

*On This Topic*

## Legacies of Militarism in the Korean Peninsula in the Twenty-First Century

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In the summer of 2016, the governments of South Korea and the United States, led by Park Geun-hye and Barrack Obama, respectively, agreed to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (hereafter THAAD). Manufactured by Lockheed Martin, this system was presumably to protect South Korea from potential attacks from North Korea and elsewhere. Despite domestic and international opposition and protests, the two governments managed to install it by September 2017. The installation site was in the rural Seongju County, including the city of Seongju itself and the village of Soseong-ri, in Gyeongsangbuk-do Province, 200 kilometers southeast of Seoul.

The agreement to deploy THAAD outlived the demise of Park's administration, which came to an end through an impeachment in early 2017 and survived into the Moon Jae-in administration. During his election campaign in the spring of 2017, Moon, the candidate for the opposition Democratic Party, was critical of the secretive nature of the decision to deploy the antimissile defense system, which did not allow

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public discussion. Yet after the election in May, he reversed his position and accepted the US demand. This military decision was apparently made in response to a series of nuclear tests carried out by North Korea in recent years, which escalated military tension.<sup>1</sup> Military analysts speculated that North Korea's repeated firing of dysfunctional satellites signaled its ambition to test an intercontinental ballistic missile (hereafter ICBM) that could reach the mainland US and Washington D.C. in particular. This development posed a far more serious threat to the United States than to South Korea. The United States needed to intercept North Korean ballistic missiles with advanced technology.

However, from the perspective of the human security of Koreans living on the Korean Peninsula, the latest example of flexing the muscle of "deterrence-science militarism" does not make any sense at all (Shaw 1991). Almost half of South Koreans opposed the deployment for various reasons. First, THAAD is not necessary for the protection of South Korea because Seoul is only 30 miles away from the border between two Koreas. The antimissile defense system is designed to destroy an ICBM, travelling a much longer distance at 20 times the speed of sound and at altitudes of thousands of kilometers high.<sup>2</sup> It is highly unlikely that North Korea would use this type of missile against its close neighbor. Second, the presence of THAAD would heighten the insecurity and vulnerability of South Korea by provoking North Korea and China. It would accelerate further militarization by inciting an arms race between the United States and China, as well as North Korea and Russia. China is particularly sensitive to THAAD's powerful radar, which can monitor its military actions (Snyder and Byun 2017, 84).<sup>3</sup> Third, the deployment would generate health and

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1. Throughout 2016, North Korea conducted four nuclear tests in January, one failed satellite launch in February, and the three ballistic missile firings in September (Lee 2017). On November 28, 2017, the country test-fired the Hwasong-15, an improved missile which flew at an altitude of 4,500 kilometers, the highest among its missiles. This missile could have flown 13,000 kilometers if it flew through a lower, more conventional trajectory (Press TV 2017).
  2. It turned out that THAAD does not have capacity to intercept such ICBM and Lockheed Martin has proposed to develop an improved version (Press TV 2017).
  3. In order to detect missile movements, a THAAD radar has to gather data from areas within a 1,000-kilometer range, including territories of China and Russia (Lee 2017).

environmental problems for local residents. This is because its operation may emit radiation and contaminate water, soil, plants, and animals. Finally, it would also increase South Korea's technological and military dependence on the United States, because the Korean government controls neither the information collected by THAAD nor its actual use during military attacks (Lee 2017). This lack of control resonates with the persistent US grip over the operational control of the South Korean military during wartime.<sup>4</sup> Critics believe that the deployment not only serves broader strategic objectives of the United States, including the encirclement of China, but also is an example of a corrupt and immensely lucrative deal between a defense company and the Korean elite (Martin 2017).

The recent case of THAAD deployment highlights the recurring logic of political power tightly interwoven with militarism. Military decisions for preparing for, beginning, and maintaining war override the rules and practices of democratic governance. In the name of national security or military security, this logic justifies and normalizes the suspension of democratic principles of transparency, self-determination, and participation. It contributes to the utterly bizarre reality in which citizens have little say over life and death decisions about war and war preparation, whereas consumers have seemingly endless choices for buying shampoo and toothpaste. To interrupt this normalcy, this special issue approaches militarism as ideas and social practices that justify the military institution and war preparation; this broader definition<sup>5</sup> allows for the interrogation of a wide range of institutional and informal workings of militarism beyond the actions of governments and political elites. While these organizations and actors dominate military decision-making processes, they must rely on popular support for the efficiency and stability of their ruling in general, and their use of militarism, in particular. Hence, they attempt to inculcate militarism in the general population through formal education and other "ideological state apparatus" (Althusser 1971). This does not mean that the

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4. The peace time Operational Control was transferred to South Korea in 1994. See Moon (2010) and Work (2017).

5. It is broader than a common definition of militarism as glorification of military values and practices.

general population is merely a passive receptacle of militarism. Attention to the informal workings of militarism can reveal that such populations actively support it for various reasons.

The broader definition also enables us to see the continuum of militarism that structures the workings of various societies beyond the facile dichotomy of militaristic authoritarian society and civilized democratic society. In other words, militarism can coexist with a democratic political system. Insofar as it reflects the profound human desire for power and security through the organized use of physical force, militarism can couple with many other liberal and civilized institutions and activities. For example, the United States has a democratic political system but has been highly militaristic both internally and externally; particularly so in this era of the global War on Terror. In this continuum of militarism, South Korea remains one of the most militaristic societies in the world. As was analyzed more than a decade ago, the development of South Korea as a modern nation was deeply militarized; in particular, what was coined as the project of “militarized modernity” which Park Chung Hee’s regime systematically pursued has lasting impacts on the society even after the end of the military rule and formal democratization (Moon 2005a). The continuing existence of male-only conscription shows the persistence of “classical modern militarism” (Shaw 1991) that many societies in the world have moved away from with the reliance on professional “volunteer” forces. Some significant changes are taking place in South Korean society. The terms of conscription have been decreasing and the Constitutional Court ordered the government to establish alternative service provisions for conscientious objectors (to military service).<sup>6</sup> At the same time, during his election campaign, President Moon used photos of himself in military fatigues, reflecting the enduring appeal to the public of military service as

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6. See Hyeon-ho Yeo, “Chong-boda yangsim . . . heonbeop jaepanso “daeche bopmuje doip-hara”(Choose Conscience over Guns . . . the Constitutional Court’s Ordered that Alternative Military Service Be Introduced.). *The Hankyoreh*, last modified June 29, 2018. [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society\\_general/851052.html#csidx8107bbadff712d1a53663634cd4eb0c](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/851052.html#csidx8107bbadff712d1a53663634cd4eb0c). I would like to thank Vladimir Tikhonov for drawing my attention to this court ruling.

a condition for normative masculinity and masculine leadership (Moon 2005b, 2001, 1998). It is yet to be seen how the current *détente* between the two Koreas will modify the workings of militarism in the Korean Peninsula.

Three articles included in this special issue examine the legacies of militarism in South Korea in the development of the industrial economy, the expansion of the Protestant church, and the transnational migration of younger-generation men as international students. Articles on North Korea were originally intended to be included, but there were few timely submissions of articles suitable for this topic. This gap shall be addressed when the future opportunity arises. Taken together, the three articles deepen and broaden the understanding and analysis of the workings of militarism in twenty-first century South Korea. Peter Banseok Kwon's article, "Mars and Manna: Defense Industry and the Economic Transformation of Korea under Park Chung Hee," documents the central role that defense industrialization played in developing the Korean economy. By using newly declassified archival data, Kwon demonstrates specific details of the tight intertwining of military and civilian industrialization. It demonstrates that "self-reliant defense" was more than a nationalist rhetoric to mobilize the general population. It was an objective that actually drove and facilitated the building of the six strategic industries necessary for manufacturing various types of weapons; these heavy and chemical industries also strengthened civilian manufacturing in terms of skilled labor force and technology. This symbiosis between militarism and industrialization is still observable in the industrial and post-industrial Korean economy. Kwon's study nicely complements the previous study of militarized modernity, which analyzed how men as conscripts were extensively integrated into the organization of industrializing economy in the 1970s and the 1980s (Moon 2005a). While this earlier study illuminated the symbiosis from the angle of the formation of gendered citizenship, Kwon's study highlights it from the angle of political leaders' actions which transformed the content of the nation's economy.

Kwon's analysis also galvanizes readers to delve into deeper theoretical discussion of the relationship between capitalism and militarism. Global histories show variegated and shifting relationships between the two

gigantic forces. While war restricts and even destroys international trade as well as productive activities, the preparation and waging of war promotes arms production and a global arms trade, which can be immensely profitable. Similarly, waging war in a foreign country can accelerate domestic production to provide a wide range of supplies for the militaries involved. Employees of defense industry spent their income to maintain their consumerist lifestyle and thereby contribute to the reproduction of consumer capitalism. These examples of symbiosis strongly suggest that, contrary to the view of classical mercantilists which presumed capitalism as an antimilitaristic force, there has often been a convergence between capitalism and militarism. The Korean case Kwon documents can be seen as a specific example of a symbiotic relationship between capitalism and militarism with its own distinct dynamic. His article addresses this distinctive quality by elaborating on the inadequacy of the thesis of the developmental state for the Korean path of industrialization.

Incheol Kang's article, "Militarism and the Korean Protestant Churches," examines formal and informal mechanisms by which militarism permeates and persists in Protestant churches. It identifies several elements of "religious militarism" that underlie quotidian practices of church life as well as their formal institutional arrangements. In illuminating details of military chaplaincy, Christian doctrine of war and peace, and anticommunism, his article draws readers' attention to how the churches have worked closely with the military. In discussing a spiritual warfare frame, evangelical activities in foreign countries and North Korea, domestic evangelism, and the quantitative expansion of church, it highlights the centrality of the war metaphor in making sense of the daily activities of believers as well as their leaders.

Although not explicitly discussed, these specific details allow readers to think about the theoretical discussion of the relationship between religion and militarism. Although religion may appear to have little in common with militarism at first, they both address profound human need for security by ensuring it and reducing insecurity. While religion tries to do so through a belief in the divine and the spiritual realm governed by it, militarism tries to do so through the organized and armed use of physical

force. This methodical difference between metaphysical force and physical force is indeed profound and significant, which explains why many people do not couple them together. Yet as long as religion has been tied to secular political power as its official and unofficial ideology of ruling, it has been shaped by militarism more than religion shapes militarism. This uneven direction of influence is reflected in Kang's critical concern that militarized Protestantism bodes ill for democracy and peace in Korea, especially when it has exerted strong political and social influences on society.

Heejung Choi and Gayoung Chung's comparative article highlights the enduring significance of mandatory military service in the lives of young Korean men as they move across national boundaries for opportunities of education and citizenship. These men belong to a growing number of Koreans who have, since the 1990s, repeatedly migrated for education, employment, and family lives. Unlike temporary travelers who return to their countries of origin and settle there, these individuals lead transnational lives through recurring and ongoing migration. In contrast to the other two articles, focusing on the entire political economy and the entire Protestant church community, this article zooms in on individuals of upper- and lower-class backgrounds. In doing so, it enables readers to recognize that the legacies of militarism in Korean Peninsula are not uniform but have class-differentiated. Despite specific differences, however, trajectories of their transnational migration show their common acceptance of military service as an instrumental passage to citizenship in South Korea and the United States. These young men appear to embody the effect of contemporary globalization that has unmoored the territorial power of the nation state. Yet military service, as a demand made by the Korean state and as an opportunity provided by the US state, reterritorializes such possibility. The shared view of military service demonstrates that the theme of "flexible citizenship" in the age of globalization is still structured by the particular history of Cold War and militarism.

As the narratives of the four young men selected for study in the article convey, this reterritorialization reproduces militarization of citizenship for men. While Choi and Chung's article does not discuss the gendered nature of this process, it is unmistakable. Normalization of men's conscription

in Korea influences choice of the lower-class men to pursue voluntary service in the US Army. While volunteer service in the US military is open to women in principle, it is highly unlikely for Korean woman to pursue this path of transnational migration for citizenship in practice. It reminds readers that legacies of militarism in Korean Peninsula are differentiated between women and men. Insofar as military service is required only for men, it functions as a powerful institutional mechanism to contribute to gender hierarchy and maintain it. Duality of military service both as duty and privilege not only constrain men temporarily but also enable them to gain access to social network and opportunities for upward mobility. Naturalization of men's military service has also naturalized women's role as biological reproducers and cate takers, contributing to the gender division of labor in marriage and family life (Moon 2001, 2002, 2005a). This gender division of labor in the domestic sphere has shaped women's roles in the public sphere primarily as caretakers and helpmates.

Critical studies of militarism in the twenty-first century encourage us to reflect on the seemingly fluid nature of globalization marked by the accelerated movement of people and resources, as well as the unbounded virtual reality of internet-mediated interactions. While the reality of fluid migration across national borders and the compression of time and space in the virtual reality can be alluring and even empowering, they can be suspended and easily turned into an illusion in the face of militarism especially promoted by (nation or imperial) states. Destruction that normalized war preparation and actual war can sensitize us to grasp our physical frailty. Militarism reminds us that human bodies and the physical environment necessary for our survival are vulnerable to armed and organized violence. Ironically, it anchors us back to our corporeal existence bounded not only by territory, but also precarious to physical forces. Insofar as human collective existence requires the need for security, militarism is an enduring and profound force that will interact with other major sources in societies, including the capitalist economy, religion, and individual desire for upward mobility.

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