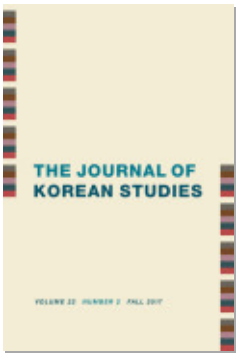
The Capitalist Unconscious: From Korean Unification to Transnational Korea by Hyun Ok Park (review)



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state power—might be a useful tool for thinking about the variations in the developmental and postdevelopmental state in non-Western nations, such as South Korea, instead of assuming that the coercive aspect of the developmental state is simply nonliberal or nonmodern.

I think both books would be useful textbooks for classes in contemporary Korea in addition to contributing to thinking about theories of social policy and social governance in relation to statehood. It is not only useful to understand the relationship between economic development and social development, but further, it allows us to broaden perspectives of development as a conceptual and historical notion.

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The Capitalist Unconscious: From Korean Unification to Transnational Korea by Hyun Ok Park. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. 349 pp. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $60.00 (cloth). $59.99 (e-book)

The pithy, remarkable claim at the opening of Hyun Ok Park's latest book—that "capital has already unified Korea in a transnational form" (p. 3)—is a claim about both an empirical reality and an ideological situation. The unification Park identifies is not of the territorial kind, nor does it concern separated families or irredentist notions. The empirical quality of unification revealed in Park's study is capitalist integration driven by the flow of commodities—specifically labor, money, and ideas—across the borders of North Korea, China, and South Korea. Park's fieldwork in Northeast Asia traces this flow, and the book presents fascinating interviews of the people who make these journeys. One theme among the North Koreans' experience is the narrative of "I didn't have to come but still . . . , " which Park considers as a discourse of migration within global capitalist integration: entrenched in the narrative is nothing less than the North Koreans' own notion of freedom grounded in market democracy (p. 256).

It is no longer secret that North Koreans move in and out of the North Korea-China border (albeit illegally, but not too different from the Mexico-US border)

for economic opportunities in China, Southeast Asia, and, for a small portion of them, South Korea. Moreover, we now know that market activities within North Korea have been an important part of the people's everyday life for the past three decades. The interviews in this book support this picture, but Park's assessment is entirely unique. What Park shows us is that North Koreans are no longer leaving North Korea to escape hunger or dictatorship. Instead, they leave to escape the risks and failures of the market within North Korea: "The crisis does not necessarily stem from the socialist state's regulation of markets, as often assumed in North Korean studies, but from the inherent uncertainty of the market" (pp. 264–65). There has been an unregulated and ubiquitous market in North Korea for a while, and its people have been essentially leaving this market for more profitable markets outside the country. As a researcher in North Korean studies, I had a hunch about this possibility, and it was a major satisfaction to see this analysis in print. This analysis is also tied to Park's statement that "socialism in the twentieth century was an idea borne of industrial capitalism . . . [and that] the dictatorship of the socialist state was grounded in the social process of pursuing industrial accumulation" (pp. 18, 31). Capitalist integration is indeed a global process. The difference between actually existing socialism and actually existing capitalism is, then, more about Cold War imaginations than about any real difference.

The most compelling part of Park's book is the discussion on the ideological side of Korea's unification under capital. This discussion moves forward with Park's original notion of "market utopia." The concept and practice of freedom, equality, and democracy today have moved away from historical contingency toward idealism based on commodity circulation: "Market utopia imagines an all-encompassing power of the market and is concerned with the individual freedom, legal rights, and protection from state violence. Market utopia rests on the market's logic of homogenization . . . as well as on the idea of the market as a self-regulating institution" (p. 25). Market utopia also rejects organized politics in favor of spontaneous individual actions and abstract ethical concerns of self-improvement (p. 27). The concept of market utopia is, then, used to examine what Park considers as three repertoires of democratic politics: reparation, peace, and human rights. These sections are thrilling to the mind. For Park, liberal reforms and privatization in China are reparations for its socialist revolution, ways to make up for the deprivations of state socialism. Allowing migration of Chinese Koreans to South Korea as sources of cheap labor is part of this capitalist reparation. Peace and human rights in relation to North Korea, too, are addressed in terms of commodity circulation: peace and unification take on the neoliberal characteristic of market freedom removed from state control, and human rights takes on the characteristic of individual freedom to participate in the labor market. National integration that promotes neoliberalism is the dual-unification politics of South Korea. This process is what Park refers to as "democracy's spectacle-making" that, while advocating peace and liberty, establishes capitalism as a universal value, a "neoliberal dictum that dispossesses the present of history and

politics" (p. 217). The experience of freedom arising from narrative and bodily affects of commodity circulation is what Park means in the term "the capitalist unconscious."

Park's study is, in the end, a critical reflection about the contemporary situation of democracy, in which democracy's acquiescence to capital has occurred throughout the world and across the socialist/capitalist divide. The Korean context is a quintessential case that brings together the issues of economic imperialism, military imperialism, and the Cold War conflict between socialism and capitalism. Reading this book makes me think about the state a bit more. While I also see the state as an instrument of capital, this relationship is a complex one since the state has its own methods of exploitation—for example, taxation that diverts money directly to private corporations, incarceration that depreciates the social value of labor, and disenfranchisement that sustains the conditions of the working poor. Could the state be colluding with and yet be distinct from the empire of capital? How the state works together with and independently from capital on behalf of the ruling class is one large question that follows this book.

Readers may at first glance find this book difficult, but this difficulty comes mainly from our habit of having accepted certain conceptual links, like liberalism as freedom, socialism as dictatorship, and consumerism as choice. These links have little to do with actual practice; they are ideological constructs. This book challenges our conceptual predilections and provides an illuminating account of our modern condition, with excellent prose to boot. Each section is a learning moment, both from Park's own research and from Park's explication of other scholars. *The Capitalist Unconscious* is groundbreaking work and confirms Park's role as a top theorist in the field of Korean studies. Whether in academia or activism, this book will be useful to various causes. The book would also help those in governments who still have not awakened from old Cold War dreams.

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Korea's Grievous War by Su-kyoung Hwang. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. 264 pp. 21 illustrations. Bibliography. Index. $65.00 (cloth and ebook).

The start of the millennium saw a turning point in the transnational public memory of the Korean War. The year 2000 coincided with an unexpected shift in contemporary popular contestations of orthodox Korean War interpretation, which