western' power (Japan) that was in the process of escaping from semi-colonial conditions.[13] As a non-European, peripheral imperial power, Japan's colonialism relatively lacked the formidable discursive forces of universalising and civilising missions, while it struggled to produce an alternative vision of modernity and worldview.[14] If full-fledged colonialism means that imperial universalism perspectives and categories are treated as common sense in non-white colonies,[15] Japanese modernity/colonialism was Western-masked Japanese/Asian imperialism in Korea. It was seen as an Asian betrayal against Asians.[16] For Korean intellectuals, Japan was not necessarily superior, yet it was lucky to be the earliest adopter of European modernity in Asia. On the contrary, Korea's Joseon dynasty was to blame for being blind to a gigantic change in its international environment, that is, the rise of the West and the fall of the Sino-centric tributary system in East Asia. Due partly to this ignorance, Korea was far behind Japan in terms of learning from the West, thereby becoming a colony of early modernised Japan.[17] Although the process of Japanese colonisation of the Korean peninsula was violent and repressive, successful Japanese modernisation and Westernisation deeply impressed Korean intellectuals. In particular, Japanese nation-building through and after the Meiji Restoration of 1868 was admired by both anti-Japanese Korean independent activists and

[11]Jung In Kang and Sangik Lee, 'Confucian international order: Its ideal and contemporary implication' [in Korean], *Hankukchulhaknonjib* [*Korean Philosophy Research*], 47 (2015), pp. 171–206.

[12]Jungmin Seo, 'Diagnosing Korea-Japan relations through thick description: Revisiting the national identity formation process', *Third World Quarterly* (forthcoming).

[13]Stefen Tanaka, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Stefen Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[14]Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Kosuke Shimizu, 'Materializing the "non-Western": Two stories of Japanese philosophers on culture and politics in the inter-war period', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 28:1 (2015), pp. 3–20.

[15]Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, Vol. 1: *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 30.

[16]Giwook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Young Soo Kim, 'A critical review on the thought and practice of the greater East Asia co-prosperity sphere: Focus on the criticism of Dekeuchi Yoshimi and Maruyama Masao' [in Korean], *Sahoegwahanknonchong* [*Social Science Research*], 17 (2015), pp. 61–87; Samsung Lee, 'Empire and empire in a colony: The conceptual functions of the term empire in Japan and Korea in the first half of the twentieth century' [in Korean], *Gukjejeongchinonchong* [*The Korean Journal of International Studies*], 52:4 (2012), pp. 7–40; To understand the Japanese empire from the vantage point of its colonies such as Korea and Taiwan, see Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie (eds), *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[17]Yeon Sik Choi, 'Changes of tribute system and development of "serving the great" ideology in Choson dynasty' [in Korean], *Hangukjeongchihakhoebo* [*Korean Political Science Review*], 41:1 (2007), pp. 101–21.

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pro-Japanese Korean collaborators.[18] The rise of nationalism in Korea, which culminated during the March 1st Movement in 1919, gave the sense of a grave mission to Koreans, that is, overcoming colonialism by emulating the enemy, Japan. In other words, Japan was an object of both hatred and envy.

The Japanese imperial state saw its colonies, later including Manchukuo, as an extension of the empire rather than territories for exploitation.[19] Therefore, it established full-fledged state apparatuses in the colonies, accompanied by massive emigration of settler-colonialists and the elimination of indigenous elite classes. Over three quarter million Japanese settlers penetrated a population of twenty-six million Koreans while forming a ruling stratum of the society.[20] The colonial state apparatus, including police stations and local administrative offices, directly and tightly controlled the colonial population through Japanese settlers in Korea, with minimal reliance upon indigenous collaborators when compared with other types of colonial rules such as those by the British Empire or the French, which utilised indigenous elites to control their colonies effectively and efficiently. Further, since the beginning of the Sino–Japanese War in 1937, the Japanese colonial government had imposed full-scale assimilation policies that banned Korean language education and Korean script, and even forced Koreans to change their names into Japanese-style ones.[21] It was a Japanese imperial initiative of converting Koreans into 'near' Japanese.[22] It is undeniable that Japanese colonialism was more comprehensive than European colonialism in terms of centralised political and economic domination in the Korean peninsula.[23] The colonial state apparatus later became the foundation for the new independent government, resulting in an 'overdeveloped state' in which the repressive state apparatus overwhelmed the premature and 'underdeveloped civil society'.[24] Statism appeared as the most powerful ideology in South Korea, intellectually and institutionally.

Through gradual colonisation, Western modernity, including Christianity, was embraced by Korean intellectuals who saw the West as the only possible protector against the Japanese coloniser.[25] Partly for this reason, (South) Koreans do not identify Christianity with imperialism. In particular, Christian missionaries from America were proactive in building educational institutions in the Korean peninsula. Private educational institutions that emerged at the end of the

[18]Carter J. Eckert, *Park Chung Hee and Modern Korea: The Roots of Militarism, 1866–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Bruce Cumings, *Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2005), pp. 121–2; Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895–1919* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 103–13.

[19]Louise Young, *Japanese Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[20]Hyung Gu Lynn, 'Malthusian dreams, colonial imaginary: The Oriental development company and Japanese emigration to Korea', in Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen (eds), *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices, Legacies* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), p. 31.

[21]Ohhyun Kwon, 'The alteration of history education in the Japanese imperialism period (1938–45)' [in Korean], *Sahoegwagyoyugyeongu* [*Research in Social Studies Education*], 18:1 (2011), pp. 1–13.

[22]Dae-seok Yun, 'A study on the nationalization/colonization movement and time & body administrated by nation-state/imperialism in Chosun during the first half of the 1940s' [in Korean], *Hangukhyeondaemunhakyeongu* [*Korean Contemporary Literature Research*], 13 (2003), pp. 79–100; Japanese imperialization of the subjects was also under way in Taiwan which was a colony of Japan from 1895 to 1945. See Leo T. S. Ching, *Becoming Japanese: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

[23]Mark E. Caprio, 'Janus-faced colonial policy: Making sense of the contradictions in Japanese administrative rhetoric and practice in Korea', *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies*, 17:2 (2017), pp. 125–47; Uchida, *Brokers of Empire*.

[24]Jang Jip Choi, 'Political cleavages in South Korea', in Hagen Koo (ed.), *State and Society in Contemporary Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 13–50.

[25]Kyeong-bae Min, *Hanguk gidok gyohoesa* [*History of Korean Christian Churches*] (Seoul, South Korea: Yonsei Universtiy Press, 1993), pp. 20–1; Donald N. Clark, 'Surely God will work out their salvation: Protestant missionaries in the March First movement', *Korean Studies*, xiii (1989), pp. 42–75; Chi-jun Roh, *Ilje ha Hanguk gidokgyo minjok undong yeongu* [*A Study on the Nationalist Movements of Korean Christianity under the Japanese Colonial Rule*] (Seoul, South Korea: Hanguk gidokgyo yeoksa yeongu, 1993).

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Joseon dynasty were all equipped with Westernised and modernised curricula, largely owing to Western missionaries and Korean intellectuals educated at overseas universities. The early higher educational institutions founded by American missionaries were Yonsei University (1885), Ewha Women's University (1886), and Sungsil University (1897). As Seo notes, 'those institutions created intellectual lineages in Korean society through the import of the Western disciplinary academic system and creating a small group of intellectuals who eventually spent [a] significant amount of time in the United States'.[26] Syngman Rhee, the first president of South Korea, who received a PhD from Princeton University in 1910, can be considered exemplary.

During the colonial period, Korean nationalists competed with the Japanese colonial government in the field of education. The colonial government's public education system introduced local cities and townships to a new concept of 'cultural policy' (*bunka seiji*) that was based on the gradualist notion of assimilation of Korean colonial subjects to the Japanese Empire.[27] Meanwhile, Korean intellectuals under the colonial rule were eager to expand private educational institutions based on either nationalism or Christianity. Nationalism and Christianity were viewed as complementary to each other; both were against Japanese imperialism.

Under the colonial rule, only one academic institution, Keijo Imperial University (京城帝國大學; KIU), performed both functions of education and research. KIU was founded in 1926 as the sixth imperial university in the Japanese Empire to meet the demands of the Japanese colonial settlers in Korea. As the only academic institution that gained the status of 'university' (other higher educational institutions ran by missionaries and Korean nationalists were called 'professional schools'), it was supposed to be the most comprehensive research institute in Korea. Nevertheless, it excluded ethnic Koreans from the process of knowledge production. By the end of the colonial rule, KIU had hired only one Korean faculty member, an assistant professor in the medical school. The KIU faculty was, by and large, populated by graduates from Tokyo and Kyoto imperial universities, who regarded KIU as a temporary workplace before moving on to teaching positions at major universities in Japan.[28]

The Faculty of Law at KIU comprised of four departments – law, philosophy, history, and literature. Of these, the Department of Law offered four political science-related courses, 'Political Science', 'History of Political Science', 'Political History', and 'Diplomatic History'. These courses played an important role in introducing the concepts of democracy (*Minshushugi*) and state at KIU, which indirectly influenced the discourses of statism of colonial intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s.[29] The concept (or subject) of 'International Relations' was entirely missing. A few Korean students in the Department of Law at KIU later became professors and lecturers of political history, constitution, and political studies at Seoul National University, which was established under the United States Military Government in Korea (1945–8).[30]

For Korea, like any other former colony, (Japanese) colonialism was a deeply humiliating experience. This painful experience made Korean colonial and postcolonial intellectuals rethink about themselves, their country, and the international environment. The first thing that they

[26]Jungmin Seo, 'Colonial and post-colonial legacies of the intellectual history of China studies in Korea: Discontinuity, fragmentation and forgetfulness', in Chih-Yu Shih, Prapin Manomaivibool, and Mariko Tanigaki (eds), *Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Studies of China and Chineseness: Unlearning Binaries, Strategizing Self* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2020), p. 153.

[27]Seng-Cheol Oh and Ki-Seok Kim, 'Expansion of elementary schooling under colonialism: Top down or bottom up?', in Hong Yung Lee, Yong-Chool Ha, and Clark W. Sorensen (eds), *Colonial Rule and Social Change in Korea, 1910–1945* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2013), pp. 114–39; Seok Won Song, 'The Japanese imperial mentality: Cultural imperialism as colonial control – Chosun as exemplar', *Pacific Focus*, 33:2 (2018), pp. 308–29.

[28]Jun Young Jeong, 'Keijo Imperial University and Colonial Hegemony' (PhD dissertation, Seoul National University, 2009).

[29]You Jung Ki, 'The political class in a Keijo Imperial University and its implication in a colonial Chosun: Focusing on the thought of Tozawa Tetsuhiko and Okudaira Takehiko' [in Korean], *The Dong Bang Hak Chi*, 163 (2013), pp. 211–38.

[30]Ibid., p. 212.

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realised was that international politics – not civilisational politics – mattered. Under the Sino-centric tributary system, Korea was diplomatic towards China and its neighbours according to Confucian rituals; this exemplified civilisational politics, and Korea barely thought about the possible demise of the system in which it was embedded. Korean intellectuals came to realise that they should pay heed to how the international environment was evolving – not to civilisational politics but rather, to international politics as the norm in a new world.

Second, against Japanese imperialism/colonialism, nationalism and state-building became ever more important than other values in Korea. Both concepts, imported from Europe via Japan, were essential to becoming an independent, equal actor in the Westphalian system and to replacing the Sino-centric tributary system. Many post/colonial Korean intellectuals put great effort into making the Korean nation and state coextensive, believing that it was the only way to secure Korean identity and autonomy in the Westphalian system. In this respect, the Japanese colonial state's centralised control of Korea for 35 years also provided a solid foundation for statism in South Korea. Related to this, an overdeveloped state and an underdeveloped civil society were the main institutional features of South Korean polity before its democratisation in 1987. Academically, statism was central to the local intellectuals' epistemological, ontological, and ethical underpinnings of conducting IR studies in South Korea.

Lastly, the Japanese colonial state in Korea was hegemonic, yet unable to monopolise the regime of truth[31] in the colonial society because of the peculiar nature of non-Western Japanese imperialism. Japan had to distinguish itself from Western imperialism for its own peculiar identity while insisting that Japan's moral superiority had a universal value that other Asian people should follow and learn. Yet, the weak status of the Japanese empire *vis-à-vis* Western imperial powers in real world politics and the relative lack of universality of Japanese imperial discourse allowed its colonial subjects, especially Korean intellectuals, to seek alternative, and presumably better, sources of modernity such as Christianity and Western knowledge. Importing and mimicking Western modernity was imperative for post/colonial Korean intellectuals with regard to their country's coming into being in the Westphalian system. The West was more than welcome – for Korea to resist the non-Western imperial Japan: to expel the 'Other' (the coloniser, Japan), the 'Self' (the colonised, Korea) needed and used a different hegemonic tool of 'Another' (Western modernity). This is the result of the above-mentioned peculiar nature of Japanese imperialism. In other words, what makes the postcoloniality of South Korea different from other postcolonial countries worldwide is the absence – or weakness – of colonial legacies in knowledge production and systems in IR studies and beyond. In South Korea's case, this is like twisted postcoloniality in IR, as further discussed in the following section.

The quest of South Korean International Relations studies for a Western/American future while discontinuing its traditional and colonial past

Because of Japan's defeat in the Second World War in 1945, Korea was liberated, which was considered sudden by most Koreans living in the peninsula. Instantly after its liberation, Korea was put under the control of the United States and the Soviet Union under a trusteeship (1945–8) that divided the Korean peninsula. South and North Korea were both founded in 1948. This was largely a by-product of great power politics at a time when the Cold War was brewing. Korean 'liberation' involved national division at the behest of two world powers. In 1950, the Korean War (1950–3) broke out. It was a civil war between the South and the North, and was the first proxy war under the budding Cold War in world politics. For a few decades after the war, South Korea was too poor to survive against North Korea without American support. It was

[31]Michel Foucault, 'Truth and power', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 74.

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widely accepted that South Korea had no choice but to join the free world bloc in the Cold War to ensure its national survival and state-building.[32]

During the final phase of the colonial rule, Japanese authorities downgraded all indigenous institutions for higher education from colleges (*daigaku*) to specialised/professional schools (*senmongakko*), leaving KIU as the only college-level research/educational institution in the colony. Upon Korea's liberation, KIU was reorganised as Seoul National University (SNU). SNU's political science department was formed in 1946, and it started to offer the course 'Introduction to International Politics'. Soon after, the offered courses on international politics were extended to 'Diplomatic History', 'Joseon Diplomatic History', 'International Organisation', 'Colonial Studies', 'International Law', 'International Relations', 'Foreign Policy', and 'Eastern–Western Diplomatic History'.[33] Professional schools, including *Yonsei* and *Korea*, regained the status of 'college' in 1946. They also offered courses on international politics from 1946.

The discipline of political science until the mid-1950s was dominated by the colonial legacy: Korean scholars educated in Japanese imperial universities. The colonial legacy of political science education at KIU is evident in the curricula during the early phase of political science in postcolonial Korea. As shown in the popular college textbook of political science published in 1953,[34] politics was defined as 'governance to maintain social order', or 'the establishment of the rule–obedience relations to eliminate the divisive elements of society'.[35] Basically, the educators tended to teach what they learnt from Japanese universities during the colonial period. Of the first seven faculty members of SNU's political science department, four had graduated from KIU and three from imperial universities in Japan. At Yonsei's political science department, all faculty members, both full and part time, had graduated from Japanese imperial and Keio universities. In the mid-1940s and 1950s, there were very few teachers who specialised in political science, let alone International Relations. Hence, it was necessary to invite faculty members from neighbouring disciplines, especially from history and law. SNU's first political scientists were all history majors, and those from Korea University were law majors. In Yonsei, among the first political scientists, one was a political science major, and all others had majored in law.[36] Political science was usually placed under the discipline of law in Japanese universities. Education on International Relations exclusively covered diplomatic history and did not include key IR concepts such as national interest and foreign policy. In a decade, the subfield of diplomatic history in political science was marginalised, and the majority of its teaching and research areas were transferred to the history department of major universities.[37]

The very first transformation of Korean IR stemmed from the publication of two books in the 1950s: Hyowon Cho's *International Politics*[38] and Yonghui Lee's *Principles of International Politics*.[39] When the Korean Association of International Studies (KAIS) was formed in 1956, Yonghui Lee was elected the first president, and Hyowon Cho, the vice president. It is worth

[32]Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*; Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Indianapolis, IN: Basic Books, 2001); Samuel S. Kim, *The Two Koreas and the Great Powers* (New York, NY: Cambridge. 2006).

[33]Jae-Suck Sohn, 'Recent trends in the research and teaching of international relations in Korea' [in Korean], *HangukJeongchihakhoebo* [*Korean Political Science Review*], 2 (1967), pp. 102–11.

[34]Gi-Seok Shin, *Geundae Oegyosa* [*Modern Diplomatic History*] (Seoul, South Korea: Munseongdang, 1953).

[35]You Jung Ki, 'The politics of a modern Korean and the logic of an academic transition: The focusing of the transition of an instruction to politics and the analysis of its discourses in the 1950–1960s' [in Korean], *Jeongchisasangyeongu* [*The Korean Review of Political Thought*], 20:1 (2014), pp. 9–36 (p. 15).

[36]Hyung Kook Kim, 'Research of international politics in Korea: retrospect and prospects' [in Korean], *Gukjejeongchinonchong* [*The Korean Journal of International Studies*], 46:5 (2007), pp. 7–35 (p. 12).

[37]KAIS (Korean Association of International Studies), *50 Years History: 1956–2006* [in Korean] (Seoul, South Korea: Korean Association of International Studies, 2006), p. 76.

[38]Hyowon Cho, *International Politics* [in Korean] (Seoul, South Korea: Munjongsa, 1954).

[39]Yonghui Lee, *Principles of International Politics* [in Korean] (Seoul, South Korea: Jangwangsa, 1955); also see Yonghui Lee, *General International Politics* (Seoul, South Korea: Parkyoungsa, 1962).

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noting how differently the two authors approached international politics/IR as an academic discipline. At that time, compared with his peer scholars in South Korea, Hyowon Cho was a rare political scientist who had received a PhD from an American university – Ohio State University. Hyowon Cho's *International Politics*[40] comprised excerpts of his coursework readings in America. He regarded the academic field of international politics as a universal science in advanced countries and positioned himself as a trustworthy translator. Conceptual universalism was the most important virtue in his writing and teaching of international politics. For him, mastering universal principles and laws of International Relations was a prerequisite for the foreign policy of a newly born nation such as South Korea, whose primary target was to survive in a hostile world.[41]

On the contrary, Yonghui Lee's *Principles of International Politics*,[42] which has a nationalistic tone, is sceptical and critical of conceptual universalism; instead, it emphasises the unique experiences of Korea and East Asia. For him, international politics until the 1950s was the extension of Euro-American regional politics. Hence, the inquiry of International Relations in Korea should have an indigenous motivation. Because general International Relations theories have the hidden agenda of sustaining the ideology and interests of Euro-American hegemonic powers, it was, according to Lee, imperative to develop Korean theories of International Relations.[43] As shown in the following section, the two scholars set a long-lasting framework for building a Korean School of IR.

Around the time when these two important publications appeared, numerous Western classics on International Relations were translated into Korean such as E. H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939*, George Kennan's *American Diplomacy*, W. Freedman's *An Introduction to World Politics*; Harold Nicolson's *The Evolution of Diplomatic Method*; Dexter Perkins' *The American Approach to Foreign Policy*; Hans J. Morgenthau's *American Foreign Policy: A Critical Examination*; and H. Kissinger's *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*. Indigenous works on international politics also started to come out in the mid-1950s such as *Modern Diplomatic History*;[44] *Introduction to the United Nations*;[45] and *Introduction to International Organizations*.[46] In the early postcolonial period, translation was the most efficient method of acquiring, collecting, circulating, and consuming knowledge in South Korea.

Wonwoo Lee, a professor at Kyung Hee University, was a noteworthy translator during this period. Nicknamed 'Mr Carr' by his students, he translated virtually all of Carr's writings, in addition to key publications in Anglo-American International Relation theories by Harold Nicholson, W. Friedmann, and Hans Morgenthau.[47] His career is somewhat exemplary in that he was a prominent translator but did not write his own theories. At the time of Park Chung-hee's successful military coup in the early 1960s, he became a policymaker in real-life politics, serving as the Minister of Public Relations, the Korean Representative to the United Nations, and a member of the National Assembly. Indeed, Hyowon Cho and Yonghui Lee, as mentioned above, also took up senior positions in South Korean government at some point in their careers. A revolving door between academia and government has been common in South Korea until now.

[40]Cho, *International Politics*.

[41]Ibid.; Chang-joon Ok, 'Lee Yong-hee as "bricoleur": The birth of "international politics" in 1950s Korea' [in Korean], *SAI*, 22 (2017), pp. 89–131 (p. 118).

[42]Lee, *Principles of International Politics*.

[43]Sangseop Park, 'Studies on international politics in Korea and introduction of foreign theories' [in Korean], *Gukjejeongchinonchong* [*The Korean Journal of International Studies*], 28:1 (1988), pp. 22–33 (p. 27).

[44]Shin, *Modern Diplomatic History*; Sang-un Gang, *Geundae Oegyosa* [*Modern Diplomatic History*] (Seoul, South Korea: Minjungseogwan, 1954).

[45]Wonwoo Lee, *Introduction to the United Nation* [in Korean] (Seoul, South Korea: Shinchang, 1953).

[46]Wi-Young Yoon, *Introduction to International Organization* [in Korean] (Seoul, South Korea: Yangmunsa, 1955).

[47]Yonggu Kim, 'History of study of international politics' [in Korean], in Korean Political Association (ed.), *The Fifty Year's History of Korean Political Science Association* (Seoul, South Korea: Korean Political Science Association, 2003), p. 290.

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Since Korea's liberation in 1945, America, a guardian of South Korea's national security against the communist bloc, had been the knowledge epicentre and dreamland where South Korean students were eager to go and study. From the early 1960s, Korean academia witnessed a sudden surge of Korean students entering American academic institutions. For instance, the East-West Centre in Honolulu actively recruited the brightest students from Korea with special scholarship programmes, aiming to create pro-American elite groups through education amid the intensifying Cold War.[48] Political science departments in Korea's major universities were quickly filled up with America-trained scholars, while IR as a subfield of political science increased its relative size in the field of political science. In 1965, 18 per cent of political scientists (who were registered in the Korean Political Science Association) claimed that they were IR-specialised political scientists. The figure increased to 28 per cent in 1978.[49] In 1963, the inauguration of the *Korean Journal of International Studies*, a flagship journal of the Korean Association of International Studies, also signalled consolidation of the status of the field of IR in Korean academia. Political science departments in Korean universities had so far been populated by scholars educated in America or other Western educational institutions.

Yet, for Korean scholars of International Relations, the 1960s and 1970s were 'the age of citations'.[50] The problem with expanding and deepening IR studies in South Korea was not the lack of scholars who mastered Euro-American International Relations theories, but the absence of shared points of concerns among Korean scholars.

The poverty or discontinuity of indigenous IR intellectual traditions and the asymmetrical knowledge production gap between South Korea and America made unconditional and uncritical knowledge import from the West/America possible and even inevitable. The imported Western theories were often decontextualised and fragmentised to be utilised for the state's developmentalist purposes.[51] The academic inquiry about International Relations that had been unavailable for colonial subjects in the Korean peninsula was directly imported from the United States, as it was regarded as a prerequisite for a new sovereign state. Imported IR knowledge was received as universal knowledge without reflecting on the Western-centric nature of the IR discipline, with the rare exception of Yonghui Lee. The earlier generation of Korean IR scholars/political scientists faithfully functioned as ardent translators and importers of the mainstream IR theories from the United States.[52] In the 1980s, Marxist thoughts spread in Korean campuses among students who were ideologically armed with democratisation, anti-Americanism, and a rejection of unconditional reception of mainstream social sciences. It was an import of critical-yet-still-Western knowledge. The hidden teleology of importing Western knowledge was that Korean IR scholarship must serve national security, South Korea's state-building, and Korean nation-building. Since the hegemonic West as an ideal model was seen as the most powerful tool for achieving South Korean developmentalist goals, there was a lack of interest in the critical consumption of imported knowledge from the West. Moreover, America-educated scholars strategically attempted to secure their social status and vested interest in the academia/society, with utmost admiration for the West, by importing and circulating 'pure' Western knowledge at home as quickly as possible. In short, the expansion of IR studies in political science at that time can be characterised as quantitative growth without qualitative development.

[48]Jungmin Seo and Hwanbi Lee, 'Indigenization of International Relation theories in Korea and China: Tails of two essentialisms', in Shimizu (ed.), *Critical International Relations Theories in East* Asia, p. 52.

[49]Kim, 'History of study of international politics'.

[50]Sangwoo Lee, 'For the establishment of Korean International Relation theories: Directions for development and confirming the tasks' [in Korean], *HangukJeongchihakhoebo* [*Korean Political Science Review*], 12 (1978), pp. 137–48 (p. 139).

[51]Jong Gook Baek, 'The dilemmas of indigenization of imported scholarship and their solution', *HangukJeongchihakhoebo* [*Korean Political Science Review*], 50:1 (2016), pp. 5–21 (p. 7).

[52]Hyung Kook Kim and Yun Young Cho, 'International Relations studies in Korea: Retrospects and prospects', *Pacific Focus*, 24:3 (2009), pp. 402–21.

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In a postcolonial society, leaders and intellectuals consciously craft narratives and make judgements considering their local context to decide how they should engage colonial legacies.[53] As mentioned earlier, in experiencing Japanese colonialism, great power trusteeship, the Korean War, and the budding Cold War, the question of 'why is our country so weak'?[54] pronounced by Yonghui Lee,[55] struck most postcolonial intellectuals deeply. Arguably, this question necessitated IR studies as an academic sub/discipline in a newly born South Korea. 'Why' easily led to 'how', as in: how can our country be autonomous and prosperous? Statism is central to this line of thinking.

The only plausible answer for early postcolonial South Korea was to fully embrace the hegemonic West, particularly America. Although there had been a short time span of imperial Japanese-style political science education in a liberated Korea, the incomplete hegemony of the Japanese regime of knowledge was soon replaced by American intellectual hegemony. In the decade since the liberation, non-Western Japanese intellectual legacies were regarded as irrelevant, unorthodox, or heretic in the field of IR and social sciences in South Korea. Furthermore, although Seoul National University was built based on Keijo Imperial University, its institutional system copied not the Japanese but the American university system. All South Korean universities copied the American institutional model after the liberation. This reveals South Korea's twisted postcoloniality, which is characterised by the absence – or weakness – of colonial legacies in knowledge and institutional systems, especially in social sciences, compared with other postcolonial countries.

In addition, the radical shift from Japanese to American knowledge systems showed that Korean academia neither praised Korean traditions nor employed anti-Western rhetoric. Nativism, which is a handy choice in postcolonial countries for national restoration, was not an option for South Korea, since traditional Korean knowledge on diplomacy under the Sino-centric tributary system was regarded as humiliating, backward, and irrelevant for sovereign South Korea. Thus, in South Korean IR, the (early) postcolonial period implies that South Korea went Westphalian and became Western/American for the sake of its security, development, and unification, while rejecting both the Japanese and the traditional knowledge systems. In a broader sense, it signifies a discontinuity of the traditional and colonial past and a quest for a Western/American future in the social science knowledge system. Indeed, South Korea, on the whole, ideologically became seriously dependent – if not colonial – on the West/America after Japanese colonialism: non-Western, physical Japanese colonialism had ended, while Western coloniality had just begun. This strategic move of becoming colonial again was believed to be imperative in South Korea, as the Cold War began just after the Korean War and thus, Seoul felt that it had no choice but to take the side of America for national survival against North Korea and the communist bloc. As Kuan-Hsing Chen keenly observes, '[t]he cold war mediated old colonialism and new imperialism' in Northeast Asia.[56]

Along with the above-mentioned postcolonial scholarly development, IR studies, as an academic subject, emerged and was formed in South Korea. Unlike the positivist mainstream IR that sought more of a scientific answer to describe how the world 'really' works, IR studies in South Korea emerged as more of an art of navigating and living in the colonial matrix of the Cold War. This type of knowledge production is more way-seeking than truth-seeking, which appears to continue until today. It seems clear in South Korea that IR scholarship is inseparable from statecraft; perhaps the IR scholarship itself is a performative mode of statecraft.

[53]Chih-yu Shih, Tze-ki Hon, and Hok Yin Chan, 'Introduction: The Cold War and decolonization in East Asia', *Asian Perspective*, 44 (2020), pp. 171–7.

[54]In the mid- and late twentieth century, country (*nara*), state (*gukga*), and nation (*minjok*) were used interchangeably in South Korea, due to the unquestioned belief of Korean homogeneity.

[55]Lee, *Principles of International Politics*, p. 4.

[56]Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, p. 8; Interestingly, like the case of South Korean IR, Taiwanese mainstream IR, whose country was a non-Western Japanese colony, has been Western/American-centric, too. See Shih, Chih-yu, 'China rise syndromes? Drafting national schools of International Relations in Asia', *Intercultural Communication Studies*, XXII (2013), pp. 9–25; Hwang, 'The births of international studies in China'.

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Neoliberal institutional turn and the search for a distinctively Korean International Relations theory with universalism

The financial crises in 1997 and 2008 initiated and accelerated a neoliberal institutional change in many sectors of the South Korean society, including education from the top. Going global, backed by neoliberal developmentalism, has been a national motto of South Korea since the end of the Cold War. Against this backdrop, universities are increasingly seen as commercial goods in domestic and global marketplaces, and have become 'profit-seeking companies' consisting of different departments and centres. Almost all universities in South Korea have become obsessed with the university ranking evaluation by the government, domestic news agencies, and global commercial ranking companies.[57]

Under the neoliberal institutional system, the number of Social Science Citation Indexed (SSCI) journal publication is the most important factor in evaluating a scholar's academic performance and thus, affects his/her job security. Moreover, quantity matters more than quality: the greater the number of published articles, the higher the ranking.[58] Without SSCI publications, the odds of getting a tenure-track position and promotion for tenure are extremely slim in the political science and IR departments of major South Korean universities. As Jungmin Seo and Hwanbi Lee note, 'The current IR scholars in Korea and abroad have different class backgrounds than the previous scholars, with far fewer belongs to the upper class. Additionally, their research is focused within the scope of prospective jobs and research trends of Western academia, so as to ensure their survival by publishing more articles in prominent [SSCI] English journal.'[59]

Consequently, the neoliberal institutional system has immensely affected the topics and ways of research in the local IR academia. Particularly, young IR scholars are more inclined to search for topics and methods that are easily acceptable in the mainstream IR to increase the odds of SSCI publication, for job security. Mimicking of the mainstream IR, and not innovative research, is considered safe and desirable. This trend is also harmful to conducting IR research in Korean, because American PhDs are preferred to domestic PhDs who are less familiar with English writing. As a result, the institutional impact originating from outside the academia on South Korean IR studies has made already West-dependent IR studies more colonial and dependent on the West, in terms of academic content. South Korean IR and social science have become an integral part of the Anglo-American academic world.[60] In spite of this deepening Western dependency, South Korean IR's craving for SSCI publication has engendered a liberating effect on the scholarly culture of the South Korean IR community. As the sheer number of SSCI publications has become the ultimate criterion for hiring, promotion, and tenure in most Korean universities, the underdogs who did not do their BA in top-tier Korean universities and MA/PhD in American universities, now have a leverage against the rampant nepotism in the faculty hiring process in Korean universities, as long as they can publish enough SSCI articles.[61] In this sense, the institutional obsession with SSCI brought about a certain level of transparency in South Korean universities and the local IR community.[62]

[57]Sungin Bae, 'The commercialization of universities and the privatization of scholarship and knowledge' [in Korean], *Hwanghaemunhwa* [*Hwanhae Literature*], March (2017), pp. 29–49; Chae-Hong Lim, 'Neo-liberalistic higher education policy and the public education' [in Korean], *Minjubeobhak* [*Democratic Legal Studies*], 24 (2003), pp. 171–206.

[58]Myungkoo Kang, 'How do we evaluate faculty performances: Knowledge production and university ranking' [in Korean], *Communication Iron* [*Communication Theory*], 10 (2014), pp. 127–68.

[59]Seo and Lee, 'Indigenization of IR theories in Korea and China', p. 52.

[60]Jung In Kang, *Western-Centrism and Contemporary Korean Political Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015); Young Chul Cho, 'Western-centrism and "doing research" in South Korea' [in Korean], *Munhwawa Jeongchi* [*Culture and Politics*], 7 (2020), pp. 213–38.

[61]Seo and Lee, 'Indigenization of IR theories in Korea and China', pp. 52–3.

[62]Jongyoung Kim, *A Ruler under the Hegemonic Ruler: Study in America and the Birth of South Korean Elites* [in Korean] (Paju, South Korea: Dolbege, 2015).

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With the institutional change discussed above, as Seo and Lee observes, academically, the generation of IR 'scholars who explored their academic career after the liberalising study abroad policy … in 1988 engaged with American academia quite differently from their predecessors'.[63] Along with democratisation at home, they proactively applied American IR theories to Korean and East Asian circumstances. They also formulated 'country-specific and region-specific research that obviously went beyond the simple translations … They have arduously interpreted the meanings and implications of realism, liberalism, and constructivism and tried to apply those to both the past and current international affairs of East Asia.'[64] In addition, Western dependency and Western-centrism in South Korean social sciences were substantially problematised. According to Jung In Kang, a political scientist well known for his research on Western-centrism, the excessive Western dependency in South Korean political science had damaging effects on its scholarly community as follows:

> As they digest 'advanced' Western theories, non-Western scholars internalize the Western mode of thinking as both universal and preferential while failing to craft the critical tools to theorize their own unique political experience … Non-Western scholars, immersed in advanced Western theory, sometimes distort the realities of their own societies when they are not able to locate the relevance of Western theory … With the prevalence of Westernized critical thinking and assimilationist interpretative frameworks, the reality or facts of non-Western societies continue to be marginalized.[65]

In line with this critical awareness, there has been a persistent call to construct a Korean School of IR (a distinctively Korean-style IR theory). This call has been intensifying with South Korea's rapid economic and political development in the post-Cold War age of globalisation.[66] Similar calls can also be found in many non-Western areas (for example, a Chinese school of IR, a Japanese school of IR, etc.).[67] The South Korean call presumes that its current IR academic field is still very colonial under the hegemonic influence of the West, specifically, mainstream American IR. It is argued that, to overcome this colonial situation – to normalise IR studies in South Korea – a Korean School of IR should be constructed to speak to global audiences on behalf of South Korean scholars and South Korea as a nation-state. Doing so

[63]Seo and Lee, 'Indigenization of IR theories in Korea and China', p. 52.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Jung In Kang, 'Academic dependency: Western-centrism in Korean political science', *Korea Journal*, 46:4 (2006), pp. 115–35 (pp. 120–6).

[66]Chaesung Chun and Jun Young Park, 'Reflections on international relations theories in Korea: In search of alternatives' [in Korean], *Gukjejeongchinonchong* [*The Korean Journal of International Studies*], 42:4 (2002), pp. 7–26; Young-sun Ha and Yong-ho Kim, 'Korean diplomatic history and International Relations studies: The correct establishment of Korean International Relations studies' [in Korean], in Young-sun Ha, Young-ho Kim, and Myongsob Kim (eds), *Korean Diplomatic History and International Relations Studies* (Seoul, South Korea: Sungshin Women's University Press, 2005), pp. 9–24; Kim and Cho, 'International Relations studies in Korea: Retrospects and prospects'; Yong-Jae Lee and Chul-Soon Lee, 'A bibliographical study on the decolonization discourse in the political science of Korea' [in Korean], *Hangungmunheonjeongbohakoeji* [*Journal of Korean Library and Information Science Society*], 37:1 (2006), pp. 83–107; Chul-Koo Woo, 'The quest for Korean identity of International Relations studies' [in Korean], in Chul-Koo Woo and Kun Young Park (eds), *Contemporary International Relations Theory and Korea* (Seoul, South Korea: Saheopyongron, 2004), pp. 9–18; Chun Hee Yang, 'International Relations as an American social science and academic freedom: A need for an expansion of research programmes and the discussion of taboo subjects in international relations' [in Korean], *Ataeyeongu* [*Journal of Asia–Pacific Studies*], 17:2 (2010), pp. 127–48.

[67]Ching-Chang Chen and Young Chul Cho, 'Theory', in Aoileann Ni Mhurchu and Reiko Shindo (eds), *Critical Imaginations in International Relations* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), pp. 245–61; Yaqing Qin, 'Why is there no Chinese International Relations theory?', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7 (2007), pp. 313–40; Takashi Inoguchi, 'Are there any theories of International Relations in Japan?', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7 (2007), pp. 369–90.

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might enable Korea to achieve equal status in relation to the West, in IR studies as well as in real-life politics.[68]

In seeking a distinctively Korean IR theory, there appears to be some tension between two approaches: the universality- and particularity-focused approaches.[69] The universality-focused approach is in line with Hyowon Cho's notion of IR studies as a universal science. According to Hyowon Cho, the close interplay between strong powers seeking domination and weak powers showing resistance inevitably requires an analysis of International Relations. 'Doing so gave rise to efforts to extract the laws or organising principles of International Relations, and thus international politics as an academic discipline was born here'.[70] This universality-focused approach thus aims to manufacture so-called scientific knowledge that is globally applicable and empirically testable. In other words, seeing IR as a modernist social science, future Korean IR theory should be universally applicable while incorporating its unique experiences, history, and tradition.

Meanwhile, the particularity-focused approach is pursuant to Yonghui Lee's[71] emphasis on the unique experiences of Korea and East Asia in understanding international politics. For Yonghui Lee, the academic field of international politics 'cannot be disconnected with the village I live and the fate of a country in which I live. Yet, knowing and changing the fate of my country is impossible without exploring European modes of politics which dominate the East.'[72] The particularity-focused approach thus stresses 'the importance of identifying Korea's unique historical experience from its own historical perspectives'.[73] At the same time, this approach insists on making a significant contribution to world politics from the Korean perspective, believing that the political phenomena found in Korea share a universal nature with those of other countries.[74]

Despite the apparent tension between these two approaches, they are more alike than opposite. First, content-wise, both seriously take into account Korea's unique political experience in theorisation. Many South Korean political scientists and IR scholars believe that Korea's certain political experiences, such as national division and the Korean War, are unique. Yet, as Seo and Lee note, the 'only way to ensure the uniqueness of certain political experiences is to accept the notion of universal experiences. In other words, as much as the notion of "international" is the outcome of "national" … to claim uniqueness one should take "the universal".'[75] Second, both approaches see universality as an essential core of their theorising, explicitly or implicitly. They are both universalists. Thus, both have the same objective: a Korean-style IR theory that is welcomed, recognised, and used by the local and global/Western academia. Universality – making the 'Korean School' of IR marketable worldwide – is required. Broadly speaking, the two approaches suggest two strategies for achieving universality. One is to acquire recognition from the West as an equal IR enterprise (most of all, from American IR based on rationalist/positivist epistemology); the other is to export made-in-Korea or made-by-Koreans IR theories to both Western and non-Western IR audiences.[76]

Regarding the first strategy for recognition, apparently, many South Korean IR intellectuals look to American IR as the global standard for evaluating their academic work while concurrently

[68]Young Chul Cho, 'Colonialism and imperialism in the quest for a universalist Korean-style International Relations theory', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 28:4 (2015), pp. 680–700.

[69]Jong Kun Choi, 'Theorizing East Asian international relations in Korea', *Asian Perspective*, 32:1 (2008), pp. 193–216; Kim and Cho, 'International relations studies in Korea'; YoungMyung Kim, *From Discourse to Action: In Search of Political Science with Korean Identity* [in Korean] (Gyunggido, South Korea: Hankukhaksuljungbo, 2010).

[70]Cho, *International Politics*, p. 1.

[71]Lee, *Principles of International Politics*.

[72]Quoted in Ok, 'Lee Yong-hee as "bricoleur"', p. 117.

[73]Choi, 'Theorizing East Asian International Relations', p. 205.

[74]Chaesung Chun, 'Future tasks for developing the field of international relations in South Korea' [in Korean], *Gukjejeongchinonchong* [*The Korean Journal of International Studies*], 46:S (2007), pp. 227–49 (p. 235); Kim, *From Discourse to Action*, pp. 10, 121–3.

[75]Seo and Lee, 'Indigenization of IR theories in Korea and China', p. 56.

[76]Cho, 'Colonialism and imperialism'.

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competing with it.[77] The point is that, to (appear to) be universally applicable in International Relations, in practice, future Korean-style IR theories should receive general recognition as an equal scientific IR enterprise from mainstream American IR scholarship. Towards this end, what South Korean IR scholarship appears to do is adopt a positivist epistemology, which is the minimum essential requirement to be accepted by the mainstream rationalists as an 'equal' and 'legitimate' scholarly enterprise in the field of IR.[78] Good examples of this are the debates between rationalism/positivism and reflectivism/post-positivism, and the debate 'via media' on Wendtian constructivism.[79] Byoung Won Min argues that, starting from the revision of existing Western theories to suit Korean realities, the South Korea IR community should produce Korean IR theories that are 'communicable' and 'compatible' with international standards in the existing global/Western IR scholarship.[80] Kim also argues that South Korean IR scholars should produce a new type of 'positivistic, universal' IR theories and try to revise and improve the existing positivist IR theories along with their peers in the West.[81] In his article, titled 'Theorizing East Asian International Relations in Korea', Jong Kun Choi claims that '[a]lthough Korean IR should strive to explain the country's unique historical experience, it will be judged by strict measurements of scientific universalism, which will contribute to globalization of Korean IR in return.'[82]

However, this strategy seems to bring about a paradox. The South Korean IR academia has sought to overcome excessive Western dependency (intellectual colonialism) in their IR studies by building an independent, self-reliant Korean School of IR. However, by adopting the positivist epistemology for achieving universality at par with the West, the local IR scholarship is unable to become 'self-reliant' and 'independent'. The reality is that achieving the universalists' desire for independence against intellectual colonialism rests not on South Korean IR's efforts, but on the long-term benevolence of the academic coloniser. South Korean IR needs American IR's favourable endorsement. Thus, it is difficult for South Koreans to normalise by themselves, the so-called colonised IR studies.

South Korean IR universalists are like players playing a game with rules laid down by the mainstream American IR. These universalists want recognition so strongly that they fixate on American IR and thus, are unable to see themselves except 'through the revelation of the other world [American hegemony]'.[83] Their sense of subjectivity and dignity does not rest on themselves alone. They are enslaved by their inferiority.[84] This insinuates that the universalists have internalised American IR so much that it prevents them from seeing their subconscious Western-centrism, while criticising apparent Western-centrism. They seem to be the 'subliminal Eurocentric[s]'[85] who are critical of the West; yet, they are no less Western-centric. This is ingrained 'Westoxification'.[86] Alternatively, South Korean IR universalists may lack the energy

[77]Byoung Won Min, 'International Relations theories and Korea: A critical review and some suggestions' [in Korean], *Gukjejeongchinonchong* [*The Korean Journal of International Studies*], 46:S (2007), pp. 37–66; Byoung Won Min, 'Not so universal? The search for indigenous International Relations theories in South Korea', *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, 14:3 (2016), pp. 461–87.

[78]Steve Smith, 'The United States and the discipline of International Relations: "Hegemonic country, hegemonic discipline"', *International Studies Review*, 4:2 (2002), pp. 67–85; Steve Smith, 'Singing our world into existence: International Relations theory and September 11', *International Studies Quarterly*, 48:3 (2004), pp. 499–515.

[79]Young Chul Cho, 'Conventional and critical constructivist approaches to national security: An analytical survey', *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, 7:1 (2009), pp. 75–102; Young Chul Cho, 'State identity formation in constructivist security studies: A suggestive essay', *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 13 (2012), pp. 299–316.

[80]Min, 'International Relations theories and Korea', pp. 43, 50; Min, 'Not so universal?'.

[81]Woosang Kim, *Korea's Security Strategy in East Asia* [in Korean] (Seoul, South Korea: Nanam, 2007), p. 285.

[82]Choi, 'Theorizing East Asian International Relations', p. 215.

[83]W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 8.

[84]Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2008).

[85]Hobson, *Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*.

[86]Hwa Yol Jung, 'Transversality and what "Global Asia" means in an age of hyphens and hybrids', *Global Asia*, 5:4 (2010), pp. 88–97 (p. 96).

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to discern and alter their Westoxification; they would rather not be bothered with it as long as they can be universalist like the hegemonic West. This call to produce universally applicable Korean IR theories with a distinctive identity still operates under a colonial mentality sustained by the hegemony of Western IR. The more South Korean IR universalists are obsessed with the universality of mainstream rationalist/positivist IR, the greater their dependency on American IR.

Moreover, in producing a universalist Korean-style IR theory, South Korea's IR community will, in practice, reinforce the hegemony of American IR's meta-theory in South Korea and make American IR appear truly universal. This may also relegate Korean IR to being little more than a provider of 'unique regional independent variables'[87] to the mainstream positivist IR theories. For South Korean IR universalists, it is hard to accept that the West is just one of the many possibilities rather than the universal idea, and that the universal applicability of Western ideas is largely due to their scholarly mimicking.[88] Future universalist Korean-style IR theories, albeit successfully produced, would at best occupy a small, compartmentalised space within the mainstream rationalist IR of America.[89] Rather than pursuing equality, South Korean IR is unwittingly working within a hierarchical system. Perhaps South Korean IR universalists will end up similar, but unequal to American IR.

Regarding the second strategy, it is likely that future Korean-style IR theories will be rooted in Korean history, traditions, thoughts, ideologies, and practices in a state-centric sense. Indeed, such theories will be seen as particular and Korean-centric, pretending to be universal, to enhance and secure their own claims and national interests.[90] In the field of international political economy, Hyung Kook Kim and Yun Young Cho maintain that 'It could be a good opportunity to extend the Korean way of development to Africa and the Asia-Pacific region in the global context.'[91] In his chapter titled, 'Knowledge and International Politics: Democratization of Korea and Task of Scholarship', Hong also pronounces that '[South] Korea should be a theory-export country', adding that South Korea should actively provide students from Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and South America with scholarships and invite them to attend Korean universities and research centres.[92] Exporting knowledge should be recognised as a crucial aspect of diplomacy, and Korean academia and government should take serious measures to promote it. All of these arguments appear to be state-centred.

Given this, as argued by Cho, roughly speaking, South Korean IR universalists 'may well respond to Western theoretical claims of universality dressed up in the garb of ethnocentrism by putting forth an ethnocentric paradigm, disguised with universalism, of their own making'.[93] Furthermore, there appears to be insufficient room for taking account of how other non-Westerns perceive the universalist Korean-style IR theory and South Korea's unquestioned drive to export its Korean-style theory under the name of universalism. If this concern is not properly addressed during its theorisation, future Korean-style IR theory may be in danger of projecting an ethnocentric undertone of imperialism to non-Western countries while becoming controversial and self-serving. As such, this future universalist Korean-style IR theory could be regarded as would-be hegemonic, rather than post-hegemonic.[94] In their search for an intellectual, diplomatic colony, seemingly Western-dependent South Korean IR studies strive to be 'independent', like mainstream

[87]Choi, 'Theorizing East Asian International Relations, p. 193.

[88]Chih-yu Shih, *Civilization, Nation and Modernity in East Asia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).

[89]Cho, 'Colonialism and imperialism'.

[90]Ibid.

[91]Kim and Cho, 'International Relations studies in Korea', pp. 419–20.

[92]Seongmin Hong, 'Knowledge and international politics: Democratization of Korea and task of scholarship' [in Korean], in Seongmin Hong (ed.), *Knowledge and International Politics: Political Power Permeated in Scholarship* (Paju, South Korea: Hanul, 2008), pp. 19–59 (p. 51).

[93]Cho, 'Colonialism and imperialism', p. 692.

[94]Cho, 'Colonialism and imperialism'.

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IR. In other words, South Korean IR may replicate hegemonic relations by subjugating other non-Westerns to itself in the same way the West had subjugated it.[95]

Nonetheless, it is almost impossible for South Korean IR studies to be 'true' independent actors at par with Western mainstream IR. As mentioned, (meta)-theoretically, because the universality of future Korean-style IR theory is likely to be based on rationalist epistemology, the South Korean universalist expansion may be a proxy-hegemony on behalf of mainstream American IR. As Cho argues, '[d]espite the long-term outcry over its American-centric intellectual dependency/colonialism within South Korean IR academia, South Korea would appear to be seeking its own colonies to vindicate the universal fit of its national school of IR in practice while consolidating the epistemological hegemony of American rationalism in theory.'[96] This reveals the colonial/imperial nexus of hierarchical and unequal relations among American IR as the centre, Korean IR as the semi-periphery, and IR of the Global South as the periphery. South Korean IR could become a ruler of the non-West, yet it is a colonised ruler under the epistemological control of a hegemonic ruler. In this structure (the West/America above South Korea and South Korea above the non-Western countries) South Korean IR will possibly do what it chastises the West for, specifically, inflicting symbolic and epistemological violence towards the weaker: South Korea is likely to subject non-Western countries to Orientalism, even though it is concurrently subject to orientalism from the West. In this process, South Korea becomes not the West, but a 'Western collaborator', while (re)producing the white gaze of hegemonic IR that it wants to overcome.

Conclusion

Korean colonial experiences under the Japanese empire, to a great extent, shaped the initial formation of IR studies in South Korea. Institutionally, the Japanese colonial state's centralised, tight control of Korea for 35 years had provided a solid foundation for statism in South Korea, whose main features were an overdeveloped state and an underdeveloped civil society before its democratisation in 1987. Statism was also central to local intellectuals' meta-theoretical underpinnings of crafting IR studies in South Korea.

However, intellectually, the non-Western Japanese colonial state was unable to monopolise the regime of truth in colonial Korea. Although Japan made a distinction between its imperialism and Western imperialism while claiming Japan's moral superiority as having universal value, Korean intellectuals sought alternative, and presumably better, sources of modernity such as Christianity and Western knowledge, to go against Japanese imperialism/colonialism. Thus, there has been the absence – or weakness – of colonial legacies in knowledge production and systems in IR studies and beyond. In South Korea's case, this is like twisted postcoloniality in IR.

To be an independent, equal member of the Westphalian system, (South) Korea discovered and started to take the West proactively as an ideal model. In experiencing Japanese colonialism (1910–45), great power trusteeship (1945–8), the Korean War (1950–3), and the ensuing Cold War, early South Korean leaders, as well as intellectuals, were absorbed in the question of how to make a weak South Korea strong and prosperous. Related to this, South Korea longed to become Western/American for the sake of its security, development, and unification, while rejecting both Japanese and traditional Korean knowledge systems, both of which were seen as humiliating and irrelevant. This signifies a discontinuity of the colonial and traditional past and a quest for a Western/American future.

From the beginning, South Korean IR scholarship was required to serve as the handmaiden of the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Since then, South Korean IR studies have imbued the nation-state with a Korean ego. South Korean mainstream IR has been mimicking American

[95]This is informed by the leading postwar Japanese intellectual Takeuchi Yoshimi's of the master–slave dynamic, which was derived from the great Chinese writer Lu Xun. See Richard F. Calichman (ed.), *What Is Modernity? Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[96]Cho, 'Colonialism and imperialism', p. 693.

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IR. As discussed, even the ways of constructing a Korean School of IR to overcome its Western dependency appear to be operating under a colonial mentality, 'either treating Korea as a mere test bed for mainstream [American] rationalist IR approaches or mimicking the character of [American] hegemonic IR theory, thereby reaffirming it'.[97] Moreover, South Korea's neoliberalised institutional system of education since the late 1990s has made South Korean IR studies more dependent and colonial *vis-à-vis* the West/America.

To become more decolonial, ethical, and responsible in IR knowledge production, IR studies should consider not only the contents of theory, but also a scholar's attitude of making theory in theorisation. IR studies in South Korea tend to validate unreflexively particular Western characteristics of 'the mainstream IR' to the progress and regress of South Korea and its IR studies. However, the point is that the West is not the standard of all civilisations; it is an option,[98] as are others beyond the West. What should be rejected is not the West but Western-centrism in the South Korean IR community's mind-set: 'we must first *problematize ourselves* – specifically, our routinized behavior and actions that continue to fall within the mainstream paradigm'.[99] Decolonising IR scholarship is as much a mind-set as it is a theory/practice. It begins with a careful examination of a scholar's life here and now, while decentring and unlearning the totalising hegemony. Indeed, it is 'a painful process involving the practice of self-critique, self-negation, and self-rediscovery, but the desire to form a less coerced and more reflexive and dignified subjectivity necessitates it'.[100]

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[97]Ibid., p. 680.

[98]Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (eds), *Globalization and the Decolonial Option* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013).

[99]Yong-Soo Eun, 'An intellectual confession from a member of the "non-white" IR community: A friendly reply to David Lake's "white man's IR"', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 52 (2019), pp. 78–84 (p. 82).

[100]Chen, *Asia as Method*, p. 3.

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