THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

SPECTERS OF WESTERN METAPHYSICS:
CHRISTIANITY AND COLONIAL MODERNITY IN EARLY MODERN KOREA, 1876-1945

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
AUGUST 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this dissertation has been one of the hardest things I have done in my life. From the beginnings of this project until its completion, there were times when it seemed daunting and paralyzing. I could not imagine completing this journey without the presence and support of my friends and family.

I am grateful to my dissertation committee. My advisor, Sarah Hammerschlag, believed in me and encouraged me to claim my voice. She has patiently guided me throughout the entire process, especially when my stubbornness and trepidation would get the better of me. I have also had the privilege of studying modern Korean history with Bruce Cumings; his support has meant a lot to me. Albert Park stepped in many times to offer support from afar, especially in connecting me with the Korean Studies community.

This project began taking shape at the Asian Theological Summer Institute in 2015. I will not forget the warmth and generosity of the faculty mentors and friends I have met through ATSI; this network has reminded me that I am not alone in this journey. I also had the opportunity to participate in the Political Theology Network Dissertation Workshop and the Korean Studies Dissertation Workshop with the Social Science Research Council. Both workshops provided a supportive and collegial space where I could connect with other doctoral students in the writing stage, as I provided and received feedback about our dissertations. The final years of finishing the dissertation were made possible by funding I received from the Martin Marty Center at the Divinity School and the Center for East Asian Studies.

One of the greatest gifts from my time in Divinity School are the friends I have met. I have learned so much from RL Watson, Elena Lloyd-Sidle, Rachel Heath, Cherice Tearte Barr, David Barr, Russell Johnson, Lisa Landoe Hedrick, Bevin Blaber, and Hyein Park; they have all made this time of life in Chicago really special, and I miss them dearly. And regardless of distance and time, JungMin Jessica Lee, Nayoung Kim, Bill Goettler, Maria LaSala, Natasha Moore, Zitsi Mirakhur, and Jennie Yamartino have stayed present with me through moments of vulnerability and joy in each stage of the process. Dan Park, Grace Hwang, and Helen Park welcomed me back to Chicago when I was beginning and ending my PhD. When I moved to Austin, my yoga community has also been an integral part of my writing and has helped me stay healthy during the dissertation. Uma Karri has been a mentor and dear friend. I am also grateful to Sonia Seeman for her friendship and for the days we wrote together at Spider House.

Over the course of writing this dissertation, I have had the privilege of welcoming Young Sik Yoo, Shin Ho Kim, Stephen Yoo, and Milda Yoo into my life. I am grateful for their support of my academic journey. I also feel very fortunate that my father-in-law, Dr. Young Sik Yoo, is a dedicated scholar of Korean Studies who did not hesitate to share his resources with me.

Pursuing a PhD would not have been possible without my parents, Se Young Roh and Mal Deuk Roh. They paved the way long before me; I continue to be humbled and inspired by their stories. My parents fiercely advocated for me my whole life, to help make my dreams a reality; it is their enduring love and support that gives me strength to chart my own path.

And to Phil, my husband and best friend: thank you for championing me countless times over the years. It is because of you that I continue to have courage and resilience.

Austin, Texas
August 2019

ABSTRACT

Specters of Western Metaphysics: Christianity and Colonial Modernity in Early Modern Korea, 1876-1945 examines how the historical imaginations of postcolonialism in Korea is haunted by colonial hegemony. In particular, the dissertation deconstructs the concept of the sovereign subject and traces its intertwinement with Protestant theology and Western metaphysics. I unpack the metaphysical claims undergirding the texts of the Protestant missionaries in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the repetition of this theology in the Enlightenment thought of Yun Ch'i-ho, and the (compromised) attempt to erase this colonial logic in the Marxist writings of Paek Nam-un. By turning to Jacques Derrida's method of deconstruction, I draw out the following conundrum haunting modern Korean historiography: how can a nation resist colonialism when it reinscribes the terms of the colonizer? In reflecting on the value of deconstruction in Korean Studies, the dissertation offers an intervention by re-thinking our relationship to the practice of history-writing: rather than approaching history as a practice of retrieval, we can instead understand history as the site of inheritance and collective reckoning of our entanglements with a colonial past.

INTRODUCTION

What is postcolonial freedom? In Korea, following *haebang* ("liberation") from Japanese colonialism in 1945, the competing answers to this question has led to a devastating civil war, the consequent division into two nation states, authoritarianism in both North and South Koreas, the rise of ethnic nationalism, and an ongoing geopolitical crisis surrounding North Korea's nuclear activity. Within South Korean politics, the North Korea question continues to polarize the ideological spectrum between the Left and the Right, stirring up fears of proximity to the North Korean regime (among the Right) or of foreclosing the possibility of a peace treaty (among the Left).

This bipolar politics appears most prominently in competing narrative spaces of modern Korean history and historiography, with an ideological warfare over historical interpretations of Japanese colonial rule (concerning what constituted collaboration with Japan), the Korean War (who invaded whom), and the position of the U.S. (the question of neocolonialism in the postwar period). The ongoing debates over history textbooks in South Korea illustrate this tension. In October 2015, the South Korean government announced plans to rewrite history textbooks used in secondary schools, claiming that the current textbooks are too left-leaning, pro-North Korean and anti-American, and that beginning in 2017, secondary schools were to use history textbooks issued by the state alone.[1] This revisionist stance occurred as part of the efforts of South Korea's New Right,

[1] Choe Sang-Hun, "South Korea to Issue State History Textbooks, Rejecting Private Publishers," *New York Times*, October 12, 2015, accessed December 10, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/13/world/asia/south-korea-to-issue-state-history-textbooks-rejecting-private-publishers.html.

which sought to claim what Henry Em diagnoses as the "legitimacy to South Korea's anti-communist legacy."[2]

This question of legacy lies at the heart of this warfare over modern Korea's history and collective memory. While the New Right in South Korea may trace their intellectual genealogy to the "positivist school of historiography" in the 1930s exemplified in the work of Yi Pyŏng-do, the Left traces their ideological and political bases back to the 1930s Marxist historiography of Paek Nam-un.[3] Throughout these schools of Korean historiography, however, there is the underlying assumption that the retrieval of "what actually happened" is not only possible but would also set the course for the "correct" version of postcolonial freedom in Korea. For both the Left and the Right, there can only be one "true" or "correct" ideological and historical legacy.

It is my contention that this political gridlock is perpetuated because both sides hold onto what Ethan Kleinberg calls "ontological realism":

> I define ontological realism as a commitment to history as an endeavor concerned with events assigned to a specific location in space and time that are in principle observable and as such are regarded as fixed and immutable. Here the historian accepts that there is a possibility for epistemological uncertainty about our understanding of a past event, but this is mitigated by the ontological certainty that the event happened in a certain way at a certain time. Central to this position is a commitment to empirical data that serve as something of a false floor to hold it. In the end, getting the past "right" is a question of historical method.[4]

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[2] Henry Em, "Historians and Historical Writing in Modern Korea," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, Volume 5: Historical Writing since 1945*, eds. Axel Schneider and Daniel Woolf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 660.

[3] For a helpful summary of the intellectual genealogies and the major schools of historiography in modern Korea, see Henry Em, "Historians and Historical Writing in Modern Korea," in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*. Em acknowledges from the outset that not all historiographies fit neatly into the typologies he examines in his chapter. However, as Em notes, these typologies offer a helpful starting point for tracing the intellectual genealogies in Korea.

[4] Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 1.

According to Kleinberg, ontological realism is the underlying commitment to the certainty that a historical event happened in a certain way at a certain time, even if the historian is not able to access that event fully. According to this position, if only the historian gets the method right, one would be closer to retrieving "what actually happened." For sure, the various schools of modern Korean historiography have, for the most part, have presumed that "getting the past right" would thus yield only one kind of ideological orientation to Korea's colonial past.

This dissertation intervenes in this gridlock surrounding Korean historiography (and the consequent bipolar discourse concerning Korea's postcolonial freedom) by deconstructing the concept of "the sovereign subject," which I argue was entangled with the theological claims of Protestant Christianity. As we will see, Protestant Christianity was deeply intertwined with the beginnings of colonial modernity in late nineteenth-century Korea, not only ushering in visibly Western institutions in medicine and education, but also disseminating the more invisible concepts of ethical and political subjectivity that was rooted in the history of Western metaphysics. In reckoning with the ghosts of Western metaphysics in the intellectual attempts to overcome colonialism, this dissertation raises a philosophical question about the very *practices* of writing history: what is our relation to Korea's colonial history and the historical archives, given that we ourselves have been shaped (and indeed are haunted) by this history? In thinking about the structure of haunting, I critique the assumption that the historian is a disenchanted figure that is disconnected from the past.

Western metaphysics has long championed the rational, autonomous, sovereign subject as the ideal of human consciousness and freedom. And this particular metaphysics of subjectivity has always been intricately intertwined with Christian theology, even as the Enlightenment declared the separation of Church and State in the modern West. That is, even in what Charles Taylor has called the "secular age," the very logic of that secularism is embedded in a Christian metaphysical claim about human subjectivity. Kant is a good example of this logic: at stake in Kant's metaphysical project is the possibility of human freedom. This freedom is constituted not only by the capacity of exercising one's reason, but also in the *will* to do so. It is the possibility of this volitional capacity that human beings are thus ethical subjects; for without this matter of will, there would only be the laws of nature. For Kant, human freedom had to be conceptualized as *separate* from the natural world; it is this dualistic metaphysics that could explain the possibility of moral agency. Here we can see that Kant's ethics is also a theological ethics—for this vision of human freedom also offered a theodicy, a metaphysical system that could explain good and evil. If we thus situate the Enlightenment project in the broader history of Western metaphysics, we can understand that there were Christian theological stakes—in both religious and secular discourses—in the call to become awakened to human freedom.

It is this Western metaphysics of human subjectivity that became the basis of constructing and disseminating liberalism around the world. Freedom, as the achievement of autonomy and sovereignty, was envisioned as a universally applicable ideal; that claim to universality thus buttressed European colonialism and imperialism in

the nineteenth century. While in most colonial contexts, there was a clear demarcation of colonizer/colonized and oppressor/oppressed, Western colonialism made those distinctions blurrier, because subjectivity *was* the site of subjection. In that sense, the colonial logic has been about constructing and disseminating a particular *kind* of subjectivity.

In critically examining the legacy of Protestant Christianity in Korea's intellectual history, we encounter this collapse of the distinction between subjectivity and subjection. We are presented with a philosophical conundrum that is at the heart of this dissertation: how can a nation resist colonialism, when it reinscribes the terms of the colonizer in its imagination of freedom? In turning to the thought of Jacques Derrida, I argue this conundrum calls for a deconstruction—not only of Western metaphysics, but also of its repetition precisely in the attempt at its erasure. In particular, it is what Derrida calls "hauntology" in *Specters of Marx* that best describes this logic of erasure and repetition. In theorizing haunting by way of Derrida's method, we have the tools to engage in a critical reading of Korea's intellectual history in recognizing the compromised colonizer/colonized binary. But this deconstruction of Korea's postcolonial discourse is not in an effort to be a-political; it is, rather, a call for a reckoning of the consequences of having inherited Western metaphysics in Korea's colonial modernity.

In undertaking both a historical and philosophical analysis, this project offers an intervention, on the one hand, in modern Korean historiography. Instead of proposing another revisionist history, the project takes a meta-historical approach to unpack the metaphysical claims undergirding both the Leftist and Rightist claims concerning

political freedom. In so doing, I suggest an alternative critical reading of colonial and postcolonial discourse in Korea's intellectual history. By tracing the specters of Western metaphysics, I contend that a deconstructive gesture toward modern Korean historiography can help us think more critically about the concept of the sovereign subject that runs through the gridlock of Korea's postcolonial discourse.

On the other hand, this project also argues that the history of Western metaphysics is not only relevant but also significant within Korean Studies. In examining the dissemination and displacement of Western metaphysical concepts as a result of European colonialism, we can also see more clearly the intricate intertwinement of Western philosophy, Protestant Christianity, and Korea's colonial modernity. The sovereign subject, a concept that will be deconstructed and critiqued throughout this dissertation, is the hallmark of Western liberalism that can only make sense when situated in conversation with Christian theological claims. Is this the only ethical system available? In reflecting on the ways that Christianity haunts both secular discourse and postcolonial discourse in Korea, is it possible to conceptualize alternative notions of subjectivity and freedom?

My claim in this dissertation is that deconstruction, as a method of critical reading, shifts our attention *away* from this concern for subjectivity, which has dominated postcolonial theory and criticism and led to the rise of nativism and ethnic nationalism that would only deepen the structures of colonial hegemony. That particular notion of subjectivity, I argue, is rooted in the Western metaphysical vision of constructing the space of mastery, in which the human subject asserts autonomy and

sovereignty over and against other subjects and against the natural world. This metaphysics thus always constructs an "inside" and "outside," and a "self" over against an "other." Hauntology is Derrida's way of exposing the artificiality of that space of mastery, thus compromising the sovereignty of the living, knowing subject. It is a way of describing that the so-called "subject" is always, already interconnected with those that came before, and those that will come after. It is in this sense that we can then shift our own relationship to history and history-writing—not for the aim of nativist retrieval or nostalgia, but rather as a site of collective inheritance. This inheritance, in turn, implies a revised concept of human agency: that of collective responsibility, with an awareness of what legacy we may be leaving behind. If the sovereign subject claims to be suspended from time and space and existing independently, the artificiality of that subjectivity reveals that we are always and already connected with one another and therefore have an ethical responsibility not to reinscribe the colonial logic of subjectivity and subjection.

The project is divided into five chapters. The first chapter makes the case that there is a crisis in postcolonial discourse emerging from the bipolar politics of the Cold War in Korea. Functioning as a literature review of postcolonial theory, this chapter puts postcolonial theory and criticism arising out of South Asia in conversation with postcolonial discourse in Korea's intellectual history. In bringing these two discourses together, I explain the following: (1) why, on the one hand, Jacques Derrida's method of deconstruction as a practice of critical reading is relevant to the study of modern Korea's cultural and intellectual history, and on the other hand, (2) why the case of colonial modernity in Korea can intervene in the existing paradigms of postcolonial criticism. I

situate Derrida's concept of hauntology, which appears in his *Specters of Marx*, as a deconstructive method already outlined in *Of Grammatology*.

I then apply this deconstructive method in my analyses of sources from early modern Korean history in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. Chapter two examines North American Protestant missionary discourse in and about Korea, most notably in their approach to the Korean vernacular and their idea of language more generally. I also show how they used Korean mythology (the Tan'gun Legend) to generate the concept of indigenous subjectivity. In so doing, this chapter unpacks the relation between their philosophy of language, Protestant monotheism, and Korean ethnic nationalism. The deconstructive resources from *Of Grammatology* are particularly relevant in my reading of two missionaries in particular, James Gale and Homer Hulbert. In showing how phonocentrism is linked to metaphysical claims about the structure of origin, I undertake a Derridean analysis of exposing the intricate relation between linguistics and Christian theology.

Chapter three then turns to the application and repetition of this concept of subjectivity in Korean Enlightenment discourses at the turn of the century, especially given the legacy of the *kaehwa* ("enlightenment") intellectual movement. It examines, in particular, the life and thought of Yun Ch'i-ho, a seminal figure of the enlightenment movement. In considering the intellectual genealogies of the Korean Right, I have chosen to study Yun Ch'i-ho, rather than Yi Pyŏng-do (mentioned above as exemplifying the "positivist school of historiography" in the 1930s), as Yun's thought sits as the intersection of Enlightenment discourse and Christianity in Korea. In this chapter, I clarify that the

meaning of "modernity" in Korea was rooted in the Western project of disseminating liberalism, and that Protestant Christian ethics were also at the heart of that project. It thus situates the nexus of Protestant Christianity, modernity, and industrial capitalism in Korea at the turn of the century, showing that Yun Ch'i-ho's endorsement of Protestant Christianity was linked to a logic of survival in the rise of industrialism and global capitalism as a result of Western imperialism. This chapter thus deconstructs the tensions in Yun Ch'i-ho's positions on race, economy, ethics, and politics.

Chapter four examines Korean Marxist historiography in the writings of Paek Nam-un to disentangle the ironies of reinscribing the concept of the sovereign subject in Paek's attempts to form a secular discourse based on "science." Paek's Marxism exemplifies the most explicit attempt to conjure and overcome colonialism, and has become a crucial figure in the intellectual genealogy of the Korean Left. Paek thus claims to take a scientific approach to Korean history, in his desire to offer a scientific account of Korea's socio-economic history. He in fact critiques nativist accounts of Korean history, claiming that it was more important to emphasize Korea as an instance of what is universal; for the emphasis on Korea's particularity would only buttress the colonial claim that Korea's socioeconomic development was "stagnant." For Paek, the social scientific method thus offers a way out of colonialism, not only in re-interpreting Korea's history, but also in proposing a postcolonial path forward to assert Korea's economic autonomy. The irony here, I contend, is that Paek's very desire for a postcolonial path ends up reinscribing the colonial terms of enlightenment, universalism, and sovereignty.

In the fifth and final chapter, I return to the thought of Jacques Derrida, offering my own intervention concerning the ways in which Western Christian metaphysics haunts the historical imaginations of early modern Korea. I consider what value hauntology can offer in re-conceptualizing the meaning of (and our relation to) history. This chapter also draws upon Avery Gordon's work on haunting to reflect on the meaning of this deconstructive gesture and a shifted orientation away from nativism. Although ethnic nationalism has been heavily critiqued in more recent discourses in modern Korean historiography, I also make the case why it is still important to reckon with the ghosts of Western metaphysics. For it is in the collective space of this reckoning with colonial hauntings that we can better understand the logic of erasure and repetition.

Here we can come back to the concept of legacy. Deconstructing history and historiography is about acknowledging what has been inherited, especially including the tensions and the aporia. And it is in the space of that acknowledgement—or reckoning—that actually opens the ethical and political necessity of collective responsibility. In exposing the aporia of colonial hegemony in Korea's intellectual history, this dissertation offers an alternative historical imagination—one that does not claim a disenchanted position of critique, but rather reckons with the ethical implications of a Western metaphysics of subjectivity. Thus in tracing the legacy of Western metaphysics in Korea's colonial modernity, this project offers a reckoning not only within the space of Korean postcolonial discourse, but also concerning our own entanglements with the colonial past.

"Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony."

— Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

CHAPTER 1
HAUNTING POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE IN KOREA: COLONIAL MODERNITY, CHRISTIANITY, AND THE TASK OF DECONSTRUCTION

"As our nation struggles to rise up from its fall and new buds try to sprout from decayed morass, unless we base ourselves on this religion [Christianity], we may not reap true benefits even from our contacts with the [outside] world [...] We must adopt this religion as the basis for everything. Everyone must forget about themselves and work for the benefit of others. We must do our best in supporting the nation to achieve the same level of civilization as that of Great Britain and the United States. Let us then meet again in the Kingdom of Heaven."[1]

— Syngman Rhee, *The Spirit of Independence*
29 June 1904

"The Korean people, therefore, are today faced with the tasks of carrying out an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal, democratic revolution and building a Democratic People's Republic."[2]

"Nowadays I often hear words such as popular rights and democracy. They are all fine words in the sense that they mean government granting rights to the people, government in which the sovereignty rests with the people. But 'democracy' of a U.S. or British type does not fit today's Korea. West European 'democracy' is already out of date and, moreover, if we adopted it, we would fail to attain our goal of achieving the country's independence and our country would be reduced again to a colony of foreign imperialism. It is, therefore, necessary to set up a new, progressive democratic system in Korea in keeping with its actual conditions. Our task ahead is to quickly educate the masses who are not yet fully awakened and lead them to fight for genuine democracy themselves."[3]

— Kim Il Sung, "On the Building of New Korea and the National United Front: Speech Addressed to the Responsible Functionaries of the Provincial Party Committees"
13 October 1945

1. The global Cold War and the crisis of postcolonial discourse in Korea

Following the cessation of the Japanese colonial era in Korea on August 15, 1945 (this date called *haebang*, or "liberation," on the Korean calendar), two leading political figures began to emerge, both claiming the path forward for a newly independent,

[1] Syngman Rhee, *The Spirit of Independence: A Primer of Korean Modernization and Reform*, trans. Han-Kyo Kim (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 282-3.
[2] Kim Il Sung, *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1971), 3.
[3] Ibid., 8-9.

postcolonial nation state. By 1948, there were two rival states that split the Korean peninsula: The Republic of Korea (ROK) in the South, with the Protestant Christian-educated reformer Syngman Rhee backed by the U.S. as South Korea's first president[4]; and in the North, The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), led by the revolutionary nationalist Kim Il Sung, who was known by the 1930s as "one of the most effective and dangerous"[5] leaders of the guerrilla resistance against Japan. In the decades to follow, South Korea would become known in the Western world as an archetype of an East Asian success story—not only as one of the so-called Asian Tiger economies[6] that achieved a drastic industrial transformation, but also as a site of democratization that adopted the Western model of liberalism. Meanwhile, North Korea would become perceived as a secretive, isolationist, outdated, totalitarian regime that remains an enigma to many in the "Free World."

For sure, where these political leaders—and the two Koreas—diverged seems obvious. In his *Spirit of Independence* (later deemed in Korean political theory as an Enlightenment [*kaehwa*] classic[7]), Syngman Rhee calls for the reform of Korean politics by looking to Great Britain and the United States as exemplary models of civilization. And Christianity is what would take Korea on this path toward Enlightenment—it is on the basis of this religion, Rhee claims, that Korea can transform into an independent, sovereign nation in a new world order. Decades later, Kim Il Sung forcefully rejects all

[4] Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005), 195.
[5] Ibid., 160.
[6] The "Tiger economies" refers to South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan.
[7] Young Ick Lew, "Foreword" to *The Spirit of Independence* by Syngman Rhee, xii.

things British and American by identifying them as the source of colonial power, including that of Japan. In claiming that Western models of liberal democracy would only compromise Korea's newfound independence, Kim in effect proposes the possibility of exorcising imperialism from its very roots. Formulating the *Juche* theory of autonomy, Kim contends that the very structure of democracy must be reworked such that sovereignty can truly belong to the people.

Korea's ongoing war points to the reverberating effects of the global Cold War in postcolonial contexts.[8] The global Cold War has conventionally been understood to be the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, from the end of World War II until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, marking the defeat of communism and the triumph of liberalism.[9] But as we know in Korea's case, the Cold War is far from over, with the bipolar division of the peninsula still affecting not only Korean politics but also geopolitics world-wide. As Bruce Cumings notes, Korea is the site of a long Cold War: "The political and ideological divisions that we associate with the Cold War were the reasons for Korea's division; they came early to Korea, before the onset of the global Cold War, and today they outlast the end of the Cold War everywhere else."[10] The so-called "end" of the Cold War eclipses so much of the enduring violence that continues *because* of Cold War politics. Or as Christine Hong incisively notes, this

[8] For a further study of the Cold War and postcolonial history in Asia (specifically in Korea and Vietnam), see Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
[9] The "origins" of the Cold War are still debated, as Heonik Kwon notes in *The Other Cold War*. But Kwon notes that there is a general consensus about the "end" of the Cold War as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. See *The Other Cold War*, chapter 1.
[10] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 186.

eclipse of violence occurs because of what she calls the "Cold War perceptual problematic in which wartime would be misrecognized as peacetime."[11]

The Cold War as exemplified in modern Korea is in fact the site of two versions of postcoloniality, with competing value systems concerning what constitutes political and economic progress following Korea's liberation in 1945. In some ways, these two Koreas contain both the archetype *as well as* the antithesis of "post-colonial" democracy. Charles K. Armstrong and Chungmoo Choi (on North and South Korea respectively), address this dissonant space:

> What are we to make, then, of a postcolonial state that claims to have rejected the western bourgeois model of politics, to have eliminated the ruling classes, to represent the poor and oppressed? What is the relationship of such a state to its colonial predecessor, and to the modern West in general?[12]
>
> South Korea is a space lying between the empty signifier, "post-colonial," and the reality that it (mis)represents.[13]

Thus, the Cold War in Korea is a crisis of the very term "postcolonial." The signifier "postcolonial" is in fact a moment of bifurcation and erasure.[14] In both the North and the South, "postcolonial" discourse reinscribes the logic of hegemony in the very attempt to erase it. For in the decades that followed the division of the Korean peninsula, the competition between these two models of "postcoloniality" would only lead to further violence, with totalitarianism in North Korea, and a "developmental state" in South Korea

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[11] Christine Hong, "The Unending Korean War," *positions* 23:4 (2015): 600.
[12] Charles K. Armstrong, "Surveillance and Punishment in Postliberation North Korea," in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani Barlow (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 323.
[13] Chungmoo Choi, "The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea," in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, 349.
[14] I am drawing on the French term *biffures*, meaning both "bifurcation and erasure." Jacques Derrida draws on Michel Leiris' *Biffures* in the essay "Tympan," in *Margins of Philosophy*. I am indebted to Sarah Hammerschlag in her use of this source in a course on Levinas and Derrida at the University of Chicago, Fall 2013.

that made severe compromises in democratic values in prioritizing economic growth over everything else.[15] It is this discursive crisis that disrupts the way we may think of postcolonial history—particularly in American Orientalist imaginations that eclipse the consequences of this elongated Cold War in Korea.[16]

This project argues that the origins of the Cold War in Korea, as well as the consequent crisis of Korea's postcolonial discourse, are located in the dissemination of Western metaphysical notions of the autonomous, sovereign subject; and this notion of subjectivity, in turn, is intimately linked to the values of Protestant Christianity. The crisis of postcolonial discourse in Korea must be situated against the backdrop of colonial modernity, industrial capitalism, and Western liberalism that long precede World War II and Korea's "liberation." In positioning the two "postcolonial" Koreas in the elongated effects of colonial modernity, we can actually better diagnose the intellectual and cultural history undergirding Korea's bipolar politics. If we take another look at the rhetoric as exemplified by Kim and Rhee, there is a peculiar point of convergence: both claims are driven by the need and desire to salvage Korea and form a newfound sense of nationalism in the advent of colonial modernity. How, then, do we make sense of the strange repetition (and erasure) of the following categories: enlightenment, freedom, sovereignty, independence, democracy, and religion, in these polarizing attempts to either embrace or reclaim these terms? Is it strange that Kim Il Sung, in his call to resist all forms of foreign

[15] See Meredith Woo-Cumings, ed., *The Developmental State* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).
[16] For a further study of the Cold War and American Orientalist imaginations about Asia, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

imperialism, including that of Japan and the West, calls for an "awakening" of the masses—that is, does Kim reinscribe a narrative of enlightenment and the rhetoric of progress and futurity? As we will see, this claim for an indigenous democratic revolution is constituted in a particular notion of political and cultural subjectivity that preserves the possibility of the autonomous, sovereign subject that will constitute postcolonial freedom. What we see here is a metaphysical claim about what constitutes the human subject (both individual and collective), that then shapes how we understand ethical and political values.

At the heart of this project is the following question: how is it that the two Koreas' "postcolonial" attempts to overcome the colonial origins of Korea's modernity reinscribe the logic of hegemony, as well as further ethical and political violence? How, then, does the story of colonial modernity as it is manifested in modern Korea—and the two Koreas' subsequent "postcolonial" condition—revisit and revise the status of postcolonial discourse? I address this question by interrogating the position of Protestant Christianity as the harbinger of Enlightenment ideals in Korea's colonial modernity, as we can see in Syngman Rhee's *Spirit of Independence* in the opening quotation above. In so doing my aim is two-fold: (1) I undertake an analysis of a discourse that *can* be traced to the history of Western political and religious thought and show how the construction of the concern for historical agency and subjectivity is itself a *product* of Christian metaphysical categories. (2) Instead of focusing on proclaiming the culpability of the West, I show how the colonial logic of *disseminating* this discourse via Christianity in fact finds peculiar ways of reproducing and repeating the very political and economic structures that

postcolonial states purport to resist. Thus the consequent ideological warfare in Korea demands a deconstruction of the very ideas of "subjectivity" and "freedom."

As I will argue further, the position of Christianity in Korea's cultural and intellectual history revises the existing paradigms of postcolonial criticism that have largely been rooted in the South Asian experience of British colonialism. The postcolonial situation in Korea complicates this paradigm for a number of reasons. Most notably, there is the position of Japan in Korea's colonial history: it was Japan, not a Western nation, that had annexed Korea as a colony in the first half of the twentieth century. Thus the oversimplified geopolitical imaginations of "East"/"West" that reinforce the colonizer/colonized binary does not easily map onto Korea's colonial history and criticism. But as I will show further, the "West" nonetheless remains, but as a spectral figure in the interrogation of Korea's colonial past. The colonizer/colonized binary is not only inadequate in framing Korea's postcolonial discourse, it also eclipses what I diagnose to be the deeper problem—the dissemination of a logic of colonial hegemony, that is rooted in a Western metaphysics of subjectivity and has reproduced layers of colonization.

Furthermore, in Korea, what Leela Gandhi calls the "colonial aftermath"[17] entailed an ideological warfare about the meaning of postcoloniality and freedom, leading to two nation states and a traumatic civil war that is still ongoing to this day.[18] That is, it was the

[17] Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 4.
[18] See, for example, the contemporary historiographical debates in South Korea between Kang Man-gil, *Haebang chŏnhusa ŭi insik*, vols. 1-6 (Seoul: Han'gilsa: 1985) and Pak Chi-yang et al., eds., *Haebang chŏnhusa ŭi chaeinsik*, vols. 1 and 2 (Seoul: Ch'aek Sesang, 2006).

postcolonial interrogation itself (and the severe disagreement therein) that led to polarized politics in a newly liberated Korea. With the ongoing Korean War, and the continued warfare concerning the interpretation of Korea's colonial past, we are not only confronted with the question of "how did we get here," but also, perhaps more pressingly, "why are we stuck here?"[19] In order to address this question, I will argue that we need to foreground the question of metaphysics—specifically, the position of Christianity in the intellectual history of early modern Korea. In so doing, I seek to ask: what kinds of metaphysical claims undergird the value systems and imaginations surrounding freedom?

In framing this project, my analysis is indebted to Jacques Derrida's method of deconstruction. By drawing on what Derrida calls "hauntology" and situating this category in his larger project of deconstruction, I also address the following question: is it in fact possible to conjure Christianity, so as to exorcise it by naming its entanglement with colonial history? "Haunting" refers to a way of framing this problem—what I call a *foreclosure of vision*—a way of framing the very *structure* and logic of colonial and cultural hegemony, in which various attempts for resistance in fact reinscribe that logic. By revisiting the status of postcolonial discourse and the crisis as it is experienced in Korea's own Cold War, I suggest that the task and practice of deconstruction can have a revised application in so-called "postcolonial" contexts.

The remainder of this chapter argues how and why the case of Protestant Christianity in Korea revises the role of deconstruction in postcolonial theory. I begin by

[19] I owe this formulation of questions to Gretchen Helfrich, who made this observation in response to my public presentation at the University of Chicago Martin Marty Center on May 16, 2019.

examining the paradigms set by Subaltern Studies, with particular attention to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay, "Deconstructing Historiography" (1988) as a seminal statement in postcolonial theory and criticism. I look at the role that Derrida plays in Spivak's postcolonial project. I then examine the category of "colonial modernity" emerging from East Asian Studies and Korean Studies, as a term that further complicates postcolonial narratives from South Asia. From there, I examine the position of Christianity and its relation to the problem of colonial modernity—that is, how does religion, political economy, and discourse intersect in ways that formulate a peculiar logic of cultural hegemony? I then suggest that Derrida's "hauntology" is the best way of framing this question and elaborate on this category by situating this term in Derrida's *Specters of Marx* and *Of Grammatology*. The final section of this chapter then returns to the question of colonial hegemony in its *spectral* form, showing that the case of Korea revises Spivak's hypothesis concerning the role of deconstruction in postcolonial discourse. I conclude by suggesting that spectrality thus offers us an alternative meaning of "postcoloniality."

2. The "subaltern" and Spivak's use of Derrida in existing paradigms of postcolonial criticism

Postcolonial studies first burgeoned as historians and literary scholars[20] grappled with what Leela Gandhi calls the "colonial aftermath"[21] of 19th century European colonialism, and in particular, British imperialism as it was experienced in India.

[20] These include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha, to name a few postcolonial critics who have pioneered this field.
[21] Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 4.

According to (Leela) Gandhi, postcolonial theory can thus be seen as "a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past."[22] This emphasis on the "colonial past" provides insight into why and how "history" and "historiography" emerged as a site of interrogation in postcolonial theory. The multi-volume *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (1982-1987) was one such contribution that interrogated "history" itself as the site of oppression, as the narratives *and* the material archives belonged to those in power (in India's case, to the bourgeois elite and to the British *Raj*). As Edward Said writes, "subaltern history in literal fact is a narrative missing from the official story of India."[23] It is no wonder then the Subaltern Studies collective writes in critical response and resistance to the official historical record. Said provides a helpful synopsis of this project: the task of "rewriting Indian history today is an extension of the struggle between subaltern and elite, and between the Indian masses and the British *raj*."[24]

As postcolonial theory constituted a new wave of criticism that proliferated in various postcolonial contexts around the world including Asia, Latin America, and Africa, the South Asian experience (as it was narrated by the Subaltern Studies collective) became a paradigmatic model for postcolonial criticism. The task of the postcolonial critic and scholar, according to this paradigm, is to re-claim history—both in its conceptual and material forms—from past colonial authorities, thereby re-writing the

[22] Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 4.
[23] Edward Said, "Foreword" to *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), vii.
[24] Ibid.

narrative and giving historical agency to the colonized masses who would otherwise not appear in the official records. A key feature of this paradigm is the colonizer/colonized binary, which has then universally positioned Europe (and the West more generally) as the colonizer, over and against whom all other formerly colonized nations must rise.

The "subaltern," drawn from Antonio Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks* (1948) and defined as the oppressed subject, was claimed as the figure against whom elitist historiography committed epistemic violence. Postcolonial critics such as Edward Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (both situated in literary criticism), also drew from poststructuralist resources to highlight, in particular, the politics of representation. In *Orientalism* (1978), Said undertook this task by documenting the problem of knowledge production, particularly when it came to the historical archive, the dominant discursive patterns and canonical texts in institutions that held power (including but not limited to institutions of higher learning). What was at stake in this set of philosophical, political issues was the question of Europe's "other" and the consequent epistemic violence done onto the colonized subject.

In response to the Subaltern Studies collective, critics have raised issues about whether the category "subaltern" then reinscribed the very problem it was attempting to resist. If by definition "subaltern" subjectivity is a lacuna in the historical record, was it possible to "rewrite" history "from below"? Rosalind O'Hanlon's 1988 article aptly addresses this concern: "At the very moment of his assault upon western historicism, the classic figure of western humanism—the self-originating, self-determining individual, who is at once a subject in his possession of a sovereign consciousness whose defining

quality is reason, and an agent in his power of freedom—is readmitted through the back door in the figure of the subaltern himself, as he is restored to history in the reconstructions of the Subaltern project."[25] The main source of contention, of course, was whether the emphasis on the subaltern subject reinscribes problematic forms of humanism and thus problematic forms of representation.

It is in this context that Spivak famously formulates the concept of "strategic essentialism" in her introduction to the 1988 publication of *Selected Subaltern Studies*, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography."[26] Despite appearances to the contrary, she claims that the Subaltern Studies collective is *in fact* engaged in the practice of deconstruction. Spivak draws heavily on Jacques Derrida's method, providing a seminal statement on the role that deconstruction plays in postcolonial theory and historiography.[27] But she does so by negotiating Derrida with Marx and Nietzsche—by aligning Subaltern Studies with Derridean deconstruction, the Marxist idea of fetishization, and Nietzschean genealogy, Spivak attempts to negotiate a positivist concept of agency and political resistance while safeguarding postcolonial theory from reinscribing problematic forms of essentialism.

Spivak's argument proceeds as follows. Contesting traditional narratives of India's colonial "transition," "from semi-feudalism into capitalist subjection,"[28] she claims that

[25] Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and the Histories of Resistance in South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies 22:1* (1988), 191.
[26] Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, 3-32.
[27] Spivak's engagement with Derrida is particularly well known in her translation of and lengthy Preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. I will return to *Of Grammatology* at length later in this chapter.
[28] Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," 3.

the work of the subaltern studies collective offers a "theory of change"[29]—one that revises the definition of change by claiming that (1) this "transition" is in fact a series of confrontations (thereby exposing the power relations of domination and exploitation), and that (2) it is "marked by a functional change in sign-systems,"[30] e.g. from religious to militant, crime to insurgency, bondsman to worker, etc. The key proposition of Subaltern Studies, then, is to locate "the agency of change"[31] in the subaltern.

Although the Subaltern Studies collective perceives itself as dialectically constructing a theory of consciousness, Spivak claims that their work is actually closer to a practice of deconstruction:

> …as self-professed dialecticians, they open themselves to older debates between spontaneity and consciousness or structure and history. Their actual practice, which, I will argue, is closer to deconstruction, would put these oppositions into question. *A theory of change as the site of the displacement of function between sign-systems*—which is what they oblige me to read in them—is a theory of reading in the strongest possible general sense. The site of displacement of the function of signs is the name of reading as active transaction between past and future. This transactional reading as (the possibility) of action, even at its most dynamic, is perhaps what Antonio Gramsci meant by 'elaboration,' *e-laborare*, working out.[32]

That is to say, the subject-position or the subject-effect of the "subaltern," for Spivak is the site of displacement—that which exposes the change in sign-systems operating in elitist historiography. Thus, the work of the collective as outlined in the *Subaltern Studies* volume is to map the irreducibility of the "cognitive failure"[33] in authoritative accounts of India's history. Deconstruction, as practice of critical reading or what she calls "transactional reading" above, operates so as to expose the *violence* in the change of the

[29] Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," 3.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 4. Emphasis added.
[33] Ibid., 5.

system of signs in elitist historiography. By means of a critical reading practice, deconstruction thus maps the structures of domination and exploitation that undergird what is in fact a confrontation rather than "transition" in India's colonial history.

Thus Spivak defines "strategic essentialism" as follows: "From within but against the grain, elements in their text would warrant a reading of the project to retrieve the subaltern consciousness as the attempt to undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and 'situate' the effect of the subject as subaltern. I would read it, then as a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest."[34] This essentialism is "strategic" because it is not that the subaltern can or *should* be retrieved, but the *processes* and the *logic* by which the epistemic violence takes place in historiography can then be exposed. That is, the aim for the Subaltern Studies collective, according to Spivak, is *not* necessarily to recover the subject (unlike what O'Hanlon suggests), but rather to chart the violently hegemonic constitution of the colonized, exploited subject. Precisely in mapping the *im*possibility of retrieval, the irreducibility of the "cognitive failure," Subaltern Studies can therefore expose the logic of hegemony operative in elitist historiography.

Yet, in articulating the explicit and strategically *political* motivation, Spivak seeks to preserve the *possibility* of agency and of political action in the "Subaltern." It is still a question, then, of political agency that incentivizes the task of deconstruction in postcolonial historiography. This practice is motivated by a concern for *action*, as evident in her reference to Gramsci. Spivak claims: "This is the greatest gift of deconstruction: to

[34] Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," 13.

question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysing him, persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility."[35] She makes this claim about the transformation from impossibility to possibility by referring to Nietzsche: "It can be advanced that their work presupposes that the entire socius, at least in so far as it is the object of their study, is what Nietzsche would call a *fortgesetzte Zeichenkette*—a 'continuous sign-chain.' The possibility of action lies in the dynamics of the disruption of this object, the breaking and relinking of the chain."[36] The process of *breaking* the sign chain—the process by which the so-called seemingly natural historical narrative—turns out to be *un*natural and furthermore violent. By means of this breakage, the authority of the official record then gets compromised.

But for Spivak, this concern for "action" seems to require something beyond the discursive dimension. Here is where Marx takes a more prominent position in her argument. Strategic essentialism is most useful, Spivak writes, when it is harnessed for *class* consciousness:

> The strategy becomes most useful when 'consciousness' is being used in the narrow sense, as *self*-consciousness. When 'consciousness' is being used in that way, Marx's notion of un-alienated practice or Gramsci's notion of an 'ideologically *coherent*', 'spontaneous philosophy of the multitude' are plausible and powerful. For class-consciousness does not engage the ground-level of consciousness—consciousness in general. 'Class' is not, after all, an inalienable description of a human reality. Class-consciousness on the *descriptive* level is itself a strategic and artificial rallying awareness which, on the *transformative* level, seeks to destroy the mechanics which come to construct the outlines of the very class of which a collective consciousness has been situationally developed [...] Subaltern consciousness as emergent *collective* consciousness is one of the main themes of these books.[37]

[35] Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," 9.
[36] Ibid., 5.
[37] Ibid., 13-4.

Spivak makes the distinction between the narrow sense of "class-consciousness" and the more general sense of "ground-level consciousness." In so doing, she wants to make the claim that a Marxist notion of the exploited subject does not necessarily repeat the same kind of violence incited by problematic forms of Western humanism. That is, insofar as "class" is *not* a natural, "inalienable" feature of humanity, "class-consciousness" has less to do with the constitution of a human subject and more to do with exposing the artificiality of the category "class." Furthermore, in a Marxist move, Spivak contends that the Subaltern consciousness, *as* a form of collective class-consciousness, can thus be harnessed on a "*transformative* level"—that is, with the aims of political emancipation.

Here I would like to return to the question of epistemic violence done onto the colonized subject—it is this question that *foregrounds* Spivak's use of deconstruction, thereby subordinating Derrida to Marx[38], utilizing the critical reading practice of deconstruction to a political interest in action and transformation. For Spivak, post-structuralist European intellectuals do not fully comprehend the force and effects of the violence constituted by "the international division of labour"[39]: "Although some of these Western intellectuals express genuine concern about the ravages of contemporary neo-colonialism i[n] their own nation-states, they are not knowledgeable in the history of imperialism, in the epistemic violence that constituted/effaced a subject that was obliged to cathect (occupy in response to a desire) the space of the Imperialists' self-consolidating

[38] This is also evident in Spivak's later engagements with Derrida, most notably in "Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida" in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 97-120; see also her response to Derrida's *Specters of Marx* in Spivak, "Ghostwriting," *Diacritics* 25:2 (1995), 64-84.
[39] Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," 19.

other. It is almost as if the force generated by their crisis is separated from its appropriate field by a sanctioned ignorance of that history."[40] This is why the figure of the "subaltern woman"—the figure of the Third World woman whose labor is exploited in the new international division of labor—has an important function in Spivak's analysis (and in her subsequent writings on international feminism). Hence, the binaries colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed, exploitation/domination must ultimately be preserved in order for Spivak to claim the Subaltern as the site of epistemic violence in the "international division of labor."[41]

3. The question of "colonial modernity": recent scholarly interventions from East Asian studies

In recent decades, scholars (including geographers, literary theorists, historians) in East Asian studies have returned to this question of global capitalism as intricately intertwined with European colonialism, so aptly raised by Spivak, but where the colonizer/colonized binary becomes severely compromised. In the 1993 opening issue of Duke University's *positions: asia critique* journal, Tani Barlow writes on the significance of the term "colonial modernity" to describe the processes by which "Asian modernities perform their own recodings of the discourses of modernity within a hegemonic capitalist world."[42] In Barlow's later assertion that "Colonialism and modernity are indivisible

[40] Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," 18. A further critique of Foucault is found in Spivak's earlier essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985) published in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.
[41] Spivak, "Deconstructing Historiography," 19.
[42] Tani E. Barlow, "Editor's Introduction," *positions: asia critique* 1 (1993): vi.

features of the history of industrial capitalism,"[43] the question of "colonial modernity" thus seems to articulate an alternative critique. For one thing, the term corrects Eurocentric accounts and critiques of modernity that erase the effects of colonialism as part and parcel of "modernity" (as both a temporal/historical marker and a discursive category). But this corrective does not necessarily provincialize the "West" or the "East" either, for that could also easily eclipse the power relations that connect 20th century events in East Asia to events and discourses in 19th and 20th century Europe and North America. That is to say, characterizing modernity as "colonial" offers a way of framing the complex processes by which colonial and neocolonial structures are reproduced in so-called postcolonial contexts.

The view that colonialism is intertwined with modernity is not necessarily a new one. Scholars have offered such formulations of modernity as synonymous with processes of colonialism and empire. Timothy Mitchell's influential book, *Colonising Egypt* (1988), offers a powerful analysis of modernity as a colonial production, not simply in terms of colonizing space itself but the spread *and* maintenance of a certain "metaphysics of power."[44] Bruce Cumings' analysis of American-East Asian relations in the late 20th century in *Parallax Visions* (1999)[45] similarly unearth the remnants of American and European imperialism built into the layers of urbanization and the developmental ideology of "progress" that undergird modernized East Asia.

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[43] Tani E. Barlow, "Introduction," in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, edited by Tani E. Barlow (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 1.
[44] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), ix.
[45] Bruce Cumings, *Parallax Visions: American-East Asian Relations at the End of the Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

But for Tani Barlow, the constellation of political economy and geopolitics as it is exemplified in East Asia produce a "semicolonial"[46] situation that confronts the serious limitations of existing postcolonial discourse. The crux of Barlow's critique of the Subaltern Studies collective is worth quoting at length:

> How could a lexicon forged in conditions of binary opposition of colonizer/colonized work in the manically proliferating conditions of difference that operated under the conditions of semicolonialism? If colonialism is said, in a categorical sense, to be best exemplified by the English Raj, and all other forms of colonialism are understood in reference to that historical model, then not only are all other formations derivative but conditions fundamentally unlike that originary design might indeed be inconceivable or unseeable—on precisely the same grounds as the critique of colonial discourse holds European epistemes responsible for overriding the consciousness of the subaltern. My underlying point is very simple: Where in the idiom of current postcolonial studies, itself indelibly marked by the allegedly originary Manicheanism rooted in the colonial construction of the European Self in relation to multifarious others, would a form marked "semi" fit?[47]

Barlow states that the "historical model" produced by the South Asian experience of British colonialism, a model that seemingly endorses the possibility of postcolonial emancipation, cannot adequately describe the logic of colonial modernity. It is the "semi" fit that in fact produces this space of dissonance between discourses of Asian ascendancy and the material realities that reproduce colonial structures, whereby the particular and peculiar manifestations of "modernity" in East Asia raise distinct kinds of theoretically substantive concerns about the status of postcolonial discourse.

The case of "colonial modernity" in Korea offers an instance of this ambiguity of postcolonial discourse. Marking a shift within Korean intellectual history, the term "colonial modernity" first appeared in *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (1999)[48] as an analytic category that re-evaluates Korea's colonial history. In an attempt to apply postcolonial

[46] Barlow, "Introduction," *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, 5.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, eds., *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

theory to Korean history, scholars in this volume argued that colonialism, nationalism, and modernization in fact form a *nexus*—a position that pushes against nationalist discourses that *claim* to resist colonial structures but rather, ironically, reinscribes them. But because nationalist historiography had become associated with leftist politics in Korea since the 1980s, postcolonial theory was in fact welcomed by neo-conservatives (or the "New Right") as of means of critiquing Korean leftism.[49] In short, while the Korean Left has focused on socio-economic issues, the so-called New Right has become more associated with postcolonial critiques on the politics of identity. Thus the very category "colonial modernity" (or at least its application within Korean historiography) has sparked controversy among Korean intellectual circles.[50]

More recently, Nayoung Aimee Kwon's *Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan* (2015) elucidates what Kwon calls a "conundrum of representation"[51] in colonial Korea. Kwon suggests that colonial modernity constitutes a "paradox": "What are actually constitutive and coeval (coloniality and modernity) have been discursively and hegemonically severed and forced into a contradictory relationship (psychically and politically) *as if* they were incompatible and not coeval."[52] In her incisive analysis of this paradox, it is actually the colonizer/colonized binary in post-1945 Korean cultural memory that violently elides the "unstable play of affects" and the "ambivalent

[49] See Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 16-7.
[50] Albert Park writes, for example, that the volume *Colonial Modernity in Korea* has "deemphasized the study of the political economy of the colonial period." See Albert L. Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese-Occupied Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 13.
[51] Nayoung Aimee Kwon, *Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015), 1.
[52] Ibid., 9.

experiences of colonial modernity."[53] Thus by highlighting the troubling spaces of "collaboration" with Japanese imperialism in Korean colonial literature, Kwon helps elucidate why colonial modernity in Korea is actually a "conundrum."

4. Christianity, a foreclosure of vision, and hauntology: a revised framework

If these recent interventions in postcolonial discourse have taken place, as Barlow suggests, at the "cusp where political economy, deconstructive political strategies, and discourse analysis meet,"[54] I would like to submit an addendum to that list—that is, the question of religion, and in particular, the position of Christianity. It is my contention that an analysis of religion (and specifically of the theological claims of Protestant Christianity) is the key to unpacking this postcolonial conundrum. As harbingers of colonial modernity in Korea, late 19th century Christian missionaries paved the way for 'enlightenment reforms,' introducing Western-style medicine and education into the Korean sphere. Schools and hospitals were established—to name just a few examples: Severance Hospital (by the Presbyterian missionary Horace Allen, who introduced Western medicine to Korea), Yonsei University (by Horace Underwood), Ewha Women's University (by Mary Scranton from the Methodist sponsored Women's Foreign Missionary Society), and numerous secondary schools. Christianity was the avenue by which Korea encountered *and* negotiated colonial modernity in the economic, social and political institutions of industrial capitalism.[55]

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[53] Kwon, *Intimate Empire*, 8.
[54] Barlow, "Introduction," *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia,* 3.
[55] For a collection of essays that document the relation between Christianity and modernity, see *Encountering Modernity: Christianity in East Asia and Asian America*, ed. Albert L. Park and David K. Yoo

Protestant Christian missionaries also played an integral role in transforming the Korean language. In their efforts to translate the Bible and disseminate copies to a wider audience, Protestant missionaries "modernized" the Korean vernacular by "standardizing" the Korean script according to what they considered scientific values. According to Henry Em, it was in this context that the Korean alphabet was elevated to "an icon of Korea and an icon for the Korean nation,"[56] while the status of classical Chinese was consequently denigrated to "mere Chinese writing."[57] Thus in the context of severing the tributary relation Korea had with China, the elevated status of the Korean script instilled a newfound sense of indigeneity, nationalism, and the (liberal notion of) sovereignty. I will return to a more detailed discussion of this linguistic transformation and the consequences of this particular philosophy of language in the next chapter.

If we recall Syngman Rhee's call to Korea's independence by turning to Christianity, and Kim Il Sung's strikingly parallel visions for national independence in the wake of Korea's newfound "postcolonial" era, how do we make sense of Christianity's role in Korea's own historiographical debates? How does Christianity affect the way one narrates history and constructs the very concept of what Namhee Lee calls "historical subjectivity"[58]? Is the construction of "post-coloniality" itself envisioned by a Christian

(Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014). This dissertation adds to this body of work by thinking critically about the legacy of Western metaphysical claims in Korea's intellectual history.

[56] Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 9. See also Ross King, "Western Protestant Missionaries and the Origins of Korean Language Modernization," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 11:3 (2004).

[57] Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 9.

[58] Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 4.

metaphysics? That is, how does Christian metaphysics structure a sense of time, of space, and of subjects shaped by that time and space?

I suggest that Christianity is a crucial site of the *spectral* form of hegemonic discourse, one that consequently formulates an important theoretical question about ***vision***—insofar as "vision" operates as a metaphor for knowledge—and in particular, the very possibility of a panoramic vision when it comes to understanding ("seeing," "perceiving") hegemony. While certainly not denying the importance of social scientific tools for analysis, I want to raise a problem of perception or what Avery Gordon calls "haunting recognition"[59]—a perception that is also somehow recognition, of that which cannot necessarily be articulated but one knows is "there," of that which one inherits without being aware, of the lived experience of the uncanny. In foreclosing this vision of hegemony, Christianity[60] is the site which *both* disrupts and drives this quest for critique of colonial modernity.

It is for this reason that I have found Jacques Derrida's "hauntology" a most fitting way of framing this problem, as well as a way to revise Spivak's thesis on the role that deconstruction can play in postcolonial contexts. The term "hauntology" comes from Derrida's 1994 text, *Specters of Marx*, the publication of his plenary address at a conference hosted by UC Riverside the year before (in 1993), reflecting on the status of

[59] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 63.

[60] I do not mean to imply that "Christianity" is a monolithic category. Certainly, there are recent scholarly contributions that argue for speaking of global "Christianities" in the plural to account for the diversity of Christian practices, especially outside of the West. While recognizing the multifarious forms of Christianity, in this project I refer to "Christianity" in the singular, so as to foreground the political questions that emerge from Christianity's relation to Western imperialism and to Western metaphysics.

Marxism in the wake of the Soviet collapse, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the supposed "triumph" of a capitalist liberal world order. In his remarks, Derrida famously coins the term "hauntology" as a category that is "irreducible" to "ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology."[61] While some readers of Derrida designate this moment as one of his more explicit and sustained reflections on politics and history, I would like to situate and exegete "hauntology" as an articulation of "deconstruction" as a thoroughly political project even in its early formulation. My aim in this section is two-fold: (1) to make sense of "hauntology" in the context of Derrida's larger deconstructive project as an *alternative logic*, and (2) how this theorization of haunting then makes a case for "deconstruction" as still a relevant way of grappling with the inheritance of and indebtedness to Christianity in hegemonic discourse.

But in order to explicate "hauntology" as an alternative logic, I would like to revisit one of Derrida's earliest works, *Of Grammatology* (1967). While Spivak's Preface to the English translation omits an explicit discussion of religion, Derrida's own resources in formulating the practice of deconstruction is actually drawn from Christian theological categories. That is to say, if the history of Christian theology becomes both the source and target of Derrida's deconstructive program, a re-reading of *Of Grammatology* can provide insight into how deconstruction can be used for understanding the role of Christianity in relation to colonial modernity. Thus, deconstruction, I want to argue, is not really possible without thinking about the pivotal position of religion (and specifically Christianity) and its relation to hegemonic discourse. Thus *Of Grammatology* is a

[61] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 63.

significant resource in this discussion on haunting for the following reasons: (1) this text most clearly articulates the *schemata* or the "architechtonic" of the operation of deconstruction as a critical reading practice,[62] and (2) it is also a text that explicitly configures the position of religion and specifically of *Christianity* as the source and target of this method. Part I outlines this "theoretical matrix," while Part II is a moment of the "example"[63] that tests out deconstruction in Derrida's reading of Rousseau. I will be sticking to Part I here.

To briefly outline how Derrida proceeds to critique the history of Western metaphysics: Derrida questions the concept of "science" that undergirds the practice of linguistics (as exemplified in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*). According to Derrida, Saussure attempts to construct linguistics as a "science" by relying on phonocentrism—the distinction between "speech" and "writing" which then *privileges* "speech" *over* "writing." His deconstructive move then shows how Saussure's *own* claim about the arbitrariness of the sign works against this desire for "scientificity."[64]

Derrida then proceeds to make a claim about the *theological* layer in this science of signs: "The age of the sign is essentially theological."[65] That is, there is an inextricable link between the "logic" of science in linguistics and the "logic" undergirding Western metaphysics. The *theological*, insofar as it designates the all-encompassing claim to truth,

[62] I owe this interpretation of deconstruction as a critical reading practice to Sarah Hammerschlag, who made this suggestion in her course on Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in the Spring of 2015 at the University of Chicago Divinity School.
[63] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), lxxxix.
[64] Ibid., 3.
[65] Ibid., 14.

assigns the following hierarchical system of signs, from higher to lower: divine understanding and reality (i.e. logos)—the mind—the voice—the written mark. Thus, the very difference between signifier and signified outlined in Saussure's linguistics turns out to be a *theological* distinction, more specifically attributed to Christian theological appropriations of Greek philosophy. In this theological structure, writing is conceptualized as that which is always secondary to, or preceded by, the logos—it is in this sense that theology assigns a specific function to writing. Writing is "inferior" because this distinction has an *ethical* dimension as well—as Derrida explains the artificiality of this logic: "the good and the natural is the divine inscription in the heart and the soul; the perverse and artful is technique, exiled in the exteriority of the body."[66] Thus, phonocentrism in fact turns out to be a form of logocentrism. And according to this system, there must be a hierarchical distinction between signifier and signified, between speech (*parole*) and language (*langue*), between the voice (*phonè*) and the written mark (*grammè*). That is to say, there is the "mind" which is "inside," whereas the "writing" is *derivative* and therefore *inferior* expression "outside."

What seems to be crucially at stake is actually the desire for *presence* or *self-presence*, or the issue of subjectivity. In this text, presence is defined as "the system of 'hearing (understanding)-oneself speak' through the phonic substance."[67] The privilege of the *phonè* or the voice exemplifies the moment of self-presence or subjectivity. And this desire for self-presence (with a conception of "God" as the archetype of such self-presence

[66] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 17.
[67] Ibid., 7.

in medieval Christian theology) constructs the possibility of the knowing, living subject. Thus, in showing how the "science of writing" re-inscribes metaphysical structures of discourse, deconstruction shows how the "scientificity"—or what makes "science" a "science"—is in fact haunted by metaphysics. Drawing on medieval Christian theology (e.g. Christian creationism) as both the source and target of deconstruction, Derrida does not propose to move "outside" of hegemonic discourse but finds a way to critique hegemony while remaining within it. He thus seems to distinguish this task of deconstruction as the attempt *not* to go 'outside,' but to operate "necessarily from the inside"[68] and even destabilize the inside/outside distinction altogether. That is, deconstruction is not the attempt to destroy metaphysics, but to expose the *desires* that both drive and disrupt its own logic.

If the theme of *presence* saturates Western metaphysics, the ghost, the specter, or the apparitional is unsettling because it disturbs the very distinction between presence and absence, between life and death. To unpack what is at stake in "hauntology" not only as a category but also as a *method*, we may first ask: why the term "hauntology"? Even though Derrida himself urges his audience that he has not created this term just for the sake of creating one,[69] it is worthwhile unpacking why "hauntology" is an *irreducible* category. This concept is actually already present in *Of Grammatology*, for "hauntology" provides a framework for deconstructing the logic of repetition and erasure, or exposing

[68] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 24.
[69] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 63.

the internal contradictions already present within the very logic of Western metaphysical claims.

The specter is best understood, in my view, as a *figure*—a figure whose very possibility unseats and disturbs the sovereignty of the living, knowing subject. At stake is both an ontological and epistemological question, which has been intertwined in the history of Western metaphysics. The specter destabilizes the following metaphysical binaries which are also hierarchies: being vs. non-being, reality vs. non-reality, presence vs. absence, life vs. death, soul vs. body, material vs. spiritual, actuality vs. inactuality, essence vs. existence. In turn, the "ontological" status of the ghost thus destabilizes the question of knowledge, *how* we know what we know, the possibility of an *object* of knowledge. So, if the figure of the specter (like the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*) cannot be known—that is, if the ghost cannot be objectified— what emerges is an *alternative logic* that foregoes the aim of retrieval and the aim of objectification. That is to say, "hauntology" is less about whether ghosts "exist" or not (for that question is itself a rather metaphysical question), but rather about the implications of the logic of that which is neither present nor absent, neither corporeal nor spiritual, neither soul nor body. So to talk about haunting, then, is to talk about that which can*not* be retrieved, that which neither exists nor doesn't exist, that which neither appears nor disappears. The sovereignty of the living subject is displaced with the figure of the specter, whom "we do not see [but] who looks at us."[70]

[70] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 6.

Another important feature of the ghost is that it is a figure of the *revenant*, that is, the return. Derrida begins the *Specters* text with a scene from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The ghost is a figure of *return* and *repetition*. Thus spectrality is not just about ghosts of the past, but of a future-to-come. It is for that reason that Derrida quotes Shakespeare: "Time is out of joint."[71] Haunting destabilizes the linearity of time, whereby narratives of progress are inextricably linked. If narratives of progress are contingent on linear time, and if, as Bruce Cumings writes, "The discourse of progress is inseparable from an industrial mode of production, which is its justification, its verification,"[72] haunting is the structure—perhaps an affective structure as well as a political order—that disrupts the narratives embodied in sites of extreme and sudden urban development that we see in (post-)colonial Korea. Such hallmarks of capitalist "success" and harbingers of the newest technologies then emerge as somehow disjointed if we consider haunting at the structural base of this developmental logic. That is to say, haunting lies at the *structure* of such development.

Derrida claims further in *Specters of Marx* that "hauntology" is what makes *possible* "ontology, theology, positive or negative onto-theology."[73] In order to unpack what he means by this, it is worthwhile examining the double meaning of **conjuration**. According to Derrida, the French noun "conjuration" gathers two English and German words:

1. On the one hand,

[71] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene V.
[72] Cumings, *Parallax Visions*, 11.
[73] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 63.

    a. conspiracy (*Verschwörung*), an oath or a political alliance "to struggle against a superior power,"[74] as "a matter of neutralizing a hegemony or overturning some power"[75]
    b. or the incantation, convocation or evocation of a spirit
2. On the other hand, conjuration also means "conjurement" (*Beschwörung*): a magical exorcism that *expulses* an evil spirit (or according to the OED: "the exorcising of spirits by invocation," "the exercise of magical or occult influence"[76])

Thus to conjure something is to exorcise it by calling it or evoking it. This is another way of saying that there is power in *naming* something—calling it what it is—whereby *naming* is meant to "exorcise." That is why Derrida claims that haunting is the condition of the possibility of constructing a concept.[77] To construct a concept is to name something—thus the very construction of the concept of *being* (i.e. ontology) is a moment of conjuration. That is to say, the very construction of metaphysics (e.g. the moment in which "being" is distinguished from "non-being," the moment in which metaphysics constructs linear time) is itself a conjuration. And if so, Derrida seems to suggest, metaphysical discourse is haunted.

It is this deconstructive gesture which then exposes Marx and Marxisms themselves as sites of haunting in *Specters of Marx*. In his critique of Max Stirner, Marx attempts to conjure ideology and religion, which is never merely one ideology among others.[78] In particular, Marx wants to exorcise the Christian-Hegelian vision of historicity and eschatology. But Derrida asks—does not this very desire for exorcism, this attempt at conjuration, emerge as a site of haunting? As Derrida writes, "Is not to possess a specter

[74] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 50.
[75] Ibid., 59.
[76] Quoted in Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 58.
[77] Derrida writes: "To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. This is what we would be calling here a hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism. Ontology is a conjuration" (*Specters of Marx*, 202).
[78] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 51, 209.

to be possessed by it, possessed period? To capture it, is that not to be captivated by it?"[79] It is in this sense that Marx's "injunctions"[80]—the emancipatory promise, the oath, which is the first meaning of "conjuration" as mentioned earlier—are *conditioned* by an "undecidability."[81]

Christianity is thus positioned as a significant source for the content and method of "hauntology"—content, insofar as Christianity's colonial hauntings become the target of conjuration; and method, as Western metaphysics is itself a site of conjuration. We return to the question, is it in fact possible to conjure Christianity, so as to exorcise it by naming its entanglement with colonial history? It is this very moment of conjuration, driven by what Derrida calls an "emancipatory promise,"[82] which actually designates contemporary philosophical discourse as a site of haunting. To say we are haunted by Christianity and colonialism *is* to inherit this history, since "hauntology" foregoes the claim to a disenchanted position "outside" of hegemonic discourse. Moreover, "There is no inheritance," Derrida writes, "without a call to responsibility."[83] By letting go of the space of disenchantment as the possibility of critique, "hauntology" is thus an alternative way of affirming the "messianic promise"[84] because it foregrounds the question of responsibility rather than the sovereignty of the living, knowing subject. That is to say, hauntology shifts the emphasis *away* from the postcolonial concern for agency and emancipation, and instead *interrogates* the construction of agency (as well as the

[79] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 165.
[80] Taken from the title of the first chapter, "Injunctions of Marx" (*Specters of Marx*, 1-60).
[81] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 94.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 114.
[84] Ibid.

construction of the colonizer/colonized binary) as itself a hegemonic production. For Derrida, it is *not* that the "emancipatory promise"[85] should be given up; rather, a reckoning of this haunting actually calls for the responsibility to continue to work toward that promise.

5. Deconstruction re-configured: specters of colonial hegemony

Thus "hauntology" offers us a different way to think about the role of deconstruction in postcolonial contexts. It is colonial hegemony's *spectral form*—the problem of *repetition and return*, colonial domination's ghostly figure in postcolonial imaginations of Korea and East Asia more generally (for example, in discourses on Asian ascendancy and Korean sovereignty)—that re-opens the meaning and task of deconstructing historiography. Korea's colonial modernity is the *effect* of layers of colonization, reproduced and reinscribed in the developmental structure of Korea's own political economy, and the question of colonial history cannot be directly tied to the "West" (unlike the case in India's colonial relation to Great Britain). In fact, the "West" and the "East" become, in some ways, apparitional categories in Korea's case. I want to suggest that the question of colonial modernity is best understood as a site of colonial hauntings.

If colonial modernity in Korea (and East Asia more generally) confronts us in its *spectral* form, how might that change the way we speak of postcoloniality, with the signifier "post" not meaning its aftermath but the critical interrogation of its *repetition*

[85] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 94.

and return? I now consider largely two possibilities of hauntology's application in Korea's colonial modernity as a site of analysis: (1) On the one hand, the language of haunting seems to offer a framework by which we can name the *ongoing* processes of colonial production and reproduction, intertwined with late capitalism in its contemporary and perhaps most robust form. In this view, modern Korea is a site of the ghosts and specters of the "West," however abstractly we conceptualize Western ideologies, such as that of British and American versions of liberalism and the Enlightenment. (2) The second possibility of hauntology's implications with colonial modernity is a slightly more complicated one—one in which it is no longer easy to name "Europe" or even "America" as the sole colonizing culprit. Nationalism and nationalist discourse thus emerge not *in spite of (or in resistant against)* colonial power, but rather *because of* it—in this way, colonial hegemony, in its spectral form, comes into view as *both* the source and target of postcolonial discourse. Thus, Derrida's deconstructive method offers us a critical reading practice by which we can expose those political claims that reinscribe the very structures they purport to resist. But, in engaging the figure of the specter or the ghost, if haunting is indeed key to the very *structure* of hegemony, then the position of the scholar foregoes the possibility of a disenchanted position of critique.

So first, could we say that colonial Korea, and "East Asia" at large, is the site in which we encounter specters of the "West"? In Bruce Cumings' *Parallax Visions*, Cumings makes the claim that the so-called "East Asian" model of capitalism can in fact be

historically linked to 19th century European political thought.[86] Drawing on Nietzsche for the purposes of method, Cumings traces the genealogical link between the model of East Asian capitalist development (in post-war Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan) and 19th century European notions of the state. Cumings sketches the following features of the East Asian developmental model: (1) "A bureaucratic state," (2) "Education of the masses," (3) "Effective surveillance of those same masses," (4) "Metaphysical ideology of national essence," (5) "Political economy of administrative guidance and neomercantilism," and (6) "Involvement in closely linked *regional* political economy."[87] This model, Cumings argues, is in fact engaged in a kind of "state science," or what is known as *Staatswissenschaften* in 19th century Germany—a conception that inextricably links "state" and "society" such that "states decide who constitutes the citizenry ('civil society')."[88] Cumings makes the case that East Asian development is in some ways also haunted by Europe, even before the American ideology of progress that gets disseminated in post-war industrialization and urbanization. What Cumings attempts to show are the ways in which Japan, South Korea and Taiwan industrialized *within* what he calls a "hegemonic web,"[89] while China and North Korea positioned themselves "outside" of this web. Colonial modernity, as experienced in East Asia, was constituted as "a subordinate part of either bilateral American hegemony or trilateral American-British hegemony."[90]

[86] Cumings, *Parallax Visions: American-East Asian Relations at the End of the Century*, 71. See also Cumings, "Webs with No Spiders, Spiders with No Webs: The Genealogy of the Developmental State," in *The Developmental State in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Meredith Woo-Cumings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
[87] Cumings, *Parallax Visions*, 88-90.
[88] Ibid., 92.
[89] Ibid., 94.
[90] Ibid., 30.

What Cumings seems to diagnose are the ways in which the particular position of American liberalism produces blind spots with respect to American-East Asian relations, and the larger web of hegemony that constitutes the past century's manifestations of neocolonial power. He frames his argument with the following question: "How do we purge our minds of a 'progress' which was the *point d'honneur* of Western civilization, and which held much of postwar academe in its thrall (modernization theory, end of ideology, "New" Leftism, rational choice theory)?"[91] "Parallax," as Cumings quotes the Oxford English Dictionary, means the following: "Apparent displacement, or difference in the apparent position, of an object, caused by actual change (or difference) of position of the point of observation."[92] By invoking this sense of epistemological "blind spots" in America's view of East Asia, Cumings writes that the myth of progress has blinded Americans from comprehending the events of the last century, *except* as a system of economic production: "Using the world as our "unit of analysis," our archaeology has also placed us in the anarchic march of "progress," circa 2000, 1950, 1900 and 1880, and into an epistemology that makes it impossible to comprehend our world, whether then or now, *except* as a global system with endlessly shifting points of production."[93] Drawing on Nietzsche's severe critique of the "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject"[94] in the *Genealogy of Morals*, Cumings exposes the particular position of American liberalism as blinded by its own perspective on the narrative of progress. And despite the

[91] Cumings, *Parallax Visions*, 20.
[92] Ibid., 1.
[93] Ibid., 28.
[94] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 119.

philosophical and political critiques of an Enlightenment narrative, most notably by the Frankfurt School with regards to Nazi Germany and with post-structuralism's philosophical influence, Cumings traces the ways in which "American mythology" is unable to see "East Asian reality" (see chapter 1). Speaking of Shanghai, "where construction cranes sprout like bamboo shoots,"[95] it is this image of the modern East Asian city that seems to disrupt such claims that narratives of progress are over and done with. It is the particularity of the American point of view, for Cumings, that seems unable to know and to comprehend the historically specific position of hegemony.

Cumings' historical analysis in *Parallax Visions* is one of excavation—one that, in sifting through the fragmented archives, recovers the presence of continental European, British and American discourses and realities of power that have formed the basis of industrial and thus urban development in East Asia. In this view, the language of haunting certainly seems appropriate in locating "East Asia" as the site of haunting, whereby we encounter specters of the West. And the East Asian city, insofar as state-sponsored urban "physiognomy"[96] replicates and adapts forms of European and American industrialization, these cities in particular emerge as the most charged sites of colonial repetition and reproduction. What Cumings offers us, by way of Nietzschean genealogy and Foucauldian archaeology, is a sobering corrective to the American liberal perspective. His critique is predicated on the possibility that the "presence" of the West in East Asia *can* be recovered, retrieved, and understood.

[95] Cumings, *Parallax Visions*, 10.
[96] Ibid., 77.

While this question of vision seems to suggest that a re-positioning of one's perspective may in fact bring into view what is *actually* at play—such that the consequences of American liberalism can be analyzed with further clarity if one were to position one's perspective from "within" East Asia itself—Jini Kim Watson's analysis in *The New Asian City: Three-Dimensional Fictions of Space and Urban Form* (2011) seems to suggest that this problem of blindness persists even with a perspectival shift. That is to say, the boundaries of what is "the West" and "the East" become blurrier, and what is "outside" or "inside" imperialism is no longer all that clear. In other words, perspectivalism—as crucial as that is—and even provincialism (such as the provincializing project that Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued for in *Provincializing Europe* [2000]) seems somehow not to solve the problem of perception. As Watson writes: "Yet the city itself, being at once object, tool, environment, and experience, is also the perceptual lens through which to comprehend this very process, whether it is through the returning overseas student, the visit to the colonial or metropolitan capital, or the everyday experience of its claustrophobic spaces."[97] That is to say, do these so-called *peripheral* positions necessarily offer us a clear vision?

Watson's spatial analytic suggests a way to think about the mechanisms of the *re*-production of imperial power within "East Asia" itself. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's analysis of space, Watson addresses the problem of *re*-production of social relations. Watson writes, "Space links political rule—the arrangement of social relations—with the

[97] Jini Kim Watson, *The New Asian City: Three-Dimensional Fictions of Space and Urban Form* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 84.

individual's daily experience and the futurity of such social relations." Very much like Derrida's analysis of the specter as a figure of the *return*, that which repeats, in which not only past-ness but also futurity is frighteningly built into hegemonic structure.

Both Cumings and Watson argue, employing different methods, that colonial and imperial remnants can be excavated precisely in discourses of "Asian ascendancy" and industrial capitalist production and development. That is to say, both authors claim that the so-called success stories of Asian modernization and urbanization are precisely the *product* of hegemonic structures. Watson's analysis of the "colonial city," however, traces the complications and contradictions of lived spaces in which this question of vision is not resolved from "within" the colonial city. Thus when one's vision is always and already "caught" in the "hegemonic web" of which Cumings speaks, it is ambiguous whether the project of excavation remains a possibility.

Here I would like to address the second possibility of interpreting "East Asia" as a spectral site. While I do not deny that colonial hauntings can attempt to detect "the West" as a spectral figure, what seems more significant in hauntology as *method* is to think of "East Asia" as the specter, as an apparitional category. That is, what would happen if we actually let go of the claim to be "outside" hegemonic structure, if we let go of the claim to clear vision, if apparition does not equal appearance/presence? What Derrida's method offers—and this is a persistent theme throughout his corpus in the larger project of deconstruction—is to forego of the aim of retrieval (of "lost" subjectivities and agencies, whether that is individual or collective) that so dominates political projects, while still affirming the desire for justice and the call to responsibility.

That is to say, if "East Asia" or "Korea" as a category is no longer understood as a bounded entity, a provincial and geographical reality, with claims such as "inside" or "outside" as themselves instantiations of colonial modernity's logic, then what we end up foregoing is the very claim to a disenchanted position. Critique, then, comes not simply from occupying a different perspective but rather from the position that one may always and already be haunted by the political order we may want to resist.

In that way, haunting, it seems to me, offers us a critical analytical paradigm for deconstructing claims of "indigenous" or "national" resistance (against colonial history and politics) that are themselves moments of reinscribing those structures of hegemony. When Derrida writes, "Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony,"[98] he seems to suggest that this moment of *repetition*—the figure of the *revenant*—*is* part and parcel of the *logic* of a certain political and social order. In the case of "East Asia," the site of urban development emerges then as a *spectral* figure, one in which the very logic of development that undergirds urban form can be exposed as haunted by present pasts as well as a future-to-come. Spectrality, then, seems to offer us a way of critically reading this colonial logic in which the same structures of power return.

What I would like to suggest is that spectrality thus articulates an alternative meaning of "postcoloniality" as embodied in the processes of urbanization and development in Korea's colonial modernity. I have tried to make the case that Derrida's deconstructive method—as instantiated in what he calls "hauntology"—can in fact offer us way to affirm the necessity of critique without having to rely on the claim to

[98] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 46.

objectivity. For it is this claim to a clear vision that we still find in existing paradigms of postcolonial discourse—one that still operates on the basis of the colonizer/colonized binary. As Derrida quotes Shakespeare, if "time is out of joint," the "post"-colonial condition is in fact, in its very structure, sites of haunting, and narratives of progress are themselves the return of colonial power, such that colonial modernity can no longer mark a teleological moment of "overcoming." Spectrality hence poses an alternative relation to history, time, and space, speaking more about the way in which the disjointed "now" is connected to the past and to the future, rather than marking a moment of historical closure and arrival. What the framework of haunting makes "transparent" (if we can use that term) is in fact a foreclosure of vision. Precisely by letting go of a disenchanted position outside of hegemony, hauntology affirms historicity and the necessity of critique *without* having to claim forms of nativism and indigeneity that often mark and reformulate teleological narratives of Asian ascendancy.

This analysis thus attempts to bridge two discourses—Korean intellectual history on the one hand, and postcolonial discourse on the other. By turning our attention to the case of Christianity in Korea, we foreground the question concerning the status of metaphysical claims that are operative in postcolonial discourse. Spivak had targeted Western narratives concerning Europe's "Other," and argued that "strategic essentialism" can be used to expose what she calls "cognitive failure" about this "Other." In this analysis, this "cognitive failure" does not necessarily refer to the European or Western gaze, but rather to the failure of the knowing Subject of History. This knowing subject, as I will argue in the chapters to follow, is itself a concept that is rooted in the history of

Western metaphysics. In revising the role that Derrida's deconstruction can play in unpacking postcolonial discourse, this study not only targets Western metaphysics, but the dissemination and repetition of these metaphysical claims in (post)colonial imaginations of freedom.

CHAPTER 2
THE METAPHYSICS OF ETHNIC NATIONALISM: PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES AND THEIR "MODERNIZATION" OF THE KOREAN LANGUAGE

> "The first great father of Korea was a being called Tan'gun. Be he myth or reality, he emerges from the shadowy prehistoric past and stands between Korea and Manchuria on the Ever-white Mountains. Here he gives the simple-hearted people their first lessons in right living, and in return, they call him *sinin*, which, translated, may mean divine man, angel, spirit, or god [...] A startling rumour comes down with him to say that he was the third person of a divine trinity. The *Kogŭm ki* reads, 'Hwanin is God (*ch'ŏn*), Hwanung is the spirit (*sin*), and Tan'gun is the god-man (*sinin*); these three constitute a divine trinity (*samsin*).' What this means who can tell?"[1]
>
> — James Gale, *History of the Korean People*

> "In the primeval ages, so the story runs, there was a divine being named Whan-in, or Che-Sŏ, "Creator." His son, Whan-ung, being affected by celestial *ennui*, obtained permission to descend to earth and found a mundane kingdom. Armed with this warrant, Wang-ung with three thousand spirit companions descended upon Ta-bāk Mountain, now known as Myo-hyang San, in the province of P'yŭng-an, Korea."[2]
>
> — Homer Hulbert, *The History of Korea*

1. The Tan'gun Legend and the search for Korea's origins

According to the Legend of Tan'gun, the heavenly creator Hwanin sent his son Hwanung, along with three thousand spirits, to possess the earth and rule humanity from the Taebaek Mountains.[3] When a bear and a tiger begged Hwanung to transform them to become human, they were instructed to eat mugwort and garlic, and to avoid sunlight. The tiger had become impatient and failed at the task, while the bear succeeded and was thus transformed into a woman. She married the divine being Hwanung and bore a child, Tan'gun, who established the Kingdom of Chosŏn (Korea).[4]

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[1] James Gale, *James Scarth Gale and his History of the Korean People*, with Introduction by Richard Rutt (Seoul: Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch, 1972), 93.
[2] Homer Hulbert, *The History of Korea* vol. 1 (Seoul: The Methodist Publishing House, 1905), 1.
[3] Taebaek Mountain refers to present day Baekdu Mountain, located at the northern edge of North Korea.
[4] I have relied on Paek Nam'un's summary of the Tangung Legend in Paek, *History of Korean Society and Economy*, trans. Sim Usŏng, in *Chosŏn sahe kyŏngjesa: Chosŏn minjogŭi chillo*, 31-2. The original text of the Tan'gun Legend is in *Samguk yusa* (1285?).

Today, it is hard to remove the Tan'gun Legend, the Korean creation myth, from Korean history and religion. Most, if not all, contemporary history textbooks begin with this myth, dating Korea's origins to 2333 B.C.E., the year of Tan'gun's birth, with a couple of significant implications that would fuel Korea's ethnic nationalism over against both China and Japan: (1) Korea had a direct relation to the heavens, with Tan'gun as the divine progenitor of the Korean nation, which in turn established Korea's own sovereignty apart from their historical tributary relation with China. As Henry Em writes, Tan'gun was a figure "who stood outside the Chinese genealogy, as the progenitor of the Korean state."[5] (2) Tan'gun's birth in 2333 B.C.E. predated the establishment of the throne of Japan's first legendary emperor, Iwarebiko; this was the primary reason that Japanese colonialist readings of Korean history discredited the Tan'gun Legend.[6] This creation myth, therefore, linked the Korean people as a divinely originated race or ethnicity, to the extent that the marker "Korean" came to be historically understood as both an ethnic and racial category.[7]

While the Tan'gun Legend may be a given in (institutionalized) Korean historical narratives today, that was not always the case prior to the modern period. According to Em, the myth has an "ambiguous" position in premodern Korean historiography.[8] Em observes that this myth is not mentioned in Korea's oldest history, *Samguk sagi* (Historical Record of the Three Kingdoms [1145]). And although it is mentioned in the

[5] Em, *Great Enterprise*, 6.
[6] Ibid., 120-1.
[7] As Gi-Wook Shin notes in his *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 4, "Koreans have not historically differentiated between" the categories of race and ethnicity. That is, "Korean" has historically been understood as *both* a "race" and an "ethnicity."
[8] Em, *Great Enterprise*, 80.

Samguk yusa (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms, [1285?]), its narrative significance is best understood in the context of the Mongol invasion of the Kingdom of Koryŏ in 1259-1356.[9]

It is in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that this myth begins to appear again more frequently. Most scholars note the appearance of the Tan'gun Legend in the writings of Sin Ch'ae-ho (1880-1936), considered one of the first modern intellectuals to construct a nationalist historiography of Korea.[10] According to Henry Em, Sin Ch'ae-ho's "use of the Tan'gun legend in the twentieth-century context was similarly a narrative of resistance, but it was also a reinvention—and not simply a revival—of this old and recurrent narrative in premodern Korean historiography. The claim to a distinct history of legitimacy (*chŏngt'ong*) that reached far back into the mythic past did not naturally or teleologically give rise to nationalist modes of narrating territory, temporality, and peoplehood. The best evidence that any 'transmission' of the past must also be a reinvention is Sin's 'Toksa sillon' itself." Em suggests here that it was Sin Ch'ae-ho's use of the Tan'gun Legend that constructed a nationalist mode of writing and conceiving Korean history in the twentieth century.

But apart from Sin Ch'ae-ho and other Korean nationalist writers of his time, it also appears quite prominently in the writings of the North American Protestant missionaries. Among these missionaries include James Scarth Gale (1863-1937), a Canadian Presbyterian missionary, and an American missionary Homer Hulbert (1863-

[9] Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 81.
[10] Ibid.

1949), who begin their histories of Korea with the Tan'gun Legend, as we can see in the epigraphs above. While we may easily draw the connection between the Tan'gun Legend and Korea's nativist claims, what were these missionaries doing in *also* beginning their histories of Korea with the Tan'gun Legend, embracing the mythology and perhaps even its historical veracity?

For one thing, both Gale and Hulbert were convinced that they had found traces of their idea of the Western Protestant God in Korean folklore. They could not read the Tan'gun Legend without their own Christian monotheistic lens. As we can see above, Gale can only make sense of the three divine beings by equating them to the Christian trinity: Hwanin as creator, Hwanung as spirit, and Tan'gun as god-man. Hulbert also makes a similar comparison to the trinitarian structure of these Korean deities.[11] According to Sung-Deuk Oak, Hulbert's interpretive choices were reflected in his translation of this myth. As Oak writes: "He [Hulbert] paraphrased *Whanin* as 'Creator,' *Whan'ung* as 'the Spirit,' and *Tan'gun* as the incarnated 'Lord.' Hulbert described that *Tan'gun* was conceived by the Spirit—the wind—, and born from a perfect woman as in the case of Jesus. He implied that *Tan'gun* was a god-man as well as a king-teacher-priest like Jesus."[12] Whether or not Tan'gun could be seen as a divine human being was a matter of contention among the missionaries. But by locating Tan'gun as a Jesus-like figure, both Gale and Hulbert attempted to claim that there are traces of the Christian trinity in Korean mythology; in other words, they claimed that these were not deities in a

[11] See Sung-Deuk Oak, "North American Missionaries' Understanding of the *Tangun* and *Kija* Myths of Korea, 1884-1934," *Acta Koreana* vol. 4 (2002), 8.
[12] Ibid., 7-8.

polytheistic world, but in fact referred to the one, monotheistic God. According to Oak, we can still find traces of Hulbert's influence in Korean Christian theology, as exemplified in the following statement by Yun Sŏng-bŏm: "Whanin, Whanung, Wangŏm are in fact 'Hananim.'"[13] *Hanănim*, meaning "the one lord," is the Korean Protestant term for "God"; the etymology of this term will be examined further in this chapter. And in this attempt to link the Tan'gun Legend with Christian monotheism, we can actually detect the *theological* layers undergirding this search for Korea's origin—Gale and Hulbert do not depict the Korean people with *a* divine origin, but *the* (i.e. only) divine origin. In their interpretation of the Tan'gun Legend, we can see a peculiar link between Christian monotheism and the mythology that narrates Korea's ethnic origin.

This chapter argues that the Protestant missionaries' monotheistic idea of "God" is intimately linked to the metaphysics underlying ethnic nationalism in modern Korea. As I will show, at the heart of both monotheism and ethnic nationalism is the metaphysical concept of a "pure" subjectivity, which in turn, I argue, is the basis of the nativist idea of a "purely Korean" subject. By employing Derrida's deconstructive method as outlined in *Of Grammatology*, this chapter unpacks the missionaries' theory of language to expose the theological and metaphysical claims that are implicit in their idea of language as a "science." I argue that this particular theory of language drives missionaries like Gale and Hulbert to reform the Korean writing system, who attempt to make the Korean script more "scientific" and therefore "modern." While the missionaries' motivations and intentions driving these language reforms may have been pragmatic

[13] "Whanin, Whanung, Wangŏm ŭn kot 'Hananim' ida," *Sasanggye*, May 1963 [my translation].

(namely, to make it easier for them to translate the Protestant Bible into the Korean vernacular), this deconstructive analysis scrutinizes the logic of "science" at work in their theory of language; and that logic of "science," in turn, fuels a robust metaphysical vision undergirding Korea's ethnic nationalism.

Thus I examine, on the one hand, the Protestant missionaries' "modernization" of the Korean writing system to make it more "scientific." On the other hand, their attempts to "translate" monotheism into what was originally—and for a long time before the missionaries showed up—a polytheistic context. While extensive scholarly research has been done in both areas, this analysis attempts to reflect further on how these two sites are closely related: how the missionaries' discourse on language is informed by their metaphysics and how, in turn, these ideas are transmitted via language reforms. At stake is, I argue, the consequential rise of modern ethnic nationalism in Korea. More specifically, it is the missionaries' concept of writing that I attempt to deconstruct here: how does their theory of language view the world as a system of signs? I will examine their idea of a science of writing that systematically links signifier and signified, their assumptions about the link between language and ethnos (language as the site of ethnic origin), and their consequent historical imaginations of a "purely Korean" people. And it is in their claim to retrieve this Korean origin that they transmit the idea of the one and only "God." Consequently, monotheism and ethnic nationalism are exposed as two sides of the same coin. Thus, this chapter attempts to show how the emergence of modern Korean ethnic nationalism *is* the site of Western metaphysics. It is not to say that nationalism (or in this case ethnic nationalism) did not exist before the missionaries, but

the historically particular way in which *modern* nationalism in Korea emerges is, in my view, inseparable from Christian monotheism.

By applying Derrida's deconstructive method and foregrounding the concept of a science of language, I thus attempt to understand the profound connection between writing practices and translation practices, and argue that they are not two separate systems at play. When the missionaries were changing the feel and look of the Korean script and furthermore contributing to the elevation of its status as a "national script" (*kungmun*), this practice of transforming Korean orthography was actually connected, I argue, to the theology that was driving their own translation activity. Thus, not only did the missionaries change the very concept of "god" by creating a monotheistic deity over and against all "idolatrous" deities in a pantheistic system, they also inscribed their own metaphysics in reforming the writing practices of Korea. Inspired very much by the way that Derrida is able to glean a discussion on the history of Western metaphysics by examining linguistics as a "science" (at least the way that this science was practiced in the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss), this analysis also targets missionary discourse on language to glean something about their theology. At stake—in both the scientific approach to language and the theological claims concerning Korea's origin—is the concept of ethnic or racial purity. It is *this* concept, by means of Derrida's philosophy of language, that I will deconstruct in this chapter. That is to say, there are theological layers that undergird the claims of ethnic purity, the artificiality of which is exposed when we closely examine their theory of language.

The chapter analysis proceeds as follows: I will first provide an overview of the Protestant missionaries and their significant role in inaugurating Korea's "modern" era. How did they understand "modernization," and why did they think it was a normative task related to their own religious motives? After setting up this broader background, I will then turn to their role in the "modernization" of the Korean vernacular, using the Derridean lens from *Of Grammatology* to deconstruct their theory of language. I will then proceed to unpack the actual language reforms themselves, explaining the linguistic concept of "science" and why the missionaries' phonocentrism is of particular importance. Finally, I return to the theological concept of monotheism, and explain why this linguistic analysis in fact exposes theological claims about their idea of "God" as the transcendental signified. And these claims, in turn, can tell us about the metaphysics underlying the logic of ethnic nationalism.

2. Background: Protestant missionaries and Korea's modernity

As a historical marker, Korea's "modern" period was inaugurated by what historical records have come to call the "opening of Korea."[14] While this "opening" refers primarily to the opening of Korea's ports as stipulated by the Kanghwa Treaty in 1876 with Japan, Korea's first international treaty, this event had a much broader significance. As Bruce Cumings argues, Korea's "opening" constituted several interwoven levels of meaning: discovery, enlightenment, free trade, a shift in ideological positions, and subjugation, all

[14] To list just a few examples: Frederick Foo Chien, *The Opening of Korea: A Study of Chinese Diplomacy: 1876-1885* (North Haven, CT: The Shoe String Press, Inc., 1967); Kim Key-Hiuk, *Opening of Korea: A Confucian Response to the Western Impact* (Republic of Korea: Yonsei University Press, 1999); Charles Oscar Paullin, "The Opening of Korea by Commodore Shufeldt," in *Political Science Quarterly XXV* (1910): 470-99.

tied to Western imperialism.[15] I agree with Cumings' analysis that while it was Japan that had "opened" Korea, it was the nexus of Western imperialism (and what would become American geopolitical hegemony in the East Asian region over the course of the 20th century) that constituted the beginnings of Korea's "modernity."

Hence, the discursive meaning of the "modern" in Korea does not simply describe this chronological period following the Kanghwa Treaty. As Albert Park notes, the term actually became a normative category because of the ideological processes that undergirded the so-called "opening" of Korea.[16] We cannot divorce "modern" with the ideologies driving Western imperialism and global capitalism. These ideologies, according to Park, include "historical totalities, such as Hegelian thought, Marxism, social Darwinism, and Rankian history"[17]—the concept of the universal trajectory of historical development for all societies, with the West as the exemplary model for this trajectory. Within Korea, this normative idea of the "modern" yielded ideologies such as *munmyŏng kaehwa* ("civilization and enlightenment") after Korea's "opening," calling on Koreans to emulate the West and hence become more "civilized."[18] The term "modern," in Park's analysis, is a normative category that made a claim about universal historical development. In turn, I suggest that ideologies of the "modern" underscored the knowing Subject of History: a subject with a panoramic vision of where particular societies stood according to this universal model.

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[15] Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 2005), 86.
[16] Albert L. Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese Occupied Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 4.
[17] Ibid.
[18] This ideology of *munmyŏng kaehwa* will be explored more extensively in the next chapter on the Korean enlightenment.

Relatedly, I use the term "modernization" to refer to the concrete processes and reforms that were driven by this normative claim about emulating the West in the name of universality.[19] In this analysis about Korean language reforms, "modernization" thus refers to the process of transforming the Korean script according to what the Western missionaries considered "scientific." Hence, "modernizing" the Korean language meant not only systematizing the Korean script, but also transforming the status and function of the Korean script as the site of Korea's ethnic origin. But this very idea of a science of writing, and the science of language, as we shall see, is in fact specifically rooted in Western metaphysical claims—claims concerning the relation between signifier and signified, which in turn has theological implications.

Amidst the political, economic, and commercial forces that were at play, it was actually missionaries who were the first to request Korea's "opening."[20] The earliest record describes Catholic missionaries, such as the Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who seems to have influenced the first Korean Catholic converts while they were in Beijing.[21] It is, however, no surprise that the first Catholic missionaries were not received well in Korea—from 1791 to 1866, the Catholic missionaries were persecuted by the Korean government, having been labeled as the "Western" religion and therefore an

[19] In Park's analysis, "modernization" refers to the social, political, and economic reforms in colonial Korea, in order to transform Korea into a colony and supplier of goods to the Japanese empire. See Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth*, 7. I suggest that a similar logic is at play with the language reforms undertaken by the missionaries.
[20] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 96.
[21] See for instance, Yi Su-gwang, *Chibong Yusŏl* (1611).

encroachment on the Korean way and philosophy of life, as well as a threat to national security.[22]

But at the turn of the century, the Protestant missionaries had tremendous success in retaining their presence on the Korean peninsula—they in fact played an integral role in ushering in Western institutions (particularly in medicine and education)[23] and contributing a great deal to the inauguration of "modernity" in Korea. How did they do it? Perhaps the most visible strategy was that they differentiated their religion from Catholicism and drew on the separation of church and state, claiming not to denigrate the Korean government's authority.[24] But in my view, their presence was more effective in an invisible way, particularly in the way that the Protestant missionaries actually contributed to the ideology of "modernization," as I outlined above. The congregational minister William Griffis, for instance, greatly shaped the Western (specifically North American) view of Korea as the "hermit kingdom," a significant concept that justified the need for Korea's "opening."[25] The Protestant missionaries produced staggering amounts of research and publications (books, journals, magazines) to document and extend missionary activity in Korea and East Asia at large.

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[22] Sung-Deuk Oak, *Making of Korean Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions, 1876-1915* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 20.
[23] These institutions are, to this day, among some of the most prestigious institutions in South Korea. To name just a few examples: Severance Hospital (by the Presbyterian missionary Horace Allen, who introduced Western medicine to Korea), Yonsei University (by Horace Underwood), and Ewha Women's University (by Mary Scranton from the Methodist sponsored Women's Foreign Missionary Society).
[24] Oak, *Making of Korean Christianity*, 22.
[25] William Griffis' *Corea: The Hermit Kingdom* actually became required reading for missionaries training to go to Korea. See Oak, *Making of Korean Christianity*, 53-4.

With regards to language reforms, the missionaries encouraged and revitalized the use of the Korean vernacular alphabet (*hangŭl*), contributing to the elevated status of the Korean script as the "national script" (*kungmun*) from its previous status as the "vulgar script" (*ŏnmun*). There were largely two factors at play (that will be discussed in further detail below): first and foremost, the missionaries were obviously motivated by evangelism and the transmission and dissemination of their theology; and second, they contributed a great deal to the severing of ties between Korea and China. While the practices of Western medicine, science, and education[26] may have left more visible traces of Protestant missionary activity, their role in transforming the Korean language is more of a spectral site that gets eclipsed by nationalist discourses in Korean historiography. On the one hand, secular nationalist historians either downplay or deny outright the role of the missionaries, and on the other hand, Protestant Korean historians praise the missionaries as having awakened a nationalist consciousness. In both cases, the question of ethno-nationalism (as itself a modern construct) is not necessarily examined critically. In tracing the missionaries' more elusive mark in the Korean writing system, this deconstructive analysis takes a more critical approach to the question of modern ethno-nationalism in Korea.

3. Grammatology and the missionaries' desire to "modernize" the Korean language

> On top of this we find an anarchy in the orthography and even in certain parts of the declension system which is well understandable if one recalls the contempt in which the Korean language is held in its own country [...] It is precisely this apparently so undisciplined and arbitrary orthography, this An-orthography in Korean texts [...] There is still no telling if and when science

[26] These missionaries were mostly medical or educational missionaries who were building schools and hospitals.

> will be in a position to bring order to this situation. The only thing worse than a non-literary language is a language which, though used for literary purposes, is neither cultivated literarily nor stabilized.[27]
>
> — G. von der Gabelentz, 1892

> *Grammatology*:
> a new science of writing [...] While the general histories of writing treat individual writings mainly from a descriptive-historical point of view, the new science attempts to establish general principles governing the use and evolution of writing on a comparative-typological basis.[28]
>
> — I. J. Gelb, 1952

When Jacques Derrida adopted the subtitle "grammatology" from I. J. Gelb for what would become his signature statement on deconstruction, *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida mimics the format of "grammatology" (the science of writing) in his own text. What Derrida does in writing *Of Grammatology* is to take on the *form* of a history and science of writing, so as to outline its impossibility.[29] "Grammatology," for Derrida, is a science that is impossible. Derrida's deconstructive project was in response to the trends of this "science of writing" that was circulating in French linguistic discourses. What he is able to offer, in turn, is a critical reading of the *logic* that undergirds this desire for a science of writing. Rather than claiming to have an "objective" or "scientific" stance, Derrida's deconstructive project operates from *within* the logic of "grammatology" to expose its impossibility.

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[27] G. von der Gabalentz, "Zur Beurteilung des koreanischen Schrift-und Lautwesens," in *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, Bd. XXIII (Berlin: Königlich Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin), 587-600. Quoted and translated by Ross King, "Western Protestant Missionaries and the Origins of Korean Language Modernization," in *Journal of International and Area Studies* 11, no. 3 (2004): 14.

[28] I. J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing: The Foundations of Grammatology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 1.

[29] See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 323n4: "In spite of a concern for systematic or simplified classification, and in spite of the controversial hypotheses on the monogenesis or polygenesis of scripts, this book follows the classical model of histories of writing."

It is from this analysis of language that Derrida deconstructs a larger target—the history of Western metaphysics. Out of the very practice of "linguistics" as a science, he is able to deconstruct the theology at play—a metaphysics that imagines and prioritizes "self-presence," a subjectivity that can systematically draw a connection between signifier and signified. This idea of a systematic (i.e. non-arbitrary) connection between signifier and signified is consequential for Derrida, for it is this metaphysical claim that ultimately positions "God" as the transcendental signified—that to which everything refers, and that which ultimately collapses the very distinction between signifier and signified. It is in that sense that the logic operative in the science of language is connected to a Christian monotheistic concept of God. Furthermore, from deconstructing "phonocentrism" (the prioritization of the voice), *Of Grammatology* makes the ultimate claim that logocentrism (the prioritization of *logos*) turns out to be *the* most powerful form of ethnocentrism.[30]

A strikingly similar logic of the science of writing can be found in the case of the "modernization" of the Korean language and the Protestant missionaries' role therein. We encounter the concept of science in the excerpt above from the German linguist von der Gabelentz, who was among the earliest Western scholarly authorities that critiqued the Korean vernacular script.[31] In von der Gabelentz's critique, what we encounter is an implicit expectation of a scientific approach to orthography, as Korea's script is not only "undisciplined and arbitrary," but also a form of "anarchy." Von der Gabelentz' criticism

[30] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 3: "*logocentrism*: the metaphysics of phonetic writing (for example, of the alphabet) which was fundamentally [...] nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism."
[31] Ross King, "Western Protestant Missionaries and the Origins of Korean Language Modernization," 14.

foreshadows the major language reforms that North American Protestant missionaries would propose in the name of "modernizing" Korean writing just a few years later.

George W. Gilmore (1858-1933),[32] an ordained minister writing for a Presbyterian missionary publication, makes a similar observation with regards to the Korean language: "It must also be borne in mind by those who may study the Korean grammar that the natives have very little idea of the science of philology, and hence but little help must be expected from them in the direction of scientific derivation, and hardly any reliance can be placed on their statements."[33] Gilmore laments the lack of a "scientific" system when it comes to Korean writing, thereby calling forth the very *need* for a science that would aid in the missionaries' task of translating the Protestant Bible. It is what both I. J. Gelb and Jacques Derrida call a "science of writing" that seems to make possible, for Gilmore as well as for other missionaries, the translation and transmission of Protestant ideas to Korea via the Korean language.

4. The writing system in premodern Korea: a brief history

Prior to missionary activity in the colonial period, there were, in large part, three main writing systems employed in Korea: (1) literary Chinese (*hanmun*), usually reserved for the aristocracy or the literati (usually men), (2) the vernacular script (*han'gŭl*, also

[32] George W. Gilmore's *Korea from its Capital: With a Chapter on Missions* (1892), along with William Griffis' *Corea, The Hermit Nation* (1882) and Percival Lowell's *Chosön, The Land of the Morning Calm* (1885), was part of this early Protestant literature that became integral to the missionaries' understanding and research on Korea.
[33] George W. Gilmore, *Korea from its Capital: With a Chapter on Missions* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1892), 62.

called by the denigrated name *ŏnmun*, "vulgar script"), and (3) mixed Sino-Korean script (*kukhanmun*). These systems are worth looking at briefly.[34]

Literary Chinese (*hanmun*) was the official script in premodern Korea and generally known as "the earliest form of writing on the Korean peninsula."[35] In the fourth century, particularly with the official adoption of Buddhism during the Koguryŏ Dynasty in 372 C.E., Chinese translations of Buddhist texts were imported to Korea.[36] Henry Em provides a helpful account of the philosophical and epistemological significance of *hanmun*, particularly as it functioned in the Chosŏn Dynasty:

> Literary Chinese (*hanmun*) was the writing system of power and universal truth. It was not foreign. It was the script that secured Korea's place in civilization. The Chosŏn literati expressed intense anxiety that the widespread use of *ŏnmun* would inevitably result in many turning their back on a vast universe of cultivated learning. Thus laws, indeed anything of importance, could not and should not be written in the Korean alphabet [*han'gŭl*].[37]

Em's analysis provides a crucial perspective concerning the position of Korea in civilization. In a Sinocentric world order (that then constituted a Sino-Korean tributary system), it was literary Chinese (*hanmun*) that expressed the philosophical and religious practices. It is important to note here that (a) literary Chinese was not necessarily considered a "foreign" language, and relatedly, (b) this tributary relation was what Bruce Cumings calls an "inconsequential hierarchy."[38] Thus within this Sinocentric world order, the mastery of *hanmun* was (and perhaps still is to this day) a philosophical practice that

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[34] See Theresa Hyun, *Writing Women in Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 3. See also Kim Hyŏn and Kim Yun-Sik, *Han'guk munhaksa*, 83.
[35] Hyun, *Writing Women in Korea*, 2. See also Pak Byŏng-Ch'ae, "Han'gŭl munhwa hyŏngsŏng kwa minjok chŏngsin," 55.
[36] See Hyun, *Writing Women in Korea*, 3.
[37] Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 69.
[38] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 95.

did not have to mean the denigration of the Korean literati. That is to say, the idea of "origin" (geographic, cultural, ethnic, philosophical, or religious) did not denigrate Korea's position. In other words, locating China as the "source" of civilization did not necessarily mean Korea's denigration. As we will see later, it is this very idea of "origin" that has its own artificiality and historical contingency.

Scholars have documented several methods by which the Korean literati modified the Chinese script before the vernacular *han'gŭl* was invented in the 15th century. Theresa Hyun provides a helpful summary:

(1) "***Kugyŏl*** was a system of reading Chinese texts that used Chinese characters in fixed ways to express Korean grammatical functions. It was mostly used as a system of textual explication."
(2) "***Hyangch'al*** used certain Chinese characters for their sound and others for their meaning to come as close as possible to Korean usage. *Hyangga* were Silla poems that used this system. Although this was an effective system for adapting Chinese characters to Korean usage, it had fallen into disuse by mid-Koryŏ, when *hanmun* culture was becoming stronger."
(3) "***Idu***, which used certain Chinese characters to express syntactical relations, was employed mostly in official documents."[39]

While this project certainly does not aim to take on a comprehensive linguistic analysis of the complicated writing systems in premodern Korea, what is useful to note here is that there existed systems of modification that could incorporate both Chinese characters and Korean grammar and syntax. Chinese characters could be used either for their sound or for their meaning. Thus "meaning" did not necessarily reside solely in Chinese or in Korean; these methods of modification allowed for an interesting synthesis that suited the interests of Korean writers. There did not have to be a fixed and necessary relation between signifier and signified. And "language" did not necessarily have to be the site of "ethnos."

[39] Hyun, *Writing Women in Korea*, 3. Bold added for emphasis.

Han'gŭl, the Korean vernacular alphabet, was invented in the 15th century. The Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910) had come about with the radical transformation of Korean society, shaped by neo-Confucian ideology. Not long after the founding of the Chosŏn Dynasty, King Sejong promulgated the vernacular script in 1446. He directed a newly founded research institution and reference library, *Chiphyŏnchŏn* ("Hall of Worthies," founded in 1420),[40] to devise a vernacular writing system—this order was also called *hunmin chŏngŭm* ("instruct the people on correct sounds"[41]). In the introduction to the newly created vernacular alphabet, Sejong offered this explanation for the invention of this new script: "Thinking of these, my people, with compassion, We have newly devised a script of twenty-eight letters, only that it become possible for anyone to readily learn it and use it to advantage in his everyday life."[42] Sejong states that *hanmun*, the Chinese script, is difficult to learn, and that this new phonetic system would allow for a wider access to knowledge and to the classics. While more contemporary explanations (at least within Korea) may celebrate Sejong's invention[43], Theresa Hyun suggests that the primary motivation that was actually driving the invention of this script was the correct pronunciation of sounds (thus, *hunmin chŏngŭm*, "the instruction of correct sounds for the people"). Although many missionaries later claim that this script was for the "common people," Hyun argues that was not the complete picture: "Thus it would seem that in addition to his stated aim of providing a means of expression for the common

[40] Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 117.
[41] Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 69.
[42] Quoted in Hyun, *Writing Women in Korea*, 5.
[43] There is a giant statue of King Sejong in the heart of Seoul. And Sejong is most famous for *han'gŭl.*

people, Sejong intended the new script as an aid to correct pronunciation of Chinese characters for members of the upper classes."[44]

The broader context of the *Chiphyŏnchŏn* is worth noting here as well. Sejong, along with the *Chiphyŏnchŏn*, played a key role in what Martina Deuchler calls the "Confucian Transformation of Korea,"[45] the way in which neo-Confucian ideology re-shaped Korean society, culture and politics at the beginning of the Chosŏn Dynasty. The *Chiphyŏnchŏn* was an institute dedicated to the meticulous reading of the Chinese classics, which constituted what Deuchler calls the "ancient institutions" of Korea.[46] Thus, in addition to the aim of correcting the pronunciation of sounds, the invention of *han'gŭl* played a useful role in translating (at first) Buddhist texts, but then with the discrediting of Buddhism in this new (Chosŏn) dynasty, the institute dedicated their research to the Chinese classical texts that would reinforce the epistemology of neo-Confucian ideology.[47] Thus, it was this reverence—and not resistance—toward Chinese philosophy and culture (*sadejuui*)[48] that motivated the invention of the Korean vernacular script.

Furthermore, according to Deuchler, class differentiation—in particular the rise and consolidation of the aristocracy—was an absolutely critical part of the formation of the Chosŏn Dynasty. Thus, the invention of the Korean script was actually for *class*

[44] Hyun, *Writing Women in Korea*, 6.
[45] Martina Deuchler, *Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992).
[46] Deuchler, *Confucian Transformation of Korea*, 117.
[47] Hyun, *Writing Women in Korea*, 7: "From the late fifteenth to the late sixteenth centuries translation activities focused on Chinese classics, works dealing with Neo-Confucian ethics, literary works, and texts on medicine and agriculture."
[48] *Sadejuui* is actually a term for this philosophy of reverence toward China. This will be an important term to examine in later chapters, as the Korean Enlightenment largely constituted the rejection of *sadejuui*.

interests, not "national" interests (and as is obvious by now, the concept of "nation" that we speak of today did not necessarily exist at this time, at least in Chosŏn Korea). That is, in the Korean peninsula, class interests were driving this reverence toward the Chinese classics.

Thus, in 1894 (towards the end of the Chosŏn Dynasty and before the Annexation) when King Kojong made his "Declaration of Independence,"[49] the following royal edict marked a significant shift in Sino-Korean relations: "All laws and edicts shall have Korean as their base; one may attach a translation in literary Chinese [*hanmun*] or in mixed script [*kukhanmun*]."[50] This was unthinkable before the modern period. *Han'gŭl* became elevated to the status of the "national script" [*kungmun*]. Henry Em offers a significant perspective on this transformation: "Prior to the late nineteenth century, then, it would have made little sense to place *country* [the meaning of the character *kuk*] before *mun* [meaning script or language]. To the extent that a 'national script' made any sense at all, it would have suggested a 'country' mode of writing unable to shake off its parochialism: *country* would have rendered *mun*—letters, but also literature in the larger sense—into its other, that is, the local written vernacular, the 'other' of true knowledge."[51] That is, the very concept of a "national script" was an epistemological rupture of sorts—if knowledge was ordered such that literature (at least the philosophical classics) were to be read and written in a Sinocentric universe, the very idea of "nation" or "country" was itself a modern invention that then rendered the very *link* between "nation" and "language" a

[49] Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 6.
[50] Quoted in Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 68-9.
[51] Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 69.

strange, artificial construct. According to Ross King, this link was a "European romantic/nationalist notion of Language = Nation."[52] But how did this incredibly significant shift in the status of *han'gŭl* (from a "vulgar script" to a "national script") come about? Here is where the role of the Protestant missionaries had a consequential effect.

5. A modern concept of writing: the missionaries' "discovery" of the scientific value of *Hangŭl*

> Their speech too bears upon it the mark of the beast, for there are two different languages, where one easy one might serve. One is the written or eye-language, and the other is spoken or ear-language. No one understands the eye-language when it is read, and no one thinks of writing the ear-language as it is spoken. When you make a note of what is said, you have to translate it from the ear-language into the eye-language; and when you read from a book to listeners, you have to translate from the eye-language into the ear-language. The languages in their character and construction differ as widely as English differs from Syriac; for they belong in different families and are in no sense related whatever. The ear-language, which all the people understand, is considered beneath the dignity of the scholar and official class to use as a means of written communication, so they spend twenty years on the study of the eye-language, and then most of them fail to use it successfully. No more hopeless confusion exists than in the use of the original languages in Korea. From this confusion we are hoping to bring forth a Christian literature that will be understood and appreciated by the mass of the people.[53]
>
> — James Scarth Gale, *Korean Sketches*, 1898

James Scarth Gale (1863-1937) was a Canadian Presbyterian missionary who played a prominent role in reforming the Korean language and translating the Protestant Bible into the Korean vernacular. A devoted scholar of Korean studies, Gale wrote extensively on Korean language, history, and folklore. While Gale's intentions may have been to translate Protestant theological ideas and preserve what he believed to be intrinsically Korean, his views on the Korean script reveal a type of orientalism that then motivated his role in Korea's language reforms. When Gale went to Korea at the end of the 19th century, he, along with many other Protestant missionaries found the writing system in

[52] Ross King, "Western Protestant Missionaries and the Origins of Korean Language Modernization," 32.
[53] James Gale, *Korean Sketches* (New York, Chicago, Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1898), 245-6.

Korea an anathema. The passage above exemplifies why. For Gale and for other Protestant missionaries encountering and learning the Korean language, there seemed to be two features that constituted what von der Gabelentz called an "anarchy" and what Gale here calls "the mark of the beast": (1) the "bi-lingual"[54] writing system that used both the Chinese script (*hanmun*) and the Korean script (*hangŭl*), and (2) the Korean script itself as unscientific. But *both* of these features will turn out to be related, such that what might be called a "science of writing" (borrowing from Derrida and in turn from I. J. Gelb) would "fix" this "anarchy."

The plurality of writing systems posed both a problem and an opportunity for the missionaries. The most pressing problem, of course, was the issue of translation—the translation of the Protestant Bible into Korean. So how were they going to translate if there were two written scripts—Korean and Chinese? Chinese, a pictographic system, was significantly harder to learn. In his *Korea and Christianity* (1986), Spencer Palmer provides the following analysis of the missionaries' frustration with literary Chinese:

> The Chinese literary language was a formidable barrier to the propagation of ideas among the masses. John Fryer's remark that the devil had invented this 'intractable' written language as a tactic for keeping Christianity out of China was a reference to a problem which all proponents of foreign ideas eventually came to recognize: obscurity, erudition, and allusiveness characterized the traditional literary style. Confronted with a script which could be mastered only after many years of painstaking study, and a written language whose major characteristics were telegraphic conciseness and the absence of any device for indicating proper names, it is little wonder that the Protestant missionaries became embroiled in prolonged bitter arguments over questions of usage and terminology.[55]

[54] David Silva, "Western Attitudes toward the Korean Language: An Overview of Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Mission Literature," in *Korean Studies* 26:2 (2002): 273.
[55] Spencer Palmer, *Korea and Christianity* (Royal Asiatic Society Korea Branch, 1986), 69.

As Palmer writes, the task of translating concepts and words into literary Chinese would involve many years of study; the confrontation of this Chinese script in the Korean writing system was not only an anathema but also a significant barrier.

They found, however, that *hangŭl* was a completely phonetic system, and as a phonetic system, much more familiar to Westerners (e.g. German, English, French). And on the one hand, *hangŭl* was used by the masses of the people; the Chinese script, on the other hand, was primarily reserved by and accessible only to the aristocratic men, *yangban*, of Korean society at the time. But with evangelism as a numbers game, the use of the so-called "vulgar script" would allow them to reach the masses more quickly. And indeed, more than 18 million Bibles were translated and distributed in the Korean vernacular script by 1936.[56] Not only was *hangŭl* easier to learn, it was the language "of the people"—"people" not only in the sense of "the masses" (the poor, the uneducated, women, those who did not have access to the Chinese classics), but also "people" in the sense of their idea of "nation." In conflating these two senses of people, the missionaries saw an opportunity to translate their theology in nationalist terms. Thus the missionaries had instigated what Palmer calls a "revival of vernacular language."[57]

Thus the Protestant missionaries were claiming to "re-claim" *hangŭl*—thereby transforming not only its look but also its function. That is to say, this "revival" and "reclamation" constituted a different concept of language altogether. Gilmore writes of the ignorance on behalf of the Koreans about their own language: "It must also be borne

[56] See Em, *Great Enterprise*, 197n76. Em also cites Kim Yun-gyŏng, *Han'guk muncha kŭp ŏhaksa* and Ch'oe Hyŏn-bae, "Kidokkyo wa Han'gul," *Sinhak nondan*, 7 (1962).
[57] Palmer, *Korea and Christianity*, 69.

in mind by those who may study the Korean grammar that the natives have very little idea of the science of philology, and hence but little help must be expected from them in the direction of scientific derivation, and hardly any reliance can be placed on their statements."[58] As the missionaries begin painting the picture of the ignorance and lack of command Koreans have toward their own writing system, James Gale speaks of *hangŭl* as part of "divine providence":

> Korea's native script is surely the simplest language in the world. Invented in 1445 A.D., it has come quietly down the dusty ages, waiting for, who knew what? Never used, it was looked on with contempt as being so easy. Why yes, even women could learn it in a month or little more; of what use could such a cheap script be? By one of those mysterious providences it was made ready and kept waiting for the New Testament and other Christian literature. Up to this day these have had almost exclusive use of this wonderfully simple language. This perhaps is the most remarkable providence of all, this language sleeping its long sleep of four hundred years, waiting till the hour should strike on the clock, that it might rise and tell of all Christ's wondrous works. They call it Un-mun, the "dirty language," because it is so simple and easy as compared with proud Chinese picture writing. God surely loves the humble things of life, and chooses the things that are naught to bring to naught the things that are.[59]

Gale's reflections exemplify the kind of attitude that the missionaries had in claiming their own divinely ordained responsibility to reclaim but also to reshape the vernacular script. Griffis also says: "[T]he translated Bible, besides quickening the Korean mind and heart, called into life not only an unknown world of thought, but by setting a new standard of speech and writing induced the beginnings of a true national literature."[60]

Their tactic was equally interesting—the missionaries were convinced that they had "discovered" the scientific value of *hangŭl*. They praised the potentiality of its scientificity, while at the same time claiming that this science was in its primitive stages

[58] George William Gilmore, *Korea from its Capital*, 62.
[59] Gale, *Korea in Transition* (New York: Easton & Mains, 1909), 137-8.
[60] William Griffis, *A modern pioneer in Korea: The life story of Henry G. Appenzeller*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1912), 189-90.

that needed to be cultivated. But it is important to question what they mean by "scientific value." Homer Hulbert (1863-1949), an American missionary whose work will be further examined below, praises Korean writing in the following way: "If it were possible to believe this pretty fiction we should have to concede that no alphabet was ever more simply invented or on a more really scientific plan, *for the perfect alphabet is the one that unites the greatest degree of simplicity with the broadest range of phonetic power*."[61] What is striking—especially considering Derrida's deconstruction of "phonocentrism"—is Hulbert's idea of the "perfect alphabet" as having "phonetic power." That is to say, the idea of writing as a *science* involves a theory of language such that the spoken and the written should be "in sync." It is *this* theory of language—the idea that in order for a writing system to be scientific, it must be phonetic—that Derrida calls phonocentrism. Phonocentrism, according to Derrida, is the site of a desire for scientificity, a systematic and consistent connection between the signifier and signified. Phonocentrism thus becomes a crucial premise for the missionaries as they begin proposing Korean language reforms in order to better suit their own translation activity.

6. The language reforms[62]

Thus in their attempt to "reclaim" *hangŭl* and its "scientific" value, the Protestant missionaries proposed two main kinds of language reforms: (1) the elevation of the status

[61] Homer Hulbert, "The Korean Alphabet," in *Korean Repository* vol. 1 (1892) (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1964), 74. Emphasis added.
[62] In this section, I have relied on the archival work presented in Ross King's article, "Western Protestant Missionaries and the Origins of Korean Language Modernization." King's article provides a thorough selection of missionary archives that discuss the Korean language and in particular the missionaries' suggestions for orthographic reforms.

of the Korean vernacular script, and (2) the standardization of Korean spelling, which would support their translation activity. While the most obvious motivations may have been to harness the vernacular for the sake of reaching the masses, reclaiming the origins of *hangŭl*—if it were to become the site in which Koreans would encounter the concept of the Christian God—thereby displaced the philosophical significance of literary Chinese. Elevating *hangŭl*, as we will see, would thus reconfigure the formations of collective identity into a more ethnocentric one.

Both of these reforms were rooted in an idea of "modernizing" the Korean language, which in turn exposes a particular concept of writing as well as a particular concept of science. Gale's passage above provides a helpful anchoring moment to discuss these concepts (the kind of linguistic analyses at work). The first reform (elevation of *hangŭl*) is based on a *philological* analysis that then leads to a typology of the Korean script with an origin that is distinct from literary Chinese. Gale claims that Korean and Chinese belong to different linguistic "families." The second reform (standardization of Korean spelling) has to do with *phonology* that makes the distinction between the "ear" and the "eye," embedded in a theory about the ways in which the visual and hearing organs/senses relate to each other. This section traces the missionaries' attempts to employ these linguistic sciences—typology and phonology—with Korean writing.

Philology. Perhaps the most explicit application of philology—motivated by the search for Korea's ethnic and racial origin—is found in the writings of Homer Hulbert. In his essay, "The Origin of the Korean People," Hulbert undertakes a philological study of

the Korean script and offers a striking suggestion that Korea's linguistic origin cannot be Chinese, but rather Turanian:

> Did the Korean language come from China? In answer let us briefly recapitulate the characteristic features of the Turanian languages. (a) They are agglutinative rather than inflectional. The dialects of China today are neither. (b) They are characterized by the free use of suffixes rather than prefixes. Chinese has neither. (c) In the Turanian languages the order of the sentence is invariably subject, object, predicate. In Chinese it is commonly not so. Let it be noticed that in every feature the Korean of today is plainly Turanian.[63]

In citing Max Müller,[64] Hulbert seems to be basing his analysis primarily from Müller's typology, in which Müller constructed the three kinds of "races" in Europe and Asia: the Turanians, the Semites, and the Aryans.[65] Hulbert draws out the similarities between Korean and the "Dravidian" languages. He concludes the following in another essay on the Korean script:

> … the Koreans drew from the Thibetan the form of most of their consonants, that they invented their vowels, that they originated their own method for putting the letters together, that they originated their own method of aspiration and of hardening sound and, what is rather remarkable, they hit upon a purely phonetic method of spelling.[66]

Hulbert thus claims that the shapes of Korean letters must have been derived from Tibetan scripts.[67]

The most striking claim in Hulbert's philological and typological study is that he contests the idea that Chinese would have been Korean's progenitor: "It is likewise hard to believe that had Korean been an offshoot of the Chinese it should have left its

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[63] Hulbert, "The Origin of the Korean People II," in *Korean Repository* vol. 2 (1895) (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1964), 255-6.
[64] Ibid., 256.
[65] Max Müller, "Lectures on the Science of Religion," *Introduction to the Science of Religion: Four Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution with Two Essays on False Analogies, and the Philosophy of Mythology* (London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899).
[66] Hulbert, "The Korean Alphabet," in *The Korean Repository* vol. 1 (1892), 72.
[67] This observation is owed to Ross King's research in his article, "Western Attitudes toward the Korean Language," 16. King states that Hulbert's claim was criticized by Yi Ik Seup, who disagrees with Hulbert's philological analysis.

progenitor so far behind in the race of linguistic development."[68] Here is where he cites Müller's concept of "phonetic decay"[69] to claim that Korea's phonetic alphabet indicates its more developed status from the Chinese script. Furthermore, Hulbert's typology proceeds to link geography with "race" and "language"—tracing where the Chinese might have geographically originated from; and in contradistinction, Korea as having its geographical origin alongside the "Turanian" people.

In another essay, "Korean Survivals," Hulbert makes the argument that Korea has had a "distinct national life" prior to China. His most effective point of evidence has to do then with the Korean language: "The language of Korea, in that particular which all philologists admit to be the most distinctive of any people, namely, in the grammar, has been wholly untouched by the Chinese, and even in the vocabulary the borrowed words have been thoroughly assimilated and form no larger proportion of the whole vocabulary than do borrowed words in English or in many other languages."[70] His essay is actually a response to James Gale's essay on the "Chinese Influence upon Korea," arguing that Korea has its own distinct culture and history: "It must be confessed then that, all things considered, the points of similarity with the Chinese are the exception and that the survivals of things purely native and indigenous are the rule."[71] It is this idea of survival, the idea of something "purely native" and "purely indigenous" that I want to call attention.

[68] Hulbert, "The Origin of the Korean People II," in *Korean Repository* v.2, 256.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Hulbert, "Korean Survivals," TKB1 (1900): 40.
[71] Ibid., 42.

Phonology. The missionaries' preference for a purely phonetic script drives their phonological analysis of the Korean writing system. James Gale's observation in the passage above, for instance, expresses a real frustration concerning the split between the spoken language and the written language in the Korean writing system. For Gale, the ear and the eye must be in sync—the eye must *represent* the ear. The issue of the "hearing" vs. "seeing" language comes up again in the writings of the missionary W. L. Swallen, who draws on "The Gouin System of Language Study":

> Prof. Gouin observes that the organ of language is not the *eye*, which all the schools have employed, primarily, in the study of language, but the *ear*. A language is not learned by looking at the characters which represent it; but by hearing the sounds of the words and phrases themselves. The order of nature, which the child employs is not first to see, then to know, then to write and speak; but the child first learns to *speak*. He learns this through the *ear*. He then learns to read what he knows how to speak, He does this through the *eye*. He then learns to write what he has previously learned how to speak and read.[72]

W. L. Swallen's study of the French linguistic "Gouin System" is a particularly striking example of phonocentrism: the distinction between "speech" and "writing" which then privileges "speech" *over* "writing."[73] It was this synchronization of the eye and the ear—the condition of the possibility of what they considered a scientific script—that drives the missionaries to propose their spelling reforms. And in so doing, they not only abandon the pictographic Chinese script, but also suggest changes to "perfect" Korean spelling altogether.

[72] W. L. Swallen, *Korean Repository* v.2, 466-7.
[73] In Derrida's analysis in *Of Grammatology*, he deconstructs Saussure's phonocentrism by showing how Saussure's own claim about the arbitrariness of the sign works against this desire for "scientificity." See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 3.

The Reforms. The Unification of *Hangŭl* Orthography was finalized in 1933,[74] and the standardization of the Korean writing system is ongoing to this day.[75] The missionaries were of course not the only ones suggesting these reforms. The Korean Enlightenment movement (to be examined in the next chapter) included intellectuals such as Chu Sigyŏng, who advocated for the reform of the Korean language—not only orthographic reforms, but more importantly the reform of one's attitude toward the vernacular.[76] However, the missionaries' role in these orthographic reforms cannot be understated. James Gale and Homer Hulbert were two such missionaries who were already proposing suggestions at the turn of the century.

In the 1902 meeting of the Presbyterian Council, James Gale had proposed the following spelling reforms which came to be known as the "Gale system"[77]:

> (1) the 'arae a' (ă) was abolished and replaced in most instances with ㅏ
> (2) all cases of 'arae a' in the accusative marker were changed to ㅡ
> (3) ㅅ, ㅈ, ㅊ + yV[owel] → simple vowel: (서, 셔 → 서, 자, 쟈, 댜, ㅈ → 자)[78]

In all three propositions, the common denominator is the standardization of vowels. Prior to these reforms, the same sound could be written in different shapes. Thus in standardizing the vowels and consonants, Gale's suggestion was an effort to reduce, universalize, standardize, and simplify only *one* possibility of writing a word according to a sound—such that there would be only one "correct" spelling of a sound. The Board of

[74] Iksop Lee and S. Robert Ramsey, *The Korean Language* (New York: SUNY Press, 2000), 22.
[75] See Henry Em, *Great Enterprise*, 197n76.
[76] See Chu Sigyŏng, "Essay on the Korean Language," from *The Independent*, 24 April 1897.
[77] King, "Western Protestant Missionaries and the Origins of Korean Language Modernization," 18.
[78] Quoted in King, "Western Protestant Missionaries," 19; reported in the 1903 *Minutes of the Permanent Executive Bible Committee of Korea*.

Translators[79] adopted Gale's new spelling but then reverted to the old spelling due to resistance by Korean church-attendees, and there continued to be a sustained debate concerning the spelling reforms.

In a 1904 volume of the *Korea Review*, a missionary magazine edited by Homer Hulbert, Hulbert writes a treatise on spelling, writing and language altogether, titled "Spelling Reform."[80] In this essay, Hulbert's propositions are quite similar to that of Gale, claiming that "the writing of Korean falls below a perfect phonetic standard, and it is generally felt that it would have been well if the originators of the alphabet and its use could have avoided these inconsistencies and infelicities."[81] Hulbert further explains why this is such an issue: "It gets out of alignment, so to speak. The question is whether we shall draw the spelling back into alignment with the pronunciation or not. It seems to us that it depends very much upon the degree to which the present spelling has fixed itself in the Korean mind."[82] The "alignment" he refers to here is the alignment between the eye and the ear—between the sound and the sight, between the signifier and signified. Hulbert states exactly what the missionaries are proposing: "It is the desire of the advocates of the reform to give the people a system which will make the spelling of words absolutely phonetic so that the very sound of the word will indicate the spelling and there will be no chance of mistake. The advantages of such a system are manifest. Children will

[79] Gale was one of the members of the Board of Translators, along with Horace Grant Underwood (Presbyterian), William B. Scranton (Methodist), Henry G. Appenzeller (Methodist), and Mark N. Trollope (Anglican).
[80] Hulbert, "Spelling Reform," in *Korea Review* (1904): 385-393.
[81] Hulbert, "Spelling Reform," 387.
[82] Ibid., 388.

be able to learn to read more readily and writing will be a very simple matter."[83] By the end of this treatise, Hulbert makes the distinction between reading and writing, and argues that reading is more important—that is, of course, reading to the Western eye.

Ross King makes the analysis that what Hulbert is getting at here is the debate between "phonemic" and "morphophonemic" spelling that is at stake in these reforms. Iksop Lee's study of the Korean language explains this distinction the following way:

> This older, traditional orthography reflected the neutralization mentioned above and thus transcribed the actual pronunciation more faithfully. In contrast, the modern orthography transcribes, as much as possible, each morpheme in a single, unvarying form. In other words, the old orthography was much more of what is known as a phonemic orthography, while the modern orthography is morphophonemic. *The change in orthography thus represented a different concept of writing.* The decision to allow any consonant to be written at the end of the syllable as *patchim* was a product of this newer way of thinking.[84]
>
> The reason for choosing the modern type of orthography and writing the consonant *patchim* is to keep the spelling of the morpheme the same no matter how it is actually pronounced. As was mentioned above, the basic principle of today's Hangŭl orthography is to always write each morpheme with a single unchanging shape.[85]

While Lee's study does not explicitly look at (perhaps even omits altogether) the role that the Protestant missionaries played in this change in orthography, this transformation—from "phonemic" to "morphophonemic" spelling—is exactly what the missionaries proposed in the 1900s. Most significantly, the new spelling, also called the "one-sound one-character principle,"[86] would allow for the *direction of writing* to change (from right-to-left vertical writing, to dextro-horizontal writing)[87], which would also allow its adaptation to a Western-operated printing press.

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[83] Hulbert, "Spelling Reform," *The Korea Review*, 389.
[84] Lee, *The Korean Language*, 22. Emphasis added.
[85] Ibid., 23-4.
[86] See Ross King, "Western Protestant Missionaries," 19.
[87] Lee, *The Korean Language*, 19: "the grouping of the Hangŭl letters into syllables allows freedom in the direction in which the lines are written […] What gives Korean writing the flexibility to be written in different directions this way is the grouping of letters into syllabic units."

Thus, these spelling reforms would allow what Charles Ferguson calls "intertranslatability."[88] And here we can see the real stakes of these reforms: to "modernize" the Korean script was to make it "translatable" to the Westerner. According to Ross King, it is most likely none other than James Gale who touches on the issue of "intertranslatability": "what will we do when Korean literature, as it inevitably must, comes into contact with the outside world of thought, and when terms and names and translations and quotations in other dialects must be introduced into the Korean text. It can only be done with perfection by beginning from the present time to educate the Korean eye to horizontal writing from left to right…"[89] This passage is revealing—because in his suggestion "to educate the Korean eye," what we detect is a desire to make the Korean script easier to the Western eye.

7. "Translating" monotheism[90]

> "The Koreans understand the word of *Hanănim*. They have already worshipped *Hanănim*. It is our job to teach them that *Hanănim* is only one and the only God, to tell all His nature. Then all will become easy."[91]
>
> — L. H. Underwood, 1918

It may be no surprise to the reader that translation always involves some act of interpretation. In this case, the missionaries were not just interpreting, they were also actively introducing their own metaphysical concepts. When the Protestant missionaries

[88] Charles Ferguson, "Language Development," in Joshua A. Fishman, Charles Ferguson and Jyotirindra Das Gupta, eds., *Languages problems of the developing nations* (New York: Wiley, 27-35), 28. Cited by Ross King, 8.
[89] "Spelling Reform," *Korea Review* (1904), 541.
[90] In this section, I have relied on the sources provided by Sung-Deuk Oak's *The Making of Protestant Christianity: Protestant Encounters with Korean Religions, 1876-1915*. While I have benefited greatly from Oak's archival research, this analysis also attempts to interrogate the theological claims that undergird Oak's analysis.
[91] L. H. Underwood, *Underwood of Korea* (New York: Revell, 1918), 123 and 135.

attempted to translate their monotheistic concept of "God" into Korean, they could not find an easy equivalent, as the very concept of monotheism did not exist in premodern Korea. They thus went searching for the highest deity in the Korean cosmos, and constructed a neologism, *Hanănim*.[92] Very much like their approach to "reclaiming" the origins of the Korean language, a similar logic is at play in "reclaiming" (but actually constructing) *Hanănim* as the one and only God.

According to Sung-Deuk Oak in his research on the "indigenization" of Christianity in modern Korea and the missionaries' translation for "God" as *Hanănim*, the Protestant missionaries had excavated and developed what Oak calls an "original monotheism" or "primitive monotheism."[93] While I rely on Oak's extensive archival work on missionary sources, and summarize some of his documentation here, this analysis deconstructs the claim of a "primitive monotheism." I argue that the process of "indigenization" was actually a construction of the very *concept* of "origin" or "indigeneity"; it is from this idea of an indigenous history (a "pure" Korean history that had "survived" Chinese domination) that the missionaries fold in their concept of "God." Very much like their role in transforming the status and feel of the Korean script, this neologism was a two-pronged approach: first, they constructed a term for "God" in the Korean vernacular and linked this "God" to the Korean creation myth (the Tan'gun myth); then second, they claimed that they were simply "reclaiming" what was "already indigenous" to the Korean people.

[92] Oak, *Making of Korean Christianity,* 35-7.
[93] Ibid., 36.

The term *Hanănim* seems to have first been adopted by John Ross (1842-1915), a Scottish Presbyterian missionary. Ross began translating the Bible into the Korean vernacular script in 1877 and chose the vernacular *Hanŭnim*[94] in his first translations of the Gospels of Luke and John in 1882.[95] Oak documents that Ross seems to have taken an "anthropological approach"[96] by talking to merchants, farmers, and even a Daoist priest. And what he encountered then was *Hanŭnim*, a term from Korean shamanism-Daoism, which he concludes is the most similar to the Protestant monotheistic God.[97]

By the 1890s, the missionaries were debating two competing names for "God": *Hanănim* and *T'yŏnjyu*. Both terms actually seemed to have a similar meaning with a combination of the word for "heaven" (*hanal* and *t'yŏn*) and the word for "lord" or "master" (*nim* and *jyu*): thus both seemed to mean "heavenly lord" or "lord of the heavens." On the one hand, *T'yŏnjyu* was used primarily by Catholics, and furthermore also shared the same Chinese characters, *Tianzhu*. *Hanănim*, on the other hand, was a vernacular name, divorced from Chinese characters. And in 1894, the Board of Translators

[94] The spelling also shifts to *Hanănim*, which also has to do with the transformation of the concept of heavenliness into one-ness.
[95] Oak, *Making of Korean Christianity*, 49.
[96] Ibid., 52.
[97] Ibid., 53. For Oak, John Ross' adoption of *Hanŭnim* best exemplifies the process of "indigenization": "Ross' adoption of the vernacular name for God, Hanŭnim or Hananim, was closely connected with his translation principle of using the ordinary people's colloquial language, and of his mission policy of indigenization and the Nevius method [...] He identified the Korean people's contemporary Hanŭnim with the biblical Elohim. He did not introduce a foreign god to the Koreans, but taught them that the Christian God had already been working among them" (Oak, 55). Here Oak cites the Nevius Method as the basis of Ross' translation principle—the Nevius Method was the missionaries' policy that encouraged the autonomy of Korean churches with the "Three-Self principle of self-propagation, (financial) self-support, and self-government" (Cha, 55). But as Paul Cha argues, this Nevius Method was actually ambiguous—the principle of "autonomy" became a method of policing the boundaries of Protestant theology in the newly found Korean churches.

actually voted for *T'yŏnjyu*, with votes from H. G. Underwood, William B. Scranton and H. G. Appenzeller.[98]

G. H. Jones' "Studies in Korean Etymology" (1892) hints at the interpretation of the Korean and Chinese characters for "heaven" (*hanal*) as actually incorporating the concept of "one-ness":

> We are told that the Chinese character for *heaven* is composed of the characters for *one* and *great*, the idea being that heaven is the 'one or only greatness'—the greatest thing in existence. The Korean idea is analogous, for *hanal* is simply the word *hana—one* with the letter *l* suffixed to identify its thought and distinguish it from the numeral. There are two thoughts connected with *one* which recommend it to the Korean mind as a proper equivalent for *heaven*: First, it represents pure beginning, for back of it there is nothing and beyond it you find the composite. Second, it also for the same reason represents pure unity. So heaven is undoubtedly the source or beginning of all things, and also containing all harmony and perfection is therefore the truest example of unity known.[99]

Here in Jones' interpretation of the Korean word for "heaven," we find traces of monotheistic theology of "one or only greatness" that is also the "source or beginning" (i.e. origin) and the site of "unity." *Hanănim* goes from being the highest deity in the Korean cosmos, a shamanistic deity, to being the *only* deity to worship.[100]

By 1910, the Protestant missionaries had abandoned *T'yŏnjyu* and officially agreed on *Hanănim* as the Korean term for "God."[101] Integral to this change was the work of James Gale, the only one who voted for *Hanănim* on the Board of Translators in 1894. Gale crystallizes G. H. Jones' etymology of *Hanănim*, in emphasizing "oneness" over

[98] See Oak, *Making of Korean Christianity*, 59.
[99] G. H. Jones, "Studies in Korean Etymology," *Korean Repository* v.1 (1892), 333.
[100] But it is not actually clear whether Jones' etymology was actually the case—he may have been squeezing a square peg into a round hole.
[101] Oak, *Making of Korean Christianity*, 74.

"heavenliness." In Gale's essay, "Korean Ideas of God," Gale recounts his conversation with a certain "Mr. Chu."[102] Gale writes:

> "Our God," said Chu, "is the Great One, and is called by us *Hananim*, from the word *Hana*, meaning one, and *nim*, meaning lord, master, king. The one great Lord of Creation is *Hananim*. We associate him with the building of the universe (*Chun-ji*), and also call Him *Cho-wha-ong*, the ancient Creator."[103]

Gale's new etymology is as follows: "The Ruling One, The Honorable One, The Great One, The One" and "One Great Lord of Creation."[104]

In constructing *Hanănim* as "The One Great Lord of Creation," thereby transforming the deity of the heavens into the only deity, the missionaries thus policed the boundaries of this metaphysics, attempting to prevent syncretistic practices.[105] This same anxiety toward syncretism can actually be found in Sung-Deuk Oak's words as well, which are worth quoting at length:

> To be sure, the Christian term Hanănim has some negative connotations rooted in its formational history. Hanănim has not been freed from northwestern provincialism, Confucian naturalism, shamanistic syncretism, and its patriarchal image. Northwestern provincialism resisted the spelling change from Hanănim to Hanŭnim. The adoption of Hanănim relied on numbers rather than theological reflections, to some extent. The Confucian metaphysical idea of the interaction between supernatural principle and the natural process hindered an immanent and personal conception of the Christian God and his revelation in Jesus. Shamanistic syncretism was influential among Christian believers. Their Hanănim was no more than a magical machine for material prosperity or a wonder drug for physical health. The patriarchal image of Hanănim came partly from the image of the grandfather Tan'gun, and partly from the Confucian conception of Shangdi. The theological conservatism of the populace, shamanistic syncretism, an Confucian patriarchal structure, exposed in the history of the term Hanănim, are theological challenges for Korean Protestant Christianity.[106]

What we detect in Oak's research on the missionaries, as well as the translation activity of the missionaries themselves, is the desire to safeguard a "pure" form of Christianity that

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[102] Some speculate that this might actually be Chu Sigyong, a distinguished scholar of Korean language and linguistic reform in the early 20th century.
[103] Gale, "Korean Ideas of God," in *The Missionary Review of the World*, 697.
[104] Gale, "Korean Beliefs," *Folklore* 11, no. 3 (1900): 325-32; quoted in Oak, 68.
[105] One of the ways that the missionaries enforced a strict theological doctrine was by means of examinations to newly converted Christians. See Paul Cha's article.
[106] Oak, *Making of Korean Christianity*, 83.

relies on the metaphysical idea of "God" as "origin," and in turn, humanity as derivative of that origin.

Christian monotheism thus constructs the metaphysical distinction between "God" and "creation," but with "God" as the origin of creation. At stake is the idea of a "pure" worship of the deity, and the denial of any form or practice of syncretism. In other words, at stake is the concept of purity as truth—namely, only that which is pure can be true. To return to Derrida and his examination of linguistics here, monotheism claims that the world—as a system of signs (signifier and signified)—ultimately point toward *one* (pure) transcendental signified (i.e. "God"). Thus, what we see in this *theological* claim about monotheism is actually found in the very logic of the missionaries' *linguistic* claim about language as "science"—namely, that there is a *systematic* connection between signifier and signified, and language (insofar as language is a system of signs) *must* operate in this way to safeguard against theological misinterpretation or syncretism.

Thus when the missionaries enfold this monotheism into their interpretation of the Tan'gun Legend, they actually make a metaphysical claim about the purity of Korea's origins. And in re-claiming the Tan'gun Legend as the "proper" beginning of Korean history, missionaries like Gale and Hulbert effectively construct a different concept of history. The task of history-writing thus becomes the task of retrieval, such that writing itself becomes the site of reclaiming what is "originally" the source of Korean identity and subjectivity. In my analysis, it is difficult to divorce this concept of history from their concept of language (and the metaphysical claims of a "pure" subjectivity) that we have seen earlier. If "modernizing" the Korean language involves making it more "scientific"

(claiming a universal standard, but in fact implying its translatability to the Western eye), we can detect here a "modernization" of history-writing as the desire to "scientifically" locate the position of Korea in the universal narrative of "History."

8. Conclusion

It has already been documented that Protestantism and nationalism (and nationalist consciousness) were intricately linked in modern Korea.[107] But this idea of a monotheistic "God" has an interesting paradox—it is this appeal to a universal God that in fact fuels particular ethno-nationalist imaginations. And as the subsequent chapters will argue, this Western metaphysics haunts the history-writings of Enlightenment thinkers and Marxist thinkers who attempt to "reclaim" Korean subjectivity and identity in the face of colonial powers.

By first examining the missionaries' role in Korean language reforms, and their invention of a vernacular neologism for "God," this chapter has attempted to deconstruct the logic that undergirds this imagination for a "pure" origin—whether it refers to race, ethnicity, or the cosmos altogether. And by choosing to focus on the question of language, I have attempted to outline the less visible marks of Western metaphysics—its spectral presence—in what would become modern Korean nationalism.

We can take a moment to return to Derrida here. At the beginning of his *Of Grammatology*, Derrida defines "logocentrism" as follows: "what I shall call *logocentrism*: the metaphysics of phonetic writing (for example, of the alphabet) which was

[107] See, for instance, Kenneth Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896-1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990).

fundamentally—for enigmatic yet essential reasons that are inaccessible to a simple historical relativism—nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism, in the process of imposing itself upon the world."[108] For Derrida, phonetic writing (at least the science of perfecting it) is the site of what he calls a metaphysics of presence—that is, a certain logic of subjectivity that turns out to be an imagination. While the "ethnocentrism" in this passage seems, at first glance, to refer to a European ethnocentrism, this chapter raises the following question: if the Protestant missionaries did in fact disseminate their ethnocentrism to Korea, then is it perhaps the *logic* of the category "ethnos" or "race" (rather than "Europe" or the "West") that is the real problem?

It is the anxiety toward syncretism—or in other words, the anxiety toward a hybrid form of subjectivity or identity—that drives ethnic nationalism as well as monotheism. In that way, this claim to the one "true" origin exposes the desire to safeguard the idea of a "pure" subject. Monotheism and ethnic nationalism, in that sense, operate according to a similar logic—one in which the concept of purity is at stake. And it is *this* notion of purity that fuels the idea of "Korean" identity and nostalgia of what has been "lost." This desire for purity—in the concept of science or in the concept of origin—actually exposes an anxiety about any form of syncretism or hybridity when it comes to one's theological convictions or cultural identity.

The Protestant missionaries had believed in this "science" of language that then informed their proposed reforms of the Korean script. But as Derrida's deconstructive method exposes, this "science" is itself predicated on the fixed relation between signifier

[108] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 3.

and signified. Ultimately, it is that relation that undergirds the Christian monotheistic concept of God, the transcendental signified, the source and origin of History. When Derrida writes that logocentrism is the most powerful form of ethnocentrism, he is suggesting that it is the very *logic* of constructing a "pure" origin that is constituted in the very category of "ethnos." It is in this sense that ethnic nationalism in Korea reinscribes the logocentrism of Western metaphysics. In some ways, this theory of language also points to the claim of locating meaning—the claim that the Subject of History can always locate historical meaning. And it is *this* claim that undergirds ideologies of "modernization," which will examined the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3
THE QUEST FOR SELF-RELIANCE:
YUN CH'I-HO, CHRISTIANITY, AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT IN KOREA

Generally speaking, Koreans are constitutionally lazy. It is born and bred in them. Their phlegmatic temperaments render them thoroughly indisposed to continued or consecutive labor, whether of physical or mental effort. The Koreans are probably the laziest people among nations occupying a cool zone.

— W. L. Swallen (of the Presbyterian mission), "Korean Christian Character"[1]

What will be the future of the Coreans? I believe in the doctrine and fact of survival of the fittest. Give them a fair chance—which they have never had so far—and if they prove not fit to survive let them go. Then my duty is to contribute my part of making them fit to live, the consequences being left in the hand of God. Christianity is the only salvation to Coreans.

— Yun Ch'i-ho, *Diaries*[2]

1. Background: industrial capitalism and Protestant Christianity in Korea

Protestant missionaries like W. L. Swallen[3] thought that Koreans lacked a work ethic and made unfounded claims about Koreans being inherently "lazy"; they claimed that this "laziness" was also due to social factors, as they thought that Koreans were long oppressed by their government.[4] Based on these racist claims, and with the help of prominent Korean Christians like Yun Ch'i-ho, these missionaries envisioned an "enlightened" Korea and established institutions like Industrial Education Departments (IEDs) where Koreans could be trained to be industrious and self-reliant.[5] The missionaries considered it their task to "enlighten" Korea on many levels—one significant

[1] W. L. Swallen, "Types of Korean Christian Character," *Missionary Review of the World*, March 1902, 192.
[2] Yun Ch'i-ho, *Yun Ch'i-ho's Diary* (Seoul: National History Compilation Committee, 1973-1989), entry for April 8, 1893, 3:55.
[3] W. L. Swallen also wrote about the Korean language and exemplified the linguistic theory of phonocentrism. See my previous chapter, "The Metaphysics of Ethnic Nationalism," 29.
[4] See Albert Park, "A Sacred Economy of Value and Production," in *Encountering Modernity*, 30. For another example of this stereotyping of Koreans, see Robert Grierson, "Korean Industrial Characteristics," *The Korea Mission Field*, January 1918, 5-7. I owe the excavation of these sources to Albert Park in his essay, "A Sacred Economy of Value and Production," in *Encountering Modernity*, 45n62 and 45n63.
[5] See Albert Park, "A Sacred Economy of Value and Production," in *Encountering Modernity*, 32, 38.

layer of their enlightenment project was the transformation of Korea from an agriculture-based economy to what Albert Park calls an "industry-based capitalist economy," for this industrialization was a "requirement to become 'modern.'"[6] In other words, American missionaries sought to make the Korean economy more like that of America, for industrialization had transformed and benefitted the American economy since the late nineteenth century.[7] But perhaps more importantly, this social and economic vision was constituted in the missionaries' desire to transform Korean people into Christian, "enlightened" subjects that could be self-reliant and "free" from oppressive traditions.

Believing that Christianity undergirded the economic power of nations like the United States, Korean Christians like Yun Ch'i-ho claimed that what was at stake is Korea's survival in the context of early twentieth century global capitalism. And this survival would depend on transforming Koreans into industrious, self-reliant subjects; and that subjectivity, in turn, would be undergirded by a Protestant work ethic. Yun endorses the missionaries' vision of Korea's industrialization and even suggests that there should be special sermons instilling the value of hard work: "Why not set apart one Sunday every month on which special sermons may be preached in all churches on virtues of industry, of thrift and of saving or on sins of laziness, of extravagance, of improvidence and kindred subjects?"[8] But Yun goes on further to suggest that preaching these "virtues of industry" would not be enough; practical training must also be incorporated: "They [Koreans] must be taught not only to work but how to work and

[6] Park, "Sacred Economy," 30.
[7] Ibid.
[8] T. H. Yun (Yun Ch'i-ho), "What Shall We Eat," *The Korea Mission Field*, January 1918, 12.

what to work at. Herein is the field where Mission schools can render the greatest service."[9] Here we can find a reference to institutions like the IEDs, where missionaries performed industrial training and instilled the values of labor as part of the Protestant Christian identity.

This chapter examines the transmission of Western Enlightenment ideals in the "modernization" of Korea, with particular attention to prominent Korean Christian intellectuals like Yun Ch'i-ho. Studies have been done to document the intricate connection between Protestant Christianity and capitalism in Korea.[10] Albert Park's analysis, for instance, invokes Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in documenting the case of Protestant Christianity in Korea. My analysis augments that claim—that there is indeed a deep connection between Protestantism and capitalism—by taking a closer look at the theological, metaphysical claims made by Yun Ch'i-ho throughout his writings. In particular, it is the concept of self-reliance or autonomy that I seek to interrogate and deconstruct. For Yun, self-reliance becomes the ultimate virtue for the possibility of Korea's economic survival and growth. As we will see in his writings, Protestant Christian theology offers a way of constructing self-reliance as an *ethical* matter; that is to say, a Protestant Christian-informed ethical subjectivity would give Korea a chance to survive in the global economy. Thus the case of the Enlightenment in Korea, as exemplified in the life and thought of Yun Ch'i-ho, depicts the deepening

[9] T. H. Yun (Yun Ch'i-ho), "What Shall We Eat," *The Korea Mission Field*, January 1918, 12.
[10] See especially the work of Albert Park in *Encountering Modernity* and *Building a Heaven on Earth*.

inscription of Protestant Christian values in Korea's transformation into an industrial capitalist economy.

I also suggest here that this intertwinement of Christianity and the Enlightenment, however, was not really unique to Korea; for the Enlightenment project in Korea was in fact a Western-originated enterprise that made claims about its universal applicability to all of humankind and thus undergirded colonial and imperial efforts in the name of "civilization." While the Enlightenment in the late 17th and early 18th century West was envisioned as freedom *from* religion, the Korean case actually reveals that the Enlightenment was indeed rooted in Christian metaphysical claims. This concept of self-reliance, which we encounter in Yun Ch'i-ho's thought, is in fact the hallmark of Enlightenment ideals as it originated in the West; furthermore, a closer look at the metaphysical presuppositions undergirding the concept of self-reliant subjectivity reveals that the 17th and 18th century Western Enlightenment was also always a Christian enterprise. But this is more explicitly exposed when the Enlightenment is displaced outside of the West and in a colonial context like that of early modern Korea.

I thus begin my analysis by turning to the writings of Immanuel Kant, whose writings exemplify Enlightenment ideals as it pertained to the questions concerning religion and modernity in the West. I then examine that nexus of religion and enlightenment in the case of Korea's modernity, reviewing the history and discourse concerning the Enlightenment movement in Korea. My analysis will then turn to the life and thought of Yun Ch'i-ho, discussing how he saw himself as a reform nationalist, whereby Protestant Christianity became the ethical grounds on which he constructed the

concept of self-reliance, as he sought to mold Koreans into Christian ethical subjects who valued industrial work and labor and would therefore become economically self-reliant in a world capitalist economy. I then return to the thought of Kant, to pose questions concerning the status of the metaphysical claims that we encountered in the case of Yun Ch'i-ho. I argue that the concept of self-reliance or autonomy is in fact a Christian metaphysical notion that is intricately intertwined even in Western Enlightenment claims to be "free" from religion.

2. Enlightenment, religion, and modernity

Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere aude! "Have courage to use your own reason!" – that is the motto of enlightenment.

— Kant, "What is Enlightenment"[11]

Enlightenment's program was the disenchantment of the world [...] the mind, conquering superstition, is to rule over disenchanted nature.

— Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*[12]

In the history of Western thought, the Enlightenment marked the beginnings of modernity in the West. Celebrating a rational, autonomous subjectivity that was "free" from the chains of religious authority, this philosophical movement marked the beginnings of the separation between Church and State in Europe, thus setting off social and political transformations that demarcated the limits of religious authority. Thus, the

[11] Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" in *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 3.
[12] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1-2.

Enlightenment claimed a disenchanted epistemological position—a disenchantment from religion and mythology, and in particular, from Christianity.

A key statement that exemplifies this Enlightenment discourse in the West is Immanuel Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784). Submitted as a response to an essay contest of sorts by the *Berlinische Monatschrift* (*Berlin Monthly*) on the question, "What is enlightenment," the newspaper published Kant's response, which would then become a seminal statement on the philosophical, political and religious implications of "Enlightenment" as a new way of articulating modern subjectivity. In the background of this public discourse was the rise and success of Western modern science in the 16th and 17th centuries. The key victory in the Scientific Revolution had to do with the newfound confidence in the power of human reason as a source for knowledge about the natural world, truth claims, and human life. And this, in turn, had consequential ramifications for Kant concerning an individual's relation to religious and political authority.

We can take a moment to review Kant's main argument. Kant writes, "Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another."[13] Kant uses the word "tutelage" (*Unmündigkeit*). The German *mündig* refers to (political) maturity, responsibility, or in other words "of full age"; thus *Unmündigkeit* would in this sense mean, "not – of full age – ness," that is, the state or condition of not having come of age. This claim has a couple of implications: (1) Kant is making an anthropological claim about what it means to be fully

[13] Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment," 3.

human. In order to reach one's full human potential, one of must use reason. (2) And this trajectory of progress (toward full maturity) unfolds in universal space and time. That is to say, according to this metaphysics, human progress is inevitable, if only we were to (willingly) grant the use of human reason. Thus, when Kant speaks of *Unmündigkeit*, he refers to a person who has not yet matured into their full potential as a human being, which is then exemplified in the capacity to use one's own reason, referring to individuality and autonomy. Furthermore, he claims that such immaturity is in fact self-incurred—it is due to "laziness" and "cowardice."

At stake in Kant's larger philosophical project was the metaphysics of human freedom and the ethical consequences thereof—the possibility of autonomy, the possibility of the human will to have agency and to make choices for oneself. And the way to go about achieving this vision of enlightenment was by means of "waking up," so to speak, from one's own complacency in looking to other sources of authority and to instead exercise the full potential of one's own reason.

In 20th century Europe, Adorno Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno called the Western Enlightenment a project of "disenchantment"—disenchantment from superstition, and disenchantment from religion. For Horkheimer and Adorno, such disenchantment was actually disastrous: "Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity,"[14] referring to the failure of "enlightened" Europe to resist the rise of fascism in the 20th century. When Adorno and Horkheimer claim that the enlightenment as the idea of disenchantment is in fact itself a myth, they put into question the trust that

[14] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1.

modern philosophy had placed on human reason. As Seyla Benhabib suggests, what is at stake is the "political fate of democracy," which is inextricably linked to the "philosophical fate of reason."[15] Thus in their critique of Western modernity, Horkheimer and Adorno help us think about the ironies, failures, and consequences of the Western Enlightenment project. If, as Kant had envisioned, the enlightenment was essentially the fulfillment of human freedom, what were the consequences of this vision? As we shall see in the enlightenment movement in Korea, it is this vision of freedom and sovereignty that would haunt colonial ideology.

3. Protestant Christianity, nationalism, and the enlightenment in Korea

The case of the enlightenment in modern Korea perhaps exposes, in a more explicit way, the myth that the enlightenment meant freedom *from* religion—for enlightenment and religion were not only linked in modern Korea, the enlightenment (as envisioning a sovereign subject) *was* a Christian enterprise. For at the turn of the century in Korea, Protestant Christianity was harnessed in formulating a nationalist consciousness—and it is *this* consciousness, according to Korean reformers, that would enable Korea to become a sovereign and autonomous entity in the capitalist world order. As we will see, the ideologies driving the Korean Enlightenment were in fact attempts to emulate the West. Under the guise of "catching up" with the universal standards of "civilization," Korean nationalism thus became a mirror image of Eurocentrism. In outlining the Enlightenment movement in Korea, I will show how the Korean case thus

[15] From Seyla Benhabib's syllabus for the course, "European Political Thought: From Weber to Derrida," at Yale University, taken in Fall 2011.

shows the far-reaching consequences of Eurocentrism, altering the nexus of religion, modernity, and enlightenment. That is, by interrogating the dissemination and repetition of Western enlightenment ideals in Korea, I will thus argue that the Enlightenment—whether in Europe or in Korea—cannot be disentangled from Western Christian metaphysics.

The "enlightenment" in Korea was, at first, more of a response to the internal deterioration of neo-Confucian ideology. It began with the School of Practical Learning (*sirhak*); *sirhak* was a critique of the philosophical tradition of Neo-Confucianism in late Chosŏn Korea.[16] That is to say, the Neo-Confucian ideology that constituted the backbone of the Chosŏn Dynasty had become stale, especially in its ethical vision for society, and the *sirhak* school was one response to a philosophical system that seemed to be deteriorating. There was a sense in which the Neo-Confucian orthodoxies were beginning to lose a grip, just as the Chosŏn Dynasty was beginning to fall apart at the end of the nineteenth century. We can see traces of intellectuals who began to look outside of Korea for philosophical sources. For instance, Pak Kyusu (1807-1877), who was the grandson of a prominent *sirhak* scholar Pak Chiwŏn (1737-1805), is documented as the first figure to suggest Western learning.[17]

Korea in the 1880s saw a number of reform movements that sought to modernize Korea, influenced by liberalism in Japan and America. [18] Those who looked to Japan

[16] Han-Kyo Kim, "Development of Enlightenment Thought," in *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization Volume II*, 337.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 111.

included Yun Ch'i-ho, Sŏ Chae-pil, Kim Ok-kyun, Pak Yŏng-hyo, Sŏ Kwang-bŏm, and Yu Kil-chun, among others, who comprised the "progressive party" in late Chosŏn Korea—they "were also known as the Party of the Enlightenment (*Kaehwa Tang*), the Party of Independence (*Tongnip Tang*), the Progressive Party (*Chinbo Tang*), or the Pro-Japan Party (*Ch'inil Tang*)."[19] They were convinced that the model of liberalism that Japan had imitated of the West would benefit Korea. Although many historians position these reformers as influenced and inspired by the Meiji Restoration in Japan, lurking in the background is the presence of Western liberalism in Japan. "Westernization" was thus filtered through the presence of Western technological and philosophical influence in Japan, speaking to the effects of the multiple layers of imperialism.

Many of the reform efforts by the Enlightenment Party, however, were thwarted by the Min faction in the palace, the royal family who sought not to lose power. Continued frustrations at reform efforts eventually led to the Kapsin Coup of 1884. On the evening of December 4, 1884, a small group of reformers staged a coup at the inauguration ceremony of the new Post Office in Seoul. These reformers proclaimed a new government, stating the following reforms: "a radical revision of Sino-Korean relations, immediate return of the Taewŏn'gun, equal rights for all people, and a reform in land taxes."[20]

The coup was a failure. These initial reform efforts amounted to nothing more than a political faction within the palace, without any substantive changes in political or

[19] Yur-Bok Lee, *West Goes East: Paul Georg von Möllendorff and Great Power Imperialism in Late Yi Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 66-7.
[20] Ibid., 74.

legal institutions.[21] Scholars have thus assessed that this failure was due to the imitative nature of these efforts. According to Yur-Bok Lee, for instance, "These reformers were neither profound philosophers nor great theoreticians; rather, they were idealistic, reform-minded, pro-Japanese and pro-Western, and yet strongly nationalistic politicians. The main source of their inspiration was Japanese liberalism. They were immensely impressed with the progress that the Japanese had been making in imitation of the West."[22] Bruce Cumings makes a similar claim, suggesting that this so-called Enlightenment Party hardly constituted a proper enlightenment movement in Korea: "the phase of fitful Westernization cannot remotely be compared to the Meiji Restoration (let alone the Enlightenment in Europe) and was constantly thwarted by reactionary scholars and officials. At best it was a pale reflection of China's 'self-strengthening movement,' both being premised on the idea that Eastern learning would still constitute the philosophical and political 'base' (*t'i* in Chinese, *ch'e* in Korean), with Western science and technology for 'use' (*yong*)."[23] The value of imitating the West (or imitating Japan's imitation of the West) thus remained at the level of technology and science. But while these assessments may be correct in noting that these reformers were not great theoreticians, their idealism marks the very beginning signs of the ways that Western liberalism began to be disseminated in Korea. These reform efforts of the 1880s may have been a failure, but the failed Kapsin Coup had sent many of these reformers—most

[21] Sin Ch'ae-ho, a seminal figure in Korean nationalist historiography, writes that this coup "was nothing more than a dramatic struggle between special forces in the palace." Quoted by Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 114.
[22] Lee, *West Goes East*, 67.
[23] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005), 112.

notably Yun Ch'i-ho and Sŏ Chae-pil—into asylum outside of Korea, and this exile would lead to their exposure to Christianity, which they perceived as the backbone of Western liberal democracy and culture.

By the 1890s, when Yun Ch'i-ho and Sŏ Chae-pil had returned to Korea from exile, they were part of a new brand of Enlightenment intellectuals that pushed for nationalist reforms in Korea in the name of *munmyŏng kaehwa* ("civilization and enlightenment"). This was an ideology that paid homage to the West, claiming that Korea's own place in the world was at stake. The word "civilization" (*munmyŏng*) is conditioned by its history in the West. Andre Schmid locates the origins of this concept of universal (standards of) "civilization" in Europe, citing Norbert Elias' work on the idea of *civilité*. Schmid's reading of Elias is worth quoting at length:

> As Norbert Elias has shown, the idea of *civilité* had originally been a means for medieval European, especially French, aristocrats to separate themselves from the lower classes. By the eighteenth century, this idea had been diffused across the social spectrum to become a widespread social precept, spawning its nominal form, "civilization." As Europeans traveled beyond their borders, they carried this notion of civilization with them, moving it from the domestic social sphere onto the international stage, as it offered a useful rationale for both protecting their citizens in faraway lands and using force to extend their political and economic interests. By the time Korea established relations with outside powers in the latter half of the nineteenth century, civilization had become the foundation of international law and, with its claims to universality, had become the central tenet of an international modern discourse.[24]

Schmid's use of Elias in his genealogy of the concept of "civilization," particularly as it relates to the rise of *munmyŏng kaehwa* in Korea in the late nineteenth century, is a helpful reference in our discussion. Elias' intellectual and cultural history traces the concept of *civilité* as having its origins as a marker of classism; this then became a useful concept for justifying colonialism, such that it became the basis of international law.

[24] Andre Schmid, *Korea between Empires 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 33.

Foundational to modern international law and commerce was the concept of sovereignty, or as Bruce Cumings calls it, "sovereign equality."[25] It was this idea of sovereignty that allowed Japan to then extricate Korea from its tributary relation with China; but this concept was by no means attributed to Japan alone—it was the logic of modern international discourse in the nineteenth century that was then shifting geopolitics in East Asia. Thus, while it may have had political and economic motives, sovereignty operated as a legal concept in thus "opening" Korea to international commerce.

Thus, 19th century imperialism and global capitalism were both the source and target of nationalist reforms. To refer back to Schmid, who writes that "nationalism was the vehicle for accelerating the peninsula's inclusion in the global capitalist order"[26]—*munmyŏng kaehwa* thus posed a "double bind" for nationalists who envisioned and advocated for Korea's independence: "The dilemma they faced [...] was how to extricate themselves from these ideologies that were undermining their goals for independence but on which they rested their own leadership of the nationalist movement and in which they had framed their very definition of the nation."[27] That is, "civilization and enlightenment" not only justified Japan's colonization of Korea, but made that logic of universalism (the idea of universal standards for civilization) compelling to those who were being colonized.

[25] Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 95.
[26] Schmid, *Korea between Empires*, 32.
[27] Ibid., 14.

Thus, although the concept of *munmyŏng kaehwa* was conditioned by this homage to the West as the "origin" of civilization, this became an ideology that was most seductive for its claim to universality. As Schmid points out, "The power and seductiveness of *munmyŏng kaehwa* lay in its ability to link seamlessly the individual, nation, and globe into a historical and spatial unity."[28] Thus, "civilization and enlightenment" provided a newfound means of *linking* one's identity to universal space and time, but mediated through nationalist terms. That is to say, *munmyŏng kaehwa* offered a way to reconceptualize the very question concerning the individual's relation to the universal. This ideology constructed a particular mode of conceptualizing "self" and "nation" in the global capitalist order that became the force propelling Korea's colonial modernity.

Decades later, we can see traces of what is really a Eurocentric ideology—the concept of self in relation to universal space and time—in Korean nationalist historiography. Most notably, we detect this ideology in Sin Ch'aeho's philosophy of history. One of the first to construct a nationalist historiography of Korea, Sin Ch'aeho (1880-1936) articulated the following definition of history: "What is history? It is a record of the state of mental activities in which the ego (*a*) struggles against the nonego (*pia*) in the context of passing time and expanding space. World history is a record of mankind's struggles, and Korean history is that of the Korean people's."[29] Sin Ch'aeho's concept of

[28] Schmid, *Korea between Empires*, 32.
[29] Sin Ch'aeho, "What Is History? What Shall We Study in Korean History?" in *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization Volume II: From the Seventeenth Century to the Modern Period*, edited by Peter H. Lee (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 483. An excerpt from the introductory chapter of Sin Ch'aeho's *Ancient History of Korea,* published posthumously in 1948, and included in *Tanjae Sin Ch'aeho chŏnjip* 1:19-23. The significance of Sin Ch'aeho's nationalist thought will be revisited in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

history shows how this particular way of linking the individual to universal time and space would yield the concept of the "ego," i.e. the subject. Here we can even see the striking resemblance to Hegel's history of philosophy. Although (to my knowledge) it is unclear whether Sin was exposed to Hegel, scholars have argued that Sin's nationalist thought was indeed a direct product of the intellectual fervor of "civilization and enlightenment."[30]

Thus the Enlightenment, in turn-of-the-century Korea, had taken root through a series of cultural productions—especially with the rise of the Korean modern press in newspapers, journals, and history texts—that had successfully disseminated this ideology of *munmyŏng kaehwa*.[31] But there is spectral figure in this intellectual history that is lurking in the background of this ideology: Western metaphysical claims about what constitutes the "self." If we are to understand what undergirds this ideology of Enlightenment that then gets reproduced in Korean nationalism, I argue in the remainder of this chapter that the position of Christianity can help us map out the coordinates between knowledge and power in Korea's enlightenment.

In order to make this case, this analysis now turns to the figure and writings of Yun Ch'i-ho, a prominent enlightenment reformer and politician whose philosophical

[30] See Michael Robinson, "National Identity and the Thought of Sin Ch'aeho: Sadaejuŭi and Chuch'e in History and Politics," *Journal of Korean Studies* Vol. 5 (1984): 122. Robinson writes, "He [Sin Ch'aeho] devoted a lifetime to historical studies of ancient and early medieval Korea, but his historiography was not motivated in the slightest by classical East Asian scholasticism. *On the contrary, his work was a product of the intellectual ferment in turn-of-the-century Korea; it was motivated by and directed toward the intellectual agenda of the Korean self-strengthening movement and the political furor of the enlightenment movement after 1905*." Emphasis added. I will return to the traces of Hegelian concepts in Sin's thought in Chapter 5.
[31] For a more extensive analysis on the role played by the production and circulation of newspapers, journals, and textbooks, see Andre Schmid's intellectual history in *Korea between Empires*.

vision was heavily indebted to Protestant Christianity. Yun's thought is an exemplar of this nexus constituting enlightenment, religion, and modernity in Korea. In so doing, I suggest that Protestant Christian theology played a crucial role in constructing a particular idea of the sovereign subject—how did this subject stand in relation to time, space, and history? Relatedly, how did this kind of subject-making construct a concept of identity around race and ethnicity as the site of enlightenment—categories (race, ethnicity) which might not have themselves made sense prior to the nineteenth century? Thus, by shifting our attention to the concept of subjectivity, we can then trace a link between Christianity and the Korean enlightenment. In reconstituting the racialized, nationalist subject through the rhetoric of *munmyŏng kaehwa*, how did Yun Ch'i-ho reconfigure the meaning of (and relations among) "economy," "ethics," "politics," and "religion"?

4. The Life of Yun Ch'i-ho: a reform nationalist

Yun Ch'i-ho (1864-1945) was a seminal figure who contributed to the intellectual fervor surrounding "civilization and enlightenment," particularly as it was envisioned by Protestant Christianity. One of the first Koreans educated in the United States, Yun became the editor-in-chief of the *Tongnip sinmun* (*The Independent*), a prominent Christian newspaper, which marked the beginning of Korea's modern public sphere.[32] Yun was also the president of the associated Independence Club, founded by Sŏ Chae-pil or Philip Jaisohn (Sŏ's anglicized name), another enlightenment figure who was part of

[32] Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 62.

the reform efforts in the 1880s. The Independence Club is where these reform nationalists had found and reclaimed their political space after their return from political exile. Yun helped re-structure the Independence Club as a debating society,[33] thereby contributing to this newly established public sphere. And after the Independence Club (along with the newspaper) dissolved, Yun continued his efforts in contributing to "enlightenment movement organizations,"[34] such as the *Taehan Chaganghoe* (Self-Strengthening Society) which he founded in 1906, and *Sinminhoe* (New People's Society), which sought to raise nationalist awareness concerning the political circumstances in and surrounding Korea.[35] Furthermore, with the help of American missionaries, Yun played an integral role in "modernizing" (i.e. Westernizing) the social, political, and educational infrastructures of Korea—for example, founding the Korea chapter of the YMCA, as well as establishing an Anglo-Korean School in Songdo. According to Kenneth Wells, Yun was "the architect of self-reconstruction nationalism," [36] while for others like Henry Em, Yun Ch'i-ho was "a progenitor of the Korean (Christian) bourgeois class,"[37] a paradigmatic case of an elite Korean male whose Christian convictions were constitutive of his bourgeois interests.

Yun Ch'i-ho's conversion to Christianity occurred in Shanghai, where he was in exile following the failure of the 1884 Kapsin Coup. With the aid of the American minister-designate to Seoul, Lucius H. Foote, for whom Yun Ch'i-ho was an interpreter,

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[33] Hyung-chan Kim, *Letters in Exile: The Life and Times of Yun Ch'i-ho* (Covington, Georgia: Rhoades Printing Company, 1980), 28.
[34] Donald Clark, "Yun Ch'i-ho (1864-1945): Portrait of a Korean Intellectual in an Era of Transition," *Occasional Papers on Korea*, No. 4 (September 1975): 55.
[35] Ibid., 56.
[36] Kenneth Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea 1896-1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990), 15.
[37] Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 7.

Yun was smuggled on board an American ship to escape Korea. In Shanghai, Yun attended the Anglo-Chinese College for three years (1885-1888), sponsored by the American Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and run by the missionary Young J. Allen. Yun was baptized in the American Methodist Episcopal Church. The written confession of his conversion is perhaps one of the more striking documents where one of the first Korean converts to Christianity self-identifies as a "heathen":

> I had not heard of God before I came to Shanghai—For
> I was born in a heathen land.
> I was brought up in a heathen society.
> I was taught in heathen literature.[38]

With the help of Young J. Allen, Yun pursued further study of Christian theology in the U.S. at Vanderbilt University (1888-1891) and at Emory University (1891-1893), where he took courses that were part of a classical Christian seminary training in systematic theology, homiletics, biblical history, ecclesiastical history, and pastoral theology.[39]

Under the rubric of reform, Yun saw himself as a radical nationalist, convinced that Christianity would instill a nationalist consciousness for Korea. This process would involve "civilization and enlightenment," as we have seen above, with the establishment of Western medicine (the establishment of Western hospitals), Christian schools (both secondary and post-secondary), the establishment of the press, and a renewed understanding of the Korean vernacular. However, Yun was later charged with collaboration with Japan, thus making him a tragic figure in Korean nationalist discourse. As Kenneth Wells writes, "for most nationalists, he was, after 1918, a disappointment. Yun

[38] Yun Ch'i-ho, "A Synopsis of What I Was and What I Am," excerpt from *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea: 1832-1910*, by George Paik (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1929), 166.
[39] Hyung-chan Kim, *Letters in Exile*, 13.

is usually seen as an example of the vulnerability of highly educated aristocratic culturalists to the Japanese cultural offensive."[40] Thus, in more recent nationalist historiography, Yun's "pro-Japanese" and "pro-Western" stance would be seen as compromising or watering down his nationalism. But this dismissal of Yun Ch'i-ho's thought only further eclipses the ironies of the rise of modern ethno-nationalism itself: its inextricable ties to the Enlightenment project that began in the West, and the position of Christian theology and metaphysics therein. It is precisely the colonial origins of Yun's own nationalism that makes Yun Ch'i-ho a good example for this study, for Yun's concept of nationalist subjectivity or consciousness was itself rooted in a Western and Christian metaphysical concept of self-reliance.

5. Yun Ch'i-ho's Diaries: the making of a Protestant intellectual

Christianity puts man above nature. It makes a man free in mind and imaginations and in the exercise of his native powers. He uses natural agencies as their lord but not worships them as a slave. Hence a Christian nation becomes wealthy.

— Yun Ch'i-ho, *Diaries*[41]

In his posthumously published diaries, Yun Ch'i-ho documents much of his daily experiences through China, the U.S., Japan, and his return to Korea. What has been published so far are his diaries from 1883 to 1906. Interestingly enough, he writes his diaries in English from December 7, 1889 (while he is living and studying in Nashville, Tennessee), writing that Korean "vocabulary is not as yet rich enough to express all what I

[40] Kenneth Wells, *New God New Nation*, 15.
[41] Yun Ch'i-ho, *Yun Ch'i-ho's Diary* (Seoul: National History Compilation Committee, 1973-1989), entry for March 11, 1894, 3: 290-1.

want to say."[42] While much of the content of his diaries explore his observations about the world outside of Korea, there are some passages that are particularly striking in its philosophical and theological reflection concerning Christianity (in comparison to other religions, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, i.e. the religious traditions of Korea at the time), what he finds compelling about Christianity, and the ways in which it is *Christianity* that provides the necessary tools for Korea's enlightenment and modernization. He wrote extensively about his observations concerning American society and in particular why he found Christianity so compelling. It is here that I think we can begin to understand the intricate thought processes of an intellectual whose own political and religious conversion exemplifies a modernist, colonial worldview.

Yun Ch'i-ho's diary documents his own experiences of racism.[43] In his first years living in the American South, he seems, at first, to be discomfited by white supremacy and the history of slavery. He writes with great apprehension, questioning the status of such a "civilized" nation: "I heard a young man say that he would sooner pull down his church than to admit a colored member to the congregation. Now is this prejudice compatible with the boasted civilization, philanthropy, religion of this people?"[44] While he poses this critical question, he is hesitant to provide a response: "I must examine the subject more before I can answer this question."[45] Yun even expresses (a muted) criticism of colonialism that same year, but it is a criticism laden with the Christian concept of sin:

> I need not be so mad about the cruelty and injustice of the [*sic*] England or of any other nation which they show in their transaction with foreign and weaker peoples. The opium trade with

[42] Yun, *Yun Ch'i-ho's Diary*, entry for December 7, 1889, 1: 407.
[43] Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 62.
[44] Yun, *Yun Ch'i-ho's Diary*, entry for December 9, 1889, 1: 408.
[45] Ibid.

> China, the unjust treatment of Indians and the Chinese, the slave and rum trade with the Africans, the conquest of India, the partition of Poland--, all these wicked deeds of stronger nations—Christian nations—nations boastful of philanthropy and civilization and morality and liberty—deserve severe censure. Indeed, they are blameable in proportion to their enlightenment. But my indignation at these international sins is softened or modified when I read of and see the cruelty and treachery which a nation practice or had practiced among themselves. Then these international sins are nothing but the enlargement of a national sins and national sins are the congregation of individual personal sins are the expression or outcome of wicked motives in every man's heart.[46]

While Yun is indeed disturbed by British and European colonialism, just as he is by American slavery, he locates the source of these acts in the concept of sin, which is ultimately on the individual level. Here we detect a Christian anthropology: the claim that human beings are inherently evil. In turn, Yun thus develops his theology further in the same entry, claiming that the world is making progress: "World is getting better in moral and physical conditions. Miseries to which men were once indifferent and wrongs and crimes which men did not consider as wrongs and crimes, now engage the attention of good men. Public conscience is now more delicate, its sympathy more wide, its sense of justice more strong, its idea of freedom more noble than ever before, at least, *in more enlightened Christian nations*."[47] For Yun, sin and progress as theological *concepts* go hand in hand—that is, while humanity (on an individual and collective level) is sinful, it is Christianity (as enlightenment) that eventually leads history in the trajectory of historical progress. Yun ends this passage claiming, "God bless missionaries!!!"[48]

What is disturbing is that this intellectual development leads to Yun's eventual endorsement of slavery, racism, and colonialism. He answers his question above, formulating a response to slavery in America:

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[46] Yun, *Yun Ch'i-ho's Diary*, entry for December 23, 1889, 1: 414.
[47] Ibid., entry for December 23, 1889, 1: 415. Emphasis added.
[48] Ibid., entry for December 24, 1889, 1: 416.

> For the first time, I was convinced that the dark slavery was, after all, the best thing that could be done for the colored people under circumstances. Compare the conditions of the Indians with that of the negroes. When a nation is unfit to govern herself it is better for her to be governed and protected and taught by a more enlightened and stronger people until she is able to be independent. Say what you may bring as many real and unreal charges against the English in the east Indian policy. I stand by the conviction and undeniable fact that India is infinitely better off under English government than it ever did under others. It will infinitely better for Corea to be under the English, if she is unfit for self-government, than to be under the [*sic*] China.[49]

This is perhaps the most explicit exposure of the logic that undergirds the justification of colonialism. For one thing, Yun believes in "race" as a category—"different races possess markedly different degree of mental and physical strength and energy."[50] He is then convinced that some "races" have been more enlightened than others—the rubric of which, for Yun, falls under Christianity. It is worthwhile returning to his confession of conversion that we have encountered above:

> I had not heard of God before I came to Shanghai—For
> I was born in a heathen land.
> I was brought up in a heathen society.
> I was taught in heathen literature.[51]

Yun had internalized this idea of American whiteness as more fully human, while other "races," including his own, was of a "heathen" culture that needed to be corrected by accepting and endorsing Christian theology.

By the time Yun is at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, he is not only complicit with racism but furthermore expresses contempt at Native Americans. Seeing Native Americans gathering along the Central Pacific Railroad, Yun writes: "Indians were seen at almost every station. Some of them painted their faces red and most had red or blue blankets wrapped around their bodies. A sad and somewhat contemptible sight: sad

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[49] Yun, *Yun Ch'i-ho's Diary*, entry for December 24, 1889, 1:416.
[50] Ibid., entry for December 23, 1889, 1:414.
[51] Yun Ch'i-ho, "A Synopsis of What I Was and What I Am," excerpt from *The History of Protestant Missions in Korea: 1832-1910*, by George Paik (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1929), 166.

because of their past history, but contemptible because of the inability to improve their condition. A race that fails, from voluntary laziness and ignorance, to avail itself of the advantages of civilization brought so close to its reach isn't worthwhile to live."[52] This is perhaps the pinnacle, I think, of Yun's idea of enlightenment—especially as it pertains to race and religion. Henry Em offers an insightful interpretation of this passage: "For Yun, the decision to embrace Euro-American civilization was, in itself, proof of a people's capacity for rationality and autonomy. His privileging of freedom, and ruminations on why certain populations do not deserve to live, point to not just the inclusionary pretensions of liberal theory and exclusionary effects of liberal practices, but also to liberalism's essential link to imperialism and colonialism."[53] Em notes that this passage thus exposes the ironies of liberalism, particularly in the ways that this discourse on sovereign equality was in fact linked to imperial and colonial efforts. But what undergirded this theory of "rationality and autonomy" was Christian metaphysics. For Yun, the enlightenment had become synonymous with Christianity, and the Native Americans were a site of religious and racial difference. Indeed, for Yun, Native Americans were voluntarily choosing not to be enlightened; he thus held them with contempt because enlightenment (i.e. Christianity) was the only path to achieving progress.

What Yun means by "progress" is quite clear—progress is the prosperity of economic and material conditions. When Yun returns to Korea in 1895 after ten years of

[52] Yun, *Yun Ch'i-ho's Diary*, entry for October 14, 1893, 3:187.
[53] Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 7.

living abroad in the U.S. and China, he directs this same contempt towards the Korean people. He is dismayed at the sight of his native land:

> My native land once more, after 10 years of absence. And on such a beautiful day! Surely I should and would be happy now and here, if I could be so anywhere and anywhen. But, alas! I have seldom been as sad as I am now. The Corean coolies with white and clumsy clothes black with dirt, the native hovels rising no higher than the ground they encumber and compared to which the Chinese huts of the dirtiest sort are palaces, the horrible smell from the accumulated filth all around, the abject poverty, ignorance, stupidity of the people, the naked and unattractive hills sadly emblematic of the defenceless state of Corea—this sight is enough to make any patriotic Corean sick. I can't smile except the smile of despair. Welcome, ten times welcome, to anybody, Christian or pagan, who may do something for the amelioration of the condition of Corea. He shall have my help and prayer. The Catholic and the Church of England Missions have neat houses. God be with them![54]

As documented in his diary above, Yun copes with a tremendous sense of judgment and perhaps even sensory disgust towards his own people, remarking on what he sees as "abject poverty" and "ignorance." Yun also remarks on the clothes, the architecture, and the land, almost as if he were seeing through the eyes of a Westerner comparing the land and culture of Korea to that of the United States. It is no surprise that Yun would then call upon the Christian missionaries to "do something for the amelioration of the condition of Corea," persuaded that it was another religion, "Christian or pagan," that would bring what he saw as better economic and material conditions.

Yun had become convinced that Christianity and economic wealth went hand in hand. The following passage provides a striking display of a Weberian Protestant ethic: "Christianity puts man above nature. It makes a man free in mind and imaginations and in the exercise of his native powers. He uses natural agencies as their lord but not worships them as a slave. Hence a Christian nation becomes wealthy. The writer might as well blame a man for becoming healthy by following the laws of hygiene as to blame a

[54] Yun, *Yun Ch'i-ho's Diary*, entry for February 12, 1895, 4:18-9.

people for becoming prosperous by obeying the teachings of Christ."[55] This is truly a striking passage. Many themes are discussed here that are worth unpacking. First, there is the discussion of "man" as having accomplished mastery over nature—almost as if this is the fulfillment of what it means to be human. Second, there is the discussion of freedom—freedom of mind, referring primarily to an articulation of human agency. Then, there is the discussion of wealth. It is because of this understanding of fulfilling and exercising a kind of agency over and against nature that then makes "man" a sovereign individual; therefore, for Yun, one who exercises such potential fully is necessarily entitled to wealth and prosperity.

Yun Ch'i-ho had become convinced, very much like Kant, that enlightenment was essentially the task of becoming an autonomous, sovereign, self-reliant subject—and all that one needed to do was to choose one's way out of ignorance, and Protestant Christianity provided the best framework for this concept of agency and freedom. According to this Christian metaphysical framework, the human being was constituted by mastery over nature, and it was simply a matter of will, rather than capacity, that would lead to the exercise of this autonomy or sovereignty. "Hence a Christian nation becomes wealthy," Yun writes; but the tragedy of this prosperity gospel is that those (whether individuals or "races") who were in poverty were in an abject condition because they were either ignorant or voluntarily lazy. It would then make sense why he held such contempt for Native Americans, and why he thought that slavery was a good idea. What Yun was determined to do was to incorporate Korea (as a "race") toward the path of sovereignty,

[55] Yun, *Yun Ch'i-ho's Diary*, entry for March 11, 1894, 3:290-1.

and Christianity was the only path: "What will be the future of the Coreans? I believe in the doctrine and fact of survival of the fittest. Give them a fair chance—which they have never had so far—and if they prove not fit to survive let them go. Then my duty is to contribute my part of making them fit to live, the consequences being left in the hand of God. Christianity is the only salvations [*sic*] to Coreans."[56]

6. Christianity and the reconfiguration of ethical and political subjectivity

On April 7, 1896, the very first issue of *Tongnip sinmun* (*The Independent*) was published under the editorial direction of Yun Ch'i-ho. "The time seems to have come for the publication of a periodical in the interests of the Korean people," the editors wrote, "By the Korean people we do not mean the more favored classes alone, but we include the whole people of every class and grade. To this end three things are necessary; first, that it shall be written in a character intelligible to the largest possible number; second, that it shall be put on the market at such a price that it shall be within the reach of the largest possible number; third, that it shall contain such matter as shall be for the best interests of the largest possible number."[57] The publication of *The Independent* marked the rise of Korea's modern press[58] and the beginning of a modern public sphere.

On the one hand, we encounter the belief in the concept of Korea as an "ethnic nation." The *Tongnip sinmun* was the first newspaper to be written in the Korean vernacular as opposed to literary Chinese. The editorial board explains this choice of

[56] Yun, *Yun Ch'i-ho's Diary*, entry for April 8, 1893, 3:55.
[57] "Editorial," *The Independent*, April 7, 1896.
[58] Schmid, *Korea between Empires*, 47.

language in the excerpt above, stating that it is (1) motivated by "the interests of the Korean people" and therefore nationalist, and that it would also be (2) "intelligible to the largest possible number," making it accessible to those outside of the aristocratic *yangban* class (who were the only ones with training in literary Chinese). The claim here was that every person, as a "Korean," was equal—thus this newly formulated egalitarianism was imagined within the boundaries of "nation." The move away from literary Chinese and towards the Korean vernacular (as we saw in the previous chapter) was a way of forming this nationalist consciousness.

But on the other hand, the *Tongnip sinmun* was in fact a bilingual newspaper that was also published in English, with a more explicit homage to the West, precisely in one and the same moment of its nationalism. "We make it biliteral [bilingual]," the editors write, "because this will act as an incentive to English speaking Koreans to push their knowledge of English for its own sake. An English page may also commend the paper to the patronage of those who have no other means of gaining accurate information in regard to the events which are transpiring in Korea."[59] They thus imply that the knowledge of English, along with the use of the vernacular Korean, was to be aspired for; also implied is a Western audience, for whom the writers wanted to disseminate "accurate" knowledge about Korea. This audience most likely included American Protestant missionaries who were publishing their observations about Korea in journals such as the *Korean Repository* and the *Korea Review* that we saw in the previous

[59] "Editorial," *The Independent*, April 7, 1896.

chapter—the publication of a newspaper by and for Koreans was thus a (compromised) attempt to reclaim the narrative about Korea from "within."

The *Tongnip sinmun* defined "enlightenment" in the following terms: "to open wide one's state of absolute ignorance and strive to undertake myriad tasks while taking into account actual circumstances and natural laws."[60] These tasks—invoking a Protestant work ethic—involved instilling a newly formed concept of working *for* one's "nation." We can see echoes of Kantian ideals in this reference to do "myriad tasks," i.e. the call to *do* things, suggesting that enlightenment is not a matter of potential or capability but rather a matter of willpower. And *this* conception of agency (agency as action) is what would grant the Korean people the possibility of sovereignty, freedom, and independence, both as individuals and as a "nation." In other words, Korea's enlightenment constituted the task of reconfiguring one's subjectivity—this call for enlightenment may have been directed at the individual, but it was a call that aligned the individual with a new sense of collective consciousness, surrounding the concept of "nation." Thus, at stake in these writings was the task of what it took to constitute a "sovereign subject"—individually and collectively.

Yun Ch'i-ho's writings on Christianity, race, and colonialism, especially as it pertained to Korea's position in the global capitalist order, were not only complicit with the idea of Eurocentric hegemony, but also reconfigured his imaginations of what constitutes an ethical subject—a sinful being who needed (Christian) salvation in order to achieve freedom and mastery over nature. And it was *this* reconstitution of morality that

[60] *Tongnip sinmun*, 30 June 1896. Translation by Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires*, 33.

would then allow for economic and political freedom—sovereignty and autonomy as individuals, but also as an "ethnic nation." And it was imperative, in Yun's worldview, that the Korean people would thus see themselves in light of this new concept of subjectivity, so that Korea would not fall behind in the path toward "civilization and enlightenment," in what he saw as the inevitable path of world progress.

According to Kenneth Wells in his analysis of Protestant Christianity and Korean nationalism, this particular form of nationalism that was associated with Christianity can be called "self-reconstruction nationalism."[61] Wells goes into a lengthy discussion on the thought of Yun Ch'i-ho and the ethics of self-transformation. However, Wells does not question the concept of Christian ethics—that is, an ethical relation that the individual has to a monotheistic god. And in the Korean context, this god is actually intertwined with the god of "Korea," a god of national interests. Thus, the relation to oneself as a "sinner"—and the ethical subject that is thereby created—is in the *service* of a national consciousness.

The Korean Enlightenment had reconfigured the relation between ethics and politics. As a Christian enterprise, the enlightenment in fact espoused secularism, separating church and state, and separating ethics from politics. It was only when a newly "enlightened" subject (enlightened of one's own "sinfulness" and therefore of the need for a monotheistic god) was formed that one could achieve freedom and sovereignty. *Then*, as a sovereign subject, one could hold political and economic power. For intellectuals like

[61] See Kenneth Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896-1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990).

Yun Ch'i-ho, this Protestant work ethic thus demanded that Korean people become "enlightened" in order to be "fit to live."[62] Christianity had become the metaphysical framework in which Yun Ch'i-ho and other enlightenment intellectuals could formulate their logic of survival in the context of global capitalism.

7. Conclusion

While Yun Ch'i-ho may have openly embraced Christianity *as* Enlightenment for Korea, the Enlightenment in the West (and even later in Korea) claimed freedom from any form of bondage or oppression, especially from religion—insofar as Western philosophers like Kant envisioned the willpower to become a self-reliant subject that would not look to external sources for authority. But only when we see the displacement of the Enlightenment project in colonial contexts like Korea, can we notice that Christianity became embedded in the Enlightenment ideology that drove modernization. In that way, the conjuring of Christianity in Yun Ch'i-ho's thought does not actually exorcise religion; the ghosts and specters of Christian metaphysics *in* the Enlightenment project become more explicit.

Kant had envisioned the Enlightenment as "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage,"[63] claiming that the human subject was a rational agent, capable of making their own decisions, and only held back by a lack of courage or willpower. Thus, the so-called "courage" to use one's own reason was an *ethical* matter—for it is in the willful exercise of

[62] Yun, *Yun Ch'i-ho's Diary*, entry for April 8, 1893, 3: 55.
[63] Kant, "What is Enlightenment," 3.

this innate capacity that one acted as an ethical, moral subject. For Kant, this would mean freedom from religious authority.

If the Enlightenment was a project of disenchantment, Adorno and Horkheimer were incisive in exposing the irony of such disenchantment—for in Korea, Christianity and the Enlightenment became merged in the rhetoric of modernization, which in turn called for the molding of subjects who could survive in an industrial, capitalist system. And as we will see this Enlightenment discourse reinscribed into Korea's own "secular" politics and historiography (in the thought of Paek Nam-un in the following chapter), we can detect the specter of Western metaphysics lurking in the background. And here I come back to the question: can we indeed exorcise religion, when the concept of "self-reliance" is itself haunted by a logic that justified colonialism?

CHAPTER 4
CLAIMING HISTORY AS SCIENCE: PAEK NAM-UN AND KOREAN MARXISM

1. Overview: Nationalism and Marxism in 1930s Colonial Korea

The colonial era (1910-1945) in Korea is understood to be divided into three periods: the "dark period" or military rule (1910-1919), the so-called "cultural policy" or cultural rule (1920-early 1930s), and the period of imperialization (early 1930s-1945).[1] The first period, or the period of military rule, began with Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910 and continued until the March First uprising (or the March First Independence Movement, still commemorated on the Korean calendar) in 1919. With this uprising, the Japanese colonial government shifted its policies from militarized rule toward assimilation, relaxing restrictions, for instance, on Korean-language publications, public gatherings, and business activity.[2] In the 1930s as Japan expanded its empire throughout Asia, its colonial policies shifted once again, intensifying constraints on Koreans as colonized subjects.

The 1930s thus marked a particularly difficult time in modern Korean history and memory, as the intensification of colonial subjugation demanded what Christopher P. Hanscom, Walter K. Lew, and Youngju Ryu call the "imperative to clarify cultural identity."[3] Korea had lost its political and economic agency in the name of "sovereignty"

[1] Christopher P. Hanscom, Walter K. Lew, and Youngju Ryu, "Introduction," in *Imperatives of Culture: Selected Essays on Korean History, Literature, and Society from the Japanese Colonial Era*, edited by Christopher P. Hanscom, Walter K. Lew, and Youngju Ryu (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), xiv.
[2] Ibid., xiv.
[3] Ibid., xi.

(the code of international law that had "liberated" Korea from its tributary relations with China, only to be annexed by Japan soon thereafter). Hanscom, Lew and Ryu aptly describe the particularly straining period of the 1930s in colonial Korea:

> It was during the 1930s that well-known efforts at molding Koreans into model imperial citizens intensified: compulsory worship at Shinto shrines; the "national language" movement (J. *kokugo undō*), with the Korean language (treated as a second language in schools even prior to formal colonization in 1910) greatly restricted (when not banned, as in the case of film) by the late 1930s and early 1940s; the "name-changing campaign" (J. *sōshi kaimei*) that replaced Korean names with Japanese names from 1940; the active recruitment of military volunteers; the coercive recruitment of hundreds of thousands of women into sexual slavery for the imperial military; and the recruitment and forced migration of hundreds of thousands of laborers.[4]

That is, the 1930s thus marked the restrictions of language, religion, and cultural production, as well as the increasing demands of labor (not only profit-making in the agricultural economy, but also sexual slavery of Korean women who were forced to migrate with the Japanese military).

Thus, on the one hand, the 1930s heightened the awareness of the loss (and therefore the need to identify and preserve) Korean "culture" over and against the pressures of assimilation. The Korean language, especially as the vernacular script had begun to be circulated and used among the modern printing press (as we saw in the previous chapter), played a crucial role in cultural production. In some ways, this emphasis on "culture" was a continuation of the intellectual and political reforms enacted by nationalists such as Yun Ch'i-ho. This pressure to preserve Korean culture in the face of colonial assimilation therefore inevitably placed an emphasis on what was *particular* about Korea and its people—the concept of "identity" therefore had nativist inclinations that sought to clarify the ethnic and cultural origins of Korea, with aims to create a

[4] Hanscom, Lew, and Ryu, "Introduction," in *Imperatives of Culture*, xiv.

"national" consciousness. We have seen how thinkers like Yun Ch'i-ho at the turn of the century were convinced that the clarification of Korean cultural identity (including the elevation of the Korean vernacular), especially as it was buttressed by a Christian theological framework, would boost Korea's position in the new world order by making it more "civilized" like Western nations.

But on the other hand, Japan's occupation of Korea had economic motivations and consequences. It was not just about asserting one's cultural superiority over another; there were political-economic structures, patterns, and forces that undergirded Japan's expansion into Korea and in other parts of Asia, which was in turn within the context of global capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. With the rise of industrial capitalism and the infrastructures that consequently followed (e.g. railroads, factories), the production of goods (e.g. textiles, agricultural products, most notably rice) in Korea were servicing Japanese needs. And this radically transformed social relations—not only between Korea and Japan but also (perhaps more significantly) the relations between the *yangban* elite and the peasant farmers. While classism certainly existed according to the neo-Confucian order before the modern period, the efforts to democratize Korea (with regards to gender and socioeconomic class) at the turn of the century as a new "modern nation" (especially as we saw in the previous chapter) did not completely eradicate these socioeconomic relations; it merely transformed them. The commodification of land and agriculture as sites of profit-making thus fundamentally changed the relations between landlords and peasant farmers in Korea. And as the Korean rural economy struggled—and as the plight of peasant farmers increased

throughout the 1930s—the existing discourse on *culture* as the mode of nationalist resistance did not (and could not) resonate with the Korean "masses."

It is no surprise, then, that the culturalist version of Korean nationalism were thus critiqued by an emerging Korean left that proposed an alternative take on Korean nationalism—one that was undergirded mainly by an analysis of political economy. This version of nationalism, which would become the archetype of leftist historiography and cultural memory, shifted the discourse away from "culture" or cultural production, and instead critiqued not only Japanese exploitation of Korean labor but also "bourgeois nationalists" within Korea whose vision of the nation elided what was *really* underneath the plight of most of Koreans, as peasants accounted for 80 percent of the Korean population.[5] Marxism was also beginning to appear more prominently in this political discourse in the 1930s and became a crucial framework by which leftists in Korea diagnosed the historical circumstances surrounding Korea's (and Japan's) political economy.[6] As Marxist discourse thus circulated throughout the 1930s, the emerging leftist intellectuals envisioned a nationalism that would be inextricably linked to their postcolonial imagination. Insofar as colonialism was, at heart, an economic enterprise, the promise and hope for economic justice would inevitably yield Korea's liberation from Japan—and *that* form of liberation undergirded this version of Korean nationalism.

[5] See Albert L. Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth: Religion, Activism, and Protest in Japanese-Occupied Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 56.
[6] For instance, a 1931 article in *Tonggwang* referred to Marx to analyze the pace of capitalist development in Korea. See Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth*, 59.

One of the most significant features of Korean Marxism was the attempt to refute "stagnation theory" and what would later become "modernization theory." These theories undergirded the historiography of Korea (utilized by Japanese colonial officials) to justify the annexation—this was the narrative of Korean history that claimed Korea's economic development as stagnant, which therefore needed an external intervention. This narrative claimed that Korea, at the turn of the century, showed no signs of change from a feudal economy to a capitalist one. Relatedly, "modernization theory" (later on more fully formulated after the colonial period and articulated by the American economist W. W. Rostow in the 1960s and 1970s) made a similar claim concerning the Korean economy—namely, that it needed an external intervention to boost its development. After the Japanese occupation, the United States then played a significant role in both diagnosing and buttressing Korean economic development through international aid and positioning Korea in the global capitalist market. Back in the 1930s when Marxist intellectuals were emerging, one of their main goals was thus to re-claim the narrative of Korean history and to refute this theory of Korea's stagnation in world history.

This chapter examines the thought of a key figure in Korean Marxism, Paek Nam-un, whose *History of Korean Society and Economy* (1933) was the first Marxist interpretation and narration of Korean history. As we shall see, one of Paek's main aims in his historiography was to show that Korea's history did indeed show signs of capitalism from within and that Japan's occupation was therefore what he calls a "transplanted capitalism," an *interruption* of the Korean historical trajectory that would have unfolded just fine on its own. Paek wanted to show that Korea's history was in fact *not* particular

(that is, not an anomaly that needed an external intervention), but rather in accordance with universal laws—just like any other European nation. In so doing, Paek's Marxist historiography made claims about history as a scientific enterprise, a methodological choice that played a significant role in his analysis of Korea's history.

Paek Nam-un's scholarship is exemplary of the type of nationalism that would then become emblematic of the major features of Korean leftism to this day. This chapter analyzes what undergirds Paek's postcolonial imagination, and how and why this imagination ends up reinscribing those very metaphysics of colonial historiography that he desired to overcome and refute. I look at two texts in particular: excerpts from Paek's seminal *History of Korean Society and Economy* (1933) and "A Theory on the Present Stage of the Korean Economy" (1934). I unpack the structure of his argument and how he positions himself over against his contemporaries. I then take a step back to deconstruct the metaphysical categories and distinctions that haunt Paek's historiography. The chapter ultimately interrogates the concepts of myth/science, universality/particularity, the "human," and the idea of human freedom and autonomy. In arguing that Paek's method hinges on these concepts, which are in turn haunted by Western metaphysics, the chapter raises a question concerning the status of "postcolonial" freedom.

2. The Life and Legacy of Paek Nam-un

Paek Nam-un (1894-1979) emerged as a major figure in the Korean intelligentsia in the 1930s, when he published *Chōsen shakai keizaishi* [*The History of Korean Society and*

Economy] (1933), the first major Marxist interpretation of Korean history.[7] Positioning his claims over and against Japanese Marxist historiography, Paek argued that Japanese colonialism had in fact disrupted the historical development of the Korean nation. Aiming to show that Korean history did in fact hold signs of the universal laws of historical materialism (appropriated from Marx and Engels), Paek underwent his second major study, volume 1 of *Chōsen hōken shakai* [*The History of Feudal Society and Economy in Korea*] (1937), an analysis of what he identified as the feudal stage of Korean history.[8] One year after the publication of *The History of Feudal Society and Economy in Korea*, Paek had become known to Japanese authorities as a dissident and was imprisoned for over two years on charges of violating the Peace Preservation Law of 1925, a policy that was a form of colonial censorship.[9]

Paek's own scholarly background provides an important window into the backdrop of colonial Korea, more specifically the educational infrastructures that were not only intellectually formative sites for Paek but also became the targets of his later critiques. From 1912 to 1915, Paek studied at the Suwŏn School of Agriculture and Forestry (*Suwŏn Nongnim Hakkyo*), which fell under the jurisdiction of the Model Farm for the Promotion of Agriculture. Korea's agricultural economy became a crucial site of Paek's analysis of

[7] See Charles R. Kim, "Paek Namun," in *Imperatives of Culture*, 104.
[8] Paek identified Korea's feudal stage as the Unified Silla era (669-935) and the Chosŏn era (1392-1910). See Kim, "Paek Namun," in *Imperatives of Culture*, 106.
[9] Charles Kim writes, "This law was enacted in both Korea and Japan to control the activities of communist and anarchist dissidents, who were deemed 'thought criminals' [...] As Japanese militarist exploits escalated during the 1930s, official tolerance for various types of politically oriented activity diminished even further. See Kim, "Paek Namun," in *Imperatives of Culture*, 127n6.

colonial power.[10] As Pang Kie-chung writes, explaining the context of this school, "The Japanese operated the model farm as part of its policy to control Korean agriculture as the basis for its exploitation of the colony, and the school sought to legitimize Japan's control of the Korean rural economy and to maintain the dominance of the landlord system."[11] Albert Park writes that the Suwŏn School of Agriculture and Forestry was, essentially, "the colonial government's school for agricultural education [...] this school educated young Korean and Japanese men on modern farming technology and knowledge, natural science, and the principles of capitalist agricultural economics."[12] After teaching at the Kanghwa Public Normal School (*Kanghwa Kongnip Pot'ong Hakkyo*)[13] and working as a technician at the Kanghwa Forestry Association,[14] Paek went to Japan in 1919 to study liberal economics at the Tokyo University of Business Administration (present-day Hitotsubashi University), where he was exposed to Marx and Engels more extensively. Pang Kie-chung notes that Paek's study of Marx in Japan occurred at a turbulent moment in other regions around the world, where Marxism and Stalinism seemed to hold particular resonance: "With the success of the Russian revolution and the end of the First World War, national liberation movements became widespread in former colonial and

[10] We encounter this analysis directly in Paek, "A Theory on the Present Stage of the Korean Economy" (1934).
[11] Pang Kie-chung, "Paek Namun and Marxist Scholarship," in *Landlords, Peasants and Intellectuals in Modern Korea*, edited by Pang Kie-chung and Michael D. Shin (Ithaca: Cornell University East Asia Program, 2005), 249.
[12] Park, *Heaven on Earth*, 59.
[13] See Kim, "Paek Namun," *Imperatives of Culture*, 104.
[14] Pang, "Paek Namun and Marxist Scholarship," 249.

semi-colonial regions."[15] Thus, as Pang seems to suggest, Paek's own study of Marx and Engels was integral to his own imagination of a liberated, post-colonial Korea.

Upon Korea's liberation in 1945, Paek remained active, establishing the Korean Academy of Sciences (*Chosŏn Haksurwŏn*), which he envisioned as a politically neutral organization that would help construct what Charles Kim calls an "autonomous national culture" for a post-colonial Korea.[16] Paek shifted more explicitly into politics as he led the southern section of the moderate-leftist New People's Party (*Sinmindang*) and published *The Path for the Korean Nation* (1946), still envisioning an alliance between the Left and the Right in Korean politics. With increasing political polarization in a newly liberated Korea, however, Paek retired from his political position and eventually migrated to North Korea in 1947. He continued his political career in North Korea as the Minister of Education and the president of the Academy of Sciences—according to Charles Kim, these were "prestigious but politically impotent positions."[17] Paek may not have positioned himself on the "far left," but with his legacy in articulating Korean Marxism and his migration to North Korea, his historiography of Korea exemplifies a version of Korean nationalism that has influenced the discourse of the (South) Korean Left to this day.

[15] Pang, 250.
[16] Kim, *Imperatives of Culture*, 105.
[17] Ibid., 105.

3. "A Theory on the Present Stage of the Korean Economy" (1934)

Paek's 1934 article, "A Theory on the Present Stage of the Korean Economy," is an analysis of colonial Korea's political economy. This piece was written a year after his seminal *History of Korean Society and Economy*, which was Paek's interpretation of Korea's ancient history. As Paek's diagnosis of the economy in Korea and Japan, this article can be a helpful point of departure. How Paek understood his present (1930s colonial Korea) is thus a window into how he understood Korea's ancient past, and hence what constituted the task of writing history. Thus, in order to understand the stakes of Paek's Marxist historiography (and in particular, his interpretation of the Tan'gun Legend and the function that it has in Korean history), I will begin with Paek's analysis of the Korean economy in the 1930s.

Paek's primary claim in "A Theory on the Present Stage of the Korean Economy" is that colonialism and capitalism are intertwined, both domestically and internationally. As the market and supply site for Japanese goods and materials (most notably rice), "Korea," Paek claims, "is thus a site of transplantation for Japan's imperialistic capitalism."[18] Here is where Paek formulates the concept of "transplanted capitalism," which was Paek's interpretation of "colonial capitalism." As we will see later, this concept was developed as Paek was convinced that Korea had its own processes of evolution towards an

[18] Paek Nam-un, "A Theory on the Present Stage of the Korean Economy," trans. Charles R. Kim, in *Imperatives of Culture*, 114. This sentence was censored in the original version.

"autonomous capitalism"[19] that was disrupted by colonialism, i.e. the development of Japanese capitalism that was transplanted in Korea.

Paek then frames the Korean economy in terms of a "dual conflict."[20] For Paek, these two conflicts refer to a political conflict between nations (between Korea and Japan), as well as a socio-economic conflict of capitalism (between landlords and peasants within Korea). Paek claims that these two conflicts are in fact intricately intertwined: "what seems politically to be a conflict between nations appears socio-economically as a conflict of capitalism."[21] That is, classism and colonialism are one and the same problem, although they appear to be a dual conflict. In other words, for Paek, overcoming the domestic class conflict within Korea *is* in the service of national interests. That is to say, politics and economics were deeply intertwined in a way that other forms of nationalism did not necessarily detect. In this case, Korean nationalism was perhaps not about articulating the uniqueness or particularity of Korean culture or ethnicity, but rather about cultivating a class consciousness such that economic justice can be aspired for and achieved. This dual conflict, Paek claims, occurred when Japan annexed Korea in 1910.

In outlining the developmental process of Korea's economy since the Annexation, Paek identifies three major stages, leading up to the 1930s when he wrote this article: (1) the period of Company Law (1910-1916), in which Koreans needed the permission of the Japanese governor-general to establish companies. As Paek writes, "according to the intentionally planned restrictions placed on the Korean economy by the period's

[19] Paek, "A Theory on the Present Stage," trans. Charles R. Kim, in *Imperatives of Culture*, 126.
[20] Ibid., 114.
[21] Ibid., 115. This sentence was censored in the original version.

industrial policy, it followed that, while we must supply raw materials, we must not manufacture goods, and while we must buy manufactured goods, we must not sell them."[22] (2) Paek then identifies the second period, already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Cultural Policy (1919-1931), where military restrictions were laxed, but according to Paek, police spending had increased such that what *seemed* laissez-faire during this "Cultural Rule" in fact eclipsed what he identifies as a colonial "police state."[23] Finally, Paek identifies (3) "the stage of monopoly associated with the regulated economy during the time of Governor-General Ugaki" (1931-1936).

In focusing on the period of Cultural Rule, Paek locates the historical significance of this period by naming it "the systematization of capitalism's migration."[24] Paek notes that this migration of capitalism (i.e. "transplanted" capitalism) was marked by a rapid industrial development in Korea during this period: "this stage of cultural rule was in truth a period of remarkable growth for the industrial revolution in Korea."[25] As a colony, Korea had thus transformed into what Paek calls "Japan's imperialistic food supply policy."[26] In turn, Paek argues that this period of capitalist industrialization has led to a "crisis in Korea's rural economy."[27] He claims that under the guise of "industry first,"[28] the transplanted capitalist economy was constituted by a transformation of social relations:

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[22] Paek, "A Theory on the Present Stage," trans. Charles R. Kim, in *Imperatives of Culture*, 116.
[23] Ibid., 117. Paek's analysis of the Japan's Cultural Policy in the 1930s is buttressed by contemporary historians, including Albert Park, who writes that this Cultural Policy was in fact aimed at establishing a "Foucauldian-like power structure" in forming "disciplined subjects who had internalized colonial power." See Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth*, 71.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 118.
[26] Ibid., 120.
[27] Ibid., 119.
[28] Ibid., 117.

"it made a major social impact by bringing about the redistribution of landholdings, the dispersion of petty cultivators, and the downfall of small-scale landowners."[29]

Paek mentions two programs created by the colonial government that eventually led to this crisis in Korea's rural economy: the Program to Increase Rice Production, and the Program to Create Owner-Cultivators (also known as the Rural Revitalization Campaign). Both were government-backed programs to transform the Korean colony into a more efficient, commercialized agricultural market that would produce goods for Japan and throughout East Asia—this is why Paek describes Korea as "a sacrificial object offered for the sake of East Asian peace."[30] New technologies in irrigation systems, for instance, were established in order to increase rice production.[31] In addition to these infrastructural changes in agricultural technology, Paek refers to the legal and financial reforms that were implemented by the colonial government. While the government distributed subsidized, low-interest loans for tenant farmers to purchase land, Paek notes that this increase in "large-scale landlords" has structurally meant the decrease in "small- to medium-scale landlords and owner-cultivators."[32] This, in turn, has led to a crisis in the Korean economy by uprooting the social relations between landlords and peasant farmers, deepening the socio-economic division. In conducting an analysis of the "ethnic trends in landownership,"[33] Paek also notes that Japanese landlords were located in a

[29] Paek, "A Theory on the Present Stage," trans. Charles R. Kim, in *Imperatives of Culture*, 117.
[30] Ibid., 114.
[31] Albert Park's study of the transformation of Korea's rural economy buttresses Paek's observation here about the industrial transformation. Park mentions, "Alongside legal and financial reforms, the agriculture market grew with the expansion of the road, rail, and port systems. Japanese authorities supervised the construction of over 28,000 kilometers of road by the end of 1938." See Park, *Heaven on Earth*, 58.
[32] Paek, "A Theory on the Present Stage," trans. Charles R. Kim, in *Imperatives of Culture*, 123.
[33] Ibid., 119.

dominant position throughout the all of the provinces of Korea.[34] Hence, the crisis began, Paek writes, "with the tenant disputes of the peasants. Initially this was a movement appealing for the preservation of tenant cultivation rights, reduction or exemption of tenant rents, and the like […]"[35] Paek's analysis thus leads to his conclusion that colonialism had thus led to a "stage of monopoly for Japanese industrial capital"[36] and that the socioeconomic disputes between landlords and peasant farmers thus constituted the *political* conflict between Korea and Japan.

Paek's conclusion in this piece, then, is a claim concerning the proletariat's alienation from the product of their own labor. Paek writes, "If we examine this phenomenon in relation to the inevitable fall of owner-cultivators into the class of tenant farmers, it becomes clear that tenant farmers actually comprise the overwhelming mass of the Korean peasantry. Moreover, their precarious condition consists of being dispossessed of the products of their own labor—Korean rice—and being forced to subsist, if at all, on substitutes of foreign rice and Manchurian millet."[37] Thus, while the tenant farmers were thus paying increasing amounts of rent in the form of their crops (i.e. rice), they were subsisting on foreign rice and Manchurian millet. That is, the capitalist industrial transformation in Korea, along with the legal and financial reforms backed by the colonial government, had in fact developed a structure of economic exploitation where the tenant

[34] Paek, "A Theory on the Present Stage," 122.
[35] Ibid., 119-120.
[36] Ibid., 125.
[37] Ibid., 123.

farmers suffered the most.[38] Hence, it is the tenant farmer, the peasantry whose labor was exploited by the capitalist structure, that Paek thought was the proper Subject of History, whose economic liberation necessarily meant Korea's political liberation from Japanese colonialism.

4. *The History of Korean Society and Economy* (1933)

From Paek's point of view, existing histories of his time did not do justice to expose the social relations that could explain the economic and political position of Korea in the 1930s. Paek had problems with not only the Japanese colonialist historiography of Korea (most notably the work of Fukuda Tokuzō[39]), but also with other nativist historiographies that seemed trapped within the same epistemological problems. On the one hand, Japanese historiography of Korea was in fact also a Marxist interpretation of Korean history; the Japanese viewed Korea as having been stagnant in the "Asiatic" mode of production (that is, not having reached even the feudal stage of development).[40] According to Marx, the Asiatic mode of production was understood to be a more primitive stage in the trajectory of historical materialism—it referred to a communal ownership of land (as opposed to private property). As Henry Em aptly notes, "In creating the category of Asiatic society, Marx sought to explain and contrast the dynamic and

[38] For a thorough historical study of the transformation of Korea's rural economy (that is more recent), see Albert Park, *Building a Heaven on Earth*, pp. 56-77. Park's study confirms many of the diagnoses that Paek Nam-un had offered in this article.
[39] See Henry H. Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 133.
[40] See Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 131-2.

progressive character of the West with the static and despotic character of the Orient."[41] Japanese colonial historiography was, to no surprise, a form of Orientalism—tragically imposed upon an East Asian nation by another East Asian nation.

On the other hand, Paek also pushed back against Korean nationalist historiographies, most notably Sin Ch'ae-ho (whom we encountered briefly in the last chapter) and Ch'oe Nam-sŏn.[42] Very much like Marx's critique of Hegel, Paek criticized these historiographies for their "idealism" as well as "particularism." In Chapter 1 of *The History of Korean Society and Economy*, he calls their "particularist view of history" a "foreign import of Japan."[43] For Paek, the nationalist attempts to narrate Korean history from an idealist point of view by emphasizing Korean uniqueness in fact reinscribed the same logic in colonialist historiography. Paek then argues in this chapter that Japan had, in turn, imported that view of history from Germany—he locates the origin of this "particularism" in the German Historical School: "Their particularist view of history, the ideology of the German Historical School," Paek writes, "was entirely the product of the nationalist movement wherein emergent German capitalism resisted England. Since this coincided with Japan's emerging capitalist national condition, it was imported *en masse* and has resulted in the rapid growth of the field of Japanese historical studies."[44] Thus nationalist historiographies that hinged on the Hegelian concept of *Geist* would resort to essentialism, nativism, and most problematically, particularism. And for Paek, this

[41] Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 132.
[42] See Em, *Great Enterprise*, 133.
[43] Paek, *History of Korean Society and Economy*, trans. Charles R. Kim, in *Imperatives of Culture*, 109.
[44] Ibid.

emphasis on what was unique about Korean ethnicity or race would only corroborate the colonial narrative. That is to say, the desire to claim Korean exceptionalism would in fact support Japanese exceptionalism, which justified their view of Korea as distinct (from their pace of capitalist development) and therefore stagnant and inferior.

Paek wrote *History of Korean Society and Economy* as well as his second major publication *The History of Feudal Society and Economy in Korea* in Japanese, and he published both texts in Japan. He saw his scholarly intervention as politically and economically urgent, as a mode of exposing and resisting what he saw to be Japan's transplanted capitalism that disrupted Korea's own mode of development. In targeting both Japanese as well as Korean nationalist (culturalist) narratives of Korean history, his turn to Marx's historical materialism was an attempt to reclaim the authority and authorship of Korean history away from colonialism. In a sense, Paek thus imagined a post-colonial view of Korean history—colonialism only interrupted what he saw as the universal laws of historical development: "from primitive communism to slave, feudal, capitalist, and socialist societies,"[45] which became what Em calls the "prevailing orthodoxy" of historical materialism by Marxist scholars. For Paek, Korea was not an exception but rather a rule to that universal human story of evolution. He thus proceeded to map out these various stages of development in ancient Korean history up to the modern moment, outlined in the Preface of the *History of Korean Society and Economy*:

1. Forms of primitive tribal communism
2. The slave economy in the Three Kingdoms period
3. The character of Asiatic feudal society in Korea from the end of the Three Kingdoms period to contemporary times
4. The disintegration of Asiatic feudal society and the sprouts of capitalism

[45] Em, *Great Enterprise*, 132.

5. International relations and the agenda behind the development of transplanted capitalism
6. A comprehensive survey of the development of ideology[46]

Paek thus tried to show that he had located the "sprouts of capitalism" from *within* Korea, hinting at what he elsewhere calls the possibility of "autonomous capitalism"[47] that was itself interrupted by Japanese colonial activity.

The most prominent example of Paek's Marxist interpretation of ancient Korean history was his "critical view of the Tan'gun Myth."[48] To review, this Korean creation myth is told as follows:

> The divine being Hwanung desired to possess the earth. Knowing this, his father, Hwanin, looked upon the Taebaek Mountains[49] and sent Hwanung with three thousand spirits to rule humanity. At the time, a bear and a tiger lived in a cave; desiring to become human, they begged the divine being to transform them. Given them mugwort[50] and garlic, the divine being instructed the bear and tiger: 'If you eat this for one hundred days without seeing sunlight, you shall become human.' While the tiger became impatient and failed to do this, the bear succeeded and became a woman. She married Hwanung, and they bore a child, named Tan'gun. Tan'gun thus established a kingdom, named Chosŏn. He ruled for 1500 years, then hid and became a mountain god.[51]

On the one hand, this myth played a significant role in earlier nationalist attempts to locate Korea's ethnic origins (which was, as we have seen, used by the Protestant missionaries to garner a particularly "Korean" historical consciousness). On the other hand, Japanese colonial histories dismissed the Tan'gun narrative altogether, as the historical recognition of the narrative would threaten Japan's claim to an origin that was

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[46] Paek, *History of Korean Society and Economy*, trans. Sim Usŏng, in *Chosŏn sahoe kyŏngjesa: Chosŏn minjogŭi chillo* (Seoul: Tongmunsŏn, 2004), 9. I have relied on Henry Em's translation in Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 130.
[47] Paek, "A Theory of the Present Stage," trans. Charles R. Kim, in *Imperatives of Culture*, 126.
[48] Paek, *History of Korean Society and Economy*, trans. Sim Usŏng, in *Chosŏn sahoe kyŏngjesa: Chosŏn minjogŭi chillo*, 31. Translation mine.
[49] Taebaek Mountain refers to present day Baekdu Mountain, located at the northern edge of North Korea.
[50] A type of Korean root vegetable.
[51] This is a summary of Paek Nam-un's version of the Tangun Legend in Paek, *History of Korean Society and Economy*, trans. Sim Usŏng, in *Chosŏn sahoe kyŏngjesa: Chosŏn minjogŭi chillo*, 31-2. The original text is in *Samguk yusa* (1145).

prior (and therefore superior) to that of Korea.[52] Thus as a creation narrative that linked Korea's own origins to the heavenly beings, the Tan'gun Legend became the site of ethnic nationalism or the site of its suppression in colonial historiography.

For Paek's historical materialism, this myth functioned differently. While Korean nationalists (culturalists) have treated the myth as more or less historical "fact" that could then establish Tan'gun as the progenitor of Korea as its own ethnic nation, Paek argues that the myth should not be read as reality, but rather "has value only because we can get a glimpse of the primitive state."[53] While Paek accepted the very distinction between myth and fact, he did not dismiss the Tan'gun narrative but rather argued for its value as a myth that could explain the social relations that constituted ancient Korea.[54] Paek explains the scholarly value of interpreting mythology in the following way: "From our perspective, myth can be interpreted as the structure of the relation between human beings and nature, or among human beings, perhaps the relations and structures of domination and submission."[55] Paek thus argued that we could detect the beginnings of the relations between humanity and nature, as well as the social relations among human beings.

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[52] As Henry Em explains, "historical veracity to the Tan'gun story would have meant confirming not just the sovereign origins of the first Korean state but also Korea's claim to a much older history: Tan'gun's birth dated to 2333 BCE; Iwarebiko, or Emperor Jimmu, the first legendary emperor of Japan, was said to have established his throne in 660 BCE." See Em, *Great Enteprise*, 120.
[53] Paek, *History of Korean Society and Economy*, trans. Sim Usŏng, in *Chosŏn sahoe kyŏngjesa: Chosŏn minjogŭi chillo*, 31. Translation mine.
[54] See also Henry Em's analysis of Paek on the Tan'gun Myth in Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 121.
[55] Paek, *History of Korean Society and Economy*, trans. Sim Usŏng, in *Chosŏn sahoe kyŏngjesa: Chosŏn minjogŭi chillo*, 33. Translation mine.

In proceeding with an anthropological analysis of what constitutes the human (in relation to nature and to animals), Paek notes the significance of the natural setting in which the narrative unfolds and the subsistence of human beings from agricultural activity. He notes, for example, that the story is set in the mountains, with agricultural products such as mugwort and garlic. He then argues that there are the beginnings of class differentiation based on the relations among the three divine beings (Hwanin, Hwanung, and Tan'gun). Paek also conducts a linguistic analysis of the word "Tan'gun" and notes that the name was in fact the title for a "male aristocratic chieftain" (*wŏnsi kwijokin namgye ch'ujang*).[56] In drawing on the work of the Russian linguist Nikolay Yakovlevich Marr (1865-1934), Paek notes the significance of "manual language,"[57] whereby the concept of "language" is in fact language of the body (the hands) as opposed to spoken language. In interpreting the significance of the hands in particular, Paek thus argues that the hands denote the capacity of labor for human beings to subsist and survive. Paek also draws heavily on the methods of Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881), whose theory of human evolution appears in the work of Frederick Engels in *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Paek was convinced that he had found traces of the Punaluan family structure, which according to Lewis Henry Morgan, referred to the earliest forms of kinship and marriage in his theory of cultural evolution. Paek cites his

[56] I agree with Henry Em's interpretation of Paek here. See Em, *Great Enterprise*, 121. I have relied on Em's translation for the Korean word, *wŏnsi kwijokin namgye ch'ujang*.
[57] Paek, *History of Korean Society and Economy*, trans. Sim Usŏng, in *Chosŏn sahoe kyŏngjesa: Chosŏn minjogŭi chillo*, 37.

evidence of this structure in his phonological analysis of the terms *menuri* (daughter-in-law), *manura* (wife), and *nui* (sister) that appear in the Tan'gun narrative.[58]

Thus for Paek Nam-un, the significance of the Tan'gun Legend had less to do with establishing the ethnic origins of Korea—this historiography, which was a version of Korean particularism, would operate under the same logic as Japanese colonialist historiography. Instead, the Tan'gun Legend was in fact evidence that ancient Korean history showed the same signs of evolutionary biology; in other words, Korean history unfolded according to the universal laws of human evolution. Paek relied on his reading of Frederick Engels, and Engels' sources, including Lewis Henry Morgan, and had accepted the premise of grand theories of human evolution and history. Thus universalism, rather than particularism, would be the main framework that shaped Paek's Marxist historiography. And it is this universalism, for Paek, that would reclaim and salvage the narrative of Korean history towards a post-colonial state.

The task of writing Korean history, for Paek Nam-un, was a scientific enterprise. Paek thought that historical materialism that he had found in the thought of Marx was the most advanced form of the social sciences.[59] In claiming, "The Korean nation does not consist of the children of a peculiar tradition but of normal, biologically evolved humans,"[60] the study of Korean history necessarily meant the study of the evolution of social relations, as that was constitutive of the universal trajectory of evolutionary biology. If we return to the very beginning of the *History of Korean Society and Economy*,

[58] Also see Henry Em's reading of this in Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 121.
[59] Charles R. Kim, "Paek Namun," in *Imperatives of Culture*, 106.
[60] Paek, *History of Korean Society and Economy*, trans. Charles R. Kim, in *Imperatives of Culture*, 111.

Paek defines his own historiography in outlining this social scientific method: "What we mean by the study of Korean economic history is a scientific demonstration of the following for all eras in which the social existence of the Korean nation has been delineated: the internal connections within economic structures, the development of immanent contradictions, and both the nomothetic nature and the inevitability of the successive shifts in productive relations arising from these contradictions."[61] In Paek's research, "history" was thus metonymic with "science." In applying the Marxist shift away from idealist concepts like *Geist* (or the Korean concepts like *hon* or *ŏl* in the historiography of Sin Ch'ae-ho and Ch'oe Nam-sŏn[62]), and instead turning to historical materialism, Paek attempted to give more agency to Korea's proletariat subjects, the peasant farmers, who had been erased not only from Japanese colonial historiography but also from previous forms of Korean nationalism.

5. The Metaphysics of Paek Nam-un's Historiography

There are four major distinctions that undergird Paek Nam-un's historiography. First, perhaps most importantly, is the distinction between "myth" and "science." Second is the distinction (and dialectical relation) between the universal and the particular. Third is his anthropological differentiation of "the human" (as opposed to and in relation to) nature and animals. Fourth, Paek also makes a distinction between "internal" and "external" development in his understanding of the trajectory of capitalism, for he

[61] Paek, *History of Korean Society and Economy*, trans. Charles R. Kim, in *Imperatives of Culture*, 112.
[62] See Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 119.

believed that Japanese colonialism had interrupted what he thought was *internal* to the economic development of Korea. All four of these distinctions, I will argue, reinscribe the kind of metaphysical claims that Paek himself tried to overcome. If it is indeed the subjectivity and agency of the Korean masses (constituted by their labor) that Paek tried to restore a consciousness of (i.e. class consciousness), it is the larger picture of historical determinism that compromises this task.

Paek's scholarship was situated during the rise of the human sciences in the West,[63] which, as we have seen, had tremendous influence on the philosophical trends in Japan, where Paek was exposed to Marx and Engels. In proposing that history-writing was a form of science, thereby differentiating the scientific method as a way of diagnosing empirical and material realities, Paek had also implicitly accepted Marxist secularism and humanism. While Christianity does not appear more explicitly in Paek's historical writings, Christian metaphysics as a form of idealism would have undoubtedly been a major target of Paek's scientific method. A subscription to what he considered mythology of any sort therefore did not constitute the task of writing history. And the particular variation of human sciences that Paek relies upon heavily, especially in his analysis of the Tan'gun Legend, was phonological linguistics. But as we have seen in Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, it is this very concept of scientificity that can also be called into question.

Paek's treatment of the Tan'gun Legend is worth taking a closer look, especially in exposing the ironies of his own distinction between "science" and "myth." Although

[63] See also Jason Josephson's analysis of the rise of the human sciences in *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

Paek's own treatment of the Tan'gun Legend *was* as "myth," the function of that myth may not be as clear as Paek purported it to be. While Paek wanted to conduct a scientific analysis of the social relations exposed in the Tan'gun Legend, the myth still operated as constituting the evolutionary origins of the Korean people. That is, for Paek, the Tan'gun Legend functioned as a record of the primitive social relations in ancient Korean history, showing that Korean mythology contained the earliest forms of kinship that were universal to the narrative of human evolution. What is odd here is that it seems that Paek wants the Tan'gun Legend to function as *both* "myth" and "science." While he may have resisted nativist interpretations of Tan'gun, he nonetheless claimed that the Tan'gun Legend provided a scientific account of Korean history.

This leads me to interrogate the second distinction in Paek's historiography. Paek wanted to re-negotiate the relationship between the particular and the universal, such that the signifier "Korean" did not have to denote ethnic or cultural particularity. In fact, he was convinced that the emphasis on "culture" or "ethnos" repeated the same epistemology of Japanese colonialism. From a social scientific perspective, it was more important to establish how the Korean historical narrative followed what he accepted as the universal laws of evolutionary biology. And in turn, he seemed to reject the significance of the category "ethnos" or "culture." But in so doing, Paek's historiography operated from a very specific anthropological claim on what it means to be human. And as I will argue below, he ended up reinscribing a version of Korean nativism by

conceptualizing the notion of "autonomous capitalism"[64] in his post-colonial imagination of Korea's liberation from Japan.

Paek accepted the anthropological claim made by Marx in the "German Ideology," one that defined what it means to be human. What distinguished humanity from animality, according to Marx, was labor (rather than the capacity of reason), the production of their own means of subsistence. In explaining his methodology, Paek quotes the following passage from Marx in the "German Ideology":

> The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature [...] The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means of subsistence they find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.[65]

For Marx, human beings are constituted by the product and means of their labor—that is, not only *what* kind of materials they produce for their own subsistence, but also *how* they produce it. "What they are," Marx writes in the above passage, "coincides with their production."

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[64] Paek, "A Theory on the Present Stage," trans. Charles R. Kim, in *Imperatives of Culture*, 126.

[65] Karl Marx, "German Ideology," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978), 149-150. Emphasis in the original. The following is Paek's quotation of this passage as it appears in *History of Society and Economy*, trans. Charles R. Kim in *Imperatives of Culture*, 110: "The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of individuals as living human beings. The first historical activity by which these humans distinguished themselves from animals was not thinking but rather the production of their means of subsistence. Thus, the first established fact is their physical organization and, with this as a condition, their relationship to their given external natural world...Human existence manifests itself in the way individuals express their lives. What they are, therefore, coincides with their productive manner (*Weise*), or, in other words, it depends on what they produce and how they produce it. Consequently, what people are depends on the material conditions of their production. Here we see that determinate individuals, who are engaged in productive activity according to a fixed mode, form determinate social and political relationships under fixed productive relations."

But this constitution of the human, for Marx, is not possible for an individual alone, for labor always occurs within the context of social relations. Thus Paek quotes the following passage from "Wage Labor and Capital":

> In production, men not only act on nature but also on one another. They produce only be co-operating in a certain way and mutually exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations with one another and only within these social connections and relations does their action on nature, does production, take place.[66]

If human existence is constituted by labor, then what forms a society are the social relations constitutive of production. Marx then suggests that these social relations must be characterized by connection and cooperation, rather than domination and exploitation.

However, what we find in Marx's definition of the human (both the individual being as well as the collective) is an unfortunate irony. In his critique of German Idealism, Marx sought to criticize the notion that consciousness existed in a vacuum—he thus claimed that human beings are not only constituted by social relations, but also by the materials of their subsistence. However, by defining human existence according to labor alone, and by constructing the very category of "human" in contradistinction to nature, Marx preserves the structure of mastery *over* nature. That is to say, this notion of mastery and human autonomy nonetheless remains at the forefront of the (eschatological) promise of historical materialism. Although Marx attempted to re-define human existence according to materialism rather than idealism (the capacity of thought or

[66] Karl Marx, "Wage Labour and Capital," in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 207. Here is the passage as it appears from Paek's text in *History of Society and Economy*, trans. Charles R. Kim in *Imperatives of Culture*, 110: "In production, humans are not in relation exclusively with nature. Within a fixed mode, they produce only by working cooperatively and exchanging their labor with one another. In order to produce, they enter into fixed connections and relations with one another, and indeed it is only through these social connections and relations that their relationship to nature is formed and production is carried out."

reason), this humanist vision nonetheless maintained the structures of domination and power between human beings and nature. And in so doing, Marx thus implied what constitutes human autonomy (or perhaps what it means to be fully human): the capacity to produce one's own means of subsistence.

And it is this promise of autonomy that we find in Marx that drives Paek Nam-un to construct the notion of an "autonomous" as opposed to "transplanted" (i.e. colonial) capitalism with respect to Korean social and economic history. This brings us to the fourth distinction I have outlined above—the idea of what is "internal" as opposed to "external" to Korea and to Korean history. Paek argued that Korea's history—beginning with the Tan'gun Legend—was already unfolding according to the laws of historical materialism, and that there were signs of capitalism in late Chosŏn Korea. His main aim here, as we have seen, was to refute the Japanese colonial view of Korea as "stagnant." But in arguing for the possibility of an "autonomous capitalism," an economic and political vision that Paek himself attempted to implement in his political career, Paek had inadvertently inscribed a Korean nativism that he aimed to critique in the culturist versions of nationalism.

Thus, in these four metaphysical distinctions—myth/science, particular/universal, human/nature, and internal/external—Paek Nam-un's historiography had inscribed an imagination of political freedom that emphasized human autonomy and mastery. And by placing such emphasis on the very concept of the human subject, Paek had subscribed to a neo-Kantian idealism that claimed a disenchanted, panoramic vision of human history. Without a doubt, Paek's Marxist analysis did indeed expose the structures of exploitation

that were built into the legal, economic, and political institutions of colonial Korea. But the promise of a Marxist emancipation was haunted by a metaphysics of human autonomy, a metaphysics that was strikingly similar to the Enlightenment vision of Yun Ch'i-ho and the Protestant missionaries. Paek's attachment to science was itself an attachment to the myth of a panoramic vision.

"Is not to possess a specter to be possessed by it, possessed period? To capture it, is that not to be captivated by it?"

— Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*[1]

"To be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects."

— Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*[2]

CHAPTER 5
HAUNTOLOGY AND THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION IN MODERN KOREAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

In his epilogue to *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, "Exorcising Hegel's Ghosts: Toward a Postnationalist Historiography of Korea,"[3] Carter Eckert conjures Hegel in proposing an alternative path forward in modern Korean historiography. In addressing the question of how nationalism became the dominant "pattern"[4] in historical studies of colonial Korea, Eckert rightly points out that the origins of nationalist ideology can be traced to nineteenth-century Europe:

> Nation-states and nationalism, of course, developed first in Europe, and nationalist history was their handmaiden, especially in the nineteenth-century heyday of nation-building and imperialism. Hegel, whose intellectual influence proved in time to be as profound in East Asia as in Europe, regarded nation-states as the vehicles of reason and freedom in the universal progress of world history. The Hegelian view was in fact quite unequivocal on this point: no nation-state meant no freedom and no history. From the beginning, therefore, nationalist historical thinking was part and parcel of a modern consciousness that would spread from Europe throughout the world.[5]

As Eckert notes, the very concept of nation-state was rooted in Hegel's concepts of reason, freedom, history, and progress; it was the claim of the universality of these

[1] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 165.
[2] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 190.
[3] Carter J. Eckert, "Exorcising Hegel's Ghosts: Toward a Postnationalist Historiography of Korea," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson.
[4] Eckert, "Exorcising Hegel's Ghosts," 366.
[5] Ibid., 366-7.

concepts that then buttressed the nineteenth-century European imperialist enterprise around the world. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the ideology of nationalism became the basis of the "civilization and enlightenment" movement in turn-of-the-century Korea, and as I will discuss further in this chapter, these Hegelian concepts can indeed be exposed in Korean nationalist thought such as that of Sin Ch'aeho.

Eckert laments the ways in which Korean nationalism has become the dominant ideology that frames most Korean historiography, especially surrounding the events of colonialism—an ideology that would overlook and subsume the various, hybrid, and plural sites of identity and culture in Korean history. In conjuring "Hegel's Ghosts," Eckert thus proposes that the exorcism of this nationalist ideology is not only possible but also necessary for the moral exercise of the historian: "The morality of the historian is ultimately humanistic. It might be described as a fearless commitment to knowledge of the human condition in all its complexity, a factual, honest, and richly detailed exploration of the things human beings have done, why and how they have done them, and their impact on human life."[6] That is, insofar as the historian attempts to undertake what Eckert calls the "inductive"[7] task of documenting the diverse and complex facets of human experience, this would inevitably and ideally yield a "pluralistic"[8] account of historical events. In that sense, nationalist ideology, if and when it overshadows historical facts, is the site of a moral problem, especially if it erases the plurality of subjectivities and experiences that might not necessarily claim a nationalistic interpretation of their own

[6] Eckert, "Exorcising Hegel's Ghosts," 377.
[7] Ibid., 372.
[8] Ibid.

lives. For Eckert, it is thus a moral imperative to remove and exorcise the ghosts of Hegel in Korean historiography.

However, in my deconstructive reading, what we have in modern Korean historiography is an aporia, which is in turn the very structure of haunting. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, specters of Western metaphysical claims (not only in Hegel, but furthermore in the larger history of modern Western philosophy) can be traced in the unfolding of early modern Korean intellectual history. The claim that human freedom is found in the actualization of autonomy or sovereignty—a philosophical claim about what constitutes human subjectivity as a rational being—has actually reconfigured the moral imagination of Korean historiography: one that is focused on nativist retrieval as a *moral* (not just political) task. These claims run through not only the religious "Right," but also the secular, Marxist "Left." While nationalist historians may be quick to dismiss Yun Ch'i-ho as having been pro-U.S. and pro-Japan, Yun genuinely believed in his version of Korean nationalism as being informed by the "civilization and enlightenment" project of Christianity and the West. Similarly, while Paek Nam-un's socio-economic analysis incisively exposed the structures of global capitalism that had exploited the Korean peasantry, Paek's vision of an "autonomous capitalism" was also predicated on the concept of sovereignty, which was in fact disseminated as part of the Western Enlightenment. If we thus look at the position of Protestant Christianity in Korea's intellectual history, the spectral presence of Western metaphysics destabilizes the ways that the following signifiers operate in Korea's post-colonial historical narratives:

"nationalism," "the West," "America," "religion," "secularism," "enlightenment," and perhaps most significantly, "sovereignty."

In concluding this project, this chapter addresses the question: what, then, is the value of deconstruction in this critical reading of modern Korean historiography? In being confronted with this philosophical conundrum of repetition and aporia in modern Korean historiography, how then could we conceptualize postcoloniality in Korea? Does deconstruction show postcoloniality to be an impossibility? What is the status of postcolonial discourse and criticism? I suggest that deconstruction, as a critical exercise of exposing this aporetic structure, is *not* paralysis, but rather an opening into a different kind of moral and historical imagination: one that can reframe the meaning of ethical responsibility in terms of collective inheritance. In returning to more theoretical reflections on haunting and hauntology, I explore the ways in which this deconstructive gesture is actually an opening into a critical reading practice that does not have to remain "stuck" within the claim of a fixed historical meaning; the exposure of aporia actually opens up the possibility of seeing multiplicity and difference, in contradistinction to Hegelian historicism. Rather than thinking of haunting as a paralyzing diagnosis, I suggest that the deconstructive approach to modern Korean historiography actually allows us to move away from the concern for sovereignty and to unravel the very attachment to or desire for nativist subjectivity.

In proposing Derrida's hauntology as a way of framing this conundrum in Korean historiography, this project has offered a slightly revised suggestion from that of Eckert. I do agree with Eckert's recognition that Hegel haunts Korean nationalist ideology; there

certainly is a moral problem that is consequently present in nationalism, especially in the desire to erase pluralism. Eckert's diagnosis offers us a reckoning of the violence that has been constituted in Korean nationalism, especially the violence of erasure. In turning to Derrida, I suggest that the value of deconstructing historiography—especially in postcolonial criticism—is to think carefully about the ways in which the emancipatory promise itself should always be under interrogation, such that the very logic of repeating colonial rhetoric is actually itself an important site of analysis that should not be glossed over. Perhaps before moving too quickly into the possibility of postnationalism, which I agree is indeed a necessary direction, I also suggest that the exposure of this philosophical conundrum invites us to take a pause. As much as we may want a clean break from ethnic nationalism, the continued specters of Hegel (and of Western metaphysics more broadly) actually force a reckoning—a reckoning of what Korean history and culture has inherited, including Christianity and the Protestant ethical system that has fueled a particular (and narrow) idea of human freedom.

Even in the history of Western philosophy, there seems to be a sense in which postmodernism has declared an "overcoming" of the metaphysics of subjectivity undergirding modernism. The autonomous subject has been revealed to be a myth, and the universalism of metaphysics has been exposed in its violence, while the postmodern task is commonly understood to articulate the human condition of alterity and plurality. But the case of colonial and postcolonial Korea, among many other postcolonial contexts, challenges this idea that we are "past" the problem of metaphysics and the ethical, political consequences and reverberations of Western metaphysics that has been

disseminated in formerly colonized contexts. Hegel might have been over and done with, but what do we do with Hegel's ghosts and specters? This is thus not only a reckoning from within modern Korean historiography, Korean Studies, and postcolonial criticism, but also a reckoning within the history of Western philosophical thought. For not only are we confronted with the ghosts of Hegel, we are confronted with the position of Christianity in Western intellectual history that had long buttressed the logic of colonial expansion.

Thus, before we exorcise Hegel, the conjuration itself is a moment of reckoning with the so-called sovereignty of an autonomous subject that is compromised, because the desire for this kind of subjectivity is itself the site of haunting. The recognition of ghosts and of specters thus compromises the concept of linear time, as well as the sovereignty and autonomy of the living, knowing subject. When that idea of autonomy or freedom is compromised, we have the opportunity to re-imagine what the task of "history" means. I am not suggesting here that "history" as an academic discipline is no longer a possibility; nor am I suggesting that deconstruction forecloses the possibility of the task of writing history. Rather, as Kleinberg suggests in *Haunting History*, hauntology offers a more explicit recognition of "the limitations of our own historical horizons, the extent to which our personal perspective is determined and directed by our past."[9] In critiquing the assumption that history-writing must only take place from a disenchanted position, I am suggesting that Derrida's method can offer us the tools to construct a

[9] Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 2.

different kind of historical and moral imagination—one that detects the internal contradictions within the logic of hegemony, and one that can also detect the pluralism and difference *already* present within that logic. Within the Hegelian model of history, we can only think of time in a linear fashion, as well as the ego as positioned within that linearity. In contrast, haunting offers us a way to imagine our relationship to time and to space in a different way, and displaces the ego of history (the autonomous subject) as no longer the primary normative epicenter of one's narrative.

This chapter thus takes a step back and returns to theoretical reflections on hauntology, reflecting more explicitly on the ethical value of this deconstructive gesture in modern Korean historiography. I will aim to show that this practice of critical reading is not intended to foreclose the task of history writing, but rather intended as a philosophical reflection on our assumptions about individual and collective autonomy or sovereignty[10] and our relation to history, time, and space. By deconstructing the Western metaphysical concept of autonomous subjectivity—and the claim that this subjectivity is the normative ideal of history—I consider how hauntology actually offers us an alternative historical imagination by deconstructing that notion of subjectivity or sovereignty. In turn, I will suggest that a moral imagination is at stake, especially in the way that haunting exposes the artificiality of the autonomous subject.

This chapter will begin by visiting both Hegel and his ghosts in the thought of the nationalist intellectual Sin Ch'aeho, unpacking how both Sin and Hegel conceptualize the autonomous subject, space, and time. I will then return to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* to

[10] "Autonomy" and "sovereignty" are used interchangeably throughout this project.

examine how he deconstructs the concept of the sign—this concept, I will suggest, helps us unpack the metaphysical claims undergirding Hegel's historicism, the logic of repetition and erasure, and in turn, how that logic is operative in the very structure of haunting. Following this discussion of the concept of the sign, I will put Derrida in conversation with the work of Avery Gordon in *Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. In drawing upon Gordon's work, I reflect on the ways that haunting constructs a different kind of historical imagination that refuses to reduce the historical narrative to cause and effect. I will argue that hauntology not only shifts our attention away from the concern for sovereignty, but it also reframes (or re-imagines) the very concept of agency—not as autonomy or sovereignty, but rather as collective inheritance and moral responsibility. If the concept of autonomy is a nostalgic orientation toward the past with a concept of linear time, then the notions of inheritance and responsibility disrupt that linearity, such that the present is always already connected to the ghosts of the past and the specters of the future. In the case of Korean historiography, if we cannot so easily exorcise the ghosts of Western metaphysics, and in turn, if we cannot so easily exorcise Christianity, then how does the (perhaps uncomfortable) reckoning of this inheritance help us rethink our relation to historical time, space, and the legacy that we (in our present time) will leave for future generations? At stake in broadening our concept of, and relation to, collective history and memory is, at heart, a moral question: what responsibility do inheritors of colonialism (such as the two Koreas) have, by shifting *away* from nativism?

Sin Ch'aeho, nationalist historiography, and the ghosts of Hegel

> What is history? It is a record of the state of mental activities in which the ego (a) struggles against the nonego (pia) in the context of passing time and expanding space. World history is a record of mankind's struggles, and Korean history is that of the Korean people's.
>
> — Sin Ch'aeho, "What Is History? What Shall We Study in Korean History?"[11]

A particular concept of subjectivity runs through the thought of Sin Ch'aeho (1880-1936), a seminal figure in Korean nationalist historiography. This is the concept of the "ego," or what Michael Robinson describes as "an autonomous spirit (*chuch'e ŭi chŏngsin*),"[12] which Sin Ch'aeho set up in contradistinction to the mentality of subservience (*sadaejuŭi*). A sovereign nation state is the material, physical manifestation of this autonomous spirit on a collective level; Sin thus defines the state as "an organic entity cemented by national spirit."[13] Sin's reference to the "ego" echoes what Hegel calls "consciousness" or what Derrida calls "self-presence" in *Of Grammatology*—the "ego" is constantly becoming more conscious of itself, continuously struggling "against the nonego" according to Sin's words above, and seeking to retain or reclaim its autonomy or sovereignty.

This concept of subjectivity as the "ego"—or what I have called the autonomous or sovereign subject—operates with the following logic: the subject is always constructing

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[11] Sin Ch'aeho, "What Is History? What Shall We Study in Korean History?" in *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization Volume II: From the Seventeenth Century to the Modern Period*, edited by Peter H. Lee (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 483. An excerpt from the introductory chapter of Sin Ch'aeho's *Ancient History of Korea,* published posthumously in 1948, and included in *Tanjae Sin Ch'aeho chŏnjip* 1:19-23.

[12] Michael Robinson, "National Identity and the Thought of Sin Ch'aeho: Sadaejuŭi and Chuch'e in History and Politics," *The Journal of Korean Studies* Vol. 5 (1984): 123. As Robinson notes, *chuch'e* ("self-reliance" or "autonomy") is "the single most important tenet of North Korean ideology" (124).

[13] Sin, "Introduction to *A New Discourse on Reading History*," 423.

the "nonego" or the "other," constructing centers and peripheries, and existing over and against space and time. Thus the nation, as a collective ego, claims itself as the center while depicting other nations as nonegos, and it is expected that other nations are operating in the same way. But with*in* the nation, the center (and the peripheries) must also be created, and Sin refers to this task as locating the primary ethnic group:

> The historian must first identify the primary or master ethnic group of the nation, which then becomes the main theme. He can then proceed to describe how the master ethnic group's politics developed or regressed, how its industry prospered and declined, how its military exploits progressed and waned, how its mores changed, how it absorbed other ethnic groups, and how it managed relations with foreign countries. Only then would there be a history. Otherwise, it would be a history without spirit. History without spirit creates a people without spirit and a nation without spirit. How dreadful![14]

For Sin, the collective subjectivity or identity of a nation is constituted in the dominant "ethnic group," which absorbs all other groups. Ethnic nationalism is thus predicated upon the erasure of plural subjectivities, absorbing all of them into one dominant, central subjectivity. In this logic of constructing centers and peripheries, we can now see the violence in the desire to erase difference and multiplicity for the purpose of producing an all-encompassing historical narrative.

This logic of ethnic nationalism thus constructs Sin Ch'aeho's historical imagination, in which Sin defines the very concept of "history" as predicated on the concept of "nation": "The history of a state describes the ups and downs of the nation. *Without the nation, there is no history*; without history, the nation cannot have a clear perception of the state. The historian indeed has a heavy responsibility."[15] In other words,

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[14] Sin, "Introduction to *A New Discourse on Reading History*," 424.
[15] Sin Ch'aeho, "Introduction to *A New Discourse on Reading History*," in *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization, Volume II: From the Seventeenth Century to the Modern Period*, edited by Peter H. Lee (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 423. Original published in *Korean Daily News*, 27 August 1908. Emphasis added.

without the collective ego, there is no narrative. Sin also speaks of having a "clear perception of the state," implying the possibility of historical vision only from the perspective of the ego, that can explain historical cause and effect according to linear time and expanding space. As such, this historical vision is constitutive of a *moral* imagination, as the ego makes value judgments of those events which either buttresses or threatens its autonomy.

In Sin Ch'aeho's thought, we encounter the ghosts of Hegelian historicism.[16] Hegel defines the nation state as the material expression of rationalism, freedom, and morality. For Hegel, the individual human being is first and foremost a rational being whose Reason is embodied in its subjectivity, and the State is where individuals come together *willingly* constituting a universal subjectivity. Hegel writes:

> What is the material in which the final end of Reason is to be realized? It is first of all the subjective agent itself, human desires, subjectivity in general. In human knowledge and volition, as its material basis, the rational attains existence [...] But the subjective will has also a substantial life, a reality where it moves in the region of essential being and has the essential itself as the object of its existence. This essential being is the union of the subjective with the rational will; it is the moral whole, the *State*. It is that actuality in which the individual has and enjoys his freedom, but only as knowing, believing, and willing the universal.[17]

This belief in the universal constitutes morality for Hegel, for it is predicated on an individual's desire to *will* the common good, and the material form that embodied this collective will is the nation state. In that sense, for Hegel, and for Sin Ch'aeho, the

[16] As I have noted in Chapter 3, it is not clear whether Sin Ch'aeho was directly exposed to Hegel's philosophy. However, as Michael Robinson notes, Sin Ch'aeho's thought was a product of the Enlightenment in Korea, which as I have argued, was a Western Enlightenment project that was disseminated with universalizing claims. See Robinson, "National Identity and the Thought of Sin Ch'aeho: Sadaejuŭi and Chuch'e in History and Politics," 122.

[17] G. W. F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, translated by Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis and New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1953), 49.

"nation" is as much of a *moral* concept as much as it is a political one. The nation state, in the Hegelian system, is the collective consciousness of one's freedom.

Hegel defined the concept of world history according to this idea of the individual and collective awakening to freedom: "World history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom."[18] History is the progress of becoming conscious of one's freedom, but certain nations, for Hegel, were closer to that consciousness of freedom more so than others. It was the Germanic peoples that became conscious of this freedom via Christianity: "Only the Germanic peoples came, through Christianity, to realize that man as man is free and that freedom of Spirit is the very essence of man's nature."[19] Hegel goes further to claim that there are degrees of this consciousness of freedom among the various regions or peoples of the world, and that is a "natural division of world history."[20] It is in this context that we also encounter Hegel's orientalist claim: "Orientals do not yet know that Spirit—Man as such—is free."[21] Thus, Hegel's philosophy of history was intimately tied to his philosophy of religion. If Christianity was the vehicle for world historical progress, the dissemination of Christianity was, for Hegel, necessarily part of the universal historical trajectory. In that sense, Christianity was embedded in Hegel's orientalism.[22]

Indeed, as I have argued throughout this project, Christianity was the vehicle by which the Western metaphysical concept of autonomous subjectivity (or what Hegel calls freedom) was disseminated in colonial (and postcolonial) Korea. In other words,

[18] Hegel, *Reason in History*, 24.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 23.
[22] I use the term "orientalism" the way it is constructed in Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

Christianity—not its negation—was conceived as the condition of the possibility of individual and collective freedom and autonomy, as well as the consciousness of this autonomy. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the specters of Hegel can be seen in the work of the Protestant missionaries, in the Enlightenment which was exposed as a Christian project, and even in the secular Marxism of Paek Nam-un who desired Korean historiography to be a scientific project of reclaiming Korea's economic and political autonomy from Japan's transplanted capitalism. All three types of historical narratives, I have suggested, converge not only in the modern construction of Korea's ethnic nationalism, but also in the Western metaphysical notion of the autonomous subject that is either trying to retrieve or maintain its sovereignty and freedom. In Korea's colonial modernity, much of the nativism undergirding nationalist historiography, as exemplified in Sin Ch'aeho's thought, has centered around this concept of subjectivity and of retrieval that would inevitably yield a narrative of ethnic nostalgia, with the moral imagination of Korea's history shaped primarily by the story of collective loss, suffering, and trauma surrounding colonialism and division.

What Hegel's philosophy of history offered was actually more than the concept of ethnic nationalist ideology; what Hegel offered was a metaphysical claim about the nature of human freedom and subjectivity, which could then offer a metaphysical explanation of historical events. Hegel had a view of time as linear, and of the human subject as a being capable of autonomy. By making history about progress toward the recognition and actualization of one's freedom, historical narrative has always been about (divine) providence and the justification of traumatic events. The violence in Hegel's system is not

just that there is the sublation of the diverse, particular, and lived realities of these events (especially surrounding the upheavals and cognitive dissonances of colonialism); the violence is in the way that historical narrative reduces all of these events to cause and effect. Moreover, this reduction to cause and effect is from the vantage point of universalism, whereby what Hegel calls the "Spirit" view can see a panoramic vision of world history leading toward progress, with the European West leading the way. For the Spirit becoming conscious of itself (self-presence) constitutes freedom.

Derrida and the concept of the sign

…reading should free itself, at least in its axis, from the classical categories of history—not only from the categories of the history of ideas and the history of literature but also, and perhaps above all, from the categories of the history of philosophy.[23]

The idea of science and the idea of writing—therefore also of the science of writing—is meaningful for us only in terms of an origin and within a world to which a certain concept of the sign (later I shall call it the *concept of sign) and a certain concept of the relationships between speech and writing, have* already *been assigned.*[24]

— Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

The practice of historical writing—whether it is a history of events and/or a history of ideas—is traditionally centered upon locating the origin of things, or, in other words, locating cause and effect. As Derrida writes, the "typological or historical research of facts are always arranged around problems of definition and beginning."[25] As we have seen in chapter 2, Protestant missionaries like Gale and Hulbert were concerned with locating the definition or origin of the Korean people, the culture, and the language. Even in this very

[23] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, lxxxix.
[24] Ibid., 4, emphasis in the original.
[25] Ibid., 28.

project, which sought to present an intellectual history, I have traced Christianity (and the Western metaphysical category of autonomous subjectivity) as the "origin" of the dissemination of a colonial logic. For Derrida, this typological or historical arrangement of facts around the question of origin is constituted in the very structure of the sign—a signifier pointing to a signified. This is why, in Derrida's deconstructive project, the scholarly practice of linguistics is of particular significance in targeting the history of Western metaphysics.

This practice of locating origin implies a few philosophical claims about how the sign operates. It constructs a hierarchical relation in this particular concept of the sign, such that the closer the "replica" is to the "original," the "purer" it is. Phonocentrism—the privileging of speech over writing—is the paradigmatic example given in Derrida's deconstruction of linguistics. As we have seen in Chapter 2, phonocentrism plays out in the Protestant missionaries' concept of language. Phonocentrism is based on the idea that the written script—insofar as it is conceptualized as *representing* spoken language—hence *signifies* what is "originally" said. Metaphysics thus orders not only a distinction but also a hierarchical relation, such that "writing" is denigrated in status when it is conceptualized as a mere representation of speech.

This metaphysical hierarchy between "origin" and its "representation" is what constitutes the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung* ("sublation"). Derrida writes that this concept of sublation is the dominant concept of writing and of history: "*Aufhebung* is, more or less implicitly, the dominant concept of nearly all histories of writing, even today.

It is *the* concept of history and of teleology."[26] *Aufhebung* is thus the following notion: the "representation" of the origin is "lifted into" (and therefore submitted to and erased in) the "origin."[27] Here, Derrida points out that Hegel's metaphysical concept of the sign *is* intertwined with a teleological concept of history. In other words, *Aufhebung* is not simply a claim about the philosophy of history; it is predicated upon a particular metaphysical claim about the relation between the origin and its representation, between the cause and the effect.

Once this claim of the hierarchical structure of the sign system is exposed, Derrida's deconstructive move is to turn this concept of origin on its head. This structure of the sign, it turns out, is actually a structure of repetition and erasure, thereby erasing and concealing the "origin":

> "Signifier of the signifier" describes on the contrary the movement of language: in its origin, to be sure, but one can already suspect that an origin whose structure can be expressed as "signifier of the signifier" conceals and erases itself in its own production [...] There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language.[28]

That is, if an origin is, *structurally* speaking, the "signifier of the signifier," the "signifier" in turn becomes the "signified." As Derrida writes elsewhere, "There the signified always already functions as a signifier."[29] The very "movement of language," as Derrida writes above, is this infinite repetition of reference and signification: "A signifier is from the very beginning the possibility of its own repetition, of its own image or resemblance."[30]

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[26] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 25. Italics in the original.
[27] As I will discuss further in returning to the thought of Sin Ch'aeho, specters of this Hegelian concept of the sign runs through Sin's nationalist historiography.
[28] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 7.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., 91.

In this infinite play of reference and of representation, the very idea of a "pure" or "simple" origin turns out to be an artificial construct. Derrida writes: "the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer a simple origin."[31] The origin is no longer simple, because it is the "representations"—and the layers of reference and signification—that actually end up constructing the image of an origin. What we can expose here is the structure of repetition. This structure of repetition or of reference must be constituted by difference, for 'A_1' cannot be reference to 'A_1,' but must rather be a reference to something *like* 'A.' In other words, what we have is not a "source" but rather a specter of that which *resembles* an origin. And in exposing this structure of reference and the consequent artificiality of a "simple origin," deconstruction offers us a way to think about the concept of origin differently—not as a "source" that sublates the signifiers, but as the site of the structure of reference itself.

What we have, then, is a reckoning with the structure of aporia. For in the practice of critical reading, when the concept of origin is let go, we no longer claim a retrieval project that is actually operative in the Hegelian move of *Aufhebung*. Samir Haddad's reading of Derrida on the concept of aporia is helpful here:

> What is it to expose an aporia? It is not to show it in all of its aspects, since an aporia always contains an essential absence. Aporias cannot be fully or finally presented—they elude total mastery. But what can be done is to heighten an aporia's tension, foregrounding the necessary contradiction that it contains.[32]

[31] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 36.
[32] Samir Haddad, *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 35.

As Haddad observes, the exposure of an aporetic structure is not to have a panoramic vision of the sign system in its entirety; what this aporia reveals is the tension and the internal contradiction of that play of reference. Unlike Hegel's attempt to construct a subjectivity whose aim *is* mastery, Derrida's method is the intentional letting go of such mastery, so as to let the tension be exposed.

If we are to bring these theoretical claims back to the primary example in this project, namely that of the position of Christianity in Korea, we are indeed left with such an aporia, an uncomfortable tension whereby the exorcism of Hegelian specters or ghosts cannot be so easily accomplished the way a post-nationalist outlook would presume. In exposing this trace (or specter) of Western metaphysics in the construction of a certain notion of political subjectivity in Korea (i.e. the subject of mastery), this deconstructive analysis seeks to *let go* of the aim of mastery. In so doing, the location of a Christian or Western "origin" is not with the aim of exorcising it; rather, its conjuration is to illustrate the uncomfortable ways in which the metaphysical concept of autonomy or sovereignty has been *replicated* and disseminated in the system of reference or signs. Thus, in naming Christianity as the origin of the colonial logic, I am not referring to a "simple origin"; rather, it is the structure of *repetition* of Christian theological categories that is exposed. To conjure Western metaphysics and Christianity in Korea is to conjure the structure of its reproduction and its reinscription.

Throughout this project, I have applied Derrida's deconstructive method as a practice of critical reading—a practice that sought to be based on a different axis, free

"from the classical categories of history."[33] This refers to a reading that is free from the categories of metaphysics—the concepts of origin, of sovereignty, and of linearity. If we therefore have "the myth of the simplicity of origin,"[34] what Derrida's deconstructive method offers is a letting-go of the notion of causality. When we let go of the concept of causality, what happens to the concept of history and of reading history? If historical imagination *refuses* to reduce the narrative to cause and effect, or refuses to erase plurality for the sake of the retrieval of sovereignty, how can we find ourselves reckoning with that which we inherited—in all of its aporetic, uncomfortable forms?

The "failure of the explanation"[35]

In her groundbreaking work in the field of sociology, Avery Gordon suggests that haunting forces a reckoning about the "failure of the explanation."[36] If history writing usually aims to explain how things happened, Gordon's analysis helps us rethink our own relationship to the concept of history. In her reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a novel about haunting, Gordon invokes Walter Benjamin's concept of time to disrupt this notion that things can indeed be explained:

> The story is about haunting and about the crucial way in which it mediates between institution and person, creating the possibility of making a life, of becoming something else, in the present and for the future. The work and the power of the story devolve from beginning with this asymmetry, beginning with a relationship whose evocation requires precisely refusing to reduce these two moments to cause and effect, as if this story or history could be told simply as a "sequence of events like the beads of a rosary" (Benjamin 1969: 263). The work and the power of the story lie in giving all the reasons why the reasons are never quite enough, why they cannot close the breach between two interrelated but distinct affairs, why haunting rather than "history" (or historicism) best captures the constellation of connections that charges any "time of the now" (ibid.) with the debts

[33] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, lxxxix.
[34] Ibid., 92.
[35] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 142.
[36] Ibid.

> of the past and the expense of the present, why one woman killed her child and another was haunted by the event.[37]

Reading *Beloved*, Gordon writes that the narrative that unfolds is "not Slavery with a capital S,"[38] but rather about haunting. That is, the story is not about the institution of Slavery, since according to the historical account of "Slavery with a capital S," the protagonist Sethe would technically have been understood as "free." But as a story about haunting, Sethe is not exactly free; the reasons that are given to explain the "why," the causes and effects, are not even remotely enough to explain the lived experience of Sethe's present moment being haunted by "the debts of the past."[39]

In referring to Walter Benjamin, Gordon is also able to touch on the concept of time, and the ways that the linear concept of time is destabilized. Benjamin's concept of the "time of the now,"[40] is not just about an indebtedness to the past; it also refers to what Gordon calls "the expense of the present," pointing toward one's connectedness to the future. This "time of the now" is to be juxtaposed against what Benjamin calls "homogenous, empty time"[41] that is characteristic of historicism, which according to Benjamin, "contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history."[42] This vision of the "time of the now" resists the space of mastery, as if the "subject" (whether individual or collective) is the only "ego" that exists. Rather, it points to the question of accountability to those whom we may not have met, for time is

[37] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 142.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, 263.
[41] Ibid., 260.
[42] Ibid.

neither "homogenous" nor "empty." Gordon writes on this question of accountability: "How can we be accountable to people who seemingly have not counted in the historical and public record?"[43] This question of accountability shows that how we conceptualize time is actually a *moral* question. How we conceptualize temporality—not in terms of linearity, but in terms of a space in which past and future intersect—thus has moral implications: it is a question of "to whom" we find ourselves accountable.

The story of haunting, as Gordon explains, resists the space of mastery. To be haunted is to be unable to claim the kind of subjectivity that can "overcome" the realities of having inherited a personal or collective trauma. In other words, it resists the Hegelian attempt to put the sequence of events into a neatly organized metaphysical order, one in which all events—no matter what they are—can signify towards the universal becoming of Spirit. But haunting, as a *structure*, resists this sublation (*Aufhebung*). In fact, not only does it resist being sublated into a transcendental signified; it exposes the ways in which the very attempt at erasure *is* the site of repetition. That desire for erasure is itself reinscribing the spectral presence of that which is haunting the subject. It is in this sense that Gordon also discusses "the tremulous and complex relationship of subjectivity and subjection."[44] Thus the failure of the explanation refers to the failure of this space of mastery; it is the failure of the coming to fruition of the sovereign subject.

[43] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 187.
[44] Ibid., 80.

An alternative historical imagination: moral agency, inheritance, and responsibility

What both Gordon and Derrida bring to the surface is that haunting is, at its core, a paradox, a tension, or an aporia that is irreducible to cause and effect. The paradox is held in *both* the desire for mastery (and erasure of the specter) *and* the space of repetition that is created in that desire. Or in other words, the desire for erasure *is* the site of repetition, as we have seen Derrida demonstrate in deconstructing the concept of the sign. Gordon's description of this paradox of haunting is also interesting:

> And thus we return to end with that paradoxical feature of haunting. Haunting always harbors the violence, the *witchcraft* and *denial* that made it, and the *exile of our longing*, the utopian. When I am a spooky phantom you want to avoid, when there is nothing but the shadow of a public civic life, when bedrooms and boardrooms are clamorous ghost chambers, deep "wounds in civilization" are in haunting evidence. But it is also the case that some part of me in abeyance of the injury and some part of the missing better life and its potentialities are in haunting evidence too.[45]

Gordon insightfully notes that it is precisely the violence of the attempt at denial or exile where the ghost is made. But the injury is not just to that which haunts; the injury is also within the subject (or the imagined sovereign subject). Returning to Derrida, we can thus see why the exposure of this paradox of haunting explains precisely why "deconstruction" is not and cannot be "destruction." For the desire to destroy, erase, deny, and exile *is* how the specter is created in the first place, revealing that the subject (who may desire mastery) is entangled in that injury.

In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida also articulates this paradox: "Is not to possess a specter to be possessed by it, possessed period? To capture it, is that not to be captivated by it?"[46] Here we have Derrida upholding the two meanings of "possession": on the one

[45] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 207.
[46] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 165.

hand, possession from the space of mastery, whereby one's sovereignty is established in the possession *of* something; and on the other hand, *being* possessed, precisely exposing that subjectivity and subjection are indeed not that far apart. An interesting question then emerges from that dissonant space: who possesses whom? Who belongs to whom? Is the desire to possess, contain, and perhaps even erase the ghost precisely where the ghost appears? That question of possession—or of belonging—deconstructs that space of mastery by inverting that concept upside down. As I will discuss further, an alternative concept of collectivity (of collective belonging) can emerge from this paradox.

Gordon describes haunting as that space "between institution and person."[47] When we speak of Colonialism and Christianity, both with a capital C, the explanation of these institutions as powerful forces that inaugurated Korea's modernity is not quite enough in depicting one's lived connection to its "historical and social effects,"[48] as well as one's ownership and responsibility in reinscribing those effects. Collective subjectivity, in that sense, is not constituted by a "simple origin," but rather by the sequence of shared signifiers, which of course can have divergent signifieds. Regarding this lived connection, Gordon's observations on the work of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo is insightful: "The Mothers are the ones who understood, better than Amnesty International or CONADEP or the radical psychoanalysts and all the rest, what it means to be *connected* to the disappeared, connected viscerally, connected through kinship, connected through a shared social experience."[49] Part of that lived connection, as Gordon notes, is what

[47] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 142.
[48] Ibid., 190.
[49] Ibid., 112. Emphasis in the original.

constitutes a shared experience of being haunted in a visceral and embodied way. The explanation of and by the institution does not and cannot erase that visceral but elusive specter; haunting is *in between* the institution and the person, because the lived experience or memory of the person cannot possibly be encapsulated in the institution, while that experience is indeed connected to that institution. Gordon's observations of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo helps us think differently about collective subjectivity—one that is not about an inherent, biological, or typological connection to a "simple origin," but rather about what it means to be socially, politically, and perhaps even viscerally connected through a shared inheritance of an event.

This concept of inheritance, then, helps us think about an alternative way of imagining or constructing collective agency. If nativist accounts of history have focused too much on the idea of an ethnic identity that then necessarily becomes a narrative about loss or nostalgia, a collective agency conceived in terms of inheritance shifts the perspective in a subtle yet powerful way. In concluding her work, Gordon writes:

> The ghost registers and it incites, and that is why we have to talk to it graciously, why we have to learn how it speaks, why we have to grasp the fullness of its life world, its desires and its standpoint. When a ghost appears, it is making contact with you; all its forceful if perplexing enunciations are for you. Offer it a hospitable reception we must, but the victorious reckoning with the ghost always requires a partiality of the living. Because ultimately haunting is about how to transform a shadow of a life into an undiminished life whose shadows touch softly in the spirit of a peaceful reconciliation. In this necessarily collective undertaking, the end, which is not an ending at all, belongs to everyone.[50]

As Gordon writes, the work of confronting the ghost is a "necessarily collective undertaking," referring indeed to the emergence of a collective task. This language of "belonging" is also interesting, for it denotes a different kind of belonging from that of

[50] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 208.

being ethnically, racially tied. Rather, this belonging is *created* in the event of a "collective undertaking" that calls for the active position of taking collective responsibility.

Concluding reflections

The critical reading technique that Derrida offers us in *Of Grammatology* is a reflection on the concept of the sign, and how a particular notion of sign systems in turn construct this linear concept of history. In the competing "schools" of Korean historiography, history writing is conceptualized as the task of retrieving "what actually happened," such that certain signifiers (e.g. "colonial," "post-colonial") can only constitute *one* meaning. And it is that logic of a singular signification—the claim to an objective, neutral, scientific stance of constructing a collective, historical memory—that undergirds the politics of erasure. Derrida offers us a way to think about the tensions and contradictions in those sign systems. When the signifier "sovereignty" has been claimed as an anti-colonial, nationalist enterprise within Korean history, how does the exposure of this signifier as a *colonial* logic destabilize the emancipatory claim driving that signifier? By exposing and highlighting that tension, Derrida actually offers us an alternative historical imagination—one that does not have to remain "stuck" in that aporia. Deconstructing Korean historiography is not about remaining "stuck" in colonial hegemony (for that stance is itself based on a linear concept of history); rather, the framework of hauntology—which is another articulation of the structure of aporia—offers a way to think *beyond* the concept of linearity, which in turn invites us to shift the focus *away* from the concern for sovereignty and nativist subjectivity.

We can take a moment to come back to Carter Eckert's essay on "Exorcising Hegel's Ghosts." Eckert also claims, in proposing a postnationalist historiography as a path forward, that "the study of history cannot be directly equated with the study of literature."[51] In a sense, however, hauntology—as a way of describing and exposing the structure of aporia—does offer the value of taking a literary approach to historical writing. It allows us to see the logic that drives one's historical imagination. The term "historical imagination" comes from the work of Hayden White in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteen-Century Europe* (1973). White famously claims that "there can be no 'proper history' which is not at the same time 'philosophy of history.'"[52] In effect, White collapses the distinction between history and literature in analyzing modes of historical consciousness according to the literary *form* through which a historical explanation is made. In seeing history as "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse,"[53] White's "meta" approach is to identify the literary or narrative mode according to which historical meaning is offered. It is the force of the imagination that in turn constructs political and ethical meaning. While I am not suggesting that "history," as involving the scholarly task of collecting data and evidence, may not be equal to "literature," I do see the value of deconstructing the philosophy of history that does indeed shape the moral imagination of a historical narrative.

[51] Eckert, "Exorcising Hegel's Ghosts," 373.
[52] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), xi.
[53] White, *Metahistory*, ix.

Thus what unfolds is what has been the philosophical question at stake in this project: the consequences of reinscribing a narrow vision of subjectivity, as well as the question of a collective moral responsibility. It is the question of how we conceptualize ethics, especially when it comes to the question of accountability: to whom and to what do we hold what Leela Gandhi has called the "colonial aftermath"[54] accountable? Within the colonizer/colonized binary, the answer is quite simple with the causal relations also clear. And in that historical narrative, the issue of accountability is almost always framed in terms of culpability. But when the notion of accountability (and the aporia therein) is instead reflected upon as a "collective undertaking"[55] as Gordon writes, the nostalgic concern for a retrieval for subjectivity is instead transformed into collective responsibility. This, in turn, is an alternative way of conceptualizing collective agency. As such, a collective responsibility can therefore no longer externalize blame onto an outside "source" or "origin." In fact, this very idea of an "outside" or an "inside" is itself artificially constructed by the desire to create centers and peripheries. Indeed, Derrida's approach has been to deconstruct that very notion of an "inside" or an "outside," by picking apart and exposing the ruse of the space of mastery.

Here we can return to the concept of the sovereign subject, or what Sin Ch'aeho calls the "ego." It is *this* illusion of mastery that has been a driving force behind Western metaphysics as well as ethnic nationalist historiography, as a way of conceiving moral and political agency. In that historicist picture, the ego, in a journey to become conscious of

[54] Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 4.
[55] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 208.

its own freedom and to actualize that freedom, is positioned within "passing time and expanding space"[56] as Sin Ch'aeho writes. But if that very ego is haunted, time is not necessarily passing, but rather the intersection of the past and the future; space, too, is inherited and shared. What we can imagine, in this reflection of hauntology, is a subjectivity that is already and necessarily constituted by difference and multiplicity. From that intersectional space, we may begin to also imagine "agency" a little differently—not as retrieval, but as a moral responsibility.

When we let go of causality, our philosophy of history is *less* that of an orientation toward the past. Instead, what if we have a relation to the present, such that the purpose of "history" is less about having a *fixed* relation to the past, but *rather* about reckoning with the connection with that we have inherited, *such that* we therefore have a responsibility? In taking this deconstructive approach to modern Korean historiography, my main critique of the colonizer/colonized binary that still pervades postcolonial criticism is the way in which accountability can be too easily diverted to the "West." Thus, while there is no doubt that the European West—especially in the dissemination of Western metaphysical ideals of freedom—did indeed have a hand to play the history of global colonialism and capitalism, the spectral presence of colonial hegemony forces of a reckoning of the responsibility that formerly colonized contexts like Korea can take in working toward democracy.

[56] Sin Ch'aeho, "What Is History? What Shall We Study in Korean History?" in *Sourcebook*, 483.

CONCLUSION

In February 2015, Hyeon Soo Lim, a Canadian citizen, was detained in North Korea for charges of undermining the Kim dynasty. North Korean officials had uncovered, among the scores of documents, internet footage of a sermon he gave at a Korean-Christian conference in Texas in 2010, in which he preached: "If God allows…in a few years, North Korea will be evangelized and recover its past glory." Before Kim Jong-un took power, Lim had developed a special relationship with North Korean officials to do humanitarian work and had managed to visit North Korea some 150 times by 2015. With funds raised from church donations, he oversaw the construction of orphanages, senior citizens' homes, farms, and a noodle factory; taught English to schoolteachers; and even invested in a gas station, with the proceeds intended for the orphanages. Found guilty by a North Korean court for crimes against the state, Lim was sentenced to a lifetime of hard labor. After two and a half years, he was released and returned to his home in Canada in August 2017. In a recent piece recounting his survival, Lim writes, "I believe that North Korea is where the devil resides."[1]

Lim's account of his two and a half years in a North Korean prison is harrowing, but his story is also hauntingly familiar, resembling the North American Protestant missionaries' account of their experiences in late 19th century Korea, or what they called the "Hermit Kingdom" (a name that is still in use today, albeit for North Korea). Like Lim, the missionaries had numerous building projects—hospitals, universities, secondary

[1] Hyeon Soo Lim, "I spent 919 days in a North Korean prison," *Toronto Life*, January 18, 2018.

schools, and of course, churches. But as we have seen, the theory and practice of "modernizing" Korea reached far beyond the more visible institutions of medicine and education; the missionaries transformed Korean writing practices, contributing to language reforms and writing Korean histories that they believed would help Korea reclaim their collective identity as an independent people—very much like Lim's belief in his humanitarian work as part of a divinely sanctioned recovery project for North Korea. Today, South Korea is among the leading exporters of missionaries worldwide, while North Korea cracks down on Christianity within their borders.

As we have seen, both the embrace and the forceful rejection of Christianity are spectral sites of Western metaphysics. It is this logic of nostalgia and retrieval, precisely in their appearance as a "Korean" project of self-understanding over against the colonial powers, that can be traced to the logic that undergirded colonial hegemony in the first place: a sovereign subject that seeks autonomy by constructing itself over and against the "other." By way of examining the position of Christianity in these varying versions of nationalism in Korea's intellectual history (particularly in the thought of Yun Ch'i-ho and Paek Nam-un), a deconstructive approach thus reveals this philosophical conundrum about the imagination of freedom. Religion and colonialism in Korea are more intricately entangled in such a way as to haunt both versions of postcolonial discourse.

As the trauma of Korea's ideological division continues to reverberate to this day, especially in recent talks of denuclearization and even a Peace Treaty, what then is the value of this deconstructing these competing strands of modern Korean historiography? For one thing, by offering a "metahistory" like that of Hayden White, we can see that the

philosophical force driving these historical narratives is not all that different: for in the thought of both Yun Ch'i-ho and Paek Nam-un, and certainly in the thought of Sin Ch'aeho, there is a vision of autonomy and freedom constituted in a Western metaphysical concept of human subjectivity. But there is another, perhaps more significant, critique that is offered in this deconstructive approach: Western metaphysics haunts the very concept of a postcolonial subject that is free from the structures of colonialism. The structure of hauntology forces a reckoning, in our own practices of writing and interpreting history, that there cannot be a disenchanted position of critique.

A reckoning with this structure of haunting thus shifts our relation to these historical archives. In both the leftist and rightist strands of Korean nationalism, there is the idea that a "pure" nationalism is possible—a claim that is predicated, as we have seen, on the assumption that there can only be one "right" way of interpreting history and therefore only one "right" historical legacy. This very claim operates according to the logic of retrieval, such that the practice of writing and reading history is to safeguard only one kind of legacy. But in exposing how these "pure" nationalist legacies are in fact haunted by the very terms of colonial hegemony, we can shift our understanding of legacy in terms of inheritance. Deconstruction, as a practice of critical reading, allows us to see the contradictions and tensions that have been inherited. In turn, our attention can shift from that of retrieval, to that of responsibility of reckoning with these tensions.

For instance, in many nationalist histories, Yun Ch'i-ho's thought is too easily dismissed because of his bourgeois status and proximity to the West and to Japan, with charges of collaboration compromising Yun's nationalism. But this dismissal of Yun is

also a denial of the proximity between the Western ideology of modernization and the emergence of nationalist reform movements at the turn of the century. A reckoning of Yun's theological and political claims in fact helps us understand the entanglement of industrial capitalism and the Protestant ethic of hard work that was disseminated in early modern Korea. By deconstructing this kind of ethical subjectivity—a Protestant ethic of moral depravity, coupled with the necessity of labor—which became the basis of Yun's vision for Korea's survival in the global economy, we can thus ask the following philosophical questions as inheritors of the Korean Enlightenment archive: has this kind of ethical subjectivity been reproduced in modern Korea, and is this the only kind of ethical system available? A critical engagement (rather than dismissal) of Yun's thought actually opens the possibility of such a critique.

Our engagement with Paek Nam-un's secular Marxist approach also shifts in this deconstructive analysis. While Paek may be seen as a more committed adherent (than Yun Ch'i-ho) to a postcolonial historiography, his narrative is also haunted by a Western vision of progress, freedom, and most importantly of what constitutes Korea's autonomy. As an intellectual in Japanese-occupied Korea, Paek was extremely critical of nativist approaches in Korean historiography. For Paek, these approaches only emphasized Korea's particularity; he therefore sought to establish that Korea's socio-economic history was actually in alignment with the universal narrative of human progress. According to his analysis, Japan's colonial enterprise actually disrupted and intervened in what could have been Korea's "autonomous capitalism." As we discussed, however, there are a few internal contradictions within Paek's postcolonial vision for Korea. As I have argued,

Korean nativism was not actually particularism; it was Western universalism disguised as Korean particularism. Paek's desire to have a scientific (and therefore universal) approach to Korean history was based on a Western notion of human freedom and autonomy—one that was always seeking mastery over other subjectivities and over nature. Thus, Paek's claims about what was "internal" and "external" to Korea's economic development only reinforced this logic of mastery that was driving colonialism itself. In exposing these tensions within Paek's historiography, we actually have the opportunity to unpack and critique the Western claim about universalism and historicism.

This analysis also shifts our relation to the Tan'gun Legend. What does this deconstructive approach reveal about the status of this Legend? Paek Nam-un's attempt to reclaim the Tan'gun Legend—his attempt to "get it right"—is precisely the site of haunting. While this dissertation has explored the function of this Legend in the historical narratives of the Protestant missionaries and that of Paek Nam-un, the Tan'gun Legend continues to hold a significant place in both Koreas' historical imaginations. The Japanese colonial attempts to discredit this myth, as well as the various Korean attempts to verify it, point first to the narrative significance in buttressing Korea's ethnic nationalism. But if we take a look at the various nationalist attempts to "retrieve" the "correct" version, we encounter yet another instance of what Kleinberg has called "ontological realism,"[2] the core assumption that some version of the Tan'gun event indeed happened. What we see in these various formulations of the Tan'gun Legend,

[2] Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 1.

however, is that no pure form of this myth can actually be recovered. Rather, what we encounter is the *desire* to construct an ethnic nationalist understanding of Korean identity and history. And that desire for retrieval is precisely the spectral site of a Western metaphysical notion of subjectivity.

Thus, in deconstructing Christian theological discourse (with the North American missionaries), its repetition (in the Enlightenment thought of Yun Ch'i-ho), and its erasure (in the Marxist historiography of Paek Nam-un), this dissertation has shown the logic of colonial hauntings in Korea's early modern intellectual history. It is not just that Protestant Christianity has taken a strong foothold in South Korea following the Korean War; it is that Christianity, as a theological basis for the Western metaphysical claims about human freedom and progress, haunts *both* religious and secular visions of postcolonial subjectivity. When Christianity is positioned in the history of Western metaphysics, and in its entanglement with the intellectual and cultural history that buttressed nineteenth-century imperialism, the reappearance of Christianity in Korea indicates the spectral presence of the West in Korea's colonial modernity. This deconstruction shifts not only our interpretation but also our *relation* to these historical archives, for as Kleinberg aptly notes, "All archives are haunted in this way because their structure is spectral."[3] If the very *structure* of the historical archive is spectral, this then shifts the way we understand the practice of critical reading—that we as historians or philosophers are not disenchanted beings. Rather, as inheritors of these archives (whether it is that of the missionaries, or Yun Ch'i-ho, or Paek Nam-un), a recognition of

[3] Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 10.

this inheritance is to see the structure of our own connectedness to a messy, colonial history.

In offering this deconstruction of Korea's early modern intellectual history, however, this dissertation is therefore not proposing that the status of Korean postcolonial discourse is a-political. Chapter 5 addresses this potential criticism that the deconstructive method (and the theory of haunting) is paralyzing and therefore not conducive to the possibility of action. Contrary to this idea that deconstruction is a-political, Derrida's method offers us a critical stance of interrogating emancipatory claims, such that the desire for continued work towards democracy is affirmed. It is when the promise of progress and arrival becomes reductive and all-encompassing that there is the potential of reinscribing the violence of erasure. Thus as I have discussed in Chapter 5 by also bringing in the writings of sociologist Avery Gordon, haunting—not just as a theory but as a lived and embodied experience—resists the tendency to reduce historical events (and the retelling of them) to cause and effect. Haunting thus forces a reckoning and a recognition of the failure of the metaphysical explanation—the failure of Hegelian historicism, the failure of nationalist explanations of postcolonial freedom.

What emerges in the recognition of this failure and of this aporia in historical explanations of Korea's colonialism is not simply a political concern, but a deeply moral question about our own lived connection to the hauntings of colonial hegemony: What are the ethical and political consequences of this idea of a sovereign subject? What are the effects of disseminating and reinscribing this narrow idea of subjectivity that will always produce an "inside" and an "outside," so as to construct "self" over against an

"other"? As we have seen in the space of this conundrum, the ethical consequences are clear—the violence is reproduced in the very attempt to overcome it. But in exposing this aporia, this internal contradiction that is present in a postcolonial desire, Derrida's theory of hauntology actually reframes this nostalgic concern for retrieval (an orientation towards an imaginary "pure" past or origin) in terms of inheritance (a recognition of our own entanglements with the past and all that we have inherited). In that sense, hauntology reframes the very concept of agency: not in terms of "ego," but in terms of collective responsibility to work towards democracy.

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