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Radical versus Conservative Nationalism
Contending Nation-Building Discourses in East Asia in the Early Cold War

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By Chen Jian

Cornell University

During the Cold War, East Asia was one of the regions where some of the most important international forces and trends were at action on local, national and international levels. Among these forces, radical revolutions directed by various patterns of Communist ideologies occupied a central position. It was in East China—and in Korea, Vietnam and China in particular—that at times Communist revolutions gained tremendous momentum and strength, leading to the establishment of sustained Communist states there (where all of them survived—despite in quasi ways—the end of the global Cold War).

Communist revolutions occurred in East Asian countries, however, not without facing serious challenges from the beginning. East Asia's tortuous path toward modernity was characterized by confrontations and competitions between radical and conservative forces and political trends over which side's voices should claim the position as the dominant discourse in national and international politics and political economy. While it seemed that ideas and actions for radical changes (which the Communists often represented) were able to occupy a powerful position vis-à-vis their conservative opponents after the Second World War in various East Asian countries, the conservative alternative was never silenced—let alone undermined. Indeed, even at and

after such historic moments when the Chinese and Vietnamese Communists achieved victories in their respective revolutions, successful modernization drives by the Republic of Korea in the southern part of the Korean peninsula and the Republic of China in Taiwan not only tarnished the impacts of radical/Communist revolutions but also, and more importantly, changed East Asia's overall political landscape while, at the same time, making the conservative alternative an influential representation as the "preferred path" toward modernity in East Asia, especially toward the later stage and after the end of the global Cold War.

Consequently, when scholars try to look back for an overall understanding of East Asia's historical development in the 20th-century, how to comprehend the failure of radical revolutions to become—as the Communists had pursued—the exclusive and dominant discourse in various East Asian nations' search for modernity emerges as a question of critical importance. Insightful answers to it will help scholars achieve a deeper understanding of how East Asia's path toward modernity had been shaped and transformed by the contending discourses of radical and conservative nation-building experiences in various East Asian countries. This effort also helps scholars better comprehend the orientation of East Asia's development in the post-Cold War era.

This paper, by taking the early Cold War period as a focal point of investigation, discusses why and how did radical revolutions emerge as a powerful political choice in East Asia, where and how did the trend of radical revolutions confront the conservative alternative, and when and how did radical revolutions become challenged and, as a result, contained and tarnished by the conservative alternative.

Radical Revolutions in East Asia: Communism or Nationalism, or Both?

After the end of the Second World War and during the early Cold War period, "revolution"—and radical revolution in particular—was a fashionable term and phenomenon in East Asia. Almost everywhere in East Asia, Communist-led revolutionary movements were gaining strength and momentum. By the late 1940s, three Communist states—China, North Korea, and Vietnam—had been established. Together with Communist rebellions in Malaya, Burma, the Philippines and some other

areas in the region, they threatened to undermine the existing international order dominated largely by Western industrial powers. In the meantime, they formed a new pattern of modernization drive (which differed not only from the patterns of the West but also from that of the Soviet Union), creating a profound challenge to global capitalism's reign in East Asia as well as in the world.

As far as the logic of history's development is concerned, the Second World War played a major role in precipitating the emergence of radical revolutionary movements in East Asia. This was in the first place a natural revelation of the usual relationship between revolutions and wars. In world history, it is commonplace that revolutions serve as the origins or develop as the results of wars. Same is true in East Asia. Communists and Communist sympathizers there either played a leading role or actively participated in the resistance movements against the Japanese aggression. During the war years, Communist forces grew significantly in China, Indochina, Malaya, Burma, the Philippines, etc. For example, in the case of China, when the war of resistance against Japan began in 1937, the Chinese Communist party (CCP), which had just survived the "Long March" (during which the Chinese Red Army lost ninety percent of its strength), was restricted to a small, barren area in northern Shaanxi province in northwestern China.¹ Toward the end of the war, however, the CCP claimed that it had commanded a powerful military force of 900,000 regular troops and 900,000 militiamen, and party membership had reached over one million.² In Indochina, the Communists' influences and the mass support they received had reached such an extent by the end of the war that, by playing a leading role in the August uprising of 1945, they proclaimed the establishment of the Communist-dominated Democratic Republic of Vietnam in

¹ Recent Western and Chinese studies all agree that by 1936, the Communist forces in northern Shaanxi could hardly survive another of Jiang's all-out suppression campaign. See, for example, Joseph Esherick, "Ten Theses on the Chinese Revolution," *Modern China*, 21 (January 1995): 53; see also Yang Kuisong, *Zhonggong yu mosike de guanxi, 1920-1960* [The CCP's Relations with Moscow, 1920-1960] (Taipei: Dongda, 1997), pp. 328-329.

² Department of Military History under the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences, *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zhanshi* [A History of the Chinese People's Liberation Army] (3 vols., Beijing: Junshi kexue, 1988), 2: appendix 4.

early September, 1945.³ In Korea, the situation was different in the sense that, after Japan's surrender, it was occupied by the Soviet Union and the United States at the end of the war. But when the Soviet Red Army put together a Communist regime in the northern part of the peninsula, Communist and pro-Communist, left-wing elements were extremely active south of the 38th parallel, which was then under America's occupation.⁴

That radical revolutions were nurtured by the Second World War, in turn, created conditions for East Asia to become one of the regions most significantly influenced by radical revolutions, and to experience wars on national and international levels during the Cold War. Indeed, the only two major hot wars that the United States fought during the Cold War occurred in East Asia—respectively in Korea and Vietnam. Both wars were shaped by profound and interrelated domestic *and* international causes, among which the impact of radical revolutions served as an outstanding one. Indeed, from the perspective of the Communists, the Korea and Vietnam wars were also integral parts of the Korean and Vietnamese revolutions.

A noticeable feature in the emergence of radical revolutions in East Asia was that Communists, in representing their political philosophy and ideology, all embraced revolutionary nationalism. Communists in each and every East Asian country (even in the case of Communist North Korea, where Kim Il-sung and his Communist regime were propped up by the Soviet Red Army after Japan's surrender in August 1945) championed revolutionary nationalism, anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. The most successful Communist revolutions were also the ones that were most capable of creating a powerful public image that no matter to what extent they were loyal to Communism, they were also nationalistic in their essence. Central in the discourse of every successful Communist movement in East Asia were the narratives and myths of how the Communists played a decisive role in destroying the reign of Western

³ See, for example, David G. Marr, *Vietnam, 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

⁴ Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

imperialism/colonialism and the alliances between Western powers and the conservative/reactionary local forces. Wherever the Communists were able to represent themselves as more nationalistic than their conservative foes in domestic politics, they were able to gain tremendous popular support to the political and social revolutions that they carried out.⁵

To be sure, the Communists in various East Asian countries did not take their beliefs in Communism—the political ideology that aimed to transform the “old world” of oppression and exploitation and to create new societies characterized by universal justice, equality and prosperity—lightly. Indeed, it was the utopian vision of Communism that provided various Communist movements in East Asia—same as in many other parts of the world—the extraordinary discursive space within which to develop powerful representations, vis-à-vis the decadent global reign of Capitalism, that history was on the side of the revolutions that they were pursuing. Consequently, often times it was the Communists in East Asia who became the most active in representing radical nationalism.

Specific national conditions—historical, cultural, as well as contemporary political—were crucial for the development of any successful Communist revolutionary movements, making it impossible for Communists in East Asia not to present themselves not only as Communists but also as revolutionary nationalists. In this respect, if we compare East Asia with other parts of the world (and the “West” in particular), we can easily find that such East Asian nations as China, Korea and Vietnam had been profoundly influenced by the collective-value-centered Confucianist ethics and cultural tradition, which offered, at one level, the much-needed “cultural matching” for the Communists in these countries to make their revolutions (often fashioned as a choice for the betterment of the populations and societies as “collective existences”) easier to claim legitimacy among the ordinary people. On another level, the

⁵ In comparison, it was where—such as in Malaya/Malaysia, Thailand, and Burma—the Communist rebels were unable to dominate the domestic political agenda by representing themselves as the sole, or at least as the most important, champions of national liberation and independence that the Communist revolutions failed, even in the circumstances that there was no the intervention of the United States.

collective-value-centered cultural tradition reduced the possibility of resistances to radical revolutions when they, in the name of the interests of the collectives, caused great individual sufferings. (Ironically, however, it was the same historical-cultural tradition that provided the Communists with such benefits that the Communists had endeavored to destroy.)

From a grand historical perspective, it was the “national crisis” situation that brought about by the Second World War that had created the “golden opportunity” for the Communists in East Asia to form strategies and policies that combine the tasks of “saving the nation” and “promoting the revolution.” That radical nationalism was central in shaping revolutions in East Asia was most clearly revealed in the case of the Chinese Communist revolution. Indeed, the CCP’s tremendous gains during the Second World War have to be understood in the context of the extreme tensions that had developed in China’s state and society during the previous decades. China’s modern history, as viewed from a Chinese perspective, is characterized by the humiliation caused by the incursions of Western powers and Japan. The repeated failure on the part of the Chinese to deal with Western and, after the end of the 19th century, Japanese challenge, or indeed to reform China’s premodern political, military and economic institutions, left the Chinese people frustrated and angry. This frustration was further strengthened as the result of the unsuccessful outcome of China’s 1911 Revolution, which destroyed an empire, but failed to establish a stable and genuine republic. The desire for rapid and radical changes thus gained tremendous influences among the Chinese people. In the wake of the Russian Bolshevik revolution, the CCP emerged as the force of radical and revolutionary change in China, embodying defiance of the relatively conservative reign of the Chinese Nationalist Party (the Guomindang or GMD), which, around the time of the Second World War, was increasingly perceived by many Chinese, especially radical intellectuals, as a force for the reactionary status quo.

China’s war of resistance against Japan forced the Chinese people to concentrate on “saving China” from destructive crises, delaying their efforts to cope with the nation’s deep-rooted political, social, and cultural problems. But the momentum for

fundamental changes remained. The CCP's dramatic development during the war years can be interpreted in terms of the changing balance of power between the CCP and GMD—for the first time in the confrontation the former had possessed the strength to challenge the latter in the entire country. In a deeper sense, however, it is also important to note that the CCP, as the most radical political force in China, found at the end of the war a highly favorable environment in Chinese society since China's victory "suddenly" released the long-accumulated popular momentum for revolutionary internal changes.

China's case was with much broader implications for understanding why and how radical revolutions prevailed in East Asia during the early Cold War. In Korea and Vietnam, both had their own long histories and unique identities and had fallen into the status as colonies of foreign powers in modern times. Therefore, to pursue and achieve their nations' liberation and independence became a dominant and powerful theme for the intellectuals and political activities. The failure to realize the sacred mission of saving their nations from deep crises and humiliation had resulted in ever-growing aspirations on the part of the Koreans and the Vietnamese to bring about more rapid transformations of their nations' position in the international community. Thus, same as in the situation that China had been facing, a broad environment conducive to radical revolutions was created. When the Russian Bolshevik Revolution brought to East Asia the message that Communism, as the preferred path toward modernity, would give East Asian nations not only independence but also liberation and modernization, Communism gained increasing supports from many intellectuals and political activities. At the end of the Second World War, the defeat of Japan and the decline of such old colonial powers as France created the stage that was naturally defined in terms of nationalism for the Communists in Korea and Vietnam to perform the dramas of their political and social revolutions. Given the profound and accumulative nature of the forces that underlay this trend combining nationalism with Communism, it was difficult for it not to become a prevailing phenomenon during the early Cold War years in Korea and Vietnam.

The Conservative Alternative

When radical revolutions developed rapidly—in seemingly prevailing manners—in East Asia after the Second World War, the more conservative forces were not silenced. In China, there were Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) and his Nationalist party and regime. In Korea, there were Syngman Rhee and, after its establishment in 1948, the Republic of Korea. And, in Vietnam, there were Bao Dai and, later, Ngo Dinh Diem. In the actual political confrontations either within a certain country or internationally in the region, the conservative forces served as the barriers to stop the advance of the Communist forces. On a very fundamental level, they offered a series of alternative responses to the basic challenges that East Asian countries had encountered in the age of worldwide modernization. Throughout the Cold War—yet especially during the early Cold War—the conservative alternative was engaged in fierce confrontations with the Communist-led radical revolutions both domestically and internationally. In retrospect, however, the conservative alternative, together with radical revolutions, formed an important and integral part of East Asia’s comprehensive course toward modernity.

I brand the conservative political forces in various East Asian countries as the “conservative alternative” in East Asia’s search for modernity. This is because that despite the differences in the specific strategies and policies carried out by conservative forces in different countries, they shared several common features that had distinguished them in some fundamental senses with the Communist-led radical revolutionary movements.

In terms of the origins of the political philosophies and ideologies that underlay their “grand political choices,” the conservative alternative was more consistent and less contradictory (if we compare it with the Communist revolutionary movements) with their respective nations’ historical and cultural legacies. Although—same as the Communist revolutionaries—the conservatives were eager to modernize their nations as well as to make their nations “stand up” in the international community, they never embraced—as did the Communists—a representation that favored total negation of their nations’ past. Accordingly, as far as the social foundation of their political moves were concerned, they were more willing and ready to rely upon the established social and

political elites to carry out the political, economic and social transformations in their respective nations.

Both in the domestic and international political arenas, the conservative forces championed anti-Communism, taking the Communists as their most dangerous enemies. While “red scare” was often associated with Communist revolutions, “white scare” and bloody suppressions of Communists, Communist sympathizers, and suspects of Communist supporters were common practices, in Taiwan, South Vietnam and South Korea during the Cold War. Associated with all of this were the domination of political regimes and political leaderships that were authoritarian in styles and practices. Underlying the authoritarian political practices, though, were both the profound influences of the political legacies of these East Asian countries that could be traced back to their premodern history. However, for various reasons (some of which this paper will discuss later) the authoritarian political institutions and practices had never reached the extent of “personality cult,” as what happened under the “proletarian dictatorship” in China and North Korea. In South Korea and Taiwan, the authoritarian regimes were eventually—toward the later part of and after the end of the Cold War—undermined mainly because of internal political, social and economic changes in Taiwan and South Korea.

Closely related to these domestic political features, in international affairs these conservative regimes firmly stood on the side of the America-led Capitalist West in its confrontation with the Soviet Union-led Communist bloc in the global Cold War. They also received substantial support—militarily, economically, and financially—and the strategic backing of the United States. Consequently, to different degrees they not only became important members of the anti-Communist camp—indeed, their importance was perceived in such decisive ways by Washington that top American policymakers, from Harry Truman to Lyndon Johnson, were firmly convinced that defending them was of major import for US global strategic interests. In the meantime, they gained very favorable conditions to become integral parts of the Capitalist-dominated “world market.”

All of this was reflected in the courses of development and change in the societies and states ruled by these conservative regimes. In forming grand programs of domestic economic development, these conservative regimes refused to embrace radical land reform practices (usually characterized by confiscation of the land owned by landlords and redistributing the land among landless peasants, which would be followed by various collectivization moves). They also refused to carry out ambitious nationalization plans of commerce and industry in their respective nations. In no circumstance would they favor the ideas of total abolition of private ownership. Indeed, it was here one finds one of the fundamental distinction between the Communist programs of development and those favored by the conservative alternative. That South Korea and Taiwan were part of the Capitalist-dominated “world market” offered a basic condition for the conservative alternative to turn their modernization drives into stories of successes.

In the early Cold War period, however, the conservative forces encountered huge difficulties in their efforts to achieve an upper hand in their confrontations and competitions vis-à-vis their Communist opponents. In China, despite the overwhelmingly superior military forces that he and his Nationalist regime had possessed, Jiang Jieshi and the Nationalists were defeated by Mao Zedong and the CCP in the Chinese civil war in three short years in the late 1940s. In Indochina, Bao Dai and later, Ngo Dinh Diem, in competing with Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh, were unable to present themselves as the more genuine, let alone the sole, defenders of Vietnam’s national interests. In Korea, the state and society of the “reactionary” South were much more divided and experienced more profound turbulences than the Communist North in the late 1940s. One of the main reasons that the North Korean leader Kim Il-sung was so eager to use military means to bring all of the Korean peninsula to Communism lay in his—and many of his comrades’—conviction (mistakenly, though, as later proven)

that a real revolutionary situation existed on the peninsula, including the southern part of it.⁶

In different countries, the causes underlying the difficulties that the conservative forces had encountered were sometimes specific and unique . For example, the political and military capacity and overall legitimacy of Jiang Jieshi and his regime in the late 1940s and Ngo Dinh Diem and his Saigon government in the late 1950s and early 1960s were significantly weakened by the widespread corruption among their own ranks. The inability on the part of Jiang Jieshi to control the running-away inflation—one of the worst in world history—in the late 1940s made his regime and his anti-Communist war efforts doomed.

But there were also common causes responsible for the conservatives' difficulties in the early Cold War period. For example, they all seemed to have had more connections with the collaborators in the war against Japan, thus making their claims to be truthful nationalists vulnerable in face of the challenges of their Communist opponents. In a more fundamental sense, their plans for political and economic transformations were less attractive in representation as they did not promise to bring about changes as rapidly and profoundly as did their Communist opponents. They thus had been unable to create a more convincing image—than that of the Communists—that history was on their side. At least they were unable to shatter the Communists' claims to this effect.

However, time actually was not on the side of the Communists. The irony was that, in the long run, what once seemed to be the strength of the Communist utopian vision turned out to be the very source of its fundamental weakness. In retrospect, when the Communist ideas and practices had repeatedly failed the tests of people's lived experiences, the general trend of the confrontations between the Communists and the conservative alternative would begin to turn around, and the conservative alternative would be given the opportunity to ascend to a much more influential position in the

⁶ See, for example, *Bruce Cumings, The Origins of the Korean War: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

competition over which side—radical revolutions or the conservative alternative—should be defined as a more superior path toward modernity. As is well known, this is exactly what happened in the cases of ROK and ROC’s rise as the “little dragons,” especially after entering the 1960s and 1970s.

The Korean War as a Test Case and a Turning Point

In retrospect, the Korean War represented a test case and a threshold for the confrontation between radical revolutions and the conservative alternative in East Asia. First and foremost, America’s intervention in the wake of the North Korean Communist invasion of the South saved ROC from being defeated and conquered by the Communist North. Thus it also formed an indispensable point of departure successful story of the ROC’s nation-building experience toward modernity to be unfolded. In the meantime, President Harry Truman’s decision, after the outbreak of the Korean War, to dispatch the Seventh Fleet to “neutralize” the Taiwan Strait played a crucial role in stopping Beijing’s planned invasion of Taiwan, perpetuating the “Taiwan question” while, at the same time, creating a key condition for Taiwan to pursue its own unique path toward modernity.

From the perspective of regional and global development (associated with different types of modernization drives), the most important consequence of the outbreak of the Korean War and, then, the Chinese-American confrontation in Korea, was that they greatly upgraded East Asia’s overall position in the Cold War strategies and resource-deployment of the capitalist “West” in general and the United States in particular. This was most clearly revealed in changing US strategies and policies toward East Asia. After the outbreak of the Korean War, when policymakers and military planners in Washington increasingly emphasized the threats from “Communist plots of expansion” in East Asia, their definition of “America’s vital interests” and their perceptions of how America’s vital interests were challenged changed accordingly. This constituted the strategic calculations that led President Harry Truman to come to the decisions of intervening in the Korean War and sustaining and escalating America’s military intervention when the South Korea/US/UN forces were driven to and confined

in to the “Pusan perimeter.” The Cold War’s escalation in East Asia formed the background against which President Dwight Eisenhower administration decided to “release Jiang Jieshi” for the purpose of containing the threats from China during the late stage of the Korean War. All of this also shaped the larger context in which policymakers in Washington decided to make America involve, more and more deeply, in the military conflicts in Indochina.

To be sure, the continuous escalation of America’s military involvement in East Asia during and in the wake of the Korean War did not come into being for promoting the conservative alternative as a nation-building discourse and experience. The Americans were in Asia to serve their own perceived Cold War strategic interests. Scholars of US diplomatic history thus long criticized the hegemonic features of America’s Cold War experience in East Asia as well as in the world.

Central in the strategic calculations shaping America’s escalation of military intervention in East Asia was the perception (or misperception) of coordinated “Communist threat” there. Ever since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in October 1949, yet especially after the direct Chinese-American military showdown over Korea in 1950-1953, the United States and the PRC entered a total confrontation. Policymakers in Washington believed that the threats from Communist China represented an integral part of the threats of a unified international communist movement that took the destruction of America’s and the Capitalist West’s global reign as its sacred mission. A widely-shared belief among policymakers in Washington was that compared with those from the Soviet Union, the threats from Communist China were more daring and, therefore, more dangerous. This perception justified America’s continuous military involvement in East Asia after the Korean War. From President Eisenhower to President John F. Kennedy and, then, to President Lynton B. Johnson, policymakers in Washington consistently believed that if the United States allowed Communist revolutions following the Chinese model to prevail in East Asia, the vital interests of the United States would be seriously damaged. This belief played a decisive role in bringing America into the “longest war” in American history. In this sense, one

may argue that if there had not been the Korean War, there probably would never have been the Vietnam War.⁷

As far as its direct impact is concerned, the Korean War greatly enhanced the anti-Communist tendencies of the conservative and counter-revolutionary regimes in Seoul and Taipei, making them even more authoritarian than before. The “white scare” that already had prevailed in South Korea, Taiwan and other parts of East Asia (under the control of anti-Communist and counter-revolutionary regimes) reached the peak in the 1950s and 1960s. In the meantime, America’s military intervention during the Korean War and continuous military existence in East Asia (including the later military intervention in Vietnam) provided such counter-revolutionary regimes as the ROK and ROC with a security umbrella. As a result, these regimes were allowed to devote more of their strategic attentions, as well as the resources available to them, to developmental issues. Together with the large amounts of aids—military, economic and financial—that the United States gave them, favorable conditions for the further takeoff of their modernization drives had been created. Against this background, the ROK and ROC further entered the Western-capitalist-dominated world market. By learning from, digesting, and transforming the experiences of Western industrial powers’ paths toward modernity, they began to develop their own models of modernization.

The Conservative Alternative’s Story of Successes

The main subjects of the conservative alternative’s story of success, however, were not the Americans, but the Koreans and the Chinese in Taiwan. In spite of America’s extensive involvement in East Asia and Washington’s support to them, the ROK and ROC leaders never were Washington’s “running dogs” (to borrow a term created by Mao Zedong and frequently used by the Chinese Communists to characterize Washington’s Cold War allies in Seoul, Taipei and Saigon). Exactly it was against the

⁷ While there are studies comparing the Korean War and the Vietnam War from American and other perspectives, there have not been in-depth studies on the interconnections between the Korean War and the Vietnam War, especially on how the former prepared the context and conditions and paved the path leading up to the latter.

background that the United States was deeply involved in East Asia and Washington's backing seemed indispensable for the survival of their respective regimes, Syngman Rhee (and, later, Park Chung-hee), Jiang Jieshi (and Jiang Jinguo, his son), and even Ngo Dinh Diem demonstrated the persistent desire and, in many cases, the capacity to demonstrate that they were nationalists first and American allies second. Indeed, it was through the processes of managing their alliance relationships with Washington that they gained more opportunities to develop and demonstrate their own identities, ones that were made sense because of their own visions, ideas, and policy orientations, rather than because they were America's allies. As a matter of fact, as is well known, the relationships between Seoul and Washington, Taipei and Washington, and Saigon and Washington were oftentimes a mixture of cooperation and friction. Scholars thus must treat these conservative and counter-revolutionary leaders and their regimes more seriously.

The role of the United States in the conservative alternative's nation-building experience was much more complicated than simple endorsement or opposition. Out of consideration of serving America's anti-Soviet/Communist strategic interests in the global Cold War, Washington supported the governments in Seoul, Taipei and Saigon and oftentimes ignored these were authoritarian regimes, thus playing a role to help sustain their authoritarian features in the heyday of the Cold War. In the meantime, creating conditions for democracy and promoting the values and visions that the Americans had cherished the most were never absent in the context in which Washington made policies toward East Asia.

However, the escalation of America's military intervention in East Asia and, related to it, the upgrading of East Asia's overall position in the strategic thinking of the United States and the capitalist "West," also created some of the most important conditions for the conservative alternative to gain political and economic resources for constructing a path toward modernity in various East Asian countries that would have been otherwise difficult to obtain if there had not been the turning point brought about by the Korean War.

America's escalating involvement in East Asia placed Washington in face of challenges that the Americans had not encountered (or at least had not encountered to such an extent) before. In a sense, East Asia did not represent a favorable location for Washington to have Cold War showdowns with America's enemies. Although Washington emphasized America's intervention was with anti-Communism and pro-democracy as its purpose, the reality was that American policymakers and military planners had to take pursuing America's strategic advantages vis-à-vis the Communists—by using any means—as a top priority goal.

Thus America's involvement in East Asia caused Washington to face a huge dilemma over how to deal with the trend of decolonization as a Cold War political issue. The Second World War led to the decline of European colonial powers and the disintegration of their colonial empires throughout the third world. America was the only major Western power that was not burdened by the legacies of colonialism, and its culture and political philosophy thus cherished liberty and self-determination as values of fundamental importance.⁸ During the early Cold War, however, this potential advantage seemed effectively undermined by America's military intervention in East Asia and support of the counter-revolutionary regimes there.

The Cold War was simply a confrontation between the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—and the two blocs that they headed in a strategic sense. The Cold War, in the final analysis, was the competition between two ideologies and two ways of life. And it was also a contest over which side was able to win over ordinary people's hearts and minds. Thus no matter how Washington's East Asian policies were confined by the Cold War environment, American would have to be a part of making the conservative alternative a story of success. When US policies toward East Asia in the Cold War were defined in ways far from building democratic states/societies in East Asia, Americans, whenever possible, were concerned about building democratic states/societies in East Asia. The ROK was such a case.

⁸ For an excellent discussion of the United States as and "Empire of Liberty," see Odd Arne Westad. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially Chapter 1.

Throughout the Cold War period, yet especially in the late 1940s and 1950s, the United States supported the conservative and rightist elements in South Korea as well as the dictatorial regime in Seoul mainly because this served the perceived needs of carrying out America's Cold War security strategy in East Asia.

However, even when Washington supported the dictatorial regime in South Korea for strategic security reasons, the pursuit of promoting democracy and development was never completely absent as a “hidden aim and result” in America's actual policy behavior in South Korea. As Gregg Brazinsky points out in a recent study, Americans working in South Korea during different periods of the Cold War “spontaneously” attempted to incorporate what was deeply built in their own perception and value system into the political and societal evolution process in South Korea. Even when how best to serve America's security interests was Washington's top priority concern in forming and carrying out US policies toward South Korea, many Americans in Korea still tried very hard to promote progressive nationalism and “instilling” consciousness of political participation among the Koreans. These attempts were transformed into different kinds of institutional efforts and served to help the Koreans to develop what would become the foundation of the emergence of South Korea's process of “development that was compatible with democracy.”⁹

Concluding Remarks

The overall balance of influence between radical revolution and the conservative alternative, on the grand scale of postwar history's development, began to experience visible changes in the late 1950s and early 1960s. While the former was continuously losing momentum, the latter was gaining influences and power. Especially in terms of the two choices' capacities (and potential capacities) in managing economic growth and improvement of people's living standard, the key—and most visible and noticeable—component of any processes toward modernity, such Communists states as

⁹ Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University Press of North Carolina, 2007).

China and North Korea were increasingly lagged behind their conservative counterparts in Taiwan and South Korea by the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In the conservative “repulse” of the advance of radical revolutions in East Asia, the nation-building experience of the Republic of Korea played a crucial—or even central—role. Indeed, together with the experiences of Taiwan’s successful modernization drive—first in the economic field and then in political transformation, the ROK’s path toward modernity, as another “little dragon” of East Asia, greatly enhanced the conservative alternative’s overall influences. Consequently, the Korean and Taiwan models served as one of the most important “pushing” factor in China’s grand decision to turn to the path toward “reform and opening to the outside world” in the late 1970s.

This turned out to be the beginning of the end global Cold War came. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the PRC entered the Cold War as a revolutionary country, in its own ways challenging the existing international order—including the norms and codes of international behavior—both in East Asia and in the world. Ever since the Cold War’s beginning in the mid- and late 1940s, it had been characterized by a fundamental confrontation between communism and liberal capitalism. With China abandoning Mao’s revolutionary principles and embracing the “reform and opening” process, the Cold War in East Asia—as far as some of its basic features are concerned—virtually approached its end in the late 1970s, almost a decade before the conclusion of the global Cold War. This development, as now we can see clearly, presaged the way in which the global Cold War would end.

Do radical revolutions—as a dramatic means for transforming a nation and the larger world and achieving modernity in the shortest possible time—have a future? There is no doubt that as a political ideology, the ideas favoring radical revolution have withered in East Asia (as well as in many other parts of the world) along with the decline of Communism as a 20th-century phenomenon. With such former radical revolutionary countries like China and Vietnam changing “outsiders” into and “insiders” of the existing international system, it is difficult for the radical revolution

choice to attract large numbers of devotees in the region.¹⁰ But it seems premature to say that the ideas favoring radical revolutions have forever lost their influence. Some of the strategies that had been used by radical revolutionaries during the heyday of their movements—such as those about mass mobilization and armed struggle—will remain attractive to revolutionaries of generations to come. In a deeper sense, the most lasting legacy of the ideas favoring radical revolutions lies, perhaps, in the utopian nature of them—one concerning the necessity and possibility of achieving universal justice and equality in human society. The ideas’ beauty exists in their ambiguity. Because the final aims of these ideas are so difficult to be clearly defined in practical political terms, they may have continuing appeal as long as injustice and inequality persist in human life—in East Asia, and in other parts of the world as well.

All of this also represents a challenge to Western scholars on East Asia: How to better understand a rapidly reemerging East Asia (and China in particular) in the context of its history and culture. In order to meet the challenge, real efforts should be made to enhance language training in undergraduate and, especially, graduate study, to promote field investigations in East Asian countries, and to explore fresh opportunities of using archival sources in various East Asian countries. But most important of all, scholars of different backgrounds (such as between historians of East Asian origin and of other origins) will have to break up the intellectual barriers sometimes embodied in their thinking along the way of their own particular intellectual traditions, so that they may achieve a genuinely more global and transcultural vision in studying other societies and cultures.

¹⁰ “Communist” North Korea remained an “outsider” of the international system, but it was no longer the same kind of “revolutionary countries” as itself and China had been in the early Cold War period. It is more a “rogue state” than a genuine “revolutionary country.”