Comments on Dr. Tsuchiya Yuka’s “U.S. Industry and Technology in the Cultural Cold War: Case Studies of Korea and Japan in mid 1950s”

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Introduction

The paper written by Dr. Tsuchiya Yuka is very interesting not only showing model cases of USIS activities in 1950s, but also giving opportunity to have comparative studies between Korea and Japan.

As the author and Dr. Lee Chong Won wrote, the 1950s is a very crucial period in both modern Korean and Japanese history. For Korea, it was the period of recovery from the war devastation and making a nation state, while Japan achieved successfully the rehabilitation and normalized its social condition, especially due to the special procurement of the Korean War.

In spite of differences of two histories, there was commonality between Korean and Japanese history in 1950s, however. Both countries were located under the US sphere in Northeast Asia and politically, economically, and socially both countries received great impacts from America in 1950s. Even the US forces were stationed in both countries and America had military alliance with both, although the status of Korea and Japan in Northeast Asia from the viewpoint of American foreign policy was different and both countries have not had alliance agreement.

In that sense, it is very significant to examine Korean and Japanese cases at the same time like Dr. Tsuchiya’s paper. It can show several things; 1) the characteristic of US policy toward Northeast Asia, 2) the peculiarity of Northeast Asia and 3) differences and commons in Korean and Japanese history and society.

I. Cultural Approach and the More

Until now, most of literatures have paid attention to the economic and political structure in the International Relations studies when American policy of foreign assistance has been examined. It is not easy to find works and books focusing on the cultural characteristic of the US assistance and relationship between America and recipient countries. Especially, since Northeast Asia was a kind of frontline in the Cold War, researchers have stressed the security and
economic significance of the region in international system.

However, recently more and more scholars have paid attention to the constructivism which covers diverse variables like perception, discourse, soft power, and so on. In the research from the perspective of the constructivism, agents and elements like state, policy makers, social discourse and consensus, and so on are stressed. These factors played really critical roles in policy making process, especially for deciding foreign policy, according to recent IR works.

On the one hand, Dr. Tsuchiya's approach to the cultural issue seems to adopt the constructivism, given the fact that the propaganda of the USIS and the response of Japanese people to the propaganda are approached. On the other hand, she tried to broaden the research topic on science/technology and the relationship between state and business in the Eisenhower administration.

In particular, I am very interested in her position on the role of private company with US governmental institution during the cold war era. Almost all of scholars have chiefly examined governmental agents during the cold war era, since the government was the most important actor/agent to carry out the foreign assistance and psychological and cultural warfare. ICA, USIS and USAID were the representative institutions being focused on. However, Dr. Tsuchiya's analysis could contribute to broaden the area of research to the private sector as well as the combined one.

Of course, I do not fully agree with Dr. Tsuchiya's argument about the role of private sector during the Eisenhower Administration. I published an article on the policy of the Eisenhower administration's assistance policy which stressed the participation of private companies in order to reduce budget deficit. My conclusion was that the policy was not successful due to reluctance of the private business sector because the social condition in developing country was unstable in 1950s. However, I did not analyze the Japan case at the time. Her paper urges me to revise and add something in my previous paper.

When I received this paper, I was very happy to read because I am doing a project with SNU professors in the department of electricity about the 120 year history of electricity in Korea. In particular, I gave a presentation at the AAS in Hawaii last April about the history of electricity in South Korea under the cold war. At the conference, I mentioned about the role of the Union Oil, the Caltex, and the Westing House in the late 1960s and the early 1970s to boost power plants in South Korea.

And I will publish a paper on history of science and technology under the US hegemony between 1945 and early 1970s at the Korea Journal (UNECSCO) coming March next year. In the paper, I mentioned about the Pacific Bechtel and the Batelle Institute which contributed a lot to promote science and technology in South Korea.
II. Unbalanced Approach

I totally agree with the author’s conclusion that people in recipient countries shows “selective acceptance” of US messages (p. 201). This is the most important one in IR because the IR is always mutually and reciprocally operating. The response of agents in recipient countries is very crucial not only because it shows whether a policy is successfully implemented or not, but also because peculiarity of policy in specific countries and areas could be showed. I think that Dr. Brazinsky’s recent book would be paid attention in that sense.5

However, I think that there are different examinations between Korean and Japanese case in this paper. The former part of Korea was concentrated on the US policy toward South Korea, whereas the latter part of Japan included the Japanese response and reaction, as well. Although the author mentioned about the problem of the US policy toward South Korea in the 1950s through citing Dr. Heo Eun’s book, the citation and the critique against Heo’s are very different from the analysis on Japan’s case.6 I guess that this is due to the lack of raw materials expressing the public opinion, social discourse and consensus in South Korea.

In the case of the construction of thermal power plants in 1950s South Korea was not quite welcomed by scientists and technicians. They had already experienced the giant hydro power plants at Supung and Jangjin (Chosin) during the colonial period and would like to construct hydro rather than thermal power plant. However, to construct a hydro one was not possible due to the feature of US assistance in 1950s which was not based on long term projected one but on annual base. That was one of the dissatisfactions among Korean technicians in the field of electricity in 1950s. This kind of complains to American assistance from Korean side could be found in another case like sending Oregon Advisory Group to South Korea to assist in the designing and implementing economic development plans in the late 1950s.7

From the extension of this perspective, the citation in page 9 is self satisfaction of American government without checking social discourse and perception. “The People of Korea, who have viewed this film…officials and private citizens alike...undoubtedly now have a far greater appreciation of the tremendous task involved in the construction of these electrical power plants, and the part additional electrical power in playing in the rehabilitation program in Korea.” The policy makers did not carefully survey the public opinion on the US assistance in South Korea, although it is not sure whether the self satisfaction was expressed on purpose or not.

I think that the Minnesota Plan since the mid 1950s and the Korea Institute for Science and Technology [KIST] case in the late 1960s would be more interesting one to show the effect of US aid and its cultural effect, rather than the power plants case.8
III. Others

I would like to mention several points on the details and facts in this paper.

- US government, however, wanted to offer the economic aid through the United Nations (UN), because “a move to make the economic assistance program a unilateral US program would undermine the whole concept of collective action” which characterized the Korean War. (p. 192)

This is a very significant point to show the important role of the UN in South Korea. American government wanted to involve in internal affairs of South Korea through special committees organized by the UN until the late 1970s in order to show superficially the American assistance as a multi-lateral one. There were several special committees in Korea organized by the UN as follows:

- UNTCOK (United Nations Temporary Committee on Korea, 1947~1948)
- UNOK (United Nations Committee on Korea, 1948~1950)
- UNCURK (United Nations Committee for Unification and Rehabilitation in Korea, 1950~1972)
- UN Forces (United Nations Forces, 1950~present)

However, the UNKRA was the only one for economic aid for Korea. Even the fact that the amount of aid by UNKRA was very small compared to US assistance in 1950s as well as that the UNKRA was disorganized in 1958. Although the US assistance in 1950s was connected with the UN forces in South Korea, it was a direct one from the American government. At the same time, PL 480 should be examined in 1950s and 1960s.

On this condition, it is not proper to regard the “bad” response of the Rhee government as the only one obstacle to the US modernization and industrialization policy. Although I agree with the problems in the Rhee government in economic sector, the problem caused from non-project and short-term US assistance in the 1950s was another fundamental element creating ineffectiveness simultaneously.

- He regarded himself as the “UNC Economic Coordinator,” in his correspondence with the ROK government. (p. 192)

According to the agreement between ROK and the US, 2 ECs should be appointed under the Office of Economic Coordinators (OEC): one is under the UNC, and the other is from the ROK government (usually the minister of finance or the minister of rehabilitation.) Furthermore, it mentions that “UNC EC had strong power exactly because he was the designer of the new country. “The US
business played a central role in designing a new country” is inappropriate, in particular to South Korea, considering the result of the aid in 1950s and the response of Korean people. The reason why the EC had power is because he completely controlled the counterpart fund. However, UNC EC did not conduct many things since President Rhee was reluctant to meet him throughout the 1950s. At the same time, as the Kennedy Administration pointed out through the Presidential Task Force Paper on Korea, assistance to South Korea in 1950s was considered as a representative case of failure.

- Japanese colonial law of 1943 was still valid in 1954, when the contract was concluded. Under the colonial law, all the power plants were nationalized under the control of the Japanese government sponsored company.

There were three electricity companies since the colonial period. All were not public, but private companies, even though Korean people and several Japanese officials and technicians raised the necessity of publicizing and integrating the companies. Changes came from the first constitution of the ROK in 1948. According to the first constitution of the ROK, all of public and major industries should be nationalized or be publicized. Electricity industry was one of the sectors to be nationalized along with mining and water. The articles on economic sector in the first constitution were revised in 1954 due to the pressure from the US.

- the steam power plants in Korea and nuclear power plants in Japan were both bridges to liberal, capitalist modernity.

This is a very not historical comment considering the history before 1945. As I mentioned above, Korean people already experienced partially the liberal and capitalist modernity during the colonial period, even though there were broad opposition against Japanese rulers by Korean people.

I would like to mention about the necessity of different approaches to different people lastly instead in the conclusion part. Usually, scholars use ‘people’ without any specific consideration. However, there have been various kinds of people in any society since ancient period, of which idea and thought has been diverse according to class and status. Even these days it is not difficult to find differences of ideas and perceptions in one society. I think that the so-called South-South conflict in South Korea is one of outstanding phenomena, while the attitude and response to the history textbook made by the Fusosha is another interesting case. Not only in Korea, but also in Japan, we can easily find diversity of people these days. In Korea, not only common people, but scholars frequently use Japan or Japanese as a general terminology to pointing Japanese government along with Japanese people. This would create possibly wrong collective image and perception of Japanese society.

And I believe that we should think about the relationship between American government and big business. On the surface, American government seems to
mobilize private business for its objective in foreign policy. However, at the same
time, we must think about what the most significant interest group in America is.
As President Eisenhower warned in his remarks when he left the presidential
office, military complex business has been operating as the most crucial win-set.
Sometimes members of the military complex business were picked up by American
government as we can see in the case of the Bush Administration. Even most of
the defense secretaries were appointed from the business area. So it is not so
strange for big business to have close relationship with the government. Even in
order to have a sustainable prosperity of business, the relationship is inevitably
connected with US foreign policy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I really enjoy reading the paper and broaden my historiogra-
phy. I believe that I should learn more about Japanese history and society in
order to improve my perspective.

However, I would like to ask the author to have profound raw materials and
analysis to develop her argument. In particular, I would like the author to pay
more attention to agent in the recipient countries.

At last, I would like to add one more thing. After 1945, Korea and Japan had
different situation. From Korean side, the US as well as the Soviet was not
invited, while the US was invited in Japan. I would like the author to consider this
different condition in both countries.

Notes

1. 1950s has been considered as a dark age among Korean scholars because of the devas-
tation of the war and dictatorship under the Rhee government. However, there are
several attempts to review the 1950s Korean society from different perspectives. One is
now a Harvard-SNU modern Korea project led by Prof. Eckert and me, the other is by
Canadian scholars.

2. PARK Tae Gyun, “Changes in US Policy Toward South Korea in the Early 1960s,”

3. PARK Tae Gyun, “Cold War and the Electricity in South Korea,” unpublished present-
tation paper, 2011 AAS Annual Meeting at Hawaii.

4. PARK Tae Gyun, “Catch up, but Limited: The Roles of the U.S. and Japan in Science
and Technology of South Korea During the Cold War,” unpublished draft.

5. BRAZINSKY Gregg, Nation Building in South Kora: Koreans, Americans and the
Making of a Democracy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

6. On the one hand, I agree with Dr. Heo’s argument, while I do not agree because the
reason of the failure was derived neither from the military initiative, nor from the US
intervention in the Korea Japan normalization negotiation.

7. The Oregon Advisory Group in Korea, A Report on the University of Oregon Advisory
Mission to the Korean Economic Development Council, (Eugene, Oregon; School of
Business Administration, University of Oregon, 1961).