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"The Asia-Pacific War ended two generations ago, but history wars are still fought in East Asia today. Mobilizing evidence from interviews to pop culture to textbooks, Shin and Sneider show how personal experience, political change, regional diplomacy, and national identity shaped war narratives; they also suggest a path to armistice. This book is essential reading."

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"Divergent Memories is a stimulating and comprehensive account of key issues relating to memory and history in East Asia. A valuable new resource for scholars and general readers interested in the past and future of the Asia-Pacific." —Rana Mitter, Oxford University

Disputes over the history of World War II in Asia remain surprisingly intense. *Divergent Memories* examines the opinions of powerful individuals to pinpoint the sources of conflict, from Japanese colonialism in Korea and atrocities in China to the American decision to use atomic weapons against Japan. Without labeling any views as "distorted" or ignoring dissenting voices, Gi-Wook Shin and Daniel Sneider analyze how historical memory has developed, been formulated, and even been challenged in each case.

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SHIN and SNEIDER

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Opinion Leaders and the Asia-Pacific War



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GI WOOK SHIN DANIEL SNEIDER

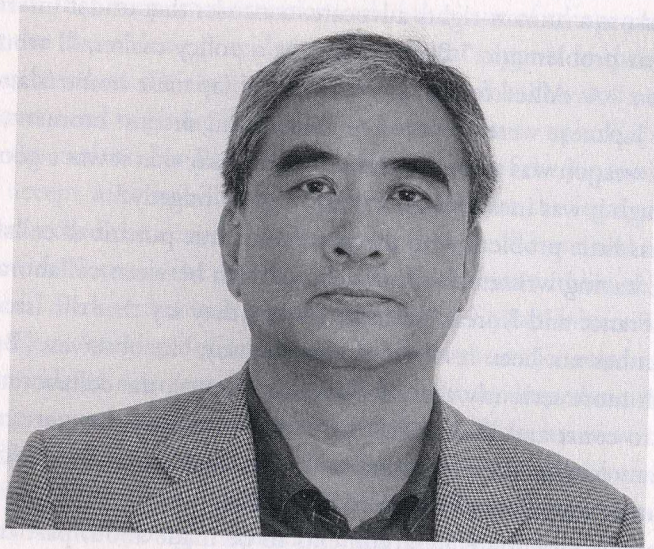
of Japan's wartime army, "I think that one person's life cannot be judged by one point," he says. "But when he was a soldier in the colonial times, he was clearly a collaborator." While France was occupied for only four years, Korea was occupied for thirty-six years. "Many people thought it was impossible to be liberated from Japan. Personally, I can understand that."

Still, for Park, the core question remains that of Japanese responsibility for the war and its colonial rule. "There can be no illusions," he wrote in 1997. "Japan cannot keep peace in Asia when it is not at peace with its own history."<sup>26</sup>

### *Rhee Yong Hoon*

Rhee Yong Hoon, with slightly graying hair and a studious appearance, carries himself with the calm demeanor of a scholar. He speaks the language of academia, with dense references to theory and long citations of research data. It is surprising, then, that Rhee has acquired the status of a controversial personality in Korea, the academic equivalent of a bomb-thrower who has chosen to assail some of the most sacred beliefs of postwar Korea.

On the surface, Rhee toils in the obscure gardens of academic research. He is an economic historian, the author of a series of studies of eighteenth-



Rhee Yong Hoon. Source: Courtesy Rhee Yong Hoon.

and nineteenth-century Korea and of the land policies of Japanese colonial rule. His work on the late Chosun dynasty in Korea is full of dense quantitative data exploring the growth of commercial activity and the structure of the economy. And from the early 1990s, he and his collaborators published detailed studies of the land surveys and policies of the Japanese, beginning during the first decade of their control of Korea.

The conventional and popular view among both academics and the general public was that the incipient development of Korea was strangled in its cradle by Japanese imperialism. In that account, Korea, during the late Chosun dynasty, was already undergoing the early stages of transition to a modern capitalist economy, experiencing the classic transition from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy, along the lines of what Japan itself was going through after the Meiji Revolution of 1968. Japanese colonial rule was built on a ruthless exploitation of Korean resources, including the seizure of at least half of Korea's land and rice production and the use of Korean labor in mines and factories.

Rhee and his colleagues challenged this historical account and precipitated a debate within Korea that has led to fists being thrown. For his school of thought, the evidence suggests that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century dynastic Korea was actually deeply stagnant, dominated by a backward agricultural economy that had failed to set the stage for industrialization. By the late nineteenth century, "Chosun Korea was in a full-scale crisis and unable to develop without an external shock," he writes.<sup>27</sup> Modern economic growth in Korea began, Rhee argues, only during the Japanese colonial period. The Japanese investment in the building of modern infrastructure, such as railroads, roads, and utilities, paired with the creation of labor and capital markets (made possible by the survey of the land, which allowed land holdings to be used as collateral for loans), "laid the basis for the development of the Korean market economy and industrial society," Rhee writes.<sup>28</sup>

Rhee, a Seoul National University scholar, went after some of the more essential beliefs about Japanese rule. His study of land ownership found that less than 10 percent of arable land actually came under direct Japanese control, and he found that rice was not seized by the Japanese rulers but bought in the marketplace. He sees the basis for postwar Korea's rapid modernization in the institutions created under Japanese rule: the civil service trained by Japan, the private companies that have driven Korean growth,

and banking and fiscal systems. South Korea's ability to preserve those gains, unlike in the North, created the basis for its miracle, Rhee and his allies contend.<sup>29</sup>

These views have been broadly labeled in Korea as "colonial modernization theory," an argument about colonial rule that can be found in many other countries, such as India, where independence movements initially denied any positive impact of their former colonial masters. But this is not only an argument about Korea's past. Rhee and his allies, who became known as the "New Right," also laid the intellectual groundwork for asserting the legitimacy of the rule of Park Chung-hee, who embarked in the early 1960s on a development path that consciously aped Japan and embraced the legacy of Japanese-trained bureaucrats and other experts. As a group, Rhee and his colleagues in academia took on the neo-Marxism that predominated in Korean academia, particularly after the fall of the military regime. Among other things, they have fought for revisions of Korean textbooks that they have felt offered a distorted history of the country.

"We Korean people usually remember that period as a miserable time," Rhee says about the colonial era. "Imperial Japan usurped the land and took all our rice. They only exploited our lands and our people. That is the usual, conventional opinion of Korean people on that time period."<sup>30</sup> Rhee traces the rise of this "theory of exploitation" to the 1960s, when Park normalized relations with Japan, sparking resistance from Koreans. "In the 1990s, I and my colleagues began to investigate land surveys carried out in 1910. We learned that the exploitation theory did not have any empirical basis."

Following his writing in the 1980s on the Chosun dynasty, Rhee's original research on the land issues was published, over the objections of many other scholars, in 1992 and then in a book in 1997. The initial response, he says, was one of stony silence. "They just pretended as if they did not hear anything," he says of fellow scholars. In more recent years, he has become a widely known figure, getting himself into hot water for comments such as one calling into question the conventional view of comfort women as purely victims of Japanese forced labor, even suggesting that Korean brokers were more responsible for the women's service as prostitutes.

Contrary to his current image as a lion of the right in Korea, Rhee's own history fits far more easily with that of his ideological foes. He was born in 1951, during the Korean War, in Taegu, in the southern end of Korea. His father was expelled from his high school in 1944 on suspicion of sympathy

for the anti-Japanese cause, and he traveled to Manchuria to attempt to join anti-Japanese guerrillas there. The family counts among its members, with great pride, relatives who served the exiled government in Shanghai. His father also embodied the complexity of the colonial experience: fluent in Japanese, he was a fan of Japanese literature and traditional Noh drama. "He often said that Japanese people are very kind, gentle, and bright," Rhee recalls.

Rhee grew up, however, in the "strong anti-Japanese atmosphere" of post-war Korea. As a student in the 1970s at Seoul National University, he joined the pro-democracy student movements and eagerly read Marxist literature that circulated clandestinely, much of it ironically written in Japanese. He was expelled from the university in 1971 for his role in organizing protests against fraud in the presidential election held that year. He fled the police, hiding in the mountains for six months before turning himself in. He was sent back to the university to await conscription for the military and finally returned to the university in 1976 to earn his degree and then his doctorate in economic history.

Rhee underwent an ideological transformation as a young professor at Hanshin Theological School. He began to read books about the realities of socialism in Eastern Europe and North Korea. "I learned it was only a totalitarian system. There was no liberty or hope. It was a very bureaucratic system," he recounts. "I began to know the miserable state of present socialism." His disillusionment with his youthful leftism deepened, and by the time of the 1997 financial crisis that struck South Korea, Rhee found that he had become an advocate of classical market liberalism "without even thinking about it."

Rhee's philosophical transformation was reflected in his work as an economic historian, animated by the belief that the empirical data should dictate the outcome of research rather than be guided by an ideological goal. He brings that same desire for precision and an aversion to broad judgment to his view of the war itself. Asked who was responsible for the war in Asia, he responds,

Usually, we Koreans believe that the Japanese were responsible for the war in Asia and the Pacific War. But as a historian, I think it is a very difficult question. I think Japan and the U.S. have the same amount of responsibility. For example, the U.S. did not try to prevent the war. At that time, the chancellor Churchill in England appealed to the U.S. government that England did not

have enough power to be engaged in war in Europe and Asia, and, therefore, England would like to avoid the war in Asia. In the beginning, the U.S. tried to avoid war with Japan. I am not a specialist of that period, but some books and papers I read suggest that both the U.S. and Japan did not try seriously enough to avoid the war. . . . For most cases in history when war occurs, there must be good-enough reasons. At that time, the imperial race was going on, and the U.S. never admitted the hegemony of Japan in Asia. Japan tried to negotiate with the U.S., saying something like "We will retreat from China in twenty years. Give us twenty years." The U.S. rejected it and demanded Japan to retreat from China promptly. At that point, Japan decided to attack the U.S. But, because of that, we Koreans were liberated. That is the history.

Rhee does not hesitate to label Japan as the aggressor in the war, a product of its gradual imperial expansion into the Asian continent. Nor does he look away from the crimes committed in the course of that war. In the mid-2000s, at the behest of the Korean government, he carried out interviews with about sixty Koreans who were drafted into the Japanese army or were mobilized for labor in Japanese factories. He recounts tragic stories he heard, such as soldiers who were forced to carry out bayonet practice on live Chinese prisoners. But he also recognizes that many of the Koreans who participated in the Japanese war effort were conflicted in their feelings. "The Japanese army was very cruel, and the person who told me that story said he was ashamed of it," Rhee says. "Yet the Korean soldier also had some pride that once he was a Japanese soldier. He said the Chinese were weak and that they never won a battle."

Rhee, not surprisingly, was an opponent of the commission formed to investigate collaboration with Japan, including the publication of the dictionary list of collaborators.

"Most of the collaborators," Rhee argues, "did not believe in the possibility of liberation or emancipation from Japan. They believed that the expansion of the Japanese Empire was going to last forever. They believed that collaboration was necessary for the development of the Korean people into a modern nation. I understand that. Of course, I criticize those who collaborated in capturing and torturing the leaders of the liberation movement. But I can understand those collaborators who worked in education or business."

Park Chung-hee "was a collaborator," Rhee says without hesitation. But because of that experience, he was able to use the experience of those who

were trained in Japan for the cause of economic modernization. For this Korean scholar, there is an overemphasis on the resistance to Japan and insufficient understanding of the process of building a modern nation in South Korea after the division of the peninsula.

Rhee shows a similarly iconoclastic outlook when it comes to the question of the decision to use the atomic bomb on Japan. Unlike almost all Koreans, including others interviewed for this book, the historian has mixed feelings about that decision, pointing to the large number of Koreans who also died as a result of the attack because they were living and working in those Japanese cities, a fact that Koreans have, at times, been reluctant to acknowledge:

When the atomic bomb was dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, about 200,000 people died promptly, and about 360,000 people were seriously injured. As far as I know, about 40,000 Korean people also died, and 30,000 were seriously injured. At that time, many Korean people resided in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a historian, my private opinion is that the dropping of the atomic bomb is also a tragedy in Korean history because so many Korean people were sacrificed, too. Usually, Korean people do not view it as a Korean tragedy and solely as that of Japanese. When the international peace movement for anti-nuclear weapons happened, Korean people did not participate. It is not good. I want to stress that so many Korean people also died. I do not have any opinion on whether the decision to drop the atomic bomb was good or bad. But so many people died. I visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki and also read many novels. I think the nuclear weapon must be banished forever. We Koreans must participate in the international campaign because we are one of the greatest victims, too. But we do not have such a kind of historical consciousness. That is the problem.

Perhaps for that reason, Rhee has little patience for the incessant demands on Japan to offer gestures of reconciliation to Koreans. "I think we Korean people must endeavor—we must overcome our history by ourselves," Rhee says with a sense of finality. "I do not think there is anything that Japan must solve. The problem is with us, Koreans."

### *Yang Mi Kang*

Every Wednesday, since 1992, a group of South Koreans have assembled across the street from the Japanese embassy in Seoul: long banners stretch