

Socialism, the National Question, and East Asia in Colonial Korea: 1937-1945

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This article examines how the national question and the issue of East Asia were dealt with in two prominent proposals concerning the East Asian community that were presented as part of the Japanese government's 1938 declaration. Not only Japanese intellectuals but also colonial socialists joined in the debates following the announcement of the New Order of East Asia. Colonial advocates of each approach (that of the East Asian Community and that of the East Asian League) suggested different understandings of "the nation" and "East Asia," which were intermingled and cannot be assigned uniquely to the proponents of one group. Even though the relationship between these two conceptions was not always aligned, it is interesting to find a correlation between the support for a definite national identity and the universalistic presentation of East Asia. The debates between colonial socialists on the New Order of East Asia illustrates how ideas of nationhood lead to the understanding of East Asia and how such an approach extended beyond East Asia to the global arena.

Keywords: East Asian Community, East Asian League, Socialism, thought conversion, national identity

Introduction

The national question was at the center of attention and debate in colonial Korea. The nationalists, who ascended in the first half of the 1920s only to be on the defensive following the emergence of socialism, and even the socialists themselves, who stood for so-called "socialist internationalism," had to grapple with the national question at hand during the colonial period. Nevertheless, it became clear in the mid 1930s, when Japanese imperialism was preoccupied

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with the invasion of China, that the prospect for national independence or liberation in any form was impossible. The national question of colonial Korea went unresolved as the nationalists slowly lost their influence and the socialist movement was defeated.

Such an ill-fated trajectory of the national question was not limited to colonial Korea. In China and Japan, during this period the national question was interwoven with international, especially East Asian cooperation, and conflict. Having secured a bridgehead for the invasion of the continent after the Manchurian Incident in 1931, Japan launched the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and marched deep into Chinese territory. China fiercely resisted this aggression at a pan-national level, a resistance which transcended ideologies and regions. In this context, Ozaki (1997 [1939], 41) wrote that “the answer to the mystery of why China is still standing this day despite its backward economy, unstable political system, and inadequate and weak army, lies with the national question.”

The huge eruption of nationalism in China sent strong shock waves throughout Japan. On November 3, 1938, the Konoe Fumimaro Cabinet made a declaration on the *Tōa shin jitsujo* (the New Order of East Asia, *Tonga sin chilsō* in Korean). The New Order of East Asia (hereafter, New Order), drafted against the backdrop of Japan’s reconsideration of the Chinese national question, stated that Japan will stop the military invasion of China and seek to secure permanent security in East Asia together with China. After the announcement, various propositions, including the East Asian Community (*Tōa Kyōdōtai*; *Tonga hyōptong ch’e* in Korean) and the East Asian League (*Tōa Renmei*; *Tonga yōnmaeng* in Korean) appeared to hammer out the details of the plan for the New Order.¹

Although the new plan was intended to turn the tide around for a Japan that was struggling on the Chinese battle front, the plan itself affected the national identity of Japan. The proposal to seek mutual existence and peace in East Asia on equal terms with China inevitably signaled a revision and negotiation of the Japanese nationalism that had emphasized exceptionality and peculiarity since the Meiji Restoration and throughout the process of modernization. If Japan were to be included in the New Order and were to become a member of a community or alliance, then clearly Japan could no

1. Ozaki (1997 [1939], 36) wrote that after the announcement of the statement, a myriad of proposals on the New Order such as the theory on the East Asian Community and the theory on the East Asian League were made simultaneously as if flowers were blossoming all at once. For example, in the case of the theory on the East Asian Community, more than 100 articles and 12 books were published from the fall of 1938 to the summer of 1939 (Cho Kwanja 2007, 177).

longer adhere to its existing nationalism. It was in this context that Miki Kiyoshi, core exponent of the East Asian Community, wrote that the narrow-minded Japanese nationalism was inevitably doomed to failure in Manchuria and China and went against the spirit of the East Asian Community (Miki 1966, 548; Ham Tongju 2000, 354).

Korean intellectuals, especially socialists, were first to respond to the new paradigm shift in China-Japan relations. As Ozaki (1997 [1939], 51) pointed out, they thought that if Japan's proposal of a New Order for China had any seriousness and humility, then it could surely be applied to Korea, one of the members of East Asia. Sō Insik argued that the plan for the East Asian Community must suggest a kind of new social order in which not only Chinese, but also Koreans, would be considered members of the community. Furthermore, the political sovereignty and cultural independence of each East Asian nation should forever be protected and respected (Sō Insik 1939, 7; Hong Chonguk 2000, 193).

Colonial socialists—including recanted Leftists—quickly jumped on the bandwagon of the New Order. Previous literature on recanted Leftists highlighted their conversion as an individual's falling away or betrayal due to strong pressure from imperial Japan and identified them as anti-national or pro-Japanese. Recently, however, various studies that attempt to re-interpret the act of conversion in historical context have emerged in South Korea as well as in Japan.² These studies on recanted Leftists shed light on the arguments of this paper.

Issues and Manifestations of the New Order of East Asia

Heated debates about the meaning and interpretation of the New Order took place around the time of its declaration in late 1938, especially among socialists, including converts.³ Without a doubt, the national question was an

2. Studies on recanted Leftists in Japan began as early as the 1950s but recent studies on Koreans point out that the past research rarely considered how the inner logic of a convert was expressed in political activities and how such practices related to the social situation of the time (Matsuda 1997, 132). Similarly, in South Korea, Hong Chonguk (2000, 205; 2004, 160) writes that to explain a conversion as a weakness of the individual is to abandon the attempt to seriously understand the situation of the time. He draws attention to the fact that most of the converts were socialists suggesting that conversion can be interpreted as being critical to modernity, decolonization or anti-capitalism.

3. In this context, Ch'a Chaejōng argued that the frame of reference in the discussion on the New Order of East Asia must be the diametrical axes of capitalism vs. anti-capitalism, nationalism vs.

issue of cardinal importance in this debate. As one can assume from the fact that the announcement of the New Order was preceded by the re-appraisal of the Chinese national question,⁴ intellectuals in China, Japan, and Korea thought in terms of dichotomies such as those between Japan and China (or Japan and Korea), empire and nation. Socialists (and converts) in Colonial Korea were no exception. The sheer diversity of their views cannot be lumped together in one rigid category such as, for example, pro-Japanese or anti-national.

More importantly, I would argue that the national question raised by the New Order must be examined in close relation to the idea of East Asia. In other words, the idea of East Asia should be considered to be as important as the national question for understanding the New Order. A series of proposals associated with the New Order, such as the East Asian Community and the East Asian League, all contained the term “East Asia.” Here, the idea of East Asia is based upon two antithetical principles. The first principle is to distinguish itself from the West. In other words, the term suggests that one excludes the West as “the other.” The second principle is that it underscores the shared identity of East Asian nations, including Japan. This concept of inclusion can further be construed as Japan’s return to Asianism, one of the main currents of thought in the Meiji Restoration.⁵

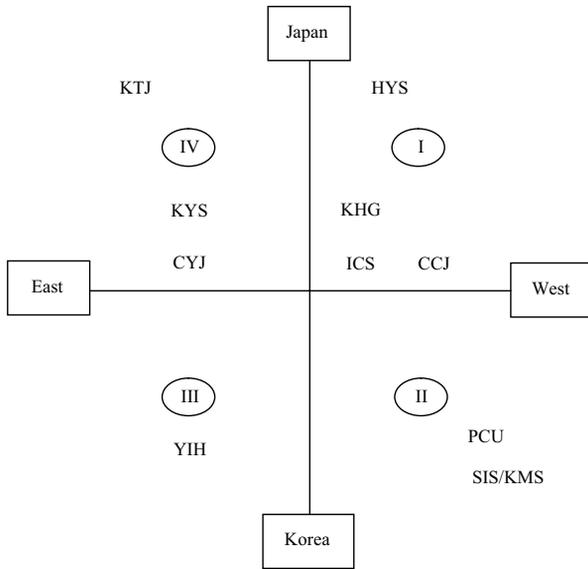
The diagram below shows the various positions of Korean socialists regarding the two main issues found in the discussions on the New Order, the dichotomies between Japan and Korea on the one hand, and between East and West on the other.⁶ Most of the socialists mentioned here directly participated

internationalism, Japanism vs. Asianism, and East Asian totalitarianism vs. cosmopolitanism. For more discussion see Ch’a Chaejŏng (1939, 66).

4. See Ozaki (1997 [1939], 40). Ham Tongju (2000, 340) writes that despite imperial Japan’s recognition of the importance of the national question and attempt to resolve the issue through the paradigm of the New Order, previous studies on the New Order failed to pay enough attention to the national question as treated in the New Order.

5. Ozaki (1997 [1939], 37) argued that the idea of the East Asian Community parallels the current of thought called Great Asianism (Dai Ajia Shugi) along with the proposal of the East Asian League. Nevertheless, considering the fact that Miki Kiyoshi, the progenitor of the East Asian Community, distanced himself from Asianism, not all proponents of the East Asian Community supported Asianism.

6. With some minor exceptions, Kim Hangyŏng, In Chŏngsik, Ch’a Chaejŏng, Sŏ Insik, and Kim Myŏngsik on the right side of the spectrum can be categorized as supporters of the East Asian Community and Cho Yŏngju, Kang Yŏngsŏk, and Yang Inhyŏn on the left as the followers of the East Asian League. In contemporary Korea, there have been comparatively many studies on the East Asian Community, whereas studies on Korean intellectuals affiliated with the East Asian League have been scarce—only on, published in Japan, could be found. This explains why more



- I: HYS-Hyŏn Yŏngsŏp; KHG-Kim Hangyŏng; ICS-In Chŏngsik; CCJ-Ch'a Chaejŏng
 II: PCU-Pak Ch'iu; SIS-Sŏ Insik; KMS-Kim Myŏngsik
 III: YIH-Yang Inhyŏn
 IV: KTJ-Kim Tujŏng, KYS-Kang Yŏngsŏk, CYJ-Cho Yŏngju

Figure 1.

in the social movement or communist movement in the 1920s⁷ and studied abroad or lived in Japan.⁸ In addition, due to such experiences, most of them were arrested by Japanese police, imprisoned, and converted during imprisonment or after being released.⁹ As recanted Leftists, they welcomed the Japanese

proponents of the East Asian Community were selected those of the East Asian League. Almost all of the socialists who discussed the issue of the East Asian Community were included in this diagram. In contrast, the number of the figures related to the East Asian League was relatively meager and hard to find; their arguments scattered over several primary sources, which include pamphlets and journal articles.

7. One exception is Yang Inhyŏn, who studied abroad at Dŏshisha University in Kyoto, Japan, in 1936, and therefore missed the opportunity to come in contact with socialism.

8. Pak Ch'iu graduated from the Kyŏngsŏng Imperial University in colonial Korea and became a professor at P'yŏngyang Sungsil University, and thus had no experience of Japan. A short stay in China at the end of the Japanese colonial period is the only experience he had abroad.

9. Not all socialists mentioned in this paper recanted. Pak Ch'iu and Yang Inhyŏn did not convert.

government's 1938 declaration of the New Order in one form or the other. After 1940, when the ideals of the New Order seemed to fade away, some of them stopped writing and withdrew from society while others became actively pro-Japanese.

As shown in this constellation, the y-axis between Japan and Korea indicates positions on the national question. The higher the intellectual is along the vertical axis the more distant he is from his own nation. As will be discussed below, Kim Tujöng and Hyön Yöngsöp totally negated their commitment to Korea whereas Sö Insik and Kim Myöngsik went much further in privileging their own national identity. The x-axis with the East and West at the opposite extremes indicates each individual's approach to the universality of Western values and the particularity of Eastern values. Sö Insik and Kim Myöngsik on the right side of the diagram were known to pursue Western values such as rationality and universality whereas Kim Tujöng, Kang Yöngsök, and Cho Yöngju on the left paid attention to the particular identity and entity of the East as expressed through race, culture, or a system of thought. Although skepticism about the universality of Western values has increased in recent times, the former group clearly demonstrated their commitment to universalism whereas the latter group was more concerned with the exploration of Eastern particularities.

One can argue that the different positions found among colonial socialists form their own constellations in the two currents of thought within the discussions on the New Order. Taking a closer look, with the exception of Kim Tujöng and Hyön Yöngsöp, who completely rejected the thought of a nation, the proponents of the East Asian Community, Kim Hangyöng, In Chöngsik, Ch'a Chaejöng, and Sö Insik on the right, are located in sections I and II. In contrast, the supporters of the East Asian League, Cho Yöngju, Kang Yöngsök, and Yang Inhyön on the left, are situated in sections III and IV. Such a categorization is based on the dichotomy of the East and West. But if the national question is added to the equation as a variable, then the East Asian Community group would be closer to section I than section II (i.e., closer to Japan), whereas the East Asian League group would be relatively closer to section III than section IV (i.e., closer to Korea).

This demonstrates that these two currents of thought had their own understanding of "nation" and "East Asia," which led them to have different proposals for the New Order. Such differences of opinion did not end with the New Order. A certain distance and tension between the original plans of the East Asian Community and the East Asian League formulated in Japan proper and the interpretations and appropriations of them by socialists in a colony

were bound to emerge. The content of the East Asian Community and that of the East Asian League, as discussed in Japan, is not identical to colonial socialists' understanding of these concepts. In other words, it is important to remember the fact that incongruity, tension, and mutual contradiction existed between the two sides of the Korea Strait.

The idea of the East Asian Community was formulated by Miki Kiyoshi and Ozaki Hotsumi of the Shōwa Kenkyūkai (Shōwa Research Association), a think-tank of Konoe Fumimaro.¹⁰ The leading figure of the East Asian League was Ishiwara Kanji of the Japanese Army who led the Japanese Forces during the Manchurian Incident in 1931 and the "creation" of Manchuria. In October 1939, the Association of the East Asian League was founded and it began the publication of a journal, *Tōa Renmei*. Both of these groups led the discussions on the New Order after the announcement of the Konoe statement from 1939 to 1940 and influenced colonial Korea and parts of China under the control of the puppet regimes, including Manchuria.¹¹

Nevertheless, it would be worthwhile to compare the two currents to find significant differences and similarities. First of all, while the proponents of the East Asian Community mainly consisted of westernized intellectuals such as politicians, scholars, and journalists, advocacy of the East Asian League was first and foremost supported by the military (the Army), bureaucrats of Manchuria or ardent believers in traditional Asianism. Second, the supporters of the East Asian Community were mostly educated in the West, and thus espoused universalism whereas the followers of the East Asian League strongly pursued Eastern and Japanese culture and tradition.¹² Furthermore, the composition of the East Asian Community group was complex with diverse

10. The Shōwa Research Association was established by Konō Ryunosuke, a confidante of Konoe Fumimaro and Rōyama Masamitchi, Professor of Political Science at the Tokyo University in October 1933. However, it was in November 1936 after the 2.26 Incident that the research association began to earnestly carry out its activities. In 1937, Ozaki Hotsumi and Miki Kiyoshi commonly known as the 'reformist left' joined. In November 1938, with the announcement of the Konoe statement the ideal of the East Asian Community became a kind of national policy. For more discussion see Ham Tongju (1996, 164; 2000, 342), Ch'a Sūnggi (2002, 95; 2003, 244), and Hong Chonguk (2004, 169).

11. China did not respond positively to these developments. To the Chiang Kai-shek government the proposal was a convenient way to camouflage the new occupying forces as a liberation army. Even Wang Jingwei, who was criticized as pro-Japanese for being friendly to the proposal of the New Order, warned that it is no different from that of Western expansionism in that Japan's action is based on an economic invasion assisted by military aggression (Cho Kwanja 2007, 180).

12. Hyōn Yōngsōp points out that the East Asian Community group had more westernized liberals while the East Asian League group had more people who were well versed in Eastern thought (Amano Michio 1940, 214). Amano Michio is the Japanese name of Hyōn Yōngsōp.

opinions whereas the proponents of the East Asian League formed a relatively homogeneous group under the strong leadership of Ishiwara Kanji. From a temporal point of view, both the East Asian Community and the East Asian League were absorbed into the wave of the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere in the 1940s. However, in contrast to the short lived East Asian Community,¹³ defenders of the East Asian League remained active even after the end of the war. Lastly, from a spatial point of view, the main stage of activity for the champions of the East Asian Community was the center of imperial Japan, Tokyo and Kyoto, whereas for the proponents of the East Asian League, it was on the margin of the empire, mainly Manchuria.

Japanese Empire and Korean Nation

Since the basic units to construct the East Asian order were individual nations and states, the question of what position and status the Korean nation would have in the newly emerging community was, without a doubt, of great concern to the Korean people. From the perspective of individual socialists, if the community of East Asia can be reconstructed through a reform of Japanese capitalism then Korea should be willing to give up its effort to achieve sovereignty as a state and become part of the new unified East Asia. Japan's proposal for the New Order became the rationale for colonial socialists to give up what they believed in and, as a result, many socialists converted.¹⁴

In this context, a new argument called the *Naisen ittai* (*Nae-sŏn ilch'e* in Korean; Japan and Korea as One) quickly gained currency.¹⁵ Historically, the slogan of the *Naisen ittai* had already been adopted as a means of colonial rule of Korea by Japan in 1910 when Japan claimed a complete and permanent transfer of Korea's sovereignty. However, the March First Movement of 1919 and the on-going national liberation movement afterwards shattered Japan's ideals. What seemed to have disappeared in the heyday of the national and

13. Many factors contributed to this such as the imprisonment and execution or death in prison of leading theorists like Ozaki Hotsumi or Miki Kiyoshi as mentioned before.

14. Many researchers on recanted Leftists agree on this point. For example, Hong Chonguk (2000, 192) mentions that the rationality of conversion gained momentum through the proposal of the New Order. Chang Yonggyŏng (2003, 234) points out that the slogan of the East Asian Community provided hope and a rationale to converted socialists. Ch'a Sŭnggi (2003, 261) also writes that the New Order gave hope for a resolution of the national question to colonial socialists who thought that a complete independence of colonial Korea was unrealistic.

15. For detailed recent discussion on this topic, see Caprio 2009.

socialist movements was resurrected dramatically as *Naisen ittai* after the Sino-Japanese War in 1937. One year after becoming the ninth Governor-General of Korea in August 1936, Minami Jirō still had to be satisfied with the tattered old slogan of the *Naisen yūgō* (Kor. *Nae-sŏn yunghwa*, fusing of Japan and Korea). But the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War turned the situation completely around.¹⁶ Minami declared that the *Naisen ittai* policy was not simply a short-term remedy for the current state of affairs but a permanent and on-going goal (Minami 1939, 59).

Soon the colonial media recklessly joined in the dissemination of the new policy, which gave rise to clamorous debates about the contents of the policy among colonial intellectuals and socialists.¹⁷ In the context of imperial Japan, the heated debates and considerable interest found in colonial Korea were in stark contrast to Japan's indifference¹⁸ and to Manchuria where the slogan of the *minjok hyōphwa* (National Harmony), rather than the *Naisen ittai*, was the dominant policy. In contrast to Japan and Manchuria, mixed and complex reactions like passion, expectation, cynicism, and denial came to the surface in colonial Korea. A Russian diplomat in the colonial capital witnessed the aggressive implementation of the *Naisen ittai* policy at the time, and noted that the Korean people saw it as vague and confusing;¹⁹ a Japanese bureaucrat

16. Minami began to promote the *Naisen ittai* policy as the basic guideline of colonial rule at a directors' meeting in August 1937, a month or so after the start of the Sino-Japanese War (July 7, 1937). At the meeting, he emphasized the need to change the policy from *Naisen yūgō* to *Naisen ittai*. About a year later in April 1938 at a national provincial governors' meeting he warned that anyone, Japanese or Korean, who disagreed with the *Naisen ittai* policy would be firmly dealt with (*Tonga-Ilbo* 1937. 08. 12, 1938. 04. 20).

17. Such a change of policy closely coincided with the situation in Japan. From 1939 to 1940, social democrats belonging to the Socialist Masses Party and a significant number of converted socialists were deeply involved in pushing reform policies in Japan. At this time, the government was called the war-time national coalition government, which included the reformist left. This government was totally different from that of the period of the national coalition government during which time Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi was assassinated by army and navy officers and the Japan Bank was bombed on May 15, 1932. During this period, the reform policies proposed by the Kikakuin (Planning Council) were established in October 1937. The council played the role of the headquarters for state mobilization. Interestingly, socialists at the time welcomed the establishment of the Kikakuin, seeing it as an embodiment of their plans. For more discussion see Totten 1997, 244-5; Yonetani 1997, 81-7; Hong Chonguk 2000, 188.

18. According to Hyōn Yōngsōp (1939b, 28), the Japanese media paid no attention to the *Naisen ittai* policy because journalists in Japan were blinded by liberal fantasy. Similarly, Yun Ch'ihō (1939, 9) also pointed out that the *Naisen ittai* policy never received any attention in Japan proper. Nevertheless, he added that such a fact does not deny the authenticity of the *Naisen ittai* policy.

19. Šabšina recalls that Korean "people were confused by the term *Naisen ittai*, which was considered to be a most influential slogan, as if it were an elixir to heal the wounds of national

simultaneously observed the contradictory scenes of Korean patriotism for Japan reaching a peak, and the formation of national consciousness after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 (Suzuki 2000 [1946], 7, Chang Yonggyöng 2003, 243). In addition, In Chöngsik's observation that the *Naisen ittai* policy that had been despised and ignored by radical socialists was being considered seriously is also witness to this dramatically changed meaning of the term *Naisen ittai*.

Nevertheless, the excitement and expectation toward the *Naisen ittai* policy did not endure for long. The change of mood began in the latter half of 1940. In January 1941, Japan prohibited talk of national union, thus eliminating tensions between the regime and the proposals for the East Asian Community and the East Asian League. Soon, these proposals were absorbed into the movement of the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere.²⁰ In December 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and entered World War II. Subsequently, the ideals of the *Naisen ittai* policy returned to those of the 1910s. In May 1942, Koiso Kuniaki, the Governor-General who replaced Minami, completely reversed previous interpretations of the *Naisen ittai* policy by saying that the aim of the *Naisen ittai* policy was to nurture Korean people as imperial subjects and neither implied equality between Japan and Korea nor their spiritual union.²¹ Consequently, the term *Naisen ittai* was henceforth rarely mentioned by the colonial media; if it was referred to at all, it was used with a completely different meaning. In other words, the discussions around the East Asian Community and the East Asian League completely lost the momentum, however inadequate, that had formed from the announcement of the New Order in November 1938 to 1941 when the actual retreat from this discourse began and shifted to the consolidation of the imperialist regime.

Putting aside the events unfolding afterwards, in the period between the late 1930s and the early 1940s converted socialists asserted that Korea was no longer a colony just as Japan could no longer be considered an empire given its New-Order-related policies on East Asia. For example, In Chöngsik argued

pride" (Šabšina 1994 [1992], 190-1; Hong Chonguk 2000, 191).

20. Looking at the trend in Japan, from the fall of 1940 to the spring of the following year, domestic tensions subsided as the new system movement led by reformists was defeated and the established regained its hegemony. In the spring of 1941 the cadres of Kikakuin that led the economic reforms were arrested on a charge of supporting the Comintern's Popular Front policy and Japan as a whole moved toward consolidation of the system through the collusion of state bureaucrats, capitalists, and the military. For more discussion see Mitchell (1982 [1976], 179) and Hong Chonguk (2000, 201).

21. See *Tongyang chi kwang* (1942), re-quoted in Miyata (1997, 191), and Hong Chonguk (2000, 202; 2004, 175).

that the principle of the East Asian Community shed new light on the question of nation and colonialism; thus, Korea at the time should no longer be considered a colony (In Chöngsik 1939a, 177). In a similar vein, Hyön Yöngsöp stated that Korea was part of Japan. He went on to say, “If Koreans think Korea is a colony, this is because they are trapped in the old slave mentality. Japanese also should not think of Korea as a colony and need to completely do away with such an opinion” (Hyön Yöngsöp 1939a, 292-3).

However, it is important to note that even if converted socialists shared the same opinion that Korea was no longer a colony of Japan, or that it should not be, their approaches to the national question reveal how they differed on how this would come about. For instance, Hyön Yöngsöp discussed two contrasting views on the idea of *Naisen ittai*. One group insisted that the two nations cooperate together as separate entities. This view, he adds, was supported by most colonial intellectuals and followers of the East Asian Community and the East Asian League. Another group insisted that *Naisen ittai* implied becoming completely one in blood, body, and soul, as emphasized by Governor-General Minami. Hyön himself supported this view. He dubbed the former *hyöphwajök* (harmonious) *Naisen ittai* whereas the latter was a spontaneous and radical version of the *Naisen ittai* policy or *ch’ölchö ilch’eron*, an exhaustive *Naisen ittai* policy (Hyön Yöngsöp 1940b, 35).

Similarly, Kim Hangyöng also mentioned two opposing approaches, the *minjok tonghwaron* (National Assimilation) and the *minjok hyöptongnon* (National Cooperation), the latter also known as *minjok hyöphwaron* (National Harmony). The former, he mentioned, emphasized that the language, customs, and tradition of Korean people should be assimilated into that of Japan whereas the latter leaves the language, customs, and tradition of Korean people as they are and allows the full realization of the Korean nation’s unique abilities; only then would Japan inject the spirit of Kokutai (National Essence of Japan) as the ultimate guiding principle. Kim added that the implication of the disputes between them were not only limited to the *Naisen ittai* policy itself, but extended to all aspects of issues the Japanese government faced (Kim Hangyöng 1940, 49).

These two groups obstinately asserted their own opinions and oftentimes they criticized and even showed contempt and hostility toward each other. Criticisms were usually led by the majority group supporting the East Asian Community. In Chöngsik lashed out at Hyön Yöngsöp who argued for complete and voluntary assimilation of Koreans saying it was far from being an idealist and infantile argument. Kim Myöngsik (1940b, 40-1) also criticized the defenders of *küpchin ilch’eron* (radical assimilationism) as being made up of

foolish thinkers who liked to jump on a bandwagon, indiscriminately believing whatever the “vulgar media” said.

These criticisms were never unidirectional. The radical assimilationists like Hyön Yöngsöp also poured scorn on the opposite front. Criticized as engaging in “an onanism of insignificant romanticism” by In Chöngsik, Hyön Yöngsöp called In Chöngsik’s proposal “a masturbation of utopic romanticism.” He accused In Chöngsik and the followers of the East Asian Community of being materialists and economists (Hyön Yöngsöp 1940a, 34-5). Similar criticisms were directed at the East Asian League group. He mentioned that although he supported the formation of the East Asian League of Japan, Manchuria, and China, he opposed the idea of applying it to Colonial Korea. He added that establishing a league would be nothing more than a reactionary act (Amano 1940, 215).

Despite apparently heated debates between the two, the opinion of a third group should be considered to complete the picture of the contested terrain. As shown in Figure 1, if Hyön Yöngsöp and Kim Tujöng, who are closest to Japan on the y-axis for the national question, can be labeled as radical assimilationists, then the supporters of the East Asian League and the East Asian Community would be located in the middle. The heated debates discussed above were carried out by these two groups. However, Sö Insik and Kim Myöngsik, at the bottom in the constellation, had different opinions on the national question. Regarding the authenticity of the national question, the distinction between assimilation and cooperation became less important than the distinction between people like Sö Insik and Kim Myöngsik and the above-mentioned two groups.

Sö Insik and Kim Myöngsik were known as the patrons of the East Asian Community, just like In Chöngsik and Ch’a Chaejöng. Although both of these groups supported the plan, they showed significantly different approaches on the issue of the national question. The former, Sö Insik and Kim Myöngsik, insisted on respecting and preserving one’s own national identity, whereas the latter, In Chöngsik and Ch’a Chaejöng, showed eclectic and flexible positions in the name of harmony within the empire. In short, Sö Insik and Kim Myöngsik did not want to receive Japanese ideas verbatim. They tried to apply them within the context of the colonial reality.

Sö Insik attempted to re-interpret the destined regional community proposed by the advocates of East Asian Community from the perspective of a colonial intellectual (Sö Insik 1939, 7). Sö argued that, although the New Order is a statement of the Japanese government on China, it must be applied consistently to all East Asian nations including Korea if it is to gain the full trust of East

Asian nations. If Sŏ emphasized the political and cultural aspects of the community, Kim Myŏngsik focused on industry and economy, calling for Colonial Korea's autonomy (Kim Myŏngsik 1939b, 28, 1940a, 200). While emphasizing the active roles of Korea and Manchuria in the plan for the East Asian Community, Kim Myŏngsik also tried to present a new interpretation of *Naisen ittai* in relation to the national question.

The differences in theoretical approaches are reflected in the actions of the advocates of each position. Kim Tujŏng and Hyŏn Yŏngsŏp totally negated their own nation and voluntarily collaborated with the Japanese regime; In Chŏngsik and Ch'a Chaejŏng colluded with the regime in one way or another and went along with imperial Japan. In contrast, after the mid 1940s, when it was clear that the ideal of the East Asian Community would be impossible to realize, Sŏ Insik withdrew from the official arena of colonial society as did Kim Myŏngsik who retreated from public life and died alone.²²

East and West, Particularism and Universalism

The discrepancy found between the two groups, Sŏ Insik and Kim Myŏngsik on one side and In Chŏngsik and Ch'a Chaejŏng on the other, are closely related to their different understandings of East Asia. As already mentioned, the proposals for East Asian communities under the banner of the New Order greatly affected converted leftists in colonial Korea. Although they were all attracted to an ideal of East Asia, differences of opinion are found in their understanding of what East Asia should be and in their detailed plans for East Asian solidarity. All in all, supporters of the East Asian Community regarded anti-capitalist reform as crucial to the formation of an East Asian ideal. This was something they put forth as the core value of a regional community centered in East Asia.

In order to carry out anti-capitalist reform in East Asia, first and foremost, there had to be anti-capitalist reform in Japan. The leading proponents of this view were moderates and eclectics like Ch'a Chaejŏng and In Chŏngsik. Ch'a Chaejŏng asserted that in examining the paradigm of the New Order the most

22. After returning from Osaka at the end of 1936 Kim Myŏngsik began to actively engage in the discussion on the New Order in 1938. After being thrown into despair by the reality in March 1940 Kim stopped writing after 3 months and returned to his home in Cheju Island. His health quickly deteriorated and he died in May 1943. Sŏ Insik stopped his involvement in public writing in October 1940 as did Pak Ch'iu in April 1941. For more information see Hong Chonguk (2004, 166) and Cho Kwanja (2007, 203).

fundamental question would be whether it is capitalistic or not.²³ He declared that Japanese capitalism had completely lost its power, as shown by the fact that Japanese capitalists failed to exercise leadership in directing the course of the Sino-Japanese War. He asserted that the Sino-Japanese War could no longer be considered as a capitalist and imperialist aggression. He thought that the establishment of the New Order would be predicated on a reformation of Japan that negated capitalism (Ch'a Chaejǒng 1939, 67).

In Chǒngsik also wrote that reformism in Japan is anti-communist and at the same time anti-capitalist and anti-exploitation.²⁴ He went on to say that he cannot but help to express his utmost respect toward Japanese reformists for their boldness, Asianness, innovation, and political preparedness (In Chǒngsik 1939a, 63). He tried to explain the anti-capitalistic and anti-colonial orientation of the New Order through the growth of reformists in Japan (In Chǒngsik 1939b, 21).

It was not only the moderates who saw the anti-capitalist aspects of the East Asian Community. Similar arguments can also be found both in groups who argued for complete assimilation into Japan and people who preferred the opposite position. For example, Hyǒn Yǒngsǒp (who belonged to the former group) argued that the Sino-Japanese War aimed to reconstruct the world and bring a new order to East Asia. Considering the fact that the war could not be resolved through an interim solution, the war was inseparably linked to domestic reform. In other words, he understood the plan for the East Asian Community as an exit strategy from the Sino-Japanese War and, therefore, the East Asian Community presumed the completion of *kungmin hyǒptongch'e* (National Community).²⁵ Kim Myǒngsik is a typical example of the latter case. He saw the reform policies of the Japanese government at the time as different from the previous fascist policies and considered the establishment of the Bureau of East Asia under the auspices of the Cabinet to be of significance. He

23. For more discussion see Ch'a Chaejǒng (1939, 66). While referring to an incident on February 26, 1936, commonly known as a mutiny led by young Kōdō ha (Imperial Way faction) officers of the Japanese Army, he regarded the regime before the incident as a regime of a particular class and the regime after the incident as a regime and a government of the whole people (Ch'a Chaejǒng 1938, 116-7). The reason for such a conclusion was because he saw the aspiration for reform in Japan could be traced back to the Kōdōshugi (Ideology of the Imperial Way).

24. Similar to Ch'a Chaejǒng, In Chǒnsik suggested a link between reformism and Kōdōshugi. In other words, the fundamental ideal of Nihonshugi was to root out capitalist exploitation and capitalistic ideas and rebuild the society based on co-existence and co-prosperity centered on the emperor (Yi Kwangsu et al. 1939, 40-41).

25. If not, he thought at least they should coincide (Hyǒn Yǒngsǒp 1939b, 27).

expected that the bureau would contribute to the liberation of Chinese peasants suffering from both domestic semi-feudal rule and the exploitation of international capitalism (Kim Myöngsik 1939a, 7; 1938b, 14).

In sharp contrast, proponents of the East Asian League (with some exceptions)²⁶ suggested a totally different approach. They tended to derive the core of their plan from the concept of East Asia itself. They constructed a dichotomy of East and West and emphasized the incongruity between the two. As such, the East was constructed as something uniquely different from the West and shaped according to the Imperial Spirit or the ideal of *Hakkou Ichiu* (all the world under one roof, literally, Eight Cords, One Roof).

Taking a closer look at Figure 1 above, the converted socialists' understanding of the East and West and East Asia can be divided into a number of categories. According to the diagram, the category closest to the East is composed of people in the left side of the x-axis such as Kim Tujöng, Kang Yöngsök, and Cho Yöngju (the last two are supporters of the East Asian League). In contrast, the people in the right side like Sö Insik, Kim Myöngsik, and Pak Ch'iu sought to understand East Asia based on the universality of Western values. In Chöngsik, Kim Hangyöng, Ch'a Chaejöng, and Hyön Yöngsöp are located in the middle and attracted to the West but demonstrated eclecticism. Considering the fact that In Chöngsik, Kim Hangyöng, Sö Insik, and Kim Myöngsik can be categorized as supporters of the East Asian Community, the different views on East Asia among them indicates that the proposals of the East Asian Community were complex, multi-dimensional, and occasionally contradictory.

In the first category, Kim Tujöng and the East Asian League group considered East Asia as a concrete and real entity and understood East Asia from a particularistic context. For instance, Kim Tujöng contrasted East and West based on race, reviving an old tradition of Asianism. In contrast to the West depicted as being violent and having destructive material culture and negative traits like economic exploitation, the East was imbued with values that are good and strong (Kim Tujöng 1940, 66-8, 72). As Okakura Tenshin mentioned decades ago (1963 (1902): 103), Kim asserted that "the East is the East of East Asians" (Kim Tujöng 1940, 72). On the unity of Asians based on race, Kim actively supported a Pan-Asianism that included India, Islam, and even some European countries like Hungary and Finland.²⁷ For the revival of

26. The most notable exception is Kang Yöngsök. As mentioned above, similar to Ch'a Chaejöng, In Chöngsik, and Hyön Yöngsöp, he attributed the failure of the full realization of the Imperial Way to Japan's inability to completely eliminate the contradictions of capitalism (Kang Yöngsöp 1939a, 60-2).

Asia, Japan was invested with the leading role in East Asia.

Similarly, emphasis on race, dichotomization of the East and West, essentialization of the East, and the bestowing of leadership on Japan are also found within the group promoting the East Asian League. For instance, Kang Yöngsök (1939b, 59) underlined the fact that modern Asia is dominated by the white race and every nation is suffering from it. He also described the West as the opposite of the East with negative attributes such as individualism, materialism, rational self-interest, conquest, the rule of might, and imperialism whereas the East is described as having positive values like benevolence, indoctrination, or guidance (Kang Yöngsök 1939b, 61). Lastly, Kang emphasized the important role of Japan by referring to Japan as the elite corps of the Tribe of Tungus, a legendary northern tribe that directed other nations with its advanced culture (Kang Yöngsök 1939b, 61).

On the other hand, Sö Insik and Kim Myöngsik sought to understand East Asia from a rational, international perspective. Instead of constructing a dichotomy of East and West or granting an epistemological privilege to the uniqueness of Asia, they wanted to understand the East from the perspective of universalism and cosmopolitanism. On race and the status of Japan as the leader, their views totally differed from those of the above-mentioned particularists. In contrast, their vision of East Asia reflected a genuine desire to transcend capitalism on the basis of East Asian regionalism and to eventually orient its people toward the global Community. Their pursuit sharply contrasted with those of the particularists and the eclectics, discussed below, whose plans for East Asian community was a form of the fascist/corporatist anti-capitalism seen in Germany.

The East, Sö Insik asserts, cannot be understood in contrast to the West or have a substance with distinct values. He rejected the Asianism that proclaimed “Asia is one” or “the East belongs to East Asians.” Unlike the East Asian League group pursuing the Imperial Way, Sö understood the East partaking in the “socialization of human labor” just as the West. He rejected cultural essentialism such as theories of national or Eastern culture and instead suggested that the East should be understood in relation to the movement of capital and exchanges of knowledge and culture (Sö Insik 1939, 15). By highlighting the “global task of the contemporary world” and the “world in its

27. In this context, Kim promoted a Turanist movement to rally even the European countries (Kim Tujöng 1939, 287). ‘Turan’ is a term used by Lewis Henry Morgan to refer to Asians from Southern India and China to Japan in the Part 3 of his book *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871).

worldliness” and rejecting a particularistic or essentialist understanding of the East, Sō was able to be critical of the dualism of the East and West, China and Japan, as well as fascism and liberalism (Cho Kwanja 2007, 226).

Similar to Sō Insik, Kim Myōngsik also refused to understand the East and West as opposite polarities. He also did not see the East having a real substance. Accordingly, he escaped the trap of Asianism and the temptation of Orientalism that decontextualized the East and, thereby, essentialized it. For him, pointing to the backwardness of Eastern culture was not to distinguish it from the West as a region but was to reject the temporal transcendence associated with time consciousness. In other words, he argued that the vision for the new construction could be neither Eastern nor Western instead it must be both Eastern and Western at the same time. In short, he cast a doubtful eye on the regional distinction itself, suggesting trans-regional consciousness (Kim Myōngsik 1939a, 51-2). On top of this, he attempted to find a way for a new cosmopolitanist construction similar to Sō Insik’s search for a global world (Kim Myōngsik 1939a, 49).

Between the two opposing views discussed above there exists a moderate and eclectic position. In Chōngsik, Kim Hangyōng, Ch’a Chaejōng, and Hyōn Yōngsōp are the major proponents of this position. Despite minor differences of opinion among them, they tried to equate the particularity of Japan with the universalist understanding of East Asia, an attempt never to be reconciled.

In contrast to Sō Insik and Kim Myōngsik, In Chōngsik’s understanding of the East was without reference to universalism. He defined the East as having a quality opposite to that of the West. Nevertheless, he did not define the West as having negative values like Kim Tujōng and the proponents of the East Asian League. Instead, he tried hard to guard against any attempt to delineate the East and West in an exclusive way. Despite this openness, he tried to understand the identity of the East through race. In a manner quite similar to that of Kang Yōngsōk, he looked for an essentialized form of Asia such as the peculiarity of origin, purity of blood (In Chōngsik 1938, 65) or innocence of the Orient (In Chōngsik 1940, 76). Furthermore he identified *Yamato Minzoku* (*Taehwa minjok* in Korean) as the main *Träger* (carrier) of the Tungus Tribe’s grand unification movement. Such an opinion naturally followed the line of the discourse on the East Asian Community which emphasized the racial homogeneity of East Asia and the role of leading nation for Japan.

Conclusion

As discussed so far, this article examined how the national question and the issue of East Asia were dealt with in the two prominent proposals, i.e. the East Asian Community and the East Asian League, that were presented as part of the New Order of East Asia. On the national question, socialists like Kim Tujöng and Hyön Yöngsöp rejected the inherent identity of the Korean nation and argued for voluntary and complete assimilation into the Japanese nation. In contrast, and at the other extreme, Sö Insik and Kim Myöngsik sought to appropriate the Japanese proposals of the New Order into the context of Colonial Korea. Arguing that the system of the New Order would fit as well in Korea as it would in China, they underscored the independent identity of each East Asian nation and openness and trust between East Asian nations.

Such a dualism is also found in the presentation of East Asia itself. Kim Tujöng or Kang Yöngsök considered East Asia as having a substantive status and attempted to interpret it within a particularistic context. Recognizing that the East and West formed a dichotomy, they understood the two as mutually opposing entities within which race played a major role and where the West stood for the negative while the East was positive. Furthermore, they called for the unity and revival of East Asia with imperial Japan playing the leading role.

At the opposite pole, Sö Insik and Kim Myöngsik presented a totally different vision of East Asia. They neither considered the East and West to be isolated and mutually opposed categories nor depicted the East as an entity with its own intrinsic values. They neither fell into the trap of Asianism nor the temptation of Orientalism that essentialized the East, separating it from its historical context. As such, while being critical of a particularism or essentialism of the East they asserted global perspectives and sought to understand East Asia in the context of universalism.

The aim of this article was to draw attention to the fact that various contradicting views on nation and East Asia interact with a certain degree of coherence. In other words, the universalist understanding of East Asia, which can be found in the suggestions of Sö Insik and Kim Myöngsik, was related to the stress on the importance of nation, while particularistic presentation of East Asia, for which Kim Tusik, Hyön Yöngsöp, and Kang Yöngsök ardently searched, tended to be affiliated with their own conceptualization of the nation. As with many things, the relationship between the two elements was not always aligned. In reality, there were gray areas where two opposing views overlapped or were juxtaposed such as the positions asserted by Kim

Hangyŏng, In Chŏngsik or Ch'a Chaejŏng.

Despite such a complex reality, it is interesting to find a certain correlation between the awareness of one's own nation and the universalistic understanding of East Asia. In contrast, the relation between the negation of a national identity and the particularistic approaches to East Asia was complex and sometimes contradictory. This is because people like Hyŏn Yŏngsŏp held a universalist understanding of East Asia but completely rejected a unique national identity. Or in an opposite case, people like Yang Inhyŏn who held a particularistic view of the East searched for a unique national identity.

If one accepts the relationship between the support for a definite national identity and the universalistic picture of East Asia, would there be a kind of causal relationship between these two factors? To put it differently, one can ask which would be the determining factor between the issue of East Asia and the national question. Although it would be difficult to come to a definite conclusion, one may suggest that the firm stand on the national question reflects the universalistic understanding of East Asia. In conclusion, the debates between colonial socialists on the New Order illustrate how ideas of nation lead to an understanding of East Asia and how such an approach extends beyond East Asia to the global sphere.

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