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**Compressed Modernity in Perspective:**

**South Korean Instances and Beyond**

(압축적 근대성의 이해: 한국 사례를 중심으로)

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## **Compressed Modernity in Perspective: South Korean Instances and Beyond**

### **< Abstract >**

In a rapidly increasing body of international research on South Korea (and East Asia), the concept of compressed modernity has been adopted as a core theoretical tool for framing research questions and organizing empirical findings. In this paper, I intend to present a formal configuration of compressed modernity and compare its theoretical logic with some of the major theoretical perspectives on modernity (and postmodernity) in international scholarship. I also delineate various levels/units of practical manifestation of compressed modernity. Then, South Korean experiences are brought in to explicate various dimensions of compressed modernity and to explore various historical and structural conditions for its emergence. Finally, I discuss the historical and international relevance of compressed modernity beyond the South Korean context.

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## **Compressed Modernity in Perspective: South Korean Instances and Beyond**

### **1. Purpose**

South Korea is a nation of extreme changes, rigidities, complexities, intensities, and imbalances. South Korea's per capital GNP was merely 100 U.S. dollars in 1963.<sup>1</sup> This would be multiplied about 200 times by 2007 when each South Korean earned 20,045 US dollars on average. The volume of the entire national economy came to rank South Korea at eleventh in the world, between India and Russia, as of 2005.<sup>2</sup> This process of explosive economic growth has been matched with a thundering restructuring of society. The urban population was 28.0 percent in 1960, and kept bloating ever since to reach 81.5 percent in 2005.<sup>3</sup> Private domains of life have not been exempted from radical alteration. South Korean women shocked the world (and South Koreans themselves) by recording a total fertility rate of 1.076 in 2005, the world's lowest.<sup>4</sup> The highest total fertility rate was recorded in the early 1960s (e.g., 6.0 in 1960). Having recorded historically and internationally unprecedented changes in their society and life, the same South Koreans have stubbornly resisted significant change in many other aspects. Above all, having become the world's most rapidly aging population, most South Koreans still regard elderly care as the exclusive domain of filial piety. In 1998, when South Koreans had to confront an unprecedented national economic crisis, as many as 89.9 percent of them reportedly considered elderly care as the sole responsibility of children.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps not unrelatedly, the

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1 *Korea Statistical Portal* ([www.kosis.kr](http://www.kosis.kr)).

2 *World Development Indicators 2007* (World Bank, 2007).

3 People in rural towns (*eup*) are classified as urban in South Korea, and many rural towns have typical urban characteristics. If more generous (and internationally more comparable) standards are applied, South Korea is more urban than most advanced capitalist societies. For instance, South Korea was estimated by the Population Bureau of the United Nations to be 90.2 percent urban in 2005 as compared to 80.8 percent in the U.S., 89.2 percent in the U.K., 88.5 percent in Germany etc. (<http://economy.hankooki.com>).

4 *Annual Report on Live Births and Death Statistics: Based on Vital Registration* (2006).

5 *Korea Statistical Portal* ([www.kosis.kr](http://www.kosis.kr)).

traditional norm of son preference (*nama seonho*) has remained largely intact. The sex ratio at birth was sustained at levels higher than 110 during most of the 1990s (except 109.6 in 1999), and has been very gradually declining in recent years.<sup>6</sup> These enduring features of South Korea in tandem with explosive changes in many other aspects have inevitably made this country an extremely complex social entity for which no easy sociological account is available.

The miraculous transformations and tremendous complexities of South Koreans' economic, social, and political life have required South Koreans to devote astonishing amounts of time, money, and energy for national and/or individual advancement (or for sheer adaptation and survival). According to the OECD, South Koreans were the only people on earth working more than two thousand hours yearly as of 2007 (i.e., 2,261 hours on average).<sup>7</sup> Before toiling in the labor market, South Koreans have to go through no less spartan processes of schooling, and almost all students advance to next levels of schooling up to college. As of 2005, the enrollment ratio at tertiary schools in South Korea was 90 percent – the world's highest level, distantly followed by Sweden (84 percent as of 2004) and the United States (82 percent as of 2005).<sup>8</sup> Intense work and study tend to keep South Koreans from getting enough sleep. Among 18 OECD member countries with available data for 2006, South Koreans slept least (at an average of 469 minutes each day), with only the Japanese skimping on sleep at equal levels (at an average of 470 minutes each day).<sup>9</sup> The French (at a largest average of 530 minutes each day) slept an hour more than Koreans and the Japanese. In spite of – or perhaps because of – such devotion to work and study at internationally incomparable levels, South Koreans have been endemically subjected to critical social imbalances in terms of social, physical, and spiritual risks, again at internationally incomparable levels. For instance, among 20 OECD member countries with available data for 2005, South Koreans were least satisfied with their job (68.6%), with the

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6 105 is usually considered the natural sex ratio at birth.

7 *OECD Employment Outlook 2008*.

8 *Social Indicators in Korea 2005*.

9 *Society at a Glance 2009: OECD Social Indicators*, Figure 2.5.

French (70.5%) and the Japanese (72.4%) trailing behind.<sup>10</sup> More seriously, the number of safety-related deaths per hundred thousand workers was 12.4 in 2007, the largest among all thirty member countries of OECD.<sup>11</sup> South Korea also topped OECD in tuberculosis cases with 96 patients and 11 related deaths per 100,000 persons.<sup>12</sup> So many South Koreans inflict fatal harm on themselves at one of the highest levels in the world – e.g., 45.2 out of 100,000 South Koreans committed suicide in 2006 (as compared to an average of 24 suicides per 100,000 people among all OECD countries).<sup>13</sup>

It is hard to imagine this society used be called a “hermit kingdom” when it was first exposed to Westerners. How can sociology deal with this miraculous yet simultaneously obstinate and hysterical society? Sociology has been employed from the West (the United States in particular) and dispatched to South Korean realities throughout the post-colonial era.<sup>14</sup> Besides hiring Koreans with degrees from major Western universities for most faculty positions, renowned Western sociologists have been invited and, all of a sudden, forced to speculate upon South Korean realities. Sociology seems to have served as another factor for weighing in on South Koreans’ extreme conditions and situations of life. What Giddens and Beck diagnose as “reflexive modernization” is certainly relevant in regards to sociology in South Korea.<sup>15</sup> But Western sociology in the South Korean context – no matter how much adapted locally – has critically added to the complicated nature of South Korean modernity. Many South Korean scholars have responded to this dilemma by proposing to construct “indigenous sociology” or “Korean-style sociology”.<sup>16</sup> However, a comparative modernity approach is needed more urgently because South Korean distinctiveness consists much more in its explosive and complex digestion (and indigestion) of Western modernity than in some isolated characteristics inherited from its past.

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10 The figures are “percentage of all employees completely, very or fairly satisfied with their job.” *Society at a Glance 2009: OECD Social Indicators*, CO2.1.

11 *Nocutnews* ([www.nocutnews.co.kr](http://www.nocutnews.co.kr), 15 Jul 2008).

12 *WHO Report 2007*.

13 *Prime Gyeongje* ([www.newsprime.co.kr](http://www.newsprime.co.kr), 21 Dec 2008).

14 Park and Chang (1999).

15 Beck, Giddens, and Lash (1994).

16 Shin, Y-H (1994).

In the following, I present *compressed modernity* in South Korea as part of such a comparative modernity approach. Since the early 1990s, I have tried to evince that compressed modernity can help to construe, on the one hand, the extreme changes, rigidities, complexities, intensities, and imbalances in South Korean life and, on the other hand, analyze interrelationships among such traits and components. In a rapidly increasing body of international research on South Korea and East Asia, my concept of compressed modernity has been adopted as a core theoretical tool for organizing empirical findings.<sup>17</sup> In this paper, I intend to present a formal configuration of compressed modernity in the South Korean context, compare its theoretical logic with some of the major theoretical perspectives on modernity (and postmodernity) in international scholarship, delineate social levels of practical manifestation of compressed modernity, point out historical and structural conditions for compressed modernity, and discuss the historical and international relevance of compressed modernity beyond the South Korean context.

## **2. Compressed Modernity in Perspective**

As I defined very briefly elsewhere, compressed modernity is a civilizational condition in which economic, political, social and/or cultural changes occur in an extremely condensed manner in respect to both time and space, and in which the dynamic coexistence of mutually disparate historical and social elements leads to the construction and reconstruction of a highly complex and fluid social system.<sup>18</sup> Compressed modernity, as detailed subsequently, can be manifested at various levels of human existence – i.e., personhood, family, secondary organizations, urban spaces, societal units (including civil society, nation, etc.), and, not least importantly, the global society. At each of these levels, people's lives need to be managed intensely, intricately, and flexibly in order to remain normally integrated with the rest of society.

### **<Figure 1> Five Dimensions of Compressed Modernity**

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17 For examples of applying my concept of compressed modernity in empirical research on South Korea, see Martin-Jones (2007), Abelmann (2003), etc. For an extended application of compressed modernity to cover Asia broadly, see Kyoto University's Global Center of Excellence for "Reconstruction of the Intimate and Public Spheres in 21st Century Asia" (<http://www.gcoe-intimacy.jp>).

18 See Chang (2009).

	<b>Time (Era)</b>	<b>Space (Place)</b>
<b>Condensation/Abridgement</b>	[ I ]	[ II ]
	[ V ]	
<b>Compression/Complication</b>	[ III ]	[ IV ]

Figure 1 shows that compressed modernity is composed of five specific dimensions that are constituted interactively by two axes of time/space and condensation/compression. The time facet includes both physical time (point, sequence and amount of time) and historical time (era, epoch and phase). The space facet includes physical space (location and area) and cultural space (place and region). As compared to physically standardized abstract time-space, era-place serves as a concrete framework for constructing and/or accommodating an actually existing civilization. Condensation/Abridgement refers to the phenomenon that the physical process required for the movement or change between two time points (eras) or between two locations (places) is abridged or compacted (Dimensions [I] and [II] respectively). Compression/Complication refers to the phenomenon that diverse components of multiple civilizations that have existed in different areas and/or places coexist in a certain delimited time-space and influence and change each other (Dimensions [III] and [IV] respectively). The phenomena generated in these four dimensions, in turn, interact with each other in complicated ways and further generate different social phenomena (Dimension [V]). The above schema of differentiating time and space and separating condensation and compression needs logical justification. In a non-Western historical/social context in which Western modernity is conceived as the core source of civilizational as well as politico-military superiority, the West stands not only as a discrete region but also as a discrete (but prospectively own) moment of history. Where

indigenously conscious efforts for civilizational rebirth are externally defeated or voluntarily acquitted, the West often becomes both a direction for historical change (modernization) and a contemporaneous source of inter-civilizational remaking (Westernization in practice). The more condensed these changes become – that is, the faster modernization proceeds and the fuller Westernization takes place – the more successful the concerned countries tend to be considered (in spite of cultural and emotional irritations as well as political and economic sacrifices experienced by various indigenous groups). However, the very processes of modernization and Westernization endemically induce the cultural and political backlashes on the part of the adversely affected groups and, in frequent cases, systematically reinforce the traditional/indigenous civilizational constituents as these are deemed ironically useful for a strategic management of modernization and Westernization. Thereby becomes compression inevitable among various discrete temporal and regional civilizational constituents.

The problem of time-space condensation here was presented as a core subject in David Harvey's seminal discussion of Western modernism and postmodernism.<sup>19</sup> In essence, according to Harvey, the accumulation crisis of capitalism and the effort to overcome it led to the expansion of controllable space and the generalization of mechanical time, which ultimately engendered time-space condensation (or, in Harvey's wording, "time-space compression") *on the global scale*. In this regard, Harvey argues, there are fundamental similarities in the objects that modernism and postmodernism respectively try to explain and overcome. While his emphasis on "the annihilation of space through time" and "the spatialization of time" involves the complex functional interrelationships between time and space, it by and large focuses on what I present here as *time-space condensation*.<sup>20</sup> As compared to Harvey's view that time-space condensation (on the global scale) accompanies the accumulation crisis of capitalism at each stage and the aggressive effort to overcome it, the time-space condensation and compression in compressed modernity

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19 Harvey (1980), *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

20 See Harvey (1980: 270).

(mostly at the national level) involves much more diverse historical backgrounds, factors, and initiators.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, the phenomena argued by main theorists of postcolonialism (such as cultural “hybridity”, “syncrecity”, etc.) can also be included in time-space compression.<sup>22</sup> If this literary criticism-derived theory is extended to cover social phenomena in general, most authors of postcolonialism seem to acknowledge the status of politically liberated Third World grassroots and intellectuals as historical and social subjects, but still think that their spiritual, material, and institutional life has not fundamentally overcome colonial (Western) cultures and values, but combined the latter with indigenous elements in diverse ways.<sup>23</sup> It is true that postcolonial culture can be both “oppositional” and “complicit” in regards to (neo)colonial order and that, in the former case, colonial (Western) cultures and values, if any, may be conceived as something to be criticized and overcome. Similarly, in the specific aspects of time-space compression in this study, the process in which various cultures and institutions positioned at dissimilar points of the two axes of time and space interact and intermingle is open to a possibility of being dictated by the ideology, value, and will of South Koreans as concrete historical and social subjects. However, it needs to be pointed out that the breadth of cultures and institutions that are subject to compression here is much wider than that is suggested by postcolonialism so as to include even postmodern and global elements. It also needs to be pointed out that the facets of compression here are not limited to hybridity or syncrecity but involve competition, collision, disjuncting, articulation, compounding, etc.

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21 In a sense, Harvey may be regarded as suggesting a sort of *global-scale compressed modernity* as a distinctive stage of (both modern and postmodern) capitalism. This stage has been further accentuated by global neoliberalism since the 1980s, largely through the same logic and/or crisis of capitalism. Besides, Harvey’s work seems to serve as an indispensable precursor to the so-called cosmopolitan turn of sociology led by Ulrich Beck (see Beck and Sznaider, 2006), etc.

22 See Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002). Before the intellectual ascendance of post-colonialism, numerous sociologists, such as S. N. Eisenstadt and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, had pointed out extensive hybridization between indigenous (traditional) and Western (modern) cultures in the modernization process of various Third World countries.

23 If postcolonialist literature and scholarship, to the extent that they intellectually and politically represents postcolonial societies or peoples themselves, are taken as social phenomena, it may be said that fundamental transcendence over the West is not entirely absent. For instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s (2000) critique of (Western) academic history as well as Edward Said’s critique of (Western) literature has not only transcended the epistemological constraints consciously or unconsciously imposed by the West on non-Western (at least by birth) minds but also helped enlighten Westerns minds about history, morality, and aesthetics.

Both condensation and compression in compressed modernity need to be diagnosed in consideration of what Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck consider “discontinuous changes” under modernity. Giddens emphasizes the qualitatively distinct nature of modern social institutions (as opposed to traditional social orders), whereas Beck highlights the discreet characteristics of “Second Modernity” (as opposed to “First Modernity”).<sup>24</sup> To the extent that South Koreans have incorporated West-originated modern social institutions into their life, the “discontinuitist” interpretation recommended by Giddens and Beck will be methodologically and theoretically indispensable. However, a more critical utility of the discontinuitist approach consists in the very fact that various versions of *Western* modernity have arrived in South Korea mainly through political coercions and decisions (that is, as direct effects of international power relations) rather than as evolutionary adaptations. When West-originated social institutions, values, and goals are attained in condensed manners, or when they are compressively compounded with traditional and indigenous elements, their discontinuous – or, more correctly, dissimilar – nature in the South Korean context cannot but be responsible for social confusion, conflict, and alienation. Paradoxically, it is also true that such discontinuous nature can become useful for inducing, suppressing or even deceiving potentially resistant local subjects and interests in strategically determined directions of social change. Abrupt institutional (or ideological) replacement is sometimes much more feasible than gradual institutional (or ideological) reform because local resistance is epistemologically and/or ecologically more difficult in the former situation.

### **3. Manifestation Levels of Compressed Modernity**

There are several different levels (or units) of manifestation of compressed modernity in South Korea and elsewhere. Societal units (nation, state, civil society, national economy), city and community, secondary organizations, family, and personhood are all observable

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24 See Giddens (1990: 3-6), and Beck and Grande (2009: 9). Beck presents Second Modernity as a critical alternative to postmodernity, arguing that various (mostly negative) “side-effects” of First Modernity add up to a qualitatively different situation in which the fundamental values of (First) Modernity are still respected, but have to be pursued with radically different social means and institutions under a cosmopolitan paradigm. In this regard, Beck disputes “methodological nationalism” in social theory and analysis and instead advocates “methodological cosmopolitanism”. In a sense, compressed modernity is already based upon methodological cosmopolitanism since it directly acknowledges and reflects international and global processes by which the nature of modernity in late-modernizing societies is critically determined.

units of compressed modernity. The primacy of certain levels or units over other levels or units in manifesting a society's compressed modernity constitutes a critical structural characteristic of the concerned society.<sup>25</sup> Let us discuss this issue in the context of East Asia since a broader context than South Korea (as a single nation) is required to properly elucidate the matters at hand.

**Societal units** are most commonly discussed in regards to compressed modernity in South Korea (and East Asia). Economic catching-up and swift social and political modernization have been common national agenda in the post-colonial contexts. Indeed, condensed economic, social, and political changes have commonly been experienced under the rubric of national development or revitalization. The nation is to flourish through economic, political, and social modernization, but its historical foundations need to be constantly reaffirmed through traditional/indigenous values, symbols, and memories. Besides, whether successful or not in such courses of (West-oriented) modernization, traditional and/or indigenous components of social, economic, and political orders would not vanish overnight. In this context, compression of traditional/modern(/postmodern) and indigenous/Western(/global) components of social, economic, and political orders almost inevitably ensue.

East Asian countries not only boast of many historic cities of traditional governance, culture, and commerce but also have undergone explosively rapid (or condensed) urbanization in the course of sequential industrializations (from Japan to Taiwan to North and South Korea to China). In mega-size **urban places**, dense blocks of modern (if not altogether Western) life are juxtaposed with museum-like pockets of traditional/indigenous culture and politics. Overnight creation of huge bed towns and industrial cities is all too usual; so is overnight spread of modern and/or Western lifestyles.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, refined versions of middle class consciousness or neotraditional forms of authoritarian

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25 It is not immediately feasible to theoretically lay out the systematic relationships among the different manifestation levels of compressed modernity or to empirically identify all-encompassing structural forces shaping them. Perhaps many years of in-depth empirical research on compressed modernity at the diverse levels of its manifestation (and in various national and regional contexts) are needed in order to address such possibilities.

26 Appadurai's (1990) conception of the complex and fluid geocultural structure of (late) modernity seems particularly suggestive in this regard.

political rule sometimes help to resurrect traditional/indigenous facades to private and public life. Condensed urbanization and compressive urban life, however, do not themselves constitute an honorable civilizational alternative, so that constant reconstruction of urban spaces becomes a built-in feature of East Asian urbanism. Urbanism here is not only “phantasmagoric” but also structurally ephemeral.<sup>27</sup>

**Secondary organizations** such as schools and business firms have been hastily set up in massive numbers as instruments for modernization and development, but their organizational structure and culture are far from simple replication of those of Western societies. Traditional teacher-pupil relations are still reverberated in authoritarian class rooms where cramming (i.e., condensed absorption) of modern/Western knowledge and technology is considered an uncompromisable goal of education in the process of national economic and sociopolitical catch-up.<sup>28</sup> In South Korean sweatshop factories where the “economic miracle” was initiated since the late 1960s, work-line supervisors and company managers demanded *yeogong* (women industrial workers) to subserviently yet faithfully serve them as if they were elder kinsmen in a village.<sup>29</sup> Both in Japanese capitalist economy and Chinese (market) socialist economy, modern industrial workplaces have often been reinvented into arenas for arguably communal interactions associated with paternalistic cultural traditions.<sup>30</sup>

East Asian familism (or family-centeredness) both as personal orientation and societal order is as much modern as traditional. **Families** function, on the one hand, like social battalions in which confusing and contradicting goals of societal processes (modern economy, polity, and civic life) are reorganized into strategic targets of everyday life and, on the other hand, like cultural reservoirs in which values and norms of diverse historical

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27 Giddens (1990: 18-19) argues, perhaps inspired by Walter Benjamin’s critical assessment of modern cities (Gilloch, 1997), “In conditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly phantasmagoric: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them.” Phantasmagoria is “a precinema projection ghost show invented in France in the late 18th century, which gained popularity through most of Europe (especially England) throughout the 19th century”, employing magic lantern “to project frightening images such as skeletons, demons, and ghosts onto walls, smoke, or semi-transparent screens, frequently using rear projection” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phantasmagoria>).

28 Han J-S (1996).

29 Koo.

30 Dore (1973); Walder (1986).

and social origins are absorbed and reproduced as guiding poles for personal life.<sup>31</sup> Family life in East Asia both appears microcosmic of condensed and compressive societal processes, and buttresses such societal processes by tightly regimenting family members accordingly.

If an ordinary East Asian adult hopes to secure a graceful image or position – or **personhood** in general – in everyday social life, he/she needs to be able to skillfully exhibit a highly complex set of values and attitudes that are finely tuned to diverse sociocultural, political, and economic contexts. To be considered a good parent, teacher, and senior worker is a highly challenging and oftentimes confusing task since he/she is expected to successfully become seemingly inconsistent or contradictory beings in variegated contexts. To be considered a good child, student, and junior worker is no less challenging and confusing. To be considered a good spouse, friend, and colleague is another formidable and perplexing challenge. Life is further complicated along different stages of one's life course that demand constantly radical shifts in his/her social roles and relations in tandem with condensed and compressive societal changes. In a most crucial dilemma in this regard, various stages of one's life course can be influenced by mutually inconsistent (or, according to Beck, "discontinuous") historical and societal factors, so that her/his youth, adulthood, and old age lack logical sequences. Born in a traditional culture, raised in a modernizing/industrializing era, and kept alive into a postmodern/postindustrial era, an ordinary East Asian must continually juggle with apparently illogical values, duties and expectations in each stage of her/his life course. *Flexibly complex personhood* – circumspectly and tactfully being, or at least appearing, traditional-modernized-postmodernized on the one hand, and indigenous-westernized-cosmopolitan on the other hand – is a civilizational requirement in East Asia.<sup>32</sup> Chronic possibilities for failing to be a flexibly complex social subject tend to induce many East Asians to remain blank-faced (and blank-minded?) in the absence of significant others, whereas some energetic and

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31 See Chang K-S (2010a), Chapter 2, "Accidental Pluralism".

32 See Orta (1999) for an ethnographic discussion of complex personhood. See Abelmann (2003) for a discussion of the South Korean case. In the context of authoritarian (or totalitarian) state-socialist systems, people showed a similar tendency of "cognitive compartmentalization" in order to cope with the dual culture of politically forced public identity and privately shaped emotional life (Parish and Whyte, 1978: 227).

resourceful individuals try to lead new forms of life by tapping all sociocultural, economic, and political opportunities associated with compressed modernity.

#### **4. South Korean Instances of Compressed Modernity**

The five dimensions of compressed modernity (in Figure 1) can be explained in terms of South Korean experiences in the following way. [I] can be exemplified by the case that South Koreans have abridged the duration taken for their transition from low-income agricultural economy to advanced industrial economy on the basis of explosively rapid economic development. The much talked-about speedy changes of this country – such as the “compressed growth” of the economy and the “compressed modernization” of society – belong to this dimension.<sup>33</sup> Such compressed (condensed) changes are also apparent in the cultural domain, so that even postindustrial and/or postmodern tendencies are observed in various sections of society. South Koreans’ pride that they have supposedly achieved such economic and social development as had required two or three centuries for Westerners merely over half a century has been elevated to the level of the state. The South Korean government has been busy publishing numerous showy statistical compilations that document explosive economic, social, and cultural changes for the periods “after liberation”, “after independence”, etc.<sup>34</sup>

South Koreans’ success in condensing historical processes, however, does not always reflect the outcome of voluntary efforts but, in numerous instances, has simply resulted from asymmetrical international relations in politico-military power and cultural influence. For instance, no other factor was as crucial as the American military occupation during the post-liberation period for their overnight adoption of (Western-type) modern institutions in politics, economy, education, etc.<sup>35</sup> Nowadays, even the postmodern culture has been instantly transposed on to South Koreans through internationally dependent commercial

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33 Therefore, compressed modernization is a component of compressed modernity. Many readers of my previous writings mistook compressed modernization for compressed modernity. However, such confusion is much more due to my fault (of failing to present a clear conceptualization of compressed modernity in advance) than their lack of attention.

34 NSO (1996), *Changes in Social and Economic Indicators since Liberation*; NSO (1998), *Economic and Social Change in the Fifty Years of the Republic of Korea in View of Statistics*.

35 See Cumings (1981).

advertisements, etc.<sup>36</sup> Even in those areas in which voluntary efforts have been decisive, the end results do not necessarily tell everything. For instance, if one drives between Seoul and Busan taking ten, six or three hours respectively, the driver must feel differently about the travel in each case and his probability of experiencing accident and fatigue from driving cannot but differ as well. We should analyze South Koreans' experience of overspeeding travel by focusing on the very fact of their overspeeding.<sup>37</sup>

[II] can be exemplified by the fact that the successive domination of South Korea by various external forces in the last century compelled the country to change in diverse aspects ranging from political institutions to mass culture under the direct influence of other regions (societies) no matter what geographic distances and differences existed. After South Koreans were physically subdued by colonial or imperial external forces, many ideologies, institutions, and technologies engendered in dissimilar regional contexts were coerced on to them directly, that is, omitting the usual geographic requirements for inter-civilizational exchange such as the Silk Road. Such geographic omission constituted an abridgement or dismantlement of space.<sup>38</sup> In particular, the Korean urbanization in the periods of colonial rule and capitalist industrialization was respectively a deepening process of external institutional imitation and economic dependency, so that the modern cities thereby created through space abridgement turn out utterly alien spaces disengaged from the indigenous civilization of Korea.<sup>39</sup>

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36 See Kang, M. (1999).

37 See Martin-Jones (2007), who analyzes South Korean cinema by "decompressing" the compressed modernity of South Korean life.

38 Such abridgement of space caused by colonial domination between different nations should be differentiated from the space/place replacement that is brought about where a foreign nation undertakes ethnic/racial cleansing against an indigenous nation and replicates in the thereby captured territory the civilization from its mother society. The most crucial examples of space replacement include America and Australia. Since space replacement involves both civilization and people, it rarely leads to space compression. The indigenous civilization is obliterated along with the aborigine population. In the case of the United States, as implied by their independence war against the Great Britain, the conquest of the new continent could be defined as a process of creating a new political, social, and economic system. From this perspective, a quality of space creation may be rendered for American history (or modernity).

39 For instance, as illustrated by the thorny issues of relocation of the U.S. embassy and the U.S. military base, even the spatial identity of Seoul, the capital city of the Republic of Korea, is quite unclear. Another evidence of space abridgement is presented by the fact that numerous universities located in major modern cities function as the outposts of the Western civilization.

The space condensation realized by South Koreans' own will was accelerated in the 1990s under the full forces of informatization and globalization. Especially, the splendid development of the so-called IT industry has placed South Korea at the rank of the very leader of informatization. Now, the abridgement or dismantlement of space by electronic communication mechanisms is a catchword for national development in the 21st century. With these changes combined, South Korea – a society where overseas travel used to be a luxury experience for a privileged minority until very recently – has enabled its citizens to go through a quasi-travel experience of foreign (mostly Western) spaces even without moving geographically.

[III] involves the phenomena of intense competition, collision, disjuncting, articulation, and compounding between (post)modern elements (which have been generated as a result of [I]) and traditional elements (which have been either left unattended or intentionally preserved or reinstated) within a compact socio-historical context. These phenomena, often dubbed “the simultaneity of non-simultaneous matters”, are usually observed in ideology, culture, and other non-material domains that have fairly complex conditions and processes of change.<sup>40</sup> Particularly on the Korean peninsula where no indigenous social revolution helped to eradicate the feudal social structure, colonization and capitalist industrialization fell short of thoroughly permeating traditional values and culture. Besides, rapidly extended life expectancy as a core facet of social development has elongated the lifespan of traditional values and culture along with that of the old generations who wish to maintain such values and culture.<sup>41</sup>

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40 Cf. Bloch, Ernst ([1935]1991), *Heritage of Our Times*. As Germany was behind England and France in industrialization, and in modernization in general, Bloch perceived the German social situation as wedged between backward culture and modern industrialism. A parallel concern was expressed by Antonio Gramsci ([1926] 1995) in respect to the North-South economic and sociocultural disparities within Italy in his *Southern Question* (or, in full, *Notes on the Southern Problem and on the Attitudes Toward It of Communists, Socialists and Democrats*). These German and Italian situations differed from the classic modernization process in that the modernizing and/or industrializing sections of society were not necessarily influencing the rest in an integrative manner.

41 In so many popular television dramas in South Korea, elders as cast figures are still given influential roles in families (and, since social institutions are heavily governed by familial interests, in society). This usually leads to a serious conflict or dilemma among all parties. When elder figures are rather modernized or liberal, this gives another interesting twist to the social context of dramas.

Consequently, traditional, modern, and postmodern values and cultures have come to coexist so as to bring about the inter-civilizational compression among dissimilar time zones. Such inter-temporal compression is also found in the economic arena where the strategy of inter-sectoral “unbalanced growth” led to the coexistence of rapidly growing modern manufacturing sectors (in which the state has favorably supported modern industrialists) and stagnant traditional agriculture (in which only archaic family farming has been allowed legally). As a result, the articulation between dissimilar systems of production representing dissimilar historical epochs has become a core trait of the modern economic order. The everyday life, not to mention the lifetime, of South Koreans who are confronted with the compression of various historical epochs is filled with ceaseless ‘time travels’. This is perhaps the most crucial ingredient of those South Korean television dramas and movies which have fascinated so many Asian nations under the rubric of “Korean wave” (*hallyu*).

[IV] concerns the phenomena of intense competition, collision, disjointing, articulation, and compounding between foreign/multinational/global elements (which have been generated as a result of [II]) and indigenous elements (which have been either left unattended or intentionally preserved or reinstated) within a compact socio-historical context. As diverse social elements generated from different regional contexts coexist and function within a same time-space, a hierarchical structure of dependency or (neo)colonial domination between them often ramifies. In the cultural realm, Edward Said criticized this asymmetrical order as “Orientalism”.<sup>42</sup> According to Michael Lipton, a similar hierarchical order has been observed in the form of “urban bias” in many Third World countries, sacrificing native agriculture, peasants, and rural society unjustly or irrationally.<sup>43</sup> Besides, the early modernization theory, which coerced self-abasement on to indigenous societies and peoples, was warmly welcomed by South Korean elite even if it constituted a political effort to propagate the supposed superiority of the Western civilization infiltrating into the politically subjugated territory.

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42. In order to highlight the Orientalist order within a society which is induced by indigenous elite or other culturally entrenched local interests, a special term “internal orientalism” is sometime used. See, for instance, Schein (1997) for an analysis of gender order in China along this line.

43 See Michael Lipton (1977), *Why Poor People Stay Poor: Urban Bias in World Development*.

Such a historical atmosphere has been crucially responsible for the extremely antagonistic conflict between indigenous cultures and institutions and foreign ones as have been vividly illustrated in the sectors of cultural production and medicine in South Korea. Chronic bitterness characterizes the atmosphere among scholars of humanities (Korean history, philosophy, literature, etc.), practitioners of indigenous medicine, and specialists in traditional music and dance when their professional counterparts of Western specialties dominate society. However, thanks to the very historical context that Korean society was appropriated as a colony of industrial capitalism by an external force (Japan) and that, even after independence, South Koreans were pressurized to accept the political and economic order of Western standards by another external force (the U.S.), the remaining indigenous culture has sometimes claimed a significant historical and existential legitimacy regardless of its practical utility. The duality of South Koreans who have trodden, in practice, a highly extroverted developmental path and still show no hint of shedding their unreserved nationalist pretense presents an easy clue that the modernity pursued by them is chronically afflicted with space-wise compression of dissimilar civilizations.

The social phenomena or cultural elements generated in the above four dimensions of compressed modernity are often put in intense competition, collision, disjointing, articulation, and compounding among themselves, so that still more social phenomena or cultural elements are engendered. These can be considered the fifth dimension ([V]) of compressed modernity. In fact, most social phenomena and cultural elements in South Korea involve this dimension. Given that the co-existence of past, present, Asia (Korea), and West is rather a common trait of social phenomena and cultural elements engendered under compressed modernity, every civilizational component must have come into existence through various processes of hybridization. If anyone who lives in this type of society fails to develop and maintain a fairly complex mindset for incorporating such complicated social phenomena and cultural elements, he/she has to constantly fear a possibility of social dropout.

While understanding and responding to social phenomena that arise through condensed time and space are already a formidable task, comprehending and coordinating the complex interaction of such abruptly new social phenomena with traditional and

indigenous ones constitute an even more challenging undertaking. (The scientific analysis of these matters, of course, would require exceptional gift and effort.) Such difficulties are particularly manifest in the complexities of social values and ideology systems. Family, firm, university, civil society, and even government exist as panoramic displays of diverse values and ideologies. These institutions, in which the values and ideologies from past, present, Asia (Korea), and West do not simply coexist but keep generating new elements through constant interactions with one another, are “too dynamic” and too complex.<sup>44</sup>

## **5. Historical and Structural Conditions of Compressed Modernity in South Korea**

The above dimensions of compressed modernity are emergent patterns of social changes and structures that can be analyzed only in concrete historical and societal contexts. Therefore, the formation and transformation of compressed modernity in South Korea need to be explained under a systematic and comprehensive examination of its historical and structural conditions. Among others, the following eight conditions require special attention: (1) forced skewed insertion into modernity; (2) the Cold War as a modernization (Americanization) regime; (3) war and post-war reconstruction; (4) statist order and catch-up development; (5) modernization instead of social revolution (versus modernization as social revolution); (6) advantages and pitfalls of late development/dependent modernization; (7) international political economy, sequential industrialization-modernization, and global economic restructuring; (8) submissive versus nationalist cosmopolitanization. These diverse historical and structural conditions imply that South Korea’s compressed modernity has been amalgamated from multiple regimes and/or sources of modernity.

***Forced skewed insertion into modernity*** : Koreans were *instantly subdued by modernity* without a thorough reawakening about the historical viability of their boasted traditional

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<sup>44</sup> “Too dynamic” became a thematic phrase for South Korea among many foreign media correspondents in Seoul. The phrase was put in vogue, first, to describe the volatile yet optimistic political changes under President Roh Moo-Hyun, but its use came to encompass various other aspects of swift transformations. While “Dynamic Korea”, in fact, was an official catchphrase for attracting international tourism to the country, these journalists seem to have felt that it was not a sufficient expression for “too dynamic” a society.

civilization.<sup>45</sup> Japan had been considered a barbaric nation, and its revolutionary transition into a modern civilization failed to fundamentally alter such a perception by Koreans. Then they were coercively incorporated into the global capitalist political economy over which Japan was ambitiously and tenaciously expanding its control and influence. Modernity was not pre-tested concerning its utility and compatibility in the Korean context, but instantaneously superimposed onto Korea in such manners that would *facilitate Japan's modernization* as a capitalist empire.<sup>46</sup> As in so many other colonized countries, the very beginning of modernity in Korea was a condensed and skewed experience of its neighbor's modern (imperial) institutions and practices. Ironically, Japan's own initial experience of modernity (under the Meiji regime) was a highly condensed and compressive process.

***The Cold War as a modernization (Americanization) regime*** : (South) Koreans' liberation from Japan after nearly four decades of its colonial rule was mostly an outcome of the international power struggle out of which the United States successfully established a politico-military and economic leadership. The United States assumed that their war victory over Japan entitled them to a politico-military authority over Japan's hitherto colony, Korea.<sup>47</sup> However, their heedless agreement with the Soviet Union on the bipartisan governance and reconstruction of post-war Korea immediately resulted in the initiation of another international power struggle – i.e. communist vs. capitalist conflict led by the two countries.<sup>48</sup> The Korean peninsula became a showcase of the clash between the two opposing lines of modernity. In the southern half of the peninsula, Koreans' anti-colonial

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45 The (unsuccessful) tradition of *silhak* (practical scholarship in the seventeenth to nineteenth century) and the (unsuccessfully staged) Donghak peasant revolution of 1894 are often discussed as foregone historical opportunities for indigenously propelled modernization.

46 Jansen (1987); Cumings (1987).

47 Cumings (1981).

48 It should be pointed out that Korean society as a whole in the 1940s was heavily under organized socialist influence – a natural sociopolitical reaction to Japan's colonial capitalist rule as well as the intellectual spreading of communism in Asia as a national liberation scheme. On its arrival in the southern half of the peninsula, the (capitalist) United States immediately decided to consider such socialist influence undesirable and intolerable and launched a massive yet indirectly managed (i.e., through pro-US local army and police) armed campaign against it (Cumings, 1981). This state-orchestrated assault on civil society continued into the Korean War period, in which numerous civilians were quite randomly branded as North Korea-collaborators and consequently summary-executed (Kim D-C, 2000). In this context, US-sponsored capitalist modernization in South Korea before and after the civil war involved a sort of civilizational warfare against progressive civil society. For the same historical reason, the socialist modernization in North Korea was from the beginning quite expedite.

struggle became instantly submerged under the domestic and international anti-communist struggle. An American cargo version of modernity was transplanted to South Korea as a lump sum package, and its basic operation would be ensured with American military protection and economic aids.<sup>49</sup> As Americans' liberal modernity was crucially characterized by strong sociocultural disembeddedness, its wholesale replication in South Korea was not questioned or delayed in any serious consideration of the specific traditions and situations of the country.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, South Koreans' (and Americans') confrontation with communists in North Korea politically delegitimated any serious criticism or attack on liberal capitalism.

***War and post-war reconstruction:*** Aside from the societal impacts of the Cold War both at the international and domestic level, a frontal civil war between South and North Korea accompanied by an instant engagement of the global community resulted in a nearly total dissolution of the social and economic foundations of the two Koreas. The post-war reconstruction in South and North Korea intensified a hasty modernizationist (*geundaehwajuu*) approach to national development as most of the traditional values, interests, and resources had been critically damaged through the three-year calamity. In a sense, the civil war paved the way for the modernization programs designed for instant social and economic restructuring.<sup>51</sup> However, the severe physical and social damages from the war matched with the resource-poor state in both Koreas simultaneously necessitated the self-reliance of grassroots (usually in terms of rehabilitating traditional resources, networks, and know-hows) in many regions and fields where public policies, programs or and assistances were unforeseeable.

***Statist order and catch-up development :*** The political regime virtually installed by Americans in post-colonial South Korea was inherently hostile to civil society. In fact, it came into existence as the result of an across-the-board aggression by the allied forces of the American occupation military and its local collaborators on the post-colonial civil

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49 See Kim S-J (1996).

50 See Giddens (1990) on "disembedding".

51 In a sense, the civil war accidentally functioned as a disembedding mechanism for Giddensian modernity (Giddens, 1990).

society (which was unsurprisingly pro-socialist after decades of colonial capitalist exploitation).<sup>52</sup> Paradoxically, an inherently illiberal state was entrusted with a historical mission of implementing and operating a highly liberal (American) version of modernity in post-colonial (and post-war) national reconstruction. Its confrontation with the North Korean communist regime served a crucial excuse for authoritarian rule, but its long-term survival under the North Korean (and Soviet) threat necessitated swift military and economic build-up.<sup>53</sup> Independent South Korea's modernization, centered on swift economic development, became a fundamentally statist project. This was particularly the case during Park Chung-Hee's military dictatorship of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>54</sup> Envisaging modernization as a strategic process of national catching-up (with advanced capitalist economies), the military-led state attempted (not unsuccessfully) to orchestrate unprecedentedly rapid industrialization and its requisite social changes while preserving or reinforcing conservative cultural traditions and social orders.<sup>55</sup> Authoritatively administered modernization was certainly expeditious (as opposed to social evolutionary modernization), but it was an essentially skewed process, leaving many domains of society unattended, underdeveloped, protracted or distorted.<sup>56</sup>

***Modernization instead of social revolution (versus modernization as social revolution) :***

Economic development-centered modernization as a statist project has been an almost universal political agenda in the post-war Third World. In some countries, anti-colonial struggle developed into a revolutionary transition of national political and social order; whereas in most other countries (including South Korea), international power constellations

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52 See Cumings (1981).

53 To a crucial extent, South Korea's compressed modernity seems to have been due to a *North Korea effect*: Until the mid 1970s, North Korea was widely held to be a highly successful case of socialist (or Stalinist) industrialization – another line of compressed national economic development. This induced South Korea under Park Chung-Hee to embark on a politically orchestrated heavy industrialization program (Kim H-A, 2004).

54 Amsden (1989); Hart-Landsberg (1993).

55 The issue of national economic catching-up tends to constitute a distinct field of research in development economics. It is no coincidence that South Korean scholars have been internationally active in this area (e.g., Lee and Lim, 2001). Another distinct field of research emerging out of the South Korean and other East Asian developmental political economies is 'developmental citizenship' (Chang K-S, 2010b).

56 See Chang K-S (1999), Hart-Landsberg (1993), etc. From this context derives strategic theories or slogans that justify asymmetrical or unequal development – e.g., "growth first, distribution later", "leading sector", etc.

pretty much determined the political and economic course of post-colonial development (usually led by dependent state elite). It is in this latter group of countries that statist development or modernization has been complemented by various efforts for retraditionalizing social, political, and/or cultural orders.<sup>57</sup> Their traditions having been subjugated and affronted by colonial forces, post-colonial peoples had a fundamental sentimental motivation to restore dignity to their past. In this context, many state heads tried to superficially or strategically reposition themselves as nationalist leaders and redefine (West-dependent) modernization as a nationalist project. Under variegated versions of *dongdoseogi* (Eastern philosophy, Western instrument), traditionally values and ideologies, encompassing both societal and personal domains, have been tenaciously recycled or reinvented by statist modernization regimes. South Korea under Park Chung-Hee was a particularly pertinent case in this regard. He promoted the *chunghyo* (loyalty to state, piety to parents) ideology as a supposedly traditional basis of social and political order while pursuing an aggressive export-oriented capitalist industrialization as a national goal.<sup>58</sup>

***Advantages and pitfalls of late development/dependent modernization*** : For the same reason that modernity was conceived as an object for national catch-up, South Korean modernization became predicated upon various advantages and pitfalls of ‘late development’. The presence of earlier-modernized and consequently more powerful countries implied not only an exigency of national catch-up but also an opportunity for *economized modernization*. The so-called “advantages of late development” were clearly perceived by South Koreans and aggressively realized, in particular, thanks to their American connections.<sup>59</sup> Even their over-the-shoulder (*eoggaeneomeo*) learning of Japanese modernity during the colonial period is occasionally argued to have been useful in

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57 Retraditionalization is often based upon “invented” traditions (cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., 1992).

58 The North Korean leader, Kim Il-Sung, was no less assertive. His people were indoctrinated to consider him *eobeoi suryeongnim* (parental highness). See Cumings (2004) for a succinct account of North Korean politics.

59 See Amsden (1989). South Korea’s relative lack of natural resources also continues to necessitate knowledge-based economic development. In its early stages technological learning and borrowing were most crucial, whereas in recent years indigenously produced knowledge and technology take on rapidly increasing significance.

corporate and administrative management.<sup>60</sup> Condensed industrialization based upon borrowed technology (as a core dimension of condensed modernization based upon borrowed modernity) is fully revealed in terms of huge amounts of money paid to advanced countries for technological/scientific loyalty and sophisticated intermediate goods.<sup>61</sup> More crucially, South Korea's success in late development has often been overshadowed by social, political, ecological as well as economic risks that are either intrinsic in borrowed technologies, institutions, and practices (no matter where they are applied) or associated with *reflectivity defects* of transnationally mobilized modernity (in potentially inappropriate social contexts).<sup>62</sup> Ever since its initiation (under imperial Japan), modernity has been superimposed on Koreans without much deliberation on local conditions and values. If any, (dependent) modernization elite seem to have envisioned a sort of *transformative reflectivity* – appraising the relevance of borrowed modernity against future projections of their nation. Under this perspective, what needs justification (or what incurs criticism) is not borrowed modernity but local realities of backwardness. Recurrent accidents, failures, destructions, distortions, and sacrifices rather normally take place, but these are summarily taken as unavoidable costs to bear until higher stages of modernity. Another crucial dilemma of late development or catch-up modernization has been chronic anomie. National development or catch-up usually involves *result- or end product-centered modernization* (as opposed to process- or foundation-centered modernization). When technologies, institutions, and practices are transnationally borrowed for immediate purposes, not only local conditions and values in South Korea but also the theoretical, philosophical, and historical foundations of such borrowings are habitually neglected.<sup>63</sup> Without fundamental

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60 This is a heavily debated issue. See Kholi (1994), and Haggard, Kang, and Moon (1997). In a separate dimension, it is undeniable that Japan's spearheading capitalist development and colonial domination over Korea made postcolonial South Korea stage an aggressive project for national economic development to catch up with Japan as soon as possible. Catching-up implied a potential convergence in developmental trajectory, while an opposite developmental trajectory such as North Korea's socialist line was still possible.

61 South Korea's continually huge trade deficit with Japan is mainly accountable in terms of its heavy industrial reliance on Japan-made high technology intermediate goods (*Digital Times*, 22 Dec 2008), whereas its international royalty payments is overwhelmingly sent to the U.S. (*Inews24*, 19 Nov 2007).

62 See Beck (1992) for intrinsic risks in reflexive modernity.

63 For instance, philosophy and history of West-borrowed sciences and technologies are rarely taught. Even in social sciences (notoriously in economics), philosophy and history of concerned disciplines and phenomena are not taught regularly. These tendencies are apparent, for instance, at Seoul National University which set the basic patterns of undergraduate and graduate curricula for other universities in South Korea ([http://www.snu.ac.kr/edu/edu0201\\_list.jsp](http://www.snu.ac.kr/edu/edu0201_list.jsp)).

philosophical or ideological justification, borrowed modernity normally incurs anomie. Perhaps, more correctly, borrowed modernity is taken as a philosophical object. Without philosophical mooring, easily borrowed technologies, institutions, and practices are also easily scrapped or replaced according to immediate material needs.

***International political economy, sequential industrialization-modernization, and global economic restructuring*** : With the Korean peninsula having become a crucial Cold War front, the United States and its capitalist allies had a strategic interest in protecting South Korea with politico-military, economic, and sociocultural support. The policy of teaching South Korea how to fish – instead of giving fish as gift – was substantiated in terms of providing South Koreans with favorable access to their knowledge, technology, and market (which became indispensable ingredients for swift catch-up industrialization and modernization). In addition, the unceasing technological and industrial restructuring of advanced capitalist economies necessitated continuous transfer of low-end technologies and industries to newly industrializing economies, particularly in East Asia. South Korea, as both Japan's next door and the West's strategic post, was a key beneficiary of the so-called "international product cycles".<sup>64</sup> This benefit, however, has not been exclusively reserved for South Korea, but soon began to be appropriated by next groups of new industrializers (i.e., Southeast Asian countries, and then China, India, etc.). In particular, the breath-taking economic rise of next door China (in addition to the continuingly strong performance of the Japanese economy) has made South Koreans inveterately worried about their "sandwiched" position.<sup>65</sup> A seemingly unavoidable economic race with explosively developing China tends to induce South Koreans into further urges for swift economic advancement. Most

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64 See Cumings (1984). While many late developing economies have capitalized on the availability of internationally left-behind technology, this can ironically help to form "leading sectors" domestically and impose arbitrary disadvantages on indigenous sectors. Such a tendency has been particularly noticeable in political economies where strategically chosen (and politically collusive) industrialists are conceived as a key instrument for national economic development. Needless to say, South Korea is an archetype instance.

65 Another effect of China on South Korea's compressed modernity (or condensed capitalist development) comes from its historical humiliation of being subjugated by England and Japan. The misery of China as traditional Korea's big brother inevitably awakened Koreans about the inevitability of their immediate conversion to Western modernity, but such awakening was already too late because of Japan's relentless invasion into the continent. As an interesting turnaround since the late 1970s, South Korea became post-Mao China's role model for state-led, market-based national economic development. A Chinese-translated biography of Park Chung-Hee once became one of the national best sellers (<http://sisafocus.co.kr/board/view.php?b=1&n=418&p=79>).

recently, active participation in neoliberal globalization has been a region-wide trend in East Asia, so that the mutual stimulation for economic race (and integration) is ever intensifying.

***Submissive versus nationalist cosmopolitanization*** : If traveling in Seoul (or any other major South Korean cities) for the first time in life, a Western visitor will not necessarily experience more troubles than a South Korean villager. As far as its physical configurations and facilities are concerned, Seoul (or most other major Asian mega-cities) is more cosmopolitan than Korean (or Asian). The most crucial factors for this irony include its history of colonization by the Westernized Japan and occupation by the United States.<sup>66</sup> However, even after the independence, South Koreans themselves have tried to build up their cities and develop their national economy in such a way as to radically Westernize (or cosmopolitanize) them. This endeavor has been launched under the banner of “national development”, and it has indeed been a very nationalist project.<sup>67</sup> Unreserved Westernization – cosmopolitanization to the extent that the whole world keeps being deployed according to Western standards and values – has been successfully pursued, legitimated, and achieved by the allied forces of state elite and grassroots. A sort of *nationalist cosmopolitanization* (as compared to *submissive cosmopolitanization* under colonial powers) has taken place.<sup>68</sup> Not only the hypermodern façade of its cities but also the superb achievement by South Koreans in whatever Westerners do or value – e.g., Western classic music, American baseball, LPGA golf, Premier League soccer, American social sciences, etc. – has been exalted in a nationalist atmosphere.<sup>69</sup>

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66 See Jeong, W. (2001).

67 For a systematic account of South Korean nationalism in this line, see Shin, G-W (2006).

68 These two terms are proposed by the author. Submissive cosmopolitanization in South Korea took place under the successive colonial domination or influence by Japan and the U.S and post-Korean War politico-military, economic, and sociocultural dependency on the U.S.; whereas nationalist cosmopolitanization has taken place as a result of the aggressive expansion of international economic activities and relations under an outward national(ist) development strategy and the urge to confirm its own condensed development and to be internationally recognized about such development.

69 Although South Koreans’ superb international ranks in economy, sports, and cultural production are not necessarily complemented by obvious cosmopolitan values, attitudes, contributions or propaganda, they tend to enjoy the resultant international recognitions a lot. In particular, South Korean media – and, ultimately, their readers – are hypersensitive to the way South Korea is portrayed in international media.

While the condensed and compressive nature of South Korean modernity has been induced and intensified by all these historical and structural conditions, it needs to be pointed out that modernity in general has an intrinsic dynamism. Giddens indicates three main conditions for such dynamism of modernity – namely, “the separation of time and space and their recombination in forms which permit the precise time-space “zoning” of social life; the disembedding of social systems . . .; and the reflexive ordering and reordering of social relations in the light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups.”<sup>70</sup> These complex conditions cannot be explicated in detail here, but it is safe to say that they are thoroughly relevant in the South Korean context as well. In fact, such conditions seem to have been intensified due to the transnational superimposition of modernity in South Korea under Japanese domination and American influence and, more recently, due to South Koreans’ own drive for globalization.

Although the above-listed historical and structural conditions in combine hint at the decisive significance of the international political economic factors and the local reactions to them for South Korea’s compressed modernity, this should not lead to a one-way thinking on the West versus non-West relationship in the global history of modernity (and post-modernity). As comprehensively and persuasively argued by many Marxist and postcolonialist intellectuals, the Western modernity has not only been imposed upon non-Western cultures and peoples but also evolved through its intense interactions with them. To begin with, as emphasized time and again by Marx and his followers, European industrial capitalism was no less an outcome of the European political economic expansion into Asia, Africa, and America than of the internal technological and social structural transformation of Europe. Even earlier, as richly illustrated by both academic and public historiography, the European encounters with the Chinese, Indian, Middle Eastern, and Central Asian civilizations critically helped form the scientific, technological, and institutional basis for the revolutionary nature of European modernity.<sup>71</sup> Besides, a significant body of rigorous historical and social scientific research in recent years has systematically revealed how the very contact of the West with non-Western societies

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<sup>70</sup> Giddens (1990: 16-17).

<sup>71</sup> This has become an extremely popular topic for the collaboration projects between Western and Asian televisions.

helped develop modern institutions and cultures.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, in Koreans' historical experiences, Japan tried to reaffirm to itself the civilizational validity of its West-oriented industrial modernity through its colonial conquest of the allegedly traditionalist Korea (then Chosun) and its capitalist exploitation of Korean people and resources. The Cold War, of which the first major showdown of international power competition was undertaken through the inter-Korea war and then political economic rivalry, shaped the Western (American) public mind and politics as critically as it delimited the ideological and sociopolitical parameters of Korean life. The developmental statist engagement in capitalist industrialization and economic growth in South Korea has become an international economic paradigm in itself, in particular, against the global neoliberal doctrine that has putatively incapacitated the developmental potential of most developing countries.<sup>73</sup> South Koreans, with the so-called "Korean wave" (*hallyu*), have also set a new direction in global culture industry, successfully utilizing their industrial technologies for cultural production and richly projecting their life experiences and social histories into global award-winning movies and internationally viewer record-breaking dramas.<sup>74</sup> All these trends and episodes clearly attest to the fact that modernity, at the global level, is a fundamentally interactive civilizational state.<sup>75</sup>

## 6. Discussion: Beyond South Korean Instances

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72 For instance, see Anghie (2005) for a lucid account of the evolution of (Western) legal universalism in the political context of colonial/imperial interactions with non-Western cultures, peoples, and states.

73 See Amsden (1989) for a forceful historical and theoretical account of South Korea's developmental political economy, see Chang, H-J (2003) on the developmentally inhibitive – "kicking away the ladder" – nature of the neoliberal economic theory and policy dominant among the advanced countries of the West. Most recently, American and Japanese political elite, confronted with the chronic stagnancy in their economies (and societies), are publicly addressing South Korea as their model for social and economic reform. The U.S. president, Barack Hussein Obama, has recurrently quoted in his public addresses South Koreans' educational zeal and work ethic as a social basis for his neo-Keynesian economic revitalization policy. Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) has recently decided to establish a division of South Korea and prepared an internal report for benchmarking South Korea, entitled "The Current State and Problems of Japanese Industries" (*Korea Economic Daily*, 5 April 2010). The report enviously indicates the strength of South Korea's corporate management, government industrial policy, government-business cooperation, and proactive technological investment.

74 Not coincidentally, the concept/theory of compressed modernity is heavily utilized in a rapidly increasing body of international research on South Korean popular culture. For instance, see David Martin-Jones (2007), "Decompressing Modernity: South Korean Time Travel Narratives and the IMF Crisis."

75 A group of influential postcolonialists – for instance, Appadurai (1990) – has agreed to this point.

Compressed modernity is not just a sociological concept or perspective but the consciously lived experience of ordinary South Koreans. Furthermore, its publicity has been politically promoted (in numerous official publications that document condensed economic, social, and political changes) and culturally represented (in frequent exhibitions of photos, artifacts, and arts that attest to the condensed and compressive nature of life experiences).<sup>76</sup> Hence, the validity of compressed modernity in regards to South Korean society and people is in no sense difficult to establish. However, does this mean that compressed modernity is a uniquely South Korean phenomenon? This question would meet many immediately negative responses. To the extent that many of its historical and social structural conditions construed in the preceding section have been rather common features of non-Western societies, compressed modernity can be duly proposed as a widely relevant theory in diverse world regions.

Let us take South Korea's East Asian neighbors as examples. The intra-regional complexity of East Asia – two Koreas, Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Russian Far East – may not warrant an easy conclusion on any shared experience of modernity, but a careful examination of their historical and social conditions can reveal interesting mutual correspondences in regards to compressed modernity. As most significant instances, Japan and China seem to present highly interesting yet different versions of compressed modernity. Japan's early modern history represents a paradigmatic instance of condensed catch-up modernization. The Meiji Restoration would become a model for Park Chung Hee's South Korea. An autocratic reformulation of politics under the name of the "October refurbishment" was staged under the supposed exigencies of political stability and economic catch-up.<sup>77</sup> More essentially, the Japanese know-hows and practices for industrial catch-up seem to have been consciously studied by South Korean bureaucracy and business, so that many similar features between the two countries would arise in industrial technologies and organizations, state-business relations, international marketing

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76 As an apparently political gesture, National Statistical Office (NSO) has kept publishing such ostentatious titles as *Changes in Social and Economic Indicators since Liberation* (in Korean; 1996), *Economic and Social Change in the Fifty Years of the Republic of Korea in View of Statistics* (in Korean; 1998), etc.

77 See Chung I-J (2006) on Park's refurbishment (*yusin*).

strategies, etc.<sup>78</sup> China, in turn, showed strong interest in emulating the South Korean achievement of rapid industrialization and economic catching-up. Delegations at various levels and in diverse domains have visited South Korea back to back since the onset of reform.<sup>79</sup> Ultimately, China's condensed economic development and industrialization have seemingly dwarfed the South Korean achievement.<sup>80</sup> Besides, the protracted coexistence of socialist and capitalist elements – a core syndrome of China's *gradual* reform – tends to make its modernity an even more compressive one than that of South Korea.<sup>81</sup> Gradualism in Chinese reform often manifests itself in terms of syncretism, for instance, as revealed in China's recent (neo)traditionalism coated with *daguozhuyi* (big country-ism).<sup>82</sup> This inevitably makes China's compressed modernity even more complex. Given these diverse instances, compressed modernity may be usefully applied to sociological accounts of Japanese and Chinese historical experiences and social conditions. In fact, compressed modernity may have served as the core rationale for frequent efforts at international learning by each follower nation. For this reason, all late developing societies have been under compressed modernity in a way or another.

As a more recent development, what may be called *cosmopolitanized reflexive modernity* tends to drive virtually every nation into a new line of compressed modernity. In today's rapidly and intricately globalizing world, if Ulrich Beck's argument is extended, the driving forces of radical scientific-technical-cultural inputs and monopolistic political economic interests almost freely operate across national boundaries.<sup>83</sup> The ecological,

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78 This does not pertain to colonial modernity but indicates voluntary learning and utilization of Japanese industrial technologies and developmental experiences. Part of such learning and utilization concerned Japan's own mechanisms for learning and utilizing Western technologies and experiences.

79 As pointed out above, the Chinese communist party (and its people) has consciously learned the developmental leadership of Park Chung-Hee.

80 It needs to be noted that the Stalinist heavy industrialization project in Maoist China as well as most other state socialist countries was pursued as an economic strategy of condensed industrialization in a political economic race with capitalist countries (Riskin, 1987). Interestingly, South Korea's Park Chung-Hee promoted heavy and chemical industrialization as a strategic effort to hastily overpower North Korea (Kim, H-A, 2004).

81 For instance, the author has systematically analyzed post-Mao China's risk structures as compared to South Korea (Chang, 2008). Certainly, contemporary China's modernity appears even more compressed than that of South Korea – particularly because of lingering effects of socialist institutions, values, and interests.

82 See Kim, K-O (2008).

83 See Beck (1999), Beck and Grande (2009) etc.

material, and sociocultural risks accompanying the latest (neoliberal) capitalist offense are not unidirectional (from developed to less developed nations) any more because even developed nations cannot avoid the cosmopolitanized hazards and pressures generated in the process of their global economic and political domination over less developed nations. Such hazards and pressures range from global-scale ecological threats (such as global warming) to flu viruses, toxic manufactured imports, contract foreign laborers, cultural and religious demands, etc. Handling these challenges by individual nations entails that internalization of cosmopolitanized risks takes place both in developed and less developed nations. As Beck's conception of risks encompasses an expansive range of civilizational components, such internationalization of cosmopolitanized risks by individual nations with distinct preexisting civilizational characteristics engenders a new line of compressed modernity that may be categorized as *cosmopolitanized compressed modernity* vis-à-vis the classic compressed modernity expounded above in respect to South Korean society.<sup>84</sup>

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84 This issue has been separately discussed in a recent article, "The Second Modern Condition? Compressed Modernity as Internalized Reflexive Cosmopolitanism" (Chang, 2010c).

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