
Reviewed by:
Mark E. Caprio, Rikkyo University
Nan Kim, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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Introduction by Steven Lee, University of British Columbia

“Warfare and the Re-Making of Korea in the 1950s”

The Korean War was a major turning point in the history of the Korean peninsula, perhaps the most significant event in the history of Korea in the past one thousand years. The peninsula has not been divided into rival warring polities since the 10th century C.E. We cannot, however, understand the history of events outside the context of wider historical processes, which for the Korean peninsula include the emergence of capitalist economic dynamics; the end of dynastic rule in Chosŏn and the expansion of the Japanese imperium; big power rivalry involving, for the first time, powers beyond East Asia, especially from Europe and the United States; and new forms of political thought, particularly nationalism, which began to affect thinking and political action in Korea by the late nineteenth century. Dynastic and colonial Korea, from the formative decades of the Koryŏ Dynasty to the end of Japanese rule in 1945, had, of course, regional differences and regionalism has been an important factor shaping the history of the two Koreas. Since 1948, however, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) have forged new national histories that have become entangled with regionalism on the peninsula. The roots of many of the differences between the two Koreas lie in the formative decade of the 1950s, and the papers in this theme issue, while focusing on South Korea, provide insight into the national history of both Koreas, highlighting the diverging competitive paths of the two nations in the early Cold War era.

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In recent historiography on Korea, the Korean War rightly occupies a central place in the narrative history of the peninsula. Over the past decade or so, historians have explored the social history of the war and the impact of the conflict on Korean society from a variety of fresh and innovative perspectives, including the bio-politics of American diplomacy and the memory and violence of the Korean War era. The articles in this double issue of the *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* that scholars in the fields of history, economics, sociology, and religious studies have written contribute to those histories while situating the war and Korean society within broad historical frameworks of analysis.

In the first article in the issue, Janice Kim explores the social history of wartime Korea from the point of view of a key city in the ROK, Pusan, which served as the country’s temporary capital for most of the fighting. Her work traces the city’s history from the point of view of “everyday life in Pusan as a refugee capital” and the impact on the city made by the refugees and evacuees who fled their villages and homes to find refuge in the southeast corner of the peninsula. She underscores the significance of the second major wave of refugees into Pusan, in the shadow of the Communist offensive after Chinese intervention in the fall and winter of 1950-1951, arguing that the influx transformed the city, making it a center, not only of local and national government, but also of newly-created services for the city’s recent inhabitants.

Kim’s narrative exposes the limited ability of the ROK government to provide assistance to the refugees and evacuees, given not only limited resources but especially its priority on mobilizing civilians for military service and battling the North Korean and Chinese soldiers. She points out that the vast increase in the city’s population, from 500,000 before the northern offensive to 1.5 million or more by mid-1951, severely exacerbated urban poverty. Relief shelters were inadequate and overcrowded, and state agencies were unable to meet the needs of the population. As Kim points out, the state effectively privatized assistance, and ordinary citizens cared for the displaced. Most of those who fled the violence stayed not in relief camps, but in private accommodation, with friends or relatives, or in abandoned buildings. Pusan’s living conditions during the war were desperate, with inadequate water, shelter, power, and food. Disease was a constant threat, and, in the first two years of the war, the United Nations Civil Assistance Command Korea (UNCACK), under the authority of the U.S. Army, undertook much of the public health and relief work for Koreans. Like the ROK government under President Syngman Rhee, United Nations Command (UNC) military priorities also dictated UNCACK’s policies. Indeed, the militarization of society in this period is an important theme in Kim’s work, which demonstrates how the ubiquitous U.S. military presence in Pusan resulted in the growth of work at the city’s dockyards, though at pay levels inadequate for survival, the expansion of the black market, where anything was available for purchase, and the extensive growth of “comfort stations,” 78 of them by 1952 in Pusan alone, to serve the sexual desires of American soldiers.

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2 See, for example, the recent work of Dong-Choon Kim, one of the authors in this special issue, on the Korean War titled *The Unending Korean War: A Social History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009). For innovative approaches to adoption and the bio-politics between South Korea and the United States, see Eleana Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); and Arissa H. Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). On the theme of memory, violence, and warfare, see the articles that Suzy Kim, Keun-Sik Jung, Daniel Y. Kim, Sunghoon Han, Seunghie Clara Hong, Brendan Wright, and Bruce Cumings contributed to the themed March 2015 issue of *Cross Currents*, "(De)Memorializing the Korean War: A Critical Intervention," [https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-14](https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-14) (accessed 30 June 2017).
Kim also underlines the resourcefulness and determination of the refugees and urban camp-dwellers who dealt in the black market, sought lost family members, sold goods on the streets and in the markets, and made courageous but initially futile efforts to return home. She notes the efforts parents and their children made to attend school during the war, but illness, lack of food, or a need to work in the streets to earn additional income for the family disrupted or precluded education for the vast majority during the conflict. Kim highlights the Americanization that took place in Pusan, as South Koreans were exposed to American slang, fast food, commercialism, and popular movies. Dong-Choon Kim’s article in this issue suggests that this experience was crucial for understanding South Korea’s longer term embrace of capitalism. In the environment of war and emotional and material need, the resources and wealth of the soldiers contrasted greatly with the poverty of the city’s inhabitants and created a situation where survival often depended on acquiring, marketing, and selling goods, in the process also socializing urban populations to American merchandise, tastes, and styles.

The U.S.-South Korean relationship is the subject of Grace Chae’s article about the U.S. military’s reaction to President Rhee’s stated intention to release North Korean non-repatriate prisoners of war (POWs)—those who had indicated to the United Nations Command (UNC) that they would be unwilling to return to the DPRK. The political purpose of their release was to underline the ROK’s anger over the truce talks while also demonstrating Rhee’s belief that these POWs were anti-Communists and loyal to South Korea. Chae’s research in U.S. military archival sources illustrates an important new dimension to the history of Rhee’s release of the prisoners. U.S. officials had expressed dismay at the time of the release, but Chae shows the willingness of General Mark Clark, the UNC commander, to collude informally with Rhee’s plan when he ordered the U.S. soldiers at the prison not to use lethal force against escaping POWs, as had been previous policy. Guards were to signal the camp at the time of an escape and to employ tactics known to have been ineffective in capturing rebellious prisoners, especially the use of riot gas. Furthermore, the UNC made little effort to recapture the POW escapees, demonstrating the American army’s compliance with ROK goals, even though no evidence has surfaced of formal coordination between the two sides. Chae argues that Clark’s motivations derived from his sympathy for the ROK position against an armistice, his willingness to increase military pressure against the Communist side, his support for the non-repatriate POWs, and his concerns about ordering the shooting of prisoners who formally had tied their fates to the anti-Communist coalition in the Cold War. Above all, Clark wanted to maintain a working relationship with South Korea and may have viewed his assent on the POW issue as a means of restraining Rhee from initiating a unilateral military offensive against the Communist armies.

North Korea has attracted the attention of scholars in recent years, and social scientists interested in the contemporary dimensions of DPRK politics and society have written much of this literature. Avram Agov examines North Korea’s relationship with other socialist nations in the 1950s, focusing on the DPRK’s internal and external integration into the socialist world. For Agov, the starting point for the country’s internal incorporation into Eurasia’s socialist system consisted of the creation in the DPRK of a one party

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3 See, for example, Suk-Young Kim, Illusive Utopia: Theater, Film and Everyday Performance in North Korea (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung, North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012); Hyun Ok Park, Capitalist Unconscious: From Korean Unification to Transnational Korea (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). These books use historical analysis to understand present day trends and rely on interviews in South Korea with North Koreans who fled the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea since the famine and social catastrophe of the 1990s.
state, the adoption of a Marxist-Leninist ideology, and a command economy. He views 1946 as an important turning point, when the newly-created North Korean Provisional People’s Committee, headed by Kim Il Sung, shadowed the operations of the Soviet occupation force and began to implement land reform and nationalize the economy, along with other vital elements of the integrative process. These internal changes in North Korea continued in the 1950s with collectivization of agriculture and the consolidation of Kim Il Sung’s power against rival factions which had links to Soviet and Chinese communism. The DPRK’s external integration, tied especially to trade and aid which it received during the Korean War and afterwards, was a vital aspect of its relationship with the socialist world in the 1950s. Agov estimates that socialist aid to the regime was probably more important in the 1950s than was U.S. assistance to the ROK, given that much of the support came in the form of industrial plants, goods, and machinery which had a prompt positive impact on North Korea’s economy, though its economic effects were constrained by local shortages of labor and skills.

Socialist world aid to the DPRK reached a peak in 1955, when it represented over forty percent of the country’s national income. In this period, North Korea rehabilitated its mining operations, partly with the assistance of aid from Poland, and, building on the colonial legacy of extensive mineral extraction, expanded its exports of raw resources to its Communist allies. The socialist world also provided North Korea with a range of subsidies and loans which further tied the regime to the socialist system, though the DPRK did not join the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). In the mid-1950s, the North Korean media welcomed and praised this aid. Although Kim Il Sung’s juche speech in late 1955 heralded a more nationalistic line, it was not until 1957 and later that the regime’s embrace of the socialist world’s assistance began to diminish. Kim designed juche with the Soviet Union in mind, but North Korean nationalism was also directed at the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in this era. DPRK leaders designed the chollima [Flying Horse] movement, for example, to establish a more uniquely Korean art presence, compared to the aesthetic movements in the PRC and the Soviet Union. By 1960, Agov notes that Kim Il Sung instructed Kim Il, the Korean delegate at a socialist conference in Moscow, to “not bend to the pressure of the Soviet great power.” By the late 1950s, the DPRK was moving closer to the PRC, but, Agov stresses, the regime’s nationalist discourse facilitated its navigation of the Sino-Soviet dispute, even assisting competition between the its two major allies, while also establishing the groundwork for the longer term evolution of North Korea’s alliance system. The instability of the Communist alliance system, as Odd Arne Westad has explained, foreshadowed the broader failure of the socialist world in the Cold War.

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4 Social conditions remained difficult, though, especially for the peasantry, and food shortages and famine deaths occurred in early 1955. See Balázs Szalontai, *Kim II Sung in the Khrushchev Era: Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), chapter 3. Balázs Szalontai is critical of the North Korean regime for helping cause the crisis, but his analysis also shows that the government responded in a flexible way to resolve the shortages, such as allowing market trade in foodstuffs. Trade with western-oriented countries was also possible, as Avram Agov notes, and in 1961 the DPRK negotiated a 45,000 metric ton grain deal with Australia.

5 Kim, *Illusive Utopia*, 111.

Turning to South Korea, Dong-Choon Kim’s article establishes the broader societal context for interpreting the war’s impact on the ROK. Basing his analysis on the work of social scientists Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passerson, Christopher Lasch, and Dongno Kim, Kim argues that the anxiety and pain produced by the bloodshed of the Korean War, combined with the Rhee regime’s anti-Communist police presence, facilitated the growth of familialism in the 1950s. Scholars have described familialism as individuals who are “eager to maximise material, short-term advantages for their family by mobilising all the resources available in the modified extended family networks, under the assumption that all others will do likewise.” Though writers have used this definition to explain the “modernization” of South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s, Dong-Choon Kim applies the concept to the 1950s, a period he describes as one that academics often have ignored because it pre-dated South Korea’s major industrialization, which occurred in the era of ROK military dictatorship. Kim is interested in the ideological, as opposed to material roots of South Korean capitalist modernity, and locates them in the 1950s. He argues that the combination of the authoritarian state and the savagery of the war led to a greater degree of individualism and abandonment of social and political engagement—a societal retreat into family and private-oriented activities, in this case to institutions tied to education and religion, especially colleges and the Christian church.

With respect to education, historian Michael J. Seth has argued that “no feature of South Korea in the decades after 1945 is more striking than the rapid expansion of education at all levels.” The article that Woo and Kahm have written for this collection explores the broader historical context for South Korea’s embrace of education in the latter half of the 20th Century, a phenomenon often referred to as “education fever.” They focus on growth in primary school education in the half century following the onset of Japanese colonial rule, leading to universal primary education for the population by the end of the 1950s. At the outset of the colonial era, Korean literacy rates were consistent with those of the developing world, at around fifteen percent. Scholars sometimes highlight Korea’s Confucian heritage as a factor in the expansion of educational opportunities in Korea, but the once meritocratic Confucian examination system applied to Korean elites, not commoners, and thus restricted and regulated education during its dynastic history. Though Japanese administrators increased the numbers of Koreans attending primary school, especially during World War II, Daeyung Woo and Howard Kahm reveal that the empire did this as part of its mobilization drive, to maintain a minimum level of industrial skills for laborers and to facilitate their conscription into the Japanese Imperial Army. Urbanization and the overdevelopment of the peninsula’s economy under Japan’s rule thus contributed to the growth in education during the colonial era, but officials continued to maintain quotas on enrollments. The poverty of villagers also limited children’s access to schooling.

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9 There are some discrepancies in the statistics Michael J. Seth uses in *Education Fever* to measure elementary school enrollments. The trends, however, were moving in the direction of consolidating universal education at both primary and secondary levels of instruction, the main difference being that primary school became almost exclusively based on public education. See chapter 3.
The most significant period of acceleration of primary school education occurred after 1945, under the U.S. occupation of South Korea and in the immediate aftermath of the Korean War. As Dong-Choon Kim notes, American military rule resulted in an education system that mixed colonial patterns in higher education with American trends in universal enrollment. In the aftermath of the Korean War, the U.S. influence grew, especially in construction of schools and training of teachers, and the South Korean land reform of 1949 opened the possibility of creating a new meritocracy. Woo and Kahm also emphasize the significance of land reform for the growth of educational opportunities in South Korea. They argue that the reform was responsible for a ten percent increase in the numbers of primary students, which accounted for half the growth in students attending elementary school in the decade after 1949.

While pent up demand shaped the longer term growth in primary school education, Dong-Choon Kim points out that the war facilitated the destruction of South Korea’s social structure and replaced it with a society which placed emphasis on individual ambition and social mobility, and not a commitment to democratic politics. Education fever, in short, needs to be situated within the political and social frame of the Korean War, the consolidation of an anti-Communist world view, and the elimination of collectivist opposition to the Rhee regime. “When Rhee’s government silences the expression of the collective voice and the uncertainty of war atomized the people,” Kim remarks, “ordinary Koreans resorted to the pre-existing family solidarity to survive and secure their futures.” Education fever contributed in important ways to the structures of South Korean capitalism, though, as Kim underlines, with largely unacknowledged longer term social and political costs for the nation.

The other major institution that South Koreans turned to in the 1950s was the Christian Church, especially Protestantism. Dong-Choon Kim notes that religious groups, in general, experienced a growth in their following, but that Protestantism in particular showed the most rapid upsurge, tripling in size by the end of the decade. Part of the growth came from Christians in North Korea who left the country during the Soviet occupation and Korean War. Of the one million or so northerners who fled to South Korea from 1945 to 1953, out of a DPRK population of about ten million, about 75,000 were Protestants, representing up to forty percent of the country’s Protestant population. As the articles in this issue illustrate, this group was most influential in shaping South Korea’s anti-Communist consensus in the 1950s and beyond. In Pusan and South Kyŏngsang province generally, Janice Kim argues, North Korean refugees formed anti-Communist congregations, believing that the only way they could return home would be through the destruction of communism on the Korean peninsula. Jeongran Yoon’s article confirms this attitude of Korean evangelicals. Indeed, the Northwest Youth Association, composed of Christian refugees from North Korea, participated in widespread anti-Communist violence on Cheju Island in 1948 and 1949. Also, Christians were involved in massacres north of the 38th parallel, notably at Sinch’ŏn, during the UNC occupation of North Korea in late 1950.


religious and secular ideologies. “The massive loss of life and property suffered by Protestants,” as Yoon emphasizes, “only furthered the militancy of their anti-communism.”

Jeongran Yoon and Dong-Choon Kim focus their analyses on the intersection of Korean Christianity and society in the aftermath of the Korean War. For Kim, Christian refugees emphasized “family solidarity and community,” thus adding religion as a second vital sphere for the phenomenon of familialism in modern South Korea. Religion appealed to Koreans partly because it acted as a shelter from the violence of war and the loss of family and friends. Kim concludes that religion and education were the two key areas where family-oriented yet atomistic Koreans sought upward mobility while sustaining the anti-Communist status quo. Yoon’s article discloses the changing character of Christian evangelical thinking about South Korean politics and economic development in the era encompassing the late Rhee period, the Second Republic, and Pak Chung-hee’s military coup in May 1961. The major concept she introduces is sŭnggong, meaning ‘victory over communism.’ While the underlying goal of Christians did not change before and after the fratricidal violence, the methods they adopted did. She points out, for example, that evangelicals entered into a period of tension with the Rhee regime over its undemocratic and authoritarian politics. They became concerned not only with the political abuses of the regime’s anti-communism that labelled opponents Communist to justify their suppressopm, but also the failure of the southern dictatorship to deal with corruption and poverty, which they believed would fuel ‘communism.”

Yoon shows that while the anti-communism of the evangelists remained potent, the political context in which they operated changed and they began to articulate critiques of the existing government and political system. The April 1960 demonstrations revitalized their sense of mission as being a ‘chosen’ people before God, causing South Korean evangelicals to support the ouster of Rhee. Their rapid disillusionment with the subsequent Second Republic, with its corruption and floundering economic policy, paralleled the view of U.S. officials, who also looked upon the Second Republic as a failure, despite the democratic potential it represented. The Christians’ aggressive anti-communism, combined with an urge for an authoritarian style of economic development, led them to support the 1961 military coup, even though it contradicted their earlier demands for democratic and responsible government. The logic of sŭnggong now demanded a new authoritarianism which would subordinate democracy to the perceived need for economic stability and capitalist ‘development.’ In this case, the close collaboration which developed between Christians and coup plotters highlighted the bankruptcy of democratic governance in South Korea’s new age of dictatorship.

Participants:

**Mark E. Caprio** is professor in the College of Intercultural Communication at Rikkyo University. He is the author of *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (University of Washington Press, 2009). At present he is researching postcolonial issues in liberated southern Korea.

**Nan Kim** is Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She is the author of *Memory, Reconciliation, and Reunion in South Korea: Crossing the Divide* (Lexington Books, 2017) and is a member of the editorial board of *Critical Asian Studies*. Her article, “The Color of Dissent and a Vital Politics of Fragility in South Korea,” appeared in the November 2018 issue of *The Journal of Asian Politics of the Sinch’ŏn violence, see Sunghoon Han, “The Ongoing Korean War at the Sinch’ŏn Museum in North Korea,” *Cross Currents*, [https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-14/han](https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-14/han) (accessed 3 July 2017).
Studies. She is currently working on a project about the post-1979 peace delegations to the DPRK sent by the American Friends Service Committee.

Steven Lee received a D.Phil. from the University of Oxford and is associate professor in the Department of History and chair of the International Relations Program at the University of British Columbia. His publications include Outposts of Empire (McGill Queens, 1996), The Korean War (Longman, 2001), and, as co-editor with Yunshik Chang, Transformations in Twentieth Century Korea (Routledge, 2006). He is currently writing a history of the long twentieth century (Wiley-Blackwell).
For a long time, perhaps too long, the important debates regarding the Korean War remained focused on its origins—whether it opened with a sudden attack or a gradual build-up to war; its kind—whether it was an international war or a civil war; and the role of the Soviet Union and China—the extent to which the two Communist giants participated in the war’s planning.¹ The articles appearing in the double-issue of the Journal of American—East Asian Relations reflect a growing trend toward multi-disciplinary diversity in the way that recent research has examined this war. The articles focus on the effects of the war and its aftermath on the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in order to trace the “diverging competitive paths of the two nations in the early Cold War era.”²

The appearance of these new trends in the study of the Korean War is a post-Cold War phenomenon. One of its more noticeable products is the more nuanced depiction of victimization and victimized that is more frequently seen as characteristic of both the DPRK and the ROK rather than one limited to either the North and the South. An early representation of this trend is Kim Don-Choon’s The Unending Korean War: A Social History that details the massacres committed in ROK villages from just before June 1950 and which continued throughout much of the war.³ ROK cinema, as well, has contributed a number of films that depict the North-South relationship as more balanced (both committed atrocities) and even more congenial (the two armies finding ways to communicate as “brothers”).⁴ Korean fiction has also captured this more nuanced characterization of the Korean War as exemplified in stories authored by Pak Wan-sŏ and others.⁵

One novel approach found in contemporary Korean War research has seen less focus on the actual fighting and slaughters and more on the war’s effect on peripheral areas, both geographically and, as seen in these articles, socially. One example of the former is a new collection of articles edited by Tessa Morris-Suzuki that consider the war’s effect on Korea’s Asian neighbors, including Japan, Taiwan, and Mongolia.⁶ This particular collection addresses the war’s social influence, both during the battles and after the fighting ceased. The six


⁴ For example, “Nambu gun” (Southern Army, 1990); “Taegukki” (Brotherhood of War, 2004); Taebaek sanmaek (Taebaek Mountains, 1994); and “Kochichŏn (The Front Line, 2011).

⁵ See The Red Room: Stories of Trauma in Contemporary Korea, Bruce and Ju-chan Fulton trans. (Honolulu: University of Hawai`i Press, 2009)

contributions are rather equally divided between wartime and postwar discussions, with one article leapfrogging over the war to offer an extensive survey on the expansion of Korean education from the colonial period to postwar ROK society. The collection is rather skewed to the ROK, with just one entry considering the effects of the war on the DPRK.

The emphasis on the war’s social influence offers surprisingly limited attention to the role of the United States, with rather enlightening exceptions. One is Dong-Choon Kim’s examination of the postwar boom in Christianity among Koreans.\(^7\) Kim calculates that while all religions expanded to some extent, the expansion of Christianity was the most remarkable. Between 1952 and 1960 the number of Catholic Koreans increased about three times and the number of Protestant Koreans by fifty percent (223). The reasons for these increases had more to do with practical than spiritual reward. One cause was the favorable treatment that the Christian Koreans enjoyed under U.S. occupation rule (1945-1948) that preceded the formation of the ROK state. The U.S. occupation favored these Koreans with administrative positions, distributed to their churches former Japanese property, and allowed Christian churches to distribute to the poor. Kim also notes that the Christian ROK President Syngman Rhee contributed by protecting Christian colonial-era collaborators from trial and punishment (224). While not ruling out Korean attraction to the doctrines of these religions, Kim suggests that more practical benefits may also have factored into the decision to convert.

Janice Kim’s contribution on wartime Pusan reveals a less-attractive side of the U.S.-ROK relationship: their collusion in establishing prostitute ‘comfort’ facilities in the city during the war.\(^8\) ROK facilities never threatened to match those developed by the Japanese during the Asia Pacific wars. They were nevertheless quite extensive given the limited territory in which they were consolidated. Kim reports that within the city of Pusan there were 78 comfort houses established by the ROK military for “special comforting activities for the welfare and moral of all [ROK] soldiers” (120). In addition, the ROK military also frequented private brothels. There also were separate facilities for the U.S. and allied soldiers. Outside Pusan the city of Masan had five such houses (120). This list does not include the extensive array of options for soldiers who spent their R & R time and stipends in Japan’s water-trade industry. The extent to which the U.S. military was involved in the planning of these facilities is unclear. However, Kim uncovered Korean newspaper articles that reported this topic being included on the agendas of meetings held between U.S. officials and their ROK counterparts. This topic is a genuinely hidden thorn in Korean War historiography. It would be interesting to learn the nationality of the women working these houses, how they were recruited and by whom, as well as the conditions under which they worked.

Grace Chae addresses yet another issue that involved possible U.S.-ROK collusion in her article on Syngman Rhee’s sudden release of POWs in 1953 in an attempt to sabotage the cease fire negotiations then being


finalized by the warring parties (minus the ROK).\textsuperscript{9} Chae’s discussion challenges previous research by Rosemary Foot that quotes General Mark W. Clark as being “profoundly shocked by [Rhee’s] unilateral abrogation of your personal commitment.”\textsuperscript{10} She finds that not only was the commanding officer aware of Rhee’s plans to release the prisoners, he apparently complied with Rhee’s plans by ordering guards to show restraint should there be a massive prison break, and to employ the “ineffective tacit of using tear gas” against the escapees (130). Clark justified this breach of protocol by characterizing these non-repatriate prisoners as “basically [being] on our side” in their renunciation of Communism (152). Rhee’s non-cooperation, perhaps, also served his own purposes. His defiance allowed him to “save face” among Koreans by being able to claim that he did his best to continue the fight to secure Korean unification, and also force the United States to deal with the ROK before it completed negotiations with the DPRK (148). Operation REPAT, she concludes, “reveals that the U.S. played a complicit role” in an act hitherto interpreted as a unilateral act of defiance by the ROK president (128).

The Korean War wrought extensive destruction and hardship to the peninsula as the battles advanced first south from the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel and then north, after General Douglas MacArthur’s daring Inchon landing up to the Yalu River, and then again south, after the Chinese military crossed into Korea, again south into ROK territory. The articles for the most part stay clear of this heavily covered history. But one entry, Janice Kim’s detailed description of wartime Pusan, considers in depth the direct effect of the battles on a city that managed to avoid direct combat. Despite escaping the destruction experienced by Korea’s other major cities, including Seoul and P’yŏngyang, Pusan did face similar hardships that tend to follow war and its aftermath, including the black markets supplied with military PX goods, the makeshift housing assembled to accommodate the heavy influx of refugees, and the increased unemployment and crime that this influx attracted.

The city’s problems, however, predated the Korean War. In 1946, for example, Pusan faced two related problems: a cholera epidemic in May and the Autumn Harvest Uprisings in September (105). These two crises both were a cause of a similar influx of Koreans brought about by the hundreds of thousands of Japan-based Koreans who entered Korea through Pusan upon repatriating from August 1945. Thus, from this time Pusan faced circumstances over the next eight years that changed the city in irreversible ways.

The effect of the Korean War on social issues such as religion and education constitute a second area emphasized in these articles. These discussions add yet another dimension to the debate over the origins of Korean modernity, which to date have been limited to whether Korean society modernized prior to or during the colonial period. Dong-Choon Kim suggests a third possibility, a post-Korean War modernity:

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“Some legacies of Confucianism and colonialism might have remained in the 1950s, but the ROK’s forced entry into the world economic system, Cold War politics, and fratricidal warfare in the form of the Korean War established the framework for the subsequent
\end{quote}


evolution of South Korea. Specifically, the Korean War continued the dividing line that dramatically transformed the fabric of Korean society.”

The author credits this advancement to the postwar “explosion of educational and religious institutions” (213).

Dae Hyung Woo and Howard Kahm’s study warns readers against neglecting the contribution that Japan’s colonial rule provided for post-liberation and postwar Korean society.11 It was, after all, during this earlier period that Korean children began to attend primary school en masse, an advancement that culminated in the early 1940s when the Japanese government declared its intention to introduce to the peninsula a compulsory education system (along with suffrage rights), but both not before 1946. The inconsistency embedded in this decision goes unnoticed in this article. In Japan the Meiji government followed a common pattern of first requiring its subjects to attend school to acquire the nuts and bolts of being patriotic subjects before sending the males off to take their final test: proving their patriotism in battle. In Korea the Japanese administration enlisted Koreans in a military and labor conscription system before instructing them on why ‘their’ country and people required their devotion. The irregular order in which the colonial administration introduced these two institutions lends doubt as to the colonial government’s true intentions in making Korean education compulsory, particularly as it declared its intention to provide compulsory education in the midst of a desperate wartime situation.

This article acknowledges a second boost that ROK education received in the United States occupation’s emphasis on primary schooling, a value that coincided with the importance that both traditional and contemporary Korean society placed on education. The authors emphasize that the infrastructure left by the Japanese after their retreat from the peninsula proved useful for ROK society. How much of this infrastructure survived the massive destruction of the Korean War is a critical point worthy of consideration.

Korea’s Confucian tradition is often cited as a reason for the people’s zeal for education, and subsequently for the economic miracle that the ROK enjoyed from the 1960s. Woo and Kahm’s tracing of the Korean “demand for education” to the early twentieth century dilutes the Confucian factor as a cause for this zeal (205). Dong-Choon Kim, on the other hand, is ambivalent on the ideology’s contribution to Korean society. On the one hand, Kim writes that like many conflicts, the Korean War “dismantled pre-existing social structures and replaced them with new systems. One such system was the Confucian social system was “destroyed” by the war to be replaced with an “achievement-oriented society” (216). This achievement, among other factors, “ignited long-suppressed yearnings for higher education” (221). Kim goes on to list other factors for Korean yearning for education including the U.S. military government advancement of education, and the devastation of the war and the need for Koreans to better ensure their future. However, he resurrects traditional Confucian culture as one additional causes for the postwar Korean emphasis on education (219-221).

11 Dae Hyung Woo and Howard Kahm, “Road to School: Primary School Participation in Korea, 1911-1960,” Journal of American-East Asian Relations 24 (2017): 184-208. This article briefly discusses the modernity issue but exclusively through the eyes of Western research (see 185, FNs #3 and 4). One wonders what Korean researchers have to say on this issue.
Many of the articles also address the role that religion has assumed in rejuvenating postwar ROK society as, along with education, both institutions pushed a strong capitalist, anti-Communist agenda. Dong-Choon Kim sees Christianity as a symbol of the ongoing anti-Christian “crusade” during the Korean War, one that verified a person’s “first-class citizenship” (225). Jeongran Yoon’s article in part takes this further by highlighting the anti-Communist stance taken by the journal The Christian Weekly. He characterizes the view of one rather extreme faction of Korean Christians as their “waging an anti-Communist war” (238). The Weekly, he argues, saw Korean Protestants as “survivors with a mission” and as “a people [that] God had chosen for a special mission”: to rescue the northern brethren from the forces of evil, –the “Communist Party [which was] the Party of Satan” (240-241).

But one article among the six, by Avram Ago, specifically addresses the influence of the Korean War on this alleged “evil force.” by tracing the DPRK’s postwar integration into the socialist world. Ago describes an apparent contradiction in the DPRK’s attempt to maintain distance from the very socialist states on which it relied for its immediate postwar recovery. Yet, ironically, he states that both sides of this dilemma—divergence and integration—“contributed to the ability of the North Korean regime to sustain itself after the end of the Cold War in 1991” (161). What allowed the DPRK to sustain this position at least in part was the Soviet-Chinese rift that enhanced the DPRK’s value to both Communist giants, and allowed it to mold its 
juche ideology to accommodate both divergence and integration. Juche, which literally means ‘master (ju 主) of one’s body (jhe 体), is most often rendered in English as ‘self reliance.’ This translation makes sense when directed toward ROK-DPRK relations: Unlike the South, since 1958 the North has not had to rely on a foreign troop presence for protection. Within DPRK relations with the socialist world self-reliance made little sense given the Korean state’s dependency on their assistance. Instead, a second possible translation, ‘self-determination,’ appears as more consistent in meaning and in the DPRK’s reality. Wooed by both China and the Soviet Union, Premier Kim Il Sung noted that the DPRK would determine by itself how to exploit this rift to its advantage. In December 1955 he envisioned this as the DPRK people choosing, for example, “whether you use a spoon or chopsticks.” Most important was the state learning “all the good things from both the Soviet Union and China and … work out a method of political work suitable to the actual conditions of our country.”

The authors of the articles in this collection are to be commended for extending Korean War historiography into areas that hitherto had been provided insufficient (or no) attention. As with most wars, the effects of the battles are hardly contained within the temporal boundaries that histories establish as beginning and ending dates. The multi-disciplinary approach enriches this history by providing multiple avenues for viewing both

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the war and its aftershocks. While making a substantial contribution to Korean War history, these articles also serve as models for viewing war in general.
Review by Nan Kim, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

Given the extent to which the decade figures into contemporary historical analyses as a unit of periodization, focusing on a given ten-year span hardly seems argumentative in itself. Yet, that is precisely the case with regard to the temporal framing of “Warfare and the Re-making of Korea in the 1950s,” the recent forum in a special double-issue of the Journal of American-East Asian Relations co-edited by Steven Hugh Lee and Janice C.H. Kim. In Korean War historiography, the dogged recurrence of a long-standing debate over the war’s origins has meant that interpretations of the war most often build upon an exploration of its causes and precursors in the late 1940s or earlier. For this volume to focus instead on the ‘1950s’ therefore sets aside the war-origins debate and instead brings attention to the impact of the Korean War’s period of major military hostilities (1950-1953) from a perspective that carries the analysis forward to the war’s understudied aftermath, including post-armistice reconstruction and social rehabilitation.1

With the exception of a notable article on North Korea, as discussed below, the JAEAR forum takes South Korea as its primary focus. It therefore warrants consideration that, in most historical surveys regarding South Korea, the years immediately following the 1953 Korean War Armistice Agreement are often obscured by the far greater attention devoted instead to two other periods of ‘re-making’ society in the late twentieth century: (1) compressed modernization of explosive economic growth during the 1970s and early-/mid-1980s under military authoritarian rule, and (2) democratization movements particularly during on the period from the Kwangju (Gwangju) Uprising in 1980 to the June Struggle of 1987. Even fairly detailed surveys of contemporary Korean history tend to gloss over the rest of the decade following 1953 in favor of jumping ahead to the April 19 Revolution of 1960 and the military coup d’état by autocrat Park Chung Hee in 1961 as two events that unquestionably represent major turning points in South Korea. Yet, as the editors and authors of this forum argue, the recovery and reconstruction from the war’s devastation during the 1950s were formative years of pivotal change, whose transformative social, cultural, economic, political, and diplomatic developments would reverberate in the decades that followed.

The forum opens with a preface and respective contributions by the forum’s two co-editors: an introductory essay by Steven Lee, and the forum’s lead article by Janice Kim. Lee’s introduction succinctly situates the forum within a brief overview of relevant historical frameworks, noting also the interdisciplinary breadth of the volume with contributions by scholars in the fields of history, economics, sociology, and religious studies.2 Several of the forum’s articles began as papers presented at a conference on “The Two Koreas in the 1950s” held at the University of British Columbia in 2011, and others grew out of the Academy of Korean Studies-

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funded “Beyond the Korean War” research project. Their research helps to fill gaps in available analyses and information about Korea during this period, and though its authors are nearly all affiliated with universities in Canada and South Korea, they draw upon archival research in a range of other countries including China, Bulgaria, the Russian Federation, Taiwan, and the United States.

While the forum warrants an engaged readership among those working on the Korean War and contemporary Korea, a considerably wider audience among those working in international history and global history would gain from its insights, given the context surrounding Korea’s post-1953 recovery and reconstruction. After all, the post-armistice reconstruction of the Republic of Korea (ROK) was the world's largest multilateral development project at the time. With respect to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), this period of reconstruction similarly represents a complex set of transnational collaborations of far-reaching significance. As historian Charles Armstrong has written elsewhere, it was “the first and only time that the Soviet Union, China, and the Soviet-aligned countries of Eastern Europe and Mongolia cooperated on a large-scale economic project of this nature,” thereby signifying “the historical high point of ‘international socialist solidarity,’ one that would never be repeated after the USSR and China fell out in the early 1960s.”

Avram Agov’s article about the DPRK addresses the topic of the country’s integration into the socialist bloc, not only through aid for reconstruction but also in terms of relations fostered through trade, diplomacy, and media coverage. Compared to U.S. aid to South Korea, Agov observes that socialist assistance to North Korea arguably had a greater impact on its domestic economy. While the 1950s were a formative period for the DPRK’s alliance with the neighboring Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, the country also notably became more integrated during this time with Communist nations in Eastern Europe, which Agov documents through numerous examples from diverse archival sources. By the latter part of the decade, however, the DPRK drew back from the embrace of such fraternal relations. Agov assesses that, by 1960, the rise of its nationalist juche (self-reliance) ideology would reach the level of a secular religion. As Agov writes of juche, “The DPRK’s independent course was a policy instrument which allowed the North Korean regime to navigate in the dangerous waters of the Sino-Soviet dispute without significantly alienating its two main benefactors, even creating a competition between its two big neighbors in vying for North Korea’s friendship and support in the Communist world” (180).

With a focus on earlier wartime events, the forum’s first two articles examine the U.S. alliance with South Korea, establishing a compelling contrast between the realms of civilian life and military strategy. Janice Kim’s...
research trains an illuminating lens on the lives of refugees and the details of civilian livelihood during the war in Pusan (Busan), the city that was the South Korean capital for most of the war. Kim describes how Pusan was transformed by a rapid influx of refugees, which swelled the city’s population by threefold in two waves of forced migration due to the war’s escalation. The chapter explores how the new and existing Pusan residents coped with conditions of overwhelming poverty and dislocation. War survivors struggled to eke out a living amid increasing marketization of the local economy that was mostly illegal or informal, while elites were the only group that could continue schooling their children, as education became increasingly privatized. Weighing how the city was both a U.S. military base during wartime and also a site of strained circumstances for civilian refuge and relocation that accounted for nearly a tenth of the country’s population during the war, Kim’s analysis of refugee life and relief policies in Pusan vividly contributes to an understanding of how militarism and ‘black market’ capitalism would later continue to be pervasive in South Korea.

The forum’s second article by Grace Chae provides new insight into the history of the U.S.-South Korean military alliance by examining the disruptive gambit that could have derailed armistice negotiations: the release authorized by South Korean President Syngman Rhee in June 1953 of 25,000 ‘non-repatriate’ North Korean prisoners of war, or those who had officially indicated an unwillingness to return to the DPRK. This POW release was Rhee’s protest against the negotiations of an armistice that he opposed for a perceived lack of sufficient security guarantees, and Chae draws upon military archival research to shed light on how the U.S. response figured into this dramatic episode. Although she takes pains to note that there is no evidence to support allegations of collusion between the South Korean and U.S. military leadership in executing the release, she argues that Commander Mark C. Clark of the United Nations Command was complicit by virtue of ordering restraint toward the escaping POWs while employing tactics that were known to be ineffective for their re-capture. Chae interprets this response in terms of not only Clark’s sympathy for the non-repatriate POWs, but also his prioritizing the preservation of the U.S.-South Korean alliance over protecting the circumstances for achieving the armistice itself. That commitment to the alliance, Chae argues, was Clark’s pragmatic response in the face of pressure from continuous Chinese bombardments and the possibility of escalation; she interprets it as Clark’s recognition that he could not afford to undermine his command over South Korean troops, who accounted for nearly two-thirds of front-line defense. While these two articles by Kim and Chae address starkly different contexts, they both weigh aspects of vulnerability and leverage in the relationship between the two counties that would have lasting effects on South Korea’s development.

When considered in contrast with other related work on Korean modernity, the remaining articles contribute toward an analysis that challenges but also deepens the ‘cultural turn’ in the practice of international history. Dong-Choon Kim addresses the pervasive characteristics of postwar South Korea that bear ostensibly cultural overtones—familialism, ‘education fever,’ and the dominance of conservative forms of Protestant

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8 Grace Chae, “Complacency or Complicity?: Reconsidering the UN Command’s Role in Syngman Rhee’s Release of North Korean POWS,” 128-159.
Christianity. In order to explain how underlying complexities of South Korean development gave rise to what might otherwise be largely chalked up to ‘cultural’ phenomena during later decades, Kim’s theoretically sophisticated article traces the material and ideological roots of their interrelated development in a social milieu shaped by global events of the 1950s. According to Kim, the aftermath of a disastrous war along with the emergence of an anti-communist authoritarian police state under Rhee created conditions of poverty, anxiety, and uncertainty, which led most South Koreans to seek out private avenues to improve their personal prospects or family circumstances through education and religious organizations, rather than collectively organizing for a more democratic society through civic participation and social engagement.

Jeongran Yoon takes up a related analysis about anti-Communism in South Korea and its close association with conservative Protestant Christianity. She investigates the paradox that, in consequential ways, Korean Christians supported both the pro-democratic April 19th uprising in 1960 and the anti-democratic May 16th military coup in 1961. Drawing upon multiple Korean-language sources, Yoon argues that Korean Christians were alienated by the Rhee regime’s inability to create a democratic order and economic stability, as those failures of governance were perceived to have created conditions more vulnerable to Communist influence; that logic similarly rationalized the Christians’ collusion with Park Chung Hee’s military junta. In the vein of economic history, the article by Dae Hyung Woo and Howard Kahm seeks to fill the gap in empirical evidence for explaining the unusually high primary school enrollment rates in South Korea, which significantly exceeds expectations based on income level alone. Noting how widespread access to education proved to be particularly significant for ROK’s later economic growth, the authors examine a range of factors influencing school enrollment, such as proximity, student and parental volition, industrialization, and the impact of land reform. Taken together, the latter half of the special issue elaborates upon the various ways that the 1950s comprise, as Dong-Choon Kim puts it, “a prototype of contemporary South Korean society”.

In terms of weaknesses among the articles, a small quibble is that Park Chung Hee’s surname has been spelled at a couple of points as “Pak.” Rather than a typo, this likely reflects the discrepancies between differing approaches to Romanization in Korean Studies, but it can nonetheless be confusing to an audience that includes non-specialists. A more substantive criticism is the need for further analysis regarding North Korea. To be fair to the editors, the issue’s imbalance is understandable, given that (1) North Korean specialists are limited in number and are at present in particularly high demand, and (2) access to North Korean materials is far more challenging to secure than access to South Korean ones. That said, it could have been helpful for the sake of contextualization to make special note of the fact that the DPRK currently has diplomatic relations with 164 countries, including Canada since 2000, and that this total number is at least comparable to the 190

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countries that have diplomatic ties with the ROK. Underscoring such a point—perhaps in the special issue’s preface—could have helped to avoid leaving unchallenged a perception of the DPRK as diplomatically isolated, a characterization that is often circulated uncritically in the West.

As this special issue makes a valuable contribution to the literature for its respective research articles, it also collectively provides substantive impetus for further consideration of Korea’s own ‘long 1950s,’ arguably from 1948 to 1961, as a period warranting analysis for its formative dimensions beyond the devastating war and physical undertaking of postwar reconstruction. Its authors explore how it was during this decade that Koreans also remade social institutions, political alliances, collective identifications, and cultural mores in crucial and lasting ways. In turn, the contributors persuasively argue why such developments of the 1950s would continue to have a profound influence, whether institutionalized and informal, long after the decade had come to a close.

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