

Leftization of Education in South Korean Society Centering Around the Authorized Textbooks

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Abstract

In South Korea, education is no longer a place for learning, but a base for preparing ideological warriors, due to left-wing ideology education and fervent and conscientious teachers' union and strong left-leaning media. Since left-wing president Moon took office in 2017, omnidirectional "leftization" of education is ongoing in society. According to Prof. Chul-hong Kim, the current left-leaning "authorized" textbook system strenuously inculcates students with the appropriateness of materialistic historical views. A high school student engaged in the protest against the campaign of "state-designated" textbooks says at a press interview, "I'm a proletarian class. It's only the proletarian revolution that can change our social structure and its fundamental contradiction."¹ For reference, there are three kinds of textbooks: (1) state-designated textbook published by state (so, its copyright belongs to state), (2) authorized textbook published by private publishing companies, on the condition of passing through the government screening system (inviting criticism for its "poor screening"), (3) free-published textbook left entirely to the private sector without any state intervention. Prologue The second authorized textbook system is a "compromise" plan between state-led and privately-led textbooks. The main motive for adopting authorized textbooks (from previous state-designated textbooks) was to introduce "diversity of views and opinions" in Korean education, but a conservative journalist Gap-je Cho concluded - from analyzing 14 authorized history textbooks - that "promoting educational diversity" by authorized textbook system ended in failure. Because a great majority of left-wing professors and teachers take part in writing historical textbooks on the basis of Marxist class struggle theory: that is, Koreanized "popular view of history" or populism-based historical perspective (民衆史觀). These authorized textbooks are adopted by almost 99% of high schools across the country. Moreover, they tend to implant one "monolithic" idea (historical materialism) in the consciousness of young students. According to Cho, the authorized textbook system mired in controversy is degraded into a "certificate" of anti-state, pro-communist education, in place of diversity.²

Keywords: leftization, education, south korea, authorized textbooks

Introduction

Today the terms "left-wing" and "right-wing" are used as symbolic labels for soi-disant progressives and conservatives in South Korea. A hot controversy over the relationship between left-wing progressives and right-wing conservatives is a snare of Korean academic society, almost impossible to escape once you are trapped in. The left-right metaphor is a specialty of the Earth. At first glance, the concept of left and right seems to indicate direction, but it's almost completely static in reality. On the contrary, the idea of progressivism or conservatism can be different for different situations. Being "progressive" is up to those to criticize the power of vested interests and the problem of dominant ideology, and to be emancipated from them. Both left and right wings can be progressive; therefore, progressivism is no longer the exclusive property of leftism, despite the unilateral claim of South Korean leftists who want to preempt/monopolize progressive values and really don't like being called "communists," "Reds," or "followers of North Korea."

¹ Hyo-jung Kim, [in Korean] "If we consider five big events that leftize Korean society," *Weekly Chosun*, December 15, 2015. Retrieved from <http://weekly.chosun.com/client/news/viw.asp?nNewsNumb=002386100005&ctcd=C02>

² Gap-je Cho, [in Korean] "The authorized textbook system: why has it failed?," *Chosun Media*, September 23, 2015. Retrieved from <http://pub.chosun.com/client/news/viw.asp?cate=C03&mcate=M1008&nNewsNumb=20150918393&nidx=18394>

The biggest variable in the political propensity of South Koreans is North Korea. South Korean leftists are very compassionate towards North Korea from a nationalistic point of view, but the concept of nationalism is considered as a right-wing element in the West. Historically, those who called themselves “progressives” have not only captured the political agendas, such as human rights, anti-war campaign, and anti-nuclear movement, but also struggled for the realization of their objects. However, South Korean leftists called “progressives” bizarrely keep silent about the “human rights” in North Korea. *Vis-à-vis* the North Korean nuclear issue, they are busy downplaying the danger of NK’s nuclear development. So, they voluntarily lose their progressiveness. South Korean leftists claim to advocate progressivism or democracy, but they are branded as pro-North, anti-American, anti-Japanese Koreans, Gangnam leftists¹ and the Reds. On the other hand, Korean rightists claim to stand for capitalism, liberalism, market economy, individualism, and anti-communism. They go by the nicknames “conservatives,” “anti-communists,” “industrial warriors,” “authoritarianists,” “pro-Japanese/pro-American Koreans,” “Taegeuk (Korean national flag) crusaders,” and “*tultak* people whose dentures are stiff (crazy conservative old people).²

We can also enumerate Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser as the representative foreign thinkers who have largely influenced South Korean left-wing scholars. At the bottom of Korean leftism, the old-fashioned *Juche* ideology is also added, due to Korean historical particularity (national division of North and South).³ Thus, South Korean left-wingers, with the catchphrase “*unriminzokkiri* (Our People Together),”⁴ are just “pro-North” Koreans locked in the old communist frames, without knowing the living zeitgeist called “progress” that keeps evolving all over the world.

South Korean left and right-wings are now engaged in an ideological war of attrition, but this war is not using force of arms, but high-tech cultural media. According to prof. Chul-hong Kim, the so-called textbook war heating up in the educational world is a historical war, and this historical war is nothing but a synchronic cultural war. It means that Korean left-wings could seize cultural hegemony in art, culture and education, etc. According to Prof. Young-hoon Rhee, Korean history textbook controversy is a religious war to liberate our “free reason” from the demonized nationalistic powers. To understand the “untimely” textbook war, we should know how left-wing ideology has taken roots in all sectors of the country. Their beginning was in the university towns in 1980s.

This paper is divided into two diachronic/synchronic sections: (1) five big events which can move South Korean society into the left (2) education under the darker shadow of socialism.

II. Five big events which move South Korean society into the left

1. Introduction of *Juche* ideology into university towns in 1980s

Left-leaning Korean textbooks are a byproduct of what we call “popular view of history” (as an opposite of elite view of history) that came in the eighties. The mutations of historical materialism take the form of: (1) popular view of history in South Korea and (2) *Juche* (self-reliance) view of history in North Korea. The former brings “people” (instead of farmers and workers) up as main protagonists of history, whereas the latter claim to advocate “humans” (instead of materials) as prime movers of history. For reference, the *Juche* ideology is no more than a deification of Il-sung Kim (1912-1994), communist dictator of North Korea. Those who support the popular view of history (民衆史觀) do not only consider Republic of Korea

¹ These days, the newly-coined term, “Gangnam leftists,” is quite fashionable in Korean society. The term, which refers to leftist activists who reside in the rich district of South Seoul, is similar to the pejorative American term, “limousine leftists”: Seong-kon Kim, “Gangnam leftists vs. Gangbuk rightists,” *The Korea Herald*, May 17, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20110517000825>

² The *tultak* refers to the elderly people who behave in an entitled manner, or, in some annoying manner. It comes from two Korean words “*tulhi*” (dentures) and “*taktak*” (onomatopoeia for click-clacking sounds).

³ *Juche* is usually translated as “self-reliance.” It is the official state ideology of North Korea, described by the government as “Kim Il-sung’s original, brilliant and revolutionary contribution to national and international thought.” It postulates that “man is the master of his destiny,” that the North Korean masses are to act as the “masters of the revolution and construction” and that by becoming self-reliant and strong a nation can achieve true socialism.

⁴ The term can be broken down into *uri*, meaning “we,” “our,” or “collective self”; *minjok*, meaning “race,” “people,” “nation,” or in this case simply “Koreans”; and *kkiri*, meaning “with,” “between,” “together,” in some cases with an exclusionary nuance, presumably intended in this case to convey the notion that Korean issues are to be solved by the Koreans themselves and not third parties or superpowers.

(ROK) as a colony of American imperialism, but also sees Korean modern and contemporary history in a conflicting structure frame “ruling class vs. common people” in form of Marxism-Leninism.

In the mid-1980s, student movement started to metamorphose into heterogeneous one by taking *Juche* ideas as a guiding ideology for action. The political pamphlet *Subordination and Cry* being passed around secretly in 1983 marked the beginning of *Juche* ideology movement in South Korea. According to this pamphlet, Korea is a colony of American imperialism and the U.S. has a control of Korean military regime. With the advent of famous *Letters of Kang-chul* (in the form of sending letters by a labor activist called “Kang-chul (pen name)” to young students) in 1986, *Juche* ideology became mainstream in university towns. Kang-chul asserts that 100 years of Korean modern history have been dotted with invasions and people’s struggles against Japanese/American imperialism, and that Korean society is still colonized by US, so it’s necessary to be freed from it through the communist revolution. In the past, most South Korean activists saw both North and South Korean military regimes as their main adversaries, but they target only the U.S. and its imperial invasions. On March 1986, the Confederation of Students for National Salvation was founded at Seoul National University. On April 1986, this confederation formed a struggle committee for anti-fascist independence, anti-American democratization (*Jamintu*). This struggle committee gained the hegemony in nation-wide student movement through their fierce struggles for popular democracy and launched the Nation Council of Student Representatives (NCSR) in 1987. Now, many of the top positions of the left-wing Moon government are occupied by people who used to be key-members of the NCSR.

2. Launch of Korean Confederation of Trade Unions in 1995

The big struggle of workers after the June struggle¹ served as a momentum to provide them with political empowerment. The camp of labor movement could not only gain self-confidence through 3 300 labor dispute cases, but also concentrate their energy to create another new labor union against the first and only legalized Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU).² In 1990, 600 branches of labor union took part in forming a Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). In the beginning, the Young-sam Kim government (1993-1998) considered it as illegal, but the president Kim decided to accept “multiple” labor unions in the wake of general strike by the KCTU. After the president Kim’s meeting with two opposition leaders, the KCTU was finally legalized. Soon, they entered the arena of politics. In 1997 they formed a new labor party to run a radical candidate in the 1997 presidential election. Mr. Kwon, chairperson of the KCTU, became a presidential candidate and he gained 1.2% of the vote (about 300 000 votes). In 2011 they reorganized the Unified Progressive Party (UPP). In 2014 the Constitutional Court dissolved the UPP by founding it illegal.³ According to Prof. Chul-hong Kim, the political struggle of the KCTU is an external war with the US, but also an internal war between bourgeois class symbolized by Korean conglomerates called “*chaebol*” and workers represented by the KCTU. As a result, previous anti-American and anti-imperialistic *Juche* movement in university towns in 1980s is now passed down to the KCTU.

3. Legalization of Korean Teachers & Educational Workers' Union (KTU)

The Korean Teachers & Educational Workers' Union (KTU) was founded in 1989. In 2013 Young-ju Go, chairman of the Foundation of Broadcast Culture, maintained that the reality of “true education” the KTU claimed to advocate is a “communist” education. Chairman Go, a former public safety prosecutor, came to read a secret memo of suspects by investigating the trial on the “periodicals of people’s education” in 1985 and learned their true identity. It said that it’s necessary to conscientize elementary, middle and high school students, and further to organize a union of teachers to achieve people’s revolution. When the reality of true education was reported in the press, more than 90% teachers of the KTU severed themselves from the organization. Those who did not secede from the KTU were dismissed till the early 1990s. Since then, they have started political struggle against the government to re-legalize the KTU. This struggle by the first generation of the KTU lasted almost ten years. The left-wing Dae-jung Kim government (1998-2003) legalized the KTU. Consequently, the KTU could move into high gear with their solid organizational power.

¹ The June Struggle was a nationwide democracy movement in South Korea that generated mass protests from June 10 to June 29, 1987.

² The Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) was formed in 1960, after a military coup and the dissolution of the General Federation of Korean Trade Unions and its affiliates. The FKTU was placed under the guidance of the military authorities. The FKTU was the sole legal trade union center in South Korea until the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions was finally recognized, in November 1999.

³ The South Korean government petitioned the Constitutional Court of Korea to dissolve the UPP due to their alleged pro-North Korea views in November 2013, two months after the UPP members allegedly involved in the 2013 South Korean “sabotage plot” were arrested

In 2001, Soo-ho Lee, former chairman of the KTU, claimed that the National Security Law¹ is an evil law to obstruct advanced ideas & learning, progressive social movement, and to foster “clique consciousness,” saying “discard your guard against North Korea!” Indeed, teachers of the KTU continuously shouted anti-Americanism, anti-war peace, abolition of national security law and withdrawal of US armed forces in South Korea, as their provocative slogans. In 2000s, many of them were often arrested or indicted for violating the national security law.

According to *Joongang Monthly Magazine: November 2004 Issues*, the analysis suggests that left-wing camp will succeed in seizing power for 20 years, thanks to militant teachers of the KTU leading and using the public opinion. Since the legalization of the KTU, the left-wing conscientization movement has started in earnest, in order to develop the 2nd and 3rd generations of the KTU. The KTU was and still is the nucleus of leftist movement in South Korean society. The kernel of opposition forces against the restoration movement of state-designated textbooks is the KTU. All key people involved in the political struggle to abolish state-designated textbooks come from the KTU.

4. Establishment of Korean Film Commission in 1999

In 1999 the left-wing Dae-jung Kim government disbanded the Korea Film Promotion Corporation and established the Korean Film Commission. From then on, Korean film world began to be rapidly leftistized. For example, Korean People Artist Federation (KPAF) founded in 1988 by 838 pan-genre artists fighting against dictatorship and institutionalized arts took the lead in the leftist “people” art movement. Since 1993, the KPAF has transformed from previous resistance-driven into more democratic, more mass-oriented movement: from voluntary into incorporated association to expand throughout the whole country. In 2002, 700 people in culture and art communities formed a support movement called “Rohsamo” (literally meaning people who love Roh).² With the inauguration of the leftist Moo-hyun Roh government (2003-2008), they gained political empowerment in culture and art world. For one thing, Chang-dong Lee, a left-wing film director, served as South Korea’s Minister of Culture and Tourism from 2003 to 2004. Yoon-soo Kim, former chairman of the KPAF, was appointed as the director of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA). With the rightist Myung-bak Lee government (2008-2013), some right-wings were appointed, but it was difficult for them to put down roots in the left-leaning movie world. There is a considerable problem with some hit movies over the most recent 8-9 year period. The Korean films *Shiri* (1999),³ *Joint Security Area* (2000),⁴ and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* (2005) skillfully erase the ideological difference of two Koreas by leaving the audience “defenseless” against communist ideas. For reference, *Welcome to Dongmakgol* that entered the 3rd grade middle school textbook describes Korea during the Korean War in 1950. Soldiers from both North and South, as well as an American pilot, find themselves in a secluded village, its residents largely unaware of the outside world, including the war. The story is based on two themes: (1) the cooperation and reconciliation between North and South Korean soldiers who fight together against the merciless attack of American bombers and (2) their glorious death. Another anti-American films *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* (2004)⁵ and *May 18* (2007)⁶ are also included the textbooks. In particular, the *Host* (2006)⁷ is portraying US as the root of evil. *Veteran* (2015) that recorded over ten million viewers⁸ is based on anti-business, anti-capitalistic sentiment.

On the other hand, South Korean television dramas - *Misaeng: Incomplete Life* (2014) or *Good Manager* (2017) about which young people are enthusiastic - tend to instigate a mockery or a hatred for big companies. For example, the TV

¹ The National Security Act is a South Korean law enforced since 1948 with the avowed purpose “to secure the security of the State and the subsistence and freedom of nationals, by regulating any anticipated activities compromising the safety of the State.” In other words, the act made communism illegal.

² Moo-hyun Roh (1946 -2009) was a South Korean politician who served as President of South Korea (2003–2008).

³ *Shiri* was the first Hollywood-style big-budget blockbuster to be produced in the new Korean film industry. It also contained a story that draws on strong Korean national sentiment to fuel its drama.

⁴ This mystery thriller film concerns an investigation into the circumstances surrounding a fatal shooting incident within the DMZ, the heavily fortified border that separates North and South Korea

⁵ It tells the story of two brothers who are forcibly drafted into the South Korean army at the outbreak of the Korean War.

⁶ The film is based on the massacre at Gwangju on May 18, 1980. It occurred when General Doo-hwan Chun tried to eliminate any rebels by using military force. If *Taegukgi* transcendentalizes cruel war into sublime brotherhood, *May 18* is a propaganda movie instigating “antagonism against Korean army” by highlighting the crackdown of air bone troops.

⁷ It’s a 2006 South Korean monster film directed by Bong Joon-ho.

⁸ *Veteran* is a 2015 South Korean action comedy film written and directed by Seung-wan Ryoo.

drama *Good Manager* by the main public broadcaster KBS¹ starts with the following publicity texts: “pocketing, embezzling and a bribe paradise Korea!” That’s always the way big companies operate with bribery and unauthorized business operations or Korea is a Hell Chosun (old Korea). It’s a socialist way of thinking to deny income/status gaps based on individual competitions. This anti-capitalistic mode of thinking is rapidly spreading through the left-leaning mass media. Ironically, it is easy to see some young people enjoy capitalist lifestyle, openly saying “changing societies is not possible without breaking down capitalist class by working class!”

5. Adoption of authorized textbooks in 2003

The authorized textbook system was first introduced into history textbooks after the enforcement of 7th curriculum (2003), under the left-wing Moo-hyun Roh government. The current authorized textbook system was formed in 2010. According to the book *How have Korean history textbooks been leftized*, it started with young scholars influenced by the popular view of history (民衆史觀) in 1980s. They were jumping to write Korean history textbooks with enthusiasm. They formed a think-tank on people’s historiography after the mid-1980s and vigorously carried out two missions: (1) severe criticism on previous state-designated textbooks in the name of diversity and (2) mass publication of new textbooks for wider public use. For example, 5 out of 6 writers of authorized history textbooks by Samwha Printing are members of the KTU or the Association of Korean History Teachers (AKHT) that already have over 2 000 members (1/3 of all history teachers across the country). Thus, the golden age of authorized history textbooks has been accomplished by Korean popular historians, teachers of the KTU and teachers of the AKHT endorsing people’s history or history from below. This actual war on textbooks shows well that Korean leftists’ conscientization movement did not come overnight; therefore, it’s necessary to understand the historical contexts to win this textbook war between two opposed camps.

III. Education under the darker shadow of socialism

1. On the Alert: Korean-styled *yutori* education

Three prohibition policies and three “noes” policies Korean left-wing superintendents of education are zealously pushing forward may be summarized as follows: 3 prohibition policies of prerequisite learning, individual university admission exam and out-of-school activities and 3 no-exam, no-homework and no-discipline policies.² The real condition of Korean education is compared to the case of failure of Japanese “*yutori*” (latitude) education or education that gives children room to grow.³ The *yutori* education was introduced into Japan in 1990s in order to better support “experience & activity-focused education” escaping from excessive competition in entrance examinations or rigid education system that is focused around cramming and memorization. However, Japan abolished it in 2007 due to marked decline in the academic ability of students and disparities of student achievement. In recent years, the mass media in Japan have used this phrase to criticize drops in scholastic ability.

Nevertheless, the actual left-wing Moon government is pushing for Korean-styled *yutori* education under the highest goal of reducing heavy study burden or academic stress on students and excessive private education expenses. By way of illustration, the prohibition of prerequisite learning ignores large differences among students in the classroom. So, it’s difficult for teachers to give rational guidance to top-ranked students. As a result, it inversely accelerates the collapse of public education in crisis. Left-wingers bitterly oppose the “rankization” of schools and students, because they think it fosters “social disharmony” among students by raising some privileged students to the modern day peerage. In regard to three “noes” schools, left-wing superintendents are immersed in child-centered education. They consider fierce entrance exam-oriented competition and blind education fever, as deep-rooted problems to eradicate. Saying “our children are not happy” with insistence, they tend to exaggerate the agony of students and the side-effects of rankization.

The problems facing the Korean education caught in a trap of leftist values can be summarized into two words: high expenditure and low efficiency. Even though more than 60 trillion wons (Korean monetary unit) of annual budget (2017) were poured into education, more than half of middle and high school students could not follow their regular classes. The academic ability of university students is showing steep declines, but the competitiveness of Korean education is also

¹ Korean Broadcasting System.

² In addition, policymakers are strongly advocating ‘three bans’ - on universities’ own written admission tests, grading of high schools and college admissions in return for financial contributions

³ *Yutori* education may be translated as “relaxed education” or “education free from pressure.”

absurdly low in over-educated world. According to IMD (International Institute for Management Development) Korean education competitiveness is ranked 37th in 2017, down 4 notches from last year.

On the other hand, Korean private education market amounts to more than 18 trillion won. It could leave the public education teetering on the brink of collapse, and mass-produce “silver poors” (poor senior citizens) or “edu-poors,”¹ due to huge private education costs forming a great part in their household economy.

What is the main cause of overheated private education culture prevailing in Korean society? It is said to be a byproduct of the Era of High Economic Growth. In the past, the most important key to success was to gain entry to the best universities. It was easier for those graduated from prestigious universities to get a good job or a rapid promotion in company. Thus, a growing number of parents began to invest in private education as a way to make their children successful. Nowadays, however, the overgrowth of private education market comes from the crisis of public education locked in the trap of left-wing values.

	2017				
	Total private education expenses (hundred million won)	Annual average private education expenses per student (10,000 won)	Monthly average private education expenses per student (10,000 won)	Private education participation rate (%)	Private education participation time (average time per week)
Total	186,223	325.3	27.1	70.5	6.1
Elementary school	81,195	303.6	25.3	82.3	6.7
Middle school	48,181	348.8	29.1	66.4	6.4
High school	56,847	340.5	28.4	55.0	4.9
Regular high school	54,568	396.3	33.0	61.2	5.5

Recently, Korean-styled “open education” inspired from Japanese *yutori* education to eradicate the evil of private education is being grafted onto an “innovation school model” started to fuel innovation in public education in 2011. The current Moon government has pledged to expand innovation schools throughout the whole country as his main election promise by emphasizing on the state’s responsibility for education. Now, the innovation school model is operated at 1 164 elementary, middle, high schools in 14 cities and provinces, except Daegu, Ulsan, North Gyeongsang province. Why is the Moon government carrying forward such innovative schools, in spite of their fundamental problems: (1) anti-state education in the name of “people” and (2) decline in scholastic ability? In 2017, the nomination of some schools as “innovation school” foundered as a result of objections of school parents and students. A nationwide scholastic achievement test among school children in 2016 shows 11.9% of innovation high school students were placed in the “deficient” category – almost triple the national average (4.5%). According to Mr. Lee, a 49 year-old school parent who had sent his son to an innovation middle school, it was very difficult for his son to catch up with his school work after going to non-innovation high school. Furthermore, most innovation schools have a high proportion of teachers of the KTU in charge of innovation school operation program.

The extension of innovation schools is also the common pledge of left-wing education superintendents. The normalization of public education is the foremost task they are undertaking under the banners of experience study, nature education, and equality & community-oriented education. Most innovation schools neither require experience study expenses, nor school supplies, because almost everything students need is provided by each innovation school authority. Where does such overwhelming financial support for innovation schools come from? Being designated as innovation school needs the approval of more than 50% of teachers and school governors. If once designated with the superintendent’s permission,

¹ “Edu-poor,” a South Korean neologism deriving from the words “education” and “poor,” is a nod to the financial difficulties faced by families who spend a large portion of their income on their children’s education.

they can receive one hundred million won per year. This means that the financial source they enjoy is based on “taxes” (educational budget) that can be allotted into non-innovation schools. Even though left-wing superintendents and high-level public educational officials put enormous budget of ten billion won into innovation schools, many of them show their “duplicity” not to send their own children into such innovation schools which have become synonymous with the decline of academic performance.

Like a “paradox” where left-wing economic policy for indigent people gets them in trouble far from reducing income polarization, left-wing education policy is also counterproductive. As the final outcome, children from low-income families are the biggest losers whose opportunity for upward social mobility is cut off, as a result of marked decline in their scholastic ability and poor accumulation of human resources. Faced with growing distrust of most school parents about more than 1 000 innovation schools all over the nation, left-wing superintendents attempt to adopt a new evaluation system capable of estimating the imagination and creativity of students. They come out with a plan to change old evaluation criteria, like moving the goalposts for being goalless in football game! However, emotional ability, void of basic scholastic ability is not getting on in good shape. How to measure numerical values of human imagination? Under the education stuck in socialist hard-core mindset, children of low-income families are more likely to sink into a swamp of poverty without even knowing the reason. For example, dumbing down education means more people unable to think for themselves and challenge a government. So, poor school parents should not to be fooled by the beautiful slogan of “innovation” or “progress.” A majority of educational policies propelled by left-wing government are all relevant “universal welfare services,” but the nation’s finances giving priority to universal welfare and/or overusing pork-barrel politics are bound to be bankrupt, under the banner of educational socialism.

In the hope of enhancing the “fairness” of education or restoring the “social ladder” to move up, the Moon government promised to adopt the abolition of “educational discrimination” in hiring or in workplace settings (cf. adoption of “blind” hiring to remove undue discrimination), the fairness of law school admission test, and the extension of supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds (at the college entrance exam), students with disabilities, students of multicultural families or students escaping from North Korea. But the hypothesis that the enlargement of educational opportunities to socially disadvantaged groups would promote social equality turned out to be false in 1960s. Therefore, the mission of Korean education is to liberate Korea from a downward standardization education, as a shortcut of retrogression.

2. Politicization of education with the left-leaning authorized textbooks

Under the authorized text book system, it is more likely to produce citizens with ideologically biased view of history, than to acknowledge more plural conceptions on history. The legitimacy of the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea) is negatively described or even denied in many authorized history textbooks, while North Korean communist regime is favorably depicted, despite of North’s provocative actions against the South and their military despotism. In its new guidance for authorized history textbooks to be used by middle and high school students from 2020, the left-wing government said it will change the definition of its national and political system from “free democracy” to simply “democracy.” The Ministry of Education also changed 1948 from being the founding year of the ROK to being the founding year of the government of the ROK.¹ Right-wing camps have contended that the removal of “free” from “free democracy” could lead to mistaken interpretations, such as “social democracy” or “people’s democracy,” whereas left-wing camps have insisted that “democracy” is a more neutral term.

For reference, Bruce Cumings has been known as “the left’s leading scholar of Korean history.” Cumings’s *Origins of the Korean War* translated into Korean and introduced in 1986 has great effect on the epistemological change on Korean contemporary history.² He asserts that the 1950-53 Korean War was a civil war due to deep-rooted class conflicts and the US government was responsible for starting this war. He likens the indiscriminate American bombing of North Korea to genocide. Cumings’s “revisionist” interpretation was enough for young Koreans under the repressive Doo-whan Chun regime to get excited. In such a period even hard to obtain research materials on Korean contemporary history, his revisionist view of history, well organized with the refined theory of “class conflicts” was unquestioningly accepted among Korean student activists and left-wing scholars. As a result, a recent study found that 69% of high school students think

¹ Regarding the changed definition of the modern nation’s founding, the ministry explained that clarifying August 15, 1948, as the day of the foundation of South Korea’s government is meant to respect the legitimacy of the provisional Korean government set up during Japan’s colonial rule in 1919 and the history of Korea’s independence movements.

² Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War* (2 vols), Princeton University Press, 1981, 1990.

South Korea invaded North Korea in Korean War!¹ Because these students are indoctrinated with erroneous national sentiment and misdirected anti-American sentiment through authorized history textbooks written by their teachers of the KTU. Nowadays, we make an issue of Japanese history textbooks' tilt toward the (far) right, but we don't need to raise a question about the leftization of Korean history textbooks?

Injecting a lopsided (anti-foreign/anti-capitalistic) view of history into young students' brain is no longer an education, but a discipline or a brainwashing. According to prof. Young-hoon Rhee, a member of the Textbook Forum of the New Right Party, young historians with the ardent "popular view of history" obtained the right to write historical textbooks, and their "cultural power" was more consolidated with the enforcement of authorized textbooks. The original aim to adopt the authorized textbook system was to improve the quality of history textbook (designated as an "elective subject" at that time) through the competition of various textbooks, and to present a variety of views on history to students. However, more than 90% of authorized textbooks are written by left-wing writers and the content of any textbook they wrote is one-sided and monotonous under the shadow of socialism. Even they joined forces to kick one right-leaning textbook by Kyohaksa publishing out, because the latter is ideologically different. They already paid attention to the creative power in human consciousness. Because they know well the decisive role of human consciousness (super-structure) in the change of sub-structure: that is, in the transition from capitalist society to socialist paradise.

IV. Conclusion

Public education plays a pivot role in Korean education, but it faces a serious crisis because of disruptions in classroom, remarked drops in scholastic ability of students and loss of teachers' authority, etc. The causes of collapse in public education come from (1) distrust of school parents, vis-à-vis the public education based on "standardization policy" that makes "educational excellence" difficult and leads to "downward leveling," despite of its initial positive effects, (2) national college entrance system which shows how often it is changed by educational officials, according to left or right-wing government propensity, (3) relatively low-grade education system in comparison to other OECD countries and top-down management system controlled by schoolmaster and educational officials, and finally (4) too much politicization of Korean education.

"A bird flies with two left and right wings." It's the title of the essay published by Korean left-wing scholar Young-hee Lee in 1994. According to him, we Koreans have been living for over half a century after liberation, under a delusion that right-wing is sacred, but left-wing is evil. He denounced blind anti-communist and reactionary ideas, as remnants of the Cold War era prevailing in South Korean society. Thus, this phrase is a representation of extremely right-leaning Korean society according to him. But now the shoe is on the other foot. Ever since this left-wing government came to power, the phrase has become the catchphrase of right-wing opposition party. Right-wingers insist bird can fly longer with an appropriate balance of two wings and politics too. There is no future for a country tilted excessively to the left.

Leftization of Korean education has been ongoing for many years, so Korean education moves to the left without break. As you can see in the case of a high school student who took to the streets to protest against "state-designated" textbooks (you can also find her on YouTube video), our education field is an arena of opposition between left and right-wingers, and between teachers of the KTU and non-KTU. There are three main objectives at which left-wingers are aiming: (1) seizure of public education, (2) control on the management of private education, without regard to the infringement on private property rights and (3) "human remolding" by education. Under the slogan "putting humans first," they have been trying to create new human races who are anti-American, anti-Japanese and pro-North Korean to reproduce huge "left-wing groups" armed with anti-liberalism, anti-market economy sentiment through left-leaning education.

To my way of thinking, Friedrich Hayek in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) best sums leftism/rightism up by considering the former as "planning" or "collectivism," and the latter as "liberalism" or "individualism." Those who control ideologically-divided Korean peninsula are "planners" who plan everything for the benefit of many. However, their plan is based on totalitarian ideology to deny individual freedom itself. To propel their plan they need large popular groups' support; therefore, planning and collectivism are, inevitably, two sides of the same coin. In general, these "popular groups" they need to seize power are not an aggregate of highly refined, educated individuals, but non-creative and non-independent people on the basis of numbers. The latter is vulnerable to political propaganda, easily fooled by rumors (fake news) and prey for emotional instigation. This public is large human resources to inflate the size of totalitarian party. Why do "our planners"

¹ A North Korean invasion of the South is an established historical fact.

spend money (from “taxes” paid by us) freely to unspecified mass people? Under the political-patronage tactic to gain votes, people tend to lose capacity to make their own way. Don’t you agree that young people with infinite potentials for being future Steve Jobs or Mark Zuckerberg become lethargic “slaves” by receiving one million won per year as a gift? This is really a dreadful dystopia! Political philosophers like Tocqueville or Lord Acton warned socialism means slavery. Free democracy is fundamentally based on individuals or individualism, and it is irreconcilable with collective socialism which is proved “retarded,” through the failure of communist countries of the 20th century. For example, China and North Korea claim to stand for people’s democracy, but they are nations of deformed bureaucratic “state capitalism” where the totalitarian state systematically exploits workers and people in fact, as the greatest capitalist who controls all modes of production

To conclude, let’s come back to the problem of historical textbook between two camps, in relation to the leftization of Korean education. As mentioned above, it started with the law revision from state-designated to authorized textbooks of elementary, middle and high schools by the left-wing Moo-hyun Roh government in 2005, in order to seek “diversity.” Diversity is a virtue to win the highest praise in the period of cultural relativism, but the diversity itself has not an absolute value. Since the enforcement of authorized textbooks, many younger scholars have taken part in writing history textbooks. They were specialized in Korean modern and contemporary history in a heyday of “popular view of history” in 1980-90, so the popular view of history (民衆史觀) becomes a political hot potato. For that reason, the controversy of textbooks is often considered to be the opposition between popular and non-popular views of history. These “popular” historians (民衆史家) apply one schematic Marxist historical materialism to Korean history, like a Procrustean bed: from primitive communism into ancient slavery, medieval feudalism, modern capitalism, contemporary socialism and finally future-oriented communist society. This stereotyped social developmentalism is not only a normative frame in writing Korean modern and contemporary history, but a theoretical basis for revolutionary strategy. Surprisingly, young students learn Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945) or history of the Korean independence movement, in the way popular historians/left-wing activists read history as class struggle. So, students think the U.S Military Government in Korea (1945-1948) after liberation was another form of imperialistic invasion, so they consider ROK (South Korea), as a colony of American imperialism. Here, romanticized people (民衆) are the main subjects of liberation from oppressive imperialism. Popular historians divide all social classes into two categories: (1) workers, farmers and socialists and (2) Japanese/American imperialists, landlords and capitalists. The class struggle between two opposed groups can be solved only by a communist revolution. This linear pattern of popular view of history is very similar to that of *Juche* view of history in North Korea. As long as left-leaning “authorized” textbooks are used in classroom by teachers of the KTU, there are high probabilities of incessantly reproducing young generation with socialism-friendly attitude. According to teachers of the KTU, “the question is always with capitalism, and the only answer to this is socialism.” But socialism is a fraud for exploiting people using “unreachable socialist dream” to bait the hook. The writers and teachers of authorized textbooks speak up for “diversity” as an icon of the era. Thus, they seem to be leaders of relativism in appearance, but they are renegades of relativism by absolutizing diversity. In fact, diversity is long gone in the Korean academic world dominated by the great majority of popular historians. So, a right-wing opposition member says 90% of Korean historians are left-wings.

In Korea, the problem of historical interpretation is no longer the exclusive property of historians. According to Prof. Chul-hong Kim, it’s not a debate among scholars, but a “war of culture,” because Korea had a war due to ideological difference. After Korea’s liberation in 1947, South Korea choose free democracy and free market system, while North Korea, people’s democracy and planned economy denying the right of private property. This ideological war escalated into Korean War (1950-53) that ended with the armistice, not a peace treaty, leaving the Koreans technically in a state of war. The Korean War was not a war where Korean people fought each other on behalf of US and Soviet Union, but an internal war free democracy vs. people’s democracy. And this war is currently underway in South Korean society, with remaining unsolved conflicts between two camps. The existence of authorized text books is living proof that there are people who claim to change regime into people’s democracy by denying the current free democracy and market economy. The problem of leftized textbooks is a war of culture. So, it’s necessary to regain the cultural hegemony from those immersed in left-wing ideas deeply rooted in Korean art, culture and education, to win this one-hundred-year old cultural war adjusting a balance of two wings.

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