

**SUBSUMPTION AS DEVELOPMENT:
A WORLD-ECOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE SOUTH KOREAN “MIRACLE”**

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Abstract

This work offers a critical reinterpretation of South Korean “economic development” from the perspectives of Marxian form critique and Jason Moore’s world-ecology. Against the “production in general” view of economic life that dominates the extant debates, it analyzes the rise, spread, and deepening of capitalism’s *historically specific social forms* in twentieth-century (South) Korea: commodity, wage-labor, value, and capital. Eschewing the binary language of development and underdevelopment, we adopt Marx’s non-stagist distinctions regarding the relative degree of labor’s (and society’s) *subsumption* under capital: hybrid, formal, and real. Examining the (South) Korean experience across three dialectically interrelated scales – regional, global, and “national” – we outline the historical-geographical contingency surrounding South Korea’s emergence by c.1980 as a regime of (industrialized) *real* subsumption, one of the only non-Western societies ever to do so. Crucial to this was the generalization of commodification and proletarianization that betokened deep structural changes in (South) Korea’s class structure, but also a host of often-mentioned issues such as land reform, foreign aid, the developmental state, and a “heaven sent” position within the US-led Cold War order. Despite agreeing on the importance of these latter factors, however, the conclusions we draw from them differ radically from those of the extant analyses. For although regimes of real subsumption are the most materially, socially, and technologically dynamic, they are also the most socio-ecologically unsustainable and alienating due to the dualistic tensions inherent to capital’s “fully developed” forms, in particular the *temporal* grounding of value. US protestations about the generalizability of these relations aside, moreover, these regimes have always been in the extreme minority and, crucially, have depended on “less developed” societies for their success. Historically, this has been achieved through widening the net of capitalist value relations; however, four decades of

neoliberalization has all but eliminated any further large-scale “frontier strategies” of this sort. Due to its relatively dense population vis-a-vis its geographical size, contemporary South Korea faces stark challenges that render it anything but a model of “sustainable development,” but rather signal the growing anachronism of value as the basis for regulating the future of nature-society relations in the “developed world” and beyond.

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Introduction

The catalyst for this work was the author's growing disenchantment with the extant analyses of South Korea's post-World War II economic transformation. Since the 1980s, the literature on the "South Korean miracle" has been vast, yet it is usually framed in a narrow and conservative manner that has concealed as much as it has revealed. Despite the various foci and nuances within these debates, that is, a true reckoning with the socio-ecological ramifications inherent to South Korea's *capitalist revolution* went largely unnoticed due to its framing within that seemingly innocuous master-trope of the post-1945 period: "development." Given South Korea's status as perhaps the quintessential success story of postwar development – this despite a host of escalating socio-ecological problems facing the country – a radical reinterpretation of the South Korean experience within broader capitalist world history is much-needed. To address this lacuna, this work combines the perspectives of Marxian form critique and Jason Moore's world-ecology. We will discuss these perspectives in greater detail in a later chapter, but here we signal briefly their centrality and importance to the analysis that follows.

Marxian Form Critique and World-Ecology

A guiding assumption of this work is that "development," as defined by the specific social relations and beliefs of modern capitalism, is positively correlated with the degree to which its historically specific social forms have been generalized within any given social formation. In other words, the more that the commodity (form), value, wage-labor and capital structure the socio-ecological relations of a society, the more "developed" it is considered to be (Watts 2009) – or, as the title of this work argues, *subsumption* (under capitalism's social forms) *equals development*. In order to express the relative degree of a given society's subjection to (or

subsumption under) these forms, we deploy Marx's (1990) spectrum of *hybrid*, *formal*, and *real* subsumption, each denoting in escalating order the degree to which a society is ensconced in capitalist social relations. In stressing the gradations of the sway of capitalist forms within societies, a central object of critique is what Marx calls the "production in general" view of socio-economic life – that is, the widespread (yet erroneous) belief that there exists only one way to produce things, and that it is merely methods of distribution that are historically specific and "political." Following the work of Marxian form scholars like Patrick Murray, Moishe Postone and others, we stress the revolutionary and contradictory character of capitalism's historically specific social forms, in particular their dualistic character, temporal grounding, and emphasis on labor (rather than land) productivity that arises from its unique set of class relations.

In one sense, then, the narrative arc of this work can be stated simply: it examines the socio-ecological tensions inherent to the rise, spread, and deepening of capitalism's *historically specific social forms* in (South) Korea between c.1910 and 1990 – namely, commodity, value, wage-labor, and capital. Capturing the historical-geographical contingencies surrounding this process, however, requires a much more complex mode of investigation, one that unpacks (South) Korea's growing insertion within the world market, its shifting place within the capitalist world-system, the tectonic shifts in its class structure, and the state-led "rationalization" process that enabled this. By examining twentieth-century (South) Korean capitalist development through three distinct but related scales – Japanese regional, US global, and SK national – we trace the rise and spread of capitalist value relations through the emergence of a distinct class structure that was a prerequisite for its passage through relations of hybrid, formal and, eventually, real subsumption under capitalism's structuring social forms.

The insights of Marxian form analysis are crucial, yet they need to be complemented by a perspective – found in Jason Moore’s world-ecology – that emphasizes the following: 1) the socio-ecological preconditions that have undergirded capitalism’s most dynamic value regimes’ success; and 2) the inherent and growing *interdependencies* of the capitalist world-system over time and space between these zones of capitalist value production and those of non-commodified “free” appropriation. Indeed, capitalist world history has been characterized by a dialectical relationship between these zones of *capitalization*, where the unique imperatives of capitalism’s value forms rule in the “formal economy,” and *appropriation* of the non-paid work/energy of, to use Moore’s (2015) stylized list, domestic labor, colonies, and nature. Capitalist value relations, in other words, depend upon the procuring of “cheap natures,” in particular the “Four Cheaps” of food, energy, raw materials, and labor(-power). Historically, these have been attained via geographical expansion – that is, by widening and shifting the web of capitalist social relations (i.e., subsumption) across the globe in accordance with the specific requirements of each hegemonic regime of capitalist world history (Arrighi 1994). Since metastasizing out of Western Europe over the past five centuries or so, the twentieth century witnessed an inexorable acceleration in the global spread and deepening of capitalism’s unique social forms, especially during the post-World War II period. A central aim of this work, therefore, is to concretize historically and geographically some of the more abstract discussions of Marxian form scholars via an analysis of South Korea’s place within these global (and regional) dynamics.

To safeguard against any initial misconceptions about the frameworks above (prior to elaborating upon them later on), a few clarifications are offered at the outset. First, and perhaps most crucial, is the caveat that the explanatory power of the Marxian form critique scholars that we draw upon (e.g., Postone 1993) is limited to those societies that are well “developed”

capitalistically. Indeed, much of this work is devoted to outlining how (South) Korean society became gradually more ensnared in capitalism's web of value forms over the course of the twentieth century. Second, the caveat above applies equally to Marx's distinctions regarding forms of subsumption, which only apply to capitalist societies. Consequently, the escalating degree of a society's subsumption under capital's forms (i.e., hybrid, formal, and real) should never be interpreted as a normative typology of "stages of development." Third, the term "ecology" in the perspective of "world-ecology" should not be read in Cartesian terms – that is, rooted in the widespread binary that erroneously separates "Humans" and "Nature" into separate ontological spheres of life (Moore 2015). As we will see, this very separation is rooted in the dualistic character of capitalism's social forms themselves. Perhaps surprisingly, then, most of this "world-ecological" critique will not deal with "Nature" or "environmental degradation" as commonly understood.

Chapter Overview

The layout of this work is as follows. Chapter 1 surveys the dominant perspectives in the extant literature on South Korean developmentalism from two broad points of view. On the one hand, we outline the most widely accepted explanations of South Korea's purportedly "miraculous" economic development. These range from market-centric, state-centric, culturalist and various geopolitical explanations. On the other hand, we contrast these with a host of criticisms that have been levelled at the first groups' triumphalism regarding South Korea's capitalist development. These perspectives dampen in many ways the optimistic and congratulatory tone of the miracle narrative, and in some case even question the way "development" has been both defined and pursued. We conclude that opening discussion by stressing the continuity of the issues at hand in contemporary South Korean society. That is, contrary to liberal views that assume the

inevitability of reform to address political, economic, and environmental problems, many of the issues that the more critical scholars highlight have in many ways worsened in the post-1990 period (i.e., after our period of analysis). This seeming contradiction is something that we ultimately seek to explain.

In Chapter 2, we outline in detail the methodological premises informing this analysis. We begin by outlining the distinct sort of Marxism that we deploy, focusing upon the philosophy of internal relations, Marx's method of abstraction, and the importance of Marx's *historical* analysis of social forms within the capitalist "production of nature." We follow this by discussing the profound significance of Marx's categorical critique of capitalism. We discuss the unique form that labor takes under capitalist social relations, emphasize the unique characteristics of the commodity (form) and value, and highlight the socio-ecological significance of Marx's value theory. We conclude the chapter by elaborating upon our initial discussion of Marx's distinctions between varying degrees of subsumption of labor (and society) under capital, as well as of Moore's world-ecology framework.

Chapter 3 deals with the ambivalent legacy of the Japanese colonial era in (South) Korean development. It focuses on Korea's place within the Japan-led regional political-economy (c.1850-1945) that the latter forged in response to mounting Western influence in East Asia. We discuss Japan's embrace of capitalist modernity and its dictates in the second half of the nineteenth century, emphasizing Korea's place within its regional imperial strategy. This period witnessed profound shifts in social property relations, forms of labor, and a general process of (capitalist) "rationalization" that largely undergirded the successful capitalist revolution that ensued in the southern half of the peninsula after World War II. Crucially, though, it was a process that signaled the beginning of the end of Korea's centuries-old landed

elite (i.e., yangban), a class that has world-historically stood as a “barrier” to the sort of capitalistic revolution that later occurred in South Korea.

Chapter 4 widens the scalar focus to consider the global hegemonic power of the US as it attempted to revive global capitalism after World War II, which was undertaken via its “development project” within a context of global decolonization. Tracing the main lines of the US rise to global supremacy from the mid-nineteenth century to c. 1945, we then focus on the socio-ecological contradictions challenging its global hegemony from the dialectical interaction of the capitalist and territorial logic of power (Arrighi 1994; Harvey 2003). We then examine the main ingredients in the US development project – namely, the nation-state system, GDP as the supposed measure of universal well-being (i.e., development), and the ideological/theoretical justification for this transhistoricization of the capitalist development process via modernization theory and development economics. In situating the new South Korean regime within the Cold War standoff between the US and the USSR, we emphasize the inordinate degree of support, aid and the like that undergirded the South Korean “miracle.” Particularly important in this process was the supply of cheap food via Public Law 480, which was the US’s agricultural surplus disposal policy that underwrote South Korea’s “cheap labor” strategy.

Having established the necessary regional and global contexts in the previous two chapters, the next two deal with South Korea itself. In Chapter 5, we trace the post-1945 consolidation of the capitalist transformation process that was initially triggered during the Japanese colonial era. It is here that South Korean labor (and society) becomes quantitatively and qualitatively more ensconced in capitalist forms and their imperatives, in all their ambivalence. We focus on the mass primitive accumulation process that took place in South Korea, which was a combination of the generalized privatization of land (and its redistribution via land reform) and

the (subsequent) proletarianization of labor (as formal waged labor-power). Common to both of these processes was that nearly all of socio-ecological life was now converted to the commodity form, and as such subjected to the dictates of capital accumulation within the new class structure that was beginning to coalesce. With the dissolution of the landed elite, moreover, room was opened for the rise of a “strong state” bent on safeguarding legitimacy for its draconian policies via economic growth – all within the regional and hegemonic webs of Japan and the US respectively. We also trace these changes from the standpoint of our alternative formulation of the “development” process via Marx’s forms of subsumption. For it was during this period that we see the generalization of *formal* subsumption – i.e., the universalizing thrust of the commodity form – and the shift to *real* subsumption via Park’s export-based industrialization drive. Although a “success” in GDP terms and, indeed, in terms of material wealth, it was this very success that revealed the beginning of the profoundly ambivalent socio-ecological ramifications of the capitalist development process.

Chapter 6 represents the culmination of the argument. It outlines the shift that South Korea undertook, via Park “developmentalist” regime, to industrialized relations of real subsumption by the early 1970s. Two processes were central here: the “political” Yushin regime, which lent Park dictatorial powers that he exercised ruthlessly to discipline society to its capitalist aims; the other “economic” one which was the Heavy and Chemical Industrialization Drive. Much of the focus in discussing these policies is demonstrating how unlikely they were to succeed, as we emphasize the reasons why they failed to succeed in other developing nations. Indeed, it was a unique set of “internal” and “external” factors that made this shift possible. It is these shifts, we argue, where the “miraculous” character of the South Korean development process lay. In the second half of the chapter, however, we zero in on the socio-ecological

tensions inherent to relations of industrialized real subsumption, and it is here that the seeming paradox of material plenty amidst societal discontent and environmental degradation lies.

Through a much-needed discussion clarifying the terms value, capital, and capitalism, we level a critique at these forms and argue for their growing anachronism based on the form critique and world-ecological tenets that structure our analysis.

Chapter 1 The South Korean Miracle and Its Discontents: An Overview

South Korea's Surprising Economic Ascent

Rising from the ashes of Japan's so-called Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, the purportedly miraculous achievements of the four "Asian Tigers" in the post-World War II period has catalyzed a voluminous debate amongst scholars and policy-makers alike.¹ Flying in the face of economic orthodoxy and the reigning "common sense" of the time, the virulence of these debates is an expression of the supposed heresy of the achievements. Of these handful of success stories, South Korea is considered by many to be the most surprising and impressive of all. The monumental transformation that took place in South Korea can be expressed through the following statistics drawn from contrasting the shifts in various conventional economic indicators between 1962 and 1989:

In the intervening years the economy achieved an average annual real GDP growth rate of 8.5 per cent, per capita income increased from \$87 to \$5199, GDP in current prices increased from \$2.3 billion to \$220.7 billion, the ratio of savings to gross national disposable income (GNDI) increased from 11 per cent to 37.6 per cent, the ratio of investment to GNDI increased from 11.8 percent to 33.8 percent, and the unemployment rate fell from 9.8 per cent to 2.6 per cent. In terms of external developments, the trade balance was in deficit by \$335 million in 1962 but had accrued a surplus of \$4.6 billion by 1989, and exports were a negligible \$55 million in 1962 but a sizable \$61.4 billion in 1989. (Harvie and Lee 2003, 9)

¹ From within this vast literature, a host of monikers arose to describe them: Gang of Four (Cline, 1982); Bureaucratic-Authoritarian Industrializing Regimes (Cumings 1984); Four Little Tigers (Balassa 1988); Newly Industrializing Countries (Haggard 1990); High Performance Asian Economies (Bernard 1996). For the sake of consistency, "Asian Tiger" is the term employed throughout this work. And although these economic "miracles" took place after the collapse of the Japanese imperial project, they were nonetheless embedded within a Japan-led regional political economy (Burkett and Hart-Landsberg 2000), one nested within the greater US-led one that we will discuss in Chapter 4.

During this period that effectively encapsulates South Korea's "development era," in other words, gross domestic product increased by a remarkable 110-fold, GDP per capita was 65 times higher, while its level of exports was 1,860 times greater (Harvie and Lee 2003, 40). It is based on abstract statistics like these that South Korea's modernization process has been hailed as a purported "miracle."²

But again, what was most puzzling about these achievements was not so much the fact that South Korea had been the victim of imperial domination (1910-1945) and civil war (1950-1953); rather, it was the fact that it lacked virtually every aspect that mainstream economic orthodoxy would deem necessary or beneficial for economic development. Looking back with the advantage of hindsight at the (Western) world's view of South Korea circa 1950, Bruce Cumings (2005) describes this seeming paradox:

South Korea, truncated into half a country, with almost no natural resources, a thoroughly uprooted and aggrieved population, no domestic capital to speak of, a minuscule domestic market, and a work force long claimed to be lazy louts (a common Japanese refrain) – and still here is this industrial country, this "miracle on the Han." There you have it: no capitalists, no Protestants, no merchants, no money, no market, no resources, no get-up-and-go, let alone no discernible history of commerce, foreign trade, or industrial development, so on and so forth – *and yet there it is.* (300)

It is easy to see, therefore, why the postwar South Korean experience has been the subject of such heated and voluminous debate. To be sure, the geopolitical stakes of getting to the bottom of how South Korea accomplished this were very high; for it dangled the possibility of delivering on the United States' (and the First World's more generally) optimistic rhetoric and promises of global "Development" for all.

On the Supposed Generalizability of the South Korean "Model" in Theory and Practice

² For those interested in the more fine-grained details of its achievements, there is no end to this literature, each account deploying a distinct methodology and set of sources to yield results that highlight certain aspects that are deemed more relevant or accurate than others (e.g., World Bank 1993; Sakong and Koh 2010).

In the past decade or so there has been a growing consensus that humanity is on the verge of an epochal crisis, one requiring nothing short of a complete rethinking of modernity's promethean approach to society-nature relations (Harvey 2014; Moore 2016; Worster 2016). With the dangers of climate change (Parenti 2011; Klein 2014) and our dependence on dwindling fossil fuel supplies (Heinberg 2005) being only the most commonly invoked issues, a host of socio-ecological challenges are being exacerbated by the global spread of capitalist *value relations* – via what McMichael (2017) calls the “development” and “globalization” projects.

Meanwhile, although in critical academic circles the idea of Western-style development (Rostow 1960) has long been viewed with great suspicion (Rahnema 1997), major heads of state and policymakers continue to insist on the plausibility of Western-style “development” for all – that is, infinite growth and high mass consumption. We offer just two examples, both coming well after the initial post-World War II optimism of the “Development Decades” of the 1950s and 1960s, and despite increasing awareness of the socio-ecological limits to infinite economic expansion. The first is Ronald Reagan's declaration during his State of the Union Address: “America's economic success ... can be repeated a hundred times in a hundred nations. Many countries in East Asia and the Pacific have few resources other than the enterprise of their own people. But through ... free markets, they've soared ahead of centralized economies” (Ju 1996, 2). Fast forward twenty-some years to similar comments made by then-US President Barack Obama, as reported in *The Korea Times* (2009):

Kenya was a more affluent country than South Korea when my father first came to the States to study [i.e., 1950]. At that time, Kenya's per capita GDP was higher than that of South Korea. But South Korea is now a developed and affluent country, while Kenya still remains in severe poverty. *There is no reason African countries cannot do what South Korea did.*

Obama's statement is not inherently false; since, given the right sort of shake-up in the geo-economic order, *individual* African nations might pull off a South Korean-style development drive via, for instance, the largesse of Chinese aid. But certainly not *all* "developing" nations can do this, as Obama's comment seems to imply, as both ecological and geopolitical reasons would preclude it, as we will discuss at length in the conclusion of this work.

The more pressing point is that these sentiments have not been limited to US presidential verbiage. In recent decades, this positive-sum view of generalizable capitalist "miracles" has been taken up by the South Korean state and various NGOs across the Global South, as witnessed in efforts to export its Saemaul model to other nations (Doucette and Muller 2016).

Dominant Explanations

As the main lines of debate emerged from the late-1970s until 2000, an increasingly nuanced and well-documented understanding emerged of the South Korean experience. The following section provides succinct overviews of the dominant explanations of South Korea's capitalistic success, all framed in the sanitized language of "development." There have been literally hundreds of major studies on South Korea, offered from a seemingly wide range of political-economic perspectives (e.g., Mason 1980; Lim 1985; Amsden 1989; Das 1992; Chang 1994; Lie 1998; Kim 2006; Minns 2006; Pirie, 2007; Hundt 2009). As Kohli (2004, 84) laments, in one sense the political economy of postwar South Korea has been terribly "over-studied"; however, as we will argue throughout this work, in some very fundamental ways it has been woefully *under-studied*. Therefore, what follows is intended to provide a sense of the main lines of argument within the extant debates from which our views engage and attempt to transcend.³

³ Arguably the most comprehensive single set of analyses on South Korea emerged from the late-1970s and early-1980s by a team of researchers from the US and South Korea. It was commissioned by Harvard University's Council on East Asian Studies, a 10-volume collection

The Market versus the State

In attempting to explain how South Korea and the other “Asian Tigers” were able to surmount the seemingly centuries-old “iron law” of Euro-American global wealth domination (Arrighi 1991), two explanatory frameworks have monopolized the discussion. The first, emerging from the late-1970s to mid-1980s, accounted for Korea’s rise by stressing its supposed adherence to the *laissez-faire* fundamentals of neoclassical economics. This economic “good sense” included, *inter alia*, dismantling barriers to trade, such as tariffs, in order to allow the market to determine interest and exchange rates, the price of inputs and labor etc. (Balassa 1981; Little 1982).⁴ The role of the state, according to this view, should be limited to provisioning various public goods (e.g., national defense), upholding the rule of law, and safeguarding private property rights (Stubbs 2005, 4). Overwhelmingly interested in the technical aspects of economic policies, this perspective rarely, if ever, took into account the geopolitical context in which these actions took place, nor inquired into the origins of these nations’ specific type(s) of “comparative advantage” in things like labor(-power). Nevertheless, the neoclassical perspective did correctly describe

entitled “Studies in the Modernization of The Republic of Korea: 1945-1975.” Quantitatively speaking, these volumes have provided an indispensable resource for subsequent scholars, covering a multitude of aspects of South Korea’s early “modernization.” In order of publication date, this series is comprised of the following: *Growth and Structural Transformation* (1979); *The Developmental Role of the Foreign Sector and Aid* (1979); *Urbanization and Urban Problems* (1979); *The Economic and Social Modernization of the Republic of Korea* (1980); *Education and Development in Korea* (1980); *Government, Business, and Entrepreneurship in Economic Development: The Korean Case* (1980); *Economic Development, Population Policy, and Demographic Transition in the Republic of Korea* (1981); *Rural Development* (1982); *Financial Development in Korea, 1945–1978* (1983); *Public Finance During the Korean Modernization Process* (1986).

⁴ A slightly less dogmatic neoclassical interpretation is World Bank 1993, which was no doubt tempered in light of the more convincing developmental state accounts that were released in the years just prior to its publication. Market triumphalism re-emerged, however, after the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-1998, which was seen to be brought about by the “cronyism” that is supposedly inherent to regimes with high degrees of state “intervention.”

various aspects of the East Asian experience that were indeed crucial to the region's capitalist success stories, including:

capital formation – the development of physical and human capital or resources within an economy – and the efficient allocation of resources; the remarkable savings rates of the successful economies; stable and effective exchange rates; the ability to attract foreign investment; the promotion of the export of manufactured goods; the supply of a well-educated and skilled labor force; the effective use of new technologies; and the need for a competent, stable and non-interventionist government. (Stubbs 2005, 5)

Reacting against the ahistorical reasoning characteristic of the neoclassical perspective, the 1980s and 1990s saw a proliferation of works correctly stressing the central role of the state in directing industrial policy in East Asia's "miracle" economies (Johnson 1982; Hamilton 1986; Amsden 1989; Haggard 1990; Wade 1990; Woo 1991; Evans 1995; Weiss 1998; Chibber 1999; Woo-Cumings 1999). This "revisionist" view is now the most widely accepted one, and its various renditions will be collectively referred to as the "developmental state thesis." And while the establishment of an agreed-upon definition of the developmental state is rather elusive, Leftwich (1995, 405) summarizes six general features of this "model." These include a determined developmental elite; the relative autonomy of a powerful, competent and insulated bureaucracy; a weak and subordinated civil society; the effective management of non-state economic interests; and performance-based legitimacy.

In more specific policy terms, some of the often-mentioned beneficial state "interventions" of these developmental states include "investment and export subsidies; protection of newer industries and enterprises from imports in exchange for their achievement of export targets; government control over the sectoral and inter-enterprise allocation of credit; and strategic planning of the new industrial activities to be developed" (Burkett and Hart-Landsberg 2000, 16). Since the details of the "state-versus-market" debate have been outlined in dozens of extant works, we will avoid digging any deeper into them here. Within the voluminous

developmental state thesis literature, however, there is a discernible split between those who believe that the experience of the “Asian Tigers” is applicable in other contexts (e.g., Amsden 1994) and those, like Meredith Woo-Cumings (1999, 1), who see these nations’ state-centered programs as “idiosyncratic response[s] to a world dominated by the West”⁵ and, therefore, non-generalizable (e.g., Cumings 1984; Hamilton 1987; Bernard 1996).⁶ We signal this split since the analysis that follows sides with the latter view, but not for the same reasons they emphasize.

Cultural Determinism

The general stress on the role of culture in economic development, while initially emerging in the early 1980s, really blossomed after the end of the Cold War. Samuel Huntington (Harrison and Huntington 2000, xiii), for instance, offers a useful – if explanatorily dubious – summary of a rather crude version of this line of argument, here referring directly to South Korea:

In the early 1990s, I happened to come across economic data on Ghana and South Korea in the early 1960s, and I was astonished to see how similar their economies were then. These two countries had roughly comparable levels of per capita GNP; similar divisions of their economy among primary products, manufacturing, and services; and overwhelmingly primary product exports, with South Korea producing a few manufactured goods. ... Thirty years later, South Korea had become an industrial giant with the fourteenth largest economy in the world, multinational corporations, major exports of automobiles, electronic equipment, and other sophisticated manufactures, and a per capita income approximating that of Greece. ... No such changes had occurred in Ghana, whose per capita GNP was now about one-fifteenth that of South Korea’s.

How was this to be accounted for? Huntington, like many others, provides a cultural reductionist view, explaining how “South Koreans valued thrift, investment, hard work, education,

⁵ In using the term “the West” throughout this work, we follow Stuart Hall’s stress on how this term is an “*historical*, not geographical, construct” (Berger 2004, 14). In particular, we will emphasize the specific social forms that structure these societies and their ways of life.

⁶ Within the neoclassical perspective as well, debates have raged over the possible generalizability of the Asian Tigers’ experience. Balassa (1988), for example, argues that the lessons of East-Asia can be applied elsewhere based on the doubtful example of Turkey in the 1980s, while Cline (1982) correctly sees that the widespread adoption of the “right” institutional policies – i.e., export-led industrialization – would glut the world market.

organization, and discipline. Ghanaians had different values. In short, cultures count” (*ibid.*). What is being referred to here, though Huntington does not mention it by name in this passage, is Confucianism, a value system that, like the Protestantism famously emphasized by Max Weber nearly a century before, had been reassessed as now being conducive to economic development. Indeed, this form of reasoning was applied to a cluster of Asian countries that were permeated by Confucian ways of thought and being, and that achieved impressive growth rates in the post-World War II period (Berger and Hsiao 1988, 7; Tu 1996; Kim and Lim 2007).

This so-called “post-Confucian hypothesis” (MacFarquhar 1980; Hicks and Redding 1983) has been substantially challenged in a variety of ways since its emergence. Some have suggested that the traditional disdain that Confucianism long held for commercial activity and manual labor – never mind unbridled capital accumulation – renders it absurd to argue that these values are the *primary* factor accounting for the region’s success (Castley 1997, 4). The four-level Confucian status hierarchy, recall, went as follows: at the top was the landed, educated elite that filled the ranks of government officialdom, then peasants, next artisans, and finally merchants (Kim 1994, 97). So how could this value system be the basis for dynamic capital accumulation?⁷ Other puzzling questions presented themselves. For instance, how does one account for those Confucian nations in Asia who have not achieved robust rates of economic growth, and why did the ostensibly compatible aspects of Confucianism lay dormant until the

⁷ While it is difficult to see how the denigrated merchant class could have *led* bourgeois revolutions in Confucian societies, L.S. Stavrianos (1981) argues that in the Japanese case, which eventually spearheaded the East-Asian region’s uneven capitalist transformation in the coming century, it was precisely the *weakness* of the merchant class that rendered it acquiescent to the Meiji state’s developmental dictates. Unlike in the West, merchants’ calls for “free trade” were largely ignored, which left them dependent upon the domestic economic structure, where they also “had no legal protection from debt cancellation, forced levies or outright confiscation” (353).

post-1945 period (Chan 1996, 43; Stubbs 2005, 11)? Finally, as Cha (2003) argues, this view also serves to legitimize the brutal forms of repression characteristic of South Korea's military dictatorship period, while also "beautifying" what were actually horrific industrial working conditions and practices.

One way out of some of these contradictions is to take a more historically reflexive approach, distinguishing between so-called "high" and "low" forms of Confucianism (Berger and Hsiao 1988, 7; Kim 1994). The former version, dominant in the late nineteenth century and practiced by the conservative landed elite, was antithetical to the societal flux and chaos that was inherent to "modernization" (i.e., capitalist development) due to the threat it represented to their entrenched class privilege.⁸ The latter, on the other hand, spread throughout the lower ranks of (South) Korean society over the course of the Japanese colonial period and beyond. Here we see similar cultural virtues historically characteristic of Confucian societies, but transformed in such a way as to accommodate ends conducive to the new industrial setting. Kim and Park (2003, 44) outline this cultural morphing process of Confucianism as follows:

Communal or family loyalty was transformed into company loyalty; diligence for self-cultivation was changed to working hard for one's workplace, and domestic paternalism was adapted to modern industrial conditions. In this way, Confucian values of hard work and diligence were incorporated into the new developed work ethic, thereby helping to shape a trainable, industrious workforce in South Korea.

Kyong-Dong Kim (1994, 99-101) finds this interpretation unconvincing on several grounds, and submits that, in the South Korean case at least, the importance of the Confucian heritage lay in instilling in its youth aspirations for "status-achievement." During the Joseon era, this form of social mobility was attained by performing well on Confucian examinations, which

⁸ Cumings (1981, 52-53) makes a similar point when distinguishing between the conservative "Type A" landlords and the more progressive and entrepreneurial "Type B" landlords.

were their means to a position within the state bureaucracy. Within (South) Korea's twentieth-century capitalist turn, however, monetary success was indeed pursued, not as a means for personal enrichment as in the West, but as the new route to social mobility (Kim 1994, 102-103). In any case, what many of these interpretations agree upon is the fact that, while cultural factors are unavoidably caught up in issues of development, these are insufficient in and of themselves to account for a society's economic performance (Kim 1994, 102-103; Kim and Park 2003, 47). Finally, a more deep-seated problem with this perspective is the fact that the post-Confucian hypothesis is a *post hoc* explanation, one that attempts to discern *after the fact* those common characteristics that targeted groups share(d). This issue pushed Ernest Gellner to state sarcastically that, should robust economic growth have taken place in the Muslim world, no doubt Ibn Weber would have been driven to write *The Kharejite Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Lie 1998, 178). In other words, it is one thing simply to note a transformation in Confucian values, but quite another to reveal the structural imperatives that made this shift necessary in the first place. Clearly, there were more issues at play in the (East-)Asian economic ascent than cultural values and economic policy-making.

Geopolitical Explanations

While the developmental statist view is far more satisfactory than the neoclassical one at taking into consideration the context in which state strategies have been performed, both nevertheless confine their analyses to the national scale. To combat this form of myopia, various scholars have stressed the significance of both regional and global political economic factors in East Asian development more generally (Cumings 1984; Pempel 1999; Essex 2013; Glassman 2018), and in the South Korean experience more specifically (Woo 1991; Castley 1997; Cumings 2005). Under this rubric, the following considers in turn the central roles of the United States,

Japan, and the role of Asia-Pacific warfare in South Korea's economic ascent, as these perspectives go a long way in rectifying some of the technocratic and cultural essentialist proclivities of the frameworks outlined thus far.

US-Centered Explanations

The geopolitical and geoeconomic significance of the United States in post-World War II developmentalism generally, and (South) Korean more specifically, is so great that we will devote an entire chapter to its consideration. We will be somewhat perfunctory here, therefore, in outlining the most common features of this view. By taking historical and geopolitical considerations squarely into account, scholars propounding this line of reasoning posit that, more than the “magic of the market” or the strategic “interventions” of its “developmental state,” it was South Korea's privileged position as a key US Cold-War ally that was primarily responsible for its economic ascendancy (Burkett and Hart-Landsberg 2000; Berger 2004; Stubbs 2005). This reinterpretation was, in some ways, somewhat forced, since the successes of the Asian Tigers seemed to debunk the reigning leftist paradigms of the 1970s – i.e., dependency theory and world-systems analysis. Working predominantly from a particular Marxist perspective, these scholars assert that stressing the importance of US influence in the region could account for both the seeming “iron law” of Euro-American political-economic domination *and* the handful of exceptions that, rather than undermining, actually proved the rule.

The US has long held an interest in Pacific Asia. This concern only heightened with events such as China being “lost” with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, as well as the outbreak of an ostensibly Soviet-backed North Korean attack on the South that kickstarted the Korean War (1950-1953) etc. This Cold War context of Washington's “domino theory” of Communist containment in Pacific-Asia made the strong revival of Japan

and further capitalist development of its former non-Communist colonial spaces of the utmost importance to safeguard the US's strategic interests in the region. This carved out for the future "Tiger" economies a "heaven-sent" space of US support, protection, and indulgence (Cumings 1999b, 93). Indeed, So and Chiu (1995, 193) argue bluntly that the emergence of East Asia's Newly Industrializing Economies (i.e., Asian Tigers) to semi-peripheral status *would never have occurred* without US intervention in the regions due to the Cold War context; in addition, "there would not be two Chinas (Communist China and the 'Free China' of Taiwan) nor two Koreas (North Korea and South Korea)" if it were not for the US influence.

The US's central preoccupation, at least during the chaos of the immediate post-World War II years, was to maintain "social stability." This was a euphemism used to describe its preoccupation with thwarting the region's "fall" to Communist influence. Aside from allowing these aligned nations to recover under its military security umbrella, the US showed its support most overtly through lavishing unprecedented sums of aid (in various forms) upon its allies. To cite but one stylized statistic to convey this point, South Korea and Taiwan alone received more US aid between them in the years 1946-1977 than did all of Africa or Latin America – nearly 11% of its worldwide assistance. Until c.1960, moreover, this was proffered in the form of grants rather than loans, allowing both nations to begin their export-based industrialization drives with essentially no debt (So and Chiu 1995, 194). As these modernization programs gathered steam, and as the US substituted direct economic aid for alternative forms of support, these two nations were privy to an incredibly rare advantage within the history of capitalism: the development of the home industry under protective barriers, while nevertheless enjoying unfettered access to a massive market in the US for the sale of its goods. This US support flowed from the fact that, as two of the most conspicuous Cold War "laboratories" where Stalinism and capitalism were

placed in direct competition, the material gains to be had through this ideological battle vis-a-vis decolonizing parts of the “Third World” meant that these nations needed to succeed at any cost.

Japanese Regional Hegemony

There are two lines of argumentation regarding the role of the Japanese in (South) Korean development. The first concerns the colonial period from 1910-1945 (Cumings 1984; Kohli 1994), but we will postpone our discussion of this issue until a later chapter due to its centrality to this work’s overall arguments. The second, and more common, emphasis is on the Japanese influence in the postwar period. Beginning in the 1960s – that is, once it had successfully achieved its own economic recovery through US assistance – Japan resumed its pre-World War II role as Pacific Asia’s regional economic leader, which had generally positive economic results for all nations involved within this regional alliance.

Indeed, although the primary measure of capitalist success (i.e., gross domestic product) is assessed according to individual nation-states, the geographical dynamics of imports, exports, production alliances etc. transcend the national scale to incorporate crucial regional and global dynamics (Castley 1997, xvii-xviii). By pairing our discussion in the previous section regarding the importance of the US role in Korea with a consideration of the Japanese as the US key ally in the Pacific, a form of triangular trade emerged between these three nations that was truly decisive in South Korea’s economic ascent. According to John Lie (1998, 67):

In effect, South Korea imported lower value-added manufacturing facilities, know-how, and product markets from Japan; South Korea in turn exported former Japanese exports to the United States. The preponderant role of the Japanese and American economies cannot be overemphasized. Three-fourths of all South Korean exports in the 1960s were to the United States and Japan. Between 1967-1974, for example, 70 percent of total Korean trade was with these two countries. This dual dependence was to persist until the late 1980s.

These relations of leadership and dependence were nested so that Japan was the beneficiary of US support, while Japan, in turn, took over from the US the primary role of providing a similar sort of support for South Korea in the mid-1960s and beyond. This transition stemmed from the US's diminishing relative economic position, from a trade surplus to deficit in the mid-1960s (Castley 1997, 80), catalyzed in no small part due to the economic sinkhole that was its Vietnam War effort.

Technically speaking, the role of the Japanese was pivotal in a variety of aspects related to its capitalist success during the crucial years of c.1965-1990: developing technology; markets and trade; marketing; industrial organization, and the like (Castley 1997, Part II; Berger 2004, 229). Moreover, Japan pumped significant amounts of aid into South Korea during that decade, especially after the US-pushed Normalization Treaty of 1965 that provided the South Korean state with an initial US\$800 million in “grants,” commercial credit, and government loans that were provided as reparations for the colonial era (Stubbs 2005, 134). This was followed by escalating amounts of foreign direct investment into the country (and elsewhere in Asia), which began in earnest in the 1970s. This escalated following the Plaza Accord of 1985, where the Japanese *yen* appreciated significantly vis-a-vis the US dollar. Japanese foreign direct investment throughout Asia exploded, multiplying five-fold in South Korea by 1989, and investing over \$5 billion across the region in manufacturing FDI in 1994 and 1995 (Burkett and Hart-Landsberg 2000, 27).

Systematically speaking, this Japanese-led regional dynamism followed a specific developmental pattern, one based on the latent replication of the Japanese experience of “sequential structural upgrading” (Ozawa 1993). As Burkett and Hart-Landsberg (2000, 26) outline, Japan's moved from “labor-intensive textiles and simple electronics goods (1950 to mid-

1960s), to heavy and chemical industries (late 1950s to early 1970s), to automobiles and more complex electronics goods (late 1960s to present), to computer-aided manufacturing and other information-intensive areas (early 1980s onwards) – [which] involved successive waves of outward direct investment, thereby ‘recycling’ previous leading sectors to the NIEs and (later) the SEA-3.” This process of a more capitalistically advanced nation upgrading its economic activities while bequeathing to those lower on the capitalist development ladder the responsibility of taking over its previous industrial foci is known in the academic literature as the “flying geese” theory of development, as first advanced by Japanese economist Kaname Akamatsu in the 1930s (Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 1998). To be clear, this process is rarely driven by the beneficent motives of the more powerful nation, but typically stems from an attempt to avoid higher labor costs and the like in the home country. Just as Japanese capital relocated many of its operations to its former colonies like South Korea, these recipients soon did likewise in regions lagging behind them on the ostensibly positive-sum-game march up the developmental ladder.

In sum, although one can certainly quibble about the *relative* extent of the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the Japanese impact on the South Korean economy, it is beyond doubt that the effect was significant. This is not to suggest that it was a one-way relationship of Japanese largesse towards South Korea, nor is it to posit that Japan somehow “developed” Korea in any sort of straightforward manner. Rather, it was a *mutually beneficial* (Castley 1997, 81-89) bilateral relationship functioning within a Japanese-led (not dominated) regional political economy of dynamic capitalist development. This notion of a US-allied regional development program of various nations’ capitalist elites is strengthened by an aspect that until recently had

been overlooked regarding Asia's "miracle" economies: the role of war in accelerating capitalist dynamism.

The Role of War

A popular refrain within non-Western scholarship on the Cold War period is that, ironically, it was only "cold" in terms of its avoidance of direct military confrontations between its two superpower antagonists (US and USSR). In many of the other regions of the world, however, things got decidedly "hot," causing much material devastation, loss of life, and psycho-social suffering (Kolko 1988; Kwon 2010). These tragic dynamics have been analyzed in great detail for specific times and places. In the South Korean case, aside from being on the receiving end during its own civil war (1950-1953), a smattering of early works emerged detailing the lesser-known facts surrounding the various roles it played as a US-allied co-aggressor during the Vietnam War (Lyman 1968; Kim 1970; Baldwin 1975). Although critical in certain respects, what these works all seem to share is a belief that military conflict represents an aberration to the otherwise upward march of civilization progress, usually expressed as "development."

In the past two decades, however, a handful of critical works have argued convincingly that warfare, rather than representing an unfortunate departure from the political-economic development process, is inextricably linked to it (Woo 1991, 90-97; Lie 1998, 62-67; Stubbs 2005, 133-136; Glassman and Choi 2014; Glassman 2018). Richard Stubbs (2005), for instance, asserts that the postwar success of the seven "miracle" economies in US-allied, Pacific Asia – Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand – cannot be understood outside the context of the jingoistic geopolitics of the region. His central argument is this:

[T]he fighting of wars, the preparation for war, and America's use of the seven East and Southeast Asian societies ... as part of a *crescent of containment* in its battle against

Communism had a profound, and on balance very positive, effect on their economies. ... These wars created the circumstances which prompted the US to invest substantial resources in specific countries which then spilt over into key parts of the region. The “hot” wars and the all-embracing Cold War also had a huge impact on the development and the political organizations and institutions as well as the economic policies of the various societies of the region. (16; emphasis added)

In the South Korean case, more specifically, a host of political-economic advantages were garnered as a result of its decision to ally itself with the US effort in Indochina, ultimately supplying some 300,000 soldiers during its protracted combat history there between October 1965 and March 1973 (Han 1978, 893). A few examples will paint a sufficiently clear picture of the beneficial political-economic effects of the Vietnam War for Korea’s modernization drive. Between 1965 and 1972, the amount of income derived from war-related business was just over \$1 billion (Woo 1991, 94), as military procurements jumped from just \$3 million in 1965 to \$57 million by 1970 (Lie 1998, 64). US military aid to South Korea by 1964 had dipped to only \$124 million, a precipitous decline from the high levels of the 1950s, but quickly rebounded upon South Korea’s entry into the war: \$2 billion from 1965-1973 (Stubbs 2005, 133; Han 1978, 908).

The war was also crucial in providing the South Korean government with the precious foreign exchange that was instrumental in allowing it to complete a number of major infrastructure projects, such as the main Gyeongbu highway that connects Seoul and Pusan (Lie 1998, 64). This foreign exchange largely took the form of remittances. And when the US requested that a second contingent be sent in light of the South Korean soldiers’ proven fighting prowess, the value per soldier increased as the US acquiesced to South Korean demands for better compensation, in light of popular opposition to this move in Korea from a public that felt its soldiers were being mistreated. This was codified through the so-called Brown Memorandum, which also allowed South Korea to partake in various construction projects in Vietnam, affording this nascent industry some much-needed experience (Stubbs 2005, 133). Due to the high US

demand for various industrial exports to support the war effort (e.g., fertilizer, cement), the production and sale of its exports helped kickstart South Korea's nascent industrialization drive (Lie 1998, 65).

In some ways, this lack of recognition of the central part that the Vietnam War played in the region's economic take-off is rather surprising. For the role of the Korean War in the Japanese economic recovery has long been readily conceded within the academic literature (Glassman 2018, 251), although Meredith Woo (1991, 85) does point out how in some cases it was deliberately ignored due to the politically sensitive nature of that line of reasoning in a fiercely nationalist South Korea.⁹ In any case, the fact that the Vietnam War helped catalyze an economic boom in South Korea, as well as had various spin-off effects in terms of learning etc., is by now indisputable. In a sort of geopolitical version of Kaname Akamatsu's "flying geese" analogy of the product cycle, the Vietnam War (1964-1975) was to South Korea what the Korean War (1950-1953) was to Japan. As a South Korean commented to the popular US political magazine *Newsweek* as early as 1966: "In the Korean war, the Japanese made the money while we Koreans did the fighting. ... Now it is Korea's turn" (Lie 1998, 63).

In a recent tome that is sure to be a classic in the literature, Jim Glassman (2018) levels a critique at postwar Asian capitalist development that, on one hand, follows the scholars above like Woo and Stubbs in stressing the centrality of war in these success stories, but, on the other, departs from these views to offer a more starkly anti-capitalist argument. Rather than analyzing the role of war in stimulating certain policy decisions favorable to industrial transformation, or as technical determinants of dynamic growth, what Glassman aims to uncover is the gradual

⁹ Woo (1991, 219) states that "the authors of the 7-vol. studies on the Korean economy, published by Harvard University and funded by the USAID and the KDI (Korean Development Institute), admit to having omitted the politically sensitive issues of Japan and Vietnam."

emergence of a Pacific ruling class through the incorporation of key East Asian elites into the US military-industrial complex. In his words (2018, 251):

It is a story of how specific actors maneuvered themselves into positions from which they could throw the switches that unleashed torrents of investment capital into targeted industries, while at the same time unleashing a torrential military assault on Vietnamese peasants and city-dwellers. It is a story, in other words, of patterns, contexts, and social structures of geo-political economic action more than a narrowly conceived story of development dynamics.

While conceding the insights of the neo-Weberian accounts of the developmental state thesis that are unabashedly pro-capitalist, Glassman's account muddies the waters of these triumphalist accounts by viewing the much-lauded "East Asian miracles" as inextricably linked to the various "East Asian *massacres*" of the Pacific, Korean, and Vietnam Wars (and beyond). For Glassman, these events are not lamentable aberrations that are somehow external to the capitalist development process; rather, they are "hardwired into capital in much the same way as its propensity for producing inequality. ... A propensity for violence, up to and including warfare, is part of the DNA of capitalist class relations" (2018, 606). Our analysis concurs with Glassman's wholeheartedly, though we will stress different aspects of capitalist dynamics.

Fortuitous Timing

Closely related, and indeed implied, in the various geopolitical explanations above is not just the fact of South Korea's friendly relations with two capitalist dynamos (US and Japan) during its initial ascent, but also the *world-historical timing* of these relationships in terms of its specifically *export-led* industrialization drive. Given Korea's colonization by Japan, a power that was forced to concede its territorial empire at least a decade prior to its European counterparts (i.e., Britain and France) in 1945, (South) Korea had a considerable head-start on the dozens of other nations who were still in the throes of bloody decolonization battles with former "masters" who were reluctant to relinquish control (e.g., Algeria's struggle against France, 1954-1962).

In terms of its development strategy that relied overwhelmingly on exports, South Korea's precocious "modernization" vis-a-vis its future Third World competitors – e.g., Thailand and Indonesia, who would emerge only after the mid-1970s – lent it (and Taiwan) a distinct advantage that should not be underemphasized. More specifically, beginning its Rostovian "take-off" stage in the mid-1960s to early-1970s meant that it did so during a period when the capitalist economy was booming, interest rates were low, and where there were few nations with vast pools of cheap labor to compete with (Koo 1987, 169). This allowed South Korea to "frolic" for years in the yawning maw of the American market," while it also benefited from the waning of light industries in its global (US) and regional (Japan) patrons' economies for things like footwear, low-end televisions, textiles, wigs and the like (Cumings 2005, 318).

The issues of geopolitical context and world-historical timing are crucial for a sound understanding of the successes of the "Asian Tigers," especially in light of the dominant neoclassical (and even some developmental statist Weberian) perspectives. As Marxist geographers in particular have lamented, these tend to analyze capitalist economies as though they "took place on the head of a pin," to paraphrase Soja, and thereby offer policy prescriptions to other nations without taking these central factors into account. The most prevalent instance of this is the call for all developing nations to pursue export-led programs in accordance with the purported East-Asian "model." As many leftist scholars have pointed out, however, this prescription suffers from what is referred to as the "fallacy of composition" – that is, the view that whatever works for any *individual* person, group, or nation will necessarily also work for all (simultaneously). According to this view, if all nations were to pursue export strategies within the zero-sum world of international trade, the market would be glutted with commodities that would eventually be devalued.

The Merits of the Dominant Explanations

We will have several occasions in the remainder of this work to consider the shortcomings of the extant explanations discussed above, so we emphasize here their collective merits. Each paradigm, taken individually, possesses a certain explanatory power that is nevertheless limited in various ways. Taken together, however, these views complement one another to offer a pretty complete picture of the South Korean development process – *if*, and this is crucial, one accepts the assumptions of mainstream developmentalism (Song 2020). In any case, the first merit of the various dominant explanations is that they examine South Korea’s postwar development from a variety of scales: both the market-based neoclassical and the developmental statist perspectives mainly confine themselves to the nation-state level, examining the “internal” complexities of state policies towards business and the like; the Japanese regional perspectives rightly extends the consideration of narrow national experiences within their political, economic, and geographical interlinkages within the Japan-led regional development drive; and the various geopolitical perspectives extend the scale even further to consider both the national and regional perspectives as nested levels within the global Cold War standoff between the rival political economies of capitalism and Stalinism (Maoism etc.).

Second, the analyses pitched at different scales reveal the importance of history and geography in framing and guiding national political-economic strategies, and the likely success of these strategies (Stubbs 2005, 16). The extent to which these factors were central to South Korea’s (and other US-allied, pro-capitalist Tigers’) success is underappreciated in the extant literature – with the works cited in the previous sections offering important exceptions. This mix of fortuitous global and regional contexts, strategic actions of specific nations’ state-capital relations, and the sheer hard work and determination of the population is what merged to produce

these capitalistic success stories. In his assessment of the postwar (East-)Asian developmental experience, Pempel (1999, 138) captures this dialectic of structure and agency:

Asian economic development has been one of history's most overdetermined outcomes. This is not to say it was "easy" – quite the contrary. If it had been easy, the numbers of successful imitators would be uncountable. But numerous factors combined to spur growth in the region. Attempting to isolate any one "key" cause results in debates over whether "my variable can swallow your variable." Numerous forces triangulated to make the isolation of some single, super cause all but impossible: "Victory finds a hundred fathers but defeat is an orphan."

The analysis that follows supports this assessment, but for now we dampen some of the triumphalism of the "miracle" narrative to consider some of the less desirable outcomes of the South Korean development experiment.

The Ambivalence of "Miracles"

Following Marx, Mike Davis asserts that "the Whig view of history deletes a great deal of very bloody business" (2001, 295). This "Whig view," according to Herbert Butterfield, is "the tendency in many historians to write on the side of Protestants and Whigs [i.e., liberals], to praise revolutions provided they have been successful, to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present" (Cronon 2012). While a consideration of the dominant developmental forces in post-World War II South Korea may need to be tempered by stressing the neo-Confucian character of its ruling elite, their shared pro-capitalist stance renders Butterfield's comments about nineteenth-century England equally valid in describing postwar South Korea. So, despite the differences between the competing explanatory frameworks outlined in the previous sections, what they have in common is that they are all admirers of South Korea's unswerving pursuit of growth, disagreeing only over the cause(s) of its success.

Reacting against this unrestrained celebration, the South Korean experience, especially during the era of Park Chung Hee (1961-1979), has been subjected to an increasing number of attacks in recent decades. These works reveal the darker side of Korea's "modernization" process. Indeed, one need only scratch the surface of South Korea's gilded facade to reveal a host of troubling trends. As John Lie (1998, 168) concludes his ambivalent assessment of its postwar political-economic development, the prosperity that the nation now enjoys was "purchased at a cost so high that beneath the surface of material abundance South Korea remains a nation fraught with social problems and deep social divisions." The following section discusses some of the major issues that had been previously masked by an overwhelming focus on South Korea's undeniably impressive quantitative growth figures, but it does so by confining itself to the period that is commonly accepted as the development epoch: circa 1945-1990. As we argue later on, however, both the explanations of its success in growth terms, as well as the criticisms leveled at that "success," can be more deeply grasped if this standard periodization is 1) projected further into the past and 2) considered outside of its regular nationally-based scale to consider its place within wider regional and global dynamics.

Urban Bias and Uneven Geographical Development

The dictates of the industrial form of capitalism necessitate a high degree of socio-spatial concentration, since it facilitates the following imperatives: conforming to the specific division of labor within the factory; providing a large pool of low-cost labor that is forced to compete with one another; enjoying economies of scale with access to large consumer markets; easing access to crucial technologies; accelerating the exchange process; and facilitating communications (Kim and Son 1997, 130). In postwar South Korea, then, especially upon the transition from an import substitution industrialization strategy in the 1950s to the much-lauded

export-led one of the 1960s and 1970s, a host of social and spatial problems arose. We focus here on the urban-rural disparities that flowed somewhat as a matter of course from its deliberate pursuit of an industrial form of economic development.

In accordance with the popular developmental wisdom of the time – i.e., “growth pole theory” (Sakong and Koh 2010, 186) – South Korea’s leaders invested selectively in a specific “national developmental corridor” that ran southeast from the metropolis of Seoul to the port city of Pusan, making use of existing infrastructures that had been first laid down during the Japanese colonial period (Chung and Kirkby 2002, 105). This concentrated production and employment, and therefore wealth and power, within the cities along this route. As Kim and Son (1997, 129) point out, for instance, this worked to the benefit of a part of the country that had already been dominant: “From 1971 to 1988, the share of manufacturing employment in the Seoul-Pusan axis rose from 79 percent to 90 percent, and the number of firms from 62 percent to 84 percent.”

The state’s attitude towards the countryside, by contrast, was one of relative neglect. As we will see in a later chapter, the South Korean state under Park Chung Hee treated rural areas in a manner quite similar to the way in which the Japanese did during the first half of its colonial occupation of Korea (1910-1945). That is, it was to serve as the source of two crucial inputs for successful capitalist development: cheap food and, by extension, cheap labor(-power). The flooding into the country of cheap US grain via Public Law 480 food aid served to lower grain prices significantly, which rendered the centuries-long dominant mode of life increasingly precarious for rural dwellers. Out of this situation the state benefited from cheap food, which it used to feed the exploding number of workers migrating to the country’s major cities (Lie 1998, 108-112).

This general trend of rural “underdevelopment” (i.e., neglect) was interrupted, however, by a brief period of intense attention by the state to revitalize it during the 1970s through the so-called Saemaul Undong (New Village Movement). The catalyst for this attention, however, was a host of pragmatic concerns that worried state leaders. For instance, in addition to attempting to regain popularity within Park Chung Hee’s previous political base in the countryside after over a decade of neglect, perhaps an even greater concern was the United States’ termination of food aid which forced South Korea to pay for its grain imports out of its jealously guarded foreign exchange reserves that were earmarked for other developmental purposes (Burmeister 1988, 69-70). And although this period of attention did alleviate some of the more extreme income inequalities between the urban and rural sectors that preceded it, the quality of rural socio-economic infrastructures still lags well behind that of cities like Seoul (Kim and Son 1997, 124-125).

In short, the state’s pursuit of a specifically *industrial form* of capitalist development meant that the rural sector was more or less “sacrificed” within South Korea’s national modernization scheme (Bello and Rosenfeld 1990, Chapter 4). For those who believe that capitalist development ought to be a positive-sum and even process, this relative neglect and suffering of the countryside is a lamentable fact that could have been avoided.

Labor Conditions

When it comes to dissident positions regarding the miracle narrative, by far the loudest voices, and the most scholarly attention, have come from those decrying the atrocious conditions under which many South Koreans were forced to labor during the nation’s industrialization drive (Cho 1987; Choi 1990; Deyo 1989; Ogle 1990; Koo 2001). There is good reason for this issue to be a central criticism leveled at the Park era and beyond. This is, nevertheless, relatively well-known

terrain, so we can be quite brief on it – focusing in turn on long hours, poor working conditions, and the state’s labor repression.

The most easily graspable (i.e., relatable) aspect of the Park’s draconian labor regime for the modern reader is the sheer number of hours worked by the average South Korean wage-laborer. According to the data of the International Labor Office, for the entirety of the 1980s South Korea held the dubious distinction of having the longest (formal and waged) work week in the world. In 1980 the average number of hours worked per week was 53.1, as compared with 39.7 in the US, 38.8 in Japan, and 51 in Taiwan (Bello and Rosenfeld 1990, 24). Despite a deepening class consciousness as expressed in various acts of worker militancy, average weekly work hours actually escalated steadily all the way until 1986, where it peaked at 54.5 hours, and began to decrease only after the Great Worker Struggle of 1987. What is interesting is that these long hours, which if anything underestimated the real hours worked, were the plight of *all* wage-workers. This was the case, albeit to varying degrees, regardless of industry, age, sex, or occupational status (Koo 2001, 48-50).

It is significant to note that, despite proclamations to the contrary, the number of work hours in South Korea has remained relatively high to this day. Despite having “graduated” to being a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1996, as of 2015 South Koreans work longer hours than any other member of that group. Their average of 2,193 yearly hours compares unfavorably with, for example, British workers (1,647) and German (1,408) workers. During the initial phase of development, where the role of the state was far more heavy-handed, the pursuit of a cheap labor strategy undergirded the state’s dictatorial and anti-democratic character. Organized labor’s prolonged and fierce battle with both the state and (increasingly powerful) capital to bring about better working conditions and

ultimately political democracy in the late 1980s was a remarkable achievement. It is for good reason, then, that this story has been both well-documented and widely celebrated within the academic literature (Hart-Landsberg 1993; Chun 2009), as well as by Korean citizens.

Individuals' experiences of working under Park's developmental drive varied widely from person to person, but one can generalize from myriad accounts that conditions were cramped, noisy, unclean, and in many cases dangerous. Captured in a fictional account of the time, "A Dwarf Launched a Little Ball," author Sehui Cho voices frustration at these working conditions through the story's protagonist, who worked at a typical small business: "We worked until night amidst murky air and deafening noise. Of course, we weren't dying right then and there. But the combination of the sordid working conditions, the amount of sweat we shed and the paltriness of pay grated on our nerves" (Lie 1998, 104). Daily and generational exposure to these sorts of conditions, which unavoidably have negative effects on one's physical and mental health, are prime examples of what Rob Nixon (2011) refers to as "slow violence."

Of more immediate concern to Korean workers, however, were the high levels of workplace accidents and injuries. Added to South Korea's "cheap labor" strategy of long working hours and low pay, was the savings to be had by skimping on work-safety policies and infrastructures. As Bello and Rosenfeld (1990) argue, "Korea has the world's highest rate of industrial accidents, with an average of 5 workers killed daily and another 390 injured." Not surprisingly, these deaths and injuries increased in near lock-step with the "miraculous" rates of economic growth achieved during its industrialization drive. Korea's own National Statistical Office (1995), for example, reported that the number of industrial accidents in 1964 – i.e., shortly after the Park regime took power – was 1,489, but later this number leaped to a high of 167,816 before "declining" to 90,288 in 1993 (Chang 1999, 48). Even by similar "Third World"

standards, Korea was remarkable: “The country also leads the world in the rate of occupation-related illnesses, with 2.66 per 11 persons suffering from work-related illnesses and injuries, compared to 0.61 for Japan, 0.70 for Taiwan, and 0.93 for Singapore” (Bello and Rosenfeld 1990, 24).

One might reasonably ask: how could these appalling labor conditions be “successfully” imposed on South Korea’s workers? The answer, in short, is that they could only be implemented through severe state repression at the macro scale, combined with on-the-ground forms carried out by managers of companies large and small. Central targets of the state’s and business’s repression were workers’ rights, often banning their ability to bargain collectively and form unions. Much has been written on this (Long 1977; Deyo 1987; Ogle 1990); however, one point that bears stressing is how these draconian acts were driven by the imperatives of the wider context of Korea’s industrialization drive, which perforce was fueled by its creation of a “cheap labor” strategy. So although South Korea’s cheap labor regime is often viewed as a self-evident, “natural” fact, this is patently not the case. It was deliberately constructed – or “made,” to use E.P. Thompson’s famous phrase. As John Lie puts it quite pointedly: “State repression must be seen in its totality; *the social foundation of cheap labor entailed nothing less than a powerful and systemic assault on civil society*” (Lie 1998, 98-99; emphasis added).

From the state’s point of view, all of the above represented a necessary evil. This belief stemmed from, as Ogle (1990) has argued, three strong assumptions that undergirded the actions of capital and the state vis-a-vis workers: 1) low-cost labor was the only basis upon which the Republic of Korea could “develop” economically; 2) the laboring masses belonged to a lower echelon of society and, as such, should show deference to their superiors; 3) any form of worker

resistance or collective action was most likely inspired by communists (47). These assumptions were, and in many ways still are, rampant in Korea.

Gendered Forms of Exploitation

During the post-Korean War period, but beginning in earnest under Park's military dictatorship in the 1960s, the South Korean state partook in the "mass mobilization of men and women as 'dutiful nationals' (*kungmin*) in the process of building the modern nation" (Moon 2005, 11).

Following the state's aim to "catch up" with the West, the compressed character of its capitalist development saw the state's heavy-handed attempts to instill new gender identities in order to create the "useful bodies" necessary to its national security and industrialization drive.

According to Nelson and Cho (2016), the socio-political instability of the postwar years "undermined existing gendered expectations and roles, and in reaction, gender itself became an explicit discursive domain for the reinforcement of what were thought of as appropriate and 'traditional' Korean norms against 'modern' aspirations of independence and individualism" (327). These tensions were evident throughout South Korean society, but nowhere were they greater than in women's waged work.

Women in "Official" Employment: i.e., Wage Work

As evidenced by the "classic" British case in its nineteenth-century history of industrialization and others, female labor is often the dominant form, especially in its earlier "light" phases (e.g., textile production). This was certainly the case in 1960s South Korea, although women's contributions to the "miracle" was for a long time overlooked. In cases of "late development" such as South Korea, which lacked the sort of *external* source of cheap labor enjoyed by Western nations, the exploitation of domestic "*internal*" sources was especially crucial.

In any case, women's contributions were undeniable. As Cho (1985) summarizes: "In major export industries such as textiles, garments, electronics and food processing young women made up over 90 per cent of total production workers in 1980" (81). Moreover, their general presence in the manufacturing sector actually grew over time, despite the state's shift to heavy industries in the 1970s. That is, women's share in manufacturing work rose from approximately 28% in 1972 to 43% by 1990 (Seguino 1997, 106).

Like their male counterparts that we encountered in the previous section, female wage laborers endured highly precarious and exploitative working conditions. These were characterized by "long hours and grueling shiftwork, extremely low wages (legally stratified by gender and, for married men, augmented to recognize men's role in family support), unsafe work environments, sexual harassment, and abusive management tactics" (Nelson and Cho 2016, 327).

Indeed, for reasons that will be discussed shortly, things were very much worse for female workers. For example, South Korea held during this time the dubious distinction of having the world's greatest male-female wage differentials – i.e., earning less than half of what their male counterparts received (Lie 1998, 106). Moreover, women workers were treated differently in terms of the sorts of state vocational training programs that were created for (and offered to) them. Barred from technical training in "masculinized fields such as metal processing, electricity, construction, wood processing, and transportation and construction equipment," women were encouraged to enhance their supposedly "essential" feminine characteristics, thereby focusing on "sewing, embroidering, dyeing, weaving, spinning, operating telephones, dressing hair, and producing handicrafts" (Moon 2005, 72).

Contrary to popular perceptions in the West of Asian women's supposed docility and submissiveness, however, South Korea's female wage workers did not endure this sort of

treatment without a fight. Women were central to union activity and labor struggles more generally during the 1970s and 1980s (Koo 2001, 92-98) and often engaged in far more direct forms of resistance than their male counterparts (Lie 1996, 48-49), although they did often endure subordination within the labor movement itself (Koo 2001, 180-185).

Motivating the myriad forms of discrimination against female workers was the state's concerns about the effects of the proliferation of female employment. The state was in a bind: on the one hand, female wage workers were instrumental to the success of its cheap labor strategy, as we have seen; on the other hand, state elites worried about the potential unforeseen consequences of this new trend (Nelson and Cho 2016, 327-328), especially in terms of possibly undermining the crucial roles that women play in society outside of "official" employment.

Domestic Labor

While women's work in the domestic realm has not received nearly as much attention as that of women's waged work, it is no less important to the proper functioning of any capitalist social totality. In its strategy to render women in the domestic sphere as "useful bodies," the state launched a massive campaign – through "educational" campaigns and mass media – to ensure that they served as "wise mothers and good wives." The measuring rod for assessing domestic women's contributions to the national modernization drive was their "rational management of the household." This involved streamlining quotidian practices – such as shopping, cooking, overseeing their children's education – to best serve the nation's export-based development strategy (Moon 2005, 89-90). To be sure, with wage-workers laboring under draconian conditions, the onus upon women in the domestic realm to work tirelessly and with ingenuity was paramount in achieving the effective daily and generational reproduction of these wage-laborers (and future workers). As with all "advanced" capitalist societies, the role of the domestic

sphere is crucial to the successful functioning of the economy as a whole (Moore 2015; Bhattacharya 2017; Ferguson 2019).

Agricultural Labor

Another often overlooked segment of South Korea's workforce was women engaged in agricultural production. While the state's neglect of rural areas has been often pointed out, its gendered dimensions have been largely ignored. Shin Gills (1999), however, has done much to address this lacuna. Arguing for the inappropriateness of feminism's usual urban- and wage-worker based notion of women's "double burden," she offers a framework of South Korean peasant women's suffering from a distinct and even more onerous "triple burden."

In labeling it a "triple" burden, she does not intend simply to add one more layer to the usual conceptualization. Rather, she mentions a constellation of forces that bear down on peasant women in South Korea: the willful *underdevelopment* of the agricultural sector, in accordance with its Western-style industrialization strategy; *patriarchal relations* which place burdens on peasant women in spheres of production and reproduction; and *state forms of exploitation* that demand that the rural sector subsidize the urban sector, yet through non-capitalist means (119-120). As Shin Gills (1999) concludes:

The expansion of rural women's labour into agricultural production was a consequence of massive rural-urban migration. In the absence of capitalisation or large-scale mechanisation of agricultural production, the demand for agricultural labour remained more or less constant. ... However, this substantial extension of rural women's labour into the sphere of agricultural production did not alter the norms of sexual exclusivity within the domestic sphere of reproduction. (210)

This framework is interesting in that it combines aspects found in both "developed" and "developing" societies during the Cold War era.

In sum, women's labor – in the official waged realm, but also in the domestic and rural spheres – has been central to South Korea's economic success. And while each of these foci do

much to dampen the triumphalist narrative of the country's economic "miracle," it is the latter two aspects that are in the greatest need of further analysis.

Ecological Degradation

Writing against the tide of celebratory views of South Korean modernization has been just a handful of accounts taking issue with the enormous level of environmental destruction *through which* the country was able to achieve its remarkable growth rates. In some ways this was inevitable, since "Korea's technocrats ... managed to compress into 30 years the processes of environmental destruction that took several generations to achieve in earlier industrializing societies" (Bellow and Rosenfeld 1990, 112). With few exceptions (e.g., Chung and Kirkby 2002), however, these accounts have focused almost exclusively on local case studies of degradation,¹⁰ or have offered unsystematic analyses that gather a disparate assortment of facts to represent what is taken to be a generally bleak environmental record in South Korea (Bello and Rosenfeld 1990; Shin 1993; Eder 1996; Kim 1998).¹¹ These scholars are quite right to draw

¹⁰ Lie (1998, 162-163) summarizes a host of such incidents:

Onsan, the site of a major industrial center located on the southeastern coast northeast of Pusan, became an ecological nightmare (Han et al. 1988, 132-133), while the Kumi Industrial Complex experienced a major chemical spill in April 1991, threatening Taegu residents (Shin 1993, 243). A particularly tragic case was the death of Mun Song-myong in 1988. Mun, just fifteen years old when he died, worked in a thermometer factory where, later reporters found, mercury was streaming on the floor like water. Only three months after working in the factory, he fell suddenly ill and died of mercury poisoning (Nishina and Noda 1989, 163-164).

Horrible as these sorts of events were, they are framed by their analysts as lamentable costs of the Park era's "rush to development." They are offered as moral condemnations or ideological criticisms, in other words, rather than viewing them as the epiphenomenal surface froth of much deeper structural transformations that the capitalist development process wrought across the whole of society.

¹¹ Despite the dearth of studies devoted to socio-ecological dimensions of Korean development, the following statistics derived from those that do exist are sufficient to paint an adequate picture of the sheer scale of the problem.

- In 1978, The World Health Organization declared that Seoul's air had the highest sulfur-dioxide content among the major cities of the world (Bello and Rosenfeld 1990, 98).

attention to this situation; however, the way in which they do so is problematic. First, these accounts proceed, without exception, from a dualistic Cartesian view that sees an active humanity operating in one (external) sphere on a supposedly passive Nature contained in another (Moore 2011a). As we will argue throughout this dissertation, this stems from these researchers' "*production in general*" (Marx 1973, 88) view of economic life, which fails to register the historically specific social forms structuring capitalist social relations (value, the commodity, capital, wage-labor etc.). The conclusions invariably drawn, then, are of two sorts. The first is a moral critique of the unswerving devotion to growth that has, in their minds inexplicably, gripped the country and its leaders. The second is an attempt at a consciousness-raising "fix" – i.e., "If people only knew about the sad state of affairs of their nation's environment, they'd vote for to remedy it etc."

Encapsulating well this ambivalent sort of analysis is the work of Byun (1983), who offers one of the few book-length analyses linking in a critical way the contradiction between

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- Until the mid-to-late 1980s, South Korea was one of the most profligate users of fertilizers and pesticides in the world, a situation that stemmed from the state's symbiotic aims during the Yushin five-year plan of the 1970s that pursued heavy industrial and chemical industrialization and high-yield varieties of rice through industrial agriculture. In terms of pesticides, for instance, usage rates catapulted by over twenty-six times between 1967 and 1985, from 1,577 metric tons to over 42,300 metric tons, while Korea's fertilizer use per hectare was over six times that of the United States during the mid-1970s (Bello and Rosenfeld 1990, 96-97).
 - Remarkably, even by the standards of other Asian Tigers, Korea's ecological track record during its initial industrialization drive was alarming. Kim (1998, 225) points out a few of the dimensions of this situation: "The size of the South Korean economy is only 1/12 that of Japan, the population 1/3, and the area 1/4, but the sulfur dioxide emission is twice that of Japan. The pollution growth rate has far exceeded the economic growth rate for decades: the annual growth rates of industrial wastewater and industrial solid wastes were both 13%, which surpassed the economic growth rate during the time which was 9.6%."

For the only book-length and systematic (i.e., critical) account of socio-ecological problems in their various manifestations in South Korea, see Chung and Kirkby (2002). Also worth consulting is Byun (1983).

environment and “development.” On the one hand, he makes several observations that today could be neatly classified within the “metabolic rift” emphasis of John Bellamy Foster (1999) and his colleagues associated with the Oregon School (2011). Consider, for instance, the following comment:

Ninety percent of Seoul’s population is sewered, but only 6% of the municipal sewage is sanitarily treated. For the remainder, sewage is collected in tanks and hauled away to be dumped directly into the river. Massive amounts of organic wastes are discharged to the Han River and its tributaries. *The traditional means of disposal of human wastes was collection of night soil and its use as fertilizer. That is now rare in Seoul* (Byun 1983, 214; emphasis added).

When it comes time to explain why this has become the case, however, Byun offers a blend of moralistic critique and consciousness raising to try to persuade his readers:

There is a tendency in Korea to believe that environmental protection is a luxury that only rich countries can afford. People feel it is much more important to build factories that can employ more people than to worry about the environmental effect that factories will have. There is something to this view, but one basic point needs to be made clear. Environmental quality is always and anywhere the fundamental base for human’s [sic] better life; it is a crucial dimension of human life itself which is indifferently applied both to the rich and poor people. ... Thus, any growth without considering the improvement of environmental quality could not lead to human development in its real sense (220-221; emphasis added).

The admirable aspect of Byun’s work is that he seems to intuit that the South Korean experience can only be considered a success or miracle if one uses the narrow measuring rod of GDP growth. Without elucidating the historically specific shifts in social relations that made capitalism’s specific social forms free to operate, however, readers of this literature respond with a defeatist logic, where those initially shocked by the alarming statistics they have just encountered wind up simply shrugging their shoulders and going on with their day. These sorts of accounts that have thus far dominated the field of critical environmental studies (even by its best practitioners like Donald Worster (1979; 2016) and William Cronon (1991) are rightfully labeled by Jason Moore environmental histories *of* (you name the place), rather than, in this

context, the South Korean miracle *as* environmental history. That is, Korea's economic and environmental histories did not take place alongside but rather *through* one another (Moore 2011a).

While any mention of environmental considerations during the early phase of development was considered akin to “national treachery” (Kim 1998, 224), by the 1980s and 1990s popular concern for the increasingly wretched state of the environment was palpable.¹² It is undeniably the case that the environmental movement that emerged out of this increasing and generalized concern has gone far in addressing many of the more extreme problems; in some sense, though, this was inevitable given how the country's relatively large population (approximately 50 million) and small size (1/100th of the US) have been forced to negotiate the implications of the state-capital nexus's unswerving pursuit of compound rates of economic growth.

Conclusion: Troubling Trends Emerging within *Post*-“Miracle” South Korea

To be fair, one could reasonably argue that the sorts of criticisms of the miracle narrative outlined in the previous section have been largely transcended. That is, many presumably apply only to the politically repressive dictatorial era (1961-1988) for which this work largely confines itself, where a single-minded, development-at-any-cost logic held sway. Indeed, it is fully within the widely-accepted bourgeois narrative of capitalist modernity that, while things may temporarily be loathsome in certain respects, they will inevitably be remedied through reforms

¹² For example, in the first survey on environmental awareness ever conducted (1982), nearly three-quarters of those surveyed stated that they were either “somewhat” or “very” concerned about the state of the environment (Lie 1998, 163). Echoing the persistence of this concern, another study conducted over ten years later (1995-1996) revealed that, for 57% of respondents, environmental issues were considered the most dangerous threat to the country's future, while nearly 80% believed that environmental problems would worsen in the future (Kim 1998, 233).

driven by the popular democratic will. This notion is not devoid of truth; for who would deny that things have not improved markedly following South Korea's prolonged and bloody, yet ultimately successful, struggle to bring down the military dictatorship in the 1980s?

Nevertheless, even in the post-miracle era (and after recovering from the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-1998), there are a host of troubling trends in contemporary South Korea that cannot be explained away as issues of the past. For example, given its undeniable improvements that are the envy of the "developing" world – e.g., GDP per capita, infrastructure, medicine, nutrition etc. – it is surprising to learn that there is currently a strong, shared desire for most South Koreans to emigrate from the country. According to a survey conducted by a popular South Korean website (*Saramin*) of over 1,600 men and women, for example, an average of nearly 80% wished permanently to leave their homeland if the opportunity presented itself, while half of these people were actively making plans to do so. The main reasons cited for the participants' motivation to emigrate were the following (listed in descending order of importance): a longing for more freedom in their lifestyle, which was supposedly being hindered by the "*pressures of the clock*" and work responsibilities; poor living and working conditions; economic inequality; worries about life after retirement; discontent with South Korea's highly competitive society; a feeling that the government was failing to protect its people adequately; and, finally, a desire to enjoy the superior welfare systems of "other" (presumably Western) countries (Coello 2016).

Another extremely troubling trend, and one no doubt a related manifestation of the issues listed above, is the country's alarming rate of suicide. That is, from 2003 to 2011, South Korea had the highest rate of suicide in the world, and in 2011 its rate almost doubled that of the second

highest nation (i.e., Hungary) that year.¹³ Evidently, this problem is particularly acute for men – with roughly double the instances as women – and for the elderly.¹⁴ The latter trend reflects the unique demographic transition facing South Korea (Klassen and Yang 2014), *inter alia*: the overwhelming senior-citizen majority currently working in the struggling agrarian sector, the lack of pensions and welfare services for senior citizens, and their desire not to be a burden upon their children.¹⁵

A high national suicide rate is surely expressive of a society with deep, and seemingly irreconcilable problems. We quote at length Franco Bernardi, an Italian social theorist, as he summarizes the contradictory ramifications of South Korea’s capitalist development that we will wrestle with throughout this work:

South Korea has the highest suicide rate in the world ... Suicide is the most common cause of death for those under 40 in South Korea ... Interestingly, the toll of suicides in South Korea has doubled during the last decade ... In the space of two generations their condition has certainly improved by the point of view of revenue, nutrition, freedom and possibility of travelling abroad. But the price of this improvement has been the desertification of daily life, *the hyper-acceleration of rhythms*, the extreme individualization of biographies, and work precariousness which also means unbridled

¹³ That is, the South Korean rate of suicide was 31.7 per 100,000 people, while Hungary was 18.3. Note: These statistics were drawn from the World Health Organization, though they were cited from the Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS) website at the following URL: http://kosis.kr/vis_eng/nso/worldInEng/selectWorldInEng.do. Given what follows in this analysis, it should not go unnoticed that three of the most widely celebrated Asian Tiger success stories were all in the top 25 countries for suicide rates between 1985-2017: i.e., South Korea 4th; Japan 15th; Taiwan 22th. In "Suicide rates per 100,000 by country, year and sex (Table)". *World Health Organization* (data drawn from Wikipedia).

¹⁴ <http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-with-the-most-suicides-in-the-world.html>

¹⁵ Interestingly, way back in 1844, Friedrich Engels drew the connection between suicide and the rise of the unstable and precarious existence of new proletarians. When discussing supposedly “immoral” and “illegal” means to which wage-workers were forced to resort in order not to perish, he remarks:

True, there are, within the working class, numbers too moral to steal even when reduced to the utmost extremity, and these starve or commit suicide. For suicide, formerly the enviable privilege of the upper classes, has become fashionable among the English workers, and numbers of the poor kill themselves to avoid the misery from which they see no other means of escape. (2005, 143)

competition ... High-tech capitalism naturally implies ever-increasing productivity and ceaseless intensification of the rhythms of work, but it is also the condition that has made possible an impressive improvement in life standards, nourishment and consumption ... But the present alienation is a different sort of hell. The intensification of the rhythm of work, the desertification of the landscape and the virtualization of the emotional life are converging to create a level of loneliness and despair that is difficult to consciously refuse and oppose ... Isolation, competition, sense of meaninglessness, compulsion and failure: 28 persons out of 100,000 every year succeed in their attempt to escape and many more unsuccessfully try. *As suicide can be considered the ultimate mark of the anthropological mutation linked to [increased] precarization*, not surprisingly South Korea is number one in the world when it comes to the suicide rate. (cited in Zizek 2015)

How does one account for this paradoxical state of affairs, where material plenty, increased life expectancy and technological sophistication sit awkwardly alongside widespread social discontent and environmental degradation? In other words, how can it be that the country that is hailed as *the* model to be emulated by countries in the Global South just so happens also to be one with a population eager to flee from it or, failing that, leave it for good by taking one's own life? It is the aim of this work not only to provide an adequate theoretical and historical context in which to understand these troubling trends, but also to demonstrate how, far from contradicting each other, the positive and negative aspects are inextricably linked.

Chapter 2 Aims, Method, and the Significance of Marx's Categorical Critique of Capitalism

Introduction

In this chapter, we outline the following: 1) why the South Korean developmental experience is an illuminating object of study for those interested in understanding nature-society relations under advanced forms of capitalism, as well as the aims of the study; 2) the specific method brought to bear on the analysis, stating as forthrightly as possible the assumptions guiding the inquiry; and 3) a discussion of the crucial, yet often-overlooked, significance of the structuring social forms of “developed” capitalist societies, stressing their historical specificity key characteristics. Considered in conjunction with, and in many ways in respectful opposition to, the literature surveyed in the previous chapter, this discussion will set the stage for the more historically grounded chapters that consider in turn the regional, global, and national scalar dynamics as they have shaped the South Korean “development” process.

South Korea as Prime Object of Analysis, and the Aims of the Dissertation

Social science has found it difficult to resist the idea that the emergence of capitalist industrialisation across Eastern Asia over the past half century is essentially a *mechanical process that transcends the specificities of time and space*. Identifying a regional model not only creates an aura of scientific certainty but it also permits the promotion of whichever factor the particular model assumes to be primary, be it the market, the state, the product cycle or free trade. Models can be packaged as bundles of policies that can be applied technocratically by experts seeking to extract the lessons to be applied elsewhere.

- Mitchell Bernard (1996, 663)

We saw in the previous chapter that, although there have been scholars who wish to dampen somewhat the triumphalist tone of the “miracle” narrative, the vast majority of analyses of post-World War II South Korea are laudatory accounts that focus on grasping its general features for the purposes of potentially applying these “lessons” to other nations (Balassa 1988). And even where there have been more historically grounded accounts that stress the non-generalizability of

the South Korean experience (e.g., the various “geopolitical” approaches), their view of South Korea’s own economic development is admiring, and in many cases even “boosterish,” as Glassman points out (2018, 605). In other words, stress is placed on how South Korea’s success was contingent upon various historically specific conditions, but that nevertheless its economic achievements are unquestionably a good thing that other nations should at least attempt to emulate. For these scholars, it is in this sense that South Korea is worth studying. From the standpoint of this work, however, the twentieth-century South Korean experience is a prime object of analysis for a host of different reasons.

First, it is Korea’s unfortunate distinction that it was spared none of the central turbulent experiences that dominate the study of modern world history, to wit: imperialism, decolonization, neocolonialism; civil war; depeasantization and proletarianization; Cold War rivalry; industrialization amidst “dependent” development and resource scarcity; transition from dictatorship to (liberal) democracy; economic crisis and neoliberal restructuring (following the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998); shift from aid recipient to aid donor. One could argue that, ironically, (South) Korea’s national experience was rather atypical in its world-historical typicality.

Second, despite the fact that its national, regional, and global contexts were unquestionably specific, the South Korean experience represents a “classic” case of capitalist development in the sense that it conforms to many of the general dynamics pertaining to 18th and 19th century England – *industrial* capitalism’s birthplace – as most rigorously analyzed by Marx in *Capital* (Harvey 2013, 154-155). For example, most peripheral countries in the history of capitalism were shackled by the power of landed interests or deliberately “underdeveloped” by the West for the sake of maintaining their role as the sources of cheap (non- or semi-

proletarianized) labor, resources, energy and the like – e.g., Africa (Rodney 1973) and Latin America (Frank 1967). The specific geopolitical context of (South) Korea, by contrast, both in terms of the profound social transformations set in motion by its experience under Japanese colonialism in the first half of the twentieth century and its geopolitically strategic role during the Cold War (both geographically and ideologically) after World War II, allowed for a capitalist transformation that was in many ways both “classic” (i.e., Western) and unique vis-a-vis other “developing” Third World nations.

Third, and by extension of the previous point, South Korea’s undeniable success in GDP terms provides a rare testing ground for the supposedly self-evident link between economic growth and well-being or happiness (Byun 1983; Hamilton 2003). Unlike other non-Western nations, where aspirations for increased standards of living akin to those achieved in the West that were/are said to have been impeded by a *lack of* “development,” the South Korean experience is unique in that the problems that it currently faces are, arguably, directly attributable to *too much development of the capitalist sort*. This tension between being both a classic and aberrant case of capitalist development (Hamilton 1986, 2-3) renders it a conducive window through which to contemplate the ambivalences of (capitalist) modernity, one pointing to the fact that a shifting world-ecological context may have rendered anachronistic past political-economic practices and the assumptions undergirding them (Postone 2017).

Fourth, the inordinate attention that the South Korean case has received in mainstream economic development discourse and in the academic literature stems from this very success. It is perhaps the key case legitimizing capitalist development and shielding it from the critiques of dependency that dominated in the 1970s. As such, it needed to be defended and promoted

vigorously, and, in this sense, the “debates” within the mainstream literature have veiled a common acceptance of capitalist social relations.

Finally, despite being a “late” developer in world-historical time,¹⁶ the rapidity and all-pervasiveness of its capitalist transition, when paired with its small geographical size (1% of Canada) and relatively large population (yet 50% higher than Canada), in many ways represents a glimpse of the future for more mature capitalist countries of the West that have been able to defer through various spatial and political strategies, or through sheer denial, the socio-ecological contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. In this way, cases like South Korea, Taiwan, and China represent the proverbial canaries in the coal mine of humanity’s planetary future. Reflecting upon the country’s turbulent history and the challenges it now faces, Franco Bernardi echoed this view when commenting after a visit to the country, “[South] Korea is the ground zero of the world, a blueprint for the rest of the planet” (cited in Zizek 2015).

These are just a few of the ways in which the South Korean experience is fruitful to contemplate. And while these issues will gradually be unpacked throughout the course of this work, they should be kept in mind from the outset.

Central Aim and Arguments of the Dissertation

The answer you get has a lot to do with the question you ask. Almost all of the development theory literature on the political economy of East Asia asks only one central question: what explains the spectacular record of sustained high rates of economic growth and the successful upgrading of the national industrial structure? Any critique of this literature must begin with the relative poverty of this central question.
- Dong-Sook Shin Gills (1999, 1)

¹⁶ The use of the term of “world-historical time” is not meant to accept the deterministic, universal, and teleological claims of modernization theory and the Western experience more generally. Quite to the contrary, a central aim of this study is to problematize this view by emphasizing capitalism’s historically specific rise to seemingly self-evident legitimacy and universality, as well as the world-ecological obstacles to its continuation.

Based on its undeniable success in capitalistic terms, paired with its strategic role in legitimizing the Western definition and path of development against its Stalinist (Maoist etc.) alternatives for countries in the Third World, the literature reviewed in the previous chapter was intended to provide a sense of both the herculean effort and massive resources that have been marshalled to document its experience, in the form of governmental and global institutional (e.g., World Bank 1993) reports and a deluge of secondary academic accounts. What is very much needed, therefore, is not yet more data detailing the “success” of South Korea’s achievements, nor even to enumerate various problematic issues that have derived therefrom. Rather, what is needed is a *critical reinterpretation* of the mass of extant sources and data to draw conclusions that are more critically relevant to the socio-ecological challenges South Korea now faces. This is the central aim of this work.¹⁷

In order to achieve this, we draw primarily from the work of Marx, whose unique method of inquiry yielded insights about the capitalist mode of production that were greatly at odds with mainstream accounts. Contrary to his supposed adherence to a form of vulgar materialism that denigrated the importance of the ideal realm, Marx appreciated the power of ideas, referring to them as a “material force” that guides thought and action (Tucker 1978, 60). Deriving not from thin air but from a dialectical relationship to the socio-ecological world, however, we outline in this chapter with as much detail as deemed necessary the specificities of Marx’s method and political-economic analysis that will inform the reinterpretation of the South Korean experience that follows. For as John Maynard Keynes warned (1936, 383-384):

The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any

¹⁷ As the literature review in Chapter 1 suggests, this rereading will be confined to the English-language literature.

intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval; for in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest. But, soon or late, it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil.

Rather than assume both for the writer and reader alike what a “Marxist approach” entails, therefore, part of our task in this chapter is to outline in detail the specific method, assumptions, and the like of the “academic scribbler” that is informing the analysis that follows.

While these details will be taken up in earnest in due course, for the present we highlight the fact that the starting point of our re-interpretive process is the assertion that the central problem with virtually all extant analyses of South Korean political economy is something that Marx referred to as the “production in general” view. This is the widespread yet erroneous belief that there is only one way to produce things – i.e., there are universally valid “laws” of economy¹⁸ – and that the historical challenge of each society is one of mere *distribution*. In following this assumption, the structuring social forms peculiar to any given society – in our case *capitalist production*’s forms like value and abstract labor – are overlooked and only their surface expressions are recognized or analyzed (i.e., prices and wages). What follows from this is a terrain of “debate” that accepts precisely what needs to be explained, arguing rather narrowly about how these accepted social forms and categories can be manipulated to produce “growth” or satisfy this or that group’s interests. Given the social turmoil of South Korea’s “modernization” process and its contradictory outcomes that we outlined in the previous chapter, what is

¹⁸ What we are referring to here is the “production” of *surplus value*, not material production in the narrow sense.

desperately needed is a critical historical analysis of *how those categories came to dominate in the first place*, how they have played themselves out historically, and with what likely future consequences.

Confronting the ambivalence of the South Korean experience head-on, this dissertation attempts to reveal the deep structures driving the seeming contradictory outcomes through a combination of historical and theoretical considerations, informed by the work of a select group of Marxian thinkers. As such, roughly equal attention will be devoted to tracing the historical emergence of capitalism's specific social forms in (South) Korea – as informed by the national, regional, and global contexts in which they emerged – and more theoretical considerations about their qualitative distinctness and socio-ecological significance. It is an interdisciplinary analysis that asserts that both the positive and negative aspects of South Korea's capitalist revolution stem from the introduction of *value relations* there, as understood in Marx's technical sense of that term, and argues that this revolutionary manner of "solving the economic problem" has become increasingly anachronistic as a way of negotiating the metabolic relation between humanity and nature.

Critical Reflections on Method

Orthodox Marxism does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx's investigations. It is not the "belief" in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a "sacred" book. On the contrary, *orthodoxy refers exclusively to method.*

Georg Lukacs (1971, 1)

In contemporary academia, discussions of method typically focus on quantitative aspects. Where qualitative aspects are broached, it is common to focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the dominant *forms of evidence*(-gathering) used in each field, for example in history (archives), anthropology (ethnographies), sociology (statistics). The problem is that much of these discussions follow what Harvey (1974) referred to as the "ethical neutrality" assumption of

today's mainstream "scientific" methods. Based on such a belief, questions of method become of secondary importance, since it is presumably only the *results* that matter. What concerned Harvey was the way in which the dominant methodological approaches of the day – in his case reflecting upon how Malthus's "logical empiricism" and Ricardo's "abstract analytics" (269) bore on the population-resources problem – overlooked the fact that the choice of method often largely predetermines the results that followed from them.

The focus of this section, then, is largely philosophical in character, outlining the qualitative assumptions that undergird the analysis that follows in this work. By force of circumstance, the discussion that follows is necessarily truncated. Nevertheless, we cover a variety of methodological issues that include, *inter alia*: the philosophy of internal relations, Marx as a *historical* materialist, his distinct method of abstraction and tendency to "study history backwards," stress on the significance of social form analysis, and the importance of taking an "interdisciplinary" approach to socio-ecological issues.

The Philosophy of Internal Relations

It is widely known that Marx supposedly adhered to a dialectical method, though what exactly that entailed and the degree to which this departed significantly from mainstream methods is not always well understood. Indeed, in most common renditions of his method, reference is made to a simplistic, schematic structure – thesis, antithesis, synthesis – despite the fact that one cannot find any references to this sort of mechanical formulation in the writings of either Marx or Hegel, from whom Marx largely derived it. A far more rigorous interpretation of Marx's dialectical method asserts that it proceeds from the "two legs" of a philosophy of internal relations and a specific process of abstraction (Ollman 2003, 51). While a lengthy exposition of

dialectics in Marx need not detain us here,¹⁹ we will nonetheless discuss these two aspects as they inform our methodological approach.

Marx was deeply influenced by his engagement with the writings of Spinoza, Leibniz, and, especially, Hegel. Despite his disagreements with these thinkers on a host of specific issues, he never abandoned their belief and effort to seek “the meanings of things and terms in relations inside wholes” (Peet 1998, 88) – that is, he shared their adherence to a philosophy of internal relations. What this means, in short, is that, rather than functioning as means of mere description, the theoretical categories that Marx deploys should be understood as “forms of expression or manifestations of social existence.” Richard Peet (1998, 87) summarizes this approach well when he writes:

In Marx, any social factor or activity (working, thinking) is composed of many tied facets or parts and is thought of as a definite social relation; hence, the concept representing this factor (labor, consciousness) must convey these facets and ties as part of its meaning. While in common-sense understanding a social factor is independent of others, for Marx, the relations between factors are internal to them, so that when a relation changes, the factor becomes something else: the term “relation” thus refers to the factor and its connections, or the factor in its relations. In this view, *interaction is inneraction* – Marx studies the inner connections between things. When something “determines” or “causes” something else, in a philosophy of internal relations this merely emphasizes one particular link or influence, for each factor develops under the direct and indirect influence of everything else. (emphasis added)

In many ways, a philosophy of internal relations is both intuitive and powerful, despite the Western educational systems’ attempts to “train” us away from this perspective.²⁰ For instance,

¹⁹ For those interested in a deeper discussion of dialectics, there are a number of good places to start in this vast and complex literature (e.g., Harvey 1996, Chapter 2; Ollman 1993 and 2003).

²⁰ As Harvey (2010, 12) notes: “One of the curious things about our educational system ... is that the better trained you are in a discipline, the less used to dialectical method you’re likely to be. In fact, young children are very dialectical; they see everything in motion, in contradictions and transformations. We have to put an immense effort into training kids out of being good dialecticians. Marx wants to recover the intuitive power of the dialectical method and put it to work in understanding how everything is in *process*, everything is in *motion*.”

as Ollman (2003, 36) asserts, “No one would deny that things appear and function as they do because of their spatial-temporal ties with other things, including man as a creature with both physical and social characteristics. To conceive of things as [internal] Relations is simply to interiorize this interdependence.”

This initially intuitive approach differs greatly, however, from today’s dominant “common sense” view that is based on a philosophy of *external* relations. From this latter perspective, there are objects and actors that exist in the world independently of their context. Like billiard balls on a table, each one is taken to be independent and self-contained, regardless of their (shifting) relations to the others, their frequent collisions, the fluctuating number of balls in play, and the like. By contrast, a philosophy of internal relations stresses how the *context* of any given “thing” is indispensable to what it is. A seemingly obvious and independent object such as a book, according to this view, only has social significance and existence from within the matrix of relations in which it is embedded – from the lamp on a reader’s desk (and the infrastructure making this possible!) that allows one to read it, to the social, economic, and educational practices that made the book’s production (and intelligibility) possible etc. (Ollman 2003, 37).

Given our attention here to both the historical specificity of capitalism’s forms, as well as the peculiar nature-society relations it produces (and through which it is produced), a word must be said on Marx’s method regarding 1) whether he considered dialectics historically general or determinate and 2) in either case, whether this logic applies to the extra-human world (i.e., nature). In producing writings such as *The Dialectics of Nature*, it is obvious that Engels believed that dialectics applied to both society and nature, in a shifting yet transhistorical sense: as he famously stated in his polemic *Anti-Dühring*, “Nature is the truth of dialectics.” Derek

Sayer (1987, 152n5), however, attributes this view to Marx as well, which he mentions only to distinguish his preference for confining dialectics' applicability to the social world only, in accordance with what he finds to be the persuasive views of Wittgenstein and others. As with most things, one can find within Marx's voluminous writings textual support for this assertion. For example, in discussing the inner-connections between two physical objects in the natural world, Marx mentions how, somewhat counter-intuitively for most Westerners today, "The sun is the object of the plant – an indispensable object to it, confirming its life – just as the plant is an object of the sun, being an expression of the life-awakening power of the sun, of the sun's objective essential power." He adds that "A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a natural being and plays no part in the system of nature" (Ollman 2003, 38). Departing from both of the views above, Moishe Postone rejects the views of Marxists that hold up something called "*the*" dialectic as (ontologically) transhistorical, whether pertaining to the natural (Engels) or socio-historical (Lukacs 1971) worlds. Rather, he holds that dialectics is the appropriate method for capitalism only, a mode of production driven by the contradictory character inherent to its basic "cell form" – i.e., the commodity – and the tension between the concrete and abstract forms of labor contained therein. As such, he argues that dialectics should not be deployed for natural phenomena, nor for non- or post-capitalist modes of production (Postone 1993, 139-140).

The purpose of distinguishing between Marx's philosophy of internal relations and the now-dominant external relations view is that it is precisely the failure to recognize this fact that is at the center of many misinterpretations of Marx's work, by both non-Marxists and many sympathetic to his work (Peet 1998, 87; Cohen 1978, 22).²¹ It is not our aim to enumerate these

²¹ But how do we explain the reticence of mainstream scholars to engage with the philosophy of internal relations? Ollman follows Marx's view that to do so would be to admit the historically transitory character of bourgeois relations of production, where, arguably, the advent and

here, though some of these issues will indeed emerge throughout this work. The more apposite point at the moment, however, is how this issue bears on South Korea as our primary object of analysis. On the one hand, since it conforms to the dominant trend of doing “national” histories, it may be erroneously surmised that the following work presents South Korea as a “case study” of post-World War II development. On the other hand, given our adherence to Marx’s philosophy of internal relations, any narrowly “national” experience is always informed by, and simultaneously informs, the whole (i.e., “global”) picture. That is, the interpenetrating character of the local and the global means that “universal” aspects of the whole are always bearing down on its heterogeneous “local” incarnations, while the obverse is equally the case.²² Examining South Korea, then, is a way of reflecting critically upon the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production *as a whole*, as well as where it is likely heading in a socio-ecological sense. It is not just a question of scalar dialectics, but the social forms through which these historical geographies play themselves out are internally related, even if this fact is rarely recognized. For example, in one of only a mere handful of works dealing with South Korean development from a (moderately) critical socio-ecological perspective, Byun’s (1983) adherence to an external

continuing justifications of neo-classical economic theory has been to posit capitalism’s social forms as transhistorically valid (i.e., production in general). In the third volume of *Theories of Surplus Value*, for instance, Marx (1971, 274) remarks, “The economists do not conceive of capital as a Relation. They cannot do so without at the same time conceiving of it as a historical transitory, i.e., a relative – not an absolute – form of production.”

²² Within the geographical literature, this notion has been expressed by a number of scholars who, not surprisingly, are influenced by Marx. Doreen Massey’s notion of a “global sense of place” (Cresswell, 2004) and Erik Swyngedouw’s concept of “glocalization” (Gregory 2009, 312) represent two of the more well-known versions of this ideas that stresses the dialectic of the universal and the particular, specifically as it pertains to spatial dynamics. This idea has been stressed recently in the Asian studies literature. For example, as Song and Hae (2019) assert following the work of Mizoguchi and Chen, the study of a place anywhere on earth ‘impl[ies] one route toward an understanding of world history’; therefore, for example, “the study of China...transcends China proper” (Chen 2010, 252-253).

relations view leads him to see the issues of capitalist economic growth and environmental degradation as fundamentally distinct. The money form (i.e., exchange value), for example, would be seen as an unproblematic way of pursuing development. The problem for him, rather, is with a seeming ideological faith in “growth” as the catch-all measure of well-being. It did not occur to him to consider how capital accumulation – grounded as it is in a contradictory “web of value of forms” (Murray 2016) – might be structurally oblivious to natural conditions.

Marx’s Method of Abstraction

Unlike when analyzing the physical environment, the social world and the overwhelming complexity inherent in the actions of its countless atomistic and willful agents cannot be subjected to the methods prevalent in fields such as physics or chemistry. In its place must be the conscious and critical exercise of dividing the heteronomous “real concrete” relations of society into “thought concrete” forms that temporarily allow the analyst to view certain partial truths about the whole that would otherwise be hidden from view due to the sheer complexity of modern societies. This is most commonly referred to as Marx’s method of abstraction; as he states in the Preface to the First Edition of *Capital* (Volume 1): “[I]n the analysis of economic forms, neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. The power of abstraction must replace both” (1990, 90). What is important to note is that we all engage in the process of abstraction countless times every day; indeed, it would be impossible to make sense and function in the world without doing so. Think for example of how our ancestors, faced with the ambivalence of the “omnivore’s dilemma” (Pollan 2006), divided the unbelievably complex world of plant vegetation into the simplistic dichotomy of edible/inedible (i.e., safe/poisonous) varieties – or less threateningly, when you pay particular attention to the bass line or vocals of your favorite song, allowing the other instruments unconsciously to fade into the background.

The main difference in Marx's case is that he abstracted deliberately and self-critically, with full awareness that his given abstractions were in some sense arbitrary and never represented a complete account of the social context or phenomenon under consideration. Most of us, by contrast, are rather lazy in our process of abstraction, and would not necessarily even register that it is taking place. Instead, the categories through which people attempt to make sense of the world – usually done through binary oppositions such as Christian/non-Christian, gay/straight, developed/undeveloped etc. – are taken for granted and viewed as self-explanatory, “true” distinctions.

Taking Heraclitus's quip that one can never step into the same river twice seriously, a fundamental difference between Marx's approach and mainstream ones of today is that change is considered to be of the essence of virtually all phenomena. As Ollman (2003, 66) explains:

With stability used to qualify change rather than the reverse, Marx – unlike most modern social scientists – did not and could not study why things change (with the implication that change is external to what they are, something that happens to them). Given that change is always a part of what things are, his research problem could only be *how*, *when*, and *into what* they change and *why they sometimes appear not to (ideology)*.

Marx's process of abstraction is three-sided.²³ The first aspect is called abstractions of *extension*, which involves delineating spatio-temporal boundaries to an analysis. For instance, Cumings' classic two-volume work on post-World War II Korea, *The Origins of the Korean War* (1981, 1990), sets the Korean peninsula as a whole between the years 1945-1950 as its mode of extension. As far as scholars are consciously aware of the process of abstraction, those of extension are the most consciously selected. In terms of the present analysis, it considers (South) Korea between the years 1910 and 1990, rooting its “national” experience in the *regional* dynamics of the Japanese colonial period (Chapter 3) and US-led post-1945 *global* “development

²³ For an extended discussion of Marx's three modes of abstraction, see Ollman 2003, 73-111.

project” (Chapter 4). Establishing firm spatio-temporal boundaries is a limiting yet necessary task, which aids one in avoiding the trap of infinite regress in attempting to trace the origins of the problematic under examination.

The second aspect of Marx’s process of abstraction, the most important one, deals with *levels of generality*. Just as a microscope allows one to examine a particular object at various degrees of magnification, none of which is any “truer” than the others, an object of inquiry can be abstracted in such a way as to showcase its specific features, those features that disclose it as part of class societies generally speaking, or those that stress its place within nature. In enumerating the levels of generality that Marx utilizes and moves between, Ollman includes seven, focusing on features that are (2003, 88-89): 1) unique to a specific individual or situation; 2) general to people and their activities as members of a particular era of capitalist society, for instance the qualities and reason(s) we would refer to someone as a computer programmer or assembly line worker; 3) applicable to capitalism in general, which widens the focus to render one’s individual features (level 1) or specific occupation (level 2) irrelevant to the analysis and instead focuses on that individual’s role as a *typical* worker under the capitalist mode of production (i.e., as wage-laborer); 4) characteristic of class societies in general, be it slavery, feudalism, capitalism, Stalinism etc.; 5) common to human society in all of its historically-geographically specific permutations; 6) shared by all of those creatures of the animal world (humans included); and 7) (stress) our qualities as a material part of nature (e.g., possessing extension, weight, biological characteristics etc.). Paolucci (2007, 114) offers a diagram of Ollman’s discussion of Marx’s levels of generality, which we have adapted for our purposes:

Marx's Levels of Generality and their Corresponding Conceptual Approaches

Level of Generality	Conditions of Possibility	Conceptual Approach
7. <i>Traits Humans Share with Nature</i> Matter, motion, speed, weight		<i>Naturalism</i>
6. <i>Humans as animals</i> Reproduction, food, emotion, etc.		<i>Species-Being</i>
5. <i>Human Society in General</i> Material base and ideal superstructures		<i>Historical and Materialist Analysis</i>
4. <i>Class Societies</i> Ruling and laboring classes, states, ideology		<i>Class Analysis</i>
3. <i>Capitalist Mode of Production</i> Essential structures, forms and tendencies		<i>Abstract Political Economy (i.e. "laws of motion")</i>
2. <i>Capitalism's Recent Era(s)</i> Rising and falling powers, wars, policies (ex. neoliberalization) etc.		<i>Concrete Political Economy (ex. neoclassical economics)</i>
1. <i>Specific Individuals and Events</i> Names, persons, dates etc. in the present		<i>Action Informed by Political Economy</i>

Note that each level of generality establishes certain limits – i.e., “conditions of possibility” – within which the “agents” in question can maneuver, as well as the dialectical interactions that can take place between levels (as signified by the arrows). Notice also that each level of generality has associated with it a particular *conceptual strategy*. Our focus will be overwhelmingly on level 3, so the conceptual strategy most apt is that of *abstract political economy*. This sort of analysis is pursued within the more technical and philosophical Marxian debates – for example, “systematic dialectics” (e.g., Arthur 2002) – but the insights derived are rarely (if ever) brought to bear on concrete historical-geographical issues.

Abstractions at the level of generality are those that most scholars fail to consider deliberately. As such, several important points should be noted about them. First, the various features that come into view at any given level of generality are always simultaneously present; however, their visibility only becomes possible when one abstracts in this specific way, whether consciously or unconsciously. Second, a crucial difference between Marx’s way of proceeding

and most mainstream scholars is that, in his “mature” political-economic conceptual theorizing, he spends most of his time analyzing at the third level of generality (capitalism in general), with occasional sidebars that proceed from levels 2 and 4. Mainstream scholars, by contrast, focus overwhelmingly on individuals (level 1) – that is, the “great men of history” style of historiography that reigned up to World War II – or humanity in general (level 5). The first proclivity is related to the ideology of bourgeois individualism as related to private property rights etc., whereas the latter stems from attempts to trans-historicize what are undoubtedly historically specific features of capitalism, where “human greed” is purportedly a characteristic of humanity in the abstract that cannot be transcended. Third, and by extension of the previous point, a major source of misunderstanding stems from the fact that competing scholars, whose specific views are purportedly diametrically opposed, are in fact complementary arguments that seem antagonistic only because they proceed, and therefore privilege, a certain level of generality.²⁴

The third aspect of Marx’s mode of abstraction deals with the particular *vantage point* from which the analysis proceeds (in general, or at various points). The world appears very different depending upon the perspective through which you (choose to) view it. As Ollman (2003, 100) explains:

A vantage point sets up a perspective that colors everything that falls into it, establishing order, hierarchy, and priorities, distributing values, meanings, and degrees of relevance, and asserting a distinctive coherence between the parts. Within a given perspective, some processes and connections will appear large, some obvious, some important; others will appear small, insignificant, and irrelevant; and some will even be invisible.

²⁴ Ollman concludes this important essay by enumerating various well-known debates within Marxism where this was the case – e.g., the famous Poulantzas-Miliband debate regarding the role of the state in capitalist societies (2003, 110-111).

Even when limiting an analysis to the capitalist class only, the industrial circuit of capital contains various “moments” whose interests are represented and pursued by actors corresponding to that particular fraction of capital – merchant, finance, production etc. The conclusions drawn about the economy as a whole will differ significantly depending upon which “window” (i.e., vantage point) of the economy through which one views it (Harvey 1982). Although abstractions of extension, (level of) generality, and vantage point are seemingly three choices, their interconnections and the influence one decision has on the others makes it in fact three sides of the same decision (Ollman 2003, 101).

What is unique about the present analysis is that the level of generality and vantage point chosen depart significantly from extant analyses of political-economic phenomena in postwar South Korea. Whereas most works, even those that take a critical position towards the triumphalist “miracle” narrative, usually proceed from a denunciation of particularly nefarious characters like Park Chung Hee (level of generality #1), or catalogue a list of injustices incurred from the standpoint of marginalized groups that stemmed from the neoliberalization of society after the Asian economic crisis of 1997-1998 (level of generality #2). The rationale behind focusing on level of generality 3 (capitalism in general) in conjunction with level 2 (the developmental statist period) – from the vantage points of the state-capital nexus and nascent working class as they negotiate imperatives of proliferating value relations – is to demonstrate how, despite the uneven material outcomes of the development process, South Korea’s capitalist revolution subordinated *all* groups to the imperatives of accumulation. Drawing attention to the plight of particularly marginalized groups may trigger awareness and, therefore, an improvement in their living and/or working conditions, but the structuring forms that trigger these issues in the first place remain obscured. These can only be grasped through an analysis of capitalism’s core

structuring forms (i.e., the commodity, value, capital, wage-labor etc.) outside of a consideration of capital's historically shifting forms (i.e., Keynesianism, neoliberalism etc.).

Studying History Backwards

A much-neglected aspect of Marx's materialist conception of history, one central to his method of *inquiry*, is what Ollman refers to as his tendency to study history "backwards." This idea is revealed in Marx's often quoted, though seldom appreciated for its methodological implications, statement that "The anatomy of the human being is a key to the anatomy of the ape The bourgeois economy furnishes a key to ancient economy, etc." (Ollman 2003, 118). Marx's point here is not to force the past into a teleological narrative that glorifies the present and denies the possibility of a host of contingent outcomes that might have been. Rather, it seeks to grasp how certain aspects that are deemed significant in the present time came to be – inquiring, in other words, into the necessary *preconditions* for the emergence of the present state of things. So instead of beginning at some time in the past and merely narrating or describing the sequence of events that unfolded up to the present, Marx begins with the present conjuncture and seeks to trace the historical lineages of some phenomenon deemed worthy of analysis. This approach has been deployed – whether following Marx's lead consciously or not – in some of the best *critical* accounts of world history and historical sociology, for example, Perry Anderson's *Lineages of the Absolutist States* (1974). But it is an approach that is certainly in the minority, even within critical scholarship.

A central reason for steering away from this sort of analysis, perhaps, stems from its seeming determinism and/or reductionism, making the present seem inevitable and thereby undermining the sense of historical contingency and personal agency of the actors involved. But by starting with an *already existing* result or state of affairs, Marx's approach effectively seeks to

uncover the “necessity of a *fait accompli*,” something that is only discoverable retrospectively. This leads Ollman to make an important distinction: “Necessity read backward into the past [i.e., Marx’s approach] is of an altogether different order than the necessity that begins in the past and follows a predetermined path into the future [i.e., functionalism]” (2003, 119).²⁵

The issue of whether Marx’s approach was functionalist is important to address. Here we follow Postone’s claim that, given Marx’s focus on historically specific social forms, his work did not privilege “the economy,” “labor,” or special interest groups above all else. Despite such functionalist perspectives’ ability to shed light on *how* the actions of this or that group worked to further the interests of the upper classes, contribute to accumulation and the like at certain historical moments, what they cannot do is disclose the social context in which, say, certain scientific paradigms and conceptions of space-time arose to inform and structure those “interests” (1993, 176).

A central argument of this work is that South Korea emerged in the late-1960s (and thereafter) as a regime characterized by what Marx calls *real subsumption* of labor under capital. This will be discussed in greater detail later on, but we can foreground that discussion here by stressing how this fact is what explains several peculiarities of the South Korean experience: 1) it has been the key to its capitalist dynamism; 2) it has been simultaneously and unavoidably, however, also the underlying source of many of the socio-ecological challenges that have plagued the country (as outlined in the previous chapter); and 3) it is what separates it – and the

²⁵ Otherwise, as Arnold Toynbee lamented regarding the views of people like Henry Ford, “history is just one damn thing after another” – equally valid happenstance events, interesting only as historical tidbits of information for the consumption of those with the wherewithal and motivation to do so.

other handful of regimes of real subsumption in the non-West (e.g., Japan and Taiwan) – from the rest of the world’s “developing” nations.²⁶

As mentioned above, a central aim of this work, then, is to provide an account that traces the origins of this regime of real subsumption, a task which informs our decision to appropriate Marx’s method of abstraction, along with selecting the particular levels of extension, generality, and vantage point that are deployed in what follows. An important caveat to this study is therefore this: to stress the importance of value relations and Marxist dialectical method to the study of postwar South Korea is not to pour it into a functionalist mold or to reduce the complexity of the experience to some predictable formula. All manner of contingent outcomes *could have* occurred, based on shifting class forces and the like, all the while still satisfying the structural imperatives of accumulation (value relations) that increasingly permeated postwar South Korean society. Like Marx’s strategy in *Capital*, our analysis adheres to an abstract, neat two-class structure of capital and wage-labor, as mediated by the state, in order to glean the socio-ecological dynamics that were unleashed on the peninsula and their significance. It is a particular angle of vision chosen deliberately to reveal important insights, while at no time claiming to capture the South Korean experience as a whole.²⁷ This aim necessitates our reading (South) Korean history “backwards.”

²⁶ This is aside from those factors already mentioned in the extant literature that made the Asian Tiger experience unique and ungeneralizable, such as the Cold War context driving US and Japanese largesse towards its Pacific allies.

²⁷ In *The Limits to Capital*, Harvey (1982, 26) makes this distinction clear:

When Marx writes about actual historical events he uses broader, more numerous and more flexible class categories. In the historical passages in *Capital* for example, we find the capitalist class treated as one element within the ruling classes in society, while the bourgeoisie means something different again. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, which is often held up as a model of Marx's historical analysis in action, we find the events in France of 1848-51 analysed in terms of lumpenproletariat, industrial proletariat, a petite bourgeoisie, a capitalist class factionalized into industrialists and

The Production of Nature

The dominant interpretations of nature-society relations under capitalism, even when taking a critical bent, have fallen largely into two camps: naturalism and (social) constructionism (Castree 2000, 31; Braun and Castree 2001). Despite their differences, however, both perspectives share a set of assumptions whose defining features have been summarized by Moore (2015, 6) as those pertaining to what he labels “Green Thought”: “the reduction of humanity to a unified actor; the reduction of market, production, political, and cultural relations to ‘social’ relations; and the conceptualization of Nature as independent of humans.”

We will have recourse to draw repeatedly on Moore’s world-ecology perspective throughout this work, but a fundamental starting point informing his anti-dualistic perspective follows the pathbreaking work of the late critical human geographer Neil Smith, with his notion of the “production of nature.” What does Smith mean exactly in invoking this seemingly paradoxical phrase? As Castree (2000) has clarified, he is certainly *not* suggesting that somehow “capitalism determines every aspect of the natural world as it transforms it: right down to each particle of natural stuff,” such as the growth of a tree (19). Rather, the term is meant to remind us all of the “unassailable fact that humans come to know [and engage with] the rest of nature through conscious and creative life activity” (Moore 2011 a, 6). In this, Smith follows Marx’s (1990, 290) argument regarding humans’ embeddedness within, and reliance upon, the rest of nature, which all takes place via the labor process regardless of the *form* of society in question:

The labour process is purposeful activity aimed at the production of *use-values*. It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of [humanity]. *It is the*

financiers, a landed aristocracy and a peasant class. All of this is a far cry from the neat two-class analytics laid out in much of *Capital*. Indeed, it can often be perplexing for a reader used to Marx’s approach in works like *Capital* to witness the absence of any of the core concepts contained in that work in his historical and political writings.

universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live.

The question for Smith, then, is not *if* humans produce nature, but *how* this is undertaken under historically specific social formations. One may wonder, therefore, how humanity's position within nature ever became to seemly cordoned off from the "web of life" in which it is inescapably ensconced? Smith argues that, while it is true that the rise and spread of capitalism has undeniably brought about a massive quantitative increase in the appropriation of (extra-human) nature, the truly revolutionary transformation occurred with respect to the new *qualitative* nature-society relations that this entailed (Castree 2000, 26). For Smith, the Hegelian distinction between a so-called "first" nature (untouched by human activity) and the "second" nature that humans have built on top (or within) it no longer pertains under capitalism. This was brought about by the revolutionary (generalized) shift from production for use to production for exchange that was ushered in with the rise of capitalism. In Smith's words:

The development of capitalism ... involves not just a quantitative but a qualitative development in the relation with nature. It is not merely a linear expansion of human control over nature, an enlargement of the domain of second nature at the expense of the first. With the production of nature at a world scale, nature is progressively produced from within and as part of the so-called second nature. The first nature is deprived of its firstness, its originality. The source of this qualitative change in the relation with nature lies in the altered relation between use-value and exchange-value.

With the increasing generalization of capitalism's historically specific social forms, (*capitalist*) humanity's relation with nature is reduced above all else to an exchange-value relation. The material, sensual world of nature and biophysical processes still exist, but do so in the realm of use-values, which is increasingly subsumed under the abstract, quantitative logic of the accumulation process (Smith 2008, 77-78). It is for this reason that Smith states that Marx's often-quoted phrase of the tendency under capitalism to move from the abstract to the concrete

was not merely a “nice conceptual idea that [he] dreamed up”; rather, it is a “perpetual translation actually achieved in the relation with nature under capitalism” (70). This is achieved through the proliferation of capitalism’s peculiar measure of wealth and form of social mediation – i.e., value – a topic that will be discussed in detail in a future section. For now, it suffices to say that, according to Smith, all of this makes for a “very complex determination of the relation with nature – nature as object of production, human nature, the reproduction process, human consciousness” (70-71).

As Ekers and Prudham (2017) comment, Smith’s thesis pinpoints what they call the “capitalist law of nature,” which is a “crucial and highly original insight” that has been underappreciated (10-11). Indeed, the insights to be derived from it are manifold (Castree 1995, 19; Ekers and Prudham 2017, 11). The primary contribution is that it dissolves the problematic nature-society dualism mentioned at the outset of this section, demonstrating how it is the peculiar social relations of capitalism itself that brought about the nature-society binary in the first place. Moreover, from this perspective it allows us to move past the widespread, erroneous universal conception of nature as pristine and untouched by humanity. Another strength of Smith’s approach is that it is fundamentally historicist, both in terms of what is commonly viewed as “first” and “second” nature, showing how they too are internally related and historically shifting. Politically, moreover, this opens up both theoretical and practical possibilities for altering nature-society relations in more equitable, just, and (actually) sustainable ways. If any of these are to be realized, however, it is imperative that we draw from Marx’s greatest strength: his attention to, and clinical dissection of, social forms.

Marx as *Historical* Materialist: The Significance of Social Form

The capitalist process of production is a historically specific form of the social production process in general. This last is both a production process of the material conditions of existence

for human life, and a process, proceeding in specific economic and historical relations of production, that produces and reproduces these relations of production themselves, and with them the bearers of this process, their material conditions of existence, and their mutual relationships, i.e., the *specific economic form* of their society.
- Marx (1991b, 957)

The object of this study is an analysis of the postwar South Korean political economy – or to put it in its more celebratory language, its “development” or “modernization” – from the sort of Marxian perspective described up to this point. There are, of course, as many competing schools of Marxism as one could wish to count. The foci of these various interpretations single out specific aspects of Marx’s thought that are purported to be decisive, and the problematics and conclusions that flow therefrom reflect these choices. Setting aside for now the specific emphases of Marx and his subsequent followers in terms of analyzing concrete political and economic phenomena, what is decisive for us about Marx’s approach is that he was, above all, an investigator of *historically specific social forms*. As Patrick Murray argues (2016, 1), Marx’s unwavering fixation on social forms is the simplest and “most profound lesson of historical materialism,” although one that is widely overlooked. As early as 1845, this was evident, as in the following passage from *The German Ideology* (co-written with Engels):

This mode of production [i.e., capitalism] must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a *definite form of activity* of these individuals, a *definite form* of expressing their life, a *definite mode of life* on their part. (emphases added)

Fast forward more than a decade and we see in Marx’s preparatory draft to *Capital* (i.e., *Grundrisse* 1857-1858) his reiteration of this most central tenet of *historical* materialism: “All production is appropriation of nature by an individual within and *through a particular form* of society” (Marx 1973, 87). Thus, although all human societies must “produce nature” through individual and collective forms of labor (as we saw in the previous section) due to their

inescapable enmeshment in the web of life, the particular form this takes – that is, the social categories/forms through which this accomplished – is historically and geographically specific.

This rather self-evident yet crucial observation is one that has been almost universally overlooked by the vast interdisciplinary literature that we reviewed in the previous chapter. That is to say, the socio-ecologically revolutionary social forms that became increasingly generalized since metastasizing beyond Britain in the late 18th century – i.e., commodity, value, capital, wage-labor etc. – are widely taken to be categories with transhistorical applicability and validity. This trend was plain to see in the work of famous classical political economists as well, where the laws of production were deemed to be fixed while those of distribution were historically mutable. John Stuart Mill, for instance, reveals this widespread but erroneous assumption in the following assertion: “the laws and conditions of the production of wealth partake of the character of physical truths. ... It is not so with distribution of wealth. That is a matter of human institutions solely.” It is precisely this false separation that Marx rejects (Postone 1993, 22): “The ‘laws and conditions’ of the production of wealth and the laws of the ‘distribution of wealth’ are the same laws under different forms, and both change, undergo the same historic process; are as such only moments of a historic process” (1973, 832).

In this work, we will refer to this tendency to transhistoricize capitalism’s historically specific social forms as the “production in general” view. We will have the opportunity to discuss the essence of capital(ism) in the later chapters of this work; nevertheless, a preliminary word can be said about a main source of the “production in general” view. Regarding the three circuits of capital – i.e., money (M...M’), production (P...P’), and (capitalistically produced) commodity (C’...C’’) – people’s proclivity to focus on the second circuit (i.e., production) leads

them to draw the erroneous conclusion that capitalist production is all about the amassing of wealth rather than money. As Marx put it:

The general form of the movement P...P' is the form of reproduction, and does not indicate, as does M...M', that valorization [making money] is the purpose of the process. For this reason, classical economics found it all the more easy to ignore the specifically capitalist form of the production process, and to present production as such as the purpose of the process – to produce as much and as cheaply as possible, and to exchange the product for as many other products as possible (Marx 1991a, 172; Murray 1997, 26).

In any case, within a certain strand of Marxian thinking, such as the value-form school (Rubin 1973) and systematic dialectics approach (Arthur 2002), overcoming this widespread erroneous view to focus on the significance of social form, as Marx intended, is well heeded.

Take, for instance, the following comments made by Christopher Arthur (2002):

While the mainstream position in Marxist theory has read concepts such as value, socially necessary labour time and abstract labour, largely in a technical sense, I adhere to the growing minority that centralises the idea of *social form*, insisting that all such categories have to be explicated within an account of specifically capitalist social forms of production and exchange. (39)

However, these are exceptions to the rule, especially vis-a-vis the sorts of literature that we are primarily engaged with critically reinterpreting in this work. Within Marxism itself, this foundational starting point for Marx's thinking is repeatedly overlooked. It is for this reason that Murray (2016) stresses how "terms such as 'Marxist economics' or 'Marxist political economy' are oxymorons" (97), since Marx was not a radical political economist, but rather a radical critic of political economy (11). That is, Marx was not setting out in *Capital* (and other works) to offer an alternative perspective on capitalism so as to render it more rational, equitable and the like; rather, as the subtitle of *Capital* makes clear (i.e., "A Critique of Political Economy"), his aim was to unmask and problematize the specific social forms through which capitalism mediates its relation *in nature* (Moore 2015).

As this is a work written in the spirit of Moore's world-ecology approach, the socio-ecological aspects will emerge gradually in the course of the analysis. It is important to mention, however, that within environmental history, too, there is a near universal tendency merely to describe (socio-)ecological content rather than to unpack the specific forms mediating that content. To be sure, it was not only Marx who appreciated the profound significance of (social) forms. This was especially true within the German philosophical tradition – from Kant to Hegel, of course, but also into the twentieth century. For example, Georg Simmel was an analyst obsessed with the power of forms – in particular with the ambivalent legacy of the generalization of money in modern capitalist societies – but more generally, too, as in the following remarks: “life can express itself and realize its freedom only through forms; yet forms must necessarily suffocate life and obstruct freedom”; and “life is always in latent opposition to forms.” It is for this reason that Murray (1997), in his discussion of Simmel's legacy, draws the following conclusion: “Social forms, then, are not just something ‘out there’; they matter all the way down to the depths of our soul, determining our manners of thinking, perceiving, feeling, desiring” (333). This is something completely overlooked by our best (English-language) environmental historians and historical geographers: for, to conduct “historical research,” it is equally imperative to historicize the social forms doing the mediating as it is to describe the socio-ecological content itself. In this sense, then, a major weakness of the extant literature in these fields is that they uncritically make use of categories that they do not adequately comprehend. These forms – such as commodity, value, capital, wage-labor etc. – are the “cell forms” of capitalist society as a whole, and it is for this reason that we devote a section of this chapter to unpacking their characteristics and significance.

Interdisciplinarity, Scale, and the Layout of this Work

Before turning to the issue of capitalism's defining social forms, a brief word must be said about the ways in which this study differs in key respects methodologically from most of the extant literature reviewed in Chapter 1. First, the work drawn upon in this critical reinterpretation deliberately makes use of an interdisciplinary set of perspectives – i.e., history, geography, sociology, political science, anthropology, Asian studies etc. Just as the inherently interconnected nature of looming global socio-ecological issues refuse to obey our socially constructed political geographies (i.e., the absolute spaces of “nations” etc.), the problematic legacy of the division of academic labor (instituted first in a generalized way in the late-19th century) has bequeathed to us disciplinary methods, categories and the like that are even more obviously partial than is already unavoidable (given the necessity of the process of abstraction). This has been especially true of the post-World War II era, as Henry Heller (2016) argues:

The departmental organization of learning largely precluded, if it did not entirely block, the ability of academics to see the forest for the trees. It encouraged a kind of tunnel learning and an uncritical pursuit of specialized knowledge largely separated from other disciplines, and disregarded any kind of historically founded, systematic perspective that would allow scholars to conceive of their discipline as part of a larger whole. The goal was to know more and more about less and less. (31-32)

Kees van der Pijl goes further still in describing the function of departmental “specialization,” explaining how this trend represented a “crucial mutation in Western intellectual life.”

According to him:

By setting the parameters of legitimate speculation about society for the cadre trained in higher education, it is a key transmission-belt by which the dominant order of society is being reproduced. Obeying the strictures of the disciplinary division of labor is a precondition for the hegemony of the liberal order ... The emergence of the “disciplines” through which a more comprehensive, class-discipline is maintained (ever more so as the middle-class cadre, whose allegiance to Western pre-eminence and the capitalist economy is primarily ideological, grows in number) was itself a response to the rise of the labor movement, Marxism, and the spectre of socialist revolution. (*Ibid.* 32)

Whether this trend was consciously orchestrated by the political-economic elite, or was simply an unintended consequence of an increasing division of labor in society more generally, it is undeniable that disciplinary boundaries and tendencies have done as much to constrain, rather than yield, more meaningful, politically pertinent and holistic knowledge. It is one of the distinctive characteristics of Marx's approach, one that has become increasingly abandoned since his time, to think across (and in tension with) various branches of learning. Quoting Marx, David Harvey (1996, 76) points out his proclivity for "rub[bing] together conceptual blocks in such a way that they catch fire." Indeed, as is well-known, it was precisely Marx's critical synthesis of French utopian socialism, English political economy, and German idealist philosophy that allowed him to achieve many of his great insights into the "laws of motion" and history of capitalist societies.

Second, this sort of narrowing of vision is not confined to disciplinary divides, but is also evident in the scalar choices currently reigning in academia. Concomitant with the rise and spread of the nation-state form over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been a tendency to privilege the study of specific countries, especially within the field of history. Donald Worster (1988, 289-290) gets at the ambivalence of this trend: On the one hand, "[s]uch a way of organizing the past has the undeniable virtue of preserving some semblance of order in the face of a threatening chaos – some way of synthesizing all the layers and forces. But at the same time it may set up obstacles to new inquiries that do not neatly fit within national borders, environmental history among them." This is precisely one of the major stumbling blocks in the analysis of economic history and geography, one that our lengthy discussion of "geopolitical explanations" sought to address, in its own way, in Chapter 1.

We will have occasion to discuss this problem of “methodological nationalism” at greater length later on, so here we only signal how this problem has informed the layout of this work. The three chapters that follow “jump scale,” so to speak, to demonstrate how the (Japanese-led) regional, (US-centered) global, and (South Korean) “national” scalar forces shaped the course of South Korea’s economic “miracle.” None of these was decisive on its own. But through this sort of nested-scale strategy, it is hoped that a clearer picture will emerge of how the competing (or complementary) imperatives of each contributed to an outcome – the “miracle,” conceived of as nothing short of a *socio-ecological revolution* – that is typically viewed through narrow national and economic lenses.

One final aspect of this work differs from most other works on the topic. In attempting to fuse theory and history – as a way of attempting to capture what Ollman (2003) calls the “double movement” of capitalism’s organic and historical aspects – the chapters that follow will shift back and forth between (or fuse) these emphases. In his discussion of the challenges of analyzing uneven geographical development under capitalism, Harvey (2006) captures nicely a recurring problem stemming from this challenge:

Theory has to address two issues: first, the rules of capital circulation and accumulation need to be specified and, secondly, a methodology must be established to track how those rules get tangibly expressed and actively re-shaped through socio-ecological processes. The conventional approach to the second question is to insist that case studies be “theoretically informed.” What this all too often means, however, is an introductory and concluding chapter in which the works of major theoreticians are in the forefront of the argument, *separated by a case study in which it is often hard to discern even a trace of influence of any of the theoretical work appealed to at the beginning and the end.* The issue of how theoretical work might in turn be informed and advanced by case study work is rarely if ever addressed. (78; emphasis added)

The approach deployed in this work, as outlined above, was deliberately pursued to address these sorts of challenges. The degree to which we are actually able to achieve this is, as always, up to the reader to decide.

Capitalism's Historically Specific Social Forms: Commodity, Labor-power, Value

The starting point of our critical reinterpretation of (South) Korea's turbulent, yet "miraculous," "twentieth-century odyssey" (Robinson 2007) is our rejection of scholars' widespread, uncritical acceptance of capitalism's historically specific social forms. In these accounts, what we have is not an analysis of the rise and significance of these revolutionary forms in all their socio-ecological ambivalence, but rather arguments regarding how best to manipulate them in the service of that twentieth-century holy grail: economic growth. We argued earlier that a major weakness of the extant literature, shared across the wide swath of social sciences and humanities disciplines, is that they deploy categories that they do not fully comprehend. This is a longstanding problem, one that Marx highlights in the opening chapter of *Capital*. Published over 150 years ago, the following "dated" statement captures the crux of what is wrong with the debates on South Korea's capitalist development as it pertains to their ignorance regarding the novelty of its forms:

Reflection on the forms of human life, hence also scientific analysis of those forms, takes a course directly opposite to their real development. Reflection begins *post festum*, and therefore with the results of the process of development ready to hand. The forms which stamp products as commodities and which are therefore the preliminary requirements for the circulation of commodities, already possess the fixed quality of natural forms of social life before man seeks to give an account, *not of their historical character, for in his eyes they are immutable, but of their content and meaning*. (1990, 168; emphasis added)

From this perspective, then, terms such as capital, commodity, money etc. are simply synonyms for use-value creation, something that, as we have seen, is a "nature-imposed condition of human existence" for all human societies as they appropriate (i.e., "produce") nature in order to live. But this is decidedly not the case, as the discussion in this section emphasizes.

Our methodological discussion in the previous section was a necessary detour due to the pervasiveness of the "production in general" view within mainstream society and, indeed, within

academia as well. McNally (2011, 5) echoes this point: “So normalised has capitalism become in the social sciences, so naturalised its historically unique forms of life, that critical theory requires an armoury of de-familiarising techniques, a set of critical-dialectical procedures, that throw into relief its fantastic and mysterious processes.” Having outlined the unique character of Marx’s methodological approach, however perfunctorily, it is now necessary to demonstrate the socio-historical novelty of some of its structuring social forms – i.e., labor-power, commodity, and value. Not simply narrow “economic” categories, these “express the forms of being [Daseinsformen], the determinations of existence [Existenzbestimmungen] ... of this specific society [i.e., capitalism]” (Marx 1973, 106). As such, the discussion that follows of its central categories represents a sort of “critical ethnography of capitalist society”: one dealing with the “categories that purportedly express the basic forms of social objectivity and subjectivity that structure the social, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions of life in that society, and are themselves constituted by determinate forms of social practice” (Postone 1993, 18).

General and Determinate Abstractions: The Case of Labor

As useful activity directed to the appropriation of natural factors in one form or another, labour is a natural condition of human existence, a condition of material interchange between man and nature, *quite independent of the form of society*. On the other hand, *the labour which posits exchange-value is a specific social form of labour*.
 - Marx (Sayer 1979, 24)

In his book, *Marx’s Theory of Scientific Knowledge*, Patrick Murray (1988, Chapter 10) highlights a crucial but often-neglected issue that has been the source of much confusion in analyses of Marx. This revolves around the distinction between *general* and *determinate* abstractions found in Marx, which is central not only to his criticisms of classical political economy but also to his critique of idealism in earlier works such as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology*. A general abstraction is a concept that is

argued to be common to all societies. In the introduction to *Grundrisse*, Marx discusses an example of this sort of abstraction – “production in general” – which in many ways is the central object of criticism in our reinterpretation of the South Korean story. Marx (1973, 85) tells us, “*Production in general* is an abstraction, but a rational abstraction, insofar as it actually brings out and fixes what is common, and therefore spares us the repetition.” However, given that the general preconditions of production apply to every society, Marx (1973, 88) argues that they are “nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stages of production can be grasped.” Murray (1988, 126) stresses that, although “real science only begins at the nexus of the two logics of abstraction,” in his work Marx was overwhelmingly fixated on analyzing *determinate* abstractions. These are the concepts capturing the relations applicable to the *historically specific* society under investigation – in Marx’s case, capitalism.

This distinction was more than mere philosophical hair-splitting, since Marx had immediate political motivations for his criticisms of general abstractions. He observed, for instance, a tendency in bourgeois writers such as John Stuart Mill to begin their economic analyses with a discussion of the supposedly universal conditions of production. In so doing, however, these economists presented concepts capturing the production relations specific to the bourgeois era as transhistorically valid. Murray (1988, 122-123) contends that Marx was highly critical of the *misuse* of these sorts of abstractions, since it had the effect of naturalizing capitalism’s (exploitative and contradictory) social forms. To take a classic example, bourgeois political economists tended to treat capitalist forms of *production* as transhistorical (general), while positing only forms of *distribution* as subject to historical change (determinate). As Marx complains:

Production is much more – see, e.g., Mill – to be presented in distinction from distribution, etc., as gripped in eternal laws of nature, independent from history, at which

opportunity then, *bourgeois* relations are quite surreptitiously shoved under as irreversible natural laws of society in the abstract. (Murray 1988, 123)

Given Marx's insistence on distinguishing these two logics of abstraction, it is ironic that Marx himself was often accused by his bourgeois critics of committing precisely this same error. Perhaps the most common instance of this phenomenon can be found in the confusions surrounding Marx's ruminations on the role of labor in human history. What follows is an elaboration of how, on the one hand, in formulating their philosophy of historical materialism Marx and Engels argue that labor is the mediator of the socio-ecological dynamic in all societies. On the other hand, Marx analyzes capitalist civilization's peculiar form of wealth – value – which he argues is measured by abstract human labor. This has horrific ecological ramifications due to its necessary abstraction from nature in deriving the (exchange-) values of commodities. This is elucidated in Marx's value theory – widely yet erroneously interpreted as his “labor theory of value” (Harvey 2018). In the former case Marx posits labor as a general abstraction, whereas in the latter labor as the measure of capitalist wealth is theorized as a determinate abstraction applicable only to the capitalist mode of production. A failure to appreciate this key distinction has led many erroneously to charge Marx with offering the labor theory of value as a theory of wealth *per se* (transhistorically), which is precisely the opposite of what Marx was attempting to demonstrate. Let us see how this was the case.

Labor in Historical Materialism (A General Abstraction)

In 1840s Europe, Hegelian idealism held sway as the dominant philosophical perspective. Against this Marx and Engels stressed the essential role that labor plays in humans' relation to nature while working out their materialist conception of history in *The German Ideology*. They write that “The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the *physical organization of these individuals*

and their subsequent relation to the rest of nature.” As such, the “writing of history must always set out from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history *through the action of men* [i.e., labor] (Tucker 1978, 149-150; emphases added).

Decades later their views had not wavered on this foundational tenet of historical materialism. For instance, in Engels’s unfinished essay written in 1876, “The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man,” he reasserts that labor is “the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labor created man himself” (Smith 2008, 56). Marx discusses the same point most thoroughly in his general discussion of “The Labour Process” in the first volume of *Capital*. He argues there that the metabolism (*Stoffwechsel*) between humans and nature is mediated through social labor, regardless of the mode of production specific to any historical epoch:

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the *metabolism* between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces that belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature (283). ... The labour process is purposeful activity aimed at the production of *use-values*. It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man. *It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence*” (290).

These passages clearly demonstrate that in his materialist worldview Marx subscribed to an open, dialectical understanding of the symbiotic relationship between human and extra-human nature, one always mediated through (social) labor. Aside from casting serious doubt on the charge that Marx held Promethean views calling for the human domination of nature, the significance of these statements is that they represent one of the very few instances where Marx

emphasizes a transhistorical category.²⁸ As discussed above, it was precisely due to Marx's awareness of the limitations of such general abstractions that he spent so little time discussing them. This does not diminish the importance of labor in distinguishing Marx and Engels's materialist position from that of their idealist intellectual adversaries. But to attempt the scientific analysis of particular social formations on the basis of a transhistorically applicable tenet alone was, Marx thought, a lost cause. Recognizing this reveals how problematic it is to attempt to gauge the degree of importance Marx placed on the society-nature dialectic by the *quantity* of writing devoted to this topic, since it represents a failure to appreciate Marx's preoccupation with *determinate* abstractions.

So while labor is the “everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence” mediating the socio-ecological metabolism in all societies according to Marx and Engels's materialist conception of history, what really preoccupied Marx's attention was the analysis of the ways in which this dynamic played itself out *under capitalism*. To be sure, it was capitalism's unique social forms that were responsible for its unprecedentedly antagonistic relation to nature; these are what Marx was bent on unveiling through his critical analyses of bourgeois political economy. Consider the following justly famous passage from *Grundrisse* (489; emphases added):

It is not the *unity* of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which requires explanation or is the result of a historic process, but rather the *separation* between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence, a separation which is completely posited *only in the relation of wage labour and capital*.

²⁸ “Transhistorical” should not be interpreted as *non*-historical or unchanging; rather, it denotes that something is applicable to all societies (though, indeed, in historically specific ways).

This passage begs the question: what is it about capitalism that creates this (perceived) separation between society and nature, one that results in myriad “ecological rifts” (Foster, York and Clark 2011)? Much of Marx’s answer lies in his analysis of the commodity in the opening chapter of *Capital* Volume 1. For it is there that he unpacks the distinctions between the foundational concepts central to his value theory that strike at the heart of capitalism’s destructive relation to nature: use-value, exchange-value, and value. Before taking a closer look at these distinctions, though, we must consider at least briefly the fundamental precondition for the emergence of the “relation of wage labor to capital” that is responsible for capitalism’s destructive ecological tendencies: primitive accumulation.

Wage-Labor under Capitalism (A Determinate Abstraction)

Private landownership, and thereby expropriation of the direct producers from the land – private landownership by the one, which implies lack of ownership by others – is *the basis of the capitalist mode of production.*
 - Marx (Musto 2008, 99)

The emergence of value rests on two (pre-)conditions. The first precondition for this historically specific measure of wealth under capitalism is the creation of a society of wage-workers. To be sure, wage-work has a long history pre-dating capitalism, but *generalized* wage-labor is unique to the capitalist mode of production. It is only after this proletarianization process is under way that the proliferation of exchange relations – the second condition of the rise of value – can be established. Thus, for Marx there are undeniable *coercive political* foundations upon which the seemingly “objective” laws of economics are based. For while Marx spends most of *Capital* adhering to the assumptions of classical political economy (in order to challenge their conclusions on their own terms), he is acutely aware that the emergence of “free labor” was, contrary to popular views of the time, anything but a peaceful affair.

Why this free worker confronts [the capitalist] in the sphere of circulation is a question which does not interest the owner of money, for he finds the labour-market in existence as a particular branch of the commodity market. And for the present it interests us just as little. We confine ourselves to the fact theoretically, as he does practically. *One thing, however, is clear: nature does not produce on the one hand owners of money or commodities, and on the other hand men possessing nothing but their own labour-power. This relation has no basis in natural history, nor does it have a social basis common to all periods of human history.* It is clearly the result of a past historical development, the product of many economic revolutions, of the extinction of a whole series of older formations of social production (273; emphasis added).

It is no surprise, therefore, that Marx concludes Volume 1 with a section on primitive accumulation: the forceful *separation* of peasants from their ties to the land (proletarianization), the *sine qua non* of the capitalist mode of production and a phenomenon that *continues* to the present day (see De Angelis 2001; Perelman 2000; Bonefeld 2011). Indeed, Marx (2000, III 272) tells us that capital “accumulation merely presents as a continuous process what in primitive accumulation, appears as a distinct historical process, as the process of the emergence of capital.”

Moreover, forcing the vast majority of humans into wage-labor by removing their access to land (means of subsistence) also speaks directly to the severing of the millennia-long *direct* human relation to nature. Marx speaks to this point in *The Critique of the Gotha Program*: “[P]recisely from the fact that labour depends on nature[,] it follows that the man who possesses no other property than his labour power must, in all conditions of society and culture, be the slave of other men who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labour. He can only work with their permission, hence live only with their permission” (Tucker 1978, 525-526). Contrary to the idyllic picture of the origins of capitalism painted by classical political economists like Adam Smith, therefore, Marx (1990, 875) insists that the history of how these

“newly freed men became the sellers of themselves” was a terribly coercive and violent process, “written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.”²⁹

The significance of primitive accumulation for the reproduction of the capital–wage-labor relation underpinning the schism in the socio-ecological metabolism cannot be overemphasized. For present purposes, though, we, like Marx, simply assume its existence. The crucial point to register, however, is that this separation of humans from their means of subsistence made possible for the first time in history aspects of bourgeois political economy that are simply assumed to be eternal: *inter alia*, the international division of labor; wage-work as the generalized means of satisfying human needs; the unprecedented shift in production for use to production for exchange. Indeed, the commodity form presupposes all of these shifts; as such, Marx begins his critique of political economy with an analysis of the commodity.

The Commodity

The commodity is not what it appears. There is, then, a hidden life to commodities and understanding something of this secret life might reveal profound insights into the entire edifice – the society, the culture, the political economy – of commodity-producing systems.
- Michael Watts (2014, 397)

For Marx,³⁰ the commodity is a determinate abstraction, the way that wealth “appears” in societies where “the capitalist mode of production prevails” (125). One major challenge in reading Marx, though, is the seeming familiarity and obviousness of many of the terms he employs in his critical analysis of capitalism. But Marx used familiar words like “value,” “commodities,” and “exploitation” in very specific ways, making it easy to overlook the novelty

²⁹ For an account of the process of primitive accumulation from a feminist perspective see Federici 2004.

³⁰ In the following sections, all page references that lack an author name refer to Marx 1990.

of his use of these concepts. After Marx's death in 1883, Engels (Marx 1990, 111; emphases added) warned the reader of this in his Preface to the English Edition:

There is, however, one difficulty we could not spare the reader: *the use of certain terms in a sense different from what they have, not only in common life, but in ordinary political economy*. But this was unavoidable. Every new science involves a revolution in the technical terms of that science. ... Political economy has generally been content to take, just as they were, the terms of commercial and industrial life, and to operate with them, entirely failing to see that by so doing it confined itself within the narrow circle of ideas expressed by those terms. ... [A] theory which views modern capitalist production as a mere passing stage in the economic history of mankind, must make use of terms different from those habitual to writers *who look upon that form of production as imperishable and final*.

To avoid the reification of capitalism's historically specific categories, therefore, it is necessary to read Marx's work with great care.

Use-Value, Exchange-Value, and Value

According to Marx, the commodity is the economic "cell-form" of bourgeois society. Despite the pervasiveness of commodities in people's everyday lives, Marx recognized that "[t]he understanding of the first chapter, especially the section that contains the analysis of commodities, will present the greatest difficulty." Comparing the analysis of capitalist society to the study of human anatomy, where the whole body proves easier to study than its individual cells, Marx goes on to remark that, "[t]o the superficial observer, the analysis of these [economic] forms seems to turn upon minutiae. It does in fact deal with minutiae, but so similarly does microscopic anatomy" (89-90).

Marx begins by arguing that the commodity has a dual character: it is both a use-value and an exchange-value. Use-values stem from the *qualitative* physical properties of commodities that meet human needs of whatever kind, and "constitute the material content of wealth, whatever its social form may be" (126). As such, use-values represent for Marx a general abstraction, and are the transhistorical basis of all *wealth*. Marx contrasts this with capitalism's

historically specific form of wealth – commodities, traded on the basis of their (exchange-) values. Crucially, Marx makes clear that wealth (use-values) is always a combination of two elements: labor *and nature*. In his words (133-134):

When man engages in production, he can only proceed as nature does herself, i.e., he can only change the form of the materials. Furthermore, even in this work of modification he is constantly helped by natural forces. *Labour is therefore not the only source of material wealth*, i.e., of the *use-values* it produces. As William Petty says, labour is the father of material wealth, the earth is its mother.

Use-values under capitalism, however, are also the material carriers of *exchange-value*, which is a determinate abstraction whose generalization is unique to the capitalist mode of production. Exchange-value is a purely *quantitative* relation, representing the “proportion in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind” (126). As Marx goes on to note, since exchange-values are in constant flux with respect to time and place, it often seems that their ratios are accidental or purely relative. The qualitative heterogeneity of use-values is the underlying factor driving exchange relations; for it would be pointless to exchange identical objects. This raises a fundamental question: how are commodities spanning such a bewildering array of physical characteristics able to be exchanged at all? In other words, how can they be rendered commensurable for the purposes of exchange, despite their heterogeneity? Marx argues that in, say, the equation 1 quarter of corn = x cwt of iron, there must be a “common element,” or a “third thing,” that both the corn and iron share. This common element determining exchange-values cannot be a “geometrical, physical, chemical or other natural property of commodities,” since the qualitative aspects of commodities apply only to their use-values (127). What commodities have in common, Marx argues, is that they are all products of human labor, “congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour” (128). He goes on to argue that, “[a]s

crystals of this *social* substance, which is common to them all, they are *values* – commodity values” (*ibid.*; emphases added).

Marx labels this “homogeneous human labour” determining the value of commodities *abstract labor*. For just as the commodity has a dual character (use-value and exchange-value), so too does the labor contained in it. This point is of central importance, as Marx (132) proclaimed: “I was the first to point out and examine critically this twofold nature of the labour contained in commodities. As this point is crucial to an understanding of political economy, it requires further elucidation.”

Use-values are created through specific *concrete labor* practices, which are as varied as the myriad objects they produce to satisfy human needs – i.e., the weaving required to produce linen, or the tailoring needed to fabricate a coat.³¹ As noted above, however, in the context of a developed division of labor the qualitative differences both of the commodities and the labor undertaken to produce them cannot be the basis for their quantitative commensurability in the exchange process. Marx’s distinction between abstract and concrete labor, therefore, marks the departure of his labor theory of value from those of the classical political economists. Abstract labor is the substance of value under capitalism, consisting of “human labour pure and simple, the expenditure of human labor in general” (135) whose magnitude is measured by duration.

The key to Marx’s notion of abstract labor, and what distinguishes it from its Ricardian variant, is that it is *socially necessary* labor. Thus, the value of commodities is determined by socially necessary labor time (i.e., snlt), defined as the time “required to produce any use-value

³¹ Marx deals with the issue of qualitatively different labor – i.e., those requiring higher degrees of skill, education etc. – through his notion of simple, average labor: “More complex labour counts only as intensified, or rather multiplied simple labour, so that a smaller quantity of complex labour is considered equal to a larger quantity of simple labour” (135).

under the conditions of production *normal for a given society* and with the *average* degree of skills and intensity of labour prevalent in that society” (129). In a context of generalized exchange relations, Marx (*ibid.*; emphases added) argues that “the *total* labour-power of society, which is manifested in the values of the world of commodities, counts here as *one homogeneous mass of human labour-power*, although composed of innumerable individual units of labour-power.” So, because commodities trade across vast geographical expanses under an increasingly complex division of labor, workers in various locations are in competition with one another (Harvey 2010, 19-20). Thus, despite the fact that a particular commodity may be produced in a hundred locations with varying degrees of efficiency (labor times), it will only possess a single, though fluctuating, exchange-value. This fact is what shields Marx from a common criticism made of the *classical* labor theory of value, which is nevertheless still often erroneously leveled at Marx due to a failure to register his key notion of abstract labor. That is, since a commodity is determined by the quantity of labor expended to produce it, should it not contain more value when produced by a lazy and incompetent worker on account of the extra time required to produce it? Marx’s answer, of course, is no. Those workers who produce goods too far above the *socially necessary average* (time) will simply be outcompeted, whereas those producing under the average will reap additional profits.³² This has profound implications, which Marx discusses at length later on under the general heading of the “coercive laws of competition” (433), and goes a long way in revealing the driving force behind things such as capitalism’s inherent technological dynamism (Marx 1990, Chapter 12: The Concept of Relative Surplus-Value).

³² A counter-intuitive result stemming from the distinction between use-value (via concrete labor) and value (abstract labor) under capitalism is that the more efficient the laborer becomes the *lower* becomes the value of her commodities per unit (Marx 1990, 137).

Finally, it is important to note that after abstracting from use-values on the opening page to help explain exchange-value and value, Marx reintroduces use-value at the end of the first section. He writes (137), “[a] thing can be a use-value without being a value. This is the case whenever its utility to man is not mediated through labour.” Satisfying one’s own needs, therefore, does not produce commodities; producing commodities requires that a person “not only produce use-values, but use-values *for others, social use-values*” (*ibid.*; emphasis added). This highlights the second fundamental precondition (alongside primitive accumulation) for the rise of capitalism’s unique value structure, and therefore for the validity of Marx’s labor theory of value: generalized exchange relations. Marx (182) insists that value’s historical emergence required that exchange become a “*normal social process.*” Value can only begin to find its expression when the producers of use-values engage one another for the purposes of exchange. This is a historically specific condition that only came to fruition during the bourgeois era through the violent process of proletarianization. Henceforth, “free laborers,” possessing nothing to sell but their labor-power, were forced to satisfy their needs through the money form – that is, through the production and consumption of commodities.

To review, people’s way of meeting their needs under capitalism – in other words, their relation to nature – is through the commodity form. But within the commodity there is a dialectical tension between use-value, exchange-value, and value. The commodity is a unity between use-value and exchange-value. But exchange-value is merely the *representation* of something – value. Value, as Marx argues, is socially necessary labor time. Something is only socially necessary, though, if it meets a social need of some kind (i.e., it will find a buyer in the marketplace), and in this way it reconnects back to use-value. Finally, Harvey stresses the following fundamental point: Marx’s analysis of commodities is not causal but *relational*; none

of these categories *causes* the others, nor can they be thought of without the others. This is crucial for what follows.

The Value-Form, or Exchange-Value

In the opening two sections of chapter 1 Marx moves from exchange-value to value, showing how value (snlt) is the “common factor in the exchange relation” that permits generalized commodity trade. However, in the third section – “The Value-Form, or Exchange-Value” – Marx’s analysis flows in the opposite direction, demonstrating how exchange-value is “the necessary mode of expression, or form of appearance, of value” (128). Marx considered this move to be of the utmost importance, since the failure to do this was “one of the chief failings” of classical political economy. More specifically, Marx’s central criticism of writers such as Smith and Ricardo is that, despite having analyzed value and its magnitude, they “never once asked the question of *why this content has assumed that particular form*, that is to say, *why labour is expressed in value*, and why the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product” (174n34; emphasis added). Once again, value, a determinate abstraction, was for Marx clearly the product of a historically specific mode of production; yet it was treated by classical political economy as a “self-evident and nature-imposed necessity.” Hence, to the extent that classical political economists treated the form of value unique to capitalism as a matter of indifference, they were unable to recognize the capitalist mode of production’s *transitory character*. In the following quote Marx (*ibid.*; emphasis added) elaborates on this fundamental shortcoming of classical political economy’s “best representatives,” both of whom Marx nonetheless had a great deal of respect for:

Smith and Ricardo treat exchange-value as something of indifference, something external to the nature of the commodity itself. The explanation for this is not simply that their attention is entirely absorbed by the analysis of the magnitude of value. It lies deeper. *The value-form of the product of labour is the most abstract, but also the most*

universal form of the product of the bourgeois mode of production; by that fact it stamps the bourgeois mode of production as a particular kind of social production of a historical and transitory character. If then we make the mistake of treating it as the eternal natural form of social production, we necessarily overlook the specificity of the value-form, and consequently of the commodity-form together with its further developments, the money form, the capital form, etc.

Despite the obvious importance Marx placed on this issue, Geoffrey Pilling (1980) laments that “very few writers have paid the slightest attention to the sections in *Capital* dealing with the value-form and its growth.” To be fair, this neglect may be partially Marx’s own fault. Marx’s exposition in this section can be “tedious in the extreme,” Harvey (2010, 30) remarks, and contains “a lot of boring material that can all too easily mask the significance of the argument being made.” Marx’s value-form analysis is the indispensable basis of his theory of money and commodity fetishism (Pilling 1980; Rubin 1973), and, as he replied to Engels’s complaint regarding the section’s difficulty in a personal letter, “the matter is too decisive for the whole book” to be dropped from the first chapter (Bottomore 1983, 511).

At bottom, what Marx is attempting to do in this key section is reveal the origin of the money-form that bourgeois political economy had accepted so uncritically. Marx does this by tracing the value-form (exchange-value) through four moments of its “development”: the simple, expanded, general, and money forms of value. This progression largely mirrors the historical proliferation of exchange relations under capitalism. As Marx (181) states, “The historical broadening and deepening of the phenomenon of exchange develops the opposition between use-value and value which is latent in the nature of the commodity.”

Marx (139) begins with what he calls the *simple form of value*, which is essentially a barter situation. He gives the example of x commodity A = y commodity B. Despite its seeming simplicity, Marx argues that “[t]he whole mystery of the form of value lies hidden in this simple form.” Several crucial points need to be highlighted here. First, x commodity A = y commodity

B is a *polar* value-expression, consisting of a *relative* and *equivalent* side of the equation. In other words, commodity A (the relative form) expresses its value in commodity B (the equivalent form); this relationship holds true in the opposite direction, where commodity B expresses its (relative) value in commodity A (equivalent). Second, the value of either of these commodities (labor input) can *only be expressed in relation to the other*, since 10 yards of linen = 10 yards of linen is no expression of value. Third, a seemingly banal but crucial point is that, although any commodity can take either the relative or equivalent form in the value equation, *no commodity can occupy both simultaneously*. Marx (139-140) argues that the relative and equivalent forms are “two inseparable moments, which belong to and mutually condition each other; but, at the same time, they are mutually exclusive or opposed extremes, i.e., poles of the expression of value.” Finally, since through exchange each commodity is only expressing *one side* of its dual character, the *internal* contradiction embedded in the commodity between use-value and value is temporarily resolved, or given “room to move” (198), by finding an *external* expression through the exchange of commodities. In Marx’s (153) words:

The internal opposition between use-value and value, hidden within the commodity, is therefore represented on the surface by an external opposition, i.e., by a relation between two commodities such that the one commodity, *whose own* value is supposed to be expressed, counts directly only as a use-value, whereas the other commodity, *in which* that value is to be expressed, counts directly only as exchange-value.

From these features of the simple form of value, Marx draws attention to three peculiarities of the equivalent form. First, “use-value becomes the form of appearance of its opposite, value” (148). In other words, the relative value of commodity A gets expressed as exchange-value through the *use-value* of commodity B. Second, “concrete labour becomes the form of manifestation of its opposite, abstract human labour” (150); and third, “private labour takes the form of its opposite, namely labour in its directly *social* form” (151; emphasis added).

Marx argues that from these peculiarities it follows that value can *only* find phenomenal expression as *exchange-value*, through these inversions that mask the essential relations involved. This is an absolutely foundational point in Marx's analysis, since, as Sayer (1979, 27) points out, in these inversions the "purely social and historical (value, abstract social labour) is represented by the natural and universal (use-value, concrete private labours). To a large extent, the seeming naturalness of capitalism's specific social forms stem from these peculiarities of the equivalent form.

Despite the insights derived from the simple form of value, Marx points out that it is entirely arbitrary which commodity is in the relative position and which is the equivalent. Consequently, it is still a challenge to grasp the polar nature of the use-value—value antagonism (160). This situation changes as the value-form "develops" into the *expanded form of value*. Here, commodity A remains in the relative position, representing only its use-value, but its value is expressed through a potentially infinite number of commodities in the market in the equivalent position, where each represents only the exchange-value of the commodity in the relative position (154). Unlike in the simple form of value, it is no longer possible to "reverse the equation without altering its whole character" (160).

Two insights are derived from the expanded form of value that are key to Marx's argument. First, because the expanded form of value is the only form where there are *multiple* commodities in the *equivalent* position, it is clearest in this expression that *value derives from abstract labor* than in the other value forms (155). For, in the simple form, the determination of value can seem arbitrary or accidental; whereas in the general and money forms, value can be fetishistically seen to derive from the physical properties of the commodities (e.g., gold). Second, since the relative value of commodity A remains constant and only varies with respect to the

quantitative ratio in which it can trade with the countless other commodities acting as equivalents, “[i]t becomes plain that it is not the exchange of commodities which regulates the magnitude of their values, but rather the reverse, the magnitude of the value of commodities which regulates the proportion in which they exchange” (156). In other words, it is the quantity of abstract human labor that is determining the exchange ratios between commodities, not the exchange process itself.

Sayer (1979, 28) points out that one of the “defects” of the expanded form, however, is that it lacks a *unitary* phenomenal expression for the communality of value. This problem is remedied in the *general form of value*, which represents a reversal. Commodity A, which had previously been expressing its relative value in other commodities’ equivalents, now becomes the general equivalent for the whole world of commodities that are all expressing their relative values in commodity A (156). This renders commodity A exchangeable with any other commodity, which makes it the “universal equivalent.” Eventually, commodity A becomes the money commodity, or *money form of value*, which represents *only* exchange-value, thus becoming “distinguished” from its use-value (158). Historically, the precious metals – gold and silver – have played the role of the “universal equivalent” or money commodity.

The central aim of Marx’s analysis of the value-form was to show how money “*necessarily crystallizes out of the process of exchange*” (181); it is not imposed from without. To repeat, Marx insists that exchange-value, the commodity’s value form as distinguished from its natural form, is the necessary form of appearance of value. That is, value (snlt) is *purely social*, or as Harvey (2010, 33) puts it “*immaterial but objective.*” Therefore, it must be represented by something else – i.e., gold as “pure exchange-value” or the “universal equivalent.”

Being a purely social phenomenon, attempts to measure value directly, for instance by considering a commodity's physical properties, will always fail. As Marx (138) declares in the following key passage:

Not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects. We may twist and turn a single commodity as we wish; it remains impossible to grasp it as a thing possessing value. However, let us remember that commodities possess an objective character as values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labour, that their objective character as values is therefore purely social. From this it follows self-evidently that it can only appear in the social relation between commodity and commodity.

Being the product of capitalism's historically specific conditions – proletarian labor and generalized exchange – the exchange of commodities requires the abstraction from their natural content. Hence, trying to determine the value of commodities directly is like “trying to find gravity in a stone” (Harvey 2010, 37) Value only exists when commodities are put in relation to one another, and only find their material expression in the money commodity's contradictory and problematic form. The discussion above, while admittedly quite abstract, goes a long way in explaining the problems that states and other interest groups have in defining value (Robertson and Wainwright, 2013). Value is the way in which the world of countless atomized commodity producers, “freed” from direct access to the means of subsistence, are able to “speak” to each other. The physical properties of the commodities they produce are merely the material *carriers* of value (snlt), a relational measure of value that is “immaterial but objective” (i.e., not discernible by examining their physical properties).³³

³³ Despite this unequivocal rebuke made approximately a century and a half ago, contemporary scholars sympathetic to Marx continue to make this error. In Andrew Herod's (2017) recent book, *Labor*, the opening line declares that “Labor is the ultimate source of all wealth,” a near verbatim repetition of the erroneous Gotha Programme statement that Marx criticized.

The discussion above is undoubtedly an abstract one. Nevertheless, it is useful for what follows in that it shows the logical unfolding of capitalist value relations. While not addressed explicitly, the increasing breadth and depth of these commodified relations in (South) Korea over the course of the twentieth century is an implied message in the macro transitions discussed in Chapters 3 through 5. We stress here the historical specificity and complexities involved in this process, on the one hand, to combat the “production in general” view that currently dominates the debates around South Korea “development” and, on the other, to foreground the analysis that comes towards the end of this work.

Further Reflections on Value

In coming to grips with the contradictory dynamics of “capitalist nature,” the issue of capitalism’s historically specific form of value is indispensable. Patrick Murray (2016) rightly insists upon its importance, yet laments both the failure to recognize this in contemporary academia, as well as the imprecise and seemingly self-evident way in which it is used in all walks of society: “What is value? This is perhaps the most urgent, yet neglected, question of contemporary social theory. Despite the proliferating talk about ‘adding value’, little thought is given to what is being added” (16). This is what necessitated our detailed discussion of the Marxian value theory above. Nevertheless, in light of the centrality of the value question in this analysis, the following section explores further the controversies and implications of (capitalist) value.

Value’s Fetishistic Character as Revealed in Contemporary Academic Trends

In 2017, Matt Huber published a piece discussing the relevance of Marx’s value theory for understanding the ways in which socio-ecological degradation is inherent to capitalism, one that echoes a core assumption of this work. He cites Robertson and Wainwright’s (2013) observation

that: 1) the question of value has been essentially ignored by critical environmental studies scholars; and 2) because nature's role in the production process disappears during the act of exchange (through the value form), this instills in researchers the desire to do site-specific research to help reveal the "real" socio-ecological relations that undergird capitalist society in "natural" sites like mining, fisheries, and agriculture.

The timing of this academic trend is hardly accidental. The revolutions in transportation and communications technologies (Teepie 2000, 65-71) that have proliferated since the late 1970s have allowed for a tremendous degree of time-space compression in terms of the global production, circulation, and consumption of commodities (Harvey 1989). Moreover, the representatives of Western capital (and increasingly East-Asian capital) have been aided in penetrating many of the last non-commodified or protected corners of the Earth through the help of an increasingly liberalized world trading environment. These spaces were at times opened up through the willing participation of nations in the Global South, but far more common was a prying open via debt-induced structural re-adjustment programs of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank (Gowan 1999; Harvey 2005).

The cultural side of this "global shift" (Dicken 2011) in capitalist production (in the broad sense of the word) and its far-reaching geographical embeddedness has led to countless place-based tensions between heterogeneous groups' reactions to the homogenizing logic of the capitalist value form. Given that this thoroughly globalizing world of atomized producers and sellers can only operate under the fetishistic form of the commodity – a peculiar world in which there are "material relations between persons and social relations between things" (Marx 1990, 166) – the concrete historical actors, places, and events of this global drama are hidden from our immediate view. In such a context, then, it is quite understandable that scholars concerned with

social and environmental justice would seek to dissolve the obfuscating form of the commodity by conducting richly detailed place-based studies.

Yet in the face of all of this, Huber (2017) reminds us of an essential point: “Marx would suggest that cataloging these different forms of concrete labor – and the different natural resources and ecologies that go into them – does not necessarily tell us a whole lot about *value* as the primary *form through which* the social relations of capitalism are consummated” (46).

The ideological hegemony of capitalist social relations is so profound – represented in the post-1945 case under the benign sounding term “development” – that it draws scholars, even critical ones, to overlook the significance of the changes associated with the global spread of what can only be called *capitalist revolutions* (in terms of the relation to nature, the structural compulsions driving all actors stemming from generalized value relations, notions of space and time etc.).

Very few scholars, then, have analyzed specific instances of capitalist development in the postwar period – and certainly nobody researching South Korea in the English-language scholarship (Hae-Yung Song’s work excepted)³⁴ – through the lens of the instituting and the coercive structural effects of unleashing capitalist value relations within a society.³⁵ What we are attempting to do in this study, therefore, is to examine the much-neglected structural *forms* within which this historical-geographical *content* is taking place.

Value as Treated in Extant Debates

³⁴ Song’s work provides a much-needed intervention (e.g., 2020), though her focus is overwhelmingly on the state, neglecting the more fundamental social forms undergirding the capitalist state’s actions.

³⁵ Even in those few works that do highlight the socio-ecological issues embedded in South Korean development, their conclusions center on moralistic criticisms of the country’s growth obsession, without appreciating the profound transformation that had actually swept their nation in ensconcing social forms that render capital’s *historically specific form of growth* that is impervious to the will of any group or individual.

To avoid any possible confusion regarding the understanding of Marxian value theory deployed in this work, we discuss in this section the ways in which “value” has been treated in the various disciplines engaged with in this work, *inter alia*: Marxism (and its “ecological” variant), human geography, and Korean studies. We do this with the hopes that, by drawing direct contrasts between the understanding we outlined earlier with those used by specific scholars in the above fields, it might be more effective in clarifying our distinct position.

But first we should draw attention to the loose and seemingly self-evident ways in which “value” is invoked, both in academia and popular culture. Even during his time, when value relations held sway over only a small percentage of global society, Marx lamented the indiscriminate way in which it was popularly deployed: “[i]t is naturally still more convenient to understand by value nothing at all. Then one can without difficulty subsume everything under this category” (Murray 2016, 16). Indeed, with the global proliferation of value relations since Marx’s time, this problem has only worsened. The widespread fetishization of value (and capital: “value in motion”) is revealed in the way that it is used today to signify “the Good” in general. Thus understood, anything that improves one’s life, or at least one’s relative position within our hyper-competitive societies, is labeled “capital” – e.g., “cultural capital” or “social capital.”³⁶ These categories, in our view, serve only to confuse what is already a complicated topic. In any case, let us now take a look at how the value question has been handled in our allied disciplines.

³⁶ Moreover, the reification of capital as a mere thing – as in Smith’s understanding it as a “stock” of assets (or use-values) – can be seen in the countless statements one hears in everyday life: “I wanted to buy a new computer, but I didn’t have the ‘capital’.” In statements like these, capital understood as a class relation, emerging from value as an immaterial but objective force, is not grasped, which lends transhistorical validity to its specific (and contradictory) features. We are getting ahead of ourselves here, however, as the relationship between value and capital will not be discussed until Chapter 6.

The question of value has, to be sure, been central to Marxist debates ever since Marx's death. Until the 1970s, "value" was typically viewed as a narrow "accounting concept," one meant to reveal the "exploitation" of the wage-worker by the capitalist in the sphere of production.³⁷ While this is true enough, it misses Marx's ultimate point. For his analysis of value was not intended to make a moral justification for a greater distribution of the (monetary or material) surplus, but to emphasize the contradictions of (proletarian) wage-labor itself. On this point, we will follow throughout this work Postone's (1993) key distinction between the former view's critique of capitalism "from the standpoint of labor" with Marx's critique *of* proletarian labor itself.³⁸

With the rise of the environmental movement in the 1970s, various critical social scientists attempted to demonstrate the possible contributions that Marx's work might make to this subject. But as Burkett (1999a, 79) notes:

The notion that Marx's labor theory of value³⁹ might provide an important ecological perspective might seem strange, given the popular view that this theory excludes or downgrades nature's importance as a condition of and limiting factor in human production. Even among eco-Marxists, the dominant position seems to be that insofar as Marx achieved any ecological insights, *this was despite – not because of – his value theory.* (Benton 1989; Deleage 1994)

³⁷ These debates were vast and contentious, focusing most centrally on the "transformation problem" (i.e., converting values to prices). Most of these debates, from our perspective, miss the point of Marx's critique of political economy.

³⁸ It is in this context that – during the Cold War – books, articles, conferences, and whole departments were produced and dedicated to something that we could consider a contradictory misnomer: "Marxist economics."

³⁹ Again, the ease with which Marx's language can be misconstrued is in full effect with the phrase "the labor theory of value," which is why we use the term "value theory." Others, such as Diane Elson (1980), have attempted to ward off confusion by using the phrase "value theory of labor," rather than labor theory of value. This was meant to emphasize how labor (as general abstraction) takes a historically specific form under capitalism (as determinate abstraction): *labor-power*.

Consequently, in the early works of so-called “ecological Marxism,” the question of value is more or less non-existent (e.g., Grundmann 1991; O’Connor 1998). This lacuna has been addressed most adequately by the work of Burkett himself (1999a; 2006), though never to analyze concrete historical-geographical contexts.⁴⁰ Moreover, those scholars that actually do invoke the category of value in a more grounded manner – like food regime scholar Philip McMichael (e.g., 2013, 132-135) within environmental sociology – do so only in passing, implying that this category is widely understood and self-evident.⁴¹ Nothing can be further from the truth, a fact that justified our earlier exegesis on the subject.

The field of critical human geography, for its part, has a mixed record of taking the value category seriously. Harvey’s pioneering account in *The Limits to Capital* (1982) placed value at the center of the analysis, but subsequent work in economic geography typically makes only passing mention of it, even while praising and citing Harvey’s work. On the one hand, one can find no end of works dealing with “value chains,” “value-added products” and the like, though with seemingly no recognition of what value is and, by extension, what exactly is being “added” (Murray 2016, 16). For most, “value” is simplistically equated with “worth” or “price” (in money terms), a *general* abstraction following from the “production in general” view of economic life. Save for a few token recognitions of the contradictory dual character of the

⁴⁰ One year after Burkett released *Marx and Nature* (1999), he co-published a book on East-Asian developmentalism with his long-time colleague Martin Hart-Landsberg (2000). The former book is pitched at the level of abstract political economy (i.e., level 3), whereas the other latter is more historically and geographically grounded (i.e., level 2). Intriguingly, however, there is almost no hint of the influence of *Marx and Nature* in the latter book, despite its obvious relevance. It is for reasons such as this that we are attempting to *fuse* the more abstract and concrete aspects of the (East-Asian) developmentalism *problematique* into a more synthetic analysis.

⁴¹ For a sense of just how easy it is to conflate basic categories such as use-value, exchange-value, and value – even by leading scholars – see Burkett’s two-part critique of Ted Benton in *Historical Materialism* (1998a; 1998b).

commodity form,⁴² the value question and its contradictions, which structures our daily lives in the ways that allow the world's billions of atomized commodity producers "speak" to each other via market exchange, is left unanalyzed.

On the other hand, some geographers have taken the value question as central, but have committed the common sin of making it far more complicated than it already is. This is typically done in the name of "mathematical rigor," attempting to meet neoclassical economics on its own terms (Sheppard and Barnes 1990; Webber and Rigby 1996). The results, predictably, are analyses that few can wrap their heads around, and that, like early works by mathematically-minded "Marxist economists" like Morishima (1973), miss the point of Marx's value theory (Harvey 1982, 35-38). To repeat: Marx was not a radical political economist; he was a *radical critic of* (classical) political economy (Murray 2016).

Despite these problems, however, Marxian value theory is enjoying somewhat of a resurgence within the field of critical human geography by a collection of younger scholars, such as Matt Huber (2017), Kelly Kay and Miles Kenney-Lazar (2017), Joel Wainwright and Morgan Robertson (2013).⁴³ Although the value question has been more invoked than actually "put to work" by these scholars, this nevertheless represents a hopeful trend for future scholarship and collaboration.

As demonstrated by the lengthy review of the extant work on South Korea in Chapter 1, the issue of value is wholly absent in that canon, which is dominated by works proceeding from

⁴² See, for example, Gavin Bridge's (2009, 1221-1222) passing reference to the distinction made between use-value and exchange-value in his discussion of the seven resource "paradoxes" of contemporary times. The category of value itself is not invoked at all, as presumably he views it as synonymous with "exchange-value." As he seems to intuit, yet does not go on to explore, most if not all of these "paradoxes" (e.g., the Jevons Paradox) stem directly from the use-value-value tension contained in the commodity form.

⁴³ See Moore 2017.

the “production in general” view. Within South Korea proper, and for those scholars trained there during the Cold War era, this absence is understandable. Due to the severe political repression of the pre-democracy era, it was illegal to be in possession of one of Marx’s works, so real expertise on these matters was difficult to come by through official academic training. Both Jeong (2010, 200) and Kim (2008) point out how, outside of the “two springs” of Marxist thought in South Korea in 1945-1948 and 1987-1991 respectively, there was no open work being done on Marx due to the severe political repression of the “development” era. Moreover, as we will see in Chapter 3, given Korea’s introduction to capitalist social relations via Japanese colonialism, the spirit of Marx was most often invoked to achieve the immediate political aim of national liberation, rather than attempting to come to grips with its historical, philosophical, and political-economic basis. This is not to suggest that any scholarship on Marx is inherently a progressive thing, especially in light of the many vulgar incarnations of Marxism that have come and gone over the years; it is merely to point out the ideological conformity that was (and very much still is) pressed upon the population.

That work that does exist in South Korea overwhelmingly suffers from two of the problems outlined above: i.e., critiques from the standpoint of labor; and a penchant for technical analyses that attempt to “prove” mathematically capitalist exploitation and the contradictions of accumulation.⁴⁴ Important exceptions to the above trends are the complementary works of Dae-Oup Chang (2009) and Hae-Yung Song (2020). These take seriously the value-form approach to Marxism that we subscribe to in this work; however, their works differ from this one in that they

⁴⁴ For good examples of the latter trend, see Chapters 1 and 2 of Jeong and Westra (2007), in what is one of the only edited collections devoted to explicit Marxian analyses of the South Korean economy: “Trend of Marxian Ratios in Korea, 1970-2000; “Uneven Development of the Rates of Surplus Value: The Case of South Korea” – by Seongjin Jeong and Dong-Min Rieu, respectively.

are focused on debunking the myth of the so-called “developmental state,” rather than really digging into the contradictory dynamics of capitalism’s social forms.

In short, in invoking “value” throughout this analysis, let us be clear that we are *not* interested in any of the following ways of viewing it: as a moral or normative idea that privileges male factory labor as a society’s only “real” work; as a predictor of prices or crisis tendencies; and not even as the “hidden” measure of wealth that exposes workers’ tremendous and underappreciated contribution to society (i.e., the theory of surplus value).⁴⁵ Rather, what we are interested in, at least as this preliminary stage of the analysis, is value’s *socially mediating character*. It is to this issue that we now turn.

Value as Social Mediator

Only in the eighteenth century,⁴⁶ in “civil society,” do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. *But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations.* The human being is in the most literal sense a [political animal], not merely a gregarious animal, *but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society.*
 - Marx (1973, 84)

A prerequisite of generalized wage-labor production is the universalization⁴⁷ of commodity exchange within society. Here for the first time in human history, people’s needs are satisfied by engaging in concrete labor practices in order to produce use-values as always, but counter-intuitively, *for others*. This furnishes the workers with the money (via wages) to then procure the

⁴⁵ We will indeed draw on Marx’s theory of surplus value in this work, in Chapter 6. However, we do not do so to stress the existence of exploitation of labor by capital, but rather to focus on its coercive tendencies, temporal aspects, and socio-ecological contradictions.

⁴⁶ Note that Marx is referring specifically to eighteenth-century *England*, and perhaps pockets of Europe and the US.

⁴⁷ By “universalization” we mean that commodity exchange is the manner through which the members of a given society satisfy the *majority* of their needs, where clothing, food, housing, entertainment etc. are all purchased as commodities on the market.

use-values produced by unseen others through the market. This is, most essentially, what it means to be “modern” – a view that departs markedly from the common teleological and temporal understanding of this idea to one characterized by a specific set of *social structures and relations*. Duncan (1996, 25-26) supports this view when commenting upon how – although capitalist “modernity” is typically characterized by phenomena such as urbanization, individualism, democracy, and monetization – the essential definition posits, quite simply, that “a society is modern to the extent that its households consume little of what they themselves produce and produce little of what they themselves consume.” What follows from this shift is a form of “human *interdependence* above and beyond the ties of kinship and acquaintanceship” – a shift described in a more general via Tonnies’ famous transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*.

This profound transformation was a central preoccupation for Marx because it is what differentiates capitalism from all other modes of life, past and present. In a commodity-based society, one that includes under that category those who work for wages, people relate to each other in a “purely atomistic way” (Marx 1990, 187). These same commodity “owners” also soon come to learn that:

the same division of labour which turns them into independent private producers also makes the social process of production and the relations of the individual producers to each other within that process *independent of the producers themselves*; they also find out that the independence of the individuals from each other has as its counterpart and supplement a system of *all-round material dependence*. (Marx 1990, 202-203; emphasis added)

This furnishes the basis for the “dual freedom” of wage-labor under capitalism, as we will explore in the South Korean case in a later chapter. In any case, because the overt, personal relations that characterized all previous modes of production – from hunters and gatherers, slaves and “masters,” feudal lords and serfs etc. – have been replaced with abstract labor as a sort of

societal glue, “[l]abor itself constitutes a social mediation” that “becomes its own social ground” (Postone 1993, 150-151). *Crucially, then, labor (power) is accorded a social centrality and significance under capitalism that it lacks in all other forms of life.*⁴⁸

This is an absolutely central point to get straight, one that necessitated the extended discussion in a previous section differentiating labor as a general and determinate abstraction in Marx’s work. As we saw above in our discussion of the commodity, the sort of social lubricant that allows a bewilderingly complex world of heterogeneous concrete labor practices (that produce specific use values) to be rendered somehow commensurable with all others across vast expanses of space (and time) is a rather remarkable feature of capitalist value production as revealed in Marx’s concept of abstract labor. But as Postone warns (1993, 151), “What makes labor general in capitalism is not simply the truism that it is the common denominator of all various specific sorts of labor; rather, *it is the social function of labor which makes it general.*” So when the countless acts of concrete labor are objectified in specific commodities and then rendered quantitatively commensurable in money terms during the process of exchange in the (world) market, the abstract labor that enables this to occur certainly represents an “abstraction” of sorts, but it is nevertheless a *real* one (Postone 1993, 151-152). Moore (2018, 239) echoes this idea when he states (citing Toscano 2008, 274–275) that “Real abstractions [like value] ‘are not

⁴⁸ Karl Polanyi (2001) has received a great deal of academic attention for pointing out the historical peculiarity of widespread commodification as the main “language” structuring social relations under capitalism. The trouble, however, is that he focuses his objections on what he refers to as the “fictitious commodities” of land, labor, and money. It is not hard to see why Polanyi does this, since it is especially in the realms of land and labor that the dynamics of commodity production can be particularly insidious. Nevertheless, Marx’s point, contra Polanyi, is that “*nothing* is a commodity ‘by nature’” (Postone 1993, 149), so to single out land, labor, and money as “fictitious” is to naturalize the generalized commodification of all other aspects of life.

mental categories that ideally precede the concrete totality; they are real abstractions that are truly caught up in the [socio-ecological] whole’.”

The twofold character of labor in capitalist production, expressed simultaneously in commodities in terms of use-value (concrete labor) and value (abstract labor), reveals a relation between specific producers’ moments within the totality of any historically-geographically bounded capitalist society. Marx’s notion of value, in short, is the dialectical sublation of the tension inherent in the dual role of commodities as both use-values and values (Harvey 2010, 37). The products of the vast world of place-based commodity production represents, therefore, a “*socially total mediation*,” one that is simultaneously both “a historically determinate, self-distributing form of wealth and an objectified, self-mediating form of social relations” (Postone 1993, 152 and 154). The essential point here is that, for those living within capitalist societies, labor *constitutes* “society” for the first time in world history (157).

In the realm of ideas and everyday “common sense,” too, this fact has enormous implications. Given that the money form (exchange-value) mediates private concrete labor practices that wind up extinguished in things, the result is an “atomistic condition of asocial sociality” where “capitalist relations appear to be no social relations at all; likewise, the wealth produced on a capitalist basis appears to have no specific social form or purpose” whatsoever (Murray 2016, 292; see also Marx 1990, 153 and 199). In people’s everyday experiences, therefore, commodities seem to be self-evident use-values, or “natural” wealth in general, given their embeddedness in a C-M-C (i.e., need-satisfaction) logic. As Murray (2016) asserts:

Commodity exchange works like a centrifuge, separating out the social aspect of the commodity as money, leaving the commodity to appear as purely private, mere use value. Since the social form of wealth in the commodity form is displaced onto money, commodities themselves appear to be socially non-specific, to be wealth in general. Likewise, commodity-producing labour appears to be labour in general. (292)

This naturalization or trans-historicization of capitalism's peculiar social forms erects enormous ideological barriers for a popular understanding of the socio-ecological contradictions and destructiveness (latent) in them.

“Paralogistic Logic”: Conflating Wealth and Value on the Historical Left

As we have seen, capitalism's unique value structure, abstracting from commodities' physical properties in the determination of value, is historically unprecedented and has produced schisms in the socio-ecological metabolism of all modern capitalist societies. In the final section of the famous first chapter – “The Fetishism of Commodities” – Marx (1990) complains of the effects of capitalism's peculiar value structure in clouding scholars' analytical clarity:

The degree to which some economists are misled by the fetishism attached to the world of commodities, or by the objective appearance of the social characteristics of labour, is shown, among other things, *by the dull and tedious dispute over the part played by nature in the formation of exchange-value*. Since exchange-value is a definite *social* manner of expressing the labour bestowed on a thing, it can have no more natural content than has, for example, the rate of exchange. (178; emphasis added)

Despite publishing those words of caution back in 1867, the conflation of the production of wealth (use-values) and value (exchange-value) has been widespread since Marx's time. Murray employs the term “paralogistic logic” to describe this confusion between general and determinate abstractions, which abounds from both sides of the political spectrum. We consider below two examples of this logical error on the left.

A classic case from the nineteenth century is found in *The Critique of the Gotha Program*, where Marx castigates the Lassallean influences of the following statement taken from the German Social Democratic Party's program (c.1875): “Labour is the source of all wealth and all culture.” Marx's reply reprimands the Party for confusing the bourgeois measure of wealth, *value* (a determinate abstraction), with wealth *per se* (use-value, a general abstraction). Thus Marx (Tucker 1978, 525) writes, “Labour is *not the source* of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much

the source of *use values* (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power.” Once again, we see that Marx is critical of those who fail to notice the historically specific character of the relations they are analyzing, especially when emanating from supposedly “socialist” parties. As Marx (*ibid.*, 526) charges, “[A] socialist programme cannot allow such *bourgeois* phrases to pass over in silence the *conditions that alone give them meaning*.” Marx’s point is clear: “value” is only the measure of wealth in the context of proletarianization, generalized exchange, the value-form of the commodity, an international division of labor etc. – conditions that pertain only to the capitalist mode of production.

A more contemporary example appears in one of the most well-respected works of environmental history ever published, William Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis*. We quote Cronon (1991, 149-150) at length from the opening subsection of his chapter on lumber – Where Value Comes From – to illustrate several common misguided criticisms of Marx:

The railroad funneled commodities into [Chicago], but it did not create their intrinsic *value*. Some portion of that value, as Marx would surely have argued, was “produced” by the human labor that had transformed prairies into wheat, forests into lumber, livestock into meat. For Marx, as for other classical economists who followed Adam Smith in embracing the labor theory of value, every economic good acquired its worth “only because abstract human labor [was] objectified or materialized in it.” ... But the labor theory of value cannot by itself explain the astonishing accumulation of capital that accompanied Chicago’s growth. Human labor may have been critical to planting, harvesting, and transporting the grain that passed through Chicago’s elevators, or to logging, driving, and milling the lumber in its yards, but much of the value in such commodities came directly from first, not second, nature. The fertility of the prairie soils and the abundance of the northern forests had far less to do with human labor than with autonomous ecological processes that people exploited on behalf of the human realm – a realm less of *production* than of *consumption*. In nature’s economy, all organisms, including human beings, consumed high-grade forms of the sun’s energy – foods – and transformed them into low-grade ones. Although plants might then concentrate that stored energy in their flesh, they all finally drew their sustenance from the light of the nearest star. The abundance that fueled Chicago’s hinterland economy thus consisted largely of stored sunshine: this was the wealth of nature, and no human labor could

create the value it contained. Although people might use it, or even build a city from it, they did not produce it.

On the basis of our exposition of Marx's value theory above, several things about Cronon's criticisms of Marx are problematic. First, it is not the case that Marx would "surely" have argued that "*some*" portion of the value of the commodities flowing into Chicago was created by human labor. Given Marx's analysis of capitalism's peculiar value structure, he would have insisted that *all* of the value derived from labor, which is not to say that he approved of such a method of valuation! Second, Cronon fails to notice the fundamental difference between Ricardo's labor theory of value and Marx's value theory. Despite quoting directly from *Capital*, Cronon invokes the concept of "abstract" labor without recognizing that Marx's distinction between abstract and concrete labor embedded in the commodity is the crux of his departure from the giant of classical political economy that he was analyzing. Relatedly, Cronon even lumps Marx in with those "follow[ing] Adam Smith in embracing the labor theory of value."⁴⁹ Third, Cronon commits the classic error of conflating wealth and value: "[stored sunshine] was the wealth of nature, and no human labor could create the value it contained."

It is worth noting that in a reply to his (predominantly Marxist) critics in a symposium dedicated to *Nature's Metropolis*, Cronon (1994 symposium on *Nature's Metropolis* in *Antipode*, 170) insists that, "When I criticize the labor theory of value for its inattention to the 'wealth of nature', it's not because I've never read the technical debates about use-value versus exchange-value; I'm just not completely persuaded by them."⁵⁰ In light of so much evidence contradicting

⁴⁹ See Harvey 2018. Moreover, in the footnote citing Marx's quote about "abstract" labor time, Cronon quotes Marx making a statement about *socially necessary labor time*, but again fails to register how this distinguishes Marx's view from Smith's and Ricardo's. See 423-424.

⁵⁰ Emphasis added. One can venture that Cronon is "not persuaded" because the so-called "use-value—exchange-value debates" are certainly not going to be very convincing without including Marx's central category, *value*, which is not the same thing as exchange-value.

Cronon's claim, it is difficult not to agree with James O'Connor (1998, 116) reflections on this "unsuccessful" symposium: Cronon "insists that he understands Marxism, and simply chooses not to use it, when it's obvious that he doesn't, hence is in no position to say whether Marxism could be useful to him or not." At bottom, Cronon's is but one example of the sort of ironic critique leveled at Marx, accusing him of holding the very position that he is trying to critique. Cronon would do well to take Burkett's (1999b, 8) diagnosis of the situation more seriously: "while value inadequately represents natural conditions, this is a contradiction of *capitalism*, not of Marx's analysis."

Forms of Subsumption of Labor under Capital

In the Appendix to the first volume of *Capital*, entitled "Results of the Immediate Process of Production," Marx engages in a lengthy discussion distinguishing between what he refers to as the various *forms of subsumption of labor under capital* (1019-1038).⁵¹ The general process of subsumption refers to the "possession, subordination and subsequent transformation of the labour process into a form compatible with capital's tendency to self-valorisation" (Anievas and Nişancioğlu 2015, 214). The four distinguishing forms of subsumption that Marx makes include formal, real, hybrid, and ideal. Below we outline the first three, as they are the most historically and theoretically significant *in capitalist history*. It should always be kept in mind, however, that these categories apply only to societies engaged in capitalist social relations (to various degrees). World-historically speaking, therefore, their applicability is limited to the past few centuries (mainly in the West and its mercantilist- and colonial-era "satellites"), and only very recently to

⁵¹ The fact that this discussion appears in the Appendix does not diminish its significance. For, in the main text of *Capital* Volume 1, Marx examined the general dynamics of formal subsumption through his discussion of its closely related notion of *absolute* surplus value in Part Three, while the dynamics of real subsumption were covered in his discussion of *relative* surplus value in Part Four (Murray 2016, 302).

the rest of the world (i.e., the post-World War II era). Having stressed this key caveat, we may proceed.⁵²

Formal subsumption refers to situations where the capitalist encounters the “free” wage-laborer in the market and the wealth of society *generally* takes the commodity form. Interestingly, Marx argues that formal subsumption is “the *general form* of every capitalist process of production” (1990, 1019), which is also a double-edged sword in that the new wage-workers begin to experience firsthand the “dual freedom” of labor-power. On the one hand, compared to pre- or non-capitalist relations, the (wage-)worker enjoys a formal equality vis-a-vis the capitalist, and therefore “[t]here is no fixed political and social relationship of supremacy and subordination” (Marx 1990, 1025-1026), a situation often interpreted to be “post-class.” On the other hand, seriously undermining the more liberatory aspects⁵³ of this setup is the fact that the capitalist is in a position to *monopolize* the means of subsistence of the laborers and to *procure* the three factors central to the production process – objects of production, means of production, and labor-power (Murray 2016, 303-304). Crucially, despite the fact that the general commodification of life represents a revolutionary societal form of change, under formal subsumption the capitalist usually engages with the existing labor process as is he/she finds it, making very few (if any) material transformations to it.

In speaking of *real* subsumption – what Marx refers to as the “specifically capitalist mode of production” (1990, 1019) – it needs to be kept in mind that a precondition for its

⁵² Given the world-historical significance of non-capitalist societies’ confrontations with capitalist modes of production, we adopt Murray’s suggestion of a fifth type: subsumption of *pre-capitalist commercial forms* under capital (2016, 301). As we will see in the following chapter, indeed, this is precisely what occurred to the Japanese (as a victim of the West) in the nineteenth century and Korea (as a victim of Japan) in the twentieth century.

⁵³ We will discuss the details of these various liberatory aspects of formal subsumption in the specific context of post-World War II South Korea in Chapter 5.

existence are all of those aspects that pertain to formal subsumption. Real subsumption is the most dynamic form of subsumption of labor under capital, where “pre-existing labour processes are either entirely transformed or destroyed, and created anew in the image of capital” (Anievas and Nişancıoğlu 2015, 214). It is here that relative surplus value strategies come to centerstage, focusing more and more on increasing labor productivity through leapfrogging technological innovations, as well as revolutions in cooperation and division of labor within (predominantly) concentrated, large-scale industrial production methods. A key distinguishing feature of real subsumption, as Murray (2016, 311) explains, is the fact that “there is a (continual) transformation in the capitalist’s command of the production process ... With real subsumption the workers’ dependence on capitalists takes a material form; capitalists, not workers, take charge of the coherence and plan of operations in the workplace.” An important point to keep in mind going forward is this: if regimes of real subsumption are so dynamic, why have more societies around the world not undergone this transformation? In other words, what are the “barriers” that have prevented the world from being filled with these sorts of regimes – akin to societies such as nineteenth-century Manchester and twentieth-century Detroit?

Hybrid subsumption is a sort of catch-all term that refers to those situations where interactions with the capitalist system (i.e., insertion into the world market) has begun, but where formal subsumption has not (yet) taken place. As Marx (1990, 645) writes, hybrid subsumption characterizes a situation “in which neither is surplus labour extorted by direct compulsion from the producer nor has the producer been formally subsumed under capital. In these forms, capital has not yet acquired a direct control over the labour process.” Notice a key point here about hybrid subsumption: although these regimes may be highly exploitative, there is no “direct, personal domination” taking place, since the role of money as mediator between “buyer” (i.e.,

capitalist) and “seller” (i.e., worker) takes place on the basis of the laws of equality in exchange (Murray 2016, 314-315). Once caught in the net of the capitalist (world) market, however, situations of hybrid subsumption often serve as a conduit to formal subsumption, since, despite not being subsumed under capital in the actual labor process, their market dependence nevertheless forces them to compete with formally or really subsumed regimes. This often catalyzes an adoption of the latter’s practices, which deepens the degree of embeddedness within capitalist social relations (178-179).

A few important points deserve mention about these forms of subsumption. First, contra the reading of scholars like Chakrabarty,⁵⁴ Harootunian (2015, 15) is correct in arguing that Marx’s conception of different forms of subsumption should not be read in a teleological manner. That is, *they are not “stages”* – where regimes of formal subsumption are “in a waiting room” prior to their transition to real subsumption being achieved” (Liu and Murthy 2017, 5). Rather, these are simply different forms of subsumption of the labor process that aid in the production of capitalism’s systemically unavoidable quest for surplus value creation.

Second, formal and real subsumption certainly receive the lion’s share of attention in *Capital*. This is because Marx’s strategic aim in that work was to analyze capital accumulation in its (fully developed) “pure state” – that is, accepting the utopian assumptions of (British) classical political economy about perfectly functioning markets, full proletarianization etc. – so as to refute them *on their own terms*. We will frequently have occasion to comment upon how

⁵⁴ In his contribution to the Liu and Murthy edited collection, *East-Asian Marxisms* (2017), Ward supports the view taken here by citing Harootunian’s (2015, 8) rejection of Chakrabarty’s argument that Marx’s categories of formal and real subsumption are *not* “simply substitutes for the overstated category of transition nor is it to gesture toward some form of historicist stagism in disguise.” “Rather,” Ward argues (99-100), “these categories help us recognize the necessary unevenness of capitalist reproduction, both historically and geographically.”

this fact has caused no end of misinterpretations from both those sympathetic and hostile to Marx's work. It is for this reason that Marx's *Grundrisse* (1973) is more helpful in emphasizing Marx's project: the critical *categorical* analysis of capitalism's historically specific social forms. *Capital*, by contrast, is written in a "tightly logical manner as an *immanent critique*" of capitalist society (Postone 1993, 21), which assumes the supposedly self-evident character of its forms; therefore, readers often take Marx's arguments (and the relative importance he places on certain aspects) at face value. For instance, Marx stresses in *Capital* a sort of logical transformation – bordering on a teleology – from formal to real subsumption. But as Murray (2016) argues, within the actual history of global capitalism, hybrid subsumption's "historic significance and scope of application is great even though the concept is marginal to [Marx's presentation in] *Capital*" (316); as such, it deserves "considerable attention from Marxian theorists" analyzing the "peripheral world" (508).

Third, as concrete examples of where certain historical societies would be placed in this framework, Anievas and Nişancıoğlu (2015) assert that the "classical" bourgeois revolution in England over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would count as a regime of real subsumption; France during the same period, in addition to the "passive revolutions" that ensued shortly thereafter, would constitute regimes of formal subsumption; and the late-nineteenth-century regime of Tsarist Russia and Meiji Japan would represent regimes of hybrid subsumption. Exactly how the countless societies of modern capitalist history may fall into Marx's schema, not to mention their shifting relations over time, is less important than the fact that the capitalist world-system has always operated as a historically and geographically uneven mix of all of these forms of subsumption that are co-constitutive and interdependent. Significantly, this allows for a transcendence of the normative models of "successful" capitalist

development, while undermining the binary language of development/underdevelopment that has pervaded discussions since its creation in 1949 to the present day.⁵⁵ As Anievas and Nişancıoğlu (2015) state:

The benefits of such a conceptualisation [i.e., forms of subsumption] are that it offers a historically sensitive and dynamic means of comparing different forms of bourgeois revolution and their resulting capitalist state forms. It dispenses with any kind of unilinear perspective that takes the Dutch or English examples as the normative model or benchmark, from which all other historical instances of capitalist revolution are then inevitably judged to be a “failure” or “incomplete.”

This line of argument has some pretty significant implications for debates about the socio-ecological dimensions of Marxian value theory, as well as undermining well-entrenched assumptions about capitalist development.

In short, the significance of Marx’s distinctions between the forms of subsumption of labor under capital for understanding the capitalist world-system as a historically and geographically uneven mix of societal formations (at various points along the commodification spectrum) has been increasingly recognized in recent years (Anievas and Nişancıoğlu 2015; Harootunian 2015; Liu and Murthy 2017).⁵⁶ As part of our critical reinterpretation of the South

⁵⁵ Due to the growing recognition of the problematic character of the static and dualistic character of the “development/underdevelopment” rhetoric, many have begun to use the word “developing” (society), presumably to suggest that Western-style development is not monopolized by the West, and that others will inevitably arrive there too. Nevertheless, this language still assumes a Eurocentric and teleological view of what constitutes “development” in the first instance. Interestingly, as we will see later on in the analysis, those regimes deemed to be at the top of an assumed teleological hierarchy – i.e., industrialized regimes of real subsumption – are in fact the exceptions to the rule for Marx. As we pointed out above, for him, it is regimes of formal subsumption that are the “general form” of all capitalist production processes. A statement that he (1990, 1019) follows up by saying: “at the same time, however, it [formal subsumption] can be found as a *particular* form alongside the *specifically capitalist mode of production* in its developed form [real subsumption], because although the latter entails the former, the converse does not necessarily obtain.” (Emphasis in the original)

⁵⁶ Scholars’ overlooking the importance of Marx’s discussion of forms of subsumption of labor under capital stem from, according to Murray (2016), both textual and conceptual reasons. In the former case, Marx’s discussion of formal and real subsumption appeared in the unpublished

Korean experience, we contribute to this trend by deepening its explanatory power by injecting into it the insights of value-form Marxism (e.g., Postone 1993; Murray 2016) and world-ecology (Moore 2015).

World-Ecology

The methodological propositions outlined earlier in this chapter, combined with the emphasis on the importance of social form (in particular, value), culminate in a set of assumptions about “capitalist nature” that is inspired by Jason Moore’s (2015) world-ecology paradigm. Even when not stated explicitly, the entire analysis that follows was organized and written with these assumptions in mind. Let us, then, close out this chapter by outlining this paradigm briefly, but more directly.

The “world-ecology” framework grew out of Moore’s long, critical engagement with “ecological Marxism.” Beginning roughly forty years ago as an attempt to “rescue” Marx for the growing ecological movement by “greening” his supposed “Promethean” tendencies (Benton 1996), ecological Marxism evolved to demonstrate systematically how it was the rise of capitalism itself and its shift of world-historical importance from production for use to production for exchange that was the basis for capitalism’s global expansion and escalating ecological destruction. Explicating the “creatively destructive” spatial and ecological tendencies of the commodity form’s inherent contradiction between use-value and value (Marx 1990), these scholars have produced a powerful set of analytical tools such as Harvey’s “spatial fix” (1982), Smith’s “production of nature” thesis and stress on the see-saw character of uneven geographical

Chapter 6 of Volume 1, which now appears as an Appendix to the Penguin and Vintage editions that came out in English in 1976 and 1977 respectively (14). The deeper conceptual reason, though, is the fact that Marx has been overwhelmingly interpreted as a “critical political economist,” rather than for what he was – namely, a radical critic *of* political economy.

development (2008), O'Connor's "second contradiction" thesis (1988), and Foster's "metabolic rift" theory (1999).⁵⁷

For Moore, however, the fundamental weakness of these writers, in particular those associated with Foster's "Oregon School," is the Cartesian and ahistorical nature of their work. Consequently, Moore builds out from ecological Marxism by synthesizing its insights with those from historical sociology and agrarian political economy to offer a promising framework for analyzing the ways capital and nature are *co-produced* through the "web of life" (2015). What follows is a list of Moore's core propositions that inform our analysis of (South) Korea's capitalist development process. He begins by explaining how radical Green Thought, and works of environmental history more generally, have suffered from a Nature/Society dualism (i.e., Cartesianism), where the ontological unity of humans and the natural world are viewed as separate realms that merely "interact" with one another. Instead of an active Humanity acting upon a passive and fixed Nature, then, human activity (e.g., capitalism) is always composed of a double movement that he labels a "double internality": capitalism through nature, of nature through capitalism. This also means that: 1) both modes of production and nature are thoroughly *historical*; and 2) all histories are always already *environmental* histories.

From its "vast but weak" beginnings in the fifteenth century, Moore argues that the capitalist mode of production has accomplished its global spread and material marvels through a peculiar "law of value" that is a "law" of Cheap Nature, driven by an incessant pursuit of converting the "work/energy" of human/extra-human natures of the biosphere into capital. Historically, this was accomplished through a dialectic of *productivity* and *appropriation*, as the

⁵⁷ Other key works in the ecological Marxist canon include: Benton 1996; Burkett 1999a and 2006; Foster 2000; Foster, York and Clark 2011; Grundmann 1991; Harvey 1996; Hughes 2000; O'Connor (ed.) 1994; O'Connor 1998; Schmidt 1971; Schneider and McMichael 2010.

successive reigning hegemonic powers – Genoese, Dutch, British, and US (Arrighi 1994) – attempted to secure, through constant geographic expansion, the so-called Four Cheaps that make dynamic capital accumulation possible: food, energy, raw materials, and labor(-power). Indeed, South Korea’s own ability to secure access to these key material components in the post-1945 period, as we will see, is a central aspect of its success. Moreover, for Moore there is an inseparable organic unity to modernity’s structures of knowledge, its dominant relations of power, re/production, and wealth – i.e., in its patterns of “environment-making.” To be sure, capitalism’s “holy trinity” of primitive accumulation, abstract social labor, and *abstract social nature* (i.e., its view of time as linear, space as flat, and nature as external, limitless, and quantifiable) has served to produce previously unfathomable material wealth. However, in the historical *longue durée* of global capitalism, the world’s hegemonic capitalist states have managed to overcome the inherent contradiction between the forces and relations of production only through a *frontier strategy* – that is, constant geographical expansion. Across the grand sweep of modern world history, however, this evolving frontier strategy of productivity and appropriation has become increasingly precarious to achieve, as the seemingly infinite reserves of appropriable uncommodified human and extra-human natures have progressively dwindled. This general trend will be analyzed more concretely through a discussion of South Korea’s “miracle,” a process rooted in the interactions of regional, global, and national dynamics (Chapters 3 – 5, respectively). This work is an attempt to synthesize these more concrete historical-geographical specificities within the universalizing logic of capitalism’s abstract categories. The degree to which this actually achieved is up to the reader to decide.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to outline the distinctive methodological and theoretical approach that will inform our critical reinterpretation of the twentieth-century (South) Korean experience that will follow. In many ways, this approach is constructed with the deliberate intention of overcoming the significant limitations of the vast – yet narrowly conceived – literature outlined in the first chapter of this work. Three take-home messages deserve reiteration.

First, as will become increasingly clear, the South Korean experience represents a “compressed” form of “development,” which should more properly be understood as its move from pre-capitalist relations through those of hybrid, formal, and ultimately real subsumption (or, in more popular yet less precise language, capitalist social relations in their *industrial form*). Rather than representing a case study of “successful development” for other nations to emulate, its experience sheds light on both the (necessary) relative rarity of these sorts of regimes in world history, especially outside the West, as well as many of the socio-ecological contradictions *inherent* to the “successful” functioning of these relations. Contra the positive-sum-game assumptions of modernization theory (and its more recent variants),⁵⁸ the South Korean experience reveals in many ways the looming future facing other regimes of real subsumption, located in the world’s centers of political-economic power and ideological hegemony in the West (and Japan).

Second, in order to carry out this critical reinterpretation, a fundamentally different method is required from that deployed in nearly all of the extant literature on South Korean development, regardless of disciplinary affiliation. Although relatively well-known within their respective branches of Marxian studies, certain central methodological tenets – i.e., the

⁵⁸ See Sheppard (2016, 20-25), for instance, for an overview of the continuing influence of frameworks heavily indebted to modernization theory.

philosophy of internal relations, Marx's method of abstraction, his stress on the necessity of "studying history backwards," and the tremendous importance he placed on analyzing the historically specific social forms (i.e., determinate abstractions) through which a given society manages its metabolic relation to nature (a general abstraction) – are all but absent in the existing works on this purportedly "over-studied" topic. Moreover, the deliberately interdisciplinary approach pursued here – along with our consideration of the South Korean experience through distinct scalar perspectives of the regional, global, and "national" – offer illuminating "windows" on the topic, and are thus the means by which this work is subsequently structured.

Third, although seemingly self-evident to those who have always lived under their sway, the peculiar structuring social forms of capitalism – *inter alia*, labor-power (wage-labor), the commodity, value – are nothing short of revolutionary and profound in their socio-ecological ramifications. The limited existence of forms akin to these did indeed exist in Korea prior to their introduction via Japanese colonialism (1910-1945), but they were in the extreme minority and functioned in a qualitatively different manner. Scholars' tendency to view the rise and spread of these revolutionary forms as in no way different than the sort of use-value production that had existed for centuries in Korean society has been the foremost weakness of extant analyses, as we preliminarily showed in this chapter.

At bottom, what is desperately needed is not more empirical data on this or that topic, but rather a *new narrative* of South Korea's place within capitalist world history. It should also be one that is free of the following widespread errors: 1) conflating capitalism's specific economic forms with "production in general"; 2) viewing its rise within the confines of "methodological nationalism" (Glassman 1999) or the "fallacy of disaggregation" (Cumings 1984); and 3) one that looks to the *future* socio-ecological challenges stemming from (South) Korea's capitalist

revolution, rather than looking to the past, as most analyses do, to discern how it can supposedly offer insights to “developing” in the Global South. This work attempts, however provisionally, to address these shortcomings in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 3 The Japanese Colonial Legacy in South Korean Development

Introduction: The Ambivalence of the Japanese Colonial Legacy

The fundamental truth of Japanese colonial rule is that Japan relentlessly pursued its own interests. The Korean economy was a classic case of an *underdeveloped* colonial economy.
- John Lie (1998, 180)

There is no question that industrial development, distorted and dependent as it was, advanced infinitely further than it could have under the old regime. Moreover, in relation to internal social and economic conditions one could with some justification call Korean industry under the Japanese *overdeveloped*.
- Clive Hamilton (1986, 114)

These opposed epigraphical statements – made by two astute, critical scholars regarding the legacy of Japanese colonialism on South Korea’s postwar development – capture the heated and ambivalent way in which this issue has been interpreted. Indeed, Japanese colonialism in Korea (and elsewhere) was a phenomenon rife with contradictions, to wit: regionally aggressive, though pursued from a position of global weakness; self-serving, yet ostensibly “benevolent”; pursuant of processes of socio-ecological change that can be equally-well labeled *overdevelopment* and *underdevelopment*; catalyzing instances of increasing personal freedom, alongside deepening structural subordination and precarity.

The story told in this chapter is about the revolutionary and turbulent disintegration of Korea’s centuries-old precolonial order – the Joseon dynasty – focusing on the ramifications of its gradual insertion into the world market, destabilization of its class structure, and initial emergence of many of capitalism’s social forms. After outlining in the first section the limitations of the extant debates in Korean historiography regarding the legacy of Japanese imperialism on South Korea’s postwar “miracle,” subsequent sections will explore the specific geopolitical context of the Asia-Pacific’s regional (sub-)imperial dynamics. The main aim of this

chapter, then, is to provide the crucial context predating postwar “development,” stressing the violent yet indispensable role of Japanese imperialism in South Korea’s *capitalistic* success. In the process, it will attempt to identify the particular assumptions that have led to such diametrically opposed interpretations amongst contemporary scholars, which we locate within the specific methodological approach outlined in the previous chapter.

Offspring of Empire vs Sprouts of Capitalism

Given the seemingly contradictory facts of twentieth-century (South) Korean history of, on the one hand, the legacy of an oppressive and humiliating experience of Japanese colonialism and, on the other, the highly touted postwar “miracle,” a vast and extremely heated debate has emerged regarding the role that Japanese colonialism (1910-1945) played (or not) in South Korea’s postwar capitalist economic success. The reason for the contentiousness of this debate is not hard to discern, especially for scholars of Korean descent. Japanese colonialism is to this day the “master metaphor for injustice and misfortune” for most Koreans, and few would deny that “Japanese colonialism entailed brutal police rule, racial discrimination, thought control, and the exploitation of peasants and workers” (Lie 1998, 179-180). To make matters worse, within nationalistic Japanese academic circles, the so-called “colonialist view” not only sought to justify the host of exploitative acts and events that took place during the colonial era, but also haughtily take credit for South Korea’s postwar economic achievements. This tension has expressed itself in the two main positions addressing the Japanese legacy: the “sprouts of capitalism” and “offspring of empire”⁵⁹ perspectives.

Desperate to debunk the Japanese nationalist view, scholars in the “sprouts” school have sought to uncover the origins of South Korean capitalism in the *pre-colonial* period. In essence,

⁵⁹ This school is named after Carter Eckert’s now-classic work of the same title (1991).

the argument is that in Korea the “sprouts” of capitalist development – e.g., wage labor and the commercialization of agriculture – actually existed *prior* the Japanese arrival, and that these nascent phenomena were stamped out due to the oppressive and self-serving actions of colonial leaders, settlers, bureaucrats etc. Within the Korean scholarship, this line of argument initially arose in the 1960s through several works by Kim Yongsop, who argued that Korea’s burgeoning pre-colonial capitalist revolution was being led by “managerial farmers” who were effectively akin to the British yeomanry, deploying similar techniques like transplanting and double-cropping (Shin 2006, 33-34).

Beginning in the late-1980s, a new line of argument emerged in the English-language literature that argued, far more persuasively than the sprouts school, that the Japanese colonial presence contributed in various significant ways to South Korea’s postwar success. Putting aside for the moment the vast levels of infrastructural and business investments bequeathed to Korea following the defeat of the Japanese in World War II – one that represented “one of the largest ‘turnkey’ projects in history” (Jones and Sakong 1980, 30) – the Japanese also left behind various modern techniques and ways of life. Atul Kohli’s highly influential article (1994) in *World Development* summarizes well the continuing postwar influence of the Japanese colonial period and the methods characteristic of that regime:

[The] Korean state under the Japanese influence was transformed from a relatively corrupt and ineffective social institution into a highly authoritarian, penetrating organization, capable of simultaneously controlling and transforming Korean society; production-oriented alliances involving the state and dominant classes evolved, leading up to considerable expansion of manufacturing, including “exports;” and the lower classes in both the city and the countryside came to be systematically controlled by the state and dominant classes. While there were important discontinuities following WWII, when the dust settled, South Korea under Park Chung-Hee fell back into the grooves of colonial origins and traveled along them, well into the 1980s. (1269)

In assessing the merits of these respective views, it is easy enough to dispense with the “sprouts” argument due to several serious problems inherent in it. The first, echoing one of Gi-Wook Shin’s own objections, is that the sprouts view drastically exaggerates the capitalist potential of the groups Kim highlights. This represents a sort of retroactive (and anachronistic) projection of contemporary dynamics and imperatives back onto the past, where the existence of *any sort of* trade or wage-labor – regardless of the structural form in which it took place, and regardless of the motivations and aims of those who engaged in it – represents “capitalism.”⁶⁰ Second, the overwhelming preponderance of what Cumings (1981) calls Type-A landlords – that is, those holding to a zero-sum view of the world and who are therefore conservative in their leanings – meant that these landed elites were perfectly content to continue collecting rents from their tenants, not bothering with the risks associated with the capital accumulation process. Indeed, world-historically speaking, overcoming the power of a conservative and deeply entrenched landed elite has been a central factor working against the sort of capitalist transition (to real subsumption) that would occur in postwar South Korea. Third, and most fundamentally, there is the sprouts school’s dubious assumption that the capitalist development process is typically a peaceable one, centered on narrow technocratic means of achieving “growth” and “efficiency.” As will become clear over the course of this work, this assumption conflates the exploitative *means* the Japanese used with the ends that laid the necessary groundwork for

⁶⁰ Despite its reactionary character and inherent conservatism, the “sprouts of capitalism” view shares Andre Gunder Frank’s problematic perspective of a singular “flattened history” of the 5,000-year-old world system of “global” trading links, which stems from an iconoclastic urge to unseat “the West” and the host of obfuscating master categories deployed by its representatives in academia. In Frank’s view, then, there was nothing particularly special about what happened under the Euro-American *temporary* rise during the nineteenth and twentieth century, and that the recent rise of China (and East-Asia more generally) reveals that we are now returning to the rightful Sinocentric system that reigned in the past (Amin 1999; Song 2015, 181).

subsequent capitalist development, which, as long as it is cloaked in a nationalistic Korean garb, is embraced by its nationalists. In other words, “legacy” is defined in narrow economic terms, stressing growth rates, infrastructural development and the like. All of this serves to obfuscate how the shock of colonial penetration brought about the rise of the structural class-based conditions for later capitalist accumulation. The “offspring of empire” view is guilty of this, too, though not to the same extent (Kobayashi 1996).

In any case, it is not hard to see why the “offspring of empire” – or “colonial modernity” (Shin and Robinson 1999) – perspective(s) would be anathematic to Korean nationalist scholars and the public alike. As such, under the suspicion of a reinstatement of this colonialist view in the work of scholars such as Kohli, these new accounts have been assiduously challenged (e.g., Haggard, Kang and Moon 1997).

The Japanese Colonial Empire

In order to move beyond the problematic framings espoused by the dominant perspectives discussed in the previous section, in this chapter we deliberately chose to remain at level 3 of Ollman’s schema (as discussed in Chapter 2): i.e., from the view of the capitalist mode of production as a whole. This does not preclude considerations of specific nation-states, but, when this is undertaken, it must always be from the perspective of its embeddedness within the larger whole – i.e., the capitalist world-system, as led by that particular era’s hegemonic power (Arrighi 1994). The contradictory imperatives of capitalism often lead to highly ambivalent actions and events, ones that cannot be wholly attributed to “good” or “bad” actors, as the nationalist scholars are prone to do. It is in this context, then, that we discuss Japan’s “defensive imperialism” in this section, a seemingly oxymoronic term that would otherwise (from a level 1 or 2 perspective) sound insensitive, if not perverse.

Origins of a Defensive Imperialism, 1853-1910

When one considers the *longue durée* of Japanese history, its abrupt shift to foreign marauding in the late nineteenth century represented a true break with its cultural tradition. With the exception of Japan's short-lived and unsuccessful invasion of Korea by Hideyoshi's forces in the 1590s, Japan remained in contented solitude for centuries, engaging with other societies through paltry levels of trade and the occasional diplomatic mission. When US Commodore Matthew Perry returned in 1854 with roughly a quarter of the US's naval forces of the time to seek redress for what cold treatment he had received a year earlier, however, the writing was on the wall for the Japanese about the inescapable, imminent threat of Western penetration of the whole of the Asia-Pacific region. Most significantly, Japanese leaders watched in shock as "barbarian" British forces rolled over China so easily during the "first" Opium War (1839-1842), which offered an important vicarious lesson about the dangers of underestimating the threat of Western aggression (i.e., "civilizational burden").⁶¹ Moreover, it offered an indispensable lesson for the nation that would turn out to be decisive for Japan's relative world power over the following century and a half.

⁶¹ The reasons for China's lack of adaptability, at least in the ensuing half-century "short run," are interesting to reflect upon. According to Eric Hobsbawm (1996, 148):

China was plainly capable of beating the westerners at their own game, at least in as much as it amply possessed the technical skills, intellectual sophistication, education, administrative experience and business capacities required for the purpose. But China was too enormous, too self-sufficient, too accustomed to considering itself the center of civilization for the incursion of yet another brand of dangerous and long-nosed barbarians, however technically advanced, to suggest immediately the wholesale abandonment of the ancient ways. China did not want to imitate the west.

China's "weakness," which ironically stemmed from its strength and civilizational longevity, was eventually made patently obvious in the ensuing century. But as Hobsbawm predicted even *prior* to Deng Xiaoping's post-Mao market-friendly reforms (c.1980), China has proven itself only too capable of "beating westerners at their own [socio-ecologically destructive] game."

But why was Japan spared the suffering of a fate akin to the Chinese? A significant contributor had to do serendipitous historical-geographical factors. Following the pioneering work of Canadian diplomat E.H. Norman (1975), So and Chiu (1995, 63) state:

Of all Asian countries, Japan was the farthest removed from the reach of the great European naval powers. Japan also was shielded from the land power of the Russian Empire by the vast, half-explored steppes of Siberia. Moreover, the Western powers were preoccupied with other areas of Asia, such as Indonesia, India, and China, where significant trade and investments had already been established.

Other crucial factors lent Japan the luxury of having an extra decade for its leaders to decide how best to deal with this outside threat, which were based on the internal situation of its potential colonizers. For although the US was the most geographically proximate Western power to Japan, its then incomplete closure of its western frontier meant that, in terms of relative space, it was “farther” than Western-European nations in terms of transportation time. Moreover, after the US seizure and settlement of what would become California in the wake of the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and the subsequent Gold Rush, and with key European powers – the UK, France, and Russia – bogged down in the “Turkish question” during the Crimean War (1854-1856), Japan had time to weigh its options (So and Chiu 1995, 64). This was the context of the often-mentioned, following Norman’s fortuitous phrase, “breathing space” that was so crucial to Japan’s “great escape” from direct colonial domination.

This situation did not last long, however, as Japan soon acquiesced to US demands by signing the Kanagawa Treaty of Friendship in late March of 1858 that was overseen by Perry, a deal soon extended to France, Britain, Holland, and Russia just four months later under the Harris Treaty. The reasons for accepting the Americans’ initial terms are not hard to discern. From the Japanese perspective, on the one hand, it was surely the case that these so-called “unequal treaties” contained several drawbacks, to wit: they allowed for free trade in five major

Japanese cities; placed Japanese tariffs under international controls, while also fixing import duties at low levels; and established extraterritorial rights for the above-mentioned Western powers, which meant that their citizens' actions would be subject to their respective consular courts rather than being dealt with according to Japanese law (Pyle 1996, 65). On the other hand, a crucial factor in the treaties, indeed one motivating the Japanese leaders to concede to it, was the fact that it entailed no territorial claims on Japan from these powers, which would allow Japan to remain formally independent and keep further threats at bay, at least temporarily. This was a prime consideration, especially in light of the renewed assault on China by British and French forces during the "second" Opium War (1856-1860).

As is well known, out of the intense debates of the 1850s and 1860s emerged the new group of leaders who took official control with the Meiji Restoration of 1868. What we highlight here is how, in pursuing this course of action, Japan offered perhaps the best example of one of the most deeply ironic phenomena of modern world history that will globally metastasize still further in the century ahead: that is, for the sake of domestic self-preservation from antagonistic Western forces and culture, societies adopt these very same strategies and ways of life. As we will see, many of the socially wrenching actions that state leaders pursued in this "revolution from above" were remarkably similar to what the leaders of the Japanese colonial state would oversee in Korea just a few decades later. In the political realm, we see "state-building, dissolving feudal classes, moral education, universal conscription, and the democracy project" (So and Chiu 1995, 70); in the economic arena, we see land tax reform, (bourgeois) private property, wage-labor, light forms of industrialization, agricultural improvements and the like.

If the Meiji leaders wavered at all in their belief that "westernization" was the best antidote to threat posed by the West, the geopolitical events of the ensuing decades would only

reaffirm this belief. That is, the economic “Panics” of 1873 and 1893 that rocked Euro-America triggered a hegemonic race to secure the world’s rapidly dwindling sources of “free” land (and, by extension, raw materials, labor, energy, food) and markets. As Hobsbawm (1989, 59) asserts: “Between 1876 and 1915 about one-quarter of the globe’s land surface was distributed or redistributed as colonies among a half-dozen states”; the major beneficiaries of this global land grab were Britain and France – acquiring approximately 4 and 3.5 million square miles of new territories respectively – while Germany, Belgium, and Italy seized approximately 1 million each.⁶² Closer to home, imperialist dynamics were in full swing during the same decades, with the French takeover of Indochina, the British in Burma and Malaya, and the Russians creeping towards the Chinese border, as well as a war between France and China in 1883-1884 that set off alarm bells for the Japanese given its previous admiration for the strength and sophistication of Chinese civilization (Duus 1995, 16-17). The threats to the new Meiji regime were palpable, and their actions stemmed from strategies to avert a China-like fate.

And while the rhetorical justifications for imperial exploitation ran the gamut from Lockean notions of land “improvement,” social Darwinian notions of non-Western cultural inferiority undergirding “civilizing missions” or the “white man’s burden,” it all effectively boiled down to a geopolitics of “might makes right,” enforced through superior technological prowess – both in the weaponry and the production of commodities – that was yet another “proof” of the West’s technical and (ostensible) moral superiority (Adas 1989). In the legal realm, moreover, European powers dismissed all alternative methods of inter-state negotiations as non-binding (e.g., suzerain-vassal relations of East-Asia’s former tributary system centered on

⁶² Duus (1995, 9) captures this trend with the following remarkable statistic: “Astonishingly, the European colonial powers acquired an average of about 240,000 square miles (an area somewhat larger than France) *per year* between the late 1870s and World War I.”

China), and the Westphalian system of law governing Europe since 1648 between the “community of nations” was considered both universally valid and sacrosanct, driven by an assumption of the God-given necessity of free trade between nations (Duus 1995, 4-9). This projected onto the world a nation-scaled version of bourgeois individual rights between capital and labor – that is, formal equality under the law, but stark asymmetries of power in terms of geopolitical clout, access to key resources, productive and military technologies etc. In such a context, Marx’s famous phrase rings true – “Between equal rights, force decides” (Marx 1990, 344) – which Japanese leaders could see clearly.

Whether this imperial frenzy was driven by the internal contradictions of capitalism (e.g., overaccumulation crises), the search for “cheap nature” (Moore 2015) that was becoming increasingly recognized as a prerequisite for capitalist dynamism and domestic stability, or simple psychological paranoia between rival powers desperate not to lose an edge to their competitors is a matter for specific historical analysis. Regardless of a nation’s specific motives, though, the central point is that Japan was operating in a hostile and competitive environment, where external land acquisitions were viewed as a matter of course in securing national prestige, power, and autonomy. Amidst the global land grab of the late-nineteenth century “new imperialism,” therefore, Japan acquired some of its own through rather remarkable military defeats of both China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). When combined with its seizure of Korea in 1910, however, this amounted to only 100,000 square kilometers of land – i.e., 10% of that acquired by Italy during the same period (Hobsbawm 1989, 59). So despite the impressiveness of Japan’s mounting national power and the psychological boost given to non-Western peoples in its defeat of a “white” power (i.e., Russia), Japan still saw itself as in a relatively defensive position in geopolitical terms. As Eto

Shinkichi remarked, Japan viewed itself as “weak and puny” (Cumings 1984, 8), and this sense of insecurity was only deepened by various domestic troubles plaguing the nation in the wake of the highly expensive war with Russia. These included soaring expenditures on industrial capital formation that resulted in mounting tax burdens on its people due to international loans (Pyle 1996, 143).

It is through this contradictory set of circumstances – something we refer to oxymoronically as “defensive imperialism”⁶³ – that the Japanese presence and actions in Korea must be understood.

Imperatives of a Defensive Imperialism, 1910-1945

Once capitalist social relations had been quite firmly entrenched through the unfolding of the Meiji revolution, the imperatives of this dynamic system became evident. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, Japan faced both internal and external challenges. On the domestic political-economic front, a host of issues needed to be resolved. On the positive side, World War I had been a great boon for Japanese capitalism, as it afforded access to Asian markets that had hitherto been controlled by Western powers, but which were non-competitive at the time on account of these powers’ preoccupation with fighting in Europe. The continued expansion of Japanese capitalism necessitated, however, an increase in labor productivity through the implementation of more efficient methods of production, which required significant increases in credit. With the end of the War – that is, with the return of direct European competition in Asia –

⁶³ Peter Duus (1995) uses the term “backward imperialism” (e.g., 434) to make a similar argument. This term is reminiscent of the problematic “backward” country rhetoric of the post-World War II development theory era, and also implies that the West’s forms of imperialism were somehow “*forward-looking*” or progressive. The term “defensive imperialism,” instead, is intended to capture the contradictory nature of what Japan was up to – national/cultural self-preservation through the annihilation/assimilation of other societies.

the favorable context that had allowed for Japan's capitalist dynamism was being undermined. In any case, this expansion in credit led to a concomitant rise in the levels of production, thereby triggering a perennial – and ironic – problem of capitalism: an overaccumulation crisis.

Inflationary pressures in the 1920s, moreover, emboldened working-class politics, taking the form of a wave of strikes and more militant union activity (Chang 2009, 75-76).

The “external” geopolitical environment in which Japan was attempting to thrive did not help matters. As a “late developer,” Japan had already been effectively shut out of Asian spaces controlled by Western powers. The latter were protecting their respective political-economic “spheres of influence” through the institution of tariff barriers and the like, which did not permit Japan to enjoy the benefits of “free trade.” After World War I, moreover, Western powers abruptly changed the “rules of the game.” In a move to secure the head-start that they had established through earlier violent colonial acquisitions, Western powers “suddenly took up the cry for peace, working through the League of Nations and arms reduction talks” (Hoston 1990, 86). This placed an additional importance upon Japan's colonies, whose role within its political-economic ascent would need to both broaden and deepen, as we will see shortly.

For now, though, we highlight a central tenet of capitalism that has been very much overlooked in the (South) Korea scholarship. This involves Rosa Luxemburg's (2003) argument regarding the ambivalent character of capital accumulation, which operates according to the dualistic logic of seeming “internal” market equality and “external” political-economic violence.

The former, she argues,

concerns the commodity market and the place where surplus value is produced – the factory, the mine, the agricultural estate. Regarded in this light, accumulation is a purely economic process, with its most important phase a transaction between the capitalist and wage laborer. In both its phases, however, it is confined to the exchange of equivalents and remains within the limits of commodity exchange. Here, in form at any rate, peace, property and equality prevail. (432)

This is the aspect of capitalism that is lauded daily by its supporters, serving as the domain of “peaceful competition” where “pure commodity exchange” and its “marvels of technology” are on full display.

The other aspect, one that she argues is inseparably and “organically linked” to the first, involves capitalism’s relationship vis-a-vis non- or semi-capitalist modes of production. These encounters are usually mediated by – in increasing order of violent enforcement – the international loan system, colonial policy and war. It is here, Luxemburg (2003) argues, that “[f]orce, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process” (432). In some cases, the relationship of violent appropriation is sporadic and ongoing, a process that Harvey (2003) calls “accumulation by dispossession,” but it does not significantly alter the production relations of the peripheral society itself. At other times, however, this relationship of violence acts as the precondition for a fundamental transformation of a society itself: furnishing the basis for the sort of *capitalist revolution* that (South) Korea rapidly and chaotically undertook over the course of the twentieth century, following in the footsteps of the West’s own turbulent transformations of previous centuries. As we will see, it is precisely this failure to recognize this ambivalent dualism of capitalist transitions that leads to the sort of nationalist blinders of much of the Korea scholarship.

As important as dominant nations’ violent procurement of the necessities for dynamic capital accumulation from the periphery – the Four Cheaps of food, labor-power, energy and raw materials (Moore 2015) – however, is the role of non-capitalist societies in serving as spatial fixes for the contradictions of “successful” accumulation within core nations (Harvey 1982).

While Luxemburg was correct to stress capitalism's need for a non-capitalist "outside" for its continued reproduction, the reason that she provided for this need is unsatisfactory (Brewer 1980), yet insightful in a way she herself did not foresee. That is, she argued that it was the problem of *underconsumption* within the core nation that was the driving force for outward expansion, since the exploitative relations between capital and its domestic working-class was such that the latter lacked the means to provide the effective demand for the products that the former were attempting to sell. This undergirds capitalism's need to trade with non-capitalist social formations in order to stabilize the overall system, which may need to be carried out by force (e.g., the Opium Wars). For Luxemburg, this is a contradictory and finite "solution" given that the system's expansion perforce means that the day will ultimately come when there are no longer any "outsides" to resolve this inherent contradiction. The historical-geographical record of subsequent world history does not support Luxemburg's underconsumptionist argument,⁶⁴ but she was nevertheless quite prescient in her insistence on capitalism's need for a non-capitalist outside (Harvey 2003a, 140-142).⁶⁵ As we will see later on, subsequent theorists have stressed this same point, though for socio-ecological reasons stemming from the peculiarities of capitalist value production (e.g., Meillassoux 1981; Moore 2015).

⁶⁴ Discussing the relevance of Luxemburg directly, Harvey (2003a, 138-140) nevertheless argues that a far more satisfactory general cause of spatial fixes is the problem of *overaccumulation*, rather than underconsumption.

⁶⁵ We insist that capitalism, as a globalizing mode of production, *ultimately* requires non-capitalist spaces to serve as "frontiers" of appropriation, investment, consumption and the like. In the short-term, however, this perceived "need" to expand is a relative one. As Harvey himself has argued, echoing a point made by scholars like Samir Amin, Western powers had not yet exhausted their domestic spaces as "fixes" for the contradictions of accumulation before venturing abroad. Rather, the West's securing of the Four Cheaps of raw materials, energy, labor-power, food (Moore 2015) from the non-West was triggered by the tantalizing opportunity that it presented. That is, in the immediate term, it was a *political choice* rather than an economic necessity.

Following from this central tenet, in the next section we examine some of the specific ways that Korea acted as Japan's colonial "other," which both served the interests of Japanese capitalism and triggered many of the necessary yet violent preconditions for (South) Korea's own capitalist revolution in the ensuing decades.

Korea as Frontier and Spatial Fix for Japan

Korea served several important functions in Japan's economic ascent. Indeed, it allowed it successfully to achieve the contradictory aims of dynamic capital accumulation and relative social stability, by acting as its own "Western frontier" (i.e., pressure release valve) to temporarily "solve" its socio-ecological challenges. We outline briefly here these functions. First, Korea (and the rest of the Empire) provided Japan with much-needed foodstuffs and raw materials, such as "rice, soybeans, cotton, cattle, and hides" (Ju 1996, 55-56). The importance of Korea as a supplier of cheap food is so crucial that it will be taken up in greater detail in the next section. Nevertheless, as a nation with limited "natural resources," Japan relied heavily upon "backward" countries to procure the raw materials necessary for its industrial growth.⁶⁶ Of Japan's imports from these nations between 1914 and 1938, raw materials fluctuated between 59 and 76 percent of its totals, approximately 15% of which came from its formal colonies like Korea (Sawai 2016, 22-24).

Second, and in a symbiotic relationship with this increased trade, Korea acted as a "captive market" for the explosion of consumer goods that were flowing out of Japanese

⁶⁶ Hoston (1990, 86) argues that a unique feature of Japanese imperialism that sets it apart from its European counterparts is that, due precisely to its paucity of natural resources, it had no choice but to "rely on military expansion rather than economic expansion first," whereas the "classic" European pattern was initially driven by a mixture of industrial power and financial forces. This argument further supports the idea that Japan's imperialism was, at bottom, an ironic and defensive one aimed at national self-preservation through Westernization.

factories during this period (So and Chiu 1995, 93-94), thereby allowing it to avoid potential crises of overproduction. This was especially the case in light of the commodification of everyday products that had previously been made in the home. This stemmed from, as we will see shortly, peasants being pushed off the land. And while the total amount of commercial activity in the colonies lagged far behind Japan, in terms of *per capita* consumption the discrepancy was significantly reduced (though it was unevenly distributed according to well-developed trade routes, or “nodal points,” within its transportation and communications networks (Sawai 2016, 28)).

Third, for those Japanese entrepreneurs and businessmen suffering under the intense competition of the domestic market, Korea represented a veritable “capitalist paradise,” due to its “minimal business taxes and little regulation of working conditions and business practices” (Cumings 2005, 168). This was compounded by the preferential treatment that the Japanese enjoyed over native Koreans, as well as the colonial state’s initial desire to keep economic power within Japanese hands. This latter trend gradually loosened somewhat, however, as Japan began to suffer from increasing labor costs, “swollen company profits,” and financial volatility following World War I. This led it to increase its industrial investment in Korea threefold between 1920 and 1929 (Chang 2009, 77), as well as “relax restrictions against production of manufactured products in Korea” (Kohli 2004, 41).

Fourth, with capitalism’s historically specific “law of population” (Marx 1990) that necessitates the *creation* of its own “other” through labor-saving technologies and the like (Harvey 2003, 140-142), the “surplus populations” that emerged in Japan found in Korea a desirable place to resettle (Duus 1995; Uchida 2011). In addition to individuals’ personal motivations for emigrating, the Japanese state – working in coordination with its Korean

counterpart, the Government General – actively encouraged out-migration due to its escalating “Malthusian dreams” of perceived population pressures that are intrinsic to capitalist social relations (Lynn 2005).⁶⁷

Korea as Japan’s Breadbasket (Cheap Food)

At least initially, Japan’s interest in colonizing Korea stemmed from its desire for it to serve as the breadbasket for the urban proletariat that was at that time exploding in Japan. This is because cheap food acts as the lynchpin in regimes pursuing capitalist modernization in its industrial form, due to its ability to cheapen the value of labor-power (Moore 2015). With Korea (and Taiwan) acting as “internal colonies” that provided cheap calories to Japan’s working-class, these nations functioned in a manner quite similar to the western frontier in the United States’ own rise (Turner 1893; Cronon 1991). This is especially true if one accepts Japan’s rhetoric about its benevolent leading of a Pacific-Asian “co-prosperity sphere”: where its slogan of “industrial Japan, agricultural Korea and Taiwan” (Ju 1996, 57) conveyed a mutually beneficial regional division of labor within a supposedly unified development process.

Sawai (2016, 25) emphasizes the central significance of colonial agricultural exports to Japan’s industrial capitalist development during the interwar years, which coincided almost exactly with its presence on the Korean peninsula:

In 1938, the ratio of the foodstuffs imports against the total imports reached 33.2%. Japan was thus able to spare foreign currencies previously needed for the procurement of such amounts of foodstuffs; this greatly helped the country’s balance of trade. *The accumulated value of the foodstuffs imports from the colonies between 1897 and 1939 was three times as much as the total amount of foreign capital introduced to the country over the same period. This is a good indication of how significant it was for Japan to take control of colonial agriculture.* (emphasis added)

⁶⁷ Lynn (2005, 29) captures well the rhetoric of the time by quoting lyrics from the so-called “Settler Song,” which declared: “In Korea where the Diamond Mountains soar, uncultivated fertile fields await us all.”

But how did it bring this situation about?

The most deliberately planned program aimed at improving Korea's agricultural productivity, and by extension yields, was the Japanese leadership's introduction of the so-called "rice production increase plan," which was carried out between 1920 and 1933 in response to the "Rice Riots" that broke out across urban Japan in 1918 (Ho 1984, 350; Ju 1996, 57; Chang 2009, 75). Japan's desperate need for cheap food is revealed by the unrealistically ambitious targets it set its Korean representative – the Government-General – to achieve. Beginning in 1919 with a total area of rice fields of 1,538 thousand *cho* yielding 12,708 *koku*,⁶⁸ the plan called for an increase to 427,000 *cho* and 9,200,000 *koku* respectively (Ju 1996, 58).

In order to bring about such dramatic increases, Japan sought to convert traditional Korean practices into ones more consonant with "modern agriculture." This included the following policy and technical "suggestions" for Korea's peasants-cum-farmers, most of which were pushed upon them through a host of oppressive arms of the colonial state that will be examined shortly. In terms of policy, a number of government-led programs were instituted, including land reclamation projects and irrigation associations, as well as technical support and financial subsidies to help facilitate the overall process. As far as agricultural methods were concerned, the state engaged in the "deliberate promotion of irrigation, improved seeds and the use of fertilizer" (Kohli 1997, 883) and other yield-improving techniques. These changes were brought about through the hefty sums of money that the Japanese invested in the process (Sawai 2016, 25).

From the standpoint of serving the needs of the Japanese mainland, the colonial government's approach to Korean agriculture worked extremely well. With a set-up akin to what

⁶⁸ One *cho* is equivalent to 2.45 acres, while one *koku* is 5.12 bushels.

would now be viewed as an export-oriented monocultural economy, Korea's agricultural output *doubled* between 1910 and 1941 (Lie 1998, 180). This, in turn, allowed Japan to increase its rice imports from Korea by 600% to 700% from the beginning of the colonial period to the early 1930s.⁶⁹

Japan's rhetoric about positive-sum-game increases in prosperity for all nations enmeshed in its regional developmental web aside, however, this siphoning off of a significant proportion of Korea's total rice crop – e.g., over 40% by the early 1930s (Hamilton 1986, 12-13) – and its other oppressive policies more generally, brought about a marked deterioration in the average Koreans' standard of living (in material, use-value terms) during the colonial period. Sticking for the moment to the issue of food consumption, Koreans suffered both quantitatively and qualitatively. In the former sense, for example, between 1915 and 1938 Korean peasants' overall intake of cereals decreased, while the average person's consumption of rice in particular dropped 40% (Grajdanzev 1944, 118-119). Not surprisingly, tenant-farmers and their families were the worst hit, where an estimated 62% of them were unable to meet the minimum calorie requirements of an "adequate diet" (Lie 1996, 180). Qualitatively speaking, Koreans were made to subsist on lower-quality and less desirable foodstuffs such as barley and millet: so, whereas average rice consumption dropped from 124 liters in 1912 to 77 liters by 1929, millet consumption increased from 42 to 65 liters over the same period (Ju 1996, 60; Lee 1936, 302). Within this paradoxical situation of a nation doubling its agricultural output yet decreasing its citizens' material standard of living, a variety of terms arose to capture this such as sending so-called "starvation exports" to Japan, or speaking of the "spring starving" (Cumings 1981, 44-45).

⁶⁹ An entry in the *Encyclopedia of Korea* (527) provides the following figures: "net imports of rice from Korea by Japan increased over the period of 1915 to 1935 from approximately 170 000 to 1.2 million metric tons."

This discussion of Japan's colonial motives in Korea reveals a fundamental truth about the capitalist mode of production. As Moore asserts, "every epoch-making 'economic miracle' rested upon an epoch-making agricultural revolution sufficient not merely to feed itself, but also to lead the world" (2015, 243). He is speaking here of capitalist world history's main hegemonic regimes (Arrighi 1994) – Dutch (1648-1740), British (1680s-1910s) and U.S. (1870s-1980s) – but this insight pertains equally well to Japan's own (industrial) ascent within its regional East-Asian hegemony, with its "partners" (i.e., colonies) providing the cheap food that undergirded its cheap labor-power strategy. The significance of this food/labor-power nexus has been underappreciated in academic discussions of Japan's motivations in colonial-era Korea, which usually stress general economic or political ends.⁷⁰ The centrality of this issue however, especially for regimes pursuing an industrial form of capitalist development (i.e., real subsumption), will re-emerge in our discussion of South Korea's post-World War II "miracle" (Chapter 5).

The Colonial State

In his *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Engels (Tucker 1978, 755) made a fundamental point about the state that is often goes unrecognized today:

The state, then, has not existed from all eternity. There have been societies that did without it, that had no conception of the state and state power. At a certain stage of economic development, which was necessarily bound up with the cleavage of society into classes, *the state became a necessity owing to this cleavage.* (emphasis added)

In other words, where there were no classes in society, there was no need for a state. This sort of general claim, which is actually rare to find in the writings of Marx or Engels, does not specify the *form* that various states have taken throughout world history, since they reflect the

⁷⁰ For an important exception to this, see Ju (1996, 56n3).

particularities of the “class cleavage” that is operating in each case. Under specifically modern capitalist states, however, it is the *nation*-state form that is dominant,⁷¹ a phenomenon that has spread globally, especially under post-World War II US hegemonic auspices of the decolonization era that we discuss in the next chapter (McMichael 2017).

Although the pre-colonial Joseon (or Yi) state is typically characterized as centralized, authoritarian and bureaucratic, its powers were curbed in several important respects, especially vis-a-vis the *yangban* landed elite, which limited its sway at the peripheral, local scale. Under the Japanese, however, the colonial state emerged as a monolithic power that acted as the “sturdy backbone” of imperialist rule, subjecting the Korean populace to a degree of state power in citizens’ everyday lives that was historically unprecedented (Robinson 2007, 36). At the apex of power within the colonial state was the Governor-General – a position that was invariably filled by a military commander – who was appointed by the Japanese premier and who reported directly to the Emperor.⁷² This position conferred upon its holder a great deal of power, such as the ability to create “system ordinances” that applied to Korea only. Indeed, over the course of the Japanese colonial rule, the various Governors-General collectively instituted 681 laws, nearly twice as many as were promulgated in the longer-lasting Taiwanese colonial period (Hwang 2016, 35-36).

⁷¹ We are fully aware that the *general* nation-state form that pervades the capitalist world can nevertheless take on various manifestations: social democracy, dictatorship, neoliberalism etc.

⁷² As Seth explains (2010, 43-44): “The colonial regime maintained Korea’s administrative division of thirteen provinces, which were subdivided into over 200 counties and municipalities. Counties, in turn, were subdivided into districts, villages, and hamlets. The governor-general appointed all the provincial governors and county superintendents. These officials appointed the district and village heads. Thus, although Korea under the [Joseon] dynasty had been a centralized state with a government that appointed officials down to the county level, the colonial regime penetrated even further to the township and village level.”

In terms of actually executing these policies aimed to serve Japan's political-economic objectives, responsibility devolved to its state bureaucrats and police force, both of which ballooned in number and influence over the thirty-five years of colonial rule. Regarding the colonial bureaucracy, the initial 10,000 officials that were present in 1910 had increased nearly nine-fold (87,552) by 1937. If all positions in both the private and public sectors that were crucial to the success of the colony are considered, however, estimates place the number in 1937 at 309,000 (Eckert et al. 1990, 257-258). As usual, discerning the specific numbers is of less importance than noting the obvious trend that they reveal.

Permeating Korean society even more insidiously than the bureaucracy was the colonial police force. From an initial 6,222 civilian and military police in 1910 hired to ensure the smooth operation of its rule, the numbers mushroomed to nearly 21,000 by 1922, then to 60,000 by 1940 (Seth 2010, 43-44). This quantitative increase in the number of police stemmed not so much from the need to pacify an increasingly hostile native population. On the contrary, various "civil liberties," such as they were, actually improved with the transition from the initial "dark" period (1910-1919) of military policing to that of so-called "cultural rule" (1920 onward) and civilian policing. Rather, the reason for the dominant police presence derived from their central role in helping execute Japan's various policies, many of which entailed duties not typically associated with policing: "[t]hey were the controlling agency of politics, education, religion, morals, health and public welfare, and tax collection; even the slaughtering of animals came under their scrutiny" (Eckert et al. 1990, 259). The police also possessed the ability to exercise summary powers regarding misdemeanors committed at the local level, which "allowed them to adjudicate, pass sentence, and execute punishment for minor offenses" (*ibid.*).

What is unique about the Japanese colonial state, then, is both the extensive and intensive character of its bureaucratic and police arms. When compared to other oppressive colonial regimes of world history, the level of Japanese involvement in the rule of Korea is remarkable. In 1937, for example, the French in Vietnam ruled a nation of 17 million with only 2,920 administrative personnel and 10,776 French troops. Compare this with the 21 million Koreans that the Japanese were governing (in the same year) with some 246,000 Japanese in public and professional positions (Cumings 1981, 11-12).

Lest these figures paint the wrong picture, however, an uncomfortable truth for Korean nationalists regarding this ubiquitous and intrusive state apparatus was the high degree of Korean involvement within it. For example, of the figures cited above regarding the size of the official bureaucracy in 1937, roughly 35% of those employed were native Koreans. Within the much-despised police force, moreover, *over half* were Korean. These Korean “collaborators” were no doubt hated during the colonial era, but they were openly despised and discriminated against after liberation in 1945. But as Robinson (2007, 37) points out: “for many Korean men without family connections, resources, or land, and with little education, careers in the colonial police became one avenue of mobility during the period.” Indeed, although the colonial state was run by an elite stratum at the top, the negative effects of its policies were visited upon the most marginalized members of Korean society. In a context where centuries-old cultural and political-economic arrangements were eroding in short order, it is hard to blame these “collaborators” for accepting the only means of securing a livelihood that was made available to them.⁷³

⁷³ This is surely what Marx (and Engels) had in mind when writing about the cultural eroding power of the introduction of capitalist social relations into a society, paradoxically “creating” the supposedly transhistorical *homo economicus* who always seeks to maximize his/her fortunes by pursuing *individual* self-interest:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal,

In any case, given Korea's importance to Japan's thriving (i.e., survival) within a competitive and hostile geopolitical environment dominated by Western nations, the colonial state was under constant pressure to operate a cost-effective government in Korea through various "rationalizing" processes (Hwang 2016). This is because any gaps between revenues and expenditures would have to be financed by the colonial government itself. Moreover, it was precisely the "efficiency" gains achieved through this rationalization process – measured, of course, according to capitalistic arithmetic rooted in monetized exchange-values – that served as the justification for the state's oppressive practices. Henderson (1968, 73) offers the following summary of the overall Japanese approach to Korea during the colonial period: "In essence, from beginning to end, the theme of rule was the same: stern, centralized, bureaucratic administration without constitutional or popular restraint, its high-handedness justified in Japanese eyes by its efficiency."

This "rationalization" process was highly oppressive and, as many (nationalist) scholars have pointed out, all about facilitating the most efficient extraction of Korean resources possible to benefit the Japanese empire. Nevertheless, two points of significance emerge from this discussion of the colonial state that bear on what follows in this work. First, as Cumings (1984 and 1999b) argues, the central features of the much-touted "developmental states" of the post-World War II period were initially forged during the 1930s. These "neomercantile" characteristics included:

patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." (Tucker 1978, 475)

During the colonial period, bourgeois social relations were not yet fully established, but it is precisely the uneasy co-existence of both "traditional" and "modern" ways that helps explain Koreans' antipathy towards such "collaborators."

its virtuosity in moving through the product cycle, from old to new industries; the extraordinary role for the bureaucracy and key agencies like MITI, exercising “administrative guidance” throughout the economy; the peculiar vehicles for credit, which account for much of the mobility in and out of industries; the role of large conglomerates; the systematic exclusion of labor from most important decision making; and the high rates of exploitation of poorly paid female labor.⁷⁴ (14)

Forged in the geopolitical fire of the Depression-era that triggered a unity and single-mindedness of purpose for people in Japan (and its colonies), these features were deeply baked into the fabric of these societies. In the Korean case, therefore, after the chaos of the initial post-liberation period (Cumings 1981 and 1990) and Korean War (1950-1953), it is not surprising to witness how the 1930s Japanese-style model gradually “reappeared, in nearly all its aspects, including militarization and harsh repression of labor” (Cumings 1984, 15; Kohli 2004, 41).

Second, a more neglected aspect of the colonial period revolves around how the “rationalization” process was essentially about rendering the socio-ecological heterogeneity of Korean human- and extra-human natures “legible” to the colonial state – that is, making it conducive to capitalism’s *quantitative* measurement that is inherent to value production. Porter expresses this process as follows:

Society must be remade before it can be the object of quantification. Categories of people and things must be defined, measures must be interchangeable; land and commodities must be conceived as represented by an equivalent in money. There is much of what Weber called rationalization in this, and also a good deal of centralization. (Scott 1998, 22)⁷⁵

⁷⁴ For an extended discussion of these features, see Chalmers Johnson’s classic 1982 work, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy 1925-1975*.

⁷⁵ Porter makes a similarly apt point in another work, *Trust in Numbers* (1995): “The quantitative technologies used to investigate social and economic life work best if the world they aim to describe can be remade in their image.” (Quoted in Scott 1998, 347)

This quantification imperative is a unique characteristic inherent to capitalism.⁷⁶ And this tendency, initially introduced by the Japanese, was only to spread and deepen during South Korea's post-World War II "modernization" drive, where categories of what Moore (2015) calls "abstract social nature" proliferated. For now, though, we turn to what is perhaps the best instance of this process during the colonial period: the cadastral survey (1910-1918).

The Rise of Private Property: The Cadastral Survey (1910-1918)

Just as trace elements of capitalism's social forms (e.g., money and wage-labor) can be witnessed in pre-capitalist Western societies, something akin to the modern-day notion of private property was evident in pre-colonial Korea. Dating back at least to the beginnings of the Joseon period in 1392, select families enjoyed landholding claims that could be passed along to their descendants, allowing this class to accrue the benefits of any produce of the land that was typically worked by tenant or slave labor – after taxes obligations were met. Like countless other pre-capitalist societies, land was the most significant and trusted form of wealth and status in Joseon society. There were distinctions made, to be sure, between those members of the *yangban* landed elite who held official posts in the state bureaucracy etc.; but it was nevertheless the case that, the closer one's access to the land, the greater their social status and chances of upward mobility (Eckert et al. 1990, 264-265). This form of private property differed markedly from its modern-day incarnation, however, in that all lands technically belonged to the king, and were

⁷⁶ We signal here a contentious debate regarding whether a bureaucratic "iron cage" will, as Weber argued, necessarily emerge in *any* "post-industrial" society due to the rationalization process, or whether this is, as we argue here following scholars like Lukacs (1971) and Postone (1993, 70-72), a feature specific to capitalism due to its need to serve the commodity-structure that socially mediates social relations via objects. For a detailed discussion of this issue pertaining specifically to Korea, see Hwang 2015.

doled out to members of this landed elite in exchange for its ongoing, loyal support (Cumings 2005, 41).

Although many aspects of these landed relations managed to persist through the end of the colonial period in 1945, the Japanese sought to convert the form of private property relations in Korea in accordance with “modern” capitalistic dictates. Driven by the imperatives of its specific form of capitalist development (i.e., imperialism), one of the first acts and top priorities of the Japanese was therefore the undertaking of a cadastral survey, which it completed from 1910-1918. The central aim of the land survey was to generate greater revenues for the colonial state through the systematization of land tax collection, seeking to curb the tax-avoiding methods of Korea’s landed class that were, ironically, a key factor in the downfall of its *ancien régime*, such as underreporting crop yields, hiding resources, and the like (Cumings 1981, 41-42). To achieve this, the Government General (i.e., colonial state authorities) established the Land Survey Bureau, which “mapped all plots of land, classified it according to type (upland, dry land agriculture, paddy, etc.), graded its productivity and established ownership” (Eckert et al. 1990, 265). It also required that all landowners report how much they owned and to provide proof of title to the land.

From the standpoint of today’s popular prejudices, this process might seem rather banal and routine. However, its significance lay in the fact that, for the first time in Korean history, land was rendered a fungible and saleable commodity, the alienness of which can hardly be overemphasized given its break with centuries (if not millennia) of the area’s history (Hamilton 1986, 9). The implications of this commodification of land were, therefore, enormous and (at least to this day) irreversible. As Cumings (1981, 42) argues:

By placing landlord-tenant relations on a modern, or legal-rational, footing, ancient and customary reciprocal obligations were eroded. Tenant rights became less secure as

landlords became more aware of the possibilities for profit in changing one tenant for another; thus whatever informal ties existed that may have given some measure of stability to the old system began to disintegrate. The fixing of land values and prices meant that land became a more negotiable asset; it could be used for securing loans and mortgages.

From this statement we gain a sense of the ambivalence of this revolutionary transformation in Korea's social property relations. On the one hand, for those who accepted these new arrangements, certain benefits and privileges could be enjoyed. On the other hand, those who failed to do so – either because they objected to this break with landed tradition, did so incorrectly out of ignorance in navigating the new bureaucratic logic, or simply could not pay their taxes – had their land summarily appropriated in a clear example of what Harvey refers to as “accumulation by dispossession” (2003). The Government General added to its land holdings by nationalizing village common lands, the majority of royal lands, and all unclaimed land. These confiscated plots were typically sold off to Japanese landed companies, settlers, and absentee landlords at low prices, the biggest purchaser being the Oriental Developmental Company, a greatly detested semi-governmental outfit first chartered in 1907 (Uchida 2011).

For the Japanese, this effort was not carried out without a hefty price-tag – 20 million *yen* (Cumings 2005, 151) – but the cadastral survey nevertheless clearly achieved its objectives. By 1930, for example, the colonial state was able to bring in 250% more tax revenue than in 1910, which accounted for nearly half of all government revenues (Cumings 1981, 41). In terms of the concentration of land holdings, moreover, the Government General owned 40 percent by that year – that is, 8,880,000 *chongbo*, or 21,756,000 acres (Eckert et al. 1990, 266).⁷⁷ Significantly, it was not just the sheer quantitative proportion of Japanese land ownership that mattered, but

⁷⁷ Kuznets (1977, 17) asserts that Japanese land ownership reached the 50% mark, though a more conservative estimate places it somewhere between 25% and 50% (Hamilton 1986, 11).

also the fact that it possessed the qualitatively most preferential land of the southernmost part of the peninsula that was responsible for approximately 25% of all of Korea's grain production (Hamilton 1986, 11).

Korea's Insertion into the World Market, and Resulting Market Dependence

We will deal more specifically with the changes to Korea's class structure and the impacts of that society's insertion into the world market via colonialism in a later section, but here we stress how, in conjunction with the colonial state's "rationalization" of Korea (the cadastral survey, in particular), there was a simultaneous broadening and deepening of commoditized activity over the course of this era.

In his classic 1944 work, Karl Polanyi offered a three-stage model of how societies have historically undergone the titular "great transformation" to a *market-regulated society* – Polanyi's more palatable euphemism for capitalism. Almost invariably triggered by an external threat such as colonialism, at least until the post-1945 era of "development," this general process included: 1) the "commercialization of the soil"; 2) the "forcing up of the production of food and organic raw materials to serve the needs of a rapidly growing industrial population"; and 3) the exporting of surpluses to the metropole (2001, 188-190). Note, unlike in "developed" Western societies, this does not entail the transition to fully developed relations of real subsumption for the colony. However, what was markedly distinct in the Korean case, and what laid the basis for South Korea's (and Taiwan's) post-World War II industrial transformation (i.e., real subsumption), was the fact that Korea was subjected to Japan's unique form of colonialism that we outlined earlier – in short, bringing industry to it, rather than taking its raw materials and the like to the metropole. Cumings (1981) summarizes the central features of the "process of

commercialization” (i.e., commodification) that took place under the Japanese, which included various aspects broached in this chapter:

the establishment of contractual bases for land; the fixing of a price in world terms for its product; the utilization of landlord and bureaucratic domination for the extraction of rice; and the use of the surplus for investment elsewhere (Korean cities, Manchurian factories) or to feed the metropole. The result was a clustering of forces at the extremes: accumulation, wealth, diversity at the one end, whether in the colonial city or the metropole; primitive accumulation, poverty, and homogeneity at the other. (51)

Several important observations should be noted about the consequences of Korea’s foray into its own “great transformation.” First, it is undoubtedly the case that (pre-colonial) Joseon society was a hierarchical one that involved high levels of exploitation of peasants by (often absentee) landlords (e.g., rents of 50% or more were quite commonplace); however, these rents were paid “in kind” (Hamilton 1986, 9-10). That is, they were “paid” in *use-values*, such as rice, rather than in the money form. Dae-Oup Chang (2009) explains:

As self-subsistence production was discouraged and money-based taxes were introduced, families now had to rely on the money economy and the market. While petty farmers sold their surplus products in order to buy other necessities, the massive amount of rice that landlords took from tenant farmers as rents was commodified. By 1937, rice production for sale reached about 70 per cent of the total rice production. (76-77)

In Marxian terms, this represented a key example of the generalized shift from use-value to exchange-value production.

This is no small matter, as we will shortly see, and is intimately related to the second key ramification. This transition stemmed from the fact that the peasants’ produce was typically no longer to be consumed by the landlord, but rather circulated within the world market. By the 1930s, moreover, “population increases drove up rents, rice prices were increasingly tied to the volatile world market, and the world depression after 1930 drove rice prices down, further increasing peasant indebtedness” (Robinson 2007, 40). This led to spikes in the number of

landlessness peasants who were “set free” to try their hand in Korea’s, Japan’s and/or Manchuria’s labor markets (Kawashima 2009).

The introduction of commodification began altering radically the way in which peasants (and proto-wage laborers) lived their lives, which were now characterized by increasing market dependence, both for their livelihood and for satisfying their needs. A missionary living in Korea during this era captures the profound shifts that had occurred, and how people were forced to adapt. His description is worth quoting at length:

In 1909 the agricultural population, which was then I suppose nearly 90% of the total population, possessed very little money, and used it seldom. On market day they met to barter what they produced, food, straw or wooden shoes, cloth, vegetable oil, oiled paper umbrellas, paper for windows, walls and writing, brushes and Chinese ink, medicines, cows and pigs, hens and ducks, all these things were home produced and exchanged. Even the few imported things which were beginning to find a market, e.g. kerosene, cheap cloth, soap, were generally able to be bartered for. As far as money went the majority of the people were as poor as church-mice, yet they were to a great extent self-sufficing.

That condition rapidly changed. Rubber shoes, foreign umbrellas, clothes, Japanese ink, pens, looking glasses, medicine, government monopoly tobacco, and hundreds of other things had to be bought with money, and became necessities of life, the standard of life “so-called” was said to have rapidly risen. Again taxes had to be paid in money, taxes on land, on farm cattle and vehicles, on cycles, on dogs etc. So money had to be found, and crops of all sorts had to be sold. The majority of small farmers had to sell quickly to meet tax demands, with the result that every autumn the price of rice fell rapidly because the sellers were unable to wait, and so the market was swamped. Richer people could hold on till the Spring or later, when they probably got much better prices. Farmers had to pay their labor on the basis of the high price of rice in the spring and summer, and sell their crops on the low autumn prices. The result was that though there was much more money about, and though the rice crop in Korea was very greatly increased, the small farmer, and especially the small tenant farmer, was constantly struggling against debt; bad years resulted in permanent indebtedness, and the Japanese banks, the Oriental Development Company, and such-like bodies bought up the best land in the country, while the price of rice and all farming produce doubled and trebled the cost of living, and taxation more than kept pace. (Nam 2018, 286; emphases added)

These structural shifts, while profound, did not yet represent a transition to relations of real subsumption – nor even to generalized relations of formal subsumption – but to an uneven and fluid mix of hybrid and formal subsumption. To put it in Varoufakis’s (2019) more accessible

language, Korea was still a “society *with* markets” rather than a “*market society*.” In any case, Korea was nevertheless well on its way to its great transformation, but this would only come into full fruition in the post-1945 period.

One of the reasons for the lack of recognition of how profound these changes were – aside from the dominance of the “production in general” view – was how this period was one characterized by both *continuities* and *discontinuities*. On the one hand, a crucial barrier to recognizing the historical specificity of value relations is how, in many respects, things appear not to have changed at all. For instance, in the colonial context (or areas of the Global South today engaged in hybrid or formal subsumption), (Korean) peasants appeared to be doing what they had been doing for centuries: living on a landlord’s land and producing crops such as rice.

On the other hand, however, the new social conditions in which these actions were undertaken were revolutionary in their implications. For to grow rice for the lord’s consumption in, say, the year 1600 meant producing a specific amount since, as a use-value, since his ability to consume rice was limited. But once peasants were inserted into the world market and producing for the *yangban* or Japanese lord’s enrichment in *monetary* terms (Nam 2018), these peasants entered a profoundly new set of relations whose degrees of precarity and exploitation are incalculably greater than anything they (or any peasant in the Joseon era) had ever encountered. As Marx (1990, 909) commented, “The flax [or rice] looks exactly as it did before. Not a fibre of it has changed, *but a new social soul has entered into its body*” – that is, the immaterial but objective substance of value (i.e., abstract labor) that is the essence of capitalist commodity relations. In other words, as Polanyi (2001) lamented, a market economy’s need to render the bases of a secure life – especially labor and land – into commodities was to *subordinate the substance of life itself*. On the psychological and cultural sides, despite the

continued dominance of the landlord class over the peasantry, the precarity associated with these new life conditions lent themselves to the spread of “ideas subversive to the *ancien regime*, of education and a sense of the world beyond.” No longer was the lord’s dominance viewed as so eternally fixed, ideas that would go a long way in heightening peasants’ expectations for radical reform upon liberation in 1945 (Hamilton 1986, 11).

In any case, once capitalism’s central social forms began to penetrate Korean society, a sort of positive feedback loop (or upward dialectical spiral) emerged that increased both the intensiveness and extensiveness of these forms. More specifically, as landholdings were privatized and set upon a “rational” basis via the cadastral survey, then subsequently commodified and traded on the world market, peasant indebtedness and overall precarity began to increase markedly. This, in turn, triggered a considerable exodus from these previously self-sufficient farms, as many headed to the burgeoning urban areas to find work as wage-laborers. Being separated from direct access to the means of subsistence, the necessities of life now needed to be procured through the commodity form, which increased the demand for commodification further still. In this way, there was a tight interdependent connection between the rural and urban realms (Cronon 1991), and the new dynamics of *generalizing* commodification served as a sort of transmission belt between the two realms. While by no means yet complete, this sort of feedback loop of capitalist social relations was rather unprecedented within colonial societies. The uniqueness of Japanese colonialism in Korea, as we have stressed, was that it brought industry to the colony rather than the other way around. And this set Korea on a course towards relations of (potentially) much deeper commodification (formal, then real subsumption), though at the time that this was far from a forgone conclusion.

Changes in Korea’s Class Structure

In this section, we outline the profound transformations in Korea's two major classes: the peasantry and landed elite. Before undertaking this task, however, we need to sketch the class structure that reigned in pre-colonial Joseon society, as well as the character of state-society relations. This will establish the comparative context through which the changes wrought by the Japanese presence can be best appreciated.

In Joseon Korea, as is the case in most non-capitalist societies, a person's class, status, esteem etc. derived from their relationship to the land. Those who owned land garnered the greatest respect, and those who worked someone else's land were held in higher regard than those who had no access to land and engaged in other forms of labor (Cumings 1981, 49). In Joseon Korea, the landed elite – an aristocratic class referred to as *yangban* – wielded a great deal of power vis-a-vis the state, but were locked into relations of interdependence with it. As one of the great historians of the period, James Palais (1975), states:

The *yangban* elite, which had many of the attributes of an aristocracy, maintained itself by legal and *de facto* inherited status, privileges, landholding, officeholding (in the central bureaucracy), and utilization of Confucian orthodoxy for the legitimization of status and economic interests. King and aristocrat were both mutually antagonistic and mutually supporting; each was dependent on the other for the continuation of his place in the political and social structure. (1975, 4-5)

One of the great ironies of this period is that this interdependence of the state and landed elite during the Joseon dynasty was the key factor responsible for that regime's long reign, which spanned more than five centuries (1392-1897). At the same time, however, it was also responsible for its inability to undertake the actions necessary to ward off the external imperial threat (as Japan had successfully done via the Meiji revolution).

Once the Japanese assumed power, one of their first acts was to dissolve the monarchy, as well as the nobility and bureaucracy that was associated with it. As Henderson (1968, 77) explains:

the Imperial Household pensioned off 3,645 Korean officials, selected with a detailed Japanese knowledge of the Korean upper class and its fractions. The infiltration and undermining of the leadership class had been ... an old and long process. Its final elimination was now extraordinarily thoroughly accomplished. ... At least from 1919 on, Korea may be said to have become a country without a leadership class.

Moreover, as a result of the Japanese appropriation or purchase of extensive landholdings, the landed aristocratic class's (i.e., *yangban*) power was significantly diminished, both in terms of access to the main traditional source of wealth in the country (i.e., land) and, by extension, its degree of political power at all scales. Under these circumstances, their most rational course of action, from the standpoint of retaining power vis-a-vis the peasant masses, was to align themselves with the Japanese rulers and hope for a swift end to the colonial presence (Hamilton 1986, 19).

The landed class was not the only segment of society to have experienced dramatic changes during this era, especially in terms of its ability to procure a stable livelihood. In a 1926 agricultural survey, an agrarian expert from Nanking University, John Reisner, asked a well-respected, local Korean thinker to comment upon the “economic difficulties” stemming from the recent changes that were taking place under the Japanese occupation:

Before the coming of Japan, Korean society was divided into four principal groups, the scholar, the farmer, the artisan and the merchant. Life was lived simply and each group had definite sources of livelihood. In recent years the scholar has been displaced from the schools he used to teach and from the official positions to which scholarly attainment led. The farmer is suffering because he is being forced to let go of his land under conditions over which he has no control or knows not how to control. The artisan is unable to compete with modern industrial enterprises and the merchants are likewise unable to compete with the modern developments. (Park 2015, 1)

In all realms of society, profound changes were afoot, and people were forced to scramble to adjust to these new ways of life. In the following two sections, we will look in greater detail at the ramifications that colonialism wrought on those two key fractions of Korean society: the peasantry and landed elite.

The Increasing Precarity of the Korean Peasantry: Rising Tenancy, Land Concentration, Proletarianization, and Migration

Increasing Peasant Precarity

When we speak of peasant precarity during the colonial period, we speak of a nearly generalized Korean precarity, given that Korea was still categorized as 80% agricultural as late as 1930. Even for those who attempted to take matters into their own hands by migrating to Korea's many burgeoning urban centers to try their luck in the new wage-labor markets found their prospects hardly any better. According to Grajdanzev, for example, starting from a base of 100 in terms of real wages in the first year of colonial occupation, by 1940 wages had plummeted by 33%, leaving most new proletarians with incomes insufficient to support a family, regardless of how much they worked (1944, 179-182; Hamilton 1986, 17-18; see also Kim 1975, 23-24).

For their part, Korean peasants were struggling under the contradictory imperatives of the semi-developed capitalist logics that were introduced by the Japanese. On the one hand, as we have seen, Korean peasants were incorporated into the world market through the flow of their rice to Japan. This placed new demands upon them that had hitherto been absent. On the other hand, Korea's subsistence peasants were, as the name implies and contrary to "farmers," focused primarily on meeting their household's consumption needs in terms of concrete use-values (i.e., food), a situation that became increasingly difficult on account of the growing number of "enforced dues" that they owed to the country's new political-economic power-holders (Cumings 1981, 49).

During this "age of empire" (Hobsbawm 1989), colonially oppressed peoples were suffering similarly through their insertion into the capitalist world market, as the suppliers of the much needed Four Cheaps of raw materials, energy, food and labor-power (Moore 2015). The Korean case, however, was in a certain respect more immediately precarious than others in that

what was being exported to the metropole was central to the popular imaginary and, indeed, to the basis of life itself: rice. As Ju (1996, 63) points out:

The external trade [in Africa and Latin America] was composed of the exchange of mostly luxury items such as ivory, gold, alcohol, textile and tobacco. ... In Korea, a large amount of rice, the basic food closely related to the problem of life or death for Koreans, was exported to Japan and a small amount of the cheaper and lower-quality grains were imported. Korean people thus suffered from hunger, malnutrition and starvation in spite of the traditional self-sufficient food economy of Korea.

We outline below some of the dynamics of this contradictory tension and their consequences.

Rising Rates of Tenancy and Land Concentration

A central feature of this increasing peasant precarity was the rising rate of tenancy within agrarian society over the course of Japanese colonization. So-called “pure tenants” – those who worked lands that they themselves owned no part of – comprised 39% of all farm households in 1913-1917, a number that swelled to 56% by 1938 (Hamilton 1986, 11).⁷⁸ Moreover, the number of peasants who owned a portion of the land they worked – i.e., semi-tenants – also decreased over roughly the same period, from 40.2% in 1917 to 23.8% in 1939 (Kawashima 2009, 49). This trend accelerated markedly over the course of the Great Depression on account of the fall in rice prices, protectionist pressures from Japanese rice growers, and the concomitant negative effects stemming from the changes in the land tenure system in Korea that emerged in the 1920s, such as rising rents and rates of indebtedness (Robinson 2007, 82). These latter trends were aggravated by a credit system controlled by the Government-General that effectively excluded small cultivators and most tenants from participation, driving these increasingly desperate

⁷⁸ In terms of geographical differentiations in the rates of tenancy, it is worth observing that during the closing years of the colonial era these rates reached as high as 80% in the most productive rice-growing areas of the southwestern Cholla provinces (Robinson 2007, 40).

peasants to seek more local, personal sources of credit that subjected them to exorbitant levels of interest (Suh 1991, 86-87).

Related to this was the issue of escalating levels of land concentration, which occurred through a symbiotic combination of state policy and private landlord actions. And while Gragert (1994) is correct in arguing that land concentration did not stem *directly* from the cadastral survey (1910-1918), since it merely “codified the existing land relations” of pre-colonial Korea, it was this setting of landed relations upon a “rational-legal” (i.e., capitalist) footing that allowed the market-mediated forms of dispossession of Korean peasants that we outline in this section, the majority of which took place during the 1930s.⁷⁹ These political-economic changes and their concomitant policy expressions, moreover, were carried over to the ideological realm – for example, in landlords’ changing attitudes regarding debt repayment and other peasant-owned fees. In the pre-colonial period, Korean landlords would often come to the “aid” of struggling peasants, acting, on the one hand, in a charitable manner yet, on the other, reinforcing the hierarchical character of the landlord-peasant relationship. Under the Japanese, however, the more formal character of debt repayment obligations was enforced far more strictly, something that accelerated the number of peasant evictions. A report conducted on the land question in Korea in the 1920s observed this shift with respect to these land foreclosures:

In the old days ... the creditor rarely, if ever, foreclosed. He was willing to allow his debtor to live on in practical slavery for the sake of the high rate of interest on the money. But the Japanese, while frequently charging less interest, exact the penalty of the law if the easy-going Korean fails to pay on time. (Brunner 1928, 111; Nam 2018, 295)

⁷⁹ Uchida (2011, 61) points out how many individual Japanese land speculators amassed significant amounts of land by lending money to “cash-hungry Koreans,” using the latter’s farmland as collateral, then engaged in dishonest practices such as hiding from their debtors until the repayment due date had passed, which provided the pretext for dispossessing them. While these sorts of practices may have occurred, we emphasize here that it was the setting up of landed relations upon the bourgeois bases of equality in exchange that allowed for the much more widespread market-mediated forms of dispossession.

These trends worked hand-in-hand to accelerate the rate of land concentration.

In many respects, these dynamics represent a classic case of land grabbing,⁸⁰ and Korea's nationalist historians assert assiduously that this was the case. It is nevertheless important to keep in mind that, despite the increasing relative proportion of Japanese landed power in Korea, the majority of landlords continued to be Korean. According to a land survey conducted in 1930, Korean landlords clearly outnumbered their Japanese counterparts in the two lowest categories (5-50 and 50-100 *chongbo* respectively). It was only in the largest category – 100+ *chongbo* – where the Japanese were in the majority, a fact driven by the undeniable political-economic clout of large Japanese-financed land companies residing in Korea (Eckert et al. 1990, 267).

According to Henderson (1968), “The traditional landowners, the *yangban* connected to the court, comprised by the thirties comparatively few of those with substantial holdings while enterprising small-owners and the former *ajon* (rural clerks and tax collectors with detailed local knowledge) expanded their holdings greatly” (404). Contra the nationalist Korean position, then, we can see: 1) how the Japanese colonial period was not one of one-way exploitation of Koreans by Japanese; and 2) that for some segments of the Korean population there emerged in this new context the beginning of the belief in, and indeed the reality of obtaining, the sort of upward social mobility through individual knowledge and initiative that is the oft-stated justification of capitalism, the ostensible progressive side of its erosion of precapitalist hierarchies.

Proletarianization and Mass Migration (or “Rural Exodus”)

Faced with the challenges outlined above, many peasants left the countryside to try their luck in new urban wage-labor markets, either as would-be full proletarians or merely to supplement their

⁸⁰ See Duus (1995), Chapter 10 on “The Korean Land Grab,” which refers to the *pre*-1910 annexation.

family's agricultural income (Cumings 2005, 176). Peasants left in droves to face the "appalling conditions" that awaited them in the cities because they effectively had no other choice: "without land that could produce a surplus above rent, taxes, input costs and debt repayments there was no means of a livelihood" (Hamilton 1986, 18).

This proletarianization process – one that, crucially for subsequent events and the arguments we derive therefrom, was only *partial* over the course of the colonial period – is revealed in two interrelated phenomena. The first is the dramatic growth in the number of wage-laborers, if not "proletarians" properly so-called. A report produced in 1933 by the Chosen Industrial Bank put the number of wage-workers on the peninsula in key industrial sectors – i.e., transport, manufacturing, mining, construction etc. – at 214,000. Just ten years later, as a result of Japan's empire-wide "total war" mobilization, that number jumped by 800% to 1.75 million, the vast majority of whom were Korean. Indeed, Japanese wage-workers in Korea made up just 7% in 1943 (Eckert 1996, 17).

The second manifestation involved rapid levels of urbanization. With approximately 2-3% of the Korean population living in cities of 50,000 inhabitants or more on the eve of colonial takeover in 1910, this number catapulted to 11.6% by 1946 (Kim 1975, 32; Mills and Song 1979, 58). Outside of Korea proper, mass urban migration was evident in Manchuria and Japan, so that in 1940 there were 1 million and 2 million Koreans living in these areas respectively (Mason et al. 1980, 79). This trend was especially intense during the Japanese war mobilization period that took place roughly between 1935-1945. This process initially stemmed, however, from the manufacturing boom that took place in Japan during the First World War. Paired with the concomitant cadastral survey in Korea, they worked hand in hand to trigger both the creation of the "uncontrollable colonial surplus" that migrated to Japanese cities, as well as the need to

address the social, political, and economic challenges this presented (Kawashima 2009). Regardless of the challenges this placed on the Japanese leadership, this mass population movement outside of Korea was crucial in attenuating all manner of social pressures that would have otherwise threatened the continuity of the colonial regime in Korea, and by extension the Japanese empire itself (Hamilton 1986, 16). By the end of World War II, approximately 20% of the Korean population was living in areas other than where they were born, with this number being as high as 40% of people in the crucial period of productivity in a worker's life (15 to 40). Following Cumings (2005, 175), the crucial point is this: the effects of the above meant that, up to that time, "few if any other agrarian societies were ever subject, in such a short time, to the immense population shifts and dislocations of Korea in the last decade of Japanese rule." These were to have a profound effect on the political-economic course of South Korea's post-1945 "modernization" project. This, we stress, is the crucial legacy of the Japanese colonial period.

Indeed, an important qualification to keep in mind regarding the trends outlined above of Korea's gradual insertion into the world market is just how "immature" it was in terms of orthodox definitions of capitalist development. For example, Chang (2009) has pointed out how nearly all of the dispossessed peasants who left to engage in wage-work were not "free laborers" in the typical sense, since many were "mobilised and allocated by the colonial state and state agents, often with feudal-like labour contracts and police surveillance" (81). Moreover, the vast majority of Korean wageworkers labored not in large-scale factories – positions typically reserved for Japanese workers – but in small handicraft manufactories, something that ostensibly points further to the *lack* of development of specifically Korean capitalism (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, the uncertain and precarious conditions that they faced represented a hallmark of the (semi-)proletarianization (and primitive accumulation) process(es) under capitalism – that is,

what Kawashima (2005), following Althusser, calls the “becoming-necessary of contingency.”

Engels captures this aleatory dimension of wage-work that stems from people having been severed from direct access to the means of subsistence and, hence, being subjected to capitalism’s peculiar demographic and employment logic:

Far more demoralizing than his poverty in its influence upon the working man is the insecurity of his position, the necessity of living upon wages from hand to mouth, that in short which makes a proletarian out of him. ... The proletarian, who has nothing but his two hands, who consumes today what he earned yesterday ... is subject to every possible chance. (Kawashima 2009, 45)

This precarious state is what drove Korean workers to endure such long hours and oppressive working conditions during the colonial era and, as we will see, in the postcolonial period during its “cheap labor” strategy.

As for that small minority of Koreans who actually benefited from the altered agrarian relations and pledged their “quiet support” for the policies of the Government General (Robinson 2007, 41), the popular resentment directed towards them in the post-liberation period undergirded one of the most crucial colonial legacies for (South) Korea’s postwar capitalist revolution: explosive class conflict after 1945 that effectively undermined the political position of the much-loathed landlord class and other so-called “collaborators.” This entailed the following tensions: 1) it rendered the population susceptible to accepting the inherent turmoil of undergoing a capitalist revolution; and 2) provided a vulnerable ruling class that could be forced to accept (out of the need for self-preservation) the terms dictated by Park Chung Hee’s industrialization drive in the 1960s.

The Eroding Legitimacy of Korea’s Landed Elite

Upon assuming power, the Government-General sought to use the longstanding power and legitimacy of the Korean landlord class to achieve its goals, since the peasants were

understandably resistant to any direct interference in their affairs from this new alien power. As we saw earlier, the initial aim was to increase rice production based on improvements in agricultural techniques within the new politico-legal framework (e.g., cadastral survey), all while maintaining a relative degree of social stability amidst these tremendous changes. Although also resistant at first to the Japanese meddling in their affairs, Korea's landed elite were coaxed into cooperation by the various political-economic incentives offered by the colonial state. Crucially, however, with the implementation of the cadastral survey and the increasing power of the state (via tax collection etc.), the *yangban* became a class increasingly severed from its direct connection to the power of the (colonial) state, despite remaining powerful at the local and regional levels. This shift initially triggered Korea's landed elites to align themselves with nascent militant peasant organizations, as in during the so-called Uibyeong movement. Given the increasing hold of the Government-General in its newfound colony, however, the uprisings emerging out of this alliance were effectively quashed, which represented the first of several major blows to the landed elites' power.

Nevertheless, despite these initial clashes, the Japanese colonial authority still required the aid of the landed elites at the local level to help push through its policies upon a peasantry understandably resistant to changes in centuries-old ways of life. Drawing on the (remaining) historical prestige of the landed elites, it created government-led local agricultural associations, recruiting larger landlords (10 *jungbo* or higher) to participate in them. Suh (1991, 3) summarizes the changes sought as including "the installation of model farms and paddy fields for seed-raising, joint purchase of and distribution of new rice seeds, lending of farm tools and fertilizers, advancement of loans for purchases, education on new farming technologies," and the like. As these initial efforts proved less than satisfactory vis-a-vis the state's plans, it took it upon

itself to create links directly with the local landlords. It did so by providing them with aid and agricultural technologies that were highly state-subsidized, which were to serve a demonstration function at the local level for those still skeptical of the superiority of “modern” techniques (e.g., threshing machines, winnowers, chemical fertilizers).

Furthermore, by 1926 the state expanded its reach by creating an agricultural organization at the national level – the Agricultural Association (*Chosen Nonghoe*) – that would amalgamate the various local groups, while also extending participation to groups other than landlords, including three million farm households. Despite this new extension of membership to those much lower on the socio-economic ladder (i.e., peasants), the workings of the organization nevertheless heavily favored landlord interests. As landlords championed the state’s mandate to adopt the new methods to improve productivity, however, the previous links between peasants and landlords began to deteriorate, as the spoils of these policies accrued almost exclusively to the latter fraction. Moreover, as peasants from across the peninsula came into contact, albeit indirectly, through the national organization, peasant alliances were forged that lent power to a politics of resistance. This was all compounded by the increasing influence that leftist ideas began to exercise on the disgruntled peasants. With the waves of peasant uprisings that ensued in the wake of these developments, the landed elite relied increasingly upon colonial state power to help suppress them.

Despite being the most powerful class in Korea (outside of the Japanese), however, a number of shifts in the dynamics of colonial policy served to undermine the landed elites’ grip on power. First, as time went on, the colonial state became better able to deal directly with peasant organizations, which lessened the Government-General’s reliance upon the *yangban*. This situation was only deepened as the landed elite diminished its legitimacy vis-a-vis the

peasantry by, ironically, pursuing the aims of the colonial state itself. In this context, the state began to side more and more with peasant demands, as a way of maintaining social stability. Indeed, the Government-General enacted a series of laws in the early 1930s to help address deteriorating peasant conditions, often at the expense of landlord interests, such as the Arbitration Ordinance of 1932 and Agricultural Land Ordinance of 1934 (Uttam 2014, 78-79). These measures included a significant reduction in the landed elites' monopoly over land rights, as well as an extension to various tenants' rights.

Second, the 1930s saw a fundamental shift in the role of Korea within the Japanese regional imperial strategy, moving away from its role as "bread basket" to that of serving as an industrial center and geographical gateway for its continental invasion. As we will outline in greater detail in a later section, this signaled the birth of Korea's industrial revolution, though it was still one overwhelmingly controlled by, and benefitting, the Japanese. Moreover, as greater and greater numbers of peasants were driven into the burgeoning Japanese war machine, shortages of labor in the countryside became acute, thereby strengthening the bargaining power of those who remained behind vis-a-vis the *yangban*.

Suh (1991) summarizes the twin pressures that worked together to undermine the power and legitimacy of the *yangban* class, which served to destabilize the stranglehold on power that it had enjoyed for the centuries prior to the Japanese invasion: "[The landlords] became a declining social class sandwiched between the formidable colonial state and the intractable tenants. The landlord system, which had been weakened since the rise of the tenant movement, began to be greatly undermined" (215). Stated another way, the threat to their power forced the *yangban* into a Faustian bargain with the colonial state. That is, they enriched themselves to a great extent *economically*, but at the cost of their *political* legitimacy (Hamilton 1986, 11). In this sense, the

colonial era represented both continuities and discontinuities for Korea's landed elite. That is, it further embedded the *yangban*'s power in the land; yet at the same time, this process (and the shifting priorities of the colonial overlord) brought about seismic shifts in the class structure, which ultimately served to undermine its power. Its final defeat did not come until the post-liberation period, however, something that will be taken up in Chapter 5.

Colonial Overdevelopment or Underdevelopment?: An Impasse

Over the past several decades, a tremendous amount of ink has been spilled by scholars attempting to draw definitive conclusions regarding the legacy of Japanese colonialism in South Korea. In this section, we outline the merits of each perspective, which have essentially been stuck in a deadlock regarding whether the legacy was, generally speaking, positive or negative. These positions, held mainly by Japanese and Korean nationalist scholars respectively, are unable to reconcile themselves with one another based on the problematic way in which they have hitherto framed the issue. As such, we will attempt to transcend the impasse by way of the theoretical and methodological assumptions outlined in Chapter 2.

Infrastructural Investment under Japanese Colonialism

One of the reasons why this debate has been so heated is due to the nefarious character of many of the cultural policies implemented by the Japanese – such as the forced adoption of Japanese names, language etc. – as well as its denigration of cherished traditional Korean practices. On these grounds, the criticisms are difficult, if not impossible, to deny. However, many have pointed to the beneficial impacts, not of socio-cultural policies *per se*, but of the material-physical infrastructures that were bequeathed to Korea upon the Japanese withdrawal after World War II. It is to this legacy that we confine our discussion here.

As Jones and Sakong (1980) argue, “[t]he Japanese left behind physical facilities constituting one of the largest ‘turnkey’ projects in history,” as Korea “inherited over 2,500 operating industrial and business enterprises, as well as infrastructure, inventories, real estate, and 15% of the nation’s land; the official count was 166,301 items of such so-called ‘vested property’” (30). As we have argued, this significant amount of physical infrastructure created in its colony stemmed from Korea’s strategic position within Japan’s unique (i.e., un-Western) form of imperialism, where industry was brought to the colony rather than the other way around.

Beginning in earnest with Japan’s General Industrial Policy, first put forth at a conference in 1921, the importance of Korea’s role within the empire only grew over time. As the proposal stated: “Since Korea is a part of the imperial domain, industrial plans for Korea should be in conformity with imperial industrial policy. Such a policy must provide for economic conditions in adjacent areas, based on [Korea’s] geographical position amid Japan, China, and the Russian Far East,” which was to function as “a single, coexistent, co-prosperous Japanese-Korean unit” (Cumings 1999b, 75).

This infrastructural development process took various forms, but we will limit the discussion to two of them. First, there was the elaborate transportation and communications network that was established. Over the course of the thirty-five-year colonial period, the Japanese created thousands of kilometers of railroad track, mainly lines that ran north-south from “Korea’s southern ports to Seoul and Manchuria, and, on the bias, east-west lines that connected the mines and rice-producing areas in the interior to the newly built ports along the coasts” (Robinson 2007, 42-43). In the early 1930s, the Korean rail network was amalgamated with Japan’s much-larger South Manchurian Railway Company (SMRC), which was first established in 1906. By 1945, this network boasted 6,200 kilometers of track, over half of which was located

on the Korean peninsula. An extensive (automobile) road network was also built under the Japanese – 53,000 kilometers in total by 1945 (Eckert et al. 1990, 270). Regarding developments in communications, the colonial era saw the creation of nearly 9,000 kilometers of telegraph lines and over 11,000 kilometers of telephone lines. In addition, broadcasting flourished during this period with fifteen radio stations by the time of liberation, accompanied by nearly a quarter of a million radio receivers (Henderson 1968, 98). In short, by the end of World War II, Korea had a more developed transportation and communications network than any other country in East Asia, aside from Japan itself (Cumings 2005, 167).

Second, the development of the Japanese colonial economy – which by the 1930s was moving into new areas such as chemicals, shipbuilding and steel – required access to abundant “cheap” (Moore 2015) sources of energy. Although within Japan proper railway building dominated civil engineering projects during the 1868-1912 period, from 1912-1945 (a time coinciding almost exactly with the colonial era in Korea) the focus shifted to the production of electric power via hydraulic works to help fuel these endeavors (Yang 2006, 95). A significant portion of this energy was to be procured from dams built within Korea. For example, 1941 saw the opening of the Sup’ung Dam by the Yalu River Hydropower Company. This was the first installment in a much grander scheme to build a total of seven dams along the Yalu River, which was referred to as the “project of the century.” As Aaron Moore (2013, 151) explains: “Capable of producing seven hundred thousand kilowatts and measuring 106.4 meters tall, 899.5 meters wide, and 3,110,000 cubic meters in mass, the gravity concrete dam was the world’s second largest after Washington’s Grand Coulee Dam.” These were the sorts of massive infrastructural works that were bequeathed to Korea following the swift exodus of the Japanese after the Pacific War.

This discussion of the infrastructural legacy left by the Japanese is not at all exhaustive, yet it should be clear enough by now that it was significant, especially by colonial standards. It is on these grounds that pro-Japanese scholars speak of the progressive (“developmental”) role played by the thirty-five-year Japanese presence in Korea.

Japanese Dominance and Structural Subordination of Koreans

Despite the significant amount of industrial activity undertaken during the colonial period by companies employing both Koreans and Japanese, the actual ownership of this wealth was highly concentrated in Japanese hands. A few figures will suffice to illustrate this trend. Of all firms operating in Korea in 1941, the Japanese owned well over half of these (i.e., 58.6%). This concentration of ownership was even greater in the heavy industries that were responsible for the majority of manufacturing growth over the course of the 1930s: “In 1941 Japanese firms accounted for 98% of paid-in capital in the metal industry and over 99% in the chemical industry.” This dominance was only slightly less extreme in light industries, with the Japanese contributing over 80% of paid in capital in textiles and rice mills (Haggard, Kang, and Moon 1997, 871). Moreover, following a deliberate state policy that favored oligopolies, this nascent industrial production on the peninsula was dominated by just a handful of firms operating with modern facilities, leading to a situation where 1.2 percent of all firms produced 80% of factory products in 1939 (Hamilton 1986, 15). The colonial government also benefited from this situation, and in many cases helped fund and coordinate it. Facilitated no doubt by the dramatic rise in tax revenues accrued under the revised land laws, for example, the income produced via “government undertakings” increased twenty-fold between 1913 and 1938 – that is, from 13,047,000 to 258,214,000 *yen* (Kim 1975, 24).

Korean-owned businesses, for their part, represented a mere 11%, 26%, and 12% of the “national” total in finance, commerce, and industry respectively (McNamara 1990, 2). And while there did emerge a proliferating number of traditional establishments that serviced the local domestic market, the average size of Korean-owned factories actually decreased despite the frenzied economic activity that took place during Japanese rule. Both on the job and in society at large, Koreans suffered structural subordination under a form of Japanese rule rife with racist policies, regardless of how hard they toiled. Koreans’ average wages were only half those of their Japanese counterparts (Lee 2013, 24), a situation that was at least in part a reflection of the fact that positions as managers, technicians, and bureaucrats were overwhelmingly filled by Japanese (Lie 1998, 181).

There were exceptions to this rule of Japanese economic domination – such as the much-studied Koch’ang Kim family (Eckert 1991) – but overall, there was very little direct economic “trickle down” (Lie 1998, 181) to Korea’s new (semi-)proletarians, businesses, or to those in the traditional sector attempting to navigate the potential prospects and pitfalls of this new alien system.

Reconciling the Impasse

The seemingly irreconcilable deadlock between the over- and under-development positions outlined above stems from their sharing of certain problematic assumptions. First and foremost is the belief that the capitalist development process ought to be a peaceable and even one. In an interview with Alberto Toscano (2007), David Harvey articulates our primary objection to framing the contradictory and ambivalent dynamics of capitalism – in our present case, assessing the legacy of Japanese colonialism in Korea – in the binary terms of either over- or under-development:

I have problems with development as an institutional discourse and as a disciplinary field. It seems to rest on some unilinear idea of progress and of inevitable geographical diffusion of well-being that is misleading if not illusory. It is for this reason that I prefer to think in terms of *uneven geographical development as a structural conditionality for the perpetuation of a capitalist mode of production*. (1131-1132; emphasis added)

Capitalism's expansionary imperative – geographically, socio-ecologically, and monetarily – means that a greater and greater proportion of the world becomes incorporated into it and is subjected to its laws, albeit unevenly.

The history of capitalism reveals how this process is a sort of double-edged sword for the nations imposing its forms and imperatives onto pre-capitalist spaces (Arrighi 1994). That is, a dominant power can secure via colonialism, imperialism, or simple trade (via foreign direct investment etc.) the fundamental preconditions of all capitalistic success: these are Moore's (2015) Four Cheaps of energy, food, labor(-power), and resources. Note that these are the necessary concrete use-values – or “material bearers” (Marx 1990, 126) – through which accumulation is undertaken. In procuring them, a dominant (Western) power need not foist upon these peripheral groups capitalism's social forms in a more fully “developed” (i.e., generalized) manner. However, if that same space is eventually to serve as a market for the proliferating quantity of goods that the dominant power is producing, then they also have to become “productive” along capitalistic lines, by transforming pre-capitalist forms of use-value creation into commodified form. Through this process, however, the dominant power inadvertently creates a new value regime that may eventually outcompete it (Marx 1991, 190 and 195).

In traditional European cases of colonialism, there was little incentive to enmesh “peripheral” societies into full-fledged commodity (i.e., value) relations (i.e., formal or real subsumption), since the Four Cheaps could be procured through trade (i.e., formal or hybrid subsumption), barter, or violent appropriation. We have seen in this chapter, however, how the

Japanese case was unique in that, due to its globally subordinate position vis-a-vis Europe's colonial powers, it needed to forge an integrated East-Asian economy to safeguard its national autonomy within an increasingly competitive and violent global system. This was the underlying basis of Japan's extensive investments in its colonies (e.g., Taiwan), which was especially the case in Korea due to its proximity to Japan and its strategic geographical position vis-a-vis Japan's intended penetration of the Chinese behemoth in the 1930s. Peattie (Myers and Peattie 1984, 8) points out this key difference between Japanese colonialism and its European variants – though without recognizing how its novelty stemmed from the sorts of considerations we outlined in our discussion of its “defensive imperialism” – when he writes:

[T]he proximity of Japan to its colonies, as well as the Asian provenance of the empire, meant that lower transportation costs, more rapid communication between home government and colony, as well as the fact that Japan and its two major colonial territories [Korea and Taiwan] shared a basic and traditional agricultural commodity – rice – made it possible for Japan to aim toward the integration of its colonial economies with that of the metropole, whereas most tropical European colonies could evolve only as export-oriented enclaves.

Once the rationale underlying Japan's actions is combined with Peattie's observations, we can see how the “development” of Korea during the interwar era was highly “overdetermined” (in the Althusserian sense).

Central to this process was Japan's need to address one of capitalism's key barriers, what economic geographers refer to as the “friction of distance.” This entails how nature's “bounty” (of use-values) – now mediated through the commodity form – can, and needs to be, appropriated, circulated, and consumed at faster and faster rates due to the “coercive laws of competition” within increasingly far-flung commodity markets (Harvey 2013, 106-108). This necessitated the creation of all manner of infrastructures. Grajdanzev (1944), in publishing his classic work on Korea at the close of World War II (4), saw this clearly enough when he

remarked that “The very exercise of a domination over a colony demands railways, roads, some schools, and some hospitals.” In this way, he intuitively an axiom that Henri Lefebvre (1991, 11) would later popularize through the rhetorical question: “Is it conceivable that the exercise of hegemony might leave space untouched?” To be sure, the Japanese presence radically transformed the physical landscape of the Korean peninsula. Summarizing this process, Robinson (2007, 42-43) remarks: “Cumulatively, the government buildings, shrines, railroads, motor roads, power and telephone lines, hydroelectric dams, barrages, and irrigation works transformed Korea’s visual geography and became potent symbols of Japan’s domination of the modern sector of society.” However, the crucial point to come away with is that massive state investments in things like transportation and communications infrastructures for the sake of their ability to extract and circulate resources, surveil an increasingly uprooted and precarious population etc. is a hallmark of all of world history’s “developed” regimes (i.e., formal, but especially real subsumption). As Hwang (2016, 121-122) remarks regarding the oxymoronic (yet accurate) process of “colonial developmentalism,” these mass investments “did not make the state in Korea distinctive ... but rather part of a *generalizable pattern of early industrializing states* throughout the world, including those of the United States, Sweden, Japan, and even Britain.”

From this vantage point, we can see how Japan’s massive, and no doubt expensive, infrastructural investments in Korea were indeed carried out, lending support for the pro-Japanese over-development position. Yet at the same time, these were necessary preconditions without which the integration and exploitation of Korean resources and labor-power could not have been “effectively” undertaken, which supports the Korean nationalist argument that this was all self-serving. But when capitalism’s peculiar form of development is seen for what it

really is – that is, an uneven, exploitative, and violent process – the two positions are not at all antithetical. Rather, they are, to use the Hegelian language, “distinctions within a unity” of capitalism, a system that is both constructive and destructive (Schumpeter 1943).

We quote Cumings (2005, 166) at length, as he effectively summarizes the details of both aspects that we have stressed in this section that are inherent to capitalism, and that have been overlooked by both sides of the “impasse” – that is, uneven geographical development (Smith 2008) and time-space compression (Harvey 1989):

Korea and Manchuria were stitched together by rail networks, webs drawn by colonial spiders on a determined southeast (Japan) to northwest (Asian mainland) axis, *thus to shrink space and time* and to spill Korean rice and Manchurian soybeans all along the wharfs looking out to the Sea of Japan, then to bring back fruit-of-the-Toyoda-loom cotton clothes for the waiting backs of Koreans and Chinese. What the colonizers called “a mighty trio” of railway, highway, and sea transport drew the colonial peoples into new forms of exchange, not just with Japan but with the world market system. The rails had penetrative and integrative effects, hastening the commercialization of agriculture and replacing the A-frame carrier, oxcart, and meandering path with the most up-to-date conveyances. As much as any other Japanese institution, *the railroad network provided the people of Korea and Manchuria with a harbinger of unprecedented change* and a symbol of Japanese power. (emphases added)

Cumings certainly recognizes the ambivalence of all of this, but does not root or explain it within the contradictory imperatives of the capitalist accumulation process.

In addition to the erroneous assumption about the supposedly peaceable and even character of (capitalist) development, an equally harmful assumption held by these scholars stems from their “production in general” view. The crucial problem is that this leads them to conflate the creation of use-values (a general abstraction) with (exchange-)value (a determinate abstraction), and thereby draw materially fetishistic definitions of the terms “legacy” and “development,” of which this chapter is primarily concerned. To express this rather abstract point through a more banal everyday example, anyone who has helped a friend or family member move, say, a couch up a flight of stairs will no doubt view modern inventions to

facilitate these sorts of acts (i.e., overcoming the friction of distance) as a blessing. However, when used to serve the dictates of capital accumulation, these infrastructures serve also to ensnare people more deeply into market-based dependence. Moreover, in viewing capital (value in motion) transhistorically as mere “things” (i.e., use-values), these scholars attempt to assess the colonial legacy in terms of the quantity of use-values bequeathed to Korea and/or their role in allowing Koreans to garner exchange-value after the Japanese vacated. As such, if certain use-values were destroyed – as was especially the case during the Korean War – this would supposedly render their role in South Korea’s postwar development non-existent.

There are two problems with this line of reasoning. First, it assumes that the primary function of these infrastructures was to satisfy people’s everyday needs (i.e., “development,” as popularly understood), overlooking how the essential function of these creations was to serve the needs of capitalism’s specific *social* power relation (i.e., value). Second, following from their “production in general” assumption, measuring “development” entails simply counting up the monetary values of these assets, in line with their materially fetishistic definition of “development.” Lim (1999, 611-612) provides a good example of this line of reasoning. In an attempt to debunk the position of Jones and Sakong (1980), who viewed Japan’s leaving behind of a massive textiles infrastructure as a boon to South Korea’s postwar development, Lim points out how textile growth (a major industry during the colonial era) dropped off significantly in the year following liberation. For him, this is proof of the lack of Japanese legacy, echoing the Korean nationalist position that aims to deny any “progressive” (by capitalist standards) role of colonialism in the postwar Korean “miracle.”

However, one of our central arguments in this chapter is that the true legacy of Japanese colonialism is that it introduced the beginnings of a peculiar mode of production whereby use-

values of various sorts were suddenly rendered into commodities. Moreover, as we will see, the completion of (South) Korea's capitalist revolution during the postwar period stemmed precisely from the flux and chaos triggered by this transition, thereby dissolving the barrier that usually stands in the way of other non-capitalist societies: a landed elite. In this way, when scholars such as Lim point to asset devaluation as evidence of the *lack* of a Japanese legacy, precisely the opposite is true. The "avalanche of social dislocation" of the immediate postwar years (Cumings 1981, 50) stemmed directly from widespread instances of these sorts of economic fallouts. The precarity, uncertainty, and suffering that followed – exacerbated by the arbitrary division of the peninsula by the US and Russians into warring halves – rendered both regimes amenable to social revolution. Capitalist transitions have typically been resisted by the masses; after all, it took centuries to eventually unfold in capitalism's birthplace: Britain (Thompson 1975). But under these circumstances, and with the landed elite fully discredited and loathed, South Korean society acquiesced (either consciously or not) to the sorts of revolutionary transformations inherent to capitalism: i.e., commodification (of increasingly large portions of socio-ecological life), proletarianization, private property right, wage-labor and the like. *This social revolution, rooted in tectonic shifts in its internal class forces, constitutes the real legacy of the Japanese colonial era, one without which full-fledged capitalist social relations could never have emerged in South Korea.*

This situation of precarity and uncertainty gradually deepened over the course of the colonial period, moreover, by the increasing degree to which Korea was embedded in the world market and value relations. In this sense, the transportation and communications infrastructures served to widen dramatically the catchment area of the socio-ecological commodity web. In the fetishistic world of commodity relations – characterized by "material relations between persons

and social relations between things” (Marx 1990, 166) – a greater and greater number of wage-laborers were able to “speak” (*ibid.*, 176-177) to each other via the market exchange of the commodities they produced. This massive expansion in the geographical reach of these interdependent relations is a crucial (yet often overlooked) aspect of value relations: value as social mediator, as we outlined in Chapter 2. Postone (1993, 154) explains:

Because it exists in objectified form, this social mediation [of value] has an objective character, is not overtly social, is abstracted from all particularity, and is independent of directly personal relations. A social bond results from the function of labor as a social mediation, which, because of these qualities, *does not depend on immediate social interactions but can function at a spatial and temporal distance*. As the objectified form of abstract labor, value is an essential category of capitalist relations of production. (emphasis added)

Production can be geographically scattered under other modes of production, with an overarching authority dictating these actions; however, these various labors will not be “in dialogue,” where each is dependent on the others for their subsistence (via wages). Under the generalizing sway of value, by contrast, a potential for far-flung yet interconnected relations arises, where things that occur in one region can have dire effects on people in other regions. Davis (2001) offers many examples of this, as when the technological “miracles” of the railroad and telegraph exacerbated the effects of droughts in nineteenth-century China, killing tens of millions in the process, by signaling price increases instantaneously and therefore shipping food away from where it was needed and, indeed, produced. These obfuscating tendencies constitute how value relations represent an *abstract*, rather than direct, *form of domination* (Postone 1993).

To be clear, the process of commodification and proletarianization were far from complete in 1945. Korean society had been deeply destabilized, yet was thrown into even greater chaos upon the Japanese withdrawal. As Cumings (2005, 174) argues:

The most important characteristic of Korea’s colonial experience may have been the way it ended: the last decade of a four-decade imperium resembled a pressure cooker,

building up tensions that exploded in the postwar period. The colonial situation built to a climax, abruptly collapsed, and left the Korean people and two different great powers to deal with the results.

To repeat, a central argument of this chapter is that this destabilizing process represents the most profound legacy of the colonial period.

A Critique of Methodological Nationalism

Related to the arguments of the previous section, there has been in recent times a growing appreciation of the limited explanatory power of analyses adhering to the dominant post-World War II framework that assumes atomized, mutually exclusive nation-states as its fundamental unit of analysis (Brenner 2004; Goswami 2004; Song 2013; Hwang 2015).⁸¹ Referred to here under the umbrella term “methodological nationalism,” the extant literature on South Korea, as outlined throughout this work, is deeply ensnared in this so-called “territorial trap” (Glassman 1999).

Attempting to discern whether the Japanese colonial presence in Korea represented a highly oppressive form of colonialism (the general Korean view) or a “progressive,” albeit oppressive, form of modernization (the Japanese view) only makes sense if you see in these processes something fundamentally distinct. As Cumings (2005, 149) argues by way of Timothy Mitchell’s (1988) illuminating work on the British colonization of Egypt, these supposedly distinct processes are in fact two interpretive sides of the same political-economic coin. That is to say, “colonialism” has been an inseparable dimension of all transitions to capitalist modernity, and indeed it is for this reason that they were so fiercely resisted historically (e.g., Thompson 1975). Following Marx’s belief that capitalism is no mere “economic system” in the narrow

⁸¹ Two examples will suffice to make the point here: 1) the vast majority of historical analyses, and indeed history courses in general, are framed by nation; 2) the field of comparative politics is “comparative” in the sense that it analyses two or more nations in a single analysis.

sense but rather a radically distinct *way of life* (Murray 2016),⁸² the nefarious acts of cultural imperialism were, in essence, merely the initial steps towards creating the modern bourgeois subject. Given enough time, moreover, this new way of life is *internalized* by its victims-turned-subjects. There is a crucial shift at play here therefore, from a “restrictive, exterior power” – e.g., the much-maligned Japanese assimilationist policies – towards an internalized form of productive power that is achieved through socializing agencies such as schools, armies and factories. These all aim to produce the “modern individual, constructed as an isolated, disciplined, receptive, and industrious political subject” (Cumings 2005, 149; Mitchell 1988, xi).

In the extant literature on (South) Korea, however, the significance of this transformative process has been obfuscated by the deep-seated historical rivalry between these two societies, as well as their relatively “late” timing in the sense of being fully developed “nations.”⁸³ The shocking transformations that are the essential preconditions for capitalist development (i.e., primitive accumulation, proletarianization, shifting class relations etc.) were in many ways lost on Koreans who read these in narrow culturalist terms, as malicious *but as distinctively Japanese* practices, not those inherent to capitalism (or “modernity”) as such. When the formal yoke of

⁸² Mitchell echoes this point when he asserts that (1988, ix): “Colonising refers not simply to the establishing of a European [or Japanese] presence but also to the spread of a political order that *inscribes in the social world a new conception of space, new forms of personhood, and a new means of manufacturing the experience of the real*” (emphasis added). In the preface to the paperback edition, he stresses how the insights of his particular spatially-temporally bound study can be extended to the operation of the modern “metaphysics of power” in all colonial regimes: “This book is not a history of the British colonisation of Egypt but a study of the power to colonise” (ix).

⁸³ Similar processes occurred in the US, of course, but due to the host of different European nations that were proletarianized in Europe and then sent to be exploited as wage-laborers in the US, it wasn’t interpreted in the same nefarious way. Many of these “settlers,” moreover, were given direct access to the means of subsistence through the Homestead Act that gradually pushed the native peoples out. This fact offers a further example of the obfuscating character of methodological nationalism, where equally despicable acts can be justified or overlooked by a discourse of national – read: “collective” – progress.

Japanese colonialism was removed in 1945, therefore, many of the changes wrought by the Japanese presence had been more or less internalized. South Koreans went on to operate under their sway due to the “production in general” view pushed by the US development project (and for the sake of national survival in a hostile Cold War context).

When the myopic lenses of methodological nationalism are jettisoned, and the profound socio-ecological transformations of twentieth-century Korea are viewed from the perspective of capitalism (or modernity) in general (Ollman’s level 3), however, we can more readily appreciate Cumings’s seemingly heretical claim that “there is no fundamental distinction between Japanese colonialism and the modern industrial project itself, *and thus no basic distinction between Japanese colonialism, American hegemony, and South Korean ... or Taiwanese modernization*” (2005, 149; emphasis added). Indeed, many of the abhorred technologies of power deployed by the Japanese to create “productive,” atomized, and self-disciplining citizens were pursued with vigor during the often-praised “developmental state” era under Park Chung Hee (1961-1979).

The Blinders of Korean Nationalism

Japan’s success and unique form of defensive imperialism set a significant new world-historical precedent, one that eventually drove it to the idea that it was its duty to liberate itself and Asian peoples in general from the (real or perceived) Western threat. Emboldened by their early military victories and the structural changes in political-economic relations that yielded greater material production, the Japanese rejected the social Darwinian dogma of the time and entertained an increasingly firm belief that national “self-strengthening” and, by extension, geopolitical might was within any society’s control, if only it could collectively garner the will to do so through hard work, wise policy decisions and the like. Reflecting upon Japan’s recent heightened position in the world, a writer for the *Chosen Shinpo* captured well the spreading

mood in Asia about the possibility of upward national mobility when he wrote the following in 1903: “Does that mean, however, that among the yellow race only the Japanese are superior in talent and wisdom or that they surpass others in insight and understanding? No, not at all. It is just that [the Japanese] exert themselves diligently, day and night, without ceasing” (Duus 1995, 431). The assumption was that the Koreans and other Asian peoples needed to learn from Japan in the same way that the Japanese had learned from the West. This justification for foreign expansion has been referred to as Japan “yellow man’s burden.” But contrary to the overtly racist and condescending British version, or that of the French *mission civilisatrice*, the Japanese espoused a language of a pan-Asian family that shared various cultural and historical features that Western powers could not so easily claim to share with its colonies. According to this line of reasoning, there may be a power imbalance in the relationship, but this was likened to the nurturing and benevolent unequal dynamics between an older and younger sibling (Duus 1995, 432-433).⁸⁴ Land occupation aside, the Japanese justificatory language sounds very similar, as we will see, to the sort of rhetoric used by the United States in its post-World War II “development project” (McMichael 2017). Societies – now framed legally and ideologically as “nations” – were not different in any essential way, so the argument proclaimed; rather, some members of the positive-sum-game “community of nations” just happened to be a bit further down the road to generalized prosperity.

Needless to say, however, the reason for the Japanese occupation of foreign lands was one stemming from its own lack of the human and natural resources requisite for dynamic capital

⁸⁴ As John Dower (1986) has shown, in its actual execution of this “pan-Asian family” strategy, Japan often resorted to racist, social Darwinian rhetoric and practices vis-à-vis “lesser” Asian groups, especially in the run-up and during the Pacific War (1941-1945). Japan’s so-called “Rape of Nanking” in 1937 offers an especially sickening example of this trend in the Chinese context (Chang 1997).

accumulation, so for many Koreans this language sounded hypocritical and self-serving. To make matters worse, the rhetoric of an (East-)Asian “family” that shared overlapping cultural-historical lineages needed to be supported by more than words. Towards that end, a cadre of Japanese colonial archaeologists and historians set out to prove that places like Korea and Manchuria had belonged to the “Japanese” prehistoric past, views that they attempted to substantiate materially (i.e., “objectively”) through the amassing of various artifacts and monuments that were unearthed during the forward march of the Japanese-owned South Manchuria Railroad Company and the imperial army. Ironically, therefore, the new-fangled political-economic logic of modern capitalism created the (perceived) need to prove its ancient origins for the sake of legitimizing its actions, both in Japan proper and the lands requisite to its current needs. As Pai (1998, 15) remarks, “the administrative and political necessities of incorporating newly ‘discovered’ people into their empire opened the first doors to the accumulation of historical, ethnographic, and archaeological knowledge.” Tradition, it turns out, is a modern invention (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

In a further irony, South Korean scholars in the post-colonial period resorted to the same sort of tactics to prove its supposedly millennia-long “national” heritage. To counter the more obnoxious apologetic Japanese accounts of the time, the postwar period saw the rise of a highly influential school of nationalist historiography (*minjok sahak*) in South Korea. Drawing on the same sort of archaeological, historical, and ethnographic sources, these scholars sought to provide material proof of a “pure Korean race” that supposedly had its origins some 4,000 years in the past. Projecting current experiences, circumstances, and imperatives back into the future, these scholars, at the dictatorial state’s behest, produced a narrative of a timeless and implacable

“Korean spirit of independence.” As Pai’s (2000) exhaustive account describes the state’s dominant nationalist position:

Korea’s national spirit (*minjokhon*) and its ongoing historical struggle (*t’ujaengsa*) continue to define Korea’s national identity as a homogeneous race (*tan’il*), unified state, and indigenous culture distinctly separate from those of China and Japan. Korea’s sense of racial and cultural superiority over other East Asian nations has been further reinforced by racial historical works that inculcate the belief that more powerful Chinese emperors, nomadic invaders, Japanese colonialists, and, more recently, Western foes have failed to suppress Korea’s national spirit of survival and struggle. A Korean identity was thus forged out of this racial history of suffering by instilling in all Koreans a collective sense of destiny as victims of superpower politics and foreign invasions since time immemorial. (2)

To be fair, it is not uncommon for societies that have recently experienced a traumatic period in its history to have the groups competing for power amidst the social chaos to hark back to the past as a form of legitimizing themselves. Inevitably, however, “In order to reconstruct an unbroken national lineage of one’s own distinctive past, frequently ‘historical continuity’ ha[s] to be invented by creating an ancient past either by ‘semi-fiction’ or ‘fabrication’”; moreover, these aspects of South Korea’s traditional “national” culture needed to be “creatively combined to appeal to nationalistic zeal and altered to accommodate contemporary political agendas shaped by changing domestic as well as international conditions” (Pai 2000, 11-12). To be clear, these comments are certainly not made to deny any “real” collective affinities between the various groups that have inhabited the Korean peninsula over the past several thousand years. Indeed, in contrast to some other Asian Tigers (e.g., Taiwan), Korea has a “millennium-long history of continuous, independent existence within well-recognized territorial boundaries, combined with startling ethnic homogeneity and pronounced ethnic, linguistic, and cultural difference from its neighbors” (Cumings 1999b, 74). Nevertheless, regardless of how heretical it may be to Korean nationalists, John Lie (1998, 176) observes soberly how, due to the “lack of print media, mass schooling, and historical-geographical variations across the peninsula, it is senseless to discuss a

‘national’ [Korean] culture prior to the 20th century”⁸⁵ – that is, prior to existential external threats to the peninsula that catalyzed the necessity for creating one. As Benedict Anderson (1991) has pointed out echoing a host of so-called constructionist perspectives (e.g., Gellner 1983),⁸⁶ the idea of the “nation” is effectively an “imagined community.”⁸⁷ The main problem with the Korean accounts is that they erroneously equate *ethnicity* with nationhood. For sharing a language (though with differences in local dialects), culture, and geographical proximity and boundedness is patently *not* the same thing as the characteristics reflected in modern nation-states and their unique capitalist imperatives.

In addition to this similar habit of selectively appropriating the past to forge unity and achieve social control, various other undeniable continuities persist from pre- to post-colonial (South) Korean state-society practices. Cumings (1999b, 77) summarizes some of them as follows: “[P]ostwar South Korea, far from being an anticolonial entity, often contained virtual replicas of Japanese forms in industry, state policies toward the economy, education, police, military affairs, the physiognomy of its cities, and its civic culture.”⁸⁸ Despite this, however, Cumings (1999b, 73-74) describes the visceral, and frankly quite reactionary, disavowal of any of these legacies by virtually all contemporary (South) Koreans:

Among Koreans, north and south, the mere mention of the idea that Japan somehow “modernized” Korea calls forth indignant denials, raw emotions, and the imminent sense of mayhem having just been, or about to be, committed. For the foreigner, even the most

⁸⁵ As support for this argument, Lie (1998, 176) points out how Korea’s “traditional” nationalist song – *Arirang* – derives from a movie released as recently as 1926.

⁸⁶ For a succinct discussion of the distinction between the competing “constructionist” and “ethnicist” views of nationalism, see Shin 1998b (150n5).

⁸⁷ Contrast Anderson’s view with the much stronger formulation of Ernest Gellner, who argues that “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist.” Anderson (1991, 6) takes Gellner to task for this view, claiming that he conflates “invention” with “fabrication” or “falsity,” rather than “creation” or “imagining.”

⁸⁸ More superficial continuities that Cumings lists include the dominant form of newspapers, as well as schools that were “museums of colonial practice” in terms of uniforms and the like.

extensive cataloguing of Japanese atrocities will pale beside the bare mention of anything positive and lasting that might have emerged from the colonial period.⁸⁹

These deeply entrenched views did not arise from happenstance. Just as the US spent billions during the Cold War on anti-Communist propaganda through the covert actions of the CIA's Congress for Cultural Freedom (Saunders 1999), South Korea's dictatorial leaders, as we have seen, did likewise through the propagation of fierce rhetoric that placed loyalty to the Korean "nation" above all other considerations. The language deployed by Park Chung in his speeches,⁹⁰ for example, is replete with calls to nationalism that paints any foreign influence as by definition an affront to its sovereignty, and is therefore entirely negative. More importantly, in terms of maintaining control over a populace that was being deeply exploited in the labor process and politically-culturally suppressed, this rhetoric worked to promote the state's twin goals of security and development, while framing any dissent in terms of labor or pro-democracy activism as anti-nation and pro-Communist (Shin 1999b, 155-156).

Building on "revisionist" accounts that stress the significance of the colonial period (Eckert 1991; Kohli 1994), a central argument of this chapter (and dissertation) is that the

⁸⁹ For a recent everyday example of the sort of vitriol that will be unleashed when an unsuspecting foreigner (i.e., non-Korean) suggests that there might be some connection, however faint, between the Japanese colonial legacy and South Korea's postwar economic success, consider the apology required by NBC analyst, Joshua Cooper Ramo, as he commented on Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's presence at the Pyeongchang winter olympics held in South Korea in 2018. Ramo remarked that Japan was "a country which occupied Korea from 1910 to 1945, but every Korean will tell you that Japan is a cultural, technological and economic example that has been so important to their own transformation." Following these comments, outraged South Koreans expressed their anger by circulating an online petition that collected some 8,000 signatures supporting it. The statement summarized their position as follows: "Any reasonable person familiar with the history of Japanese imperialism, and the atrocities it committed before and during WWII, would find such a statement deeply hurtful and outrageous. And no, no South Korean would attribute the rapid growth and transformation of its economy, technology, and political/cultural development to the Japanese imperialism" (Qin 2018).

⁹⁰ Shin (1999b, 152) lists some of the terms commonly used by Park: "national unity"; "nation regeneration"; "unification of the nation"; "national resurrection"; "national consciousness."

underlying issue with many nationalist scholars' interpretation of the Japanese colonial period is that it overlooks how this harsh treatment was indispensably *functional to, and derived from*, the imperatives of ushering in a capitalist revolution in (South) Korea and to the Japanese-led regional political economy more generally. At bottom, the problem is this: there is a failure to distinguish, on the one hand, the much-deserved moral condemnations of Japanese actions and, on the other, the unavoidable turbulence associated with instituting the structural prerequisites for capitalism – i.e., instituting private property, inserting the nation into the world market, proletarianization of the population etc. – all of which, often, are carried out through acts of force. This has been true, to a greater or lesser extent, in *all* capitalist transitions. To pin the establishment of the general preconditions of the capitalist mode of production on an *individual* nation or culture is to confuse the particular with the (historically specific!) universal, in terms of the operation of the world-system as a geopolitical and socio-ecological totality. If this profound shift in social relations had been rejected by Korean society following decolonization, this would be one thing; but it is South Korea's postwar *embrace* of the material dynamism deriving from the social forms (unknowingly?) bequeathed to it through the violence and social chaos of the Japanese period that renders these denunciations problematic. The exploitative actions of the Japanese colonial state and the collaborating fractions within Korea's proto-bourgeoisie are in many ways indistinguishable from what occurred under the dictatorial regimes of the post-World War II period. So for the latter to be lauded as "development," while the former to be denounced as "oppression," is a true testament to the ideological hegemony of nationalism, both as it informs the perspectives of everyday South Koreans and the academic literature.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion in this chapter, several conclusions emerge that are central to the arguments that follow in this work. First, the Japanese colonization of Korea, aided by the actions of the colonial state that was there to serve the Empire, introduced for the first time many of the “accoutrements of capitalism” on a broad scale. Hamilton (1986, 113) summarizes these as follows:

Wage-labour developed on a fairly wide scale; notions of private property in land, which had been underdeveloped traditionally, were imposed; exchange relations spread to all corners of the country; modern industrial facilities were established and some workers acquired factory skills; many thousands of workers became accustomed to the discipline of factory work and the obligations of the employee; international trading relations were thoroughly developed; and, not least, a centralized state authority with the power to impose its decisions throughout the land became a part of daily life.

Like other colonially dominated societies across the soon-to-be “Third World,” however, these changes were introduced in a highly uneven and incomplete manner. It is precisely upon this latter point – the incomplete and self-serving character of Japan’s capitalist policies – that the debates revolve.

When viewed from what Harvey (2013) calls Marx’s “dialectical and co-evolutionary theory of social change,” however, we are able to transcend the impasse of the “sprouts vs. offspring” debate with which we opened the chapter. The former view, recall, considered the mere existence of trade and money in pre-colonial Korea, regardless of how limited, as a sign of the existence of “capitalism” that was subsequently crushed through the self-serving actions of the Japanese. The latter view, by contrast, sees the Japanese role as instrumental in importing capitalist relations, regardless of how lamentably exploitative this process may have been. Only by considering the structural changes within the wider context of the necessary preconditions of capitalism can we escape this sort of “chicken and egg” debate about the origins of capitalism in Korea, and in world history more generally. That is, fully developed capitalist social relations

require two elements that reinforce each other in dialectical fashion. As Harvey (2013, 46) explains regarding Marx's discussion of the industrial circuit of capital in the opening chapter of Volume 2, "Both the class relation and generalized commodity production (and by implication the money form) must *precede* the rise of capital, but the rise of capital *generalizes* these preconditions."⁹¹

As we have seen, Japan's exploitative presence in Korea was instrumental in initiating, though not fully implementing, these changes, as well as introducing many of capitalism's structuring forms – such as the commodity form and money – in a generalized way throughout Korean society. These profound shifts were both reflected in and manifested through the state and its policies. Indeed, the much-lauded post-World War II "developmental state" has its origins in the transitions in the state's focus since the late-nineteenth century, following a common pattern in modern world history when its primary interest becomes the nurturing of an abstract (yet nevertheless real) capitalist "macroeconomy." Hwang (2016), following the work of Timothy Mitchell, traces these changes in detail and offers the following conclusion:

[T]he full spate of bureaucratic concerns and technologies, of imperialist and self-strengthening drives, and of military and territorial rivalries, might have created the (national) economy as not just a new concept, but a definitive entity in itself. *While it is not possible to locate the precise moment when concerns over economic growth came to occupy such a preeminent place in Korean statecraft, from the late nineteenth century to the end of the colonial period, the state's approach to the economy passed unmistakably and irreversibly from a physiocratic to a mercantilist, then industrializing focus. And through these transitions the emergence of the macroeconomy as a distinctive sphere of state control and of industrial development as an overriding state goal came into sharper relief, particularly as material conditions within the peninsula became more clearly connected to the extended circumstances of imperialism, colonialism, and war. (143-144; emphasis added)*

⁹¹ More specifically, these preconditions are: "The class relation between capitalist and wage-laborer is ... already present" and 2) general commodity production for the market must already exist (Harvey 2013, 44-45; Marx 1991a, Chapter 1).

From our particular vantage point of the state and its necessary mediation of antagonistic class forces, when paired with the level-3 concern with the emergence of the preconditions for the generalization of the capitalist mode of production, these shifts are anything but surprising.

Second, the revolutionary shifts associated with the changes summarized above triggered a veritable “avalanche of social dislocation” (Cumings 1981, 50), such as few societies in the past had ever experienced in such a condensed timespan. The cumulative effects of this meant that, once the Japanese had vacated the peninsula after their defeat by the US in 1945, the lid blew off of the decades-long pressure cooker of Koreans’ suppressed social discontent. The main source of discontent stemmed from land disputes between tenants and landlords that had erupted as a result of the deterioration of rural life during the last fifteen years or so of the colonial regime. According to the official Government-General records, the number of disputes rose from 667 in 1931 to 7,544 just three years later, then mounting to 25,834 in 1935 (Robinson 2007, 82-83; Kawashima 2009, 49). For a society with centuries, if not millennia, of agrarian relations connected directly to the land, these tensions are easily understandable.

Despite the widespread discontent, the ability of the Japanese to manipulate Korea’s internal class cleavages meant that the previous ruling class – the *yangban* landlords – had been thoroughly discredited (and were downright loathed), yet no other group was in any position to represent the general interests of the “nation.” As Cumings (1984b, 496) explains:

Colonial rule left Korea with no single indigenous leader or leadership legitimized by popular support, but rather an assortment of political aspirants whose origins, ideas, and ambitions were so varied that cooperation among them to establish a strong, unified, independent Korean state would never have been possible. ... Such was the divisive political legacy which Japanese colonialism bequeathed to the Korean peninsula.

It was precisely this political-economic *power vacuum* that emerged with the withdrawal of the Japanese that formed the class basis for the ensuing strife and suppression that led up to, and that

was indeed a major contributor to, the Korean War (1950-1953). The central issue was the *domestic* struggle over the land question that had been so fundamentally altered by Japanese imperialism along capitalistic lines – not, as it was assumed by US leaders at the time, driven by Soviet or Chinese directives.

Chapter 4 The World-Ecological Context of Postwar Developmentalism: The United States Negotiates the Capitalist and Territorial Logics of Power

Introduction

This chapter examines the global-scale forces within which South Korea was forced to operate, an ambivalent mixture of great (capitalistic) opportunity within significant constraints related to the US's hegemonic project of the post-World War II period. After a brief survey of the tensions involved in the US's rise to global supremacy, we focus on the contradictory forces involved in its attempt to sustain the political-economic momentum it had gained during World War II and, at the same time, revive the capitalist system by spreading its social relations to the volatile decolonizing world through the so-called "development project" (McMichael 2017). We then narrow the focus to key aspects of postwar US policy that bore directly on South Korea's successful capitalist revolution – i.e., the US aid and food regimes – which laid the groundwork for the "cheap labor" strategy through which its economic "miracle" was achieved.

But first, we clarify a key distinction mentioned in the subtitle of this chapter – that is, regarding the differences and similarities between what Arrighi (1994) calls the capitalist and territorial logics of power. We begin with Arrighi's (1994) comments on the differences between these "opposite modes of rule," as they pertain to the individuals who embody these roles:

Territorialist rulers identify power with the extent and populousness of their domains, and conceive of wealth/capital⁹² as a means or a by-product of the pursuit of territorial

⁹² As we have alluded to earlier and will stress later on, this popular conflation between wealth and capital (or value), as in Arrighi's problematic terms "wealth/capital" strikes at the heart of the "production in general" of economic relations under capitalism. Indeed, according to Postone (1993, 197-198) and others, the distinction between value and wealth represents Marx's most fundamental critique of the capitalist mode of production. Indeed, despite the brilliance of Arrighi's works (e.g., 1994; 1999; 2007), his fundamental failing is to pay insufficient attention

expansion. Capitalist rulers, in contrast, identify power with the extent of their command over scarce resources and consider territorial acquisitions as a means and by-product of the accumulation of capital. (33)

Regarding their “core features,” moreover, Jessop (2006) adds that within the capitalist logic “economic power flows in networked, molecular fashion across continuous space and time. Cross-territorial integration results from monopolistic spatial strategies. Flows and spatial-temporal fixes ignore borders.” By contrast, within the territorial logic, “political-military power defends and expands segmented territorial control in order to advance [the] state’s own interests. It involves strategic decisions and claims at [the] state level and is tied to territorial borders” (158). Regarding each logic’s view and use of space: the capitalist logic thrives through its exploitation of uneven geographical conditions and levels of (capitalist) development (Smith 2008); the territorial logic, for its part, follows a more zero-sum-game approach that focuses on increasing the economic standing and general well-being of one territory vis-à-vis others, which can lead to the formation of regional (or other scaled) alliances or blocs. The danger of pursuing the territorial logic too vehemently, however, is that it can become too expensive or logistically complex to sustain. In such cases, it leads to hegemonic decline in what Kennedy (1988) has labelled “imperial overstretch.”

Although Arrighi’s initial focus was to distinguish between these two logics, they are nevertheless inherently interconnected. As Harvey (2003) contends in discussing Arrighi’s concepts:

The two logics are distinctive and in no way reducible to each other, but they are *tightly interwoven*. They may be construed as *internal relations* of each other. But outcomes can vary substantially over space and time. Each logic throws up contradictions that have to be contained by the other. The endless accumulation of capital, for example, produces periodic crises within the territorial logic because of the need to create a parallel

to the unique social forms grounding the dynamics that he analyzes at a macro-economic scale via “systemic cycles of accumulation” and the like (Postone 2009, 93-101).

accumulation of political/military power. When political control shifts within the territorial logic, flows of capital must likewise shift to accommodate. States regulate their affairs according to their own distinctive rules and traditions and so produce distinctive styles of governance. (183; emphases added)

Harvey (2003, 29-30) offers as a concrete example – one consonant with the content of this chapter – how it would be difficult to see the *immediate* “economic logic” behind the US’s thirty-year quagmire in Vietnam (1954-1975). Yet from a higher level of abstraction, as we will see, the US’s involvement in the Pacific was embedded within a logic of postwar Soviet containment, which was, at bottom, about maintaining and expanding the global “Open Door” for commodified relations.

A crucial observation should be noted regarding these two logics, one that should be kept in mind in considering this work as a whole: unlike under other forms of society, capitalism is peculiar in that the “economic logic” predominates (Harvey 2003, 33). In non-capitalist societies that are mainly self-sufficient and interested in material production and consumption only as a means to need satisfaction (i.e., use-values),⁹³ the logic of “accumulation for the sake of accumulation, production for the sake of production” (Marx 1990, 742) makes little sense. It is only under capitalism’s structural imperative of surplus value creation – combined with the generalization of the commodity form (in its dual character) that renders money/wages the primary means for meeting ones needs – that this applies. Therefore, over the history of capitalism since c.1450 – despite the qualitative differences regarding the relative “global” presence of differing levels of subsumption of labor under capital (i.e., hybrid, formal, and real,⁹⁴

⁹³ This is not to suggest that “need satisfaction” has to be limited to basics such as food and shelter; indeed, power, prestige and the like can be pursued via use-value means – e.g., the construction of the Egyptian pyramids.

⁹⁴ “Fully developed” capitalism of the sort characterized by (industrialized) relations of real subsumption did not emerge until approximately two hundred years ago via the “industrial revolution,” and then only in Britain. This is not to suggest that relations of real subsumption,

as well as non-capitalism) – the expansionary character of the circuit of capital meant that much of the negotiation between the logics has revolved around how the territorial logic could respond to and facilitate the expansionary economic (and geographical) logic.

What this has meant in terms of capitalist history’s “cycles” of hegemonic rise and fall – i.e., Arrighi’s “systemic cycles of accumulation” of material expansion and subsequent financialization – is that the physical (and social) size of each succeeding hegemon’s “container of power” has grown in response to the successful operation of capitalism’s expansionary imperative. This is an issue that has often been misinterpreted, so we cite Arrighi’s (2005) own clarification about it here:

Contrary to the reading of some critics, my concept of systemic cycles of accumulation does not portray the history of capitalism as “the eternal return of the same.” It shows instead that precisely when the “same” (i.e., recurrent system-wide financial expansions) appeared to return, *new rounds of inter-capitalist competition, interstate rivalries, accumulation by dispossession, and production of space on an ever-increasing scale revolutionized the geography and mode of operation of world capitalism, as well as its relationship to imperialistic practices.* Thus, if we focus on the “containers of power” that have housed the “headquarters”⁹⁵ of the leading capitalist agencies of successive cycles of accumulation, we immediately see a [scalar] *progression* from a city-state and cosmopolitan business diaspora (the Genoese); to a proto-national state (the United Provinces) and its joint-stock chartered companies; to a multinational state (the United Kingdom) and its globe-encircling tributary empire; to a continent-sized national state (the United States) and its world-encompassing system of transnational corporations, military bases and institutions of world governance. (90-91)

what Marx calls the “specifically capitalist mode of production,” represents “true” capitalism. Indeed, real subsumption’s generalization is impossible within the logic of the system itself, which is why Marx (1990) argues that *formal* subsumption is “the general form of every capitalist process of production.” “At the same time, however,” he continues, “it can be found as a *particular* form alongside the specifically capitalist mode of production in its developed form, because although the latter entails the former, the converse does not necessarily obtain [i.e., the formal subsumption can be found in absence of the specifically capitalist mode of production]” (1019).

⁹⁵ Arrighi is here stressing the size of the hegemonic “headquarters,” though it applies equally the new “global” reach of the world-system itself (i.e., the periphery and semi-periphery).

Putting a world-ecological twist on Arrighi's argument, Moore (2015) states succinctly how the "accumulation of capital is the appropriation of space," though adds that this is simultaneously "the appropriation of *historical* natures" (161). We would only add (or stress) that a key part of this appropriation of space and historical natures is the broadening and deepening *subsumption* of human and extra-human natures under capital's value forms (Boyd, Prudham and Schurman 2001; Boyd and Prudham 2017).

In this way, each hegemon possesses – or, more precisely, *is* (Moore 2015, 158) – a *world-ecological regime* (*ibid.* 158-165), something that would apply equally to (sub-)imperial regimes like the Japanese colonial system that we examined in the previous chapter. This will also apply, it should go without saying, to the "miraculous" postwar South Korean regime.⁹⁶ In this way, then, our analysis is not an environmental history *of* South Korea; rather, it analyzes the South Korean miracle *as* an environmental history (Moore 2011). In this we follow Harvey's non-Cartesian dictum about how "*any ecological project is always a social project; all social projects are ecological projects.*"⁹⁷ Having said this, what distinguishes the post-World War II US case is its truly global and hegemonic character. That is, given the overwhelming relative increase in the US's global standing after World War II, its vision needed to be grand, indeed, one befitting the historic claims its citizens had for centuries told itself about the US being a Winthropian "city on a hill," endowed with a "manifest destiny" (via the Monroe Doctrine) to

⁹⁶ For example, South Korea(n) scholar, Hagen Koo (1987), makes a strikingly similar distinction between what territorial capitalist and power: "[W]e must distinguish between two world systems: the international state system, based on geopolitical and military competition between nation-states; and the capitalist world economy, governed by worldwide capital accumulation. The two are intimately connected, but, as Theda Skocpol argues, their separation is useful for the analysis of concrete socioeconomic transformations" (169).

⁹⁷ This often-cited sentiment is typically attributed to Harvey 1996, though we find no mention of it there. The version cited above comes from class 5 of Harvey's (2007) lectures on Volume 1 of Marx's *Capital* (18:26-18:38). These are available at davidharvey.org.

spread (capitalist) “civilization” to the rest of the world.⁹⁸ Let us now explore briefly how this was the case.

A “Historical Sketch” of Modern US Capitalism

“The discovery of America and that of the passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope,” Adam Smith declares in *The Origins and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, “are the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of humankind” (Worster 2016, 45). The first of these “discoveries” represented Europe’s stumbling upon the peoples and resources of a so-called “second Earth,” while the second solidified access to the long sought-after riches of the “orient” after centuries of failed attempts to find a sea route there in the wake of Marco Polo’s famous travels. During such a religiously embedded time, secular Enlightenment claims notwithstanding, Smith words appear blasphemous in the extreme. But as is popularly lauded, Smith captured the burgeoning logic of the “modern” (i.e., capitalist) world, though perhaps with far more optimism than was called for. Although he was not ignorant of the violent and shocking ramifications that this would have for the native groups being dispossessed in the name of the “invisible hand,” Smith nevertheless thought that, on the whole, the “general tendency would seem to be beneficial” in that it would bestow upon these “conscripts of modernity” (Scott 2004) “the necessities and conveniences of life” (Worster 2016, 45).

For better or worse, the European colonization of the Americas introduced (Cronon 1983; Crosby 1986) and spread (Worster 1985; Cronon 1991) capitalist relations to both the people and the landscape, which would ultimately have far-reaching ramifications (Worster 2016). Given

⁹⁸ To avoid arguing anachronistically, we note that the language of US exceptionalism was initially premised on religious grounds, which gradually shifted to secular arguments about civilizational superiority based on technology, markets and the like (Adas 2003, 26-27) – though always grounded in the Weberian protestant ethic.

our emphasis on the “most developed” form of capitalist social relations (i.e., real subsumption), we pick up the US story of its capitalist history in the late-nineteenth century, just as the “natural bounty” that had gotten Adam Smith so excited – and a century later, Chicago’s “boosters” (Cronon 1991, 31-41) – was at last seeming to dry up. What is crucial to grasp at the outset, however, is the fact that the European colonization (along capitalist lines) of what would come to be known as the United States, and especially its emulation of British relations of real subsumption – was only feasible due to the lack of an entrenched landed class that would oppose the sorts of increasingly “developed” forms of value relations that threatened to undermine landed power (i.e., industrial relations of real subsumption), as happened in England by the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, we have been at pains to outline how this “traditional barrier” was surmounted in the Korean case, so what should be stressed is how this (unacknowledged) precondition for generalized value relations, and industrialized relations of real subsumption in particular, existed in the US case by historical-geographical happenstance. This is important to keep in mind in light of the centrality of the “Third World” land question in the success or failure of various developmental regimes of the postwar era, and, crucially, undergirds South Korea’s “miracle” based on the US’s exceptional position vis-à-vis that society.

Spatio-Temporal Contradictions of US Capitalism, c.1890-1945

Is it conceivable that the exercise of hegemony might leave space untouched?
- Henri Lefebvre (1991, 11)

American historians who speak complacently of the absence of the settler-type colonialism characteristic of the European powers merely conceal the fact that the whole *internal* history of United States imperialism was one vast process of territorial seizure and occupation. The absence of territorialism “abroad” was founded on an unprecedented territorialism “at home.”
- Gareth Stedman Jones (1973, 216-217)

The essential features of US capitalism in the sixty-year lead-up to its post-World War II “development project” (McMichael 2017) can be grasped through an examination of the works

of “revisionist” American historian William Appleman Williams (1972) and Marxist geographer Neil Smith (2003).

The central argument of Williams’ classic book, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, is that US political and economic leaders of all stripes since the “Crisis of the 1890s” have been guided by what he considers an erroneous assumption: “That is the firm conviction, even dogmatic belief, that America’s *domestic* well-being depends upon sustained, ever-increasing overseas economic expansion” (15). For Williams the dangerousness of this entrenched belief, as it relates to the US’s twentieth-century diplomacy, is that it has tended to lead to an indifference to significant domestic developments and, by extension, US citizens have often explained their lack of the “good life” on foreign individuals, groups, and nations (15). But this begs the question: where did this tendency to “externalize evil” come from, or, more narrowly, what was the “Crisis of the 1890s” all about?

In US history, whenever a contradiction between the forces and relations of production arose – expressed in symptoms such as squalid living conditions stemming from hyper-urbanization, lack of effective consumer demand due to low wages, unemployment, etc. – America’s western frontier acted as sort of pressure valve, temporarily relieving these tensions by displacing them into “empty” space. But with the rapidly expanding ability of US business to appropriate (extra-human) nature based on industrial production methods and “annihilate space by time” (Marx 1973, 524) based on transportations (e.g., railroad) and communications (e.g., telegraph) technologies (Cronon 1991), by the 1890s the country had effectively exhausted this strategy. This realization was articulated most famously by Frederick Jackson Turner in his essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893), that emphasized the role of the western frontier in fostering the nation’s economic dynamism and democratic sensibilities.

Or as Turner put it less optimistically later on, the closing of the frontier meant that America's "gate of escape" from existing responsibilities had vanished (Williams 1972, 42).

Needless to say, this situation instilled a sense of panic among the US political and economic elites. This was especially so in light of having missed out on "opportunities" like the frenzied land grab of European powers' "Scramble for Africa" that followed the Berlin Conference of 1884. With economic surpluses increasingly mounting, the need for overseas commercial expansion was shared by elites of all political persuasions. The Department of State, for instance, declared in the closing years of the nineteenth century: "Every year we shall be confronted with an increasing surplus of manufactured goods for sale in foreign markets if American operatives and artisans are to be kept employed the year around" (Williams 1972, 48). In the so-called "Great Debate" of 1898-1901, then, the underlying contradiction of capitalism's infinite geographical expansionary imperative came to the fore; as such, it was never a matter of debating *if* the US should commercially expand abroad, but *how*. Ultimately, this US *Weltanschauung* led to the famous Open Door Notes of 1899 as articulated by Secretary of State John Hay, the central guiding policy of twentieth-century US (inter)national policy that was rooted in William S. Culbertson's pithy observation decades later that "Our economic frontiers are no longer coextensive with our territorial frontiers" (Williams 1972, 195).

Until the twentieth century, the sheer size and plenitude of resources of the United States allowed its violent and relentless western expansion – i.e., decimating the native population and appropriating its resources at a frantic pace – to appear as a "national" rather than colonial project. As the epigraph to this section points out, however, this process was in essence identical to European colonial practices in Asia and Africa. Yet by framing it as a national process, it allowed the US to criticize European colonial regimes and their protective economic policies,

while also equipping it with an ideological advantage that it would make great use of in its post-World War II relations with decolonizing Third World nations.

Despite its insights into the origins of twentieth-century American foreign policy, from the standpoint of this essay Williams' analysis suffers from two major shortcomings. First, he views the US's obsession with seeking domestic prosperity outside its borders as an erroneous assumption stemming from America's particular historical experience with its own frontier, not as something inherent to the capitalism itself. Second, despite his recognition that (US) capitalism has had a propensity for economic and geographic expansion, he fails to analyze in any systematic way the monumental transformations in global spatial relations. Fortunately, both of these shortcomings are addressed by Neil Smith in *American Empire* (2003).

Building out from the insights of his influential earlier work (1984) that theorized the spatial implications of generalized commodity relations and capitalism's "production of nature," Smith argues that the late-nineteenth century signaled a profound world-historical shift: one where "geography could no longer contain history" (14). It is in this context that Smith locates the significance of Halford J. Mackinder's famous argument about the "geographical pivot of history" (1904), the brilliance of which lay in his highlighting of the growing shift from an absolute to a *relational* conception of space as foundational for global affairs. Put another way, the global political-economic system was rapidly becoming a closed system; therefore, securing frontier spaces became an obsession for powerful states, in particular the rising industrial giants of Germany and the United States (i.e., the only regimes of real subsumption capable of competing with the British). Consequently, for the first time in history, Smith argues:

[A]ny "explosion of social forces" would not simply dissipate into distant space but would *sharply re-echo around the globe* (13) ... Development and underdevelopment were no longer sporadically related but now *functionally* related. It is in this sense that *uneven development as a systematic* rather than a somewhat haphazard *process* became

installed as the hallmark of twentieth-century economic expansion. (16-17; emphasis added)

In Marxian theories of imperialism, Rosa Luxemburg rightly identified the role of non-capitalist spaces for the previous success of capitalism. This closing off of the global system, whose denouement was World War I, suggested to her the imminent collapse of capitalism. However, Vladimir Lenin countered that, while the world had indeed been completely divided up by European powers, this did not necessarily signal the demise of capitalism. Rather, “in the future,” he argued, “only redivision is possible” (Brewer 1990). Confronting capitalism’s expansionary imperative yet facing its landlocked position in Europe and lacking overseas colonies, it was precisely this redivision of power/space that Germany attempted – twice! – during the first half of the twentieth century following Ratzel’s idea of nation-states’ “natural” quest for *Lebensraum* (i.e., “living space”).

So while Smith was right to argue that “the limits to capital are ultimately geographical” (13), he recognizes that historically specific manifestations of this problem can be temporarily overcome through various means. The US’s post-World War II strategy, differing markedly from the German strategy of surmounting the capital-space contradiction through the violent seizure of foreign lands, was to pursue a hegemony that was simultaneously global and spaceless in character. As we will see, it was a paradoxical form of “imperial anti-colonialism” that attempted to rule the people and resources of distant lands through the mediating, and obfuscating, role of the world market. Wilsonian liberalism was only the first and most well-known attempt to establish global free trade for the good of a United States facing increasing surpluses that could not be disposed of *profitably* at home and a world largely cut off by European colonial regimes, both in terms of the supply of raw materials and for consumers. The continuity of this obsession

with “new frontiers” within top policy circles can be illustrated through the following statements, the first by Woodrow Wilson in 1907 and the second by Undersecretary Stettinius in 1943:

*Since trade ignores national boundaries and the manufacturer insists on having the world as a market, the flag of his nation must follow him, and the doors of the nations which are closed against him must be battered down. Concessions obtained by financiers must be safeguarded by ministers of state, even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged in the process. Colonies must be obtained or planted, in order that no useful corner of the world may be overlooked or left unused.*⁹⁹ (Williams 1972, 72; emphasis added)

As I see it, the United States will need the greatest international trade our country has ever had following the war. The State Department must be prepared to establish by international agreements and otherwise conditions under which private industry can develop it. (Smith 2003, 349)

Juxtaposing these statements that were made over thirty years apart demonstrates, on the one hand, the persistent threat of overproduction and, on the other, US leaders’ resorting increasingly to free trade amongst sovereign nation-state as the means to accomplish this task – i.e., “global economic access without colonies” (Smith 2003, 349).

Standing in the way of this goal, however, was the “tangled web of colonial preferences, tariffs, quotas, subsidies, and tax agreements governed economic access to the areas” controlled by European powers (Smith 2003, 348). It was only in the wake of World War II, as we discuss in the next section, that the US would finally possess the opportunity to “shake the colonies loose” in the name of “global freedom” – i.e., free markets.

⁹⁹ Wilson’s language is remarkably similar to that of Marx and Engels in Part 1 of *The Communist Manifesto*:

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. *The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians’ intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate.* It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; *it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation* [read: “development”] *into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves.* In one word, it creates a world after its own image. (Tucker 1978, 477; emphases added)

The Irony of Postwar Dominance

It is no small irony that the central source of weakness for the United States in its postwar hegemonic bid was its overwhelming global supremacy. As Leffler (2010) argues, President Truman – having taken over for Roosevelt near the close of World War II – “presided over the greatest military and economic power the world had ever known.” Militarily, for example, the US was producing by 1942-1943 more arms than all of the Axis states combined and three times more than the Soviet Union, all while maintaining a monopoly over nuclear weapons by the end of the war (67).

Most impressive, though, was the US’s economic dominance. The following figures are sufficient to illustrate this: by 1947 US gold reserves accounted for 70% of the world total; and in 1948 the US possessed 48% of the world’s industrial capacity, far more dominant than the “lowly” 32% of Britain’s global share at the height of its power in 1870 (Palat 2004, 7-8). Given the interdependent character of the capitalist world-system, however, systemic imperatives threatened to render this dominance an Achilles heel for the US. McCormick (1989) captures this irony in the following: “Because the preponderant economic power of the United States, upon which its hegemony largely rested, so overwhelmed the devastated European economies that commercial imbalance among major trading parts threatened the well-being of the whole, *American economic supremacy nearly undermined its hegemonic function*” (73; emphasis added). In the centuries prior to World War II, the US’s form of internal colonialism allowed it to manage the capitalist and territorial logics of power more or less effectively (Harvey 2003, 47-48); however, as we traced in a previous section, the “end of the US frontier” by the turn of the twentieth century meant that the US’s “spatial fixes” would have to be extended to the world as a whole.

More than from the fear of slipping back into another global military conflict, US leaders (and their European counterparts) were far more concerned with the possibility of another “Great Slump” of the 1930s variety. According to Hobsbawm (1994):

[T]he Cold War was based on a Western belief, absurd in retrospect but natural enough in the aftermath of the Second World War, that the Age of Catastrophe¹⁰⁰ was by no means at an end; that the future of world capitalism and liberal society was far from assured. Most observers expected a serious post-war economic crisis, even in the USA, on the analogy of what had happened after the First World War. (230)

Despite its overwhelming power, therefore, the US did not feel at all settled about its hegemonic prospects (Leffler 2010, 67). It should be stressed just how peculiar a predicament this actually was, world-historically speaking. That is, this state of affairs could only occur, in a *general* way, under capitalism; for “prosperity” in the past was in no way *inherently* connected to external societies. But the tensions inherent in capital’s infinite expansion imperative, its productive dynamism (and, by extension, resource hunger), and need for external markets render these challenges “necessary.” Again, it is here that Williams’ (1972) is correct in pointing out the pervasiveness of US leaders’ belief in the connection between foreign market expansion and domestic peace and prosperity, but also where he is off the mark in considering this an erroneous assumption that represented the “tragedy” of the US’s twentieth-century relations with the rest of the world.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ The “Age of Catastrophe” is Hobsbawm’s (1994) term for the period of world history between World War I and World War II, characterized by world war, the rise of fascism and Stalinism, the Great Depression etc. (see pages 19-222).

¹⁰¹ Harvey (2003) echoes this view in stressing the US’s “two cardinal principles of internal strategic practice” that were established during World War II and that “remained set in stone thereafter”: that is, “the social order in the United States should remain stable (no radical redistributions of wealth or power and no challenge to elite and/or capitalist class control would be tolerated), and there should be a continuous expansion of domestic capital accumulation and consumption to ensure domestic peace, prosperity, and tranquility” (52).

But what exactly was it concerned with in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War? We outline three key concerns below: global political-economic “stability”; markets (in which to sell); and market-mediated access to the “Four Cheaps” (Moore 2015), in particular raw materials and energy, from the soon-to-be “Third World.”

First, there was the US’s preoccupation with maintaining political-economic “stability.”¹⁰² This fear was widely expressed by US leaders of the time in various registers. Speaking of the postwar domestic situation, for example, future Nobel prize winning economist, Paul Samuelson, spoke in 1943 of the US’s possibility of confronting “the greatest period of unemployment and industrial dislocation which any economy has ever faced” (Hobsbawm 1994, 230). Regarding the problems of globally strategic areas such as Europe and Asia, Assistant Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, declared in July 1945: “There is a situation in the world very clearly illustrated in Europe, and also true in the Far East, which threatens the very foundations, the whole fabric of world organization which we have known in our lifetime and which our fathers and forefathers knew.” Two years later, the situation had only worsened, as Under Secretary of State William L. Clayton observed in May 1947 regarding the situation in Europe: “Europe is still deteriorating ... Millions of people in the cities are slowly starving ... Without further and substantial aid from the United States, economic, social, and political disintegration will overwhelm Europe” (Leffler 2010, 74-75). What Acheson and Clayton were signaling in making these comments was how social instability in Europe, Asia and at home might increase

¹⁰² By “stability,” of course, what was meant was the avoidance of socialist revolutions, ones that might close off US access to markets, raw materials and the like. Indeed, as we will see later on through the lens of South Korea, there was nothing “stable” about the global imposition of capitalist social relations to the Third World in the ensuing “development era.”

the appeal of Soviet communism. This was especially the case, as we will discuss later, after the Chinese communist revolution of 1949 and the onset of the Korean War just one year later.

Second, there was the need to restore or procure foreign markets in which to sell the deluge of commodities that were pouring out of US factories and farms. As George Kennan boasted in a 1948 planning document: “We have 50 percent of the world’s wealth, but only 6.3 percent of its population” (Berger 2004, 42). While Kennan wished to safeguard this overwhelming power imbalance that World War II had helped accentuate, there was the looming risk of confronting what O’Connor (1998) calls the “first contradiction” of capitalism.¹⁰³ Kennan seemed to recognize how this advantage was a mixed blessing; for as lamented only a year later, “*It is one thing to produce; it is another thing to sell*” (McCormick 1989, 90; emphasis added). Given the interdependence of the various “moments” of the (industrial) circuit of capital – whose shorthand expression, recall, is M-C-M’ – commodities impregnated with surplus value will fail to *realize* it if they go unsold due to lack of effective demand in the market (Harvey 2013).¹⁰⁴ Taking as “axiomatic” the connection between access to foreign markets and domestic peace and prosperity, William Clayton stressed the necessity of a global “Open Door” policy, given that exports had risen *fourfold* from 1939 to 1945: “So, let us admit right off that our objective has as its background the needs and interests of the people of the United States. ... *We need markets* –

¹⁰³ O’Connor argues that this is the main focus of “traditional Marxism,” pointing out how it is a contradiction “internal” to the system itself. His contribution is to contrast this idea with what he calls the “second contradiction” of capitalism, an “external” consideration that stresses how successful capital accumulation (eventually) erodes the ability to *reproduce the conditions of production*. While we share O’Connor’s stress on the nature-society nexus and the importance of the conditions in which accumulation takes place, we view the “first” and “second” contradictions as dialectically related and both “internal” to the value logic.

¹⁰⁴ These moments include the money, commodity, and production circuits – all of which have a logic of their, despite their insertion with the larger (industrial) circuit of capital, which is beholden to the *production of surplus value* (not material production).

big markets – around the world in which to buy and sell. We ask no special privileges in these markets” (Heller 2006, 40; emphasis added). The problem, in short, was this: just as the US’s elevated global stature required it to engage in what Hudson (2003) calls “free trade imperialism,” there was worrying absence of foreign purchasers that were able to substitute for the high demand coming from the War Department¹⁰⁵ that had helped lift the country out of the Great Depression (7).

McCormick refers to this situation as the “dollar gap crisis.” Several factors created this condition by the late 1940s. For instance, due to the fallout of the ravages of war, the US’s longstanding markets in Europe lacked purchasing power, a situation that was worsened by widespread calls for decolonization in the non-West which undermined these colonial powers from procuring the usual stream of income that it had previously relied upon. The US’s worries regarding this crisis, in the immediate European sphere, were threefold: it had the potential to push European countries to economic nationalism; the rising influence of leftist parties in these countries might lead them to “play the Russian card” – that is, broker political-economic deals with the Soviet Union that would effectively limit US access to markets and resources; it might, in turn, cause the US to adopt “statist, self-contained economic approaches” that would undermine the US postwar prosperity and, by extension, stability (McCormick 1989, 74).

Returning for a moment to the capitalist and territorial logics of power, the logic of capital, as always, was pushing for the global expansion of trade. As Marx (1973) states with respect to the inherent expansionary character of the capital circuit: “The tendency to create the *world market* is directly given in the concept of capital itself. Every limit appears as a barrier

¹⁰⁵ The War Department was renamed in 1949, taking on a more euphemistic label that it retains to this day: The Department of Defense.

to be overcome” (408). By contrast, the US, as a territorial (nation-state) entity, had to garner the approval of its populace to take the necessary measures for this stabilization and expansion of the capitalist system.¹⁰⁶ What this meant in the immediate term was the extension of credit and foreign “aid” to Europe and, eventually, strategic pockets of the Cold War to help shore up the effective demand for its products that could stave off another “great slump” (Hudson 2003, 4; Heller 2006, 41). Ironically, converting nationalist sentiments of “America first” to support such “socialistic” policies was achieved through *anti*-communist rhetoric. Although the Soviet Union posed no real existential threat to the US, Truman increasingly recognized the need to adopt Arthur Vandenberg’s call to “scare the hell out of the American people” via rhetoric of a global standoff between the US’s ostensible forces of “freedom” and the Soviet Union’s forces of “totalitarianism” (Palat 2004, 11). According to Leffler (2010):

Truman’s anti-Communist rhetoric resonated deeply in the American polity. Religious fundamentalists, segregationists, anti-union businessmen, patriotic organizations, and conservative politicians had been red-baiting for years, shrilly warning the American people that their basic institutions and core values were endangered by Communists, atheists, racial integrationists, and New Dealers. How could these right-wing critics be concerned with Communists at home yet do nothing about the expansion of Soviet power around the globe? Truman’s rhetoric locked many Republicans and Southern Democrats into supporting an internationalist foreign policy. (76)

So effective and useful was anti-communist propaganda in gaining the consent of the American people that, according to some, “if it had not existed, it would have been invented” (McCormick 1989, 110). As it turned out, this “invention” was not necessary in light of China’s communist revolution of 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, which was *ostensibly* initiated by North Korea at the behest of Soviet advice (Cumings 2010).

¹⁰⁶ This betokens the tension we outlined earlier between the capitalist and territorial logics of power, something McCormick (1989, xviii) captures via different language when he speaks of the tension between economic internationalism and political nationalism in postwar America.

Third, just as important as maintaining and expanding markets, the US was deeply concerned about its ability to safeguard access to raw materials, as the first half of the twentieth century witnessed an escalating US dependence on foreign supplies. Switching for the first time to a net importer of raw materials during the 1920s, the US's reliance continued to grow. For example, regarding its consumption of metals (excluding iron and gold), its import of only 5% of them from abroad during the 1920s leapt to 38% between 1940-1949, and then to 48% during the 1950s. More specifically, in terms of strategic raw materials, the US was importing just under two-thirds of its bauxite and copper by 1930, and during the Second World War its supply of nearly half (twenty-seven out of sixty) minerals were procured *exclusively* from foreign sources, while tin, nickel, and manganese (and a host of others) were effectively all obtained from abroad by the second half of the 1950s (Kolko 1988, 54-55).

Our focus on metals and other “strategic” materials here is not coincidental; for these represented the materials without which the “modern technology” characteristic of “advanced industry” could not function, and for which there were no substitutes available (Magdoff 1969, 50-54). These represented, as Kolko (1988, 55) argues, the “sinews of industrialism,” which were central to electronics, military equipment, industrial agriculture and the like. Again, this dependence on foreign sources of strategic raw materials flowed directly from the US's economic dominance, so that by 1948 it was consuming nearly half of the world's supply of lead, zinc, copper, and steel.

All of this drastically increased the relative importance of the “Third World” in the US's eyes. Access to oil – the “ultimate strategic commodity” – was a pressing concern, which has undergirded the US's growing interest (and meddling) in the Middle East ever since (Harvey 2005; Heller 2006, 40). What is less well-known is how the US intervened in foreign regions as a

means of safeguarding raw materials for its Cold War allies. Although of less direct strategic importance to the US,¹⁰⁷ Southeast Asia and South Asia possessed raw materials without which “Japan literally could not survive as an American ally without their exports” (Kolko 1988, 55). Indeed, McCormick (1989) argues that securing Japan’s regional access to the raw materials from this region was an important motive in the US’s early interest in Vietnam – i.e., in the waning days of the French colonial era leading up to Dien Bien Phu (c.1950-1954). Japan, as the “ultimate domino” by the US’s reckoning (115), had to thrive economically for it to play its part within its postwar hegemonic system.

Three observations should be noted before moving on. The first has to do with the interconnected character of the three considerations listed above. Kolko (1988) summarizes this interdependence as follows:

Washington’s goal of global economic integration, therefore, was not merely a question of opening channels for export of investment funds abroad, although it hoped to do so both for the sake of profit and to link the economic and political development of the poor nations to that of the United States and richer countries. Most vital was the task of assuring that sufficient supplies of essential imports were available to American users, which frequently were the same companies that invested in the Third World – for profit, of course, but also to guarantee adequate output so they could sell finished products to American and foreign consumers. (55)

Global political-economic “stability,” as well as access to markets and strategic raw materials, were all necessary for US success and, by extension, the resuscitation of global capitalism after it had been dealt severe blows via a global depression, (a second) world war, and impending collapse of the European colonial system.

¹⁰⁷ This is not to deny this region’s contribution to the US economic juggernaut, but only to highlight its relative importance. According to Williams (1972, 193), for example, by the late 1930 “British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies supplied 86 per cent of its crude rubber and 87 per cent of [the US’s] tin. Asia provided, in addition, 85 per cent of its tungsten, a third of its mica, 99 per cent of its jute, and 98 per cent of its shellac.”

Second, and most important for what follows in this work, is that the US postwar predicament was rooted, ironically, in its emergence as the most “fully developed” capitalist nation ever to exist – that is, a regime of (*industrialized*) *real subsumption* of near-continental size, one requiring a truly global “frontier” for its functioning. The US’s need for ever-growing markets, raw materials and the like stemmed from these relations, which represent an ambivalent mix of technological, material, and social dynamism alongside alienated labor practices and socio-ecological contradictions. These relations arose in the United States for historically contingent reasons, and it is the main story line of this work to demonstrate how they were able to emerge in the southern half of the Korean peninsula after c.1972-1973. Foreshadowing what will follow in Chapters 5 and 6, South Korea managed to replicate (for a series of historically contingent reasons) the English and US transitions from manufacture to large-scale industry – that is, to a regime of (*industrialized*) *real subsumption* by c.1980.

Interestingly, Magdoff (1969) puts his finger on the novelty of these new relations, labelling the features that we identify as (*industrialized*) *real subsumption* as simply “the new imperialism.” These relations emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century, and represented “a general new pattern of economic relations in the world capitalist system” that were pursued and spread via its top industrial powers over next half century or so. These represented revolutionary transformations whose ambivalence has been obfuscated by a one-side focus on the material and technological dynamism inherent to them. Swept in undetected under innocuous sounding phrases like “modern technology” and “advanced industries” (e.g., Kolko 1988, 54), then, are relations of profound socio-ecological contradiction. We will dissect the specifics of this later on, but here we simply cite Magdoff’s (via Barraclough) summary of these “new imperial” relations:

[T]he voracious appetite of the new industrialism, unable of its very nature to draw sufficient sustenance from local resources, rapidly swallowed up the whole world. It was no longer a question of exchanging European manufactures – predominantly textiles – for traditional oriental and tropical products, or even of providing outlets for the expanding iron and steel industries by building railways, bridges and the like. Industry now went out into the world in search of the basic materials without which, in its new forms, it could not exist. (32)

Crucial in the transition from manufacture to large-scale industry, was the application of science, technology, and “natural forces” to the production process, as Magdoff (1969) notes:

[A] whole century of slow progress and restatement in pure science – particularly in thermodynamics, electromagnetism, chemistry and geology – began to meet up with rapid development in practical mechanical engineering – and particularly in the production of machine-tools – and in industrial methods ... not only were new industries developed and new sources of power provided – the internal combustion engine, stemming from progress in thermodynamics theory, being only less important than electricity. In innumerable exiting industries – mining and road-building, steel, agriculture, petroleum, and concrete are but a few examples – were transformed and expanded. ... It was in this period that mechanization first became characteristic of industry in general. (28)

To be sure, this rise of what Veblen called “the technology of physics and chemistry” (27) to the capitalist production process had reverberating ramifications well beyond the factory gates.

We will unpack the global implications of this transition in Chapter 6, but in reading what follows in this chapter a central contradiction should be kept in mind. That is, the very basis upon which the US’s (only slightly veiled) social Darwinian claims to civilizational superiority (i.e., “machines as the measure of men” (Adas 1989 and 2003)) – a system it purported and attempted to *generalize* via modernization theory – was precisely the same one that requires non- or semi-capitalist societies for its success. The “second industrial revolution” (Magdoff 1969, 30) of the late-nineteenth century coincided, not accidentally, with the European Scramble for Africa and other acts of interstate rivalry that culminated in World War I (Lenin 1939). This represented an inherent contradiction to these materially dynamic regimes that would come to play itself out

via US developmentalism and, by extension, the underlies the current woes of the Asian Tigers (like Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) that adopted and benefited from it.

Third, and of more immediate practical concern given the US challenges raised above, was the US's lack of a comprehensive program to address its concerns in the long term. As we will discuss, political-economic stability, increased access to the market and raw materials of Europe's crumbling colonial dynasties were achieved in the immediate sense via the Truman Doctrine (1947) and its economic policy arm, the European Recovery Plan (or "Marshall Plan" of 1948) (Heller 2006, 58-59). Despite the US's overwhelming economic, political, and military might, between 1945-1949 the US faced a very tall order. As Palat (2004) argues:

US plans for a new world order were repeatedly hamstrung by the sheer enormity of the task of postwar reconstruction, resistance by its key European allies, militant nationalism in the Asian peripheries, and the intransigence of an increasingly conservative Congress. ... Simply put, the rhetorical division of the world into two zones – one "free" and the other "unfree"¹⁰⁸ – served to overcome the objections of isolationist 'America-firsters' and cajoled them into sanctioning the reconstruction of those parts of the world deemed to be "free." (8)

Yet by the late 1940s, the Truman regime was still searching for a "grand strategy" through which to achieve the above-mentioned goals on a more long-term basis (Leffler 2010). This strategy coalesced, however, in the decade and a half after 1949 in what McMichael (2017) calls the "development project." As we will see in the following section, the "development project" addressed, at least in the short-to-medium term, the necessities stemming from the capitalist and

¹⁰⁸ As we alluded to above, the US would have been more than happy to fold the Soviet Union into its global hegemonic framework; but in light of the USSR's rejection of the Marshall Plan for various reasons (Kolko and Kolko 1972, 361-365), the idea of closing off any further access to markets, resources etc. had to be "contained." Typically framed as a battle of political ideologies about state control over the economy and the like, the US Cold-War containment policy was equally, if not more, about this issue (McCormick 1989, 40). As Harvey (2005) suggests regarding neoliberal rhetoric, "freedom" is just as much about *free markets* as it is about political freedom, hence the US's seemingly contradictory alliances with repressive states like Saudi Arabia.

territorial logics of power of the immediate postwar period, offering also a persuasive ideological justification that appealed to many First and Third World political-economic leaders alike. But how exactly was this “project” framed, and of what did it consist?

The Development Project

Based on the US’s need to address the political-economic tensions outlined above, coupled with the popular reactions to the global carnage of World War II, emerged what McMichael (2017) calls the post-1945 US “development project.”¹⁰⁹ Although the former political-economic aspects were palpable, the latter were equally important. On the one hand, the collapse of the Japan’s decades-long colonial marauding – i.e., its East-Asian Coprosperity Sphere – left nations in the Pacific clamoring for independence, often invoking the US’s own eighteenth-century break with the British as its inspiration. This occurred while Europe’s colonial powers had been weakened by the war in the European theater. On the other hand, there was the popular revulsion to the horrors of World War II – in particular Nazi concentration camps – which revealed the existential danger inherent to the sorts of social-Darwinian notions that had justified the European colonial projects that had preceded the war. Into the US-led Bretton Woods system, then, were beliefs and their accompanying institutions that stressed the ostensible equality of all humans – most notably in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (Rist 2008, 69).

The US “development project,” therefore, differed in significant ways from the European colonial form of rule. Most significant was US developmentalism’s jettisoning of the colonial binary of European “civilization” versus non-Western “savagery”; instead, there emerged the revolutionary, yet now taken for granted, idea of a spectrum moving from “traditional” to

¹⁰⁹ See McMichael’s list of the key “ingredients” of the development project (2017, 56), some of which we explore in this section.

“modern” society. Contrary to the colonial belief in the fixed and natural “backwardness” of non-Western societies, the notion of development averred that “culture” was far more important than biology, based on burgeoning ideas of the 1930s by the likes of Franz Boas and Margaret Mead. Crucially, then, “backwardness” was something that could be transcended through the agency of “developing” societies. In this sense, there was strong continuity between the colonial and development projects, as we will see, given that the US echoed European discourses vis-à-vis non-Western peoples of “deficiency, tutelage, reform, and rationalization” – that is, following the lead of Euro-American supremacy (Latham 2003, 4-5). Nevertheless, a key difference between the European (colonial) and US (developmental) forms of rule is that the US global power stemmed ostensibly from a self-sufficient (i.e., non-colonial) process. Instead of the colonial division of labor’s division between Western industrialization and non-Western agrarian “backwardness” (via the export of primary commodities to feed European industry), the US’s own internalization of the urban-rural divide (Cronon 1991) made it appear as a non-exploitative “ideal model” of nation-based prosperity (McMichael 2017, 43).¹¹⁰

In any case, the “development era” was officially kickstarted on January 20, 1949 – the day of US president Harry Truman’s Inaugural Address. In this speech, Truman laid out the ideological justification for US global hegemony via the rhetoric of development. According to Rist (2008), this document is a “minor masterpiece”: “For in synthesizing a number of ideas that were obviously in line with the [US] Zeitgeist, it puts forward a new way of conceiving international relations” (72). More than simply shifting the ideological landscape, however, Truman’s famous “Point Four” of the speech helped establish an international order that sought

¹¹⁰ As our citation of Jones pointed out earlier, US capitalism was just as exploitative as the European variants, but the nation-based way of framing this issue serves to obfuscate much of this.

to overcome some of the inherent political-economic contradictions that were facing the US, as it “outgrew” its nation-based geographical container. We quote Truman at length in his declaration of this hegemonic concept that has structured the international order for over the past seventy years -- the “age of development”:

Fourth, *we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.*

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas.¹¹¹

For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people.

The United States is pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques. The material resources which we can afford to use for the assistance of other peoples are limited. But our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible.

I believe that we should *make available to peace-loving peoples* the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life.

And, in cooperation with other nations, we *should foster capital investment in areas needing development.*

Our aim should be to help the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and *more mechanical power to lighten their burdens.*

We invite other countries to pool their technological resources in this undertaking. Their contributions will be warmly welcomed. This should be a cooperative enterprise in which all nations work together through the United Nations and its specialized agencies wherever practicable. It must be a worldwide effort for the achievement of peace, plenty, and freedom.

With the cooperation of business, private capital, agriculture, and labor in this country, this program can greatly increase the industrial activity in other nations and can raise substantially their standards of living.

Such new economic developments must be devised and controlled to benefit the peoples of the areas in which they are established. Guarantees to the investor must be balanced by guarantees in the interest of the people whose resources and whose labor go into these developments.

¹¹¹ Truman seems unaware of any potential connection between the “prosperity” of the West and the poverty and misery of the non-West – that is, the origins of how the “Third World” was *made* (Davis 2001).

The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair-dealing.

All countries, including our own, will greatly benefit from a constructive program for the better use of the world's human and natural resources. Experience shows that our commerce with other countries expands as they progress industrially and economically.

Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge.

Only by helping the least fortunate of its members to help themselves can the human family achieve the decent, satisfying life that is the right of all people.

Democracy alone can supply the vitalizing force to stir the peoples of the world into triumphant action, not only against their human oppressors, but also against their ancient enemies – *hunger, misery, and despair.*

On the basis of these four major courses of action we hope to help create the conditions that will lead eventually to personal freedom and happiness for all mankind. (Rist 2008, 71-72; emphases added)

As the emphasized sections above make clear, Point Four addressed various US priorities in one master stroke, *inter alia*: the naturalization of capitalism, framing it as merely a *technical* process for the securing the necessities of life (i.e., use-values), though along industrial lines; its supposed origins in, and extension to other, “peace-loving” Western societies (despite all historical evidence to the contrary); the US’s need of access to the Four Cheaps, especially raw materials and energy (Moore 2015), and to new markets for its commodities; the nation-state form as the seemingly self-evident vehicle for well-being, echoing at the national scale the formal equality of atomized commodity producers in their exchanges with their “superiors” (i.e., capitalists).

Two essential aspects of the development project that should be emphasized here, though, were the nation-state form and gross domestic product (GDP). The following sub-sections deal with each of these in turn.

The Nation-State System

Against the “production in general” view of postwar “economics,”¹¹² it should be stressed that the US development project was, in essence, about introducing, spreading, and deepening capitalism’s value forms. Indeed, as Watts points out (Gregory 2009, 99), non-Western societies have been defined as “underdeveloped” precisely because of their lack of embeddedness in the commodity form, wage-labor etc. US hegemony (and global capitalism, more generally) required the generalization of the nation-state form to achieve this. But why is the nation-state form the one most conducive to achieve these ends, and how was this achieved at a more practical, historical level?

As we will see later, a central reason for the ubiquity and tenaciousness of the “production in general” view is because many of the aspects popularly deemed to be central to capitalism – such as money, private property, and “commodity” exchange – predate capitalism properly so-called. These “antediluvian forms,” as Marx calls them, are *preconditions* for the emergence of capitalism, but are later qualitatively morphed to serve the specific needs of accumulation. The same is true of capitalism’s hierarchy of spatial scales: urban, global, and nation-state. In what follows, we follow Neil Smith’s (2008) analysis in *Uneven Development*. According to him, “[i]nherent in the determination of value ... is the creation of an integrated space-economy organized at these scales,” one that shifts dynamically even as the scales remain “fixed” (2008, 181). What is crucial to register is how, no matter how self-evident they may appear, the “origins, determination, and inner coherence and differentiation of each scale [is] already contained in the structure of capital” (181).

The first two spatial scales capture the two-sided character of all of capital’s forms, where the urban scale represents *differentiation* (i.e., concrete, qualitative, heterogeneous) and

¹¹² Again, this is even the case regarding “critical” works (e.g., Brenner 2002).

the global scale represents *equalization* (i.e., abstract, quantitative, homogenous). Having said this, we focus here only the global and nation-state scales, given their relevance in the spread of capitalist social relations under the auspices of the US development project.

Capitalism inherits the global scale from the “vast but weak” capitalist world market that gradually emerged after c.1500 (Smith 2008, 185; Moore 2015, 181). Since then, the spatial integration and ever-shifting definition of “global” capitalism has been rooted in the degree to which capital’s value forms, like commodity and wage-labor, have been present. Smith makes a series of important related points in the following:

Spatial integration through the price mechanisms of the commercial market – at best sparse and superficial – is increasingly infiltrated and replaced at a more fundamental level by spatial integration through the law of value. ... The cutting edge of capital’s drive toward universality is its attempt to level the world’s labor power to the status of commodity. ... As a means of universalizing the law of value, the expansion of capital fills out the political and economic content of the absolute space it inherits. (186)

In stating these general tendencies, note how Smith stresses that, although these economic forms and their imperatives help constitute the global scale, the way in which it takes concrete historical-geographical expression is *politically* determined via relations of class, race, gender and the like.

Interestingly, Smith extends Marx’s distinctions about *formal* and *real* subsumption of labor under capital to the global scale regarding the relative degree of *spatial integration* of the capitalist world-system. He locates the transition from (world-systemic) formal to real spatial integration with the shift from colonialism to imperialism that culminated in World War I (Lenin 1939). In his words: “It is precisely this historical transition from formal to a real spatial integration that lies behind the transition ... from absolute geographic expansion of capital to the production of space through internal spatial differentiation” (2008, 187). The centuries-long extension of capitalism’s value forms via its hegemons’ “systemic cycles of accumulation” of

increasing geographical size (Arrighi 1994) was achieved (though, never completely) by the turn of the twentieth century. It is here that the roots of the dominant post-World War II language of “development” and “underdevelopment” lie. Borrowing the Hegelian-Marxist language of “first” and “second” nature (Cronon 1991, xix), Smith argues that the latter increasingly colonized the former so that “‘external’ space was ... internalized and produced *within and as a part of the global geography of capitalism*. This is the ‘development of underdevelopment’” (187; emphasis in original). Crucially, despite the protestations of modernization theory that we will outline later, “fully developed” relations of real subsumption can never, for reasons internal to its own logic, be generalized. Indeed, once the transition from formal to real spatial integration is achieved, it is increasingly *through the unevenness* of the world economy that accumulation is achieved. Although ultimately leveling our critique of modernization theory (and capitalism more generally) on a world-ecological basis (Moore 2015), we agree with Smith’s follow-up point about how pre-capitalist and semi-capitalist (i.e., regimes of hybrid and formal subsumption) are integrated within a unitary capitalist economy as “internalized externals.” This renders moot discussions of competing “modes of production” in favor of Frank’s language of “development at one pole and underdevelopment at the other” (2008, 188).

The above comments were necessary in laying out the reason why the nation-state form is the one most conducive to the global spread of capitalist social relations, one that is inherent to the capital form itself.¹¹³ Indeed, Parenti (2016) has stressed how the capitalist (nation-)state is “at the heart of the value form”; however, rather than detailing exactly why this is so, his immediate (and important) aim is to show how this renders it an “environment-making entity”

¹¹³ In most cases, we can use the terms “value form” and “capital form” interchangeably, since capital is, simply put, “value in motion.” There are good reasons for distinguishing between the two, however, which we will take up in Chapter 6.

(167). This is something we will take up later, but for now we outline how the nation-state as political-economic container serves myriad functions within the logic of capital.

At the concrete level, there is a tension between the use of machinery for the purposes of increasing labor productivity. On the one hand, it provides an edge vis-à-vis one's competitors; however, this fixed capital is typically immobile, and as such, Marx argues, "cannot be sent abroad, cannot circulate as commodities on the world-market." Smith points out how this "national capital" must be protected from others if it is to fulfill its role in the competitive shift from absolute to *relative* surplus value strategies; consequently, the nation-state form is useful in that it puts in place all manner of "infrastructural supports and trade laws" to achieve this. Moreover, the nation-state erects various policies for the reproduction of the capitalist social formation, especially with respect to the daily and generational reproduction of labor-power. Other necessary functions of the nation-state include safeguarding the local currency and private property rights, as well as squelching any existential threats to value relations that the working class might pose via measures to attenuate discontent, such as permitting union formation, increased spending on social programs etc. (2008, 189-190).

In terms of the actual geographical size that the nation-state typically assumes, Smith argues that it is "constrained on the low end by the need to control a sufficiently large market (for labor and commodities) to fuel accumulation," while "[a]t the high end of the scale, a nation-state that is too large finds it difficult to maintain political control over its entire territory (2008, 190). These are generalizations of a dynamic and complex process that gets worked out through contingent political structures across space and time; however, the immediate point to register is how the nation-state form serves the central functions outlined above, which lays the basis for the success of individual nations and the spread of capitalism globally. According to Smith

(2008), the capitalist world-system has been “divided into 160 [now 195] or more discrete nation states” – “territorial jurisdictions which are set in the landscape with barbed wire and custom posts, fences, and border guards” (190) – “and this is as much a necessity for capital as the geographical portioning of private property” (116).

The capitalist world-system has always been crisis-prone, and it was with the aim of attenuating some of these inherent volatilities, as well as achieving the twin aims discussed above, that the post-1945 nation-state system was constructed. The “international” framework through which the nation-state form would be expanded and regulated is known as the Bretton Woods system. A host of institutions were created under its banner, such as the United Nations, the “twin sisters” of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, as well as the Bank for International Settlements (Harvey 2005, 10). The institutions set up under Bretton Woods were to serve three central functions: provide stability to national finances and expand levels of international trade; support national economic growth across the “developing” world by funding Third World imports of infrastructural technologies from the First World; and accelerate the primary exports from the Third World in order to procure the “foreign” currency (i.e., USD) to pay for the value-added imports from the First World (McMichael 2017, 58).

Framed as a universal, positive-sum-game, and multilateral system,¹¹⁴ Bretton Woods served to expand the sway of capitalist value relations within a system of formal equality between nations, yet skewed at a more structural level by relations of patent inequality. Echoing Aristotle’s famous aphorism that “there is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals” (Harvey 2010, 290), the Bretton Woods system formalized at a higher scale the

¹¹⁴ Of the forty-five nations that attended the Bretton Woods conference, for instance, twenty-seven of them were from the soon-to-be “Third World” (McMichael 2017, 59).

capital—wage-labor relation of individual commodity exchangers: formally equal within the sphere of exchange – free, in theory, to trade or work with whomsoever one chooses – yet structurally subordinated in various respects. On the one hand, there were the narrower, more obvious expressions of this structural inequality. The World Bank, for instance, was dominated by its five biggest Western shareholders, its president was chosen by the US (president), all while promoting projects that deepened Third World import dependence of Western capital-intensive technologies and shunning spending on “social” investments like health services, education, and housing (McMichael 2017, 59). On the other hand, there were the counterintuitive ways that decolonizing nations’ gaining of political independence under the US development project continued or deepened the economic path-dependence of the colonial era – as signaled above, regarding the continuation of the colonial division of labor with respect to the Third World’s export of primary goods in exchange for First World technologies etc. (McMichael 2017, 55).

This framework was embedded, as suggested above, in a cautious optimism regarding the US’s overarching power. Although dominant in various respects, the US was dependent upon gaining access to the human and natural “resources” of the soon-to-be “Third World.” George Kennan, speaking of the double-edged character of US postwar economic dominance, declared in a 1948 planning document that the US’s “real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will allow [it] to maintain this position of disparity” (Berger 2004, 42).¹¹⁵ With the Bretton Woods system as its basis, the challenge that Kennan identified was to be

¹¹⁵ Recall, Kennan is referring to how the US claimed to possess 50% of the world’s “wealth” – measured in monetary (exchange-value) terms – despite making up only 6.3% of the global population (Berger 2004, 42).

addressed via the nation-state system, which was globally instituted between the 1940s and 1970s.

Despite the skewed character of the burgeoning nation-state system, however, it was nevertheless hegemonic and appealed to many Third World leaders, both due to its greater ideological persuasiveness and because it was the only option available. Indeed, the recent historical genesis of the nation-state system is belied by its seemingly self-evident character. As Jessop argues (1999):

The postwar “naturalization” of the relatively closed national economy as the taken-for-granted object of economic regulation can be seen as a product of convergent public narratives about the nature of key economic and political changes facing postwar Europe and North America...Although this constitution of national economies and national modes of growth was mediated through national states, it was closely connected with the “making of an Atlantic ruling class” under US hegemony. (397)

Despite its historically-geographically specific origins, it is significant that essentially all societies in the post-World War II period – i.e., the First, Second, and Third Worlds – “accepted that the nation-state was the vehicle for liberation” and societal well-being (Berger 2004, 39).

This betokens the increasing centrality of capitalist value relations in mediating the global nature-society metabolism.

GDP as Measure of Development

The rise and spread of gross domestic product (GDP) as the measure of *national* well-being became the “*new global ontology* (a way of seeing/ordering the world)” of the development project (McMichael 2017, 4). Three points should be registered here about GDP. First, despite its contemporary ubiquity and seeming self-evidence, GDP’s rise and global spread is a very *recent phenomenon*, only being formally institutionalized in 1945 by the United Nations within the newly-formed System of National Accounts (McMichael 2017, 4). According to Victor (2010), regular estimates of GDP date back only a few years earlier (in the West), and “the measure was

initially used in support of specific objectives, such as stimulating employment. Only in the 1950s did economic growth become a policy priority in its own right” (371).

It is here that our stress in Chapter 2 about Marx’s greatest contribution being that he was a *historical* materialist is germane. So widespread and taken for granted has GDP become that it is even deployed by self-avowed “Marxists” as the means of criticizing capitalism, though from the “standpoint of labor” that differs fundamentally from our emphasis in this work (Postone 1993). In attempting to problematize Western triumphalism, for example, economist Minqi Li (2008) anachronistically deploys “GDP” figures from a recent OECD report, a “production in general” document that overlooks the specificity of capitalism’s social forms (and its contemporary measure – GDP):

According to the statistics compiled by Angus Maddison (2003), *in 1500, western Europe was already ahead of China in terms of per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP)*. However, in terms of overall territorial size, population, aggregate wealth and surplus, and the mobilizing capacity of the state, the Chinese empire was by far unmatched by any single European state, and probably, any other contemporary political structure.¹¹⁶ (Li 2008, 5; emphasis added)

Surely, the historical greatness of Chinese civilization needs no defending, especially not by way of anachronistic Western categories that do not apply at all to the context in question. For GDP assumes generalized commodification, and, as we discuss below, only measures “valuable” economic activities in the peculiar way that capitalism does (as socially necessary labor time).

Second, and relatedly, GDP is a *social construct*, not some “objective” measure that is just waiting there to record economic truths about the world. On the one hand, there are the limits to GDP deriving from its exclusion of myriad important aspects of social life that cannot

¹¹⁶ Incredibly, this same widely-cited report (i.e., Maddison 2003) includes GDP statistics on *South Korea* for the years *1820-1913* – an entity that did not exist until 1948 – all measured in US dollars (154).

be captured by its monetary and quantitative calculus – that is, quality of life factors such as happiness, sustainability and safety.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, phenomena that are far from being societally beneficial nevertheless add to GDP, whereas unquestionably more desirable incidents do not. In this sense, if one is committed to contributing to one’s country’s GDP (and, by extension, “well-being”), it would be preferable for that person to drive to work instead of walk, and getting into a car accident would be better still in that the myriad services that this would require would help “stimulate the economy” (Coe, Kelly and Yeung 2020, 38-43). These criticisms are well-known.

On the other hand, we stress the lesser noticed observation regarding how GDP’s peculiar way of measuring is not arbitrarily foisted upon society by its “economic experts.” Rather, GDP expresses the (contradictory) internal logic of the value-form, as the macro-level expression of the (exchange-)value dimension of the commodity form that undergirds the whole system: quantitative, homogenous, and (universally) exchangeable. Recall a central world-ecological tenet about how the value realm of *exploitation* (in the technical Marxian sense of that word) only functions successfully if it is ensconced in a broader zone of *appropriation* (Moore 2015). Consequently, by its own internal logic, value excludes the non-commodified sphere – Moore’s realm of the “free appropriation” of the work/energy of nature, women, and colonies – as condition for its own operation and, indeed, survival.

At the same time, there are good reasons why GDP is so widely adhered to, and obsessed over, despite its obvious limitations. A central reason is simply due to the power of its

¹¹⁷ This not to suggest that, even by neoclassical economics’ reductionist way of measuring, mainstream methods of calculating GDP are simple or straightforward. Coe, Kelly and Yeung (2020, 40) point out, for instance, that the 2008 handbook for the System of National Accounts runs some 722 pages in length.

hegemonic representatives – the “developed” nations (i.e., regimes of real subsumption) whose very success stems from the generalization of this sort of quantitative measure that necessarily structures commodified societies. A more interesting reason stems from the dual character of capital’s value forms, in this case the commodity. That is, the popular conflation of high GDP with increased standard of living is rooted in a *partial* truth – that is, the commodity form, as the inextricable unity of use-value and value – means that capitalism’s ceaseless drive for (exchange-)value results (perforce) in use-values being thrown off from the production process. This is despite the fact that use-value creation (or “need satisfaction”) is not the *immediate* aim of the system’s most powerful representatives (i.e., capitalists). Moreover, the criticism that capitalism’s material dynamism is undermined by its class-based forms of distribution is well known. What we stress, instead, is how a society rooted in GDP as its main measure of societal well-being means that, among other things: 1) there is widespread (if not generalized) commodification and wage-labor; and that the society as a whole – including the state-capital nexus, and regardless of the specific form this takes – have accepted (unconsciously) capital’s (surplus) value imperative, or “accumulation for the sake of accumulation.”

Third, GDP has served as a *technology of power* for the global spread of capitalist social relations via US hegemony, especially vis-à-vis the non-West during the post-World War II period. According to Rist (2008), this new way of dividing the world up into developed and under-developed nations based on GDP levels had several advantages with respect to the US development project. Most relevant here is how GDP was offered as a seemingly “objective” measure that transcended “the ideological divide between capitalism and communism.” As Rist (2008) explains:

Notions of primacy linked to “civilization” appeared rather dubious, because they willy-nilly placed the West in competition with other civilizations or cultures. But national

statistics, with their mathematical aura of objectivity, seemed to offer a much more acceptable basis of comparison. *The proposed solution was genuinely hegemonic, because it appeared to be not only the best but the only possible one.* (76; emphasis in original)

This was how the US concocted its structurally unequal relationship with decolonizing societies and their extra-human natures (i.e., “natural resources”) – that is, through the ostensibly neutral arbiter of market exchange. To be sure, relations between nations were formally equal, following from the Bretton Woods framework. But just as the formal equality between wage-laborer and capitalist in the process of exchange belies a structural relation of inequality in production (i.e., access to the means of subsistence), so too did the system of nation-states obfuscate this inequality. As Marx (1990) famously states regarding the struggle between capital and labor in negotiating the length of the working day: “Between equal rights, *force decides*” (344).¹¹⁸ In this way, Neil Smith (2003) is right to point out how “[t]he market became simultaneously camouflage of and mechanism for continued imperialism, albeit without colonization, a vision that underwrote much of the postwar ideology of development” (372-373).

Into this structurally unequal system of “equality,” then, Third World nations had the “opportunity” to achieve a greater relative degree of autonomy within the globalizing capitalist world-system, yet at a considerable cost. Rist (2008) summarizes the new “developing world’s” Faustian bargain as follows:

¹¹⁸ To be clear, Marx is not referring exclusively to *physical* force here, though there have been plenty of historical instances of this occurring. By “force,” rather, Marx is stressing ideological and political force in the establishment of the length of the working day via the state (Harvey 2010, 138). This is a central theme that will be taken up in our later discussion of South Korea. For as capital’s social forms (and their imperatives) become generalized, they come to seem “natural” (i.e., the “production in general” view). As such, people impose a form of *self-discipline* upon themselves. This is what Postone (1993) means when he states that “developed” forms of capitalism entail an “*abstract* form of social domination.” This mode of coercion, however, is based on the *temporal* grounding of value, which we will take up later.

From 1949 onwards, often without realizing it, more than two billion inhabitants of the planet found themselves changing their name, being “officially” regarded as they appeared in the eyes of others, called upon to deepen their Westernization by repudiating their own values. No longer African, Latin American or Asian (not to speak of Bambara, Shona, Berber, Quechua, Aymara, Balinese or Mongol), they were now simply “underdeveloped.” This new “definition” was accepted by those who headed the independent States, because it was a way of asserting their claim to benefit from the “aid” that was supposed to lead to “development.” For the colonized, it was a way of affirming the legal equality that was refused them. It looked as if they had everything to gain – respectability and prosperity. But their right to self-determination had been acquired in exchange for a right to self-definition. In gaining political independence, they forfeited their identity and their economic autonomy, and were now forced to travel the “development path” mapped out for them by others. Whereas the world of colonization had been seen mainly as a political space to encompass ever larger empires, the “development age” was the period when economic space spread everywhere, with the raising of GDP as the number one imperative. (79; emphases in original)¹¹⁹

We now turn to means through which the US executed this new global order in the intellectual realm.

Modernization Theory

As mentioned in a previous section, despite the dramatic increase in the US’s relative degree of global power that World War II brought about, its political and economic leaders were anything but certain about the future. For, as Kolko (1990) argues, “[t]he war had undermined capitalism everywhere except in the United States,” and US leaders recognized that “only the Americans could aspire to resuscitate it globally” (484). In the immediate aftermath of the war, political-economic stability had been achieved in Europe via the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan (McMichael 2017, 57-58), as we will discuss with respect to the formation of the US aid regime. However, the success of the US postwar economy – and the longer-term future of capitalism more generally – depended upon its relations with “the rest of the world” (Panitch and Gindin 2012, 102-107). On the one hand, India’s gaining of political independence from Britain in 1947

¹¹⁹ For similar arguments, see Sachs (1999, 9) and McMichael (2017, 49).

betokened the waves of decolonization movements that would flood the non-West in the coming decades; on the other hand, the “loss” of China in 1949 to Mao’s communist revolution there only heightened the sense of panic in the US (Engerman 2003, 2 and 89). As US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, announced in an address in March 1945 entitled “The Place of Bretton Woods in Collective Economic Security”: “Probably the only hope of maintaining stability – social, political, and economic – in the world, in the face of the great post-war troubles, is to adopt measures which will lead to an expansion of production, consumption, and trade.”

In terms of winning the proverbial “hearts and minds” of the decolonizing world, however, the US’s touting of the virtues of the “free market system” faced a stumbling block. That is, the US initially had a hard time overcoming the Soviet accusation that capitalism only benefited “rich white men” (Belmonte 2003, 114). US leaders were all too aware that many “Third World” peoples found Soviet propaganda more convincing than their own. For instance, at the Princeton Economic Conference of 1954 – a private meeting of US policy elites – CIA chief Allen Dulles posed the following rhetorical question: “Do you think we have firmly persuaded the people of that area [i.e., postcolonial nations] that it is better to be in our economic orbit than in the Soviet orbit?” With its “manifestos and Marxian dialectics,” Haefele (2003, 84) argues, in the “ideological war” of the post-World War II decade the Soviets possessed a “better story” than the US in which to appeal to the decolonizing world. What was required, then, was a convincing political-cultural-ideological vision, coupled with narrower “economic” prescriptions for how to bring this vision into reality. It is into this context that modernization theory emerged over the course of the 1950s and early 1960s.

A host of important monographs have outlined the details of US modernization theory, as well as the ideological aspects of US developmentalism more generally (Leys 1996; Latham

2000 and 2011; Engerman 2003; Gilman 2003; Rist 2008; Cullather 2010; Essex 2013; McMichael 2017). To simplify things, we outline here modernization theory's four main tenets (Latham 2000, 4). The first is its sharp distinction between "traditional" and "modern" societies. As Gilman (2003b) summarizes: "modern society [is] cosmopolitan, mobile, controlling of the environment, secular, welcoming of change, and characterized by a complex division of labor. Traditional society, by contrast, [is] inward looking, inert, passive toward nature, superstitious, fearful of change, and economically simple" (5).

The second tenet of modernization theory is the conviction that social, cultural, political, and economic changes are inherently interconnected. In order to achieve the "great transformation" to modern society, as Kerr (1960, 1) argues by putting a positive spin on Polanyi's (2001) famous phrase, all of these aspects of life would have to be revolutionized according to the modern "virtues" listed above. As its boosters like Kerr argued, what was required was nothing short of the creation in the developing world of "industrial man" (1960), a process of "making men modern" (Inkeles 1969) that Samuel Huntington (1974, 17) pinpointed as the "central problem of modernization" (Gilman 2003b, 10).

The final two maxims of modernization theory are more narrowly "economic" in character. Before, during, and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Western "economic science" was preoccupied with understanding economic growth within the Euro-American context, no doubt in reaction to the deflated confidence induced by the Great Depression of the 1930s. After stability within Europe was achieved, however, Western economic theory during the Cold War shifted its emphasis to the discipline of "development economics," policy-focused theory that sought to reveal and address the sources of "underdevelopment" and poverty in the decolonizing world (Berger 2004, 62). Interestingly,

although “development economics” is often viewed as merely the economic branch of modernization theory, the latter actually emerged out of the former, as the specific US response to its post-World War II geopolitical tensions vis-à-vis the Second and Third Worlds that were initially theorized within development economics (Leys 1996, 8-9).¹²⁰

There was direct continuity between these First- and Third-World foci, since the third tenet of modernization theory was to take the West’s historical experience and present it as a universal, linear, and generalizable path that all “developing” nations could and should strive to achieve. This was most (in)famously argued in W.W. Rostow’s (1960) *The Stages of Economic Growth*, where he laid out the following five stages of development (and their key characteristics):

- 1) *Traditional societies*: lacking the necessary “factors of production” (land, labor, capital); pre-Newtonian science, predominantly agricultural; limited technology; “static” society (6).
- 2) *Preconditions for take-off*: first arising in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, these included the rise of new production techniques that drew from “modern” (i.e., Enlightenment) science (focused on increasing labor productivity via machinery) for greater “commercial exploitation,” a “conducive political structure” safeguarded and managed by a modern state, and the birth of the idea of infinite economic “progress.”
- 3) *Take-off*: representing the “great watershed in the life of modern societies,” this stage witnesses the transcendence of various “traditional obstacles” to economic growth. In more technical terms, during this stage the state-capital nexus increases the rate of effective investment from approximately 5% to 10% of the national income, thereby helping to create and expand (new) industries, increase urban industrial employment, and trigger new techniques in industry and agriculture. In short: “The forces making for economic progress, which yielded limited bursts and enclaves of modern activity, *expand and come to dominate the society.*”
- 4) *The drive to maturity*: occurring roughly 60 years after initial “take-off” in historical cases of the West, this stage involves the increasing use of modern technology in the production process, as well as its spread across society, thanks to between 10%-20%

¹²⁰ The origins of development economics can be traced to a group of British scholars during World War II. Especially after seeing the writing on the wall vis-à-vis rising US power and its weakened position relative to its colonies, this view continued the work that was started during the 1930s regarding British colonial officials’ attempt to shift the way that its “civilizing mission” was practiced (Berger 2004, 63).

- of the national income being (re-)invested. Economic growth comes to outstrip population growth (i.e., per capita productivity increases). Socio-technical and entrepreneurial skills attain a sufficiently high level for the nation to meet all of its needs – e.g., electronics, chemical, machine tools etc.
- 5) *High mass consumption*: this ostensible “highest stage” of civilizational progress ever achieved is characterized by an industrial sector that produces consumer durables, such as automobiles, and furnishes for many of its citizens a real income well beyond that required to meet basic needs (such as food, shelter, and clothing), as well as allows the state the opportunity to devote funds to social welfare programs and the like. There is also a shift in the most common forms of employment, away from blue-collar work towards those of the urban-skilled and office sorts.

We will have occasion to critique Rostow’s framework below. What should be stressed here, however, is how economic models such as this represent a major shift in US Cold War strategy. Moving away from a focus on direct acts of military containment of Sino-Soviet influence in the decolonizing world (at least between the Korean and Vietnam wars), the emphasis shifted to economic development as an anti-communist bulwark.

The fourth assumption of modernization theory, directly related to the previous one, is that the movement of developing countries along this prescribed spectrum was positively correlated with its degree of contact with developed Western nations. As we will see regarding South Korea (and, by extension, other “Asian Tigers”), in many respects this is indeed the case, offering at least a partial critique of the dependency theories of the 1970s. Nevertheless, the conclusions that we will ultimately draw about this, however, are diametrically opposed to those of modernization theorists.

Modernization Theory in South Korea

Our discussion of post-World War II South Korea will be taken up in Chapters 5 and 6; however, here we briefly discuss modernization theory’s specific “translation” in that country after Park Chung Hee came to power in 1961.

Although rejecting the idea that modernization necessarily meant the Westernization of Korean culture, the political-economic aspects of modernization theory (and its variants) took

increasing hold during the 1960s. During the Joseon era, recall, commercial activity was denigrated and the erudite scholar-class (i.e., yangban) was viewed as the epitome of societal sophistication. Consequently, US leaders worried that, if the nation's intellectuals failed to adopt the US worldview on political-economic matters, this could undermine social stability and, ultimately, South Korea's role within its regional Sino-Soviet containment strategy (Brazinsky 2003, 252).

As such, great effort (and sums of money) was devoted to spreading the tenets of modernization theory (and development economics) to South Korea's intelligentsia – in particular, to its less “traditional” younger generation – which would hopefully then collaborate with state leaders to bring about a successful modernization drive along Rostovian lines. For example, the local branch of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) in South Korea – referred to as the U.S. Information Service (USIS) – disseminated the ideas of modernization theory via a plethora of translated magazines, essays, and books by top US scholars: examples of book-length works include Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth*, of course, but also Edward Mason's *Economic Planning in Underdeveloped Areas*, Max Millikan's *The Emerging Nations*, Robert Alexander's *A Primer for Economic Development*, and John Kenneth Galbraith's *Economic Development in Perspective*. A television series entitled “Modernization in Korea,” moreover, debuted in late 1965. It was structured as group discussions amongst top South Korean economic scholars, which “focused on a broad array of issues such as national planning, educational development, sociological change, and rural development” (Brazinsky 2007, 166-168). This was complemented by guest lectures by top US development theorists, most notably Rostow's own lecture at Seoul National University in 1964, as well as cultural exchange programs funded by

institutions like the Ford Foundation, the American Korean Foundation, and the Asia Foundation (Brazinsky 2003, 259).

All of this effort and investment was necessary to overcome the understandable sense of pessimism that affected many South Koreans in the wake of decades of colonialism, a civil war, and the chaos and stresses of the post-World War II era. The optimistic tone of modernization theory was intended to counter that pessimism. Brazinsky (2003) explains modernization theory's three-fold allure as follows: its "emphasis on the inevitability of social and economic progress, its critique of communism, and its inherent faith in the capacity of 'advanced' countries of 'the West' to stimulate the development of poorer regions of the world" (256-257). In the Manichean Cold War struggle between the North and South, as well as in South Koreans' desire to assert its autonomy within the world-system, modernization theory was a set of political-economic tenets that this young "Republic" could rally around.

Critical Observations

One might wonder why any credence is given to a framework as seemingly antiquated as modernization theory, especially in light of the barrage of criticisms that have been leveled at it since its rise. Although the more egregious triumphalist and teleological qualities of modernization theory's economic prescriptions have been jettisoned, its broader message is alive and well today (Latham 2003, 17-18). This is even the case regarding recent "critical" works of development economics (e.g., Chang 2003), all of which accept capitalism's revolutionary social forms as given and instead attempt to manipulate bourgeois categories in the hopes of achieving a more equitable distribution of wealth between the Global North and South.

Here, then, we make several observations about modernization theory (and development economics) that are more in line with the critical assumptions informing this work, and ones that

foreshadow what will follow in the remaining chapters. First, there is the elitism of modernization theory, a set of ideas written by the US's "mandarins of the future" (Gilman 2003b) for Third World state leaders whose developmental plans along capitalist lines ostensibly represented their respective nations' "best interests." On the one hand, this technocratic and elitist response to the pressing tensions of the US development project furnished it with ideological legitimacy, since development was framed as a "*technical problem* outside of history and politics" (Berger 2004, 62).¹²¹ If developing nations would simply copy what the US had already achieved, the story went, all would be well. In this way, it served US purposes nicely, since it accomplished three related goals: discrediting colonialism; justifying US interventions in the Third World, since these acts could be framed as *temporary* (i.e., only until the "right kind of revolution" (Latham 2011) could be brought about); and using GDP as a seemingly scientific measure of development was viewed as an apolitical standard that all could strive to achieve (Rist 2008, 75-76).

On the other hand, as we will outline in Chapters 5 and 6, creating the requisite class conditions where the rise, spread, and deepening of capitalism's revolutionary social forms can take hold is so small feat. As such, despite the US's protestations about the inherent links between the "free market system" (i.e., capitalism) and equality, freedom, democracy and the

¹²¹ As Adas (1989) has argued regarding European encounters in previous centuries with non-Western peoples, the same approach continued to an even greater degree during the Cold War (Adas 2003): machines became the "measures of men." This emphasis on seeming apolitical machines, whose superior productivity of *use-values* ostensibly justifies them as measures of "development," is rooted in the dynamics of (*industrialized*) *real subsumption*. Both the ideological hegemony that flows from this, as well as the contradictory socio-ecological outcomes that these relations beget (which undermine these claims), will be explored in Chapter 6 in terms of the South Korean case. In short, it is not machines *per se*, but rather their function in service of capitalism's historically specific social forms and their imperatives.

like,¹²² this “great transformation” (Polanyi 2001) typically required strong – often draconian – state actions to achieve. Not surprisingly, these actions often undermined the virtues above in direct proportion to the degree to which it successfully implemented these conditions. Herein lies the relevance of Scott’s (1998) discussion of “authoritarian high modernism.” As he demonstrates through a host of twentieth-century case studies, these elitist and technocratic approaches to “modernity” spanned the ideological divide. There is, then, a homology with respect to state-society relations regardless of the particular forms that this took within the ideological battles of the twentieth-century. The “state simplifications” required to manage that abstraction called “society” in the service of taking advantage of, and protecting one’s nation against the dangers of, the globalizing spread of value relations operates at a higher level of abstraction (level 3) than the concrete manifestations that this took during (prior and after) the Cold War (level 2). In this way, Gilman (2003b) is right in arguing how “modernization theory would represent liberalism’s entry into [the] hall of twentieth-century ideological horrors,” alongside “the centralized economic planning of the Soviet Union, the procapitalist tyranny of Nazism, and the orchestrated anarchism of the Chinese Cultural Revolution” (11). As we suggested regarding the rise of GDP as measure of “(under-)development,” modernization theory flattened out the heterogeneity of countless non-Western societies and their complex histories into a binary framework (Latham 2003, 13) that, ultimately, kowtowed to the imperatives of value relations through “rationalizing” society.

In a related way, the macro-economic shifts of the past 150 years – those that structure the periodization of modern world history – follow a general pattern: from the “disorganized

¹²² For a summary of modernization theory’s view of (capitalist) “modernity,” see Edward Shils’s statement of 1959 (Gilman 2003, 1-2).

capitalism” of the turn of the twentieth century, which gave way to the Keynesian “golden age,” then neoliberal turn. This general pattern reveals how the world’s “competing” blocs grappled in their own way with the spread of value relations. According to Postone (2017):

What is significant about this trajectory is its *global character*. It encompassed western capitalist countries and Communist countries, as well as colonized lands and decolonized countries. Although important differences in historical development occurred, of course, from the vantage point of the 21st century *they appear more as different inflections of a common pattern than as fundamentally different developments*. (41; emphases added)

In this way, the observation about how modernization theory represented the “capitalist mirror image” of Leninism (or Stalinism) is not at all “hypocritical” or “paradoxical” (Gilman 2003a, 50). These represented differing “paths to modernity” – the supposed “promised land” that both the leaders of the First and Second Worlds had ostensibly already attained (Latham 2003, 4). The main difference was that US leaders viewed the Soviet path as, like German fascism, a mutant deviation (or “pathology”) of the true version: a “sickness of the world,” as Henry Luce argued in *Time* magazine in 1941, that risked spreading throughout the globe and that, therefore, the US was obligated to crush (Latham 2003, 7-8).

Second, there are the aspects of modernization theory that seemingly overlap with the emphases of our analysis. One of these we merely flag here, since it will be discussed in greater detail later on: that is, how Rostow’s five stages echo Marx’s crucial discussion of the *forms of subsumption* of labor (and society) under capital’s forms. More specifically, “traditional society” corresponds to the non-capitalist societies that have dominated world history until the past century or so; “preconditions for take-off” refer to the initial and uneven introduction of capital’s value forms (commodity, wage-labor etc.) that correspond to relations of *hybrid subsumption*; “take-off” captures the spread of capital’s value categories and the generalization of *formal subsumption*; and the “drive to maturity” and “high mass consumption” captures relations of

manufacturing and large-scale industry that is betokened by (industrialized) relations of *real subsumption*. Despite this overlap, our emphasis differs fundamentally from Rostow's in that it is neither stagist nor teleological. As we will argue later, the teleological character of real subsumption (as manifested in modernization theory) is historically specific, rooted in the dualistic tensions of its forms, and socio-ecologically contradictory.

Another key point of seeming agreement involves modernization theory's recognition that the transition to capitalism – or moving from “tradition” to “modernity” – involves sweeping and profound changes *to the whole of society*. More than just a shift in narrow production techniques, then, we share this assumption that capitalism represented a revolutionary new “way of life” (Murray 2016). As a 1960 policy study prepared by MIT's Center for International Studies (CENIS) declared, modernization “inevitably involves every area and level of the life of a society” (Gilman 2003b, 5). Or again, as Millikan and Blackmer argue in *The Emerging Nations* (1961), “*Modernity is a style of life*. The ensemble of behaviors that compose the modern style is given its coherence by a *frame of mind* – toward the here and hereafter, toward permanence and change,¹²³ toward oneself and one's fellow men” (Gilman 2003a, 47; emphases added). This involves a Weberian “rationalization” of society at myriad levels, as defined by capital's value imperatives.¹²⁴ This process began in Korea under Japanese colonial rule (Hwang

¹²³ This reference to “permanence and change” is interesting, given how it reflects Postone's (1993) “dialectic of transformation and reconstitution” (298-304), which is a hallmark of “developed” regimes of real subsumption that we will discuss in Chapter 6.

¹²⁴ Again, the level of abstraction that one is operating at informs the truth or falsity of specific claims. Consider, for example, French geographer Andre Siegfried's postwar proclamation that “The United States is presiding at the *general reorganization of the ways of living* throughout the world” (Gilman 2003b, 1). We saw above that South Koreans rejected the idea that modernization necessitated (cultural) Westernization; at the concrete everyday level, this is so, thereby refuting Siegfried's claim. However, if one considers the statement as one pertaining to the imposition of the (surplus) value imperative (i.e., GDP growth), then, South Korean nationalists' protestations aside, it is certainly true.

2016), but it only came into its own during the post-1945 period. A key issue going forward involves the necessary class conditions that need to be present in order for this “rationalization” process fully to take place.

Third, an apparent paradox emerges between, on the one side, modernization theory’s insistence that capitalist *industrialization* (along US lines) is a key prerequisite for “development” or “modernization” (Adas 2003, 37)¹²⁵ and, on the other, the fact that industrialized regimes (i.e., *real subsumption*) have always been in the extreme minority world-historically speaking. This idea, patently impossible to achieve for a host of reasons we will discuss later, was triggered by the global political-economic concerns of the time. Indeed, echoing the post-Korean War shift in US hegemonic strategy of eschewing direct military confrontations with the Soviet Union in favor of “developmental” economic strategies, Rostow revealed the logic behind this stress on industrialization as follows:

The Communist bid to win Asia by demonstrating rapid industrialization is already launched. Peking and Moscow have set the time span of the race. It behooves the Free World and especially the United States to decide promptly whether it is to observe or participate in this struggle on which so much of our destiny hinges. (Gilman 2000b, 45)

With the “battle for Asia” (Berger 2004) becoming the focal point of the Cold War, then, the US needed to create a “crescent of containment” (Stubbs 2005, 16) to safeguard the continued existence and eventual dynamism of global capitalism.

Even prior to the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and the Korean War (1950-1953), this emphasis on the US-led “First World’s” maintaining its relative industrial advantage was central to George Kennan’s 1946 message to President Truman that kickstarted the “containment”

¹²⁵ Despite their differences regarding how this was best achieved, it is significant that all “development economists” in Britain and the US – e.g., Paul Rosenstein-Rodan, Arthur Lewis, Walt Rostow – essentially agreed that industrialization was the *sine qua non* of national development (Berger 2004, 62-64).

policy that ruled in Asia until c.1975 (i.e., till the end of the Vietnam War). Indeed, the seemingly counter-intuitive “Kennan Restoration” – better known as the US’s “reverse course” with respect to Japan in 1947 – was rooted in this logic. As Cumings (1984) explains: “George Kennan’s policy of containment was always limited and parsimonious, based on the idea that four or five industrial structures existed in the world: the Soviets had one and the United States had four, and things should be kept that way. In Asia, only Japan held his interest” (17). As Kennan’s fears seemingly came to fruition by the mid-1950s, modernization theorists and the US aid regime focused their attention very unevenly on those societies most crucial in safeguarding its interests in the Pacific – i.e., what would eventually come to known as the “Asian Tigers” of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore etc. (Stubbs 2005; Glassman 2018).

Moreover, these Cold War “showcase states” – for which South Korea was perhaps the most important – gained much through their “dependency” within the US development project. As Gilman (2003a, 68) argues: “[s]emiperipheries were crucial not only because their mobility deflected anger and revolutionary activity in the periphery by providing hope that peripheral areas could escape their position within the world economy, but also because they ‘served as good places for capitalist investment when well-organized labor forces in core economies cause wages to rise too fast.’” With US prosperity dependent upon opening up the decolonizing Third World so as to secure the “Four Cheaps” (Moore 2015), John F. Kennedy’s announcement at the beginning of the so-called “development decade” of the “*new frontier*” is given fresh meaning. The “new frontier” – a term coined by Rostow himself (Haefele 2003, 90) – was just as much, if not more, about laying the ideological foundations for the US’s expansionary imperatives. The continuities that we have stressed about twentieth century US geopolitical policy being a

globally extended “solution” to the nineteenth century’s “end of the [US] frontier” are patent in JFK’s words:

We stand today on the edge of a New Frontier – the frontier of the 1960s, the frontier of unknown opportunities and perils, the frontier of unfilled hopes and unfilled threats. ... The pioneers gave up their safety, their comfort, and sometimes their lives to build our new west. They were determined to make the new world strong and free – an example to the world. ... Some would say that those struggles are all over, that all the horizons have been explored, that all the battles have been won. That there is no longer an American frontier. ... Beyond that frontier are uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered problems of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus.

The interdependent character of the capitalist world-system is palpable here. This puts an interesting twist on arguments about “dependent development.” That is, “developing” nations were no doubt dependent upon the largesse of the First World in terms of aid, technology transfer, loans, markets etc., but, world-ecologically speaking, the West was arguably even more dependent on the these “new [commodity] frontiers” in order to service the expansionary imperatives of the capitalist value form.

The US Aid Regime

It is with the issue of the US aid regime that we see the capitalist and territorial logics of power fuse in their contradictory unity.¹²⁶ As we saw earlier with respect to the development project more generally, despite the US’s overwhelming relative power, the global and interconnected character of the ever-widening capitalist system meant that the US depended heavily upon “less developed” areas of the world economy for its success. This dependence reflects the two-sided character of the commodity form that undergirds the entire system – both in terms of the social relations that allow for the generalization of value relations (value as social mediator) and the

¹²⁶ Essex (2013) echoes this line of argument, though he uses the language of geopolitics and geoeconomics.

concrete use-value dimension of needing access to specific “resources” to fuel its dynamic regime of (industrialized) real subsumption.

Although the issue of aid is typically viewed as one of the strong engaging with the weak, it is important that we notice how the aid regime was positively correlated to the inordinate relative degree of US power at the time of its creation. In other words, the rise and spread of the aid regime was undertaken at the behest of the US’s internal contradictions. Again, contrary to modernization theory’s professions of the natural and teleological origins of the US’s own national economic experience that is supposedly applicable elsewhere, its global institution (via the aid regime) was a “distinctly political undertaking” (Essex 2013, 27). Here we discuss more specifically what those imperatives were in the context of establishing the regime in the early postwar period.

Recall, the US’s primary concern was that it would be plummeted back into another economic depression if the necessary expansion of its production could not be achieved. The Soviet “threat” was directly related to its possible interference in securing this requirement, not necessarily in ideological differences. To be sure, the US has historically been willing to deal and accommodate all manner of alternative systems and beliefs, just so long as it did not interfere with commodified relations between them. What was most important was that as many societies as possible be open to free trade within a US-led system. It was the deviant fascistic paths of Germany and Italy (i.e., autarky), for instance, that had posed a threat to the US during the 1930s, for which World War II was the culmination, and after the war it was the threat of a renewed European alliance or Stalinist alternative that needed to be thwarted (Panitch and Gindin 2012, 94).

The immediate aim of the postwar period, then, was nothing short of the US rescue of global capitalism (Block 1977, 79-81), at least in terms of the “open door” sort that it deemed best. Although preferring to help out its allies via loans, the US was (at least by 1947) wary of repeating the sort of post-World War I debt quagmire that saw the granting of loans simply to repay previous ones. In light of the US surplus and its dependence on foreign markets, a system of outright grants was put in place instead. The US state’s logic ran like this:

With a system of grants, the administration now came to believe, it could restructure an ideal world capitalist trading structure within a limited time span, and then allow it to operate in a self-generating system of triangular trade able to purchase America’s vast surplus with the earning of its own products, either in the United States or in the raw materials producing Third World. (Kolko and Kolko 1972, 360)

The “less developed” world was crucial to this scheme. Not only did it furnish access to much-needed natural resources, but it also served as both a market for Western European goods – which used to go to Eastern Europe – and as a US dollar earner via its sale of the raw materials (Wood 1986, 40-41). According to one economist: “Such a pattern of trade, to be self-sustaining, would mean a surplus of [European] exports to the nondollar world, a surplus of exports by the latter to this country, and a European surplus of imports from us, to be financed in this manner (Wood 1986, 41).

It was to achieve the above goals that the US announced the European Recovery Program (ERP), better known as the Marshall Plan, in 1948, a program that doled out over 13 billion dollars to Western European countries between 1948 and 1952, 90% of which were in the form of grants (Wood 1986, 29). Although this “aid” was required more concretely for the US’s own continued success on account of its hegemonic position, and more abstractly by the inherently expansionary character of the value/capital form, the Marshall Plan faced several barriers to being passed. Again, this came from a combination of “internal” and “external” factors. The

former were anti-internationalist forces within US Congress; the latter stemmed from various forces that arose out of the ravages of World War II, which were resistant to the US's far-reaching vision – the weakness of European economies, the growing strength of leftist forces there, the rising power of nationalist and revolutionary forces in the decolonizing world, and the enhanced position of the Soviet Union (which seemed to offer a viable alternative to the US-led system) (Block 1977, 70). At the same time, however, it was precisely the existence of these “threats” that gave a sense of urgency for the passage of Marshall Plan aid.

The key point to recognize, though, is not about the issue of the continuity of capitalism in Europe, but rather about the specific *form* it would take (Kolko and Kolko 1972, 367). Although “interventionist” Keynesian economic policy had in many ways originated (in a practical way) in the United States, what concerned US leaders in the immediate postwar period was the version that was popular in Europe at the close of World War II, which was a form of “national capitalism” that focused on state planning and full employment. Given European nations' weakened position vis-à-vis the US, the way to achieve these aims was through various protectionist measures, which was exactly what the US sought to thwart. According to Block (1977):

Although little was actually done before World War II to implement national capitalism, there is good reason to believe that after the war, there might have been substantial experiments with national capitalism among the developed capitalist countries. In fact, in the immediate postwar years, most of the countries of Western Europe resorted to the whole range of controls associated with national capitalism – exchange controls, capital controls, bilateral and state trading arrangements. The reason these controls were not elaborated into full-scale experiments with national capitalism was that it became a central aim of the United States foreign policy to prevent the emergence of national capitalist experiments and to gain widespread cooperation in the restoration of an open world economy. (9)

The Marshall Plan may have begun as a means to address the short-term recovery of Western Europe, as part of a way to revive the capitalist system itself, but it set a template for all future incarnations of the US aid regime.

Mirroring in many ways the shifts of the time that saw the rise of modernization theory, there was a marked shift in the role of aid over the course of the 1950s. That is, just as the US transformed its strategy from one of Soviet containment via direct military confrontation (e.g., Korean War) to economic competition via the “scientific” prescriptions of Rostow and others, the aid regime shifted from one focused on short-term objectives, such as addressing the threats in Greece and Turkey that had initiated the Marshall Plan itself, to more long-term developmental ones. According to Essex (2013), it was one of John F. Kennedy’s primary objectives to overhaul the form that the aid regime took, one which received just such a treatment after he gained the presidency in 1960. One challenge in implementing this overhaul, however, was waning public support in the US for aid, precisely on account of the relative peace that had set in after the Korean War. The sorts of immediate threats that had overcome various objections to the Marshall Plan in the first place were now absent, which decreased support for the sorts of alterations JFK hoped to achieve. To make his case, JFK condemned the ways in which aid had previously been dispersed – that is, in ways that were “bureaucratically fragmented, awkward and slow,” being “diffused over a haphazard and irrational structure.” What was needed was more systematic, long-term commitments, as one administrative official argued: “We know in our hearts that we are in the world for keeps, yet we are still tackling 20-year problems with 5-year plans, staffed with 2-year personnel working with 1-year appropriations. It’s simply not good enough” (Essex 2013, 33).

Sensible as JFK's diagnosis may have been in capitalist economic terms, what eventually served to sway public support towards the reorganization of aid was not the economic arguments themselves; rather, it was the renewal of a series of geopolitical threats during the late-1950s and, especially, in the first years of Kennedy's administration (1960-1961). These included the botched Bay of Pigs invasion, the capture of a US spy plane by the USSR, the failed attempt to improve US-Soviet relations at the Vienna Summit of June 1961, as well as the creation of the Berlin Wall just a couple of months later (Essex 2013, 34).

Prior to the publication of his *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1960), Rostow had published a series of works on the importance of what would become known as the crucial third phase of his evolutionary economic schema – i.e., “take-off.” Co-written with CENIS director Max Millikan and published in 1957, Rostow's *A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy*, contended that communism was an aberration of the process of development. As Haefele (2003) states regarding Rostow and Millikan's diagnosis, “The Soviet Union and its agents injected this ‘opportunistic’ and ‘disruptive’ disease into societies during the turbulent take-off period.” “Communists had gained ground,” he argues, “by exploiting ‘the revolution of rising expectations’ and convincing people that communism was ‘the road to social opportunity or economic improvement or individual dignity and achievement.’” Consequently, it was crucial to hasten nations through this vulnerable phase, so as to “inoculate” them against communism (86). This was the underlying assumption that guided CENIS-influenced transformations of US aid policy under and Kennedy and beyond. If nations could just be guided through this key stage, it would ostensibly render them autonomous – more specifically, capable of evincing the principles of “self-help” and “graduation” to higher stages, which was the preferred language of the US

regime under Kennedy. This emphasis highlighted the temporary character of US aid, which helped sway some of the new program's critics (Essex 2013, 34).

It is with these macro trends emanating from the global scale logic of US developmentalism that the subsequent two chapters on post-1945 South Korean development should be understood. For now, though, several things should be noted. First, at the more concrete level of everyday practice, US aid policy shifted in various ways in response to changes in the internal and external environment (Wallerstein 1980); however, through these complexities, clear continuities remained. As Magdoff (1969) argues:

Interlarded as the foreign aid program is with bureaucratic complications, the patina of a humanitarian rationale, and the idiosyncrasies of U.S. political structure (executive-legislative-judicial balance), the variations in foreign aid practice over the years may seem confusing. But throughout all its variations there are two dominant and interrelated ends toward which the control and influence is exercised: (a) to keep the outer rim of the imperialist network as dependencies of the system, and (b) to sustain and stimulate the growth of capitalist forces – economic and political – within these countries. (139)

These two imperatives are related to the second observation, which deals with the meaning of the word “dependence,” as in the well-worn concept of non-Western nations’ “dependent development” (e.g., Lim 1985). Although the US enjoyed disproportionate power and visited often draconian policies on “developing” nations, the world-ecological and Marxian categorial critique of the social forms underlying US hegemony put a twist on this idea. For it was the US that was inherently dependent on the non-West (Third World), in terms of securing markets, procuring non-substitutable raw materials and the like. Indeed, the world’s “backward” societies could have continued to exist without linking up with the First World, but due to the expansionary character of US society that was by then ensconced in relations of real subsumption to capital, this sort of “isolation” was not an option for the US. At the concrete level, this was recognized clearly enough, though in a resentful way. For example, when Soviet

Foreign Minister Molotov requested US credits in January 1945 on the basis that it would help the US avoid a postwar depression, US ambassador Harriman resented this blunt (and perspicacious) diagnosis of the US's systemic subordination to its social forms (and their expansionary imperatives). Thereafter, US leaders sought to deny this dependence on providing foreign "aid" by making proclamations such as the following made by the Marshall Plan committee, which "regard[ed] as nonsense the ideas which prevails to a considerable degree in this country and abroad, that [the US] need[s] to export our goods and services as free gifts, to insure our prosperity" (Wood 1986, 36-37). The reasons for these vehement denials of the structural imperatives of the US's own capitalist dynamism are clear enough, since they highlighted the US's own weakness (grounded, ironically, in its capitalist strength), while undermining its ideological hegemony by showing how "aid" stemmed not from liberal benevolence, but from hard-nosed necessity (of the system it would soon promote in a generalized way).

Third, this US dependence on creating a global "open door" with generalizing value relations – i.e., subsuming the socio-natures of non-Western societies to varying degrees (hybrid, formal, real) – was revealed in its highly uneven meting out of its aid. Ideas that came out of modernization theory and, by extension, the aid regime after 1960, such as "aid as a means to trade," disclose the necessity of subsuming non- or partially-subsumed societies to a greater extent under capital's value forms. These nations that were "stuck" in the "preconditions for take-off" (i.e., stage 2) required, so the US believed, aid as a means to provide "technical, capital, and political support to spark take-off and the drive to maturity." As Rostow argued from his teleological and "production in general" standpoint, once a society had successfully reached the take-off phase, "*growth becomes [the society's] normal condition*. Compound interest

becomes built, as it were, into the habits and institutional structure” (Essex 2013, 40; emphasis added). In other words, the unique form of capitalist “growth” in value terms – i.e., M-C-M’ – becomes a seemingly self-evident and natural virtue when its class relations are established. We will have occasion to unpack the contradictory ambivalence of South Korea’s own “graduation” to a regime of generalized formal subsumption and real subsumption under manufacture in Chapter 5, then the transition to after 1973 to a “fully developed” industrialized regime of real subsumption in Chapter 6. The point to notice here, though, is that it is exactly the flux and chaos of instituting generalized value relations (private property, proletarianization, commodification etc.) that makes the take-off stage so “dangerous” – i.e., susceptible to resistance and “communist” cooptation. As we saw in the previous chapter, this process began in Korea, though in a highly uneven way, during the Japanese colonial era. It did not come into full fruition, as we will see, until the era of Park Chung Hee (1961-1979). But in terms of the US’s uneven dispersal of aid, this can be only properly understood in terms of the US’s need to ensure the success of those Cold War “showcase states” like South Korea and Taiwan, as well as other societies where value relations were not yet secure. This explains Latin America’s paltry receipt of postwar US aid, sparking the region’s disappointment that there would not be a series of miniature Marshall Plans for its nations, despite the language of the Marshall Plan itself and Point 4 of Truman’s speech (Wood 1986, 46-47).

US “Food Power”: Public Law 480 (PL 480)

Of all of the sectors of the US economy, it was perhaps in agriculture that the surplus-disposal imperative was most sharply felt. The formal manifestation of the US’s surplus food disposal plan came into being in 1954. Officially called the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act, it is better known as Public Law 480 (or PL 480). As we will see in the

following chapter, food aid played a central role in South Korea's own capitalist revolution ("development"), but the focus here is on the US point of view.

In the years since the agricultural reforms of the New Deal, surplus food commodities (e.g., wheat) became an endemic feature of American agrarian life. The US agro-industrial model was shielded by tariffs and government subsidies, a situation that was institutionalized via the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) that went into effect in 1948. According to this set up, US farmers opted to specialize in in a single crop or two and, as a result of government subsidies and technological support, perennially overproduced (McMichael 2017, 67).

This general pattern was occasionally interrupted, however, such as during World War II when farm exports, and by extension farm incomes, soared. More specifically, at the beginning of the Lend-Lease program in 1941, the US shipped agricultural commodities to Europe worth over \$6 billion. This number proceeded to explode in the years following World War II, moreover, as the US supported its allies informally, and then via Marshall Plan aid. As Cathie (1989, 22-24) explains, "From 1945 exports of agricultural commodities, under government support, increased dramatically from 56 billion bushels to 318 million bushels in 1946, 367 million bushels in 1947, to 479 million bushels in 1948, and peaked to 505 million bushels in 1949."

Despite this, however, the agricultural surpluses continued to manifest themselves. This triggered a whole set of policies that sought to, on the one hand, address this problem that was rooted in its *domestic* agrarian class relations, while, on the other hand, aiding its grander goals of global leadership. To mention only a few examples of policies that preceded the passing of PL 480: \$50 million in emergency food aid was offered via the Yugoslav Emergency Relief

Assistance Act of 1950 (PL 81-897) in order to curb a famine stemming from that country's mounting confrontation with the USSR; the Indian Emergency Food Act (PL 82-48) of a year later was sent to address famines catalyzed by a series of droughts and floods in that country; and in 1953 a bill (PL 83-77) was passed that provided a grant to Pakistan also for famine relief (Wallerstein 1980, 32).

It is important to note that, in each of these instances, food aid was viewed as a *temporary* measure to address the twin problems of surplus agricultural commodity disposal and maintaining global political-economic stability that was being threatened by food shortages in other parts of the world that were central to US interests. There were ideological reasons for US leaders' opposition to entertaining the idea of establishing a permanent food aid program, especially with the coming to power of the Eisenhower administration during these years and its Republican-controlled House and Senate. And while the breakout of the Korean War compensated in many ways for the slackening off of food exports to Europe following the Marshall Plan recovery, after the cessation of fighting in 1953 it became all too clear that the problem of food surpluses was imminent. That is, with exports plunging from \$4 billion to \$3 billion 1952-1953 (Wessel 1983, 152), surpluses climbed in the summer of 1953 to over \$5 billion. This had, according to Wallerstein (1980), a "sobering influence on many of the skeptics," which was also deepened the strong pressure from farm interest groups within the US who were demanding a more permanent solution to their woes than the stop-gap measures that has been previous taken (35).

It was in this context, then, that President Eisenhower passed into law Public Law 480 in July of 1954, declaring that it would "lay the basis for a permanent expansion of our exports of agricultural products, with lasting benefits to ourselves and to people of other lands" (Wallerstein

1980, 35). Given the twin imperatives outlined above that the US was facing, it is not surprising that the two main aims of PL 480 were 1) to dispose of agricultural surpluses and 2) offer food to nations that needed it on grant and/or concessional credit terms. There were other goals, of course, such as “developing new markets for American farm products, disposing of surplus agricultural stocks, combating hunger and malnutrition, encouraging the economic development of recipient countries, and promoting the foreign policy of the United States” (Wallerstein 1980, 35-36). It should not go unnoticed, however, that “only one of these objectives involves explicit attention to hunger and malnutrition. In fact, of the five goals cited, three actually deal with benefits for the United States rather than the recipients of food aid” (Wallerstein 1980, 266).

In terms of the program itself, PL 480 food aid was divided into three component parts. By far the most dominant and important was so-called Title I aid, which was based on commercial sales on concessionary terms, paid for at discounted prices in the local currency of the receiving nation. Indeed, between 1954-1977, 70% of the world’s total food aid was comprised of Title I sales (McMichael 2017, 67). The other two Titles dealt with famine relief (II) and food exchanged for raw materials that were of strategic importance to the US (III).

The cleverness of PL 480, as viewed from the US standpoint, was its ability to negotiate the competing domestic and global imperatives faced by the US at that time, all while managing not to upset its more powerful Western allies. As the Marshall Plan gave way in 1951 to the Mutual Security Act (MSA) – an agreement which sought to protect the non-Communist world via military and economic assistance from possible Sino-Soviet expansionism – the US’s fully recovered European allies no longer viewed the heaps of US grain being poured into Europe and elsewhere as “aid,” but rather as undermining the competitiveness of their own agrarian sectors. Moreover, the US’s other agricultural export-based economies – e.g., Australia and Canada –

also took issue with the US food aid sent to other recovering *industrial* economies (Wessel 1983, 152). The focus of PL 480's bilateral food aid set up was, consequently, targeted at newly defined "under-developed" Third World nations. As Wessel (1983, 153) notes, this arrangement had several benefits for the US:

[It] allowed the US to maintain its friendly relationships with the industrialized nations and yet keep open for itself the possibility of raising US farm prices through exports to countries where international competition was not viewed as a threat. With local currency received as payment for recipient governments, the US government covered expenses for military security, embassy costs, and the purchase of strategic materials for national defense. It also used this money to make loans for industrial development favorable to US corporate interests.

This arrangement coincided nicely with the logic of the US "development project," vis-a-vis its prescriptions for Third World nations. The food surpluses that made their way to the people in nations allied with US strategic interests worked to subsidize the wage bills of its workers through the cheap food that this aid provided. It also helped catalyze a rural to urban population movement, as former peasants faced trying to compete with cheap US agricultural commodities while being structurally neglected by domestic governments bent on undertaking the industrial transformation that was posited in Rostovian theory as the transhistorical development path for all to follow (McMichael 2017, 67-68). As we will see in greater detail in the following chapter, this was especially the case in South Korea, since the major class typically opposed to full capitalist industrialization – a landed elite – had been all but wiped out through its collusion with the Japanese colonial regime.

The Origins of US Support for South Korea

It is well known that the US supported the new South Korean regime, and by now we should see more clearly why this was so (in systemic terms). Still, the motivations behind this support, and the qualitative type of support given, needs to be differentiated. In the immediate aftermath of

the Second World War, the US was overwhelmingly concerned with maintaining social stability in Korea. As the Cold War heated up in Asia by the late 1940s, the United States was directly involved in the support of two new regimes – South Korea and Taiwan – both of which had been “created” (politically speaking) by their split from a counterpart society. According to Koo (1987), initially “the integration of the two East Asian countries into the world system in the mid-20th century had a character more political than economic. South Korea and Taiwan came into being as a result of the Cold War, and the United States has supported them politically and economically for their strategic value” (175), especially in the military and security sense (Kang 1988).

As we mentioned earlier, the US (via leaders like George Kennan) wanted to maintain the four-to-one balance of the world’s industrialized regimes, as these nations were the most materially, technologically, and, crucially, militarily powerful (Cumings 2010, 214). This dynamism stemmed from these societies’ embeddedness in relations of real subsumption, something we will unpack in Chapter 6. In any case, the nation in the region that did possess an industrial base was Japan, and as such it garnered the majority of US strategists’ focus. In 1949, the US State Department formalized its “Policy for Asia” through a significant document called NSC 48, which set out its vision for the postwar political economy of Asia. Ever since the “open door notes” of 1900, and certainly before, Asia (and China in particular, despite the US greater contact with Japan in the nineteenth century) represented the “Eldorado of America’s overseas economic expansion” that was again preoccupying so many US leaders (Williams 1972, 191). It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that the principles of NSC 48 included the following: “the establishment of conditions favorable to the export of technology and capital and to a liberal trade policy throughout the world,” “reciprocal exchange and mutual advantage,” “production

and trade which truly reflect comparative advantage,” in addition to its anathema to something called “general industrialization” (Cumings 2010, 215). The immediate reason given for this last issue of discouraging generalized industrialization was that it could ostensibly only be achieved at “a high cost as a result of sacrificing production in fields of comparative advantage” (*ibid.*), though the fear that the rise of a host of potential industrial rivals could throw the world back into a military tailspin was surely also a consideration.

Recall from our discussion of the tenets of modernization theory, however, that generalized industrialization was exactly what the US eventually prescribed via the development project. The context for this about-face, not surprisingly, was the Chinese communist revolution of the 1949 and the outbreak of Korean War in 1950. In the immediate term, though, as far as the US’s interest in South Korea went, it was mainly due to the peninsula’s strategic geographical position. For the Japanese, as a popular saying goes, Korea has always been the “dagger pointed at the heart” of Japan (Lim 1985, 37). The US’s strategic interest in Korea after World War II, then, was as a military-political safeguard for the Japanese regional hegemony (under US global supervision) that was required to ensure the “First World’s” industrial advantage over its Soviet (and now Chinese) rival(s).

The outbreak of the Korean War did two important things. First, it essentially reset the lines of the US’s “grand area” in East Asia. With the Chinese “Eldorado” lost to its main rival, South-east Asia – a term, incidentally, that lumped together a host of heterogeneous societies arbitrarily under a category that made only immediate sense to the US Cold War gaze (Palat 1999, 92) – levelled up in its geopolitical significance. According to the new logic outlined in NSC 48 was a sort of triangular structure of the US’s strategy in the Pacific, where, in world-systemic terms, the US (core), Japan (semi-periphery), and Southeast Asia (periphery) would be

locked into an alliance of mutual advantage that would both contain the spread of communism and allow it to outcompete economically its second-world rivals (Cumings 1984, 19).¹²⁷

The second thing that the mounting communist threat in Asia did was to kickstart the sort of “military Keynesian” policy that the US internationalists had been hoping for since the cessation of the war. Again, this was not driven by some perverse desire for military confrontation; rather, it stemmed from the clear recognition that the full mobilization of the economy (via state “intervention”) during World War II had lifted the US out of the doldrums of the Great depression, so a prolonged “cold” battle against the Soviet Union would serve both to “prime the pump” of economic dynamism and (relatedly) to convince those nationalist forces within the US leadership to accept the necessity of a more internationalist and state-centered policies vis-à-vis “foreign aid,” military interventions (usually via coups) etc. As Dean Acheson famously remarked in 1954, “Korea came along and saved us.” According to Cumings (1984), as the US’s key ally in the Pacific, this “us” also referred to Japan: “The Korean War not only boosted the Japanese economy but provided MacArthur with the justification for reviving police and military and for excluding labor and the left with Japan” (20). In all of this, the new Republic of Korea played only a supporting role.

As the US’s Cold War strategy shifted by the mid-1950s from one of direct military confrontation to one of economic competition between its sphere of influence and the Soviet’s, there was a discernible shift in the US’s treatment of South Korea. Certainly, the US had lavished upon this new regime an inordinate amount of aid and the like, but the immediate aim of this, as we argued above, was targeted at maintaining social stability. As such, the aid that the

¹²⁷ Recall that Southeast Asia was particularly significant for the maintenance of Japanese hegemony in the region in that it supplied the requisite “raw materials” (i.e., Four Cheaps) for its industrial behemoth (Kolko 1988, 60).

US provided was consumer oriented rather than project oriented – that is, to meet people’s immediate needs rather than lay the foundations for long-term economic development (Castley 1997, 114). With faith and optimism on the upswing regarding the US’s ostensibly proven “scientific” model of development via modernization theory, a new approach was called for, especially vis-à-vis the US’s key allies like South Korea. Now well ensconced in the Kennedy administration as a top advisor, Rostow and his CENIS colleagues were able to put their ideas into practice, all with the benefit of the funds and wherewithal of the US state. Working alongside his colleague Robert Komer, Rostow assessed the situation in South Korea and lamented how the previous emphasis on military and security issues had been too limiting. In a 1961 memo, Komer postulated that “one of the basic reasons why we have accomplished so little in Korea since 1953 has been our predominantly military focus.” What was needed instead, as Komer had already surmised several months prior in a different policy document, was “*crash economic development*” in South Korea, “especially the “creation of light labor-intensive industry” combined with “much more rigorous [and] imaginative US action in directing and supervising ROK economic development” (Berger 2004, 66; emphasis added).

This policy shift coincided with the rise of Park Chung Hee’s dictatorial regime, something that was supposedly in no way in contradiction with the less militaristic approach advocated by Rostow and his ilk. There was by the 1960s a more hard-nosed and pragmatic approach taken by the US in its attempt to safeguard the Cold War advantage via “developed” allies that could be called into service to contain and outcompete (economically, militarily etc.) the Second World (Gilman 2003, 11). Indeed, of the three “paths to modernity” that Gilman (2003, 9) identifies – techno-cosmopolitan, revolutionary, and authoritarian – the US was increasingly comfortable with the third variety – the sort of dictatorial route that characterized

Park's "authoritarian high modernism" (Scott 1998). The reason for this seeming contradiction could be explained, it seemed, "scientifically" via Rostow's schema. For it was during the crucial "take-off" phase (#3) that developmental regimes were at their most vulnerable. Consequently, a "big push" was required in order to hasten regimes through this precarious phase, and thereby ushering in the "right kind of revolution" (Latham 2011): a capitalist one, though understood as "development" in the abstract.

This shifting place of South Korea within the US hegemonic project is important to note. Without doing so, goings-on that occurred during the first phase can be erroneously read into narratives of the latter Park/Rostow economic "miracle" phase. Chief among these is the issue of land reform, a central topic of the next chapter. Land reform, a widely acknowledge ingredient in South Korea's success, was supported in South Korea in light of the volatility of Korea with respect to the land question. For a variety of reasons that we will discuss later, the US acquiesced to (bourgeois) land reform policies for the sake of maintaining social stability, *not* for the purposes of establishing a key precondition for capitalist dynamism (i.e., value relations). In this way, those who (rightly) stress the *continuity* of US support for South Korea nonetheless miss the qualitatively distinct ways in which this was expressed. Koo (1987) signals a recognition of this when he states how "foreign private capital began to enter *only after a state and a class structure emerged which could adapt dynamically and positively to new conditions* in the world system" (175; emphasis added). Again, the rise, spread, and deepening of capitalism's social forms can only take place if specific class relations are present. The story of Chapters 3 through 6 are focused on outlining how this came to be in the (South) Korean case. In this sense, Koo's statement is correct, though he fails to draw out the revolutionary and contradictory ramifications of this transformation.

By Way of Conclusion: A US Literary Interlude on Value Relations

The discussion in this chapter has been mainly pitched at Marx's second level of generality (Ollman 2003): dealing with the macro political-economic context that led up to the US's post-World War II "development project," and focusing on the *concrete* political economic tenets of modernization theory and development economics that it promoted throughout the world. Despite being pitched as transhistorically valid "laws of economy," we know that these are actually the surface expressions of capital's deeper value forms, which require the sort of categorial analysis that Marx undertook in his mature works of *abstract* political economy (e.g., 1973). The purpose of this concluding section, then, is to do three things: 1) concretize these rather abstract forms via a discussion of their (implicit) appearance in two well-known works of US literature; 2) gesture at how these came to appear as the "natural," if lamentable, "laws of economy" that people were powerless to resist, and that structured their lives; and 3) stress how, despite post-1945 protestations of their universal validity and appeal, everyday Americans' reactions to their contradictory character were in widespread evidence well into the twentieth century.

The placing of this section at this midway point of our analysis is quite deliberate. For the value relations that these fictional characters are grappling with were of quite recent vintage where the stories take place – i.e., California in the first half of the twentieth century. *Yet they were precisely the ones that were soon prescribed via postwar US developmentalism to the rest of the world*, but that were far from generalized in Korean society under Japanese colonial rule. In any case, the works we examine here are Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), focusing on how, respectively, these works highlight the naturalization of capitalism's peculiar value imperatives (the basis of the "production in

general” view) and value as a form of social domination with seemingly no locus. These themes were central to our analysis in Chapter 2 and will be explored in greater depth in Chapters 5 and 6 on South Korea.

Norris’s *The Octopus* (1901)

Frank Norris’s early-twentieth-century fictional trilogy, *The Epic of the Wheat*, wrestled with the new industrial relations both in the factory and in agriculture from the standpoint of commodified wheat.¹²⁸ *The Octopus* narrates the downfall of myriad characters engaged in various aspects of wheat growing in the San Joaquin Valley during the course of their seemingly futile struggle against the powerful Pacific & Southwestern Railroad (P&SW) – a.k.a. the “monster” or titular “octopus” that represents industrial capitalism against its agricultural other, whose power reaches out tentacle-like to dominate the lives and space of the grain trade.¹ While it may not have been Norris’s intent, we interpret “the octopus” as much more than a critique of the P&SW’s spatial monopoly over the railroads, as well as the agricultural producers’ dependence upon it. Rather, the producers themselves are growing wheat almost exclusively for the world market, and as such would be, according to Marx’s distinctions, *formally* subsumed under capital: “autonomous” in the production process, yet dependent on the world market.

In any case, what is of greatest relevance here is his protagonist’s views on capitalism and nature. Presley, a would-be writer who spent significant amounts of time with various

¹²⁸ The first book, *The Octopus*, deals with its production in California; the second, *The Pit*, explores its sale at the Chicago Board of Trade; and the concluding volume, unfinished on account of Norris’s premature death in 1902 at the age of thirty-two, would have dealt with its consumption (in Europe), tentatively entitled *The Wolf*. Despite his ostensibly critical perspective, Norris’s legacy is ambiguous because the tragedies suffered by his characters in *The Octopus* are somehow subsumed under a “larger view” of human progress that supposedly justifies the deaths and/or unravelling of nearly every character in the book (Rothstein 1982, 50-51).

characters in the wheat growing business that eventually suffered tragic outcomes, was initially dismayed at the seeming heartlessness of the P&SW. Towards the end of the story, Presley notices the Railroad's headquarters by happenstance and, emboldened by his contempt for it, decides to go in to confront its head, a seventy-year-old man named Shelgrim. The following passage allows Shelgrim to summarize what will become Presley's (i.e., Norris's?) justifications for what are popularly perceived to be the inevitable evils of "The New Order of Things" (i.e., capitalist value relations):

"Believe this, young man," exclaimed Shelgrim, laying a thick powerful forefinger on the table to emphasize his words, "try to believe this – to begin with – **THAT RAILROADS BUILD THEMSELVES**. Where there is a demand sooner or later there will be a supply. Mr. Derrick, does he grow his wheat? The Wheat grows itself. What does he count for? Does he supply the force? What do I count for? Do I build the Railroad? *You are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of Wheat and the Railroads, not with men*. There is the Wheat, the supply. It must be carried to feed the People. There is the demand. The Wheat is one force, the Railroad, another, and there is the law that governs them – supply and demand. Men have only little to do in the whole business. Complications may arise, conditions that bear hard on the individual – crush him maybe – **BUT THE WHEAT WILL BE CARRIED TO FEED THE PEOPLE** as inevitably as it will grow. If you want to fasten the blame of the affair at Los Muertos on any one person, you will make a mistake. *Blame conditions, not men.*" 399¹²⁹

"But – but," faltered Presley, "you are the head, you control the road."

"You are a very young man. Control the road! Can I stop it? I can go into bankruptcy if you like. But otherwise if I run my road, as a business proposition, I can do nothing. I cannot control it. It is a force born out of certain conditions, and I – no man – can stop it or control it. Can your Mr. Derrick stop the Wheat growing? He can burn his crop, or he can give it away, or sell it for a cent a bushel – just as I could go into bankruptcy – but otherwise his Wheat must grow. Can any one stop the Wheat? Well, then no more can I stop the Road."

Following this exchange, Presley ponders, and eventually accepts, the following gloomy conclusions:

This new idea, this new conception dumbfounded [Presley]. Somehow, he could not deny it. It rang with the clear reverberation of truth. *Was no one, then, to blame for the horror*

¹²⁹ The pages numbers cited are from a PDF version, available at the Project Gutenberg website.

at the irrigating ditch? Forces, conditions, laws of supply and demand – were these then the enemies, after all? Not enemies; there was no malevolence in Nature. Colossal indifference only, a vast trend toward appointed goals. Nature was, then, a gigantic engine, a vast cyclopean power, huge, terrible, a leviathan with a heart of steel, knowing no compunction, no forgiveness, no tolerance; crushing out the human atom standing in its way, with nirvanic calm, the agony of destruction sending never a jar, never the faintest tremor through all that prodigious mechanism of wheels and cogs. (399-400; emphases added)

There is an obvious contradiction in the fact that Presley views this “New Order of Things” as something inescapably natural. This can be explained, however, by his evolutionary and teleological view of human history, like Francis Fukuyama would repeat some ninety years later in the post-Cold War triumphalism of the similarly named “New World Order” representing the ostensible “end of history.”

The point, however, is this: Presley naturalizes the unique imperatives of value relations, stressing the “laws of supply and demand” without considering the specific context that lends them their validity. This recalls a passage from Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program*, which took nineteenth-century German socialists to task for their erroneous attribution of the labor theory of value as the transhistorically valid “source of all wealth” (rather than value): “a socialist programme cannot allow such bourgeois phrases to *pass over in silence the conditions that alone give them meaning*” (Tucker 1978, 525-526; emphasis added). These “forces of nature” (supply and demand), overlook the question of the *form* of value that is unique to capitalism, along with the class conditions necessary for it to arise. Once “production in general” views like Presley’s are assumed, there appears to be no way out of the capital logic, which presents itself as a nature-imposed necessity.

Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)

Published nearly forty years after Norris’s “trilogy,” John Steinbeck’s classic Depression-era novel is written from the standpoint of someone who seems to have internalized Marx’s lessons

about the historically specific character of the capitalist social form in a way that Norris did not. Set initially in the Dust Bowl of the southern US (Oklahoma), Steinbeck describes the sense of anger and confusion regarding the local bank's repossession of a tenant's farmland – an incident that serves as a microcosm for what was happening all over the region as a result of tenant indebtedness. What is interesting is that, like Marx, Steinbeck's dialogue between both the "owner men" (bank representative) and the driver of the tractor (wage-worker) does not dwell on their individual characters, but rather treats them as representatives of certain roles within the class dynamics of the capitalist mode of production.

A variety of ironies present themselves in *The Grapes of Wrath*,¹³⁰ but the scene which captures Steinbeck's recognition of the dispersed yet oppressive force of value relations appears in Chapter 6. Several things should be noticed about this chapter. First, when the Joad family faces eviction from the parcel of land that they had farmed for generations, a seeming

¹³⁰ These ironies are as follows. First, the basis for the tenants' claims to rightful ownership of the land is that they had occupied it for a relatively long time. To the extent that their ancestors dispossessed native groups to acquire this land in the first place is apparently lost on them. Second, from the standpoint of the bank's representatives, their repossession of the land stemmed from their contractual rights. In the first instance, however, bourgeois property was based on the Lockean notion of "improvement" – that is, it was the mixing of one's labor with the land to render it more productive that justified one's ownership of it. The bank and its representative have done none of this, so their claim to legitimacy is spurious at best. Third, although they would no doubt count themselves supporters of the capitalist system, in terms of their family histories, for the Joad family (and their ilk) this represented the *second*, not first, instance of dispossession from the land, the first coming roughly a century earlier due to acts of Enclosure and industrialization that drove them to America from Europe. Rothstein (1982) notes the turbulent interconnections stemming from the web of value relations that were broadening and deepening in Euro-America during the nineteenth century:

In the broadest sense, the emergence of the world wheat economy in the last third of the nineteenth century set in motion an ironic circularity, exports from America helped create the unsettled conditions in southern and eastern Europe that cut millions of people loose from their farms and villages and propelled half of them to the United States, where many took up more land to grow more grain to send to Europe. (65)

Acceptance of this dual dispossession is easier to understand if these relations are taken as "natural."

contradiction emerges regarding the bank – which is a stand-in for capital’s value imperative – as both a human creation and something that is nevertheless out of anyone’s control.

“We’re sorry. It’s not us. It’s the monster. The bank isn’t like a man.”

“Yes, but the bank is only made of men.”

“No, you’re wrong there – quite wrong there. The bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men, I tell you. It’s the monster. Men made it, but they don’t control it.” (33)

This passage offers a vivid fictional illustration of Marx and Engels’s famous passage in the *Communist Manifesto*: “Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and property ... is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells” (Tucker 1978, 478).

Second, the infinite growth imperative of capitalism – arising not from “greed” but from the imperatives of the capital-labor relations and its surplus value imperative, M-C-M’ – is clearly registered, albeit in a lamentable and bewildered manner by all involved. So, while the tenant pleads with the bank’s representative to postpone the take-over of the farm until the following year (in case a bumper crop might somehow get him out of debt), the “owner man” explains matter-of-factly:

But – you see, a bank or a company can’t do that, because those creatures don’t breathe air, don’t eat side-meat. They breathe profits; they eat the interest on money. If they don’t get it, they die the way you die without air, without side-meat. It is a sad thing, but it is so. It is just so. ... The bank – the monster has to have profits all the time. It can’t wait. It’ll die. ... *When the monster stops growing, it dies. It can’t stay one size.* (32, emphasis added)

It is clear from this passage that Steinbeck grasped that a developmental contradiction had emerged in early-twentieth century US agriculture, where the forces of production (mechanization and concentration) had become ill-suited to the extant relations of production

(the tenant system): “The tenant system won’t work anymore. One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve or fourteen families. Pay him a wage and take all of the crop. We have to do it. We don’t like to do it. But the monster’s sick. Something’s happened to the monster” (33).

Third, Steinbeck clearly intuits what Marx referred to as the “dull compulsion of economic forces” characteristic of capitalism, how its peculiar social form of wealth – value – coerces *all* members of that society, yet seemingly with no locus. This is captured best when the tenant confronts the tractor driver – the son of a man that he knows from the community – regarding the ethical implications of his doing a job that would push a dozen families off of the land in order to get his “three dollars a day” to feed his family. The tenant declares that in the same way that his father and grandfather before him confronted those who represented a threat to their means of subsistence (i.e., “Indians and snakes”), so too he would kill those now posing an even greater threat, the bank. Given their past acquaintance, the tractor driver feels obligated to warn the tenant that he had been given special orders by the bank to “accidentally” damage the farmhouses as he works the fields. Here is the denouement of the proletarian condition underpinning value relations that suddenly confronts this tenant and the thousands of others like him, *with seemingly no one to blame*. This is revealed in the following exchanges between the tenant and bank representative:

“I built [the house] with my hands. Straightened old nails to put the sheathing on. Rafters are wired to the stringers with baling wire. It’s mine. I built it. You bump it down – I’ll be in the window with a rifle. You even come too close and I’ll pot you like a rabbit.”

“It’s not me. There’s nothing I can do. I’ll lose my job if I don’t do it. And look – suppose you kill me? They’ll just hang you, but long before you’re hung there’ll be another guy on the tractor, and he’ll bump the house down. You’re not killing the right guy.”

“That’s so,” the tenant said. “Who gave you orders? I’ll go after him. He’s the one to kill.”

“You’re wrong. He got his orders from the bank. The bank told him, ‘Clear those people out or it’s your job.’”

“Well, there’s a president of the bank. There’s a board of directors. I’ll fill up the magazine of the rifle and go into the bank.”

The driver said, “Fellow was telling me the bank gets orders from the East.¹³¹ The orders were, ‘Make the land show profit or we’ll close you up.’”

“But where does it stop? Who can we shoot? I don’t aim to starve to death before I kill the man that’s starving me.”

“I don’t know. Maybe there’s nobody to shoot. Maybe the thing isn’t men at all. Maybe, like you said, the property’s doing it.”¹³² Anyway I told you my orders.”

“I got to figure,” the tenant said. “We all got to figure. *There’s some way to stop this. It’s not like lightning or earthquakes. We’ve got a bad thing made by men, and by God that’s something we can change.*” (38, emphases added)

This passage captures the diffuse character of capitalist power relations, a “unique form of social interdependence” based on value as both a form of social mediation and valorization process (Postone 1993). The ostensible equality enjoyed by its atomized producers in the sphere of exchange is undermined by the highly unequal class relation rooted in the majority’s lack of access to the means of subsistence (i.e., the proletarian condition).

The key point to register here is just how peculiar capitalism’s value imperatives are when a group of people first encounters them. The discussion above makes clear how adverse reactions to capitalist value relations are not mere signs of the “backwardness” of “traditional societies.” Indeed, they were in clear evidence in the US, even upon the eve of the US state’s attempt to foist them upon the world via modernization theory and development economics. It is significant in this sense, then, that the bank’s representatives refer to the institution that they for

¹³¹ Presumably, “the East” refers to New York city.

¹³² Following Postone (1993), we reject the sort of critique of capitalism that traces its ultimate contradictions to private property and the market, focusing instead on its structuring social forms.

as a “monster” (32). As McNally’s (2011) work on non-Western reactions to capital’s value imperatives makes clear regarding their frequent comparison to monsters, zombies, vampires and the like:

Mainstream social science has a long tradition of characterising such tales as premodern superstitions that refuse to accommodate the disenchantment of society that is integral to modern life. *Yet such dismissals enact a mystification, denying as they do the systematic assaults on bodily and psychic integrity that define the economic infrastructure of modernity, the capitalist market-system.* And that is why we need disruptive fables of modernity like those circulating throughout Sub-Saharan Africa today. *For such tales disturb the naturalisation of capitalism – both of its social relations and the senses of property, propriety and personhood that accompany it – by insisting that something strange, indeed life-threatening, is at work in our world.* (5; emphases added)

As McNally argues, however, the danger of the generalization of capitalism’s historically specific social forms is their “invisibility” and “elusive everydayness” for those subsumed under them, their “apparently seamless integration into the banal and mundane rhythms of quotidian existence” (2011, 2). Their global hegemony, moreover, stems from their being championed by world history’s last two hegemonic powers – Britain and the US (Arrighi 1994) – who managed to conflate the material and technological dynamism that they beget with their ethical and socio-ecological superiority.

In this chapter, we traced the specific (US) national imperatives and means by which the *global* spread of value relations took place after 1945. But the narrative arc of this work focuses on the twentieth-century rise, acceptance (i.e., “naturalization”), and contradictory dynamism of these relations in (South) Korea in particular. Significant in this regard is how the abstract form of social domination and socio-ecological contradictions of its forms – those that are only hinted at in the literary accounts above – only come into their “full development” under industrialized relations of real subsumption. This is the story we tell in the next two chapters.

Chapter 5 Ascending the Value Treadmill: The Rise of Real Subsumption in South Korea, 1961-1972

Introduction

The different scalar approaches of the previous two chapters – Japan representing an East Asian *regional* hegemony, yet inserted with the broader US “development project” at the *global* scale – will inform our discussion in the remainder of this work, which is the culmination of the argument and is pitched at the South Korean *national* scale. As we discussed in Chapter 2, however, it is important to recall our adherence to a philosophy of internal relations. This means that these various scales are believed to be dialectically interrelated, both informing and being informed by one another. The “national” focus, therefore, is a sort of constructed fiction that is deployed due to its ability to shed light on certain dynamics.

It is in this and the next chapter that Marx’s distinctions between the differing *forms of subsumption* of labor under capital, as outlined in Chapter 2, come to center stage. The overarching theme is about South Korea’s transformation from an uneven mix of hybrid, formal, and real subsumption – as well as non-capitalist relations – in 1945 to one of predominantly real subsumption by the late 1960s and thereafter. Indeed, South Korea was one of only two other non-Western nations to ever make this transition (alongside Japan and Taiwan), and it is this that we claim is the most revealing explanation for the economic “miracle.” According to this view, the voluminous debates that have hitherto dominated the discussion of South Korea’s successful “development” – i.e., whether it did so by adhering to “market fundamentals” or through the workings of a “developmental state” – overlook what was by far a more revolutionary social transformation. This is not to argue that the state and market did not play their part, but that they were expressions of the essential basis of South Korea’s capitalist dynamism (real subsumption),

which could not have come to fruition outside of the sort of geopolitical contexts discussed in the chapters on Japanese colonialism and the US postwar “development project.”¹³³ In these chapters on South Korea, we will observe that this transition was anything but inevitable, encounter some seeming paradoxes and counter-intuitive claims, reveal the basis for the inescapably ambivalent character of capitalist modernity in this most developed form, and ultimately argue for the increasing socio-ecological anachronism of capitalist value production in South Korea and beyond.

South Korea’s Postwar State Formation, 1945-1960

It was argued in the chapter on the Japanese colonial legacy that it was the flux and precarity associated with the undermining of the millennia-old Joseon order which – far more important than the rates of growth or infrastructural investment etc. experienced under colonialism that is typically summoned as support for the importance of Japan – furnished a context in which South Korea’s postwar capitalist revolution became a possibility. Nevertheless, in the midst of the chaos following liberation in 1945, there was nothing inevitable about the preservation or emergence of the key elements that would yield the subsequent “miracle”: the strong state and export-led industrialization (i.e., real subsumption). We address in this section the former issue, and will deal with the other later in this chapter.

Several aspects of post-liberation state dynamics were forged or deepened during this key period, some of which represented continuities from the Japanese colonial period, while others

¹³³ Given the nation-based perspectives that the vast majority of scholars adopt, the Japanese colonial experience is concluded to have been highly disadvantageous to Korea, whereas even the most ardent nationalist would admit that the sort of US patronage that flowed from the Cold War context was advantageous. From our perspective, however, both experiences were necessary (but insufficient in and of themselves) for the completion of South Korea’s capitalist revolution (i.e., real subsumption). *Pace* the assumptions of some scholars (e.g., Haggard, Kang and Moon 1997), there is nothing that says that a “legacy” must be something positive.

were fundamental breaks with the past. First, however central the much-lauded “strong state” may have ultimately become under Park’s developmental dictatorship (1961-1979), it is crucial to recognize that the retention and deployment of this “giant bureaucratic octopus” bequeathed by Japan was a calculated *political choice* made by the United States. As the official overseer of the immediate post-World War II period, the Americans could have just as easily elected to dismantle the state. Indeed, the US opted to do just that in Japan proper, at least until the famous “reverse course” of 1947. This, as is well-known, was triggered by the revolutionary socialist wind that was sweeping through China at that time, a phenomenon that alarmed US leaders who feared “losing” China.

As we mentioned in the previous chapter, the US’s initial preoccupation with Korea was (geo)political, not economic. Their main goal was to establish a politically stable pro-American regime. However, the interim government that the South Koreans had initially formed (the Korean People’s Republic) represented the popular mood of this colonially ravaged society – that is, it was “nationalistic, left-leaning, and anti-imperialistic” – which the US chose not to support due to their suspicions that this “motley crowd” was populated by communist sympathizers (Kohli 2004, 63-64). Again, had the Korean People’s Republic (KPR) been allowed to consolidate itself, the state likely would have turned into “more of a fragmented-multiclass state that [would have] put a higher premium on political legitimacy than on economic growth” (*ibid.*). Instead, the United States recognized that the hulking colonial state possessed the “means of coercion sufficient to maintain stability, law and order, and prevent an orientation of southern Korea away from American interests – or to put it another way, toward perceived Soviet interests” (Cumings 1981, 429). Hence, not only did the United States decide to preserve

the strong state, but it also strengthened it in many respects in terms of its military, police, and bureaucratic structures (*ibid.*).

After refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the popular KPR (Hamilton 1986, 22), the US backed instead the new, ironically named, Korean Democratic Party (KDP). This was effectively a process of “Koreanizing” the repressive Japanese colonial state, since the US occupation leaders usually required that those employed in it possessed experience in the colonial government. This ensured that the state apparatus was filled with former “imperial bureaucrats” that collaborated with the Japanese regime (Chang 2009, 83-84), which the US eventually filled with approximately 170,000 positions (Cumings 1981, 153). Although many retained their landed property for the time being, for those hangers-on of the moribund Joseon dynastic regime who were attempting to preserve their privileged position in society, assuming or retaining a position within the US-backed conservative bureaucracy offered a “safer and surer” future in the context of the powder keg that was post-liberation (South) Korea (Cumings 1981, 430). In addition, the strength of the Koreanized state was bolstered by its “legal” appropriation of inherited colonial assets and infrastructures. This was done via the so-called 1948 Initial Financial and Property Settlement between the US and South Korean governments, which President Eisenhower declared in true Cold War fashion to be an “opportunity [for] the free world to prove its will and capacity to do constructive good in the cause of freedom and peace” (Jeong 2017, 162). The significance of this should not be underappreciated, given its rarity in postcolonial settings and its status as perhaps one of the largest state asset handovers in world history (Jones and Sakong 1980, 30).

In bringing this sketch of early post-1945 state formation to a close, we highlight a key discontinuity from the colonial period that was to play a central role in shaping – not determining

– South Korea’s future. That is, while it is true that the state’s strength stemmed from the US’s retention and augmentation of its coercive powers, its *relative* strength vis-a-vis society in general increased due to the erosion of the landed class’s power, as well as the general splintering of various (emergent) interest groups who formed during the chaos and uncertainty – but also *opportunities* – that arose from the legacy of Japanese rule. On the one hand, the power of the *yangban* landed elite had been compromised by its subordination and collusion with the Japanese during the colonial era; on the other hand, there was a dearth of cohesive groups to fill the political vacuum. As Woo-Cumings (1998, 327) asserts, there was a

weakness of entrenched interests, both industrial and agricultural – either because local entrepreneurial talents were not nurtured in the smothering intensity of Japanese imperialism, or because they were shattered when the colonial pressure-cooker blew up in their faces, as with the agrarian interests. *This discontinuity had a **powerful leveling effect**, equalizing incomes more than in most developing countries and providing a fertile ground for an interventionist state*, which had a relatively free hand to forge a developmental coalition. (emphasis added)

Hence, it was the impending destruction of the landlord class – and their flight into business or the bureaucracy – paired with the absence of a comprador class with ties to the metropole that lent the postwar state its “strong” character in relation to society at large (Koo 1987, 172).¹³⁴

This is a crucial point that separates (South) Korea from other “Third World” regimes,¹³⁵ as well as clarifies the rationale for the US’s retention of the colonial state machinery. Since the US’s prime aim was to maintain “political stability” (i.e., avoid a socialist regime), it would have

¹³⁴ Interestingly, this state of affairs effectively reversed the situation in the late-Joseon period, where an impotent state was powerless to push through the sorts of reforms that would have potentially warded off colonial control (i.e., mimicking the Japanese response to the Western capitalist threat via the Meiji reforms).

¹³⁵ Much of what is pointed out as a unique feature of South Korea also applies to Taiwan, usually for very similar reasons having to do with the legacies of Japanese colonialism and US patronage during the Cold War. Being that these two regimes are repeatedly held up as the “models” of successful “development” – i.e., capitalist revolutions – only lends greater credence to the arguments put forth here.

been content to dismantle the colonial state and allow the landed class to resume their position of power. This was precisely what the US did in its postwar treatment of the Philippines, since the landed class had retained sufficient power during the Japanese period to continue ruling the country after the Japanese withdrew (Kang 1988). In post-colonial (South) Korea, by contrast, the explosion of social forces that was unleashed upon the Japanese withdrawal signaled that the *yangban* elite's ruling days were numbered (Suh 1991, 224). This was the catalyst for the retention of the strong state, as we saw above, which served to quash the nation's lower classes who harbored left-leaning tendencies.¹³⁶

The widespread and vitriolic forms of social discontent in post-colonial (South) Korea that the US and its conservative Korean allies attempted to suppress were connected, in one way or another, to the land question. The experience of Japanese colonialism had a two-fold, contradictory impact on Korean society. On the one hand, the chaos and uncertainty connected to Korea's insertion into the world market, the commodification of various aspects of society, proletarianization etc. triggered a great deal of suffering and precarity. On the other hand, it also shattered the age-old idea of the landed elite's supposed "natural superiority" over the rest of society, where the experience gained on the peninsula, the factories of Japan and elsewhere introduced to a good number of Koreans the idea of the fluidity of classes and social mobility. As Lie (1998, 8) insists, "The struggle over land was the struggle over Korea's future." It is to this

¹³⁶ Incidentally, this point provides a powerful rebuttal to what Stubbs (2005, 15) viewed as a weakness of the US hegemony argument for the Asian "miracle" economies, as covered in Chapter 1. That is, he argues that the Philippines enjoyed just as much of a connection (and historically much longer) to the US, so American patronage could not be the underlying reason for capitalistic success since the Philippines' relative position diminished greatly in the region. We see from the discussion in this section that it is not the mere fact of hegemonic patronage that is important, but the *type* of policies and transformations it allows or promotes. This dismantling of landed power in South Korea – a conservative "barrier" to capitalist revolutions in scores of "Third World" societies – was central to South Korea's capitalistic success.

issue, and to the consolidation of prerequisites for fully developed capitalist social relations (formal/real subsumption), that we now turn.

Primitive Accumulation in South Korea

The narrative trajectory of the historical chapters of this work traces the gradual – yet extremely rapid by world-historical terms – emergence of capitalist social relations in (South) Korea. In Chapter 6, we will analyze these relations in their highest, and most contradictory, “development.” At that point, the pursuit of surplus value via the coercive laws of capitalist competition will be in full effect; however, at this point in our story, this was not yet the case. To be sure, the Japanese colonial period triggered the initial rise in some of these forms, yet they were far from ubiquitous in South Korean society in the immediate postwar period.

It is often overlooked that Marx’s analysis in Volume 1 of *Capital* was an *immanent critique* – that is, one that was inherent and limited to the capitalist mode of production itself, not one leveled from an external perspective. As such, it proceeded by accepting the utopian assumptions of classical political economy regarding perfectly functioning markets and the like. Most important to keep in mind, though, is that the specific class relations of capitalism and its associated social forms was also assumed to be present. The whole analysis that flows out of Volume 1, then, assumes a context that, world-historically speaking, has never actually been achieved. The closest any social formations have ever come to this ideal are those of “developed” Western societies, such as the “classic” English case and the subsequent US one. We will deal with the distinctions and interconnections between value and capital later on, but it should be stressed here how capital cannot function in the absence of these relatively rare preconditions, ones that by the early post-1945 period were not fully present in the new Republic of Korea. Marx (1990) signals this at various points in his analysis. For instance, at the beginning

of his discussion of primitive accumulation in the final part of *Capital*, he writes this caveat regarding the analysis that preceded it:

We have seen how money is transformed into capital; how surplus-value is made through capital, and how more capital is made from surplus-value. *But* the accumulation of capital *presupposes* surplus-value; surplus-value *presupposes* capitalist production; capitalist production *presupposes* the availability of considerable masses of capital and labour-power in the hands of commodity producers. The whole movement, therefore, seems to turn around in a never-ending circle, which we can only get out of by assuming a primitive accumulation (the ‘previous accumulation’ of Adam Smith) which precedes capitalist accumulation; *an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure.* (873; emphases added)

We outline here, then, the necessary preconditions for the rise of the sort of capital accumulation that we describe and analyze in the remainder of this work. These are preconditions that Marx assumed in Volume 1 to already be present (for strategic purposes), but ones that are rare world-historically speaking.

As Marx suggests via his criticism of Adam Smith (1990, 873-874), capitalist accumulation requires a “primitive accumulation.” That this process is ongoing, as well as historically and geographically uneven across time and space, represents a well-known criticism of Marx’s own formulation in Volume 1, as best articulated via Harvey’s (2003) notion of “accumulation by dispossession.” Nevertheless, what we are immediately interested in here is outlining its key features. As a short-hand definition, we will define primitive accumulation by two processes: the bourgeois form of land privatization; and the commodification of work as labor-power. We will deal with the latter aspect in this section, and cover the former later in this chapter. However, this simple definition belies a much more complex process that began centuries ago in Western Europe and that has only broadened, deepened, and accelerated globally ever since. Harvey (2003b) lists some of the wide-ranging aspects of primitive accumulation:

These include the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; conversion of various forms of property rights – common, collective, state, etc. – into exclusive private property rights; suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labor power and the suppression of alternative, indigenous, forms of production and consumption; colonial, neo-colonial and imperial processes of appropriation of assets, including natural resources; monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; slave trade; and usuary, the national debt and ultimately the credit system. (74)

In addition, a central theme throughout this analysis is the role of a “strong” state (relative to other social classes) to implement these transformations. In the previous section, we outlined the historical contingencies behind the emergence of South Korea’s own strong state, one that would pursue the above-mentioned preconditions for “development” in what follows. But in the history of *capitalist* development more generally, far from the state being antithetical to capital,¹³⁷ it has been vital, to various extents, to both its implementation and flourishing in all successful cases of “development.” As Harvey writes:

The state, with its monopoly of violence and definitions of legality, plays a crucial role in both backing and promoting these processes and there is considerable evidence ... that the transition to capitalist development was vitally contingent upon the stance of the state – broadly supportive in Britain, weakly so in France and highly negative, until very recently, in China. The invocation of the recent shift towards primitive accumulation in the case of China indicates that this is an on-going issue and the evidence is strong, particularly throughout East and South East Asia, that state policies and politics (consider the case of Singapore) have played a critical role in defining both the intensity and the paths of new forms of capital accumulation. The role of the “developmental state” in recent phases of capital accumulation has therefore been the subject of intense scrutiny. One has to look back at Bismarck’s Germany or Meiji Japan to recognize that this has long been the case. (74)

These twin processes of privatization of property and commodification of labor (as labor-power) are, moreover, intimately connected. More specifically, the generalization of bourgeois

¹³⁷ This erroneous view of the state is particularly virulent in the United States. The source of the error is in the tendency to highlight *individual* capitalists’ being negatively impacted by state actions, such as “high” taxation etc. Once again, this is remedied by viewing the state-capital relationship from a higher level of abstraction, regarding its role in reproducing the capitalist social formation *as a whole*.

private property is the means through which the vast majority of the population is divorced from direct access to the means of subsistence. This, in turn, leaves them with little choice but to join the proletarian ranks as wage-workers, rendering them subject to the uncertainty and precarity that this entails. Ironically, the only way to attenuate (but not escape) the proletarian condition, then, is to procure private property for oneself. In so doing, however, this only hastens and deepens the dependence and precarity of all of those who, for whatever reason, fail to do likewise. Marx notes this tension in his *Theories of Surplus Value*:

[I]f the land were so easily available, at everyone's free disposal, then a principal element for the formation of capital would be missing. A most important condition of production and – apart from man himself and his labour – the only original condition of production could not be disposed of, could not be appropriated. It could not thus confront the worker as someone else's property and make him into a wage-labourer. The productivity of labour ... in the capitalist sense, the “producing” of someone else's unpaid labour would thus become impossible. And this would put an end to capitalist production altogether. (2000, II/43-44)

In short, the social separation of the producers from limited natural conditions, the conversion of these conditions into the capitalist form of private property, and the conversion of natural use-values into *freely appropriated* conditions of capitalist production, are all aspects of a single process. So although serving to safeguard *certain individuals'* livelihoods and security, systemically speaking these twin processes work hand in hand to render the vast majority dependent upon, or *subsumed under*, these new relations and their unique imperatives.

These general processes play themselves out, of course, in historically contingent ways. We will trace the dynamics in the specific South Korean case in this chapter, but we are now in a position to reflect briefly upon their unique dynamics in the US case, taken up in the previous chapter. For, with the abundance of (stolen) land available for “settlement” in the US's Western frontier, the preponderance of wage-workers was far lower in the US than in England during the

nineteenth century.¹³⁸ Looking to escape the proletarian condition, settlers rushed across the continent to procure a parcel of land for themselves and their family. In doing so, however, the very land availability that made this (temporary) escape possible was foreclosed to future immigrants. This general trend that was completed in the US by the 1890s’ “closing of the frontier” was, as we have seen, reproduced globally in the post-World War II period – first by the US-backed “development project,” then by the neoliberal “globalization project” after c.1975 (McMichael 2017).

Land Reform

As we argued in Chapter 3, the chaos and flux of the Japanese colonial period rendered the Korean peninsula a socio-political powder keg in the wake of World War II. As Kolko (1968, 594) correctly perceived, during the period between 1945 until the commencement of the Korean War in 1950, Korea was “afire with revolution which transformed World War Two in the Far East almost immediately from a classic international conflict into a civil war releasing a vast liberation movement.” The central point of contention in the newfound Republic of Korea, as was the case throughout the non-Western world at that time, was the future of peasants’ relation to the land, which was still monopolized by landlords.¹³⁹ Contrary to popular beliefs about the

¹³⁸ Wakefield, in his unsympathetic yet illuminating analysis of colonization, saw this difference clearly enough: “In the Northern States of the American Union, it may be doubted whether so many as a tenth of the people would fall under the description of hired labourers In England ... the labouring class compose the bulk of the people” (Marx 1990, 934).

¹³⁹ The centrality of the land question to (South) Korea’s future and the sense of an imminent shift in everyday people’s form of being exploited by the gentry-cum-proto-capitalist is captured aptly in Choe Chong-hui 1946 novel, *The Ritual at the Well*. In the midst of observing two villagers argue, the narrator signals where their discontent should best be directed:

There is no good reason for the two mothers to fight. ... The one responsible for your starving is... Landlord Ch’oe. For decades you worked like slaves on the land from which you got your food. Although the coming of liberation made your situation better the landlords found things difficult. They felt threatened by their former servants and sold the very land upon which you had slaved so long and hard. Then they went to Seoul where

external imposition of land reforms by a benevolent US overseer interested in spreading democracy (and “development”) (Kim 2016), it should be stated up front that, although the United States eventually backed this agrarian policy, the catalyst for eventual land reform stemmed from *internal class conflicts*, not from the puppeteering of Soviet Russia, nor from the top-down actions of its American patron (Grabowski 2002). Kang (1988) explains how the revolutionary atmosphere of the period derived from “volatile class struggle, the sudden and complete collapse of the colonial class, and the stigmatization of the old dominant class as collaborators with the Japanese colonial rule” (3).

It was pointed out in Chapter 4, moreover, that the US stood in an ambivalent position vis-a-vis the land question in the soon-to-be “Third World.” On the one hand, they had been instrumental in implementing strong international laws protecting the rights of private property, even in instances of colonial acquisition; on the other hand, in the context of international leadership, it faced a world where nearly half of humanity was living in societies undergoing some manifestation of land reform by the late 1940s. The extent to which the United States was going to acquiescence to demands for land reform, therefore, was directly correlated to the likelihood of socialist revolution occurring if no land reforms were carried out. In general, small farmers and landless workers looked upon the appropriation of large land-holdings by the state favorably, yet were often suspicious of agricultural collectivization. Consequently, the US viewed small farmers as a potential ally, working as a bulwark against revolution (Weis 2010).

they back the men in politics. ... Right now these very people are using the money you earned by your sweat and blood in any way they wish, foolishly and recklessly. How do they use it? These big, rich landowners like Mr. Choe use the money for themselves; backing those who will set up a new government that will take good care of them. Everything is being turned upside down. (Lie 1998, 8)

At first, however, this was a tricky policy to implement given the clear left-leaning atmosphere that dominated southern Korea at that time.¹⁴⁰

In light of East Asia's increasing strategic geopolitical importance after the "fall" of China to Mao's forces in 1949, the US paid special attention to the region to help stop the spread of socialist revolution, as expressed in the 1947 Truman Doctrine's notion of "containment" or "domino theory." A crucial policy stance that the United States adopted in East Asia that was absent in its dealings with the rest of the "Third World," then, was something that Petras (1998) refers to as "revolution in counter-revolution." Just as the threat of socialistic sentiments in the US during the Great Depression catalyzed the beginnings of a compromise between capital and (wage-)labor that would manifest itself in the postwar era as the Keynesian revolution, the palpable existence of socialistic tendencies in East Asia meant that the US was far more amenable to seemingly left-leaning policies in that region than it was elsewhere, thereby instituting its own *capitalist revolution* (i.e., "development") as a bulwark to socialist revolution.

In terms of the land question in Korea specifically, this was especially the case in light of the sweeping radical land reforms made in the northern half of the Korean peninsula that took place as early as 1946. In March of that year, the North Korean provisional government confiscated without compensation the lands of all Japanese and Koreans who collaborated with the Japanese, continuously tenanted land, and land holdings of five *chungbo* or greater owned by Korean landlords and religious organizations. The amount of confiscated land totaled 1,325 thousand *chungbo* from 422,646 households, which comprised 52% of the total arable land area

¹⁴⁰ In a "Weekly Report" dispatched from South Korea to Washington during this period, for instance, the relative balance of popular opinion was clear, even to US analysts: "Whether their strength is spontaneous or forced is a matter of conjectures but the fact remains that the leftist group, mainly through the organized force of the People's Republic, represents the majority of South Korea" (Kang 1988, 237).

in North Korea, and 85% of landlord-owned land. All of this land was distributed to peasants free of charge, though they only held the “right to till” land and therefore could not sell it (Jang 2007, 162).¹⁴¹

The US’s key ally in Seoul, Syngman Rhee, initially objected to the land reforms on account of his aim to maintain the privileged position of the landowners that made up his political base. However, through the ravages of the Korean War (1950-1953), which accomplished little on the political front but to preserve the *status quo ante*, all conservative resistance to land reform was rendered futile. As the North Korean military made its southern push during the summer of 1950, it liberated land for peasants everywhere, save for within the “Pusan perimeter,” by allowing the former tenant farmers to exercise squatters’ rights over the parcels of land they worked. This threat of a more radical (i.e., non-capitalist) resolution to the land question served as the catalyst for the US to push for the enforcement of the extant land reform legislation – established in March of 1950 (Farmland Reform Law – Law #108) – that the conservative elements in South Korean society had been resisting (Lie 1998, 11). Cumings (1989, 12) offers the following vivid description of the situation at the time:

After Rhee clamoured back to Seoul, the Americans refused to resituate his herd of lords on the land. Thus redistribution created a vast mass of small-holding peasants and quieted the countryside, while landlords received state bonds convertible to industrial wealth. Basically the Americans were trying to fashion industrialist silk purses out of agrarian sow’s ears – part of the capitalist class-making in which they have engaged throughout the Third World. But rarely have they been helped by the revolution they sought to deny, as in Korea.

¹⁴¹ It should be noted, however, that the ease with which this revolutionary process unfolded – one that attacked the centuries-old unequal distribution of wealth based upon the “natural superiority” of those holding land – was certainly helped by the fact that a number of the largest landlords lived in the South and that many of the northern owners had already fled into the southern sector by the time of the reform (Robinson 2007, 106-107).

Despite their limited character when compared to those in North Korea, these land reforms profoundly altered social relations in the South Korean countryside.¹⁴² The general features of the land reforms, as well as some of their immediate consequences, include the following: land ownership was limited to three *chongbo* or 7.5 acres, which effectively wiped out landlordism in short order; of all the farmland in the country, over 30 percent of it changed hands, affecting nearly 70% of farming families (Morrow and Sherper 1970, 1-2); the relative distribution of wealth was also significantly leveled, as the wealthiest 3% of farming households owned 64% of all farmland in 1944, a number that dipped to only 18% for the top 6% by 1956 (Cho 1964, 94); tenancy rates, which had skyrocketed over the course of the colonial era, dropped precipitously from nearly 50% to 7% after the reforms (Morrow and Sherper 1970, 38).

In the extant literature, the dominant verdict is that South Korea's land reforms were an unqualified success. There are certainly sound reasons for holding this view. In addition to those mentioned above about decreasing levels of inequality, a host of other benefits included: increased agricultural productivity (Ban, Moon and Perkins 1980); more secure livelihoods for peasants-cum-farmers (vis-a-vis the previous tenant relations), thereby decreasing the risk of famine; a dispersal of political power due to the dismantling of the landed elite, presumably leading to fewer instances of corruption and the like; an eventual yet rapid decline in the fertility rate (Lie 1998, 12 and 21-22). Even on the rare occasions when criticisms are leveled at the land reforms by more radical scholars, what is highlighted is not the reforms themselves, but how

¹⁴² In what is perhaps the most in-depth critical analysis of the South Korean land reforms, Kang (1988) argues that this path represented a "struggle against history," in that the popular will of the peasants vis-a-vis the land question was thwarted by the self-interested actions of the United States. He argues that these bourgeois land reforms were "non-revolutionary" when compared to those that took place in North Korea. From the perspective of our analysis, however, deepening the capitalist character of land relations would have a profound effect in the subsequent decades, something that is decidedly "revolutionary."

they were not carried out far enough (e.g., Bello and Rosenfeld 1990, 77-78). The work of Kang (1988) excepted, nowhere can one find scholars that see any downsides that may have resulted in subsequent decades on account of this thoroughly bourgeois process. What is lamented, instead, is the fact that the East Asian experience arose for contingent reasons, rendering it therefore ungeneralizable (e.g., Kay 2002).

Although these positive aspects of the land reform are not to be denied, the most significant consequence of the land reform for our argument is its sweeping away of the main “obstacle”¹⁴³ that has prevented setting the capitalist juggernaut loose (i.e., *generalized* formal and, especially, real subsumption) in societies across the Global South: the power of the landed class. Quite understandably, landed elites have historically been far more content to continue collecting rents instead of troubling themselves with the stress and uncertainties associated with capitalist accumulation – e.g., hyper-competition, technological leap-frogging, devaluation, marketing products, labor unrest and organization etc. With the dissolution of landed power via land reform, South Korea was able to avoid the fate of so many other “developing” nations – that is, its relatively equal distribution of income, and the meritocratic bureaucracy that this eventually helped instill, prevented the sort of “rampant rent seeking and state capture by powerful landed interests” (You 2017, 550) that is prevalent elsewhere. Indeed, this pitched battle between landed classes and the capitalist bourgeoisie was central in the context of capitalism’s birthplace (Britain) – at least in its industrial form – when the ascendent bourgeois

¹⁴³ As Hamilton (1986, 2) rightly points out, the phrase “obstacles to development” is highly problematic, since it implies that there is some “natural” phenomenon (i.e., capitalism) that is being blocked or thwarted. When a “production in general” view is one’s starting point, however, this is a perfectly understandable (yet erroneous) way to frame the issue.

class battled during the nineteenth century with the conservative landed aristocracy over issues such as the Corn Laws (Marx 1990).

As we have seen, this overthrowing of the class typically resistant to fully developed capitalist production – that is, regimes of real subsumption with *generalized* wage-labor, private property, commodification via industrial production methods – stemmed from the Faustian bargain it struck with the Japanese during the colonial era that managed to maintain (or augment) their *economic* might at the expense of *political* power and legitimacy. To be sure, many of the absentee landlords that were affected by the land reforms managed to maintain their economic power by shifting their focus to the nascent realms of commerce and industry in South Korea's burgeoning urban centers. Ironically, given the landlords' grasp of the impending loss of their landed power, more land was released via sales to tenants (570,000 hectares) than was confiscated by the state and redistributed (330,000 hectares) in the years immediately following World War II (Ban, Moon and Perkins 1980, 285-286). Nevertheless, the source of their centuries-long political power had effectively evaporated. Cumings (2005, 301-302) captures this profound shift:

Above all, [the landlords'] capacity to control the people "below them," in clan, clientele, and tenancy lineages, *and their continuous tendency to control markets and stifle enterprise, was blasted to smithereens*. People could no longer be frozen in place in rural settings: two successive wars had set them loose. ... Here is the deep meaning of the axiom that *war is the great equalizer*. (emphases added)

This radical leveling of domestic class relations, as we will see, had profound ramifications.

In sum, the legacy of the land reform in South Korea was highly ambivalent. On the one hand, it was progressive in that it cut the legs out from under the peasantry's millennia-old exploiter (i.e., the *yangban*), introducing a more equitable distribution of wealth, the notion (and real potential) of achieving social mobility and the like. On the other hand, it ensconced this new

“sea of small landholders” deeper within both the uncertainties of the world market and commodified relations (Lie 1998, 15), as well as subordinated it to the dictates of a “developmental state” pursuing capitalist modernization. To foreshadow later arguments, in other words, it overthrew older forms of bondage – “feudalism” and colonialism (Choe 1987) – for a more abstract form of domination that grew out of its “privileged” place within the US “development project.”

Proletarianization in South Korea

The *sine qua non* of the capitalist mode of production is the capital–wage-labor *class relation*.¹⁴⁴ According to Marx, this is achieved through so-called primitive accumulation (1990, Part Eight), which converts the socio-ecological unity of various pre-capitalist labor processes into the capital relation through a two-fold process. On the one hand, what was once the social means of subsistence and production are converted into capital, while, on the other, the immediate producers are turned into wage-laborers. As he states, “So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as ‘primitive’ because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital” (Marx 1990, 874-875).¹⁴⁵ Moreover, once capitalist relations are firmly established, “it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a

¹⁴⁴ To avoid confusion, let us be clear that it is *not* the mere existence of money and wage-labor, but the *generalized* class relation between those who enjoy a monopoly over the means of production and those who have been divorced from direct access to the means of subsistence via enclosures etc.

¹⁴⁵ As Rosa Luxemburg (2003), David Harvey (2003) and others have pointed out, while it may be true that primitive accumulation is the necessary starting point for instituting capitalist relations, it is hardly relegated to the “prehistory” of capitalism as Marx seems to suggest in the passage quoted above. It is for this reason that Harvey invented the term “accumulation by dispossession,” to demonstrate how the history of capitalism has proceeded by both expanded reproduction and “extra-economic” means (Glassman 2006).

constantly extending scale” (874). While primitive accumulation is a dual process, the focus of this section is on the latter: proletarianization.

Due to the contemporary ubiquity of wage-work within “modern” societies, the profound significance and historical novelty of the proletarianization process is easily overlooked. But as Charles Tilly asserted in the early 1980s – i.e., on the eve of the unprecedented waves of proletarianization that would take place via the neoliberal turn (Glassman 2007) – proletarianization is “the single most far-reaching social change that has occurred in the Western world over the past few hundred years and that is going on in the world as a whole today” (Tilly 1981, 179). The great Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1994) echoed this point when he declared:

The most dramatic and far-reaching social change of the second half of this century, and the one which cuts us off forever from the world of the past, is the death of the peasantry. For since the neolithic era most human beings had lived off the land and its livestock or harvested the sea as fishers. With the exception of Britain, peasants and farmers remained a massive part of the occupied population even in industrialized countries until well into the twentieth century. (289)

Hobsbawm’s comment about the supposed “death” of the peasantry is surely an exaggeration, but the two key historical phenomena that he pinpoints are: 1) that for roughly 99.9% of human history people enjoyed direct access to the land to procure the food necessary to their daily and generational reproduction (regardless of the specific mode of production); and 2) that all societies – save for the few “advanced” ones he singles out – remained predominantly agrarian until very recently. Moreover, in light of the market-oriented turn initiated by Deng Xiaoping in China after Mao’s death in 1978, the dismantling of the former Soviet bloc and its integration into the capitalist world-system, and the neoliberal assault upon countries across the Global South via structural adjustment programs that have all taken place since the time of Tilly’s and Hobsbawm’s writing, the truth of their views has only deepened. According to Richard Freeman

(2010), the “global workforce” – i.e., partially or fully proletarianized wage-workers – *more than doubled in twenty years* (1980-2000). So-called “globalization” – that is, the global spread of capitalist value relations, either under formal or real conditions of subsumption of labor to capital – is at bottom a euphemism for the worldwide expansion of the twin processes of primitive accumulation.

Marx deliberately concludes the first volume of *Capital* with a discussion of primitive accumulation in order to debunk several widely held views of his time, ones still entrenched in popular views today. Having analyzed the inner workings of capitalist value relations for the first seven parts of the book in order to expose capital’s historically specific “laws of motion,” the analysis in Part VIII emphasizes the *origins* of the relations that he took for granted prior in the analysis. His acceptance of the market utopian assumptions of classical political economy, like the existence of perfectly functioning markets, was a strategic move on Marx’s part in that his aim was to debunk the conclusions drawn by its greatest representatives like Adam Smith and David Ricardo, *on their own terms* (Harvey 2010, 137 and 164).

Following from his insistence on the historically specific character of (generalized) wage-labor as the means through which a society regulates its relation within/to nature, Marx stresses how for most capitalists the existence of this pool of landless workers is a self-evident fact of social life that captures little if any of his or her attention. “Why this free worker confronts him in the sphere of circulation is a question which does not interest the owner of money, for he finds the labor-market in existence as a particular branch of the commodity-market.” As Marx makes clear, however:

[N]ature does not produce on the one hand owners of money or commodities, and on the other hand men possessing nothing but their own labour-power. This relation has no basis in natural history, nor does it have a social basis common to all periods of human history. It is clearly the result of a past historical development, the product of many

economic revolutions, of *the extinction of a whole series of older formations of social production*” (1990, 273; emphasis added).

The significance of this argument cannot be overstated, as it serves as a neglected (yet self-evidently true) bulwark against the dominant “production in general” view that Marx sought to both highlight and debunk.

Another one of Marx’s objects of iconoclasm was classical political economy’s “idyllic” depiction of the emergence of the capital–wage-labor relation in European history. Adam Smith’s account, for example, portrays a situation where over a period of time those who were industrious gradually accumulated monetary wealth (i.e., proto-capitalists), while the supposedly slothful and indifferent acquiesced to selling their labor-power to capitalists.¹⁴⁶ Marx insisted that, quite to the contrary, “It is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, play the greatest part” (874). There were, however, some classical political economists who did not shy away from stressing the need for the state to compel, by force if necessary, those recently divorced from direct access to the land to accept wage-work. James Steuart, for instance, unapologetically saw this new system of wages as an antidote to what he considered the threat of popular democracy and lower-class power, one that could operate as a near approximation of the Spartan slave system that he admired. Previously, Steuart averred, “men were ... forced to labor because they were slaves to others; men are now forced to labor

¹⁴⁶ In Marx’s words: “... long, long ago there were two sorts of people; one, the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living ... the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort finally had nothing to sell except their own skins. And from this original sin dates the poverty of the great majority who, despite all their labour, have up to now nothing to sell but themselves, and the wealth of the few that increases constantly, although they have long ceased to work.” (Marx 1990, 873; Harvey 2010, 291).

because they are slaves to their own wants [i.e., stomachs]” (Perelman 2000, 150).¹⁴⁷ Steuart’s overriding concern was with how to concoct the right mix of state policies vis-a-vis the burgeoning capitalist market to structure workers’ “wants” in such a way as to allow them to enslave themselves (151).¹⁴⁸

From the standpoint of capitalist world history, what is intriguing about the post-World War II South Korean case is that – contrary to the protracted, contentious process¹⁴⁹ “written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire” (Marx 1990, 875) that it was in European history (Thompson 1975) – proletarianization was, by comparison, a swift and peaceful affair (Koo 2001, 46-48). This is all the more puzzling given how people like Steuart stressed how capitalist states needed to guide the proletarianization process in such a way as to make it unfold gradually. Given how momentous it is for those who undergo the transition first-hand, too sudden a change can lead to all sorts of social dislocations that may threaten or undermine the process (Perelman 2000, 151-152). Although the Japanese colonial influence was crucial in establishing the conditions for proletarianization during its reign there, South Korea experienced in a few decades what took in the European and American cases centuries to unfold (Koo 1990,

¹⁴⁷ This sentiment was echoed by a French contemporary of Steuart’s, the Marquis de Mirabeau, when he wrote: “The whole magic of [a] well-ordered society is that each man works for others, while believing that he is working for himself” (Perelman 2000, 150).

¹⁴⁸ Perelman (2000) singles out Steuart, as well as John Rae (a Scot operating in Canada), as the most open advocates of the “virtues” of primitive accumulation (339-351).

¹⁴⁹ It should be noted that, prior to a surge in revisionist scholarship within historical sociology that emerged beginning in the early 1980s, the twin processes of industrialization and proletarianization in European history were initially believed to have occurred abruptly with the rise of the first industrial revolution, beginning circa 1760. The newer scholarship showed that what is popularly known as the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century was predated by myriad forms of “proto-industrialization,” while proletarian labor as the main form of labor was not actually the case until the turn of the 20th century in many European nations. Instead, it was the household that was the primary unit of production (Koo 1990, 670).

672). This process, in conjunction with various others, is what South Korea scholars often refer to “compressed modernity” (Chang 1999).

The following data should give a clear sense of both the swiftness and thoroughness of the proletarianization process in post-1945 South Korea. It was the shift from Rhee Syngman’s import substitution industrialization (ISI) strategy in the 1950s to export-oriented industrialization (EOI) under Park Chung Hee from the mid-1960s onwards where this was particularly pronounced. Over a twenty-year period, the number of South Korean wage-workers more than tripled – from 2.4 million in 1963, to 4.8 million in 1975, to 8.1 million in 1985. Not surprisingly, this increase took place mainly within the manufacturing sector where over a seven-fold increase was experienced. This contrasts with the lesser, though still significant three-fold increase in the commercial and service sector, and negative growth in the number of agricultural laborers (Koo 1990, 672-673).

If the Manichaeic Cold War logic did much to quell the usual popular resistance to the proletarianization process, does this suggest that no objections were made? Certainly not. But rather than objecting to their new proletarian condition as such, the source and focus of workers’ discontent was directed at two issues: first, proletarianization proceeded at such a rapid pace that there were insufficient sources of gainful employment in the numerically exploding metropolises of Seoul, Busan and its second-tier cities like Daegu and Daejeon; second, and by extension, competition between workers for those positions that did exist and employers’ access to seemingly unlimited wage-laborers placed little onus on them to provide clean, safe, and equitable working conditions and reasonable hours. Consequently, like the critiques of labor conditions during the Park era that we outlined earlier in this work, workers struggles were undertaken *from the standpoint of labor*, rather than *of proletarian labor* (Postone 1993). Since

this is crucial to understanding the unique character of the South Korean experience, we analyze it in greater detail in the following section.

The Historically Specific Context of Worker Acquiescence to Exploitation

We focus now on the contextual factors underpinning this most puzzling aspect of South Korea's capitalist development, one we broached earlier in the narrower discussion of the proletarianization process: that is, why did the South Korean population more or less acquiesced to the violent, turbulent, and oppressive character of the state's all-out capitalist revolution that it pursued under the label of "development"? Indeed, across the Marxist literature, we are told again and again that the various instances of primitive accumulation and nascent capitalist social relations in world history have been long drawn out and conflictual affairs.¹⁵⁰ Yet, for decades the South Korean state enjoyed the overwhelming acquiescence, if not full support, of policies that were draconian in the extreme. Several factors were at play, which for the sake of simplicity we divide into external and internal factors vis-a-vis the South Korean nation-state.

Externally, the first issue was the nationalistic fervor connected to compensating for the humiliation of colonization through a drive to outcompete the Japanese in the postwar period (Eckert et al. 1990, 408). For centuries Koreans considered themselves superior to the Japanese,

¹⁵⁰ Hagen Koo's assertion of the relatively smooth process of primitive accumulation – cited in the discussion of proletarianization – flies in the face of, to cite but one example, David McNally's (2011, 15) sweeping claim that:

Commodified labour involves a profound and thorough-going restructuring of human experience: people's sense of their very bodies, of their capacities and creative energies, of the interrelation of self and things, and of self and others – all of these are utterly transformed by commodification. 'The capitalist epoch is therefore characterized', writes Marx, 'by the fact that labour-power, in the eyes of the worker himself, takes on the form of a commodity which is his property'. *But workers do not submit to this new reality without resistance. Because it ruptures established customs, social relations and senses of personhood, the rise of capitalist labour-markets invariably meets with potent opposition.* (emphasis added)

a belief based on Korea's closer cultural and geographical proximity to China. In order to reassert this assumed superiority, a deeply entrenched collective sense of a national mission was channeled through all aspects of South Korean life towards achieving this goal. Within the business realm, for instance, corporate slogans such as "Let's catch up with Japan," "Let's surpass Japan" and "Let's beat Japan" were deployed with great effect to spur workers to accept the sorts of long hours and brutal working conditions that we outlined earlier (Kim and Park 2003, 42).

This aim of national face-saving was manifested also in terms of South Koreans' obsession with outcompeting the North Koreans. From the US's point of view, the focus on economic dynamism was intended to demonstrate the supposed productive superiority of capitalism over Stalinism in an era of global decolonization. More significantly from the South Korean perspective, though, was the idea that economic growth was the means by which to guarantee the even more important goal of warding off threats to its national survival (Kim 1988). As Kim and Park (2003) explain, "Faced with the unrelenting threat of North Korean military infiltration, real or imagined, a vast majority of South Koreans internalized the idea that they must work hard to build a strong economy in order to equip their armed forces with state-of-the-art weaponry to guard against [a] belligerent northern neighbor" (42). Park Chung Hee declared this sentiment very early into his junta's military seizure of power in 1961, for instance in the following statements made soon after taking control:

[W]e must take a great leap forward toward economic growth . . . In a country like Korea whose area is small and resources are scarce, expansion of foreign trade and acquisition of modern industries are vital conditions for full employment (Park 1962, 213-216).

What would we do if US aid were cut off tomorrow? We must not hesitate for a moment. Indeed, there is no time even to think, if we consider the present situation. With a strong enemy across the 38th Parallel, this economic struggle takes precedence over combat or

politics. Our only remaining alternative is to concentrate creative energy on the problems of the national economy and proceed to recovery. (Shin 1970, 29)

The idea that the country's overriding concern was national security stems from the often-overlooked fact that South Korea (and Taiwan, too, not coincidentally) were states born out of civil wars that were still ongoing (Woo-Cumings 1998, 319).¹⁵¹ The sort of ideological homogeneity that existed on both sides of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) that led its citizens to view the world in the binary terms of "Us" vs. "Them" already had a head start due to demographic reasons – i.e., on account of the vast population migrations that occurred when it was clear that the peninsula would be separated into two separate regimes. This acted as a sort of ideological sifting process, where those with more left-leaning political views headed north, while those with more pro-capitalist views (re)located to the south.¹⁵²

This point about the (geo-)political considerations of South Korea is important, as "external" threats were central in informing the internal actions of its leaders. On the one hand, these were expressed at the macro level in terms of state policies. For the twin purposes of military preparedness and for readying its male citizens to be "dutiful nationals" (*kungmin*) who would adjust more easily to the new alien work rhythms of the factory, for instance, the state instituted the Military Service Law in 1949 (Moon 2005, 45).¹⁵³ This program of mandatory

¹⁵¹ That this is still the case at the time of writing (i.e., 2019) goes a long way in explaining the unmoving nationalist sentiment that has infected the academic literature on South Korean history, as we point out at several times regarding its uncritical character and methodological nationalism.

¹⁵² While more people chose to settle in the southern half of the peninsula, there was also considerable movement in the other direction. For example, approximately 350,000 returnees from Japan decided to settle in the north, despite the fact that they were originally from the south (Cumings 1981, 61).

¹⁵³ Outside of the factory, and as a testimony to the shifts in non-waged work that flow from the transition to a capitalist mode of life, Moon also outlines the state's educational campaign to make women into "wise mothers and good housewives" in the service of the nation (Chapter 3).

military service – although not actually instituted until 1957 due to instabilities caused by the Korean War – continues to this day, and is one that has “taught [South Korean men] time orientation and subjugation to formal authority” (Koo 1990, 677).

On the other hand, within the factory itself, the factors rendering South Korean workers amenable to these conditions included: “a high level of urbanization and formal education; a large volume of geographic and social mobility, which had occurred continuously since the colonial period; and compulsory military service for men” (Koo 2001, 46-48), not to mention the surfeit of new proletarians all vying for jobs. Contributing to this was the fact that Korea lacked an artisanal tradition, which was the main source of resistance in Euro-America, especially since the limited artisanal work that did emerge in the nineteenth century was placed at the bottom of the Confucian hierarchy. Moreover, Korea’s lack of working-class heritage meant that, although they may not have liked factory labor, they were not equipped with the means to resist through union activity etc. on account of having been largely excluded during the colonial period and crushed by right-wing groups in the postwar period (Koo 1990, 677). Finally, the ability for workers to submit themselves to this national development project was driven by the state’s insistence that the suffering they endured would be only temporary. This was “scientifically” supported by Rostow’s purportedly transhistorical five-stage theory of economic development, which was discussed in the previous chapter. According to this logic, South Koreans needed to defer any wishes of material consumption until sufficient fixed capital investment had been produced to undergird its “take off” (stage 3) and “drive to maturity” (stage 4).

In sum, the seeming paradox of South Korea’s relatively smooth adaptation to the shocks of primitive accumulation, the dictates of capitalist production methods, and the institution of capitalist social forms more generally stem from a host of factors unique to its history. The

Manichean worldview that leaders and citizens alike shared served as a “binding agent” during its turbulent capitalist revolution, which was primarily aimed at societal self-preservation in the wake of the humiliating experience of Japanese colonization, post-Liberation competition with North Korea, as well as building its national strength in what they correctly perceived as a hyper-competitive and jingoistic world. Woo-Cumings (1998) is certainly right, therefore, to stress this *political* dimension undergirding the economic program, something that was pursued through an all-out anti-communist ideological campaign that she herself experienced first-hand. For anyone growing up in postwar South Korea, she recalls, they were subjected to a sort of

intense, emotional loathing of communism that was so successfully drilled into every school child, the constant drumbeat of admonition that national survival was contingent on economic development and military preparedness that *demand*ed personal sacrifices. *This is the kind of lived experience that is deeply internalized*, even if it has long dwelt in the shadows of much Western imagination about the golden-era of the Pacific Rim and its supposed unfettered capitalism. *It explains why the most ruthless societal mobilization for economic growth worked for so long.* (335-336; emphases added)

The impact of this ideological campaign has manifested itself in the academic realm, too. An ironic result of this nationalistic and anti-communist sentiment is that both aided in the nation’s stellar capitalist development, but simultaneously has served as a barrier to its scholars’ understanding of the revolution it gave rise to, which can be more firmly grasped in their geopolitical and world-ecological (Marxian) aspects.

The (Re-)Institution of a Developmental State in (South) Korea, c.1961-1970

Although we claim that the Park regime *eventually* restored a form of strong, developmental state akin to the Japanese colonial one, this outcome was not preordained. Indeed, anything could have happened during the immediate post-liberation period and Rhee interregnum. It is this fact

that elicits Chibber (1999, 314) to argue against scholars of the so-called “continuity thesis,”¹⁵⁴ such as Kohli (1994): “While it is plausible that the historical legacy of colonial rule and the war would allow a developmental state to *emerge*, it is by no means clear why they should *produce* one.” In this section, therefore, we will outline the context in which a (fully capitalist) developmental state was able to re-emerge in (South) Korea.

One general aspect that should be addressed at the outset is the issue of state legitimacy itself. The Korean masses were deeply resentful of the various ways in which the Japanese colonial state had infiltrated and controlled their lives, and they were soon no more impressed with the sorts of people that the US placed in charge during the post-colonial period. This changed, however, as a result of the Korean War (1950-1953). This had two consequences. On the one hand, completing the obliteration of the left-leaning workers’ and peasants’ movements of the 1945-1950 period that were attacked earlier by the state (Cumings 1981). On the other hand, a clear result of the War was the expansion of the state’s organizational capabilities and sheer size. After the ravages of the conflict had instilled a deep resentment in Koreans on both sides of the DMZ, in the south people’s faith in the legitimacy of the state grew exponentially as the most reliable bulwark against the “communist threat to freedom” (Chang 2009, 85).

The US-backed Rhee regime (1948-1960) was so committed to the causes of anti-communism, national reunification, and preserving political-economic power for a minority of elite but moribund conservative groups that it was ill-prepared for the economic crisis that hit it in the late-1950s, which signaled a clear shift in South Korea’s national priorities to economic matters (Kohli 2004, 85-86). Several factors combined to render Rhee’s economic strategy

¹⁵⁴ Chibber names Kohli as the best proponent of the continuity thesis, but names Sang-In Jun as another representative.

obsolete. First, despite contributing to the creation of a domestic (proto-)capitalist class by doling out raw materials received via US aid and redistributing property and means of production to start-up firms in good standing with his Liberal Party, this “strategy” was clearly a time-limited one. Second, with US aid drying up and the flooding of the limited domestic market with the specific commodities made according to the undiversified manner described above, Rhee’s anti-Japanese stance that had legitimized his rule became increasingly anachronistic, especially in light of the US push for South Korea to integrate itself into the broader Japanese-led regional economy under the security blanket of the United States (Chang 2009, 87). Third, this all led to vanishing business prospects and rising inequality and inflation, so that by April of 1960 Rhee had been ousted by a student-led movement. In the midst of the chaos that was the short-lived regime of Chang Myon (1960-1961), the surge of social discontent continued from various suppressed left-leaning groups in light of the small window of free speech and general democratic sentiment that opened up after Rhee’s fall.

It was with the twin goals of restoring political stability and addressing the ailing economy that Park and his military cohort seized power on May 16, 1961. After a two-year period of military rule, Park would go on to govern during the Third (1963-1972) and Fourth (1972-1979) Republics that would oversee the bulk of the “miracle” period – that is, until his assassination in October 1979. With the benefit of hindsight, the period of Park’s rule is often viewed as a quintessential example of what James C. Scott (1998) refers to as a regime of “authoritarian high modernism.” During the early period of its rule (1961-1963), however, Park’s regime was anything but dominant, or even secure.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ The institution of the first of this sort of regime under the Japanese, and the continuity that managed to exist after 1945, both coincide with what Scott argues are the triggers for such regimes: “Those [favorable] soils include crises of state power, such as wars and economic

What it did have going for it however, an aspect that would garner the support of its US patron, was the dramatic shift in political loyalties that flowed out of this shift from civilian to military rule. Of particular significance was the fact that this new generation espoused a (begrudging) admiration for Japan. This shifted the pro-American emphasis of the previous regime, which had placed taxing demands on the US for aid etc. from which its American allies were attempting to extricate themselves. Indeed, Park had been educated in both Manchuria and Tokyo, and had worked closely with the Japanese colonial army beginning in the 1930s. Having observed first-hand the effective (if ruthless) workings of the colonial state, especially in terms of its top-down handling of the economy, rendered Park both willing and able to transfer those skills to the rule of the country in the postwar period on a footing of (formal) national equality. As Kohli (2004, 87) argues, Park was both anti-communist and anti-free market liberal, so he viewed as his primary goal the achievement of national self-strengthening through a process similar to what occurred in Meiji Japan. Park is no doubt an interesting and polarizing figure; however, we focus on him here only to the extent that, in his position as the leader of the state, he represented the *nation's re-insertion* into the sort of (capitalist) developmental state logic of the colonial period.

Despite these aspects that fit better into the logic appropriate at that juncture of South Korean history, Park nonetheless still needed to legitimize his dictatorial regime. According to Lie (1998, 52), the “immediate task was to find a way to turn might into right, naked power into legitimate authority. *Only economic growth could justify military rule.*” An important aspect of our overall argument is that South Korea ultimately emerged from this period as a regime of real

depressions, and circumstances in which a state's capacity for relatively unimpeded planning is greatly enhanced, such as the revolutionary conquest of power and colonial rule” (1999, 97).

subsumption, triggered initially by an export-led industrialization strategy in the mid-1960s. Typically we would not take the time to describe these details, since they have already been described elaborately in the extant literature. Given the centrality of this shift to our argument, we sketch here the mixture of domestic and geopolitical factors that catalyzed that key policy shift.

In seizing power in 1961, Park initially justified his rule by tapping into the widespread discontent directed at the elite employed under Rhee. Park therefore decried the “corruption and illicit accumulation of wealth” under Rhee (and his “cronies”) that led the country into crisis. His subsequent “anti-Chaebol law” and mass firings of state officials from the Rhee era gave the impression that his regime was class neutral (Lie 1998, 53). Interestingly, however, in his early attempt to pursue economic growth Park followed the previous regimes’ import substitution industrialization (ISI) strategy. The necessary context for the successful shift to export-oriented industrialization (EOI) came only two years later; this was not because of some sudden realization of the prudence of this strategy, as many developmental state theorists assume via policy voluntarist arguments (Haggard, Kang and Moon 1997), but rather from the wider regional and geopolitical environment. From the Japanese and US perspective, their embeddedness within and, indeed, promotion of a globalizing system of infinite capital accumulation was running up against the costly problem of the political integration of labor into a national reproductive system, while also feeling the increased competitive pressures in the world market deriving from this spread (Chang 2009, 123).

In the domestic realm, moreover, Park was convinced of the wisdom of the export-based strategy for quite specific reasons: one was the dwindling level of US aid, as well as its call for South Korea to drum up more foreign exchange (currency); also at play was the initial success of

exports in the first five-year plan, and the South Korean capitalist class's support for this due to its business connections with Japan (Chibber 1999, 324). Against the dominant perspective shared by both the "continuity" and "discontinuity" theses regarding the role of Japanese colonialism that stress the state's pursuit of exports by governmental fiat through their supposedly complete dominance over its nascent capitalist class, Chibber (1999) argues that the state's power vis-a-vis this class emerged *only after* it had partnered with it. The initial promoters of exports, then, were the capitalists themselves, and, thanks to a conducive regional and geopolitical environment, the state's power grew as a result of this strategy through its control over finance and the like (Woo 1991).

Here we can clearly see the symbiotic, co-dependent character of the relationship between the state and capital, as the former works to mediate the class contradiction between labor(-power) and capital as a whole for the purpose of surplus value creation (i.e., GDP growth). Koo (1987) summarizes this situation class compromise:

[T]he government depends on capitalists, not so much for their political support as for their economic performance ... In sum, the state of South Korea ... enjoys only a relative, not an absolute, autonomy from their dominant classes. They are free from direct influence of individual capitalists or class segments, but they cannot transcend the collective interest of the capitalist class – both domestic and international. (174-175)

It was this fusing of the state-capital nexus, especially as it worked hand-in-hand to channel its exploding working class to the imperative of surplus value production, that by the 1970s allowed it to become one of the only non-Western "unequivocally capitalist" (Koo 1987, 174) societies in world history – that is, a regime of real subsumption.

The "Environment-Making" State

The essential features of East Asia's "developmental states" have been examined in great depth in the extant literature (Johnson 1982; Amsden 1989; Haggard 1990; Woo 1991; Woo-Cumings

1999; Wade 2004). Guided by a “political economy of administrative guidance and neomercantilism,” backed up by a “metaphysical ideology of national essence,” these nations – for which South Korea is perhaps the poster child – pursued economic growth single-mindedly through their respective bureaucratic states during the post-World War II period.¹⁵⁶

One aspect of these states that has eluded mainstream scholars’ attention, however, is the role of the state in relation to (extra-human) nature.¹⁵⁷ That is, the modern capitalist state is fundamentally *an environment-making entity*, which is “at the heart of the [capitalism’s] value form” in that it mediates the class contradiction between wage-labor and capital and has a near monopoly over the “natural resources”¹⁵⁸ contained within its territory through which it can exercise its power. This is an important argument made by Parenti (2016) on the basis of the following non-controversial claims: 1) the modern capitalist state’s essential role is to (re)produce the conditions needed for accumulation; 2) the use-values of extra-human nature are the physical bodies that make up the commodities that are exchanged; 3) these (yet-to-be commodified) use-values in nature are found on the landscape; 4) the state is inherently a territorial entity. Pulling these all together he asserts: “the preexisting use values of nonhuman nature are essential to capitalist accumulation, and these are found upon the surface of the earth. What institutions ultimately control the surface of the earth? States” (167).

¹⁵⁶ For a succinct and helpful summary of the main features of the East Asian “model,” see Cumings (1999b, 88-92).

¹⁵⁷ In addition to Parenti’s work, as discussed in what follows, see also Robertson and Wainwright (2013) for an important exception to this lacuna.

¹⁵⁸ Here, and throughout this work, we place the popular notion of “natural resources” in scare quotes, since this term treats as transhistorical the specific ways in which nature’s various use-values are rendered into “cultural appraisals” conducive to the socio-technical context of a given period, as well as in a commodified and Cartesian manner. As an American resource geographer of the early twentieth century, Erich Zimmerman, put it: “Resources are not; they become” (Bridge 2009, 1220).

In the literature on South Korea, this essential point has been overlooked due, in part, to scholars' obsession with institutional and policy voluntarism – where the state, oddly, is often viewed as antithetical to capital due to its various “interventions” in the economy. In reality, however, the state has a monopoly over the “rents” it possesses in the use-values found on the land, a fact obscured by considering them to be in “public” hands (i.e., not privately owned by capitalists). In delivering these use-values to capital – either directly or by allowing “access” to them – a host of technologies and institutional arrangements are required. Institutionally, through its monopoly of violence, the state ensures the sanctity of its private property regime, though rarely has to use direct force. But to make the most of the territory over which it commands political-economic power, the state must also make the landscape “legible” (Scott 1998), employing ways of mapping, assessing, and managing space via processes that Moore (2015) refers to as “abstract social nature.” To actually deliver these to capitalists, however, Parenti (2016, 171) describes how:

Nonhuman nature's utilities are quite literally *channeled* into production through infrastructure, the built environment of communications and transportation networks: canals, railroads, highways, pipelines, ports, and airports. These geographically fixed public goods (even when they are privately operated, like oil pipelines) are highly dependent on state power and public financing.

As we discussed in Chapter 3, all of the processes outlined above were initiated during the Japanese colonial era. That is, the institution of *generalized* private property via the cadastral survey, the dissolution of peasants' direct ties to the land that initiated the “availability” of this human “resource” (i.e., wage-labor) to capitalists, and infrastructural investments made the extraction of Korea's rice and other raw materials more efficient. This process proceeded even more systematically under the Park regime than it did under the Japanese. But notice, again, that it is the *two-fold character* of capitalism's social forms that drive this seeming paradox of

“development” amidst (self-serving) plunder. The commodity form – as a tension between concrete *use-values* and the “immaterial but objective” temporal form of *value* – predictably yields this result. Nature’s use-values are the “material bearers” of value, and to produce, circulate, and consume them according to the infinite (quantitative) logic of accumulation requires all manner of infrastructural investments and the like. Both the state and capital are instrumental in achieving this, which results in myriad space-time “shrinking” technologies and cascading commodities (use-values) alongside relations of subordination and exploitation (both morally and in the technical Marxian sense).

The Emergence of South Korea’s “Cheap Labor” Regime

Adequate food supplies at reasonable prices [are] essential in keeping Korean wages low enough to make Korean products competitive abroad.
 Park Chung Hee (1965)

It is well known that South Korea transitioned from peripheral to semi-peripheral status within the post-1945 capitalist world-system through its much-lauded “cheap labor” strategy. As the epigraph by Park himself attests, the developmental state’s leaders were cognizant that South Korea’s Ricardian “comparative advantage” lay in its well-educated and industrious labor force. In many ways, the draconian conditions under which South Korea’s newfound proletarians were forced to labor – those outlined in Chapter 1 surrounding long hours, dangerous working conditions, state repression etc. – were viewed as necessary evils by state and capitalist interests to achieve this end. All of this reflects the contradictory and ambivalent role of South Korea’s new proletarian class within the state’s internal strategies for achieving some degree of autonomy within the geopolitical pecking order. On the one hand, that is, South Korea’s (cheap) laboring class was rightly viewed as the lynchpin in its developmental strategy but, on the other, the state-capital nexus viewed it with a mixture of suspicion and derision. Ogle (1990) captures

the state's contradictory stance vis-a-vis the working class when he lists the three strong assumptions that guided state action during the Park era (only the first of which was "official" state policy): 1) low-cost labor was the only basis upon which the Republic of Korea could "develop" economically; 2) the laboring masses belonged to a lower echelon of society and, as such, should show deference to their superiors; 3) any form of worker resistance or collective action was most likely inspired by communists, or communist sympathizers (47). These assumptions were, and in many ways still are, rampant in South Korea.

The logic of the state, whose leaders were faced with the task of juggling the alien logic of capitalism through its superficial forms of wages, interest rates, profits etc., was expressed in the basic assumptions of its central planning arm – the Economic Planning Board (EPB). Ogle (1990) summarizes its logic as follows:

Capital accumulation was given priority over wages, workers' safety, pensions, job security and all else. In theory, the cheaper the labor costs the higher the margin of profits. The higher the profits, the more capital is available for further investment. Investment creates jobs, brings in technologies, and turns out new products for the market. Through these few economic steps, it is argued, the entire society, including the workers, is lifted to higher levels of prosperity. According to the EPB planners everything depends upon keeping labor costs as low as possible. Each year during the 1970's the EPB would publish a maximum rate of wage increase to be permitted in the subsequent year. Employers could pay less, but were not to go above the EPB figure. (48)

They were not wrong about this, as this was essential to the new imperatives its capitalist revolution had wrought. And when capitalism's historically specific imperatives were viewed from the "production in general" perspective that equated these tenets as "development" in the abstract, this treatment of the working class, while perhaps lamentable, was viewed as unavoidable. It was, moreover, all a part of the ostensible "virtuous feedback loop" triggered by low wages and ("trickle down") economic dynamism, which were viewed as the bases of societal prosperity more generally. As the deputy prime minister rationalized in a 1975 *Time* magazine

piece: “There is a criticism that we are exploiting labor with low wages. But in my view, the first stage is getting the economy going; the next stage is to consider [social] welfare. First growth and efficiency, then equity” (Lie 1998, 98). It is important to note that, far from being an aberration to the capitalist development process (as nearly all the “dissenters” that we reviewed in Chapter 1 do), the exploitation of the working class (again, both in the moral and technical Marxian sense) was the *indispensable means through which* the “miracle” was achieved.

Despite the growing discontent catalyzed by these atrocious working conditions and pro-business state actions, yet in light of all that was riding on its coming into fruition, low wages were indeed achieved. For instance, the average manufacturing worker in the United States and Mexico in 1980 earned on average \$10 and \$3 per hour respectively, while those in South Korea made \$1 (Deyo 1989, 91). Consequently, any would-be foreign investor from the United States, for instance, stood to reap massive returns by taking the risk of doing business in this new, but yet unproven, “capitalist paradise” (Cumings 2005, 168). Gustav Ranis describes how, in the early 1960s, the labor costs savings for American firms doing business in South Korea was a factor of 25, given that its workers were paid 10% of the going US rate, yet were 2.5 times more productive than their US counterparts. As Ranis elaborates:

In transistor assembly operations, for example, given wage rates 1/10 of those of equivalent operators in the U.S. (for the same firm), the machinery is run at physical full capacity, that is, 6 days, three shifts a day, which is 20 percent above the U.S. equivalent. ... In spite of the greater use of labor, productivity per worker seems to be higher partly due to the fast learning process ... but mainly to the greater discipline and attentiveness on the assembly line throughout. For example, in one firm the difference in speed of assembly on identical equipment yields a 30 per cent differential in output.... These greater speeds of operation, either due to faster machines or operator pacing, are once again accomplished by putting additional women into more intensive testing, inspection and repair efforts than in Japan or the U.S.

The reigning “common sense” regarding the economic logic of using low-cost labor seems self-evident enough, but two questions emerge from this: 1) why is “cheap labor” so central to

capitalism; and 2) how was it achieved in the South Korean case in particular? The following subsections will deal with these two issues in turn.

Capitalism's Cheap Food Imperative

Jason Moore (2015) has pointed out how each successive hegemonic rise in capitalist world history – i.e., Italian city states, Dutch, British, and US (Arrighi 1994) – has been underpinned by an agricultural revolution. Given the centrality of *abstract labor* in capitalism – as a *determinate social expression* of the transhistorical necessity for humans to “mix their labor with the land” – the way that the countless atomized and geographically dispersed wage-laborers “communicate” with each other is through the values of the commodities they produce for exchange. This is, recall, value’s function as social mediator. Because abstract labor is the substance of value (not wealth) under capitalism, there is an unrelenting imperative to feed workers as cheaply as possible. Here, the word “cheap” is defined as “more calories produced with less average labor time in the commodity system” (Patel and Moore 2017, 143).¹⁵⁹ The reason why each hegemonic rise coincided with revolutions in agricultural productivity is because, as Moore (2015) explains, the latter “yielded a quantum leap in the food surplus – a ‘surplus’ because the expanded body of

¹⁵⁹ Our focus here is on the significance of “cheap” food for capitalism, but this is just one aspect of a broader trend within capitalism. Patel and Moore (2017) define “cheapness” as follows:

[I]t’s a set of strategies to manage relations between capitalism and the web of life by temporarily fixing capitalism’s crises. Cheap is not the same as low cost – though that’s part of it. Cheap is a strategy, a practice, a violence that mobilizes all kinds of work – human and animal, botanical and geological – with as little compensation as possible. We use *cheap* to talk about the process through which capitalism transmutes these undominated relationships of life making into circuits of production and consumption, in which these relations come to have as low a price as possible. Cheapening marks the transition from uncounted relations of life making to the lowest possible dollar value. It’s always a short-term strategy. And cheapness has always been a battleground. (22)

From Moore’s earlier formulations (e.g., 2011a) of the Four Cheaps, as deployed in this work, Patel and Moore (2017) broaden it to seven: i.e., money, work, care, energy, food, lives, and, especially, nature.

use-values is sufficiently large to drive down the *system-wide* costs of reproducing labor-power” (243). The links to the global proletariat are intimate here, as the expansion and reproduction of the working class (both daily and generationally) is directly related to the price of food, which allows for a more effective extraction of surplus value (*ibid.*). Patel and Moore (2017) summarize capitalism’s “cheap food model” as follows: “Capitalism’s agricultural revolutions provided cheap food, which lowered the minimum-wage threshold: workers could be paid less and not starve. This in turn reduced employers’ wage bills as the scale of proletarianization increased, allowing the rate of exploitation to rise” (143). There is, in short, an inextricable link between cheap labor and cheap food under capitalism, and this is especially the case under “fully developed” regimes of real subsumption.

This represents a fundamental departure from the role of food in other class-based modes of production. This is not to deny that subordinate classes had to be fed, but rather to point out that this was something that was typically accomplished by the subordinate classes themselves, in a place-based manner that had little (if not nothing) to do with exchange in the market. So while food is central to the reproduction of the classes of all social formations, under non- and semi-capitalist societies, this nevertheless plays a much more minor role than under “advanced” capitalism (i.e., real subsumption).

The Contradictions of a Cheap Labor Strategy and Social Reproduction in South Korea

This fundamental prerequisite to achieving dynamic rates of capitalist growth are fine and well to assert in the abstract, but it begs the question as to how it can actually be achieved within specific historical-geographical social formations. For if it were a simple matter to accomplish, the world would no doubt be rife with economic “miracles” akin to the one achieved by South Korea. It is one thing, therefore, to attempt to drive wages down, but quite another in terms of

squaring this with the imperatives of the capitalist accumulation process *as a totality*. Many obstacles can arise. For instance, when wages are driven down to a significant enough extent, the internal market for the products produced by the nation's capitalists will be lacking. This is, as O'Connor (1998) has famously pointed out, Marx's "first contradiction" of capitalism. As we saw in Chapter 1 of this work, however, this barrier was largely overcome in the South Korean case by its privileged access to US and Japanese markets, based on a combination of its place within the (regional) Japanese and (global) US Cold War hegemonies, as well as its fortuitous timing in shifting to its export-based industrialization strategy a good ten years before other "Third World" nations.

What was more pressing, however, was the contradiction of reproducing South Korea's new capitalist social formation as a whole. Not only were wages relatively low by world standards, for a great proportion of the nation's new proletarians they were actually *below* the threshold considered necessary for the social reproduction of the working class itself. Or put in more technical Marxian terms, average wages were below the socially necessary minimum, insufficient to reproduce the value of labor-power. Lie (1998) offers the following figures to illustrate this point:

The Korea Development Institute (KDI; a government think tank) estimated in 1980 that a minimum monthly income for a family of five was 270,000 *won* (about US \$335). In fact, 31 percent of all workers received less than 70,000 *won*, 56 percent received less than 100,000 *won*, and 86 percent received less than 200,000 *won*. In 1986, FKTU [Federation of Korean trade Unions] estimated that a family of four required a minimum of 524,000 *won* a month; the average wage was 339,000 *won*. Nearly 90 percent of manufacturing workers were earning less than the minimum necessary to support a family of four. (1998, 104-105; see also Lie 1996, 44-45)

While most South Koreans were willing to eke out a living for the good of defeating the "Communist menace" on the northern half of the peninsula, this situation, even if exaggerated in the figures quoted above, still presented a formidable challenge to state leaders. Indeed, if history

teaches leaders anything, it is that access to (affordable) food is the bedrock of maintaining political stability. So how was it accomplished?

State Policy

A crucial factor in the South Korean state's cheap labor strategy was the enactment of various policies vis-a-vis the agrarian sector. Kickstarting all of this was the so-called Grain Management Law, which laid the legal basis for agriculture to be perhaps the most tightly state regulated sector of the economy. First enacted in 1950, it worked in tandem with the land reform law, and replaced the compulsory rice collection system (Kihl and Bark 1981, 49). According to Burmeister (1990b), it was "an edict that gave the central government wide-ranging budgetary and administrative authority to purchase, store, transport, allocate and establish prices for agricultural commodities" (199).

It was on this basis that the state created its "dual-price system" towards the staple food crops of rice and barley. In effect, the dual-price system allowed the state to purchase rice and barley from rural producers at costs significantly lower than their market prices – for example, approximately 15% below the market price during the 1960s – the savings of which were then passed on to urban workers. This strategy only increased, moreover, as time went on. The state's proportion of rice purchases, for example, were only 10% during the 1950s, but this number jumped to roughly 50% by the 1970s (Lie 1991, 41-42). Ju (1996) explains how this process worked in practice:

The state would announce its own purchase price, usually lower than the market price, at the beginning of the harvest, though grains were priced in the market. The state also could simply close the commercial channels, thus forcing the farmers to sell all their grains to the government. Moreover, the state would depress the farm prices at harvest time by dumping stored grains on the market. (94-95)

All of this was done in the service of achieving the state's primary objectives in this sphere: providing affordable food grains to the exploding urban proletariat; curbing inflationary pressures due to the centrality of food in household consumption; and creating a strong disincentive to rural workers seeking improvements in food productivity (i.e., fostering conditions of inequality great enough for them to "choose" to join the urban workforce) (Lie 1991, 42). The dual-price policy presented a financial drain on the state's resources (Kihl and Bark 1981, 64), but it was a necessary measure to ensure the social reproduction of its working class and "cheap labor" strategy.

Before moving on, it is important to register the unique character of South Korean proletarianization, as well as its links to the generalizing commodification of daily life on its eventual transition to becoming a "developed" regime of real subsumption. Contrary to the axioms of modernization theory, which attempted to generalize from the minority situation of the US hegemon to chart the supposedly "universal" path of development for all, the capitalist world-system requires an uneven mix of varying regimes of subsumption (and non-capitalist/commodified spaces) in order to function effectively. Again, a complete commodification of society would undercut the broader socio-ecological context that allows value to function, as well its ability to appropriate the "free" work/energy of nature, women, colonies etc. (Moore 2015). A few scholars (e.g., Meillassoux 1981) have made the crucial point that this imperative is precisely what has allowed "cheap labor" to flourish in the so-called "underdeveloped" world, since daily and generational reproduction of labor (though not necessarily labor-*power*) can be achieved by drawing on the support of non-commodified realms, such as the family. In the South Korean case, however, this was far less feasible. Given the high degree of geographical mobility associated with its extraordinary proletarianization process –

beginning, as we saw, under Japanese colonialism, but especially under the Park regime – these sources of support were far less available. According to Cho (1987):

[T]he reduction of reproduction costs of labor power, especially that of unskilled young women workers, who have played a crucial role in export manufacturing, scarcely occurs *since means of consumption for them are largely restricted to commodities and services purchased in the market, not in the informal sector or pre-capitalist subsistent sector.* First of all, most workers in the export industry live alone in cities, far away from their homes in the countryside. The majority of young Korean women workers' parents living in farming areas do not even know in which factory their daughter works, under what conditions she works, or with whom she lives. Under this situation, *the reduction of reproduction costs through traditional subsistence arrangements or non-paid family labor cannot be expected.* (238-240; emphases added)

All of this has only served to deepen the penetration of commodified social relations within South Korea, thereby contributing to its emergence as a “developed” regime of real subsumption, akin to those found in the West.

US Food Aid via Public Law 480

Working in tandem with the above-mentioned state policies was the second key factor in South Korea's ability to create and maintain a cheap labor regime: its receipt of massive amounts of so-called “food aid” via the United States' Public Law 480 program. It is no exaggeration to argue that the most significant factor in the South Korean state's ability to reconcile the contradiction of enjoying low wages while ensuring social stability was thanks to the flood of US aid. Without it, South Korea's cheap labor strategy would never have been feasible, since the state would have faced higher prices for its own agricultural produce, or would have had to pay for imported food at (much higher) global commercial rates.

John Cathie (1989), author of an important study on the crucial role of food aid in South Korea's capitalistic success, estimates that between 30% and 40% of all US aid to South Korea was in the form of food (128). This food aid took three main forms. The first was the one most often associated with the term “food aid” – that is, food for direct consumption. Although often

believed to be offered to struggling nations in order to stave off starvation etc., in the South Korean case it was far more central in undergirding the nation's cheap labor strategy. As the most important component of the wage bundle that dictates the value of labor-power, South Korea's long-term and reliable access to US food aid – mainly during the crucial early period of its modernization drive (i.e., 1954-1973) – ensured that real wages did not fall, as the swelling proletariat could always procure the means to reproduce itself (Cathie 1989, 156), despite the other necessities that it was forced to forego.

Second, and arguably as significant as food as a consumer good, was the role that US food aid played in terms of providing South Korea with *producer* goods. Oftentimes these two overlapped, as with the so-called “three whites” of sugar, flour, and cotton that were procured directly from US aid sources (Lie 1998, 33). In this case, the first two were clearly instrumental in providing cheap consumer goods, while the latter was perhaps the most important producer good underpinning South Korea's initial export-based success. As we saw earlier on, the textile industry was the initial “cutting edge” of South Korea's early development drive, which is not surprising given that cotton comprised 40% of all “food” aid delivered to the nation via PL 480. Moreover, textiles made up at least 10% of export earnings from 1954 (i.e., the year PL 480 began) to the end of that decade, and that number jumped to 20% by the late 1960s and to 40% by the 1970s. In short, as Cathie (1989) argues contra the neoclassical school view that reigned during the 1970s and early 1980s, South Korea's export-based industrialization was as much about being the beneficiary of “cheap” raw materials, food and, by extension, labor(-power) via PL 480 food aid as it was about the “sensible trade and foreign exchange policies” of the nation's governmental leaders (164).

Third, there was the issue of South Korea's food imports from the United States. During the early postwar period, much of the aid above took the form of outright grants to the South Korean state. But as US food aid began to taper off by the early 1970s on account of the US's expensive military quagmire in Vietnam, food imports became of greater and greater significance, especially for its key staples: rice and barley. For example, while only paltry amounts of rice were imported during the mid-1960s, imported rice increased to 6% of total rice consumption by 1967-1968, before jumping to 25% by 1970-1971 (Lie 1998, 109). It is not hard to see why this was the case. Purchased through the Title 1 form of PL 480 aid (i.e., commercial sales on concessionary terms, paid for at discounted prices in the local currency of the receiving nation), this arrangement had many attractive features for South Korea's leaders. Perhaps the greatest was the extremely favorable terms of payment for these imports, which included a 10-year grace period, interest rates of only 2%, and a repayment period of 31 years (Cathie 1989, 113). Moreover, because these imports were paid for in South Korea's local currency (*won*), it helped feed its overworked laborers without the need to draw upon into its tightly guarded reserves of foreign exchange (Ban, Moon, and Perkins 1980, 28-31). In the short-run, at least, this arrangement was a win-win situation for both the US and South Korea. As part of its "food power" strategy that we outlined in the previous chapter, the US saw a number of its allies "graduate" from food aid receiver to food (grain) purchaser over the course of the Cold War. Wessel (1983) points out this connection as follows:

The transition from a recipient to commercial buyer was not, however, merely a natural ontogenetic process whereby developing countries went off the food dole as they grew more prosperous. Rather, inducements to conversion were written into PL 480 contracts from the beginning. Eventual commercial purchases were, therefore, in many cases a *precondition* for the receipt of aid. (153)

By 1978, South Korea had joined that rarified group that the USDA referred to as the “billion-dollar club” – i.e., nations importing 1 billion dollars or more of US farm commodities (Wessel 1983, 173).

These advantageous terms of procuring cheap food over an extended period were crucial in nudging South Korea towards its transition to a regime of real subsumption. More specifically, through the largesse bestowed by the US upon its Cold War ally South Korea, Park and other state leaders could continue to pursue an urban-industrial biased development strategy without facing the sort of fallout that would otherwise have occurred by such a one-sided capitalist development scheme. What is more, as agrarian conditions deteriorated in terms of living conditions and economic inequities relative to urban areas, this only served to propel more suffering agrarian workers into the urban factories of the country’s burgeoning cities (Ju 1996, 245), thereby cheapening wage-labor still further. This was the motive force driving the changes in South Korea’s class structure – in particular, culminating in the shift from hybrid/formal subsumption to a regime of real subsumption – to which we now turn.

Postwar Transformations in South Korea’s Class Structure

Despite the fact that Japanese colonialism first introduced capitalism’s social forms and ways of life, South Korea was still overwhelmingly an agrarian society after the cessation of World War II. The 1950s, however, witnessed profound changes to South Korea’s class structure that laid the basis for the industrial take-off of the subsequent decade under Park’s leadership. At the center of this was a widening and deepening of the primitive accumulation process – accelerated by the symbiotic forces of land reform, “benign neglect” of agriculture, and its export-based industrialization strategy. These processes, operating dialectically with one another, brought about specific shifts in four key groups of South Korean society, which we will examine in turn.

Despite the specificities of each group's shift, however, it is important to register the general trajectory that they were all helping to further. As Hamilton (1986) explains: "It was clear by the end of the fifties that capitalism was the moving force in South Korean society and had taken hold irreversibly," as "capitalist social relations became the *dominant social form* politically and economically" (29).

First, the postwar period witnessed revolutionary changes in rural relations, a process intimately linked to the gradual implementation of US-backed land reforms. This process followed the dictate of "land to the tiller," which represented a quasi-socialist policy concession that was meant to address peasant unrest surrounding the land question. Recall that the land reforms set a limit of 3 *chongbo* (roughly 3 hectares) per household and effectively ended land tenancy. For example, the proportion of rural families completely owning their own land was only 14% at the close of World War II, but twenty years later this number increased to 70%; moreover, pure tenancy dropped from nearly 50% to only 7% in 1945 to 1965 respectively (Hamilton 1986, 30). As we will see later on, though, this rise of a vast set of small-landowners (akin to Jeffersonian yeoman farmers) represented an obstacle to large-scale industrial farming techniques that were being pushed at the time within the US itself, and rendered the rural sector vulnerable to the vagaries of agricultural market turbulence and state policies. Nevertheless, the establishment of this new footing for rural society, one overturning a centuries-old stratified system of tenancy, was crucial in underpinning South Korea's capitalist revolution (i.e., real subsumption), despite the suffering and subordinate position it would take within the state's development plans.

The second shift in South Korean class relations, one directly associated with the changes above, was the near complete demise of the *yangban*'s landed power. On the one hand, the legal

basis of the land reforms effectively ended landlords' official political legitimacy, which flowed from their more general discrediting by the masses for their collusion with the Japanese during the colonial era. On the other hand, the land reforms also cut off the basis of their previous economic power: rents (Chang 2009, 85-86). One of the tenets of the Land Reform Act was that, in order to pay for their land, former tenants were only required to pay 150% of a typical year's grain (i.e., rice) output, which they were permitted to pay the government over a five-year period. The government bonds that the landlords were supposed to receive as compensation often failed to materialize, as the state often did not redeem them in a timely fashion and, because landlords could not use them as collateral on business loans, their values shrank precipitously (Hamilton 1986, 30-31). By one estimation (Ban, Moon and Perkins 1980, 290), landlords received only between fifteen and twenty-five percent of the compensation "officially due" to them. Chang (2009, 86) outlines the details of this death blow dealt to the landed class, which came to a completion through the unintended consequences of the land reforms:

Although land reform was designed, through parliaments still occupied largely by the landlord class, to give the landlord class a certain priority in purchasing the state-vested means of production that Japanese capital had left, the result turned out to be rather disastrous for the landlord class. First, it caused a decline of the vast majority of landlords who owned so little land that they could not afford to purchase state-vested properties with the compensation from the state. Secondly, the value of the bond that the government issued for compensation was initially a lot cheaper than the market price of land and later even massively decreased due to inflation during and after the war. In addition, the political alliance between liberal nationalists and the landlord class had weakened since the liberal-nationalists gained their own political power by establishing Rhee Syng-man's Liberal Party. On top of that, many landlords lost their economic resources through the devastating civil war. As a result, a relatively revolutionary land reform was implemented during the war, causing a significant change in the class composition in South Korea by removing the traditional social dominance of the landlord class.

All of this does not suggest, however, that former *individual* landlords did not retain a privileged socio-economic status within postwar society; rather, it is to emphasize how, *as the dominant social class*, its centuries-long reign had finally come to an end.

The third fundamental shift in South Korea's class structure was arguably the most significant and profound: mass proletarianization. Interestingly, despite the recent land reforms, by the late 1950s the proletarianization process was still relatively negligible. More specifically, 80% of the total work force (not *wage-labor* force) was made up of agricultural laborers, who were mainly small-scale owner-cultivators. It was under Park's developmental dictatorship, however, that this process really took off, as the proportion of the agricultural workforce dipped to 50% by 1970, and to 20% by the 1980s (Koo 2001, 33-34). Stated in terms of absolute numbers, between c.1965-1985 some 11 million people migrated from South Korea's rural areas to its burgeoning cities in order to seek wage-work: 5.1 million between 1966 and 1975; and 5.9 million 1975 and 1984 (Koo 2001, 39). Koo (2001, 34) is justified, therefore, in stressing the profundity and remarkable speed of this transition from an agricultural to a commodified wage-labor society, which accomplished in only a few decades what took Britain well over a century. The timing of this profound shift, moreover, was anything but accidental, as rural-to-urban migration jumped from 243,000 in 1960-1966 to 568,000 in 1966-1970 (Hamilton 1986, 38). With the transition to Park's export-based strategy by the early- to mid-1960s, the proletarian migration accelerated and, crucially, the jobs were actually there to accommodate many (but certainly not all) of them. In short, South Korea's postwar proletarianization process represented, as Lie (1998, 111) has stressed, "one of the most accelerated rural out-migrations in world history."

Finally, there was the rise – or, more precisely, the *creation* – of South Korea’s own domestic capitalist class. Two processes were at work here. The first was the “external” influence that the United States played in shaping South Korean domestic social relations in accordance with that country’s place in its Cold War hegemonic project. At the termination of Japanese colonial rule in 1945, the US military government in South Korea seized and controlled all Japanese assets (e.g., land, factories, shares etc.). As we have seen, given the dominance of the Japanese within Korea’s economy over the preceding thirty-five years, these properties were considerable. Even by 1948, for example, Japan’s previously owned firms and plants were estimated to still comprise four-fifths of total industrial production in South Korea (Song 2020, 182-183). With popular discontent rife during the immediate postwar years, there was strong pressure by the People’s Committees (Cumings 1981) and other domestic groups to nationalize these properties. With the violent suppression of more radical demands achieved by the early 1950s however, and with the land reforms having appeased many disgruntled peasants, the US was free to disperse these assets in a manner consistent with its pro-capitalist policy desires for the country. The US followed a policy of selecting so-called “priority buyers” for these assets, which were proffered to them on favorable terms. Song (2020, 183) explains, for example, how these fortunate recipients “purchased the factory plants and properties at below market prices with down-payments of only 20 percent of the value, with the remaining 80 per cent being paid in instalments over the following ten years at an annual interest rate of 7 per cent.” Interestingly, in most cases the US selected not members of the disgraced landlord class, but rather bureaucrats who had served as managers for the Japanese during the colonial period, and who therefore had direct ties to the US military government. Working in tandem with the privatization and commodification of lands through the Land Reform Act, Song (2020) argues that the process of

privatizing Japan's confiscated colonial assets effectively created a rising capitalist class in South Korea and represented clearly the twin processes of primitive accumulation we discussed earlier (184). Moreover, she argues, the US functioned essentially as a "powerful class force that influenced and even determined the rise of a new power balance between classes, on the one hand, and state-society relations, on the other" (185).

The other factor driving the rise of South Korea's capitalist class stemmed from "internal" dynamics, as the 1950s saw a fundamental shift from landed (i.e., rentier) forms of wealth to merchant (or commercial) capitalism. In this transition, both push and pull factors were at play. On the push side, recall how the new postwar conditions flowing from the land reforms undercut the economic basis of landlords' power. It is worth noting here, however, how most of the land transfers from landlord to peasant occurred *prior* to the official promulgation of the land reform act, in the period from 1945-1950. This is no doubt because the landed class recognized enough that their prospects were waning, and so prudently sold off their lands while their prices remained relatively high. The money in their pockets from the sales of these lands only served to enhance the pull factors, as former landlords were "attracted to commercial pursuits in response to economic circumstances characterized by a flood of US aid and a shortage of foreign exchange which made possible windfall profits through trade" (Hamilton 1986, 29). Although some have argued that the state's attempt to convert former landlords into capitalists was generally a failure (Jones and Sakong 1980, 35-36), countervailing evidence can also be offered. For instance, in a 1976 survey of manufacturing firms, almost half (47%) of the fathers of these younger entrepreneurs were said to have been "large-to-medium landowners." Nevertheless, what is important is not the details regarding the specific outcomes of former landlords or bureaucrats-cum-capitalists; rather, the essential point to register is the overall trend of how

“asset-holding and investment in land declined while commercial accumulation accelerated” (Hamilton 1986, 31). But as Hamilton also points out, “No matter how large the fortunes grow, capital will continue to be invested in land or merchant trade as long as it is more profitable to do so” (29).¹⁶⁰ So how did South Korea make the transition to the specifically *industrial* form of capitalism – our shorthand for a regime of real subsumption – whereas so many other “developing” nations failed to do so?

The Rise of Relations of Real Subsumption in South Korea

This section discusses the gradual generalization of relations of real subsumption in South Korea by the early 1970s. Although the Japanese colonial era introduced many of the aspects of a regime of real subsumption into Korea, due to its self-serving nation-based character, no systematic attempt was made to revolutionize Korea society along “fully developed” capitalist lines. Therefore, when the Japanese vacated in 1945, they left behind an uneven mixture of different forms of subsumption, for example: hybrid/formal for tenant farmers; real subsumption for those who migrated to Japanese and Manchurian factories etc. However, with the increasing “rationalization” of economic life (along capitalist lines) after World War II that was part and parcel of South Korea’s embrace of the US development project, it crept nearer and nearer towards generalized relations of real subsumption. This was because, based upon developmental tenets, the limits of formal subsumption were plain enough to see. For the subcontracting and putting out systems, upon which relations of formal subsumption are based, are often “plagued by problems of irregularity of production, loss of materials in transit and through embezzlement,

¹⁶⁰ McMichael (2017, 55) echoes this line of argument, emphasizing the continuity of the colonial division of labor’s preference for primary exports via entrenched landed elites as a reason for the Third World’s “dependent development” despite winning *political* independence after World War II.

slowness of manufacture, lack of uniformity and uncertainty of the quality of the product” (Braverman 1974, 44). All of this limited the productivity, dynamism, and adaptability of capitalist production; so in light of the generalization of value relations and mass proletarianization after 1945, South Korean leaders moved to place its “development” on sounder footing.

To help illuminate the significance of this shift, we do so, first, from the more grounded historical perspective (Ollman’s level 2), then go on to examine the changes this transition wrought from a higher, more systemically pertinent level of abstraction (level 3) that notes the shifts in the character of the labor process itself.¹⁶¹

In History

In the previous section, we outlined the shifts in the four class fractions that laid the basis for the eventual emergence of capitalism’s basic social forms in South Korea by the late 1950s, as well as the general shift during the Rhee period from landed (rentier) wealth extraction to the merchant (commercial) capitalism that undergirded this. But fully developed *industrial* capitalism was still hardly an accomplished fact, nor was there anything inevitable about its coming to fruition (Chibber 1999). Here, then, we discuss this crucial shift, which saw South Korea emerge by the early-1970s¹⁶² as a regime of real subsumption, though at that point merely in the “intermediary stage” of manufacturing.

¹⁶¹ At this juncture, it is important to note that relations of real subsumption take two main forms: manufacture and large-scale industry. The former will be dealt with in this chapter, whereas the truly revolutionary latter form will be explored in the following one.

¹⁶² The exact timing of South Korea’s shift to real subsumption is up for debate. At the level of class structure and social reproduction, there is a tricky relationship between the state’s triggering, albeit often through mediated market mechanisms, of mass proletarianization and the ability for urban-based capitalists to actually take advantage of this by means of providing employment. In many “developing” nations, the state relies on the informal sector to achieve short-term social reproduction, as individuals fight to stay alive by any means necessary and rely

Although many individuals with tight links to the Rhee regime (1948-1960) did very well financially, by the end of the 1950s it was becoming increasingly evident that the period that had overseen the transition from rentierism to commercial capitalism could not continue as it had.

Lie (1998, 34) summarizes the central contradictions of the “triple alliance” that existed during Rhee’s reign:

[T]he triple alliance among the United States, Rhee’s state, and dependent capitalists was connected by aid and graft. U.S. support was crucial for Rhee’s autocratic rule, and U.S. aid contributed to corporate and bureaucratic parasitism. South Korean enterprises established personal links to the president in order to gain access to precious commodities provided by U.S. aid as well as to retain monopolistic privileges *vis-a-vis* competitors. The structure of corruption ultimately robbed South Korea of potentially innovative improvements and beneficial competition. Surplus, rather than being productively invested, accumulated among the political and business elites. The South Korean economy was stagnant.

Note that the Rhee regime’s actions did not stem from the exhaustion of its import substitution industrialization (ISI) strategy; rather, the reason why short-term profiteering was so rampant is simply because it was possible to get away with (Chibber 1999, 315). From the perspective of economic elites, why would one bother with the risk, effort, and costs associated with long-term investments when personal economic windfalls could be had so easily via rentierism, clientelism and the like? To repeat Hamilton’s (1986, 29) point: “No matter how large fortunes grow, capital will continue to be invested in land or merchant trade as long as it is more profitable to do so.”

At bottom, despite the fortunes made by those in a position to profit from exchange rate fluctuations and the markup on scarce but highly sought-after consumer goods, the zero-sum character of the economy could not meet people’s basic needs, and this at a time when the

on kin networks etc. In the case of South Korea, where available waged jobs in the formal economy did eventually emerge, this overall level of precarity aided the state-capital nexus by keeping wages low, which was in line with its general development strategy. See Koo (1976) for details on these issues.

vagaries of a commodified proletarian existence were beginning to mount for the average citizen. These circumstances, along with others outlined in an earlier section, catalyzed Park's dictatorial coup.

We can now turn to the issue of how it began its successful transition to a regime of real subsumption via export-led industrialization in the 1960s. Contrary to the popular view that Park simply imposed upon the capitalist class an export-based strategy as the "dominant partner" vis-a-vis the capitalist class (e.g., Jones and Sakong 1980, 67), things were far more complicated and contingent. For starters, given the tenuousness of his hold on power, Park's initial economic strategy was modest, tending to support small business and the struggling agrarian sector. Moreover, the First Five Year Plan, which began in 1961, continued with the ISI focus of his predecessors, featuring only a smattering of exports. It was only with the failure of this plan, which for a variety of reasons was abandoned in 1963, that the shift to exports was considered by early 1964 (Chibber 1999, 326).

Here Chibber's (1999) key distinction between export *promotion* and export-*led industrialization* is illuminating.¹⁶³ For the former had been attempted by countless nations during the postwar developmentalist period, but with little success. This approach, which treats exports as merely one aspect within a more general plan, requires no fundamental overhaul of production methods, planning and the like. The ubiquity of this strategy in the Third World, moreover, was the result of the United States support of shifting aid to its allies from grants to loans as a means of procuring foreign exchange for their developmental plans. By contrast, an export-*led* industrialization strategy requires a root-and-branch revolutionizing of its production

¹⁶³ Chibber (343) credits Gustav Ranis with this distinction, which was taken up by Cypher and Dietz (1997).

methods, backed by a state that is in a position to encourage and enforce these plans on its capitalist class. In the history of postwar developmentalism, the pursuit of this strategy is rare indeed. It requires, according to Chibber (1999), that exports be “made the fulcrum on which industrial planning rest[s],” and that “performance on this front by firms [is] made a condition for access to state largesse” – aspects that go way further than anything being pushed by the US and pursued elsewhere in the “developing” world (328-329). South Korea’s ability to carry this plan out, prior to 1965 at least, was highly improbable, as it suffered from various issues: possession of outdated machinery that produced low-quality goods, combined with unreliable supply chains (329).

As Chibber argues, it was South Korea’s Cold War alliance with its past colonizer Japan – as a regional expression of the grander US global hegemonic web – that allowed for the Park regime to pursue this bold shift to export-*led* development. Pursued officially with the implementation of the Second Five Year Plan in 1966, this involved a mutually beneficial arrangement between South Korea and Japan which can be summarized as follows (330-334). On the one hand, South Korean firms enjoyed privileged access to both the US and its own lucrative markets, access to aid, credit and know-how – all of which strengthened the power of the state and laid the basis for enforcing high performance targets on its capitalists. On the other hand, Japan was able to alleviate the contradictions of its own rapid growth by relocating its labor-intensive light industries to a nation where cheaper labor could be enjoyed as it moved up the capitalist “product cycle” to heavy industries at home in sectors such as chemicals and electronics. The take-home point is this: far from the view that sees Park switching immediately to an export-based industrialization strategy and forcing it upon a weak and dependent capitalist class, the shift to a specifically export-led model emerged: 1) out of the failures of the First Five

Year Plan; 2) out of the will of the capitalists with a positive-sum-game outlook; and 3) from privileged access to the Japanese market and its overall support (Chibber 1999).

It is important to appreciate, moreover, how there was nothing preordained about South Korea's emergence in the 1960s as a regime of real subsumption. Stated differently, the changes within the class structure were not the automatic results of autonomous economic processes; rather, they were as much, if not more, the result of *political* processes, carried out by deliberate state actions in response to national, regional, and international factors (e.g., Chibber 1999, 335-337). This is equally true of the country's fateful transition to "fully developed" relations of real subsumption after 1973 via the Heavy and Chemical Industrialization plan, which we will outline in the next chapter. The contingent alignment of these various factors goes far in demonstrating the dubiousness of attempting to recreate the South Korean experience elsewhere, pursuing what scholars like Hamilton (1986) and Kohli (1997) disparagingly refer to as the "policy voluntarism" that dominates the extant debates.

For now, though, having established the historically contingent rise of South Korea's unprecedented shift¹⁶⁴ to export-led industrialization, it is necessary to look at the changes that this wrought. Here we will limit ourselves to the sphere of material production, while exploring some of the wider societal ramifications in a later section.

In Theory

The section above traces the macro political-economic factors that allowed for South Korea's march, under Park, to relations of real subsumption under its "light industry" push of the 1960s.

¹⁶⁴ At the time of its occurrence (c.1965-1966), this shift was indeed historically unprecedented, save for Western nations and, perhaps, Taiwan (whose own shift was attributable to many of the same general factors as South Korea). After this time, other transitions were achieved – for example, in pockets of China. None of these, however, were as societally widespread as in South Korea.

From the level-2 perspective that dominates the literature on South Korea, one can find no end to technical analyses of how this process unfolded (e.g., Mason et al. 1980, 92-164; Jones and Sakong 1980; Amsden 1989; Haggard 1990, 51-75; Das 1992; Kohli 2004, 101-123; Sakong and Koh 2010). Ironically, although these analyses all single out a specifically *industrial* transformation that took place in South Korea beginning the mid-1960s, their “production in general” view of economic activity overlooks the historical specificity of the novel forms *through which* this was achieved. In other words, the specific character of *capitalist* economic growth – driven, as we will stress later on, by the value dimension of the commodity – is viewed as a self-evident increase in the efficiency of producing the other half of that conceptual couplet: use-values. In this section, then, we outline the historically specific basis of capitalist growth with regards to the changes it brings about in the labor process, focusing successively on cooperation, division of labor, and manufacture. These ideas provide an essential background to the arguments made in the next chapter.

Cooperation

One of the most important distinctions that Marx makes in *Capital* is between absolute and relative forms of surplus value creation. We can summarize this distinction by saying that the absolute form (1990, 283-428) of surplus value is gained simply by increasing the amount of time that wage-laborers are forced to work, which allows for a greater quantity of work to be done with no increase in wages. The relative form of surplus value, by contrast, revolves around increasing labor productivity *without* lengthening the number of hours worked, hence yielding a greater number of use-values in the same length of time.

In Part Four of *Capital* (Volume 1), Marx discusses the two general ways that relative surplus is procured: organizational form and machinery. Although machinery and technological

innovations garner the lion's share of attention in contemporary academia, interestingly, Marx argues that organizational form is more important for capitalist production in a general systemic sense. Regarding organizational forms, Marx stresses two: (simple) cooperation (Chapter 13); division of labor and manufacture (Chapter 14). We deal with each in turn.

For Marx, the *sine qua non* of capitalist relations of real subsumption is cooperation. As he states:

Capitalist production only really begins ... when each individual capital simultaneously employs a comparatively large number of workers, and when, as a result, the labour-process is carried on on an extensive scale, and yields relatively large quantities of products. *A large number of workers working together, as the same time in one place* (or, if you'd like, in the same field of labour), *in order to produce the same sort of commodity under the command of the same capitalist, constitutes the starting-point of capitalist production.* (Marx 1990, 439; emphasis added)

There are several advantages to labor cooperation, and these apply even when the methods of production themselves have not been altered at all – that is, when they remain those methods of handicraft or artisanal labor. For instance, in addition to the economies of scale enjoyed due to the greater scale of production, cooperation invokes the “animal spirits” of the laborers, triggered by competition both inside and outside of the workshop. “This is why a dozen people working together,” Marx argues, “will produce far more, in their collective working day of 144 hours, than twelve isolated men each working for 12 hours (1990, 443-444). It is important to note that these productivity gains stem from labor's *use-value* dimension. So while it is true that increasing labor productivity will decrease the unit cost of the commodities being produced due to the decreasing value of labor-power (considerations of the value dimension), at this point the greater efficiencies stem solely from use-value aspects. This is a function of *concrete labor's social dimension*, which is social in two senses: that the labor process is collective and that the sum of the labor is greater than the individual parts. “This power arises from co-operation itself,”

Marx writes; since, “[w]hen the worker co-operates in a planned way with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species” (1990, 447).

Moreover, since the capitalist pays wage-laborers as *individual* commodity owners yet reaps the collective rewards of cooperative labor, these efficiency gains serve as “free gifts” to capital(ists) (Postone 1993, 327-328).¹⁶⁵

Several points should be noted here. First, although world history is replete with acts of labor cooperation,¹⁶⁶ the way in which this is done under capitalist relations of real subsumption are historically unprecedented. In non-capitalist cases, these large-scale acts of cooperation were sporadic and directed at achieving concrete purposes (e.g., the Pyramids of Giza); under capitalist conditions – structured by the *temporal* character of value and “global” competition amongst all those other producers of said commodities in the world market – its unique obsession with labor productivity is historically unique. The aim of capitalist production, in addition, lacks any concrete aim other than the quantitative augmentation of value (in money terms). This is what underlies Marx’s famous phrase about capitalism being about “accumulation for accumulation’s sake, production for production’s sake.” This phrase, which is often erroneously viewed as a moral condemnation of “capitalist greed,” is meant to state simply a structural imperative inherent to value relations.

¹⁶⁵ A clarification should be inserted here. In our following of Moore’s world-ecology, where the capitalist mode of production’s commodified value dimension (“*exploitation*”) can only be sustained through the *appropriation* of “free” (i.e., uncommodified) work/energy of “women, nature, and colonies,” the “free gifts” enjoyed by capital that stem from cooperation must be distinguished from those that Moore stresses, since they occur in the commodified sphere, but, as we emphasize, from the *use-value* side of the commodity form’s dual character.

¹⁶⁶ This was true of well-known examples, such as the “gigantic structures erected by the ancient Asiatics, Egyptians Etruscans, etc.” (Marx 1990, 451-452), but equally true of hunter-gatherer societies.

Second, despite the fact that cooperation (and the other *relative* surplus value strategies) are more productive and yield “free gifts” to capital, they have nonetheless been in the minority world-historically speaking. It is, to repeat, relations of *formal* subsumption that have been both dominant globally (at least until the past 40 years or so) and that are the essential basis of the capitalist system. The “free gifts” that wage-laborers relinquish to capitalists, then, occur only under relations of real subsumption, whose globally generalizing presence is very recent indeed. These relations are characterized by what today we would popularly be viewed as wage-based employment. But as Braverman (1974) reminds us:

[Wage-labor] has been the numerically dominant form for little more than a century, and this in only a few countries. In the United States, perhaps four-fifths of the population was self-employed in the early part of the nineteenth century. By 1870 this had declined to about one-third and by 1940 to no more than one-fifth; by 1970 only about one-tenth of the population was *self-employed*.¹⁶⁷

These facts attest to both the relative recency of wage-labor and to the speed at which its generalization occurs when “certain conditions” are present. As Marx writes, “[t]he socially productive power of labour develops as a free gift to capital *when the workers are placed under certain conditions*, and it is capital that places them under these conditions” (1990, 451). Based on the analysis up to this point, the reasons why relations of real subsumption have never been

¹⁶⁷ Here we witness, yet again, the ideological power of the “production in general” view, even for historically reflexive and critical scholars like Braverman. For terms like “self-employed” are prime examples of what Murray calls “ideal subsumption,” a term that Marx did in fact use but only sparingly due to its marginal role in his critique *of* political economy. In any case, Murray writes:

The term “self-employed” worker points to a type of ideal subsumption where a single person comes to regard herself as her own wage laborer and her own means of production as her capital. This sort of ideal subsumption reveals the unseen power that specific social forms have over the imaginations of participants in capitalist societies. (2016, 317)

This foreshadows our later argument about how the rise and generalization of capitalism’s social forms, especially under real subsumption, represents not just a shift in *material* “production techniques,” but also a revolutionary new “way of life.”

generalized globally should be clear enough. On the one hand, the generalization of the “certain conditions” that Marx alludes to (i.e., generalized proletarianization and commodification) have faced many “barriers” historically. Moreover, systemic reasons stemming from hegemonic core-periphery relations in the international division of labor also present obstacles for “developing” societies, as the world-ecological assumptions we outlined in Chapter 1 stress about the need for “developed” societies to procure the necessary “cheap” inputs to fuel their own regimes of real subsumption prefer dealing with “less developed” areas. Harvey (2010) recognizes this, though at a more grounded level and not from the world-ecological standpoint that we highlight here. Nevertheless, he makes some important observations. For example, he notes how, in the “early” stages of capitalism (understood not chronically, but according to the level of subsumption or “development”), the higher initial start-up costs for relations of real subsumption serve as “barriers to entry” for aspiring capitalists. This adds further support in accounting for the dominance of formal rather than real subsumption in world history. More important, however, is his point about how the degree to which relations of real subsumption structure a society vary over time and are not linear. He offers as an example of this relative “regression” back to relations of formal subsumption North America during the neoliberal era, triggered by the “global shift” (Dicken 2011) of much of manufacturing production to the non-West. “The revival of contract work, home working and the like in our times,” Harvey writes, “indicates that some reversion to formal kinds of subjection and subsumption is entirely possible” (2010, 173-174). Modernization theory’s protestations aside, all of this emphasizes Neil Smith’s (2008) point about how capitalism thrives *through* uneven development, not despite it.

Third, with the rise of real subsumption and cooperation as its fundamental basis, there emerges a new imperative to “manage” or “supervise” the work that goes on in the workshop.

Since “moments are the elements of profit” – a fact that underscores the historically specific *temporal* character of (capitalist) value – moreover, there emerges also the imperative to qualitatively alter the character of the labor process. This occurs in earnest with the rise of manufacture, to which we now turn.

Manufacture

With cooperative labor as its basis, manufacture represents a qualitatively new system of production, aimed chiefly at reorganizing the skills, tools, technologies and the like of the existing system so as to increase labor productivity. To be clear regarding the periodization of this shift in the South Korean case, this coincides most centrally with the so-called “light industry” phase of the period running roughly from 1964 to 1972, centered on the textile industry (e.g., Amsden 1989, 247-261).

Manufacture, according to Marx, takes two forms: heterogeneous and organic (1990, 461-470). In the former case, the process of reorganization involves bringing together in the same workshop “workers belonging to various independent handicrafts ... under the control of a single capitalist.” Marx offers the example of carriage making, where the various inputs – frame, upholstery, wheels and the like – are made separately and assembled on site (1990, 455). In the latter case, for which Marx gives the example of needle making, the labor process begins with raw materials that undergo a succession of steps until it emerges as the desired end product. It is important to note how both of these processes entail a *qualitative change* in the labor process, typically by decomposing into myriad partial operations what was once a total labor process undertaken by a single handicraftsman (1990, 457). Equally important, however, is that, regardless of which of the two forms manufacture takes, both share the fact that “whatever may

have been its particular starting point, its final form ... always [involves] a productive mechanism *whose organs are human beings*" (1990, 457).

The central aim of these reorganizations of the labor process under manufacture, as with all relative surplus value strategies, is to increase labor productivity, as defined in value's *temporal* terms. This is achieved through the careful – i.e., draconian – space-time reorganization of the labor process so as to decrease its “porosity” – that is, the number of “gaps” it contains where workers are resting or not laboring. Here we no longer see the activities of myriad individual wage-laborers working independently yet in cooperation; instead, what arises is the notion of the “collective worker”: where “the different stages of the process, previously successive in time, have become simultaneous and contiguous in space” (Marx 1990, 464). With time as the measure of value, decreasing the amount of “lost” time translates directly into greater labor productivity (Harvey 2010, 178).

Manufacture gives rise to the *detailed* division of labor within the capitalist workshop, something that should be clearly distinguished from the *social* division of labor in society. The former represents a historically specific form, or determinate abstraction, whereas the latter is a general abstraction evident in all societies (though in myriad forms). Braverman (1974, 50-51) summarizes the differences between these two in their capitalist incarnations as follows, emphasizing some of the negative consequences of the detailed division of labor that are the necessary costs of greater labor productivity:

The division of labor in society is characteristic of all known societies; the division of labor in the workshop is the special product of capitalist society. The social division of labor divides society among occupations, each adequate to a branch of production; the detailed division of labor destroys occupations considered in this sense, and renders the worker inadequate to carry through any complete production process. In capitalism, the social division of labor is enforced chaotically and anarchically by the market, while the workshop division of labor is imposed by planning and control. Again in capitalism, the products of the social division of labor are exchanged as commodities, while the results

of the operation of the detail worker are not exchanged within the factory as within a marketplace, but are all owned by the same capital. While the social division of labor subdivides society, the detailed division of labor subdivides humans, and while the subdivision of society may enhance the individual and the species, the subdivision of the individual, when carried on without regard to human capabilities and needs, is a crime against the person and against humanity.

This is a highly ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, manufacture achieves tremendous efficiency gains in terms of the production of material wealth (i.e., use-values) that, at least ostensibly, can be enjoyed by all members of a given society. On the other hand, its fragmentation of the labor process into simple partial operations renders the manufacturing worker into a “crippled monstrosity [that] suppress[es] a whole world of productive drives and inclinations, just as in the states of La Plata they butcher a whole beast for the sake of his hide or his tallow” (Marx 1990, 481).

Yet despite the significant transformative repercussions that the rise of manufacture entails, it inheres serious limitations in terms of maximizing labor productivity, as it is “unable to seize upon the production of society to its fullest extent, or to revolutionize that production to its very core” (Marx 1990, 490). These limitations stem from the fact, as mentioned above, manufacture remains constituted by the labor of the immediate producers. That is, it is dependent on, and limited to, the “strength, skill, quickness, and sureness of the workers” (Postone 1993, 331). As we will see in the next chapter, these limitations are transcended only under machine-based large-scale industry – real subsumption’s most fully developed form.

For now, though, a crucial observation needs to be emphasized regarding the points above. Although not yet complete under cooperation, the detailed division of labor and manufacture, these forms of real subsumption begin the process of gradually divorcing the mental and manual aspects of the labor process (which, again, will only be completed under large-scale industry). Marx (1990) summarizes this process as follows:

It is a result of the division of labour in manufacture that the worker is brought face to face with the intellectual potentialities of the material process of production as the property of another and as a power which rules over him. This process of separation starts in simple co-operation, where the capitalist represents to the individual workers the unity and the will of the whole body of social labour. It is developed in manufacture, which mutilates the worker, turning him into a fragment of himself. It is completed in large-scale industry, which makes science a potentiality for production which is distinct from labour and presses it into the service of capital. (482)

Given the revolutionary-yet-limited consequences of manufacture, Marx views it as an “intermediate stage” of the value (and capital) form(s) (Postone 1993, 334). We should clarify, however, what Marx means by this. Although he does seem to suggest in Volume 1 of *Capital* that most societies really subsumed under value relations will ultimately transition from cooperation, to manufacture, to large-scale industry, this should not be viewed as either a teleological or prescriptive view. As we have stressed throughout this work, creating the necessary class conditions for generalized value relations of real subsumption is not easily achieved. And when Marx speaks of “fully developed” value relations, he is speaking as much about the *contradictions* inherent in capital’s dualistic forms as he is about the productive dynamism of large-scale industry. From our world-ecological perspective, moreover, capitalism’s reliance upon a vast zone of appropriation in order for the narrow zone of value exploitation to occur means that, Rostovian dogma to the contrary, these relations are never generalizable. Marx (1990) seems to recognize this, at least in part, when he states:

Simple co-operation has always been, and continues to be, the predominant form in those branches of production in which capital operates on a large scale, but the division of labour and machinery play only an insignificant part . . . Co-operation remains the fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production, although in its simple shape it continues to appear as one particular form alongside the more developed ones. (454)

Therefore, although the sheer dynamism of fully developed regimes of real subsumption (such as those that the British and US hegemonic rises were based upon) understandably garner much of

the scholarly and popular attention, their experiences should be considered anything but normative, generalizable, or even desirable.

In sum, what we have been tracing throughout this work has been (South) Korea's transition to a regime of real subsumption: from the incompleteness of its capitalist revolution under Japanese rule – i.e., non-capitalist, hybrid, and/or formal subsumption relations – to the generalization of value relations in formal but, crucially, real subsumption by the 1970s. This long march to real subsumption occurred gradually, though extremely rapidly by world-historical standards, from approximately 1910 to 1980. We are now in a position to begin investigating some of the ambivalent ramifications of this transition, one typically viewed *one-sidedly* as an “economic miracle.”

The Ambivalence of Capitalist Modernity, or Real Subsumption

Capitalist revolutions properly so-called – such as those undergone in the West and a handful of non-Western nations during the post-World War II period (i.e., the “Asian Tigers”) – involve the rise of relations of real subsumption of labor under capital. This section emphasizes, however, how what are often considered mere shifts in economic production techniques have profound reverberating ramifications throughout society, something we alluded to above as a highly ambivalent phenomenon. For instance, all of the triumphalist talk about how capitalist development allowed for the transcendence of the rigid Joseon-era social hierarchy is true enough, as it ultimately gave way in postwar South Korea to a society of individuals endowed with certain rights and the opportunity to achieve upward social mobility. This narrative, however, is decidedly one-sided, overlooking the inescapably ambivalent ramifications of the generalization of capitalism's two-sided forms. The birth of (bourgeois) subjectivity, for example, internalizes this duality, as Althusser (1971) captures in the following remark:

In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means: (1) a subjectivity, a center of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) *a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission. ... [T]he individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e., in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection.* (182)

In this section, then, we lean into this ambivalence in various registers, rooting the liberatory aspects, temporally tyranny, and emancipatory limitations in South Korea's transition to a capitalist way of life by the late-1960s. This represents the penultimate phase of labor's subsumption under capital. It was a process, to repeat, that was triggered by the shocks of the colonial period, two major wars (World War II and the Korean War), land reform, proletarianization, and the commodification of daily life, all under the prodding, tutelage, and support of the US under the Cold War development project. In place of a society that had for centuries been rooted so firmly in "lineage and place, there now arrived the time of Thomas Hobbes's 'masterless men', *harbingers of anomie and modernity*" (Cumings 2005, 301-302).

Instituting a Capitalist Way of Life in South Korea

No traveler ever thought that Korea was a commercial country before the 1860s, *if not the 1960s*.

No ruling elite seemed so intent on squashing incentives to get rich via Adam Smith's presumably universal propensity to truck and barter. The Confucian hierarchy of scholar/farmer/artisan/ merchant, Gale wrote, "not only killed manufactures of all kinds, but has put the merchant in a class little better than a pariah. Though rolling in wealth, he may not lift up his eyes to the lettered sage, who, deeply steeped in the classic lore, knows not where tomorrow's meal will come from."

- Bruce Cumings (2005, 80)

Cumings's epigraphical contrast between the Joseon-era denigration of merchant activity – a view that only collapsed following the dissolution of *yangban* landed power, rise of mass proletarianization and commodification, and the wider regional/global context of post-World War II developmentalism – highlights the rapid consolidation of South Korea's capitalist revolution after the Korean War. The frenzied, yet still un-generalized, market activity in the

country's "gigantic urban markets" that began after 1953 quickly broadened and deepened throughout society in the coming decades, a process that is considered a progressive rationalization and secularization of socio-economic life (Cumings 2005, 308). The novelty of these monumental changes, however, has been largely unnoticed because they took place under the seemingly innocuous Cold War rhetoric of "development." And even when they are registered, it is only in a one-sided manner that stresses the *material* productivity derived from the use-value dimension of that peculiar social form that was increasingly mediating the nation's socio-ecological relations – the commodity – overlooking entirely the revolutionary imperatives of the dominant value-dimension. Far more than just new economic production techniques, narrowly conceived, South Korea's capitalist revolution entailed a radically new *way of life* for all of its citizens (Murray 2016; Bottomore 1983, 393-394).

Indeed, when one speaks of the sort of development that was touted by the US in the post-World War II era, what this refers to, at bottom, is the extent to which value relations have been generalized: *the more the better*, in ascending order from non-capitalist relations to those of hybrid, formal, and finally real subsumption. As a society climbs the "development ladder," individuals become increasingly subsumed under its forms and must negotiate their imperatives. For any society, the implications of this transition to a capitalist way of life are tremendous, but here we note how Cumings (1981) summarizes some of them as they apply directly to twentieth-century (South) Korea. The twin processes of proletarianization and commodification of social relations, beginning during the Japanese colonial era and accelerating markedly thereafter, begot the following ramifications in people's everyday lived experiences:

[They] break down a peasant's narrow focus on his own family, clan, and native village and enhance a horizontal direction of peasant interests. The possibility of a common struggle deriving from common interests would replace a family-based struggle for subsistence rights and sustenance. Peasants that formerly fought with each other for

marginal advantage, and that were tied to richer peasants and landlords through varieties of crisscrossing associations (through tradition, custom, or clan), would come to a broader sense of their situation and its remedies. An industrial clock would replace the older agrarian cycle, which had demanded a tyrannous routine only at various points in the year and made peasants extremely careful in the husbanding of scarce resources (it was this that made peasants “conservative,” not a putative peasant mentality). Likewise, the former emphasis on possessing a small plot of land as the basic security for the family – also imparting a conservative bias – would lessen as peasants lost their land and wound up in industry. And the weaker the tie to the land or the possibility of owning land, the more former peasants would be available for collective movements. (64)

This array of fundamental shifts in worldview stem directly from people’s subsumption under capitalism’s structuring forms: e.g., value, commodity, wage-labor, capital.

The imperatives flowing from value relations have, to be sure, direct ramifications within the process of production itself. This is especially so, as we will see in the next chapter, under the relations of real subsumption characteristic of large-scale industry. Nevertheless, the creation and functioning of a wage-workforce engaged in manufacture also, notes E.P. Thompson (1967), “entails a severe restructuring of working habits – new disciplines, new incentives, and a *new human nature* upon which these incentives could bite effectively” (57).

This signals a crucial point regarding the dialectical connections between the immediate production process and its wider societal ramifications throughout countless “non-economic” spheres of life. But note, Marx’s categorial critique of capital’s social forms reveals not some vulgar base-superstructure dichotomy where forms of consciousness can simply be read off from the “objective conditions” of material production. To repeat, Marx’s stress of the centrality of “production” refers *not* to the material process of “economic” production, narrowly conceived, but rather to the production of *(surplus) value*: that immaterial but objective form that wealth assumes under the unique conditions of capitalism, which is *temporally* (not materially) grounded. Marx shows, then, how the value categories “express the basic social mediations characteristic of capitalism, [and] delineate *forms of consciousness* as intrinsic moments of forms

of social being.” These “entail socially and historically determinate forms of subjectivity – for example, views of society and of self, systems of values, understandings of action, conceptions of the sources of social ills and possible ways of ameliorating them” (Postone 1993, 322). Being subsumed under capitalism’s value forms, furthermore, also has profound impacts on body politics: “people’s sense of their very bodies, of their capacities and creative energies, of the interrelation of self and things, and of self and others – all of these are utterly transformed by commodification” (McNally 2011, 15).

It is easier to apprehend the generalization of value relations and its inherent surplus value (“growth”) imperative, however, in some spheres of daily life than others. For example, South Korea’s education frenzy, particularly in the fields of science and technology that occurred after Park announced the Heavy and Chemical Industrialization plan in 1973 (the primary subject of the next chapter), is easy enough to link to the state’s industrial imperatives. Korea undoubtedly has a long history of stressing education, but certainly not of the instrumentalist and commodified sort that has been pursued for immediate ends – such as individual upward mobility, (GDP) growth, national competitiveness and the like.

But even in social spheres that seemingly fall outside of the value logic, the value imperative is quite discernible. For example, Moon’s *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (2005) stresses how the construction of a “modern” or “developed” nation entails much more than the “construction of factories, power plants, highways, and urban centers.” Rather, it involves a fundamental overhaul of the practices of daily life along “rational” lines. The definition of “rationalization” here, following Weber, entails catering quotidian

practices to suit the state's growth imperative.¹⁶⁸ Moon argues that this logic applied to the domestic sphere no less than to the factory floor or university classroom. She points out how the state seized upon the extant gendered division of labor – one stressing the cultural ideal of a woman as a “wise mother and good wife” – to achieve the imperative of the “rational management of the household.” Practices like cooking, cleaning, and shopping were all to be done in accordance with the needs of the industrializing economy, compensating within the domestic sphere for the draconian and austere policies of the “cheap labor regime” that brought it to fruition (Moon 2005, 89-90). As an example of the state's official rhetoric appealing to women on this issue, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs offered the following appeal to women in 1984:

To build a self-reliant economy, government, business, and households should collaborate. In particular, it is of foremost importance for the house-wife to manage the household economy frugally and to save for the accumulation of domestic capital. We should remember that the splendid economic growth of developed nations is based on their housewives' frugality and savings. ... From time immemorial the prosperity and decline of a family has depended on the housewife's hands. The desirable housewife who respects parents [in-law], raises children to be great people, keeps house thriftily, and supports her husband wisely will not change, although time may change. ... But contemporary society, which is an open society, requires the housewife to play a wide range of roles.... [She] cannot manage the household wisely without knowledge and information about the economy, pollution, consumer issues, and so on. (Moon 2005, 90)

On the other side of the gendered division of labor, the state mobilized men to be “martial and productive”: the former by means of a mandatory period of military service that is still in effect today; the latter by acquiescing to the new industrial work rhythms and disciplines outlined above, but also more generally in men's role as “family provider” (Moon 2005, 44-67).

¹⁶⁸ One ironic result of this “rationalization” and “secularization” of life in the South Korean case is that it occurred concomitantly with the spread of Christianity throughout the country, which was, quite understandably, viewed world-historically as the religion of “development.”

To repeat, though, what the gradual (yet rapid) institution of a capitalist way of life meant in the broadest sense was that the general aim of society, all of its capacities and energies, were to be mustered to achieve the goal of (surplus) value creation (or “growth”). We should stress the distinction between our focus here on the level-3 perspective of the general “laws of motion” of capital, though, and the usual scholarly (and popular) emphasis on levels 1 and 2. For (surplus) value – M-C-M’ – captures the overarching aim and movement of the *social totality*, but this is hardly how most people view society and their role in it. Given that the vast majority of people are not capitalists – i.e., not directly faced with the (surplus) value imperative – they go about their lives simply negotiating (consciously or unconsciously) within its dictates in a rather indirect way. More specifically, the majority of people are locked into a C-M-C circuit. This is a logic that, although being a “moment” in the grander M-C-M’ circuit, is entirely different in that it is aimed at the procurement of use-values to satisfy daily needs. “The circuit C-M-C remains of primary importance for the majority of people in capitalist society,” Postone writes, “who depend upon the sale of labor-power in order to buy means of consumption” (268n19). Due to the fetishistic character of capitalism’s forms, which conflate things with social relations, the historically specific aim of capitalist production (i.e., surplus value) appears to all as a self-evident “law of economy” that aims at satisfying people’s daily needs.

It is not difficult to see why this view is so widespread. As we stressed in Chapter 2 regarding labor as both a general and determinate abstraction, the fact that labor is a natural social necessity for the successful reproduction of any society masks the peculiar way that labor functions vis-a-vis capitalism’s unique social forms. This obfuscation is so powerful because, like all non-capitalist societies, labor is aimed overwhelmingly at concrete use-value production

and consumption, which remains the case even for the vast majority of people who live under the subsumption of capital's value categories. Postone (1993) captures this conflation:

Because the specific social mediating role played by commodity-producing labor is veiled, and such labor appears as labor per se, these two sorts of necessity are conflated in the form of an apparently valid transhistorical necessity: one must labor to survive. Hence, a form of social necessity specific to capitalism appears as the “natural order of things.” This apparently transhistorical necessity – that the individual's labor is the necessary means to their (or their family's) consumption – serves as the basis for a fundamental legitimating ideology of the capitalist social formation as a whole, throughout its various phases. (161)

An important result of this is that – despite the resistance that would-be capitalist elites or societies face in bringing about the preconditions for generalized value relations (namely, proletarianization) – once this is accomplished and capitalism's structuring social forms are ensconced and viewed as “natural necessities,” overt forms of coercion are typically no longer needed. So although there are certainly acts of direct domination, repression, and “exploitation” (in the popular moral sense of that word) that do take place,¹⁶⁹ most unconsciously engage in a form of *self-discipline* that accepts capitalism's value imperatives as apolitical and self-evident.

To be clear, the rise of this general context of value relations is what we are referring to when speaking of the institution of a *capitalist way of life* in South Korea. To state that the (surplus) value imperative represents the aim of the social totality is not at all controversial, given the obsession in “developed” and “developing” nations alike with GDP growth as the most important measure of societal well-being. The ways in which these value imperatives can be met, however, can take countless political-economic and institutional forms. At the lower levels of

¹⁶⁹ It is these acts, which take place at more concrete levels of generality (1 and 2) that “critical” scholars of the South Korean “miracle” narrative focus upon. Far more insidious and societally revolutionary, however, is the people's acquiescence to these value imperatives. And it was precisely these revolutionary changes that have gone unnoticed under the language of “development,” “modernization,” and “miracles.”

generality of lived experience, moreover, contingencies run amok; that is, one cannot “read off” from the general (surplus) value imperative any sort of deterministic conclusions about likely historical-geographical dynamics or outcomes. Herein lies the truth of Marx’s often-cited statement from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past” (Tucker 1978, 595).

What we are stressing here is the fact that, once capitalism’s value imperatives are ensconced in a society, the repercussions reverberate and structure relations in all walks of life (to varying degrees).¹⁷⁰ Moreover, as a society “rationalizes” itself along these lines, the harder it becomes to recognize the historical specificity of these imperatives. This leads Marx to make the following observation, one that is infinitely more apposite for our time than his:

The advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws. The organization of the capitalist process of production, once it is fully developed, breaks down all resistance.

Regarding the last point that speaks of how capitalist hegemony “breaks down all resistance,” notice that he is not referring to the supposed absence of daily capital-labor struggles, such as those that take place daily surrounding wage levels, working conditions, and the like. Rather – and this is crucial – Marx is emphasizing how resistance *to the forms themselves* ceases – i.e., those that structure and drive these other issues.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ For discussion of the wide societal impacts of South Korea’s “compressed modernization,” see Chang (1999) and Chang and Lee (2006).

¹⁷¹ This point is what separates the analysis here from the “critical” perspectives outlined in the Introduction, no matter how sympathetic we are to the issues they raise.

Another crucial point is that the capitalist class itself is just as, or even more, beholden to capital's value imperatives as the working class. Certainly, at lower levels of generality, individual capitalists typically enjoy distinct advantages over their working-class "others," such as a higher material standard of living and greater control over the production process. From the standpoint of the systemic logic of value, however, all atomized representatives of the capitalist class (be they individual entrepreneurs, corporations, states etc.) are also subsumed under value's imperatives, which they are required to serve as a means of maintaining their relatively privileged position. Put another way, the ostensible autonomy that capitalists enjoy is, systemically speaking, a mirage. As Postone (1993) notes:

[Society's central] *goal has escaped human control*: people cannot decide on value (or surplus value) as a goal, for this goal confronts them as an external necessity. They can decide only which products are most likely to maximize the (surplus) value obtained; the choice of material products as goals is a function of neither their substantive qualities, nor the needs to be fulfilled. Yet the "battle of the gods" – to borrow Weber's term – that does actually reign among the substantive goals *only appears to be pure relativism*; the relativism that prevents one from judging on substantive grounds the merits of one goal of production relative to another stems from the fact that, in capital-determined society, *all products embody the same underlying goal of production – value.*¹⁷² (182)

All of the above is what we mean, following Postone (1993), about how relations of real subsumption involve an "*abstract* form of social domination" for all who live under the sway of capitalism's value forms.

A discussion of capitalism as a way of life should include at least some mention of the ideological aspects it involves. Recall the point above about how the social forms of capitalism beget a way of social being, or a form of subjectivity. Lukacs (1971, 27) echoes this point:

The capitalist separation of the producer from the total process of production, the division of the process of labor into parts at the cost of the individual humanity of the worker, the

¹⁷² Postone's powerful diagnosis here of "late" capitalism's dialectic of *transformation* and *reconstitution*, to be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, complements Harvey's (1989) own influential critique of postmodernism.

atomisation of society into individuals who simply go on producing without rhyme or reason, *must all have a profound influence on the thought, the science and the philosophy of capitalism.*

For example, in addition to an adoption of a Newtonian perspective of nature – i.e., viewing space as flat, time as linear, and nature as external, limitless, and quantifiable (Moore 2015’s “abstract social nature”) – the developmental era in South Korea witnessed two broad cultural-ideological shifts to what Lie (1998) labels “egalitarianism” and “materialism” (39-42). Both of these “modern ideals,” in essence, stem from the generalization of capitalism’s social forms, in response to the macro shifts summarized earlier in this section by Cumings (1981, 64). In the former case, the formal equality of all (atomized) commodity producers and owners in the sphere of exchange (i.e., market) replaces the rigid social hierarchies of the Joseon era – that is, value acts as a “radical leveller” (Marx 1990, 229). In the latter case, compensatory consumerism fills the cultural and moral void that emerges as a result of the “thingification” of life that is inherent to commodified social relations.

The ambivalence of these tectonic shifts will be taken up in greater detail in the following sections. For capitalist revolutions, on the one hand, undoubtedly offer greater personal freedom; yet it does so from within a socio-economic “process independent of the producers themselves” (Marx 1990, 202-203), one that represents a “unique form of social interdependence” (Postone 1993, 148).

The Liberatory Aspects of the Proletarian Condition

In most Marxist discussions of “free” labor, the much-vaunted freedom to choose one’s conditions of employment is often “refuted” by citing Marx’s famous discussion of the “dual freedom” of wage-labor. That is, on the one hand, workers are “free” to sell their labor-power to whomsoever they deem most desirable; on the other hand, unlike peasant proprietors they are

also “free” of any direct access to the means of subsistence. Crucially, by extension of being “unencumbered by any means of production of their own” (Marx 1990, 874), the fruits of their labor are the property of their employer. While not denying the significance of this class relation – indeed, it forms the underlying basis and focus of the critique attempted in this work – there are various progressive aspects to the wage condition, especially when contrasted with the sorts of fixed, seemingly “natural” social hierarchies of various world cultures (e.g., caste in India).

Marx admits as much in detail in a subsection (1019-1038) of his Appendix to the first volume of *Capital*, entitled “Results of the Immediate Process of Production.” As he stresses repeatedly throughout *Capital*, within the *sphere of exchange* (i.e., marketplace) there is perfect *formal* equality between capitalists and wage-laborers: one meets the other respectively as buyer and seller of commodities, and they do so on the basis of a non-coercive (contractual) agreement. This formal equality often imparts in wage-laborers, first of all, a sense of freedom. Each voluntarily negotiates both the terms of his/her employment and how to dispose of the wages he/she has earned, while also affording the opportunity to enjoy a host of use-values that would have been previously unavailable to them, or (potentially) in quantities greater than before.

Secondly, the proletarian condition can also instill a sense of responsibility and respect in workers, as the dissolution of previous relations of direct subordination requires that workers take “responsibility” for, and encourages them to “pride” in, the successful maintenance of both themselves and their dependents. Moreover, once a worker exits the sphere of production and is transformed into a “consumer,” their possession (through wage labor) of money within the context of countless capitalists vying for their business lends a (begrudging?) degree of respect towards them by capitalists.

Finally, within the working class itself, the existence of wage differentials gives each the sense that they are in control of their destiny and that they are being paid based on their employer's recognition of their individual talents, the bases for today's widespread notion of "social mobility." These "freedoms" enjoyed by workers within the spheres of exchange, consumption, and politics are fatally undermined by the collective worker's subordination *as a class* by virtue of their severance from access to the means of production. So long as the peculiarities of capitalism are understood as transhistorically valid economic laws, however, this will not be recognized by the vast majority of wage-laborers.¹⁷³ Moreover, the historically specific *temporal* grounding of value has profound repercussions, as we take up in the next section.

Value's Iron Cage: Time as Abstract Form of Domination

Having outlined in Chapter 2 the central features of the historically specific form that wealth takes under capitalism – value – we can now zero in a bit on the dynamics and ramifications of its temporal character. A more robust reckoning with the socio-ecological contradictions of value's (and, by extension, capital's) temporal character will be undertaken in the next chapter, in our discussion of "fully developed" relations of large-scale industry. For now, however, we focus on the temporal character of value as an *abstract form of social domination*, both inside the workshop and in society more generally, as well as the acceleration of the temporal rhythms inherent to relations of real subsumption under the detailed division of labor and manufacture.

We recall here a central tenet from the Chapter 2 discussion of value – i.e., that it is not labor-time in the abstract (a general abstraction); rather, it is "*socially necessary* labor-time," which is both historically specific and ever-changing (a determinate abstraction). Marx defines

¹⁷³ The discussion above draws extensively from Murray (2016, 305-306).

socially necessary labor-time as “the labour-time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society” (1990, 129). Under generalized value relations, then, the labor of each wage-worker represents only an “individual unit” of the “total labour-power of society, which is manifested in the values of the world of commodities” (*ibid.*). Consequently, the value of any commodity is *not* the labor-time that went into that specific labor process; instead, “[w]hat exclusively determines the magnitude of value of any article is therefore the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour-time socially for its production” (*ibid.*). In more concrete terms, since (under capitalist conditions) a worker produces commodities with the express purpose of exchanging them in a market, the value received at any time is the *social average* of all of those commodity producers engaging in that line of production. Consequently, producers must keep pace with the generalized average efficiency – again, as measured in temporal terms – lest they fail to receive the full value of the commodities they produce. What socially necessary labor-time represents for all of those atomized individuals subsumed under value, therefore, is a “form of social domination constituted by commodity-determined labor,” Postone argues, which represents a ‘historically determinate’ social necessity, over and against transhistorical, ‘natural’ social necessity.” It is a general, though constantly shifting (usually accelerating), temporal norm to which all must conform – in short: “*time becomes necessity*” (1993, 191) in a world-historically unprecedented way.

Following the theme of this section, the implications of this are thoroughly ambivalent. There arises, for instance, a tension between the freedom of the individual wage-workers/citizens and society’s (surplus) value imperative (i.e., “growth”). Ironically, the centrality of labor to capitalism – as a unique *form of social mediation* that allows its countless participants to “speak”

to each other indirectly through commodity exchange – also serves as the ground of its own domination. As Postone points out: “When labor mediates and constitutes social relations, it becomes the central element of a totality that dominates individuals – who, nevertheless, are free from relations of personal domination” (1993, 192). So although there still exist myriad instances of maltreatment at the everyday level in workshops etc., the *general* form of domination within a society subsumed under value relations no longer takes the form of direct compulsion at the systemic level.

Within the realm of material production, these temporal pressures are exerted all the way down the line, from individual manufacturing workers to inter-company and inter-state rivalries. The rise of “efficient management” aimed at increasing labor productivity, which arose concomitantly with relations of real subsumption, demonstrates value’s temporal imperatives clearly enough. E.P. Thompson (1967), for instance, summarizes these shifts: “In all these ways – by the division of labour; the supervision of labour; fines; bells and clocks; money incentives; preachings and schoolings; the suppression of fairs and sports – new labour habits were formed, and a new time-discipline was imposed” (90).¹⁷⁴

These features and dynamics of relations of real subsumption within the detailed division of labor characteristic of manufacture are well-known (Braverman 1974), but it is worth offering a snapshot of them from Upton Sinclair’s description from an early-twentieth-century meatpacking plant in his muckraking novel, *The Jungle* (1906). The following provides a sense

¹⁷⁴ Thompson goes on to state, however, how this was a long, protracted process: “It sometimes took several generations (as in the Potteries), and we may doubt how far it was ever fully accomplished: irregular labour rhythms were perpetuated (and even institutionalized) into the present century, notably in London and in the great ports” (90). This emphasizes two notable things: 1) just how remarkably rapid the transition occurred in the South Korean case (under Park in the 1960s); and how the increasingly alienating work methods evoke forms of resistance that bar them from ever completely taking over.

of “developmental” continuity, from the US’s own generalization of relations of real subsumption that gained a nation-wide presence by the first half of the twentieth century, to South Korea’s “late” development of these same sorts of relations a half-century later. In describing the “processing” (i.e., slaughtering) of cattle via the so-called “disassembly line” (the forerunner and inspiration for Henry Ford’s later assembly line), Sinclair writes:

The manner in which they did this was something to be seen and never forgotten. They worked with furious intensity, literally upon the run – at a pace with which there is nothing to be compared except a football game. It was all highly specialized labor, each man having his task to do; generally this would consist of only two or three specific cuts, and he would pass down the line of fifteen or twenty carcasses, making these cuts upon each. First there came the “butcher,” to bleed them; this meant one swift stroke, so swift that you could not see it – only the flash of the knife; and before you could realize it, the man had darted on to the next line, and a steam of bright red was pouring out upon the floor. ... The carcass hung for a few minutes to bleed; there was no time lost, however, for there were several hanging in each line, and one was always ready. It was let down to the ground, and there came the “headsman,” whose task it was to sever the head, with two or three swift strokes. Then came the “floorman,” to make the first cut in the skin; and then another to finish ripping the skin down the center; and then half a dozen more in swift succession, to finish the skinning. After they were through, the carcass was again swung up; and while a man with a stick explained the skin to make sure that it had not been cut and another rolled it up and tumbled it through one of the inevitable holes in the floor, the beef proceeded on its journey. (42-43)

Depressingly familiar as these methods are, we now shift focus to examine the wider societal impacts of value’s unique form of temporal coercion.

To get a sense of just how profound the rise of value relations was on (South) Korean culture, it is helpful to contrast pre-capitalist and capitalist culture for their daily temporal rhythms and virtues, which managed to be overturned in mere decades. In Joseon-era Korea, and indeed up until the landed elite’s demise after World War II, its representatives – the *yangban* – were popularly conceived as espousing society’s highest virtues. Cumings (2005) explains this “traditional-versus-modern” clash as follows:

To be a *yangban* male thus was to be everything and give nothing: not military service, not labor, not even taxes. To work with one’s hands was beneath him; to possess a lot of

slaves, a mark of his station in life. To progressive Westerners in the nineteenth century, Korean *yangban* lacked every modern virtue: they seemed idle, lazy, profligate, totally lacking in the enterprising spirit and work ethic that (they thought) built the West. But to Koreans they were the virtuous, the men of reason and contemplation, the exemplars of ethical behavior and good governance, people to look up to. (56)

How quickly things changed.

South Korea's ascension onto the value treadmill, moreover, had tremendous impacts on everyday people's sense of time. Indeed, there arose a general acceleration of daily rhythms and a sense of being "short on time" that has never seemed to go away. Following the rise of Japan, the "Asian Tigers," and the Southeast-Asian "cubs" (Stubbs 2005) from the 1960s to 1980s, this shift in time sensibility swept the Pacific region, becoming the new "common sense." Even in China, following the Sino-Soviet split and the PRC's pro-market reforms under Deng Xiaoping (Meisner 1996), this was felt. An interesting cultural artifact capturing this shift is Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir, *The Woman Warrior*, published in the same year as Mao's death (1976). In the passage below, the writer reacts to the words of her mother, a Chinese emigre, about the contrasting working rhythms and temporality between her old life in China¹⁷⁵ and her new one in the US. Her words, though technically about China, capture well the fundamental shift on these fronts from pre-colonial to "modern" South Korea:

I have worked too much [in the US]. Human beings don't work like this in China. Time goes slower there. Here we have to hurry ... I can't sleep in this country because it doesn't shut down for the night. Factories, canneries, restaurants — always somewhere working through the night. It never gets done all at once here. Time was different in China. One year lasted as long as my total time here; one evening so long, you could visit your women friends, drink tea, and play cards at each house, and it would still be twilight. It even got boring, nothing to do but fan ourselves. Here midnight comes and the floor's not swept, the ironing is not ready, the money's not made. I would still be young if we lived in China. (Murray 2016, 164-165)

¹⁷⁵ She is referring, to be clear, to life in the pre-Deng Xiaoping era – that is, before China underwent its post-Mao market-friendly reforms of c.1980.

Things in China would soon take a stark turn of their own, but the passage above discloses the lightning speed at which society's overturned centuries-old practices and beliefs within the cauldron of Cold-War competition of the development and globalization projects (McMichael 2017).

Underlying these transformations in cultural values and experience of temporality were the sorts of macro-structural changes that we have been emphasizing throughout this work: commodification, proletarianization etc. It is also important to note the interconnected character of these myriad phenomena. The society-wide implications of the shift to generalized value relations was directly related to the mass proletarianization and commodification processes that both inserted South Korean agriculture into the world market, yet in an undermined way due to the state's "benign neglect" of it and the cheap food flooding in courtesy of US aid. The cumulative impact of these shifts was to drain the countryside of its younger inhabitants and undermine subsistence ways of ensuring security. Whole family networks began to rely more and more on the wages procured from urban workers, both male and female. Koo (2001) highlights this tension between the rising centrality of the commodified sphere – namely, wages sent back to one's hometown as remittances – and the family network and traditional village life more generally as a (shrinking) safety net able to attenuate the precarity of mass proletarianization. By the time of the Park era, the southern half of the peninsula was "a society where there was hardly any security net outside that formed by family and kinship ties, [and] to lose a job meant losing the only source of one's livelihood as well as a major basis for one's social identification" (240).

Here within the iron cage of generalized value relations, then, we have a seeming paradox. On the one hand, atomized wage-laborers, who have been cut off from direct access to the means of subsistence, actually *depend on* being "exploited" (i.e., hired) by a capitalist, since

their embeddedness within the C-M-C circuit means that wages are the primary means through which they meet their daily needs. On the other hand, the very act of engaging in wage-labor on a daily, yearly, and, ultimately, lifelong basis only serves to reinforce the very relations that are subordinating (i.e., *subsuming*) them. This is a well-known contradiction, but it is the notions of “common sense” temporalities that flow therefrom that we are interested in here, alongside the self-disciplining that it entails. The ideas that, although set and reset historically through struggles amongst various fractions of society, emerge are typically in line with the general societal aim of (surplus) value creation: from the state-imposed number of mandatory years of schooling a child receives; to customary norms regarding when one should complete university, start a career, get married, have children, retire etc. Some of these considerations undoubtedly predate the rise of value relations, but they nevertheless took on new qualitative forms. All of this is to internalize a peculiar form of temporality specific to the requirements of capitalism, and all members of societies subsumed under capital’s social forms partake in this to varying extents. Harvey echoes this in his comments on the struggle over the length of the working day, perhaps the most obvious temporal battle between capital and wage-labor: “To be a ‘normal’ person is to accept a certain kind of spatiotemporal discipline convenient to a capitalist mode of production. ... [But] this isn’t normal at all – it’s a social construct that arose during this historical period in this particular way and for these particular reasons” (2010, 149). From the dominant production in general view of economic life, however, these temporal disciplines could not seem more natural or apolitical to most people.

A word should be injected here regarding the role of competition in all of this. What Marx refers to as the “coercive laws of competition” throughout the three volumes of *Capital* is what drives the temporal speed up. This occurs most obviously between rival firms in specific

industries, but the repercussions of competition reverberate throughout society – e.g., students competing amongst each other for university entrance, scholarships, jobs etc. Two points need to be noted here, however. First, as Marx states in the *Grundrisse* (1973): “Competition *executes* the inner laws of capital; makes them into compulsory laws towards the individual capital [and citizen], *but it does not invent them. It realizes them*” (752; emphasis added). For Marx, competition functions – much like those mainstays of today’s mainstream economics, supply and demand – as mere enforcers of capital’s value imperatives; it does not create those imperatives.

Second, it is through capitalism’s coercive laws of competition – where “every person is pitted against each other in a state of quasi-war” (at various scales) (Watts 2014, 403) – that the political, economic, cultural, and military hegemony of those societies that have been subsumed to the greatest extent under capitalism’s social forms derives – that is, vis-a-vis “less developed” societies. Again, from the *Grundrisse*, “[c]ompetition is the mode generally in which capital secures the victory of its mode of production” (1973, 730; Harvey 2013, 27). We see here again why, despite the fact that they can never be in the majority, the relations of real subsumption of capitalism’s most recent hegemons – nineteenth-century Britain and twentieth-century US (Arrighi 1994) – are so admired, and why societies attempt to emulate them.

In any case, the issues raised above shed light on a specific South Korean cultural expression of value temporal iron cage: so-called “*bbali bbali* culture” (빨리/빨리 문화), translated roughly as “hurry hurry.” Anyone who has spent more than a few days in South Korea will hear this phrase countless times. This is typically viewed in culturally reductionist terms, expressing a penchant for hard work that South Koreans possess “by nature.” This is the case despite the fact that, as we saw earlier, the centuries-dominant Joseon virtue was one of slowness, deliberate contemplation and the like. Interestingly, although the fact most South

Koreans will complain about their increasingly time-strapped lives, they nonetheless will accept the “*bbali bbali*” trend as a badge of honor, as the necessary (if lamentable) basis for their economic “miracle.”¹⁷⁶ As one Westerner observed in *The Irish Times* after spending several years teaching in the country: “Korea is a fiercely fast-paced country. Everyone is in a rush, everyone is stressed, everyone is looking out for themselves. It’s exhausting to be around” (Maguire 2016).¹⁷⁷ Jang and Kim (2013) refer to this generalized competitive pressure and accelerating sense of time as “the Red Queen’s race.” Speaking in the context of the education frenzy that has swept the country over the past three decades, where students will commonly study from 6:00 am until well after 10:00 pm at expensive academic institutes, they describe the “Red Queen’s race” as a phenomenon “where everyone works hard but remains in the same place” (94). That is, one has to focus one’s efforts obsessively on academic performance so as just not to fall behind. A truer encapsulation of the (value) treadmill metaphor would be hard to find. Living in such a “burnout society” (Han 2015), these pressures exert significant socio-psychological pressures, especially on South Korea’s youth, who currently face dwindling job prospects despite their Herculean efforts.

Cho (Han) Hae-Joang, a cultural anthropologist at Yonsei University in Seoul, summarizes the profound changes listed above, ones that she personally lived through:

¹⁷⁶ This reading of the rise of “*bbali bbali*” culture” is fetishistic in the extreme, offering as it does a derivative cultural expression as the explanation for the structural transformations that actually gave rise to it.

¹⁷⁷ This phenomenon has also yielded, to be fair, more lighthearted moments. For example, a Korean man recalls to his Western friend an incident from a trip that he and his wife took to Rome:

We were on a group tour with some other Koreans. The security guards at the Colosseum saw that we were obviously Korean, and started shouting “*bbali! bbali!*” and waving their hands frantically in the air. They had heard this expression so often from other Koreans that they were sure it was a greeting, that it meant “hello.” (Ruffin, 2010)

The “*bbali bbali*” pressures, it seems, cannot even be put on hold while on vacation.

The people of South Korea have been able to achieve an economic miracle by obeying these [“developmental”] imperatives and have allowed their everyday existence to be regulated by those imperatives. I do not think that these conditions are unique to South Korea. Rather, I think that this is a phenomenon common to many Third World nations, or even First or Second World nations that had to go through the compressed “rush-to” development; societies that underwent modernization while unable to make their own histories. I am dreaming of the days when I will be able to manage my own time and space, when I will be more imaginative and caring. ... Indeed, *I want to know who are the time managers that make my life so hectic.* (2000, 67)

Although erroneously framing capitalism’s “*bbali bbali*” imperatives as most applicable to “developing” nations, ones which are actually starkest under “developed” regimes of real subsumption, she nevertheless puts her finger on all that is lost in the “rush to development” (Hart-Landsberg 1993), as well as the abstract form of domination that structures hers and seemingly everyone else’s lives.

Worker Resistance and the Establishment of a “Modest Magna Carta”

One of the ironies that stems from the dual freedom of wage-labor under capitalism is that, on the one hand, workers enjoy a heightened sense of freedom relative to more directly coercive modes of production (i.e., slavery or feudalism). That is, they are free to exercise their right to geographical mobility and are free to sell their labor-power to whomever they wish under the most favorable conditions they can find. It was this ability for South Korean peasants to shake off the yoke of landlordism that was in large part responsible for their acquiescence to the revolutionary changes that swept the country after 1945. On the other hand, these same workers were “free” from direct access to the means of subsistence that they and their ancestors had enjoyed for centuries if not millennia, access that safeguarded them from potential starvation and allowed them to enjoy a high degree of autonomy within their labor process (for these workers, not yet integrated into the world market, were not even formally subsumed by capital, though to be sure surplus *product* was appropriated by the landlords). In short, the equality that they

enjoyed in the postwar period relative to their social “superiors” (the burgeoning bourgeois class) was based on a formal legal equality in the sphere of exchange (and later in the political and consumption spheres), one that obfuscated their complete subordination in the sphere of production. So yes, workers were free to enter into a labor contract with whichever capitalist they deemed most preferable (and willing), but they could no longer choose not to sell their labor-power for fear of being punished by the “whip of hunger.”

In this context, the second phase of a Polanyian double movement was inevitable, as workers eventually bound together to establish the country’s first trade unions in order to protect themselves from the harsher aspects of their new proletarian condition (especially while living under a dictatorship that was extremely hostile to worker organization). These sorts of actions were necessary because, despite enjoying formal equality in the sphere of exchange, within the sphere of production capital and labor had diametrically opposed interests. On the one side, capitalists insisted upon maximizing the use-value of the commodity they had purchased (i.e., labor-power) under contractually free conditions by working the laborers as long and as hard as possible. On the other side, workers objected that they too had a right not to have their health or safety threatened, or, worse, the length of their working lives shortened, by laboring under such long and intense conditions. As Marx famously noted in his discussion of the historic struggle over the length of the working day in 19th-century Britain, in situations such as these where one right is pitted against an equal right, “*force decides*” (Marx 1990, 344). Marx asserted, therefore, that:

for “protection” against the serpent of their agonies, the workers have to put their heads together and, as a class, compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful social barrier by which they can be prevented from selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by voluntary contract with capital. In place of the pompous catalogue of the “inalienable rights of man” there steps the *modest Magna Carta of the legally limited*

working day, which at last makes clear when the time which the workers sells is ended, and when his own begins (1990, 416).

This is indeed what the South Korea working class did through its violent struggles with both the state and capital over a thirty-plus year process that has been detailed in dozens of accounts by scholars both inside and outside of Korea, virtually all of which celebrate the hard-won gains of the workers.

While not intending to belittle the suffering or struggles of this legion of male and female workers, the assumption held by Korea(n) scholars, activists, and laypeople alike that any gains achieved vis-a-vis capital *in the short term* somehow represent a weakening of capitalism *as a system of domination* is highly misguided. A counter-intuitive fact about capitalism is that individual capitalists rarely act in ways that are beneficial to the capitalist class as a whole. Regarding the popular American opinion that sees the state's and capital's interests as antagonistic, the history of capitalism reveals that the state acts in ways that actually stabilizes the system through a host of actions like safeguarding private property, redistributing income, extending credit and bailouts when necessary etc. So while it may appear to *individual* capitalists that the state acts in ways that hinder profitability from their particular standpoint, the state's range of vision is much longer term and is concerned with the stability and reproduction of the capitalist *system* in general. Moreover, it is crucial to note that when Marx invokes the notion of the working class achieving a "modest Magna Carta" that includes a fixing of the length of the working day and certain labor rights he is stressing how *the working class itself* is an instrument for the stabilization of capitalism's volatile character that derives from the aggregation of individual actions of capitalists guided by their short-term, myopic interests.

The take-home point of all of this is that the various forms of class struggle that the working class engages in "against" capital – i.e., demanding higher wages, greater safety

standards, shorter working hours, environmental protections etc. – actually help to *sustain* the capitalist mode of production by helping to curb its more self-destructive tendencies (Harvey 2010, 158). Celebrating the achievements of labor over capital is, then, a double-edged sword. For it triggers both legitimate gains in the standard of living of working-class people, but in so doing ensures that the system that inevitably creates these problems in the first place continues to thrive. It is this ironic conclusion, that informs Postone’s (1993) stress on how Marx’s critique of political economy (i.e., capitalism) is decidedly not one that proceeds from the *standpoint of* labor (i.e., celebrating proletarian labor), but is rather a critique *of proletarian labor* as the central mediator of political-economic relations under capitalism. The central political mission of the working-class therefore – a historically specific group whose central role is restricted to capitalism only – should not be the championing of itself but its self-abolition.¹⁷⁸

Conclusion

The past few centuries have witnessed an explosion in the reach of capitalist social relations, as its successive hegemony have ventured further and further afield to enmesh earth’s countless societies into the web of the world market. It was Barrington Moore’s (1966) key contribution to differentiate between how the world’s various “peasant” (i.e., pre-capitalist) societies responded to the bourgeois pressures they encountered. This has been an implicit theme of our investigation all along. Rather than concern ourselves with Moore’s “dictatorship versus democracy” binary, however, we have made use of Marx’s distinctions between the relative degree of penetration of capital’s value forms: hybrid, formal, and real subsumption. The story that we traced over the

¹⁷⁸ It should be acknowledged that, in terms of political strategies for achieving this overthrow, Harvey (2010, 158-159) is agnostic as to whether this can be achieved through what can only be called a (oxymoronic) *revolutionary reformism* in the sense of struggling to reduce the length of the working day to such an extent that either: a) capitalism collapses; or b) the proletarian conditions itself is more or less transcended.

past several chapters, then, has centered on the rise of relations of real subsumption in South Korea, which emerged during the second half of the 1960s alongside the switch to export-led development in the “light industries.”

This transition had deep structural, conflictual, and contingent origins, however, as well as contradictory dynamics. The cutting edge of the process was primitive accumulation, through which the processes of proletarianization, mass commodification, and privatization of property were generalized. These fundamental shifts – the *sine qua non* of capitalist development – have gone largely unnoticed due to the production in general view that sees nothing unique about capitalism and its structuring social forms. Hamilton represents a key exception to this collective myopia:

The process of primitive accumulation in South Korea, which began under the Japanese, was one of separating labour from the land and reconstituting it as an industrial working class. ... The importance of the process lay not in the amassing of fortunes by individuals or firms – although there was plenty of that – *but in the creation of conditions in which capital could be accumulated through industrial production using wage-labour.* (1986, 29; emphasis added)

But why is this important to stress, if it ostensibly represents the “natural” path that all “developing” nations should aspire to achieve? It is precisely because of the world-historical rarity of this occurring in non-Western countries, due to specific combinations of internal and external factors, that have prevented full-scale capitalist transitions from taking place.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Cumings is another important exception, though neither he nor Hamilton discuss capital’s social forms. Writing against the sort of teleological certainty of capitalism’s ability to “create a world in its own image,” as found in *The Communist Manifesto*, he argues as follows: “Marx notes that “the advance of industry ... replaces the isolation of laborers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association.” Unfortunately for Marx’s world view, however, *a revolutionary combination occurs only rarely* and depends not only on a concentration of laborers but also on the adaptability and resiliency of the owning classes” (1981, 64). We have seen that, absent a “resilient owning class,” it was the state that stepped in to fill this void, as well as nurture this class that had hitherto been absent.

We have argued that certain key factors explain South Korea's successful capitalist revolution. The first was land reform. Capitalist social relations of real subsumption require the capital–wage-labor relation; however, the overwhelming majority of peasant-based societies have avoided this due to a combination of “peasant” resistance and the wishes of the landed elites (who would understandably prefer to maintain their privileged societal position via the rentierism and the like). Korea also had a centuries-old landed elite (i.e., *yangban* class), yet their power and legitimacy was eroded as a result of Japanese colonialism and through struggles over the land question between 1945 and 1953. The bourgeois land reform that took place, as Lie argues (1998), “unleashed massive structural changes”: where the *yangban*, having started off in a privileged position that that they managed to maintain as a result of their collaboration with the Japanese, migrated to positions within the business or the bureaucracy; tenant farmers became “small holders”; yet the state's “benign neglect” of agriculture meant that a rural exodus took place that flooded the burgeoning urban centers with new proletarians (164-165). The absence of any strong ruling class, moreover, allowed Park's military junta to seize political power, which it proceeded to consolidate through a mutually beneficial partnership with the nation's nascent capitalist class during the export-led push of the 1960s (Chibber 1999).

The second general set of factors allowing for South Korea's capitalist revolution, strongly linked to the first, were (geo-)political. Within (South) Korea, the radical (labor) sentiment that peaked during the late 1940s was subsequently crushed by the end of the Korean War, so that “working-class” opposition to the state's dictates was drastically weakened by the Park-era's developmental push of the 1960s (Koo 2001, 23-25). The chaos and flux of the post-land reform agrarian situation only served to undermine opposition to the state's developmental plans, as the sheer number of new proletarians fought amongst one another for the few

opportunities that were on offer in those early days. Externally, in the regional and global spheres, there was of the overwhelming Cold War-induced support for South Korea provided by its Japanese and US allies. A deluge of aid, military support, technological and economic guidance, access to credit, open markets and the like all served to ensconce capital's web of value forms at breakneck speed. It is important to note how the "antediluvian forms" (e.g., money, markets etc.) that are at once capital's necessary yet insufficient (pre-)conditions grab ahold of these conditions and, in dialectical fashion, reshape them in such a way as to serve capital's value imperatives. Marx (1973) captures this reversal as follows:

These [antediluvian] presuppositions, which originally appeared as conditions of its becoming ... now appear as results of its own realization, reality, as *posited by it – not as conditions of its arising, but as results of its presence*. It no longer proceeds from presuppositions in order to become, but rather it is itself presupposed, and proceeds from itself to create the conditions of its maintenance and growth. (460)¹⁸⁰

Through this process, we see the origins of the production in general view of economic life that predominates under capitalism, where its unique origins and dynamics appear to be self-evident and apolitical.

The points above reveal how South Korea was able to undertake its capitalist revolution, but in itself does not explain why, or on what basis, it was successful on these terms. Certainly, Japanese and US support was crucial, but this does not demonstrate how the Park regime made strategic use of these advantages. As we outlined in an earlier section, it was the rise of South Korea's "cheap labor regime" that undergirded its capitalist success, alongside fortuitous timing vis-a-vis the decolonizing world. The basis of this regime was, on the one hand, the flood of proletarian labor (as outlined above), but crucially South Korea's receipt of massive amounts of

¹⁸⁰ For how this process has functioned with respect to money – i.e., capital's disciplining of the myriad forms of pre-capitalist money along the lines conducive to its own functioning – see Harvey (2010, 32).

food aid from the US via PL 480. Following the world-ecological tenet that cheap food is one of four (Moore 2015) – or seven (Patel and Moore 2017) – prerequisites for capitalist dynamism, the Park regime had bequeathed to it an unprecedented alignment of factors that created the cheap labor regime through which the “economic miracle” was achieved.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, none of this would have been possible without the revolutionary structural changes to (South) Korea’s class structure from c.1910-1970.

This process, however, was anything but an unqualified success.¹⁸² To be sure, many have dampened the triumphalist miracle narrative based on the sorts of issues outlined in Chapter 1 of this work, pointing out such things as its uneven, exploitative, gendered, and ecologically destructive character. None of this is denied; however, our emphasis has been on the ambivalence that stems from the dualistic character of the social forms that structure the South Korean regime. In short, although its postwar economic revolution did dissolve the rigid social hierarchy of the Joseon era and its forms of overt, direct domination, the country’s rapid subsumption under capitalism’s value forms led to the rise of an abstract form of domination. It also limited the nation’s “emancipatory” political-economic options to those that do not in any way threaten the systemic (value) imperatives themselves.

¹⁸¹ Usually, cheap food is required in order to facilitate non-food-related consumption, in accordance with Engel’s Law. In the South Korean case, however, cheap food was used expressly for the purposes of keeping the value of labor-power (i.e., wages) low. The sorts of compensatory consumerism that has functioned so effectively in other “developed” nations (i.e., regimes of real subsumption) had to be postponed until the nation’s working class could muster sufficient strength vis-a-vis the state-capital nexus by the late 1980s.

¹⁸² This is where we depart from the countless studies that also stress the significance of land reform. In those works, the South Korean land reform was a wholly positive thing, dissolving as it did landed power and giving “land to the tiller.” This is true enough, but the subsequent dynamics that it helped bring about were far more contradictory than is ever appreciated.

We will continue to explore this theme of ambivalence in the following chapter, focusing in particular on the socio-ecological tensions inherent to its “full development” after 1973 to an *industrialized* regime of real subsumption via the rise of large-scale industry.

Chapter 6 Accelerating the Value Treadmill: The Socio-ecological Contradictions of South Korea's Industrial "Miracle," c.1973-1985

Introduction

This chapter represents the culmination of the argument. It unfolds in two broad movements. The first examines the specific context and details of South Korea's world-historically unique transition in the form that its relations of real subsumption took after 1973: from those of manufacture during its light industry phase of the 1960s (discussed in Chapter 5) to its industrial revolution, properly so-called, of the 1970s. No other society has undertaken such a remarkable emulation of the "classic" nineteenth-century English path to large-scale industry (Harvey 2013, 154-155); moreover, in the degree of its intensity and society-wide repercussions, this may represent the most extreme nationally-bounded case ever recorded.¹⁸³ The second half of the chapter focuses more abstractly on unpacking the revolutionary implications of this transition, especially as it pertains to socio-ecological "sustainability," in the truest sense of that term. This refers not to the preservation of some "balanced nature" that ostensibly existed in the past – which has never, in fact, been the case anywhere (Lewontin 1996) – but to the prospects of reproducing these historically specific relations over the *longue-durée* *within* the geographical confines of the society (i.e., not "solve" them via spatial fixes). To repeat a major theme of this work, although these issues may popularly be understood as "environmental" in the narrow

¹⁸³ This claim, like others about South Korea in the post-World War development era, is confined to events up to that point in world history (c.1985). After the neoliberal revolution of the 1980s, and China's switch to "market socialism" at about the same time, relations of real subsumption (of the large-scale industry sort) have proliferated throughout the world; however, these relations have been confined to a small segment of each nation's population, and were typically triggered and controlled by corporations outside of the Global South (i.e., foreign direct investment).

sense, their dynamics are rooted in the inherent contradictory tensions of the structuring social forms, namely value and those flowing therefrom. Consequently, we will conclude the chapter by focusing on the increasing anachronism of capitalist value relations in general, and of its industrial relations of real subsumption in particular, for structuring the future of nature-society relations.

Large-Scale Industry in South Korea: Yushin and HCI

It is important to notice how the relative surplus value strategies adopted under co-operation and manufacture, which are centered on the workers themselves, serve as a potential bridge in transitioning to the sort of machine-based large-scale industry that first emerged in “developed” Western nations. As Marx argues in his *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863*:

With the real subsumption of labor under capital, . . . the development of the productive power of labor takes place, in that the productive forces of social labor are developed, and **only at that point does the application of natural forces on a large scale, of science and of machinery, to direct production become possible.** (Burkett 1999a, 284)

This argument of Marx’s, however, begs the following question for those who have studied the capitalist dynamics that unfolded globally since that time: that is, despite the widespread prevalence of cooperation, division of labor and manufacture in various societies, how and why is it that some regimes made the transition to large-scale industry, while most do not? This is a question requiring case-specific analyses to unpack in detail; nevertheless, the following observations paint a pretty adequate picture with respect to the South Korean experience. We deal with Park’s twin programs in this section – i.e., the Yushin constitution and Heavy and Chemical Industrialization drive – then consider the issue of what allowed for South Korea to achieve what many other “developing” nations have so often failed to do: industrialize.

South Korea’s successful transition to large-scale industry during the 1970s was the result of an unprecedented and fortuitous alignment of both “external” geopolitical factors and

“internal” political-economic ones. Park Chung Hee is often lauded for his economic achievements, yet criticized for his political record regarding labor repression and an autocratic style of rule. As we outline below, however, the “progressive” pursuit of heavy industry in the 1970s and the draconian character of the Yushin political regime of the same era are inextricably linked (Lie 1998, 76; Kim 2004). Neither would have succeeded, or perhaps even existed, without the other.

Following our implied theme in Chapters 3 through 5 regarding the scalar interactions that were integral in shaping the twentieth-century (South) Korean experience at the regional, global and national scales respectively, the twin political-economic shifts pursued by Park in the early 1970s were catalyzed by a combination of “external” and “internal” factors. We will deal with the former sort first, regarding the geopolitical realm.

During the era of the Vietnam War’s “hot phase” (1965-1975), the regional and global logics shifted vis-a-vis South Korea’s place within the US’s postwar hegemonic project. The ramifications of the Vietnam War on America’s postwar fortunes cannot be overstated. Prolonged, expensive, unpopular, and unwinnable, the US had to undertake a serious rethinking of its regional and global commitments and strategies in light of it. Signs of these shifts triggered a great deal of concern for the South Korean leadership, for example: Henry Kissinger’s secret meeting with the Chinese leadership in the summer of 1971; and then-President Nixon’s subsequent official visit some eight months later, which culminated in the “Shanghai communique” that sought the normalization of US-PRC relations. Closer to home, moreover, while not as extreme as one State Department official’s recommended call for a “total military disengagement from South Korea,” the US’s removal of nearly one-third (from 62,000 to

42,000) of its troops from the country only heightened the Park regime's sense of alarm (Brazinsky 2007, 149).

These shifts – while certainly worrying – were not totally unexpected. They were all the logical outcomes of the US's new “Nixon Doctrine,” first proclaimed in 1969. Outlined from the White House in November, although the first two statements of the doctrine reiterated the US's commitment to uphold its treaties and provide protection for any allied nations facing nuclear threats, it was the final aspect that represented its fundamental shift away from its previous stance position, which followed from the earlier “domino theory” of containment in the Pacific. It stated that, for all “other types of aggression, [the US] shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. *But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.*” In geopolitical terms, the Nixon Doctrine represented a shift from a so-called “two-and-a-half war strategy” to a “one-and-a-half” one. The former represented the US's earlier global commitment to take on, simultaneously if necessary, the military defense of Western Europe and Pacific Asia (Korea and South-East Asia, in particular), as well as other “half” conflicts that might spontaneously arise elsewhere. The Nixon Doctrine, in short, meant that the US's full commitment to the Pacific region was effectively abandoned (Woo 1991, 123).

Not only did this mean that South Korea would be expected to *increase* its responsibility for regional and national security, despite *decreased* levels of US support, it would also be responsible for facing threats from North Korea, since the latter had not yet attained nuclear weaponry. This was especially concerning to South Korean leaders given the escalating clashes it had with North Korea at the time, such as the abduction of a South Korean patrol boat in the vicinity of Yonp'yong Island in June of 1970 (Kim 2004, 166). It was instances such as these

that led Park to issue an “emergency command” (*pisang myongryong*) some eighteen months later. Considering the nation to be in a “state of extreme emergency,” Park called for the immediate production of light weaponry to equip twenty divisions of reserve forces to guard against a (real or perceived) North Korean threat (Kim 2004, 171).

In addition to these escalating geopolitical concerns, the Park regime also faced two serious *geo-economic* ones. The first was the US’s turn to increasing trade protectionism under Nixon, especially vis-a-vis textiles, which was South Korea’s primary export during its 1960s light industry drive. President Nixon needed to address both the US’s worsening balance of payments problems, as well as do good by the US’s southern cotton growers and textile producers that were part of his base of support. And while the South Korean contribution to US textile consumption represented a paltry 0.6%, that nevertheless made up some 15% of South Korea’s total exports in 1970 (Woo 1991, 125-126). This fact reveals two limiting aspects of South Korea’s manufacturing economy of the 1960s: its structural weakness within the world-economy, and its dependence on privileged access to the vast US market for its success.

The second source of geo-economic concern for the Park regime was the sudden fourfold increase in petroleum prices that resulted from the “first” Arab oil shock in 1973. As we will see below, this took place shortly after Park’s implementation of his twofold political-economic strategy to address these and other concerns, but for an oil-dependent nation like South Korea, this event only increased the regime’s resolve to address its systemic vulnerabilities. Moreover, “political” and “economic” were overtly linked here – as North Korea had access to considerable hydroelectric and fossil fuel energy sources that South Korea lacked – which rendered the oil shock especially alarming to the Park regime (Woo 1991, 127).

In addition to the various “external” factors, Park’s regime also faced several domestic, “internal” challenges. First, when the combined effects of increasing waves of proletarianization, wage-labor, and general value relations that exploded after the nation’s land reforms and full embrace of commodification are paired with the “cheap labor” strategy of its headlong growth imperative of the 1960s, it is not surprising that labor discontent mushroomed during this period. The history of the Park regime’s draconian labor policies, as well as the working-class’s response, is well-known (Ogle 1990; Hart-Landsberg 1993; Koo 2001), so we need not rehash it here. Nevertheless, this fact only lends credence to just what a major threat it faced for the Park regime, as popular discontent with its rule spilled over into the political sphere. For in the democratic election of 1971, Park nearly lost to the up-and-comer Kim Dae Jung of South Cholla Province. Kim’s mass appeal to laypeople and connection to areas widely exempted from Park’s highly geographically uneven focus on certain parts of the country lent him great appeal at the voting booth.

The Yushin Regime

That Park recognized the seriousness of the systemic political-economic shifts at both the regional and global scales is evident. As he lamented in the 1970s:

Looking back at the days of the Cold War, we find that the question of national security was much simpler and easier then. Among the nations within the free world, a broad relationship of credibility and fraternity existed. In time of emergency, friends could be counted upon. Not so any more. (Woo 1991, 119)

The “political” half of Park’s revolutionary project to establish greater autonomy within the world-system for South Korea began, formally, with the enactment of the Yushin Constitution on October 17, 1972.

To be sure, Park’s creeping dictatorial style of rule had been in evidence in the years preceding Yushin, due, not surprisingly, to the very “success” of the all-out capitalist

modernization process he had led. Regarding the labor question, for example, Park decreed in December of 1971 the Law Concerning Special Measures for Safeguarding National Security, which was enacted to combat the rising power of organized labor (Koo 2011, 126-127). Nevertheless, the declaration of Yushin rendered his “imperial”-style rule of the country official. In many ways, this shift was geopolitically overdetermined. On the one hand, Yushin was the mirror image of North Korea’s own Yuil regime (Kim and Vogel 2011, 27). Just as many of today’s US Republican politicians find bourgeois democracy an impediment to the policies they wish to implement, Park complained in early 1972 of the “democratic distemper” that was thwarting his ability to address the challenges the nation faced: “[W]hile the affairs of state are publicly debated and decided through the ballot box here, the North Koreans are of one mind, obsessed with making guns, mortars, and tanks” (Woo 1991, 147).

On the other hand, Yushin was based upon the sort of coercive Japanese model that gripped that country after its own capitalist revolution began after 1868, and as practiced during the colonial era in Korea. Indeed, the word Yushin is the Korean pronunciation of the Japanese word – both derived from Chinese – *issin*, the very one used by the Meiji leaders in 1868 to refer to “restoration” or “rejuvenation” (Cumings 2005, 363). Some have viewed these sorts of appropriations from Japan contradictory and hypocritical, given the virulent anti-Japanese sentiment that has pervaded South Korean society since the colonial era. However, when the violence of instituting capitalist social relations is viewed in context, we recognize that these are predictable, if lamentable, necessities of “modernization” in the face of Western dominance in the world-system. Modern capitalist history is rife with instances of strong state reactions to the “malfunctioning” – or, more accurately, inherent contradictions – of the global system that was the Polanyian “collapse of nineteenth-century civilization” by the 1930s. In this sense, the US

New Deal, German and Italian fascism, and various Stalinist projects represent not radical departures from one another, but rather varying state responses to the same sort of problem (Woo 1991, 120). Postone (1993) echoes this view:

“A]ctually existing socialism” as well as the welfare systems in the West should be conceived not as fundamentally different social formations but as importantly different variations of the general state-interventionist form of twentieth-century world capitalism. Far from demonstrating the victory of capitalism over socialism, the recent collapse of “actually existing socialism” could be understood as signifying the collapse of the most rigid, vulnerable, and oppressive form of state-interventionist capitalism. (14n8)

In any case, Cumings (2005, 363) summarizes the substance of the Yushin constitution as follows: [It] remov[ed] all limits on [Park’s] tenure in office and g[ave] him powers to appoint and dismiss the cabinet and even the prime minister, to designate one-third of the National Assembly (reducing it to a rubber stamp and a cringing bunch of myrmidons), to suspend or destroy civil liberties, and to issue decrees for whatever powers the Yushin framers forgot to include.” The near-total political power that the Park regime established through Yushin, however, was only justifiable – and, really, was only undertaken – in order to push through Park’s long-term goal of transitioning to the sort of large-scale industrial capitalism characteristic of regimes in the West and Japan.

The Heavy and Chemical Industrialization Plan

Steel = national power.
- Park Chung Hee

Economic growth was the central prerequisite for justifying the draconian Yushin political system. Not surprisingly, then, just a few months after the institution of Yushin, Park announced the Heavy and Chemical Industrialization (HCI) plan during his New Year’s Press Conference of January 12, 1973. As the centerpiece of the so-called “Big Push” to achieve large-scale industry

in the nation, Park outlined its general aim, as well as the immense collective effort that would be required for it to succeed. This placed technical-scientific training at its core:

I declare the “Heavy and Chemical Industry Policy” through which the government hereafter will focus on the development of the heavy and chemical industries. I would also like to call on the people of the nation so that all of us from now on begin a campaign for national scientization. I urge everyone to learn technological skills, master them and develop them. (Kim 2004, 165-166)

Park set two ambitious targets for the HCI plan: the first was to achieve exports of \$10 billion by 1980, while the second was that more than 50% of these total exports were required to be from heavy industrial and chemical products.

There was, not surprisingly, no shortage of internal and external opposition to the aggressive industrial targets of such a young and “underdeveloped” capitalist regime. Within the country, as mentioned above, there was the growing working-class movement, which objected to both the increasingly repressive and exploitative character of Yushin politics and alienating quality of the labor process that coincides with machine-based industrialized production.

Segments of the capitalist class itself, whose interests were adversely affected by this particular export-based strategy and the uneven geographical development it promised to exacerbate, also objected (Chung and Kirkby 2002, 61-62). Interestingly, the Economic Planning Board, which is rightly considered by many to be the central architect in the nation’s overall economic success, also objected to the HCI plan (Kim 2004, 179-180).

The EPB was the main line of contact, moreover, for foreign US advisers. Both groups thought that South Korea should continue to pursue its comparative advantage in light-industrial exports. Park, therefore, was forced to pursue the HCI strategy via a “narrow core of power,” comprised of a “triumvirate of himself and two of his secretaries in the Blue House, Senior Economic Secretary O Wŏnch’ŏl and Chief of Staff Kim Chŏngnyŏm” (Kim 2011, 20).

Something that should be noted regarding the US objection to Park's plan is that it did so despite its own tacit approval of Park's dictatorial governance under Yushin. As we have argued, however, Yushin was implemented by Park with the express purpose of implementing the HCI plan. Both moves, recall, were undertaken in response to the US's own decreasing support for the country (and region) due to the Vietnam War debacle, as expressed in the Nixon Doctrine. It was more than a little hypocritical, therefore, to object to the nation's plan to achieve exactly what the US had called upon it to do – i.e., bolster its position in the regional and global systems through its own agency. Still, what the US was concerned about was how South Korean industrialization may “threaten the extant international division of labor and ... lead to problems of surplus capacity in world markets” (Chung and Kirkby 2002, 62). In other words, South Korea's ambitions threatened the sort of shift that, if somehow generalized, would upset a key prerequisite for the capitalist world-system's smooth functioning: that is, “underdeveloped” regimes of hybrid and formal subsumption, alongside various “frontiers” (i.e., non-commodified spaces).¹⁸⁴

The Park regime's HCI plan threw the (self-serving) US economic “orthodoxy” out the window, opting instead to seize this rare historical moment to grasp autonomy from an external world-system that was then in crisis. Cumings (2005) summarizes this process as follows, one that contained deep parallels to the context of Japan's own heavy industrial drive of the 1930s:

The Economic Secretariat of the Presidential Palace was the brains and the “Corps for the Planning and Management of Heavy and Chemical Industries” the horse for this gallop: *this end run around foreign and internal opposition on the Schumpeterian basis that incremental, marginal utility was not the name of the game: how about a great leap forward*, on the grounds that every future estimate of demand should at least be doubled – or tripled, or quadrupled? The Blue House became a hothouse for neomercantilists, of

¹⁸⁴ These follow our systemic and world-ecological assumptions about capitalism as a global, interconnected, interdependent, and uneven system, as will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

which the biggest was President Park himself. Much as the Manchukuo mafia industrialized Japan out of the world depression, the *Blue House team industrialized Korea out of the 1970s miasma of stagflation and oil shocks*. (322-323; emphasis added)

Ultimately, this allowed South Korea, in “dialectical fashion,” to “wrest national autonomy from the external system” (Woo 1991, 7). As we will see, however, this “search for autonomy” from the external system under Park in the 1970s would pave the way for an internal subordination of that society to capital’s value imperatives, fully unleashing the socio-ecological contradictions of real subsumption in the coming decades.

The HCI plan focused on six key industries: steel, chemicals, shipbuilding, automobiles, electronics, and machine-tools – all of which were “built seemingly overnight” (Cumings 2005, 322). The two main objectives of the plan were the creation of the above-mentioned sectors and the promotion of import-substitution with respect to intermediate and capital goods, a process which has been referred to, oxymoronically perhaps, as “export-oriented import substitution.” This required both large financial and infrastructural assets, as well as professional-grade management expertise, which only the large – though soon-to-be gargantuan – *Chaebol* conglomerates could handle. The Park regime pursued, then, the single-minded support for the *Chaebol* firms working in these industries, more or less to the exclusion of small- to medium-sized businesses. This included offering the *Chaebol* privileged access to credit, subsidized interest rates, as well as tax incentives and exemptions – all while operating from a position of quasi-monopoly within the increasingly growing and lucrative South Korean market. Many of these benefits were extended to select firms prior to 1973, but the HCI plan streamlined these into two schemes of incentive to foster industrial development: i.e., tax cuts were strongest for those investing in research and development and fixed capital in the key industries; and tariff

deductions lowered tax payments on raw materials and intermediate goods for those producing for export in these industries (Chung and Kirkby 2002, 63).

The specific details of Park's HCI plan need not detain us here, since triumphalist narratives of the HCI in various industries have been well-documented in "production in general" sorts of accounts (Amsden 1989; Kim and Vogel 2011).¹⁸⁵ What does concern us about the HCI plan, however, are the following observations. First, there is the issue of just how risky and likely to fail Park's plan was. Woo (1991) writes the following about the risk-reward tension inherent to the ambitious twin goals of the HCI plan:

The projected economies of scale of the plan were truly breathtaking: the production of producer goods had to substitute for imports *and* simultaneously (or with as little lag as possible) to be good for export. The tight sequencing of stages in ISI, as found in Latin America, telescoped in Korea, a condensation that entailed great risk: if lucky, Korea might blaze the trail of the "late" industrializations (as versus "late-late industrializers" of Latin American ilk), *but* if markets for new exports could not be found, then enormous waste, idle capacity, unemployment, and serious financial problems would follow. (130)

We will see below how and why it was that South Korea succeeded where the postwar period's most likely candidates did not (i.e., Latin American countries), but the takeaway point here is to appreciate just how much of a long-shot the HCI plan's targets were to achieve.

But achieve, it did. Remarkably, although launched in 1973 as a ten-year plan, the HCI's initial goals were already attained by the end of the decade. Indeed, the supersession of heavy and chemical industries over the previous decade's focus on light industries was in striking

¹⁸⁵ We should clarify what we mean by "production in general" accounts. For it was precisely scholars like Alice Amsden and Robert Wade that made the case, as we saw in the Introduction to this work, that the East-Asian "miracle" economies were brought about by actually *shirking* neoclassical orthodoxy by, in Amsden's famous phrase, (deliberately) "getting prices wrong" etc. In this sense, then, her account differs markedly from those market-centered ones that preceded it (and that of people like Chalmers Johnson 1982), but her account remains a "production in general" one since it accepts as transhistorical all of the categories that are peculiar to the capitalist mode of production, which had been introduced and generalized only very recently in the nation.

evidence. For example, whereas the share of light industries to total manufacturing was just over 60% on the eve of the HCI (1972), this percentage dropped to just 45% by 1979. Into this void, the heavy industries' contribution to overall output shot up to 54.9% by the end of the decade, while exports of these heavy manufactures rose from 13.7% to 37.7% between 1972 and 1979 (Woo 1991, 132-133). Each of the sectors targeted by the HCI, furthermore, experienced high levels of expansion. To take Park's symbolically favorite industry – steel – as an example, the P'ohang Steel company achieved a fourteen-fold increase between its creation in 1973 and 1981 (Cumings 2005, 323).

These shifts relate, more importantly, to our second observation, which involves the revolutionary changes in the nature of the labor process that this transition wrought. We will discuss this shift in the form that real subsumption takes from manufacturing to large-scale industry later on, so we merely signal it here.

The immediate point of this discussion, then, is to appreciate how the Yushin constitution and the heavy and chemical industrialization plan acted as a double-edged sword (Kim 2004, 173), cutting out a greater space of autonomy for South Korea that was only possible due to extreme political-economy resolve and a fortuitous alignment of factors.

On the World-historical Rarity of Regimes of Large-Scale Industry

To begin, we note two seeming paradoxes that lie at the heart of modern capitalist history. The first, more general one, is the fact that Western culture's supposed superiority is taken as self-evident; however, if this was so, why is it that most, if not all, non-Western societies that were targeted for insertion within these new relations (at varying degrees of subsumption) were resistant to it. We quote Hobsbawm (1989) at length on his observation of this trend during the

“age of empire” (1875-1914), world history’s most naked and unapologetic attempt to remake the world in its own image:

[I]f [Western] progress was so powerful, so universal and so desirable, *how was this reluctance to welcome it or even to participate in it to be explained?* Was it merely the dead weight of the past, which would gradually, unevenly but inevitably, be lifted off the shoulders of those parts of humanity which still groaned under it? Was not an opera house, that characteristic cathedral of bourgeois culture, soon to be erected in Manaus [Brazil], a thousand miles up the River Amazon, in the midst of the primeval rainforest, out of the profits of the rubber boom – whose Indian victims, alas, had no chance to appreciate *Il Trovatore*? ... [T]he failure or refusal of most inhabitants of the world to live up to the example set by the western bourgeoisies was rather more striking than the success of the attempts to imitate it. It was perhaps only to be expected that the conquering inhabitants of the first world, *still able to overlook the Japanese*, should conclude that vast ranges of humanity were biologically incapable of achieving what a minority of human beings with notionally white skins – or, more narrowly, people of north European stock – had alone shown themselves to be capable of. (31-32; emphasis added)

From the “production in general” view that dominates in the West, then, any acts of resistance to becoming subsumed under capitalism’s alien and coercive social forms was viewed as a sign of cultural and economic “backwardness,” which was best expressed in the “pseudo-scientific quackery” of social Darwinism (*ibid.*, 32). That the non-market relations of, for instance, the Western Melanesians of reciprocity, redistribution, symmetry and centrality (Polanyi 2001, 45-58) might be preferable to them was incomprehensible to the Euro-American bourgeois mindset. This is well-known, but it nevertheless bears repeating in the current era.

What is less well-recognized, however, is the second paradox: that *industrialized* relations of real subsumption characteristic of Western hegemons like the US have been posited as both generalizable and generally beneficial, despite the fact that they have always been in the extreme minority (for *systemic* reasons) and, crucially, their implementation has been fiercely resisted by their own general populations. In twentieth-century cases, moreover, this has been true on both sides of the Cold War divide, once again echoing our contention that “competing

regimes”¹⁸⁶ shared much more in common than has been usually recognized. This is the take-home message of Barrington’s Moore’s great work, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966). We will have recourse to take up Moore’s reflections on the similarities and differences between the rhetoric and reality of world history’s actually existing liberal and Communist regimes later on, but here it suffices to make the following overlooked point regarding attempts to forge industrial societies (*within* the context of global capitalism). In reflecting upon how Stalinist industrialization was unable to claim that this lessened in any way the burden imposed upon the general population as compared to the previous form of capitalism, he reminds us that Western cases, too, had also been vehemently resisted:

[I]t is well to recollect that there is no evidence that the mass of the population *anywhere* has wanted an industrial society, and plenty of evidence that they did not. *At bottom all forms of industrialization so far have been revolutions from above, the work of a ruthless minority.* (506; emphasis added)

Significantly, Moore published those words prior to when South Korea’s own large-scale industrial drive began in 1973. What is interesting for us, then, is to unpack the factors that allowed the Park regime to successfully undertake its own (capitalist) industrial revolution. For the societal forces that have resisted industrialized production methods were far less in evidence in 1970s South Korea than in their Western counterparts’ cases.

The following will outline, first, the “barriers” that generally exist that impede the rise of industrial relations in any sort of generalized or teleological way, even in societies with a high

¹⁸⁶ We draw attention again here to the significance of distinguishing between Ollman’s levels of generality. For at levels one and two of the individual (person, group, nations etc.) and specific eras of capitalism, respectively, there is no question that there was intense competition between, say, the US and USSR after 1945. However, from the level-3 perspective of the capitalist mode of production in general, each of these regimes was merely doing their best to negotiate the *systemic* imperatives of value relations etc. The fact that each was perceived by the other to be getting in the way of this goal is, from our point of view, incidental. The tactics may have differed, but the goals and “stakes of the game” were the same: value (Moore 2011a, 17).

degree of commercial (“capitalist”) activity. We will then deal with the “opportunities” that existed for South Korea by the early 1970s that made this unlikely transition possible.

There are several general reasons that capitalism in its industrial form has not arisen in the vast majority of societies that have nevertheless been a part of the capitalist world-system. First, as was the case in pre-colonial Korea, landed class interests in the subordinate society have overwhelmingly resisted a complete overthrow of their privileged position, so instead they (alongside a new bureaucratic strata) struck deals with Western powers to serve as a comprador elite for the purposes of the former’s procuring of strategic resources (i.e., the Four Cheaps) from the latter.

Second, until the postwar era of developmentalism, the vast majority of the interactions between Western and non-Western societies were thoroughly paternalistic and colonial/imperial in character (Young 2001). Locked into a colonial division of labor that focused mainly on providing the core with the necessary primary inputs for their industrial behemoths in cities like Manchester, there was no pretense made to the sorts of notions that would dominate US rhetoric in the post-1945 era, such as a “developmental ladder,” equality between nations, and the like (McMichael 2017, 26-38). Indeed, this follows our contention that the capitalist world system – despite the Wallersteinian assertion that it means the “commodification of everything” – must perforce be composed of an uneven mixture of regimes of varying degrees of subsumption. Non- or semi-commodified spaces furnish the *zone of appropriation* necessary for the value’s dynamism in the sphere of *exploitation*, as understood in the technical Marxian sense (Moore

2015).¹⁸⁷ Harvey (2013) echoes this in his discussion of the reproduction costs that are saved by employing semi-proletarian labor in the contemporary Mexican and Chinese examples:

It is still the case, under those conditions called “partial proletarianization,” that some large segments of the global labor force that have access to land and other family or kinship resources can return to such conditions when unemployed, sick, or disabled. This is the case in contemporary China, for example, where many of the costs of social reproduction are borne in the rural areas.¹⁸⁸ Even more callously, this is how US agribusiness unloads the costs of social reproduction on Mexico by employing illegal immigrants to work with carcinogenic pesticides, until they become too sick and have to return to the Mexican villages from whence they came to be cared for or to die. (86-87)

This necessary interdependence of global capitalism between “developed” and “underdeveloped” nations (or groups/peoples) is what explains the structural disadvantages that erstwhile “late” industrializers have historically faced, leading scholars to assert a “*seemingly ‘iron law’ of a global hierarchy of wealth* that stays in place no matter what the governments on the lower rungs of the hierarchy do or do not do” (Arrighi 1991, 57).

Third, even for those societies engaged in a high degree of commodified relations, cooperation and division labor in manufacture etc., there have existed rules of working culture that both stymie the rise of more developed forms of capitalism, never mind large-scale industry, and also shield those workers from the sorts of issues associated with industrial production that

¹⁸⁷ This point is important, since it dissolves many of the debates about the origins of capitalism. For if relations of real subsumption in their industrial form are taken as the “essence” of capitalism, then the origins of capitalism can be traced only to late-eighteenth century England, which overlooks the much deeper roots of many of capitalism’s other central features. We will discuss this matter in greater detail in an upcoming section. What can be mentioned here, though, is that for the majority of capitalism’s history and for most of those inserted into the world market, capitalist value relations – in their one-sided market-exchange basis – can be carried on quite smoothly without being subsumed under the tyranny of the fully developed capital form of industrialization.

¹⁸⁸ This supports our contention of the extremely high *relative degree* of penetration of capitalism’s value forms in South Korea. For contemporary China has far more proletarians, in real terms, than South Korea, and the gross number engaged in industrialized relations of real subsumption surely outstrips that of South Korea by far. Yet, crucially, the *relative* sway of these forms is far greater in South Korea than China.

we will explore shortly. As Marx (1990, 479) explains with respect to a dominant world-historical trend, even in Europe: “The rules of the guilds deliberately hindered the transformation of the single master into a capitalist, by placing very strict limits on the number of apprentices and journeymen he could employ. ... The guilds zealously repelled every encroachment by merchants’ capital, the only free form of capital which confronted them. A merchant could buy every kind of commodity, but he could not buy labour as a commodity.” But with the supersession of handicrafts and even manufacture with large-scale machinery, on the one hand, “the technical reason for the lifelong attachment of the worker to a partial function is swept away. On the other hand, the barriers placed in the way of the domination of capital by this same regulating principle now also fall” (491). What Marx describes regarding the traditional obstacles to the rise of large-scale industry in Europe can find their specific local counterparts in non-Western societies to this day.¹⁸⁹

As we observed earlier, South Korea did not face any of the barriers above: 1) its landed elite had been all but destroyed through the one-two punch of Japanese colonialism and post-World War II land reforms; 2) thriving in relative isolation as the “hermit kingdom” prior to the Japanese occupation, Korea had no colonial legacy to wrestle with; and 3) due to the denigration of commercial activity that was a central feature of neo-Confucian ideology, there was little in

¹⁸⁹ Relations of large-scale industry, moreover, are *dynamic* and revolutionary in that the technical basis is never viewed as final, whereas other modes are essentially *conservative* in that they take the secrets of their craft, built up over centuries, to be “*mysteres*” to which only the initiated are privy (Marx 1990, 616-617). This fundamental difference between the relations of (industrialized) real subsumption of Western hegemonic powers and the more “conservative” character of artisanal labor etc. of the “less developed” societies that they encountered goes a long way in explaining the former’s complaints of “backwardness” in the latter. Western power had come to internalize, in other words, the necessary “creative destruction” of relations of real subsumption as both essential and self-evidently “good.” We will unpack how and why this is so in a later section.

the way of an entrenched work culture that objected to changes in the labor process (and even if there were, the Japanese colonial period would have effectively wiped them out and placed them upon a “modern” capitalist footing).

Nevertheless, despite Korea’s absence of the sorts of typical barriers that have checked the rise of industrial relations in the non-West, by the 1960s there was nothing inevitable about its occurrence. There were, therefore, historically-specific “opportunities” that South Korea had at its disposal that helped make this transition to industrial relations of real subsumption possible. We highlight three below.

The first involved mobilizing the population to accept the sort of revolutionary project that had been popularly resisted in Western cases (e.g., Thompson 1963 and 1975; Moore 1966). While Park and his policy elites may have kept a close eye on the specific shifts taking place in the global political-economic sphere, such as the Nixon Doctrine and oil shock, the manner in which Cold War tensions were experienced by the average South Korean was much simpler: that is, as a battle between “good” and “evil” (Woo-Cumings 1998, 323). A feature that has been largely overlooked by scholars of South Korea’s (and Taiwan’s) “miracles,” then, is that they were *born of civil wars that have yet to (formally) end*. Socio-economic policies, therefore, were never immediately viewed as means to acquire a better material standard of living; rather, they were viewed as matters of *national survival* within the Manichean Cold War world. Vis-a-vis other “developing” regions of the post-1945 world-economy, therefore, this imminent security threat served as a “binding agent” that contributed enormously in securing the population’s acquiescence for the state’s political-economic ends (Woo-Cumings 1998, 319-320).

This recalls our earlier point about the inextricable connection between the political repression of the Yushin constitution and the socio-economic suffering experienced due to the

large-scale industrial drive. This link was recognized by Park's own guru of the HCI plan, O Wónch'ól. In a retrospective interview conducted in 1996, for instance, O was surprisingly frank on this point:

These days, many say that President Park succeeded in [the] economy but failed in democracy. Even former ministers under the President openly separate HCI from Yusin reform. I tell you: the bitter truth is that HCI was Yusin and Yusin was HCI. One did not exist without the other. Korea succeeded in HCI because the President disciplined the state to implement HCI precisely as planned. And the President could not have disciplined the state if there had been no Yusin [Constitution]. It is unconscionable to ignore this fact. (Kim 2004, 175-176)

In short, national security and growth via a large-scale industry revolution were one in the same strategy.

This mobilization was expressed more specifically in the new machine-based production processes, as well. Since the sort of political repression of Yushin could only squelch workers' demands and control growing labor discontent so much, the Park regime also resorted to various "positive" policies to mobilize the population for HCI. In order to motivate workers to obsess over productivity levels, accept long hours and alienating working conditions, and restrain their desires for a greater share of the nation's growing economic pie, the Park regime deployed a language of corporate familialism and likened the workers of HCI to soldiers, working to defend the country. Labelled *sanŏp ũi chŏnsa* (industrial warriors) or *sanŏp ũi yŏkkun* (builders of industry), these workers were called upon to evince the virtues of "diligence, self-help, and teamwork." These were the virtues of Park's Saemaul Factory Movement – an extension of the earlier 1970 rural campaign espousing the same virtues – which was implemented in 1973 (Koo 2011, 128-133). In outlining the aims of the Saemaul Factory Movement, Park declared:

The Saemaül movement as practiced in offices and factories is nothing different [from the one now being practiced in the countryside] for its basic spirit remains the same: diligence, self-help, and teamwork. In a business corporation the entire personnel, from the president on down, should work together to reduce waste and improve efficiency, and

devote their whole energy to increased productivity. There should be close labor-management cooperation, with the company president making an utmost effort to improve pay and welfare for his employees and the latter fulfilling their duties with a sense of responsibility and sincerity, doing factory work like their own personal work, and caring for the factory as if it were their own. In such a corporation, productivity will be high, thanks to the family-like atmosphere, and the workers will be well taken care of as due return for their faithful service. (130-131)

In reflecting upon this campaign, Koo (2011) questions the degree to which average workers actually bought into this lofty rhetoric; nevertheless, it was the official state policy, which was pursued assiduously at all levels of the economy through a great deal of financial support via educational campaigns and the like.

The second aspect, which is more or less well-known and follows from our earlier discussion of South Korea's strategic place in the US hegemonic project, was its privileged access to credit and aid. This is not to say that it was offered infinitely or without strings attached, but it was nonetheless crucial in enabling Park's HCI drive. Indeed, although an ally of both the US and Japan, there was no question that South Korea was considered a subordinate partner of these global and regional powers. As such, Tadashi (2011, 78) is correct in arguing how the Cold War context both hindered the South Korean regime's plan in certain respects, while making it possible in others. For example, Park had long held plans to undertake a heavy and chemical industrial drive. When Park approached Japan in July 1970 to help fund this in the wake of the 1965 Normalization Treaty (Cumings 2005, 318-322), however, Japan turned him down due to worries that it would lead to increased regional competition in these "advanced" industries of shipbuilding, steel, and machine-building (Woo 1991, 129).¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Despite this initial setback, Woo goes on to point out how, although the Japanese failed to support the Park's HCI-style plans at that time, the process of drawing up the plans in 1970 provided a template from which the later implementation could draw from. Concrete learning experience in some heavy industries, moreover, was gained by South Korean firms through their involvement in the Vietnam War (Stubbs 2005; Glassman 2018).

Consequently, the Park regime had to wait until a fortuitous constellation of factors aligned before it could proceed with HCI. For it was not enough to have a population motivated by a security threat; the funding also had to be obtained to actually implement the HCI scheme. As it turned out, Park did not have to wait long. Ironically, though, this window of opportunity came in the wake of *diminishing* US and Japanese support during the 1970s, a trend which only served to increase South Korea's resolve to assert some degree of autonomy within the world-system. For starters, the Park regime enjoyed an influx of cash and aid as forms of compensation for the US's decreasing structural support. For instance, in return for its increased trade protectionism in the textile industries, the US provided \$100 million in concessional loans and \$275 million in food aid in order to compensate for Korea's period of "voluntary textile export restraint" (Woo 1991, 126). For its part, Japan – shifting its willingness to support its regional partner from just three years earlier in light of the changing geopolitical dynamics – was instrumental in the creation of the Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO). Although the US did contribute \$74 million in loans and grants, the Japanese provided access to credit amounting to \$124 million, as well as crucial technology. The case of POSCO is emblematic of how the Park HCI drive succeeded more generally in the other strategic industries: "Building on the advantage of backwardness – the ability to adopt the latest technology – and relying on cheap labor, POSCO was successful" (Clifford 1994, 73-75; Lie 1998, 89-90).

These cash infusions, however helpful, were ultimately not enough to finance the massive \$10 billion USD budget for HCI. In response, Park sent a seventeen-member promotional team to the US for the purposes of raising funds in May 1973. This "do or die" mission – which made stops in Washington DC, New York and Chicago – held "Korean Investment Seminars" aimed at drumming up the estimated \$5.8 billion in foreign loans required for HCI. In addition to the \$3.1

billion that the Park regime raised domestically from 1973-1975, these efforts managed to procure some \$415 million in foreign direct investments (Kim 2004, 183-184). Park's regime was, indeed, well on its way to securing the necessary funds and credit for its HCI. In the subsequent five years (1976-1980), furthermore, the South Korean state devoted 80% of the loans earmarked for the manufacturing sector (which represented 30% of total foreign loans) – amounting to over \$4.5 billion – into heavy and chemical industries (Woo 1991, 133). The ability for a “developing” nation to both procure these levels of funding and to devote them overwhelmingly to large-scale industries, something that ran counter to the reigning logic of the international division of labor at that time, was unprecedented.

Part of the seeming paradox of how South Korea (and other East-Asian Tigers) managed to succeed – not despite, but *because of* their veering from the Anglo-American economic orthodoxy of the postwar pundits – is because of the radically different context in which “late” developers are forced to operate. For this reason, East-Asian analysts, planners and leaders have often found the writings of the nineteenth century's *continental* (European) economists more relevant to the challenges they face. Instead of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, therefore, East-Asians (and others) have looked to the likes of Friedrich List, Joseph Schumpeter, and Alexander Gerschenkron for guidance (Woo-Cumings 1998, 321).

This leads to the third aspect that allowed South Korea to successfully undertake its industrial revolution in the 1970s under Park. Recall our emphasis on the host of contingent factors that rendered possible the Thompsonian “*making of the South Korean working-class*” during the post-World War II period, and combine these with factors discussed above involving the geopolitical shifts, domestic security threat that triggered the Yushin and HCI regimes, and

privileged access to aid and financing that made it possible. It was this fortuitous synthesis of factors that came together to produce South Korea's industrial revolution.

In his famous analysis of "late development" (i.e., capitalist industrialization), Alexander Gerschenkron (1962) offered six propositions with respect to would-be industrial nations. It is important to note that the following tendencies all *increase* in proportion to the level of "underdevelopment" of a country. So, to quote Woo (1991) at length, "the more backward a country's economy is":

- 1) the more likely was its industrialization to *start discontinuously as a sudden great spurt* proceeding at a relatively high rate of growth of manufacturing output.
- 2) the more pronounced was the *stress on bigness* of both plants and enterprise.
- 3) the greater was the *stress upon producer's goods* as against consumer's goods.
- 4) the heavier was the *pressure upon the levels of consumption* of the population.
- 5) the *greater was the part played by special institutional factors* designed to increase the supply of capital to the nascent industries and, in addition, to provide them with less decentralized and better informed entrepreneurial guidance; the more backward a country, the *more pronounced was the coerciveness and comprehensiveness* of those factors.
- 6) the *less likely was its agriculture to play any active role* by offering to the growing industries the advantages of an expanding industrial market based in turn on the rising productivity of agricultural labor. (130)

Woo (1991, 130) argues rightly that the key to South Korea's successful transition to a regime of large-scale industry is that, unlike in Latin American countries where only the last two tendencies were discernible, unique geopolitical and class factors created a situation where *all six were in evidence in Park's South Korea* by the early 1970s. This point is crucial to our analysis regarding the world-historical novelty of the South Korean regime, both for good and for ill.

In sum, looking back upon the development era from today's vantage point, Park's successful HCI drive now seems almost inevitable. As we have argued above, however, nothing could be further from the truth. As the scores of attempts in post-1945 world history have revealed, non-Western attempts at large-scale industrialization have failed time and again. This is

not due to some inherent cultural superiority of Western regimes, of course, but rather stem from structural issues and geopolitical timing. We concur, therefore, with Woo's (1991, 147)

assessment on this matter:

The Korean “industrial deepening” [i.e., shift to large-scale industry] of the 1970s was unthinkable apart from the security threat, real and perceived, from outside. And the timing makes no sense without paying attention to the decline in American prowess that left Korea out in the cold. This was really what set Korea apart from the Latin American version of the “industrial deepening.”

As we will go on to argue, however, we differ fundamentally with Woo and others in terms of the profound socio-ecological ramifications of this “industrial deepening” that for so many represents the quintessence of South Korea's “miracle.”¹⁹¹

Large-Scale Industry: Real Subsumption's Most Developed Form

In contrast to “less developed” forms of capitalism in regimes of hybrid or formal subsumption – and even in real subsumption's manufacturing form (Chapter 5) – it is only with the transition in the form real subsumption takes under large-scale industry¹⁹² that capitalism fully “comes into its

¹⁹¹ As indebted as we are to the brilliant analyses of scholars like Bruce Cumings, John Lie, and Jung En Woo, our ultimate conclusions differ radically from theirs regarding the legacy of Park's “Big Push.” Although they (and others) rightly point out how the South Korean experience is non-generalizable for various reasons, as well as lament the brutally repressive character of the *Park era*, they are ultimately laudatory of its success. That is, there is the implicit assumption that, while others face near insurmountable barriers in achieving a similar industrial “miracle,” it would nonetheless be great *if* this was somehow not the case. To take but one example, Cumings (2005, 325-326) discusses how South Korea “somehow yanked self-reliance from the jaws of the world economy” and how, “[m]ost delightful of all, *everybody won from the big push*” to large-scale industry. As we will discuss later on, it is precisely the transition to “developed” large-scale industry that catalyzed South Korea's deep structural problems. In other words, the critique should not be leveled at the political repression, uneven geographical development and the like (Cumings 2005, 326) that was needed to undertake the transition; rather, it should be directed at the “success” itself, in terms of its *long-term socio-ecological implications*.

¹⁹² It is important not to make the common error, as Ernest Mandel does in his prefatory remarks to the *Results of the Immediate Production Process* section of *Capital* Volume 1 (944), of associating formal subsumption with manufacture and real subsumption with large-scale industry. As Murray reminds us: “[A]ll capitalist strategies for increasing the productive powers of labour, including simple cooperation and the division of labour and manufacture, are forms of

own.”¹⁹³ For Marx, this mode represents the “adequate materialization of the valorization process,” and it is also only with large-scale industry that the “full significance” of value’s (and, by extension, capital’s) *dual character* emerges (Postone 1993, 336). Much of the confusion and debate regarding the either progressive or deleterious character of specifically *capitalist* industrial production stems from a failure to recognize this dual character, as both a labor process and a valorization (of value) process. We focus in this section, then, on these two aspects.

We begin with the use-value dimension of large-scale machine production under capitalism, in which a fundamental shift takes place vis-a-vis manufacture. At the beginning of Marx’s lengthy discussion of machinery and large-scale industry in Chapter 15 of *Capital* (1990), he states how: “In manufacture the transformation of the mode of production takes labour-power as its starting-point. In large-scale industry, on the other hand, the *instruments of labour* are the starting-point” (1990, 492; emphasis added). What he is referring to here is the shift from a *subjective* labor process centered on the workers under manufacture to an *objective* labor process under large-scale industry that is machine-based. What this means, in use-value terms, is that industrial production represents a form of labor practice that is increasingly *independent* of the immediate producers’ labor. This is achieved by creating a kind of “division of labor” *amongst the machines themselves*, based on manufacture’s previous worker-centered one. Ultimately what is achieved is the “production of machines by machines,” where the

real subsumption, as indicated by their being included under the heading of relative surplus-value (Part Four of *Capital*)” (Murray 2016, 12n45).

¹⁹³ We must also recall, however, that it is *formal* subsumption that is the *general form of capitalism* as a systemic whole (Marx 1990, 1019). So although real subsumption is the most dynamic form of capitalism, its relations cannot be generalized, both for reasons internal to the value logic and for biophysical reasons related to the often-mentioned, though thoroughly ahistorical and asocial, invocation of the “limits to nature.”

worker's role is demoted to being a mere tender of the machines themselves (Postone 1993, 337-338).

What is crucial to recognize in this process is that, as part of the machines' supersession of labor¹⁹⁴ as the central element of the production process, "*natural forces*" are increasingly drawn upon to achieve this. Regarding large-scale industry, Marx (1990, 508) writes: "As machinery, the instrument of labor assumes a material mode of existence which necessitates the replacement of human strength by natural forces, and the replacement of rule of thumb by the conscious application of natural science." Just as the species capacities of collectivized human labor offered "free gifts" to the capitalist under the cooperation and division of labor of the rise of capitalist manufacture, therefore, likewise does the capitalist benefit and monopolize the benefits of "natural forces." These include not only forces such as water and steam power, but also the accumulation of productive forces arising from socially generalized sources via scientific and technological innovation. As Postone (1993, 338) states: "science also is like a natural force; once a scientific principle is discovered, it costs [capital] nothing" to deploy. Moreover, regarding the issue of "objectified means of production" (i.e., machinery), "aside from the costs of depreciation and of the auxiliary substances consumed (oil, coal, and so on), *machines and tools do their work for nothing*; the greater the productive effectiveness of the machine compared with that of the tool [under manufacture], the greater the extent of its gratuitous service."

An important conclusion emerges from this discussion of the *qualitative shift* of the form that real subsumption takes from manufacture to large-scale industry. That is, the social

¹⁹⁴ To be clear, by "labor" we refer here to the specific *concrete form* that abstract labor (or labor-power) takes in the use-value realm under large-scale industry, not "labor" as transhistorically understood (as general abstraction). See Chapter 2.

productive powers of *concrete* labor – the use-value side of the dual form labor takes under capitalism – become greater under large-scale industry than the collective productive powers of the workers, as well as cease to be produced mainly by them. Postone (1993, 344) states:

Unlike manufacture, the powers of the social whole no longer express in alienated form the knowledge, skills, and labor of the collective worker but, rather, the accumulated collective knowledge and power of humanity, of the species. Hence, with the development of large-scale industry, *the powers of capital* cannot be considered those of the collective worker in alienated form, *but have become greater than the latter*.

The “free gifts” of nature and social labor, in other words, come to dominate the very workers who were instrumental in ushering them in.

Take note of how, when the dualistic character of the value form is not recognized vis-à-vis capitalist industrialization, erroneous conclusions ensue. For instance, when considered *one-sidedly* as a means for the production of use-values alone, (capitalist) industrialization appears for its supporters as an unqualified good. Those somewhat critical of capitalist industrialization, for their part, also error when analyzing it solely from the use-value side of things. This is the source of Marx’s criticism, for example, of John Stuart Mill, who in his *Principles of Political Economy* laments how: “It is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day’s toil of any human being.” Indeed, rather than lightening the workload of wage-laborers in large-scale factories due to their massive efficiency increases that, under manufacture, had previously bound each man “hand and foot for life to a single specialized operation,” “the capitalist form of large-scale industry reproduces this same division of labour in a still more monstrous shape ... by converting the worker into a living appendage of the machine” (1990, 614). This seeming contradiction is the predictable result however, as Marx

goes on to outline, of the more abstract *value-dimension* of the industrial production process unique to capitalism.¹⁹⁵ It is to this issue that we now turn.

The key to unravelling the seeming paradox of producing unprecedented material wealth (not value), yet without improving the quantitative or qualitative working conditions of those in capitalism's large-scale factories, resides in the fact that capital is simultaneously both a production process and *valorization* process. This is a fundamental contradiction of capitalism in general, and of machinery in particular.

As discussed in Chapter 5 regarding the “iron cage” of value, this contradiction stems from the *temporal* determination of the magnitude of value, as socially necessary labor time. To review, the dialectical interaction between the use-value and value dimensions of the commodity form's dualistic character means that, despite ongoing increases in productivity, the temporal frame of value – say, an hour – gets reconstituted at its base level once the productivity-gaining technology or organizational form in question has been generalized via the coercive laws of competition. This tendency is what Postone (1993) refers to as the “dialectic of transformation and reconstitution” (298-304), where “the expenditure of human labor in the immediate process

¹⁹⁵ When considered *outside of* the value imperatives unique to capitalism's class structure, the quantitative productivity gains or qualitative advances in daily life could unquestionably be considered signs of progress, just as specifically capitalist industrialization has been automatically equated with “modernization” by pro-developmental factions in the post-World War II era. In Stephen King's epic novel, *The Stand*, for example, a deadly virus has wiped out 99% of the world's population and the survivors are forced to carry on in its wake. In this context, where the wage-labor, commodity, and other value forms are on hiatus, the “good” Boulder, Colorado faction's desire to “turn the lights back on” by restarting the local power plant can only be considered a desirable sign of progress. If and when this same source of power is used as a means of prolonging the working day etc. for the purposes of surplus value extraction and endless accumulation, however, many might prefer to keep the lights off. This sort of tension is an implied leitmotif of King's narrative. That is, when given the chance to start things afresh, how long will it take until society falls back into the same trappings that caused the initial calamity in the first place? A similar theme structures Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy.

of production remains necessary regardless of the degree to which productivity is developed” (*ibid.*, 347). Regarding machinery vis-a-vis its use-value role in the realm of production and its value role in the sphere of valorization, then, Postone (*ibid.*, 344) describes how:

The machine enters as a whole into the labor process, giving rise to great quantities of material wealth, *but it enters into the valorization process only in that it either transmits gradually to products the value that went into its creation or changes the proportion of surplus labor time to necessary labor time by reducing the labor time necessary to reproduce the workers*. As noted, this analysis implies that, with industrial production, the growth in material wealth resulting from ever-higher levels of productivity far outstrips the growth in surplus value.

Consequently, with labor-power remaining the source of value and form of social mediation of the system as a whole, increases in productivity, no matter how great, can never yield system-wide decreases in labor time “*on a total social level*” (*ibid.*, 344). This is the answer, in short, that Marx provides to address the “puzzle” Mill proposed (above): for the function of machinery under industrial capitalism is not to reduce the toil of workers, but to create surplus value (1990, 492).

Under large-scale industry, *labor becomes decreasingly the producer of material wealth yet remains the basis of the value structure in the realm of realization/valorization* (within the capital circuit). This valorization imperative (i.e., M-C-M’), it is worth noting, is common to all types of capitalist production and their corresponding forms of subsumption; however, it is only with industrial capitalism’s unique use of machinery that the inversion – where the “conditions of labour employ the worker,” instead of the other way around – “first acquires a technical and palpable reality” (Marx 1990, 548).

Furthermore, with the separation of the intellectual and manual aspects of the production process characteristic of large-scale industry and its monopolization by capitalists, the victory of

capital over labor is completed – though, note, only in the production process and not in a system-wide sense. According to Marx (1990, 548-549):

Owing to its conversion into an automaton, the instrument of labour [i.e., machine] confronts the worker during the labour process in the shape of capital, dead labour, which dominates and soaks up living labour-power. ... The special skill of each individual machine-operator, who has now been deprived of all significance, *vanishes as an infinitesimal quantity in the face of the science, the gigantic natural forces, and the mass of social labour embodied in system of machinery, which ... constitutes the power of the "master."* (emphasis added)

Recall our crucial point from earlier, however, regarding just how rare – world-historically speaking – this transition to large-scale industry has been *outside* of Western nations (and Japan) until after c.1985. And even in these cases, it was usually limited to certain geographical pockets, most notably late nineteenth-century Manchester, England, then in the twentieth-century in US cities like Detroit and Pittsburgh. It was only after the neoliberal revolution opened up societies of the Global South to mainly Western foreign direct investment etc. that these relations were introduced outside of the “developed” nations, though they still have never achieved the sort of societally general character as in the West, Japan, and South Korea.

Value, Capital, and Capitalism

The primary concern of this chapter is to make the case for the long-term socio-ecological unviability of South Korea’s “miraculous” regime of real subsumption. In this section, however, we focus on clarifying what we mean in deploying the terms value, capital and capitalism. We do this for two reasons: one is to define more precisely these terms that are often used quite loosely in popular culture and, indeed, in academia; the other is to establish the necessary context to appreciate our more specific arguments about regimes of real subsumption that follow.

Distinction 1: Value and Capital

In previous discussions of the core categories of modernity, we emphasized the crucial significance of value in particular. We now stress the structural logic undergirding the logical and historical transition from value to capital, then explore its enormous consequences later on. Admittedly, in certain respects, it is unnecessary to distinguish between value and capital since, as the famous shorthand Marxian definition of capital goes, it is “value *in motion*.”¹⁹⁶ It is precisely this motion, however, that sets it apart – i.e., the ceaseless pursuit of *surplus* value (M-C-M’). There are, nevertheless, sound reasons to draw this distinction. First, world-historically speaking, value relations have been much more all-encompassing than the revolutionary shift to capital, which really only applies to regimes of formal and, in particular, real subsumption that have “achieved” *generalized* commodification, proletarianization and the like. Numerically and geographically speaking, world history has been characterized far more by individuals or groups who have been incorporated into the world market and face the hyper-competition of globalizing markets for particular commodities – i.e., value relations – but not necessarily the “accumulation for accumulation’s sake” that is at the heart of capital relations. Indeed, these more market-based

¹⁹⁶ It is worth considering whether value relations can take place that are not *immediately* related to the capital form. Systemically speaking, the answer is no; however, for the vast majority of people in capitalist societies whose daily lives are embedded in the *qualitative* C-M-C logic of securing their subsistence etc. through the commodity form (rather than capital’s M-C-M’ logic of surplus value), the answer is yes. Indeed, it is precisely this arms-length removal from the surplus value imperative that lends power to the “production in general” view of capitalism that we have been criticizing throughout this work. For most people *really are not* concerned with accumulation even though, as a society, it is the overriding imperative (i.e., GDP) and basis of their employment (or not). As Marx states: “Simple circulation [C-M-C] is rather an abstract sphere of the bourgeois total production process, which through its own determinations reveals itself as a moment, a mere form of appearance of a deeper process lying behind it, which just as much results from it as produces it” (Murray 1988, 184). Moreover, this also plays into how the capitalist world-system, globally speaking, is increasingly structured by value relations, though not necessarily shaped directly by the capital form. Again, this supports our insistence on the importance of thinking not in terms of the popular development/underdevelopment binary, but rather in terms of the degree of subsumption under the value and capital forms (hybrid, formal, and real).

forms of coercion and dependence are those that we described earlier, as they arose in the Japanese colonial period and up until the 1960s in South Korea – as the population became increasingly subsumed under capital’s forms of subsumption.

Second, Marxists’ traditional stress on *surplus* value has caused two serious problems. On the one hand, non-Marxists have time and again conflated the stress on surplus value with that of surplus *labor*, once again confusing the determinate form that the surplus takes under capitalism with the general feature of *any* class society (i.e., Ollman’s fourth level of generality). Marx (1990) makes the distinction clear:

Capital did not invent surplus labour. Wherever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the worker, free or unfree, must add to the labour-time necessary for his own maintenance an extra quantity of labour-time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owner of the means of production, whether this proprietor be an Athenian καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός, an Etruscan theocrat, a *civis romanus*, a Norman baron, an American slave-owner, a Wallachian boyar, a modern landlord or a capitalist. *It is however clear that in any economic formation of society where the use-value rather than the exchange-value of the product predominates, surplus labour will be restricted by a more or less confined set of needs, and that no boundless thirst for surplus labour will arise from the character of production itself.* (334-335; emphases added)

Limited by the use-value character of material wealth in non-capitalist societies and not by the temporally determined and money-mediated (and therefore infinite) character of capitalist production (i.e., value), this conflation masks all that is revolutionary about capitalism, especially for regimes of real subsumption. On the other hand, for “traditional Marxists” who view Marx’s main contribution as the highlighting of labor’s transhistorical centrality to all modes of production and, therefore, fixating on “exploitation” in the production process, the critique of capitalism becomes one undertaken “from the standpoint of labor.” According to this view, to repeat, the targets of critique are private property and the market, rather than proletarian labor itself (Postone 1993). The former critique generally accepts industrial production and its associated forms, wishing only for a more equitable *distribution* of the (“unfairly”) appropriated

surplus value. From our perspective, however, this view overlooks Marx's most vital contribution – that is, as a critical analyst of capitalism's historically specific *social forms*. As such, our focus has been on value as the structuring social form of capitalism across all of its “levels of development” (i.e., hybrid, formal, and real subsumption).

Although Walker and Moore (2018, 51) are correct to state that “[s]urplus value is the crux of value theory,” until now we have been most interested in surplus *value*, not *surplus* value (Postone 1993, 308). The latter emphasis (uncritically) accepts value as the prime mediator of socio-ecological life, focusing the ire on the “unfair” division of the spoils of the surplus (usually in physical or monetary terms), whereas the former highlights the peculiarity of labor-*power*'s privileged position within capitalist social formations and the contradictions inherent to this.

Having said this, the discussion of the transition to, and ramifications of, capital are necessary for the following reasons. First, given that South Korea's “miracle” entailed precisely this transition to industrialized relations of real subsumption (rooted in *relative* surplus value strategies), it is crucial to outline the rise and spread of that most “revolutionary social form” (Murray 2019) – capital – in its most advanced incarnation, which arose in South Korea by c.1980. Second, in light of the postwar context of developmentalism in which South Korea undertook its transition, it is important to contextualize the specificities of the reigning political economic doctrine. Indeed, although always *perforce* (not lamentably) in the overwhelming minority vis-a-vis less “developed” relations of formal subsumption, the sheer dynamism of world history's regimes of real subsumption – most notably Britain, the United States, and Japan – has allowed them to generalize from their own historically specific (and dependent!) experiences an ostensibly generalized definition “development.” Our discussion in Chapter 4 about the teleological, yet dubious, tenets of modernization theory, in this sense, offers a most

apposite example. In the intellectual realm, as well as in the political-military one, “might,” it seems, “makes right.”

Distinction 2: Capital and Capitalism¹⁹⁷

The shorthand definition that Marxists typically give for capital is that it is “value in motion.” In one sense, this is a useful way to summarize what is otherwise quite a complicated story; however, for those not familiar with Marx’s *oeuvre*, this definition is a quaint-sounding phrase that does not reveal any of the insights that flow from a detailed elaboration of how this is so. In this section, therefore, we will provide some of the necessary fleshing out of what distinguishes and defines capital and capitalism.

Capital

Although we will ultimately be concerned with the much-neglected contradictions of capitalist relations in their most developed form of real subsumption, here we confine ourselves to a “first cut” definition of capital. Both in everyday parlance and mainstream economics, capital is viewed as a “thing” – either as one of three “factors of production” (alongside land and labor), or as “produced means of production.” In either case, it is believed to apply to all historical modes of production.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ One might wonder why a discussion of *capitalists* is not also taken up here. This is because, following from our focus on level 3 of Ollman’s scheme regarding levels of generality in Marx’s method, we focus on the coercive and contradictory logic of capital *as social form*. As Tony Smith (2006, 333) writes: “Marx’s critique is of capital, not capitalists. The latter are relevant to his theory only insofar as they function as personifications of the former. In principle, it is possible for a society without capitalists to still be subject to the alien logic of capital.” If one wishes to read accounts condemning the nefarious actions of the *Chaebol* leaders, for instance, one will find no end of it in the extant academic literature, newspaper accounts etc. Here we are interested in highlighting the deep structural pressures undergirding these lamentable practices, not in cataloguing and morally condemning them.

¹⁹⁸ Braudel (1982, 232-234) offers some helpful historical background on the emergence of the term “capital.” From the late Latin word “*capitale*” – that is, *caput* or head – it first emerged in Europe in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries to denote “funds, stocks of merchandise, sum of

For Marx, however, this thing-based understanding of capital in the modern era is patently erroneous, so instead he offers a social and processual definition of capital. Emerging from his analysis of value and the commodity, both of which had been more or less generalized in British society by the time of his writing, the transition to capital involved a revolutionary transformation. In contrast to the circulation of commodities expressed in the formula “C-M-C” (i.e., Commodity-Money-Commodity) that possesses the *qualitative* aim of exchanging one use value for another, capital represents a new goal of *quantitative* increase in the money form – represented as M-C-M’ (Money-Commodity-Money’) – given that simply exchanging one sum of money for the same amount at the end of the process would be an absurdity.

And while a detailed discussion of the role of money in the transition from value to capital need not detain us in this work, it is nevertheless important to make at least note of it here (Murray 1988, Chapters 14 and 15; Marx 1990, Chapter 3). In brief, the contradictions of money are twofold: 1) the first is between “its claim to be universal wealth and the fact that it is merely an abstraction from that wealth”; the second revolves around “money as money” – i.e., its finite character when outside of circulation, yet its claim to be “the embodiment of universal wealth.” As Murray explains, the rise of the capital form resolves both of these contradictions of money simultaneously: “The resolution of the senseless formula M-C-M into M-C-M’ shows that, as

money, or money carrying interest.” This thing-based definition is by modern standards, as we will see, highly problematic; but during this pre-capitalist era, there is nothing inherently wrong with this definition. For his part, however, Braudel should be roundly criticized for erroneously claiming that it was not until the nineteenth century that it took the “Marxist” definition of “means of production.” Once again, this understanding conflates general and determinate abstractions, as well as provides a *physical* definition for what is in essence a social relation. As if speaking directly to Braudel, Murray (2019, 211) writes: “Unlike produced means of production – a factor of production common to all societies – capital is specific to those societies where the capitalist mode of production is dominant. Capital, a specific social form of production, constitutes those societies as capitalist” (2019, 211).

circulating capital, money preserves itself only by going beyond its previous quantitative barrier, i.e., by increasing itself through circulation. ... The truth of value, manifested in the more concrete concept of capital, is that value is not a crystallized thing (as simple circulation visualizes it), *but a process*" (Murray 1988, 177-179). Marx (1990) summarizes as follows this revolutionary shift from the centuries-old one centered on the exchange of use-values to that of limitless quantitative increase in the money form:

The simple circulation of commodities – selling in order to buy – is a means to a final goal which lies outside circulation, namely the appropriation of use-values, the satisfaction of needs. *As against this, the circulation of money as capital is an end in itself, for the valorization of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement. The movement of capital is therefore limitless.* (253; emphasis added)

Several points should be noted about this shift. First, M-C-M' does not refer to the limitless increase in material wealth, but rather that of value (i.e., socially necessary labor *time*). Although the dialectical tension inherent in the commodity form between use-value and value means that use-values must always be "thrown off" from capital's circulation process, need satisfaction is never – for *structural* not moral reasons – the central goal of capital(ists). "Use-values must never be treated as the immediate aim of the capitalist; nor must the profit of any single transaction," Marx argues, "[h]is aim is rather the unceasing movement of profit-making" which can only be achieved by the capitalist's "throwing his money again and again into circulation" (1990, 254-255).

Second, the "limitless" character of the capital circuit means that it possesses an unrelenting directional dynamic, yet lacks any "external telos." On the one hand, then, with the rise of capital: "value is revealed as a *means to a goal that is itself a means*, rather than an end. [It] is a category of *movement, of expansion*; it is a dynamic category, 'value in motion'" (Postone 1993, 268-269; emphases added). On the other hand, capital is a "pure process" lacking

any definite qualitative aim: “Capital has no fixed, final form, but appears at different stages of its spiraling path in the form of money and commodities” (*ibid.*, 269). For capital, in other words, “[b]ecoming is the condition of its being” (Postone 1993, 291).

Third, and by extension of the previous point, value’s functioning as an “automatic subject” (Marx 1990, 255) imposes upon everyone caught up in its web – laborer *and* capitalist alike – “a mode of abstract compulsion and constraint” (Postone 1993, 269). The atomization of society into countless “free individuals” means that the collective actions of all via the commodity (and other value) form(s) means that no one person is in control of the macro, structural imperative of surplus value creation – or, more popularly put, “growth.” To be sure, this growth imperative, achieved through chaotic value relations, can take countless forms in terms of institutional and political structure; nevertheless, what people face at all scales of society, from liberal democracies to dictatorships, is the imperative to create surplus value. How they achieve this (or not) is a contingent question of history for each social formation, but this imperative nevertheless structures the range of possibilities for individuals (in their relation to their employment), businesses, and states alike. Value establishes, as Moore (2011a, 17) argues, the “stakes of the games.”

We see, then, that it is the *process* of circulating value that is key for both the existence and thriving of the capital form. Given the dominant thing-based understanding of “capital” in popular culture, however, what role do things like money, wage-labor, and commodities play in this picture?¹⁹⁹ This is important to consider given that a common justification for the

¹⁹⁹ Interestingly, Marx’s analysis of capital also helps explain the source of these non-processual, asocial, physicalist understandings of “capital.” In popular culture, for example, “capital” is often used as a synonym for money. Given that capital involves the metamorphoses of value in its commodity and money forms as it moves through the circuit, in a sense this is true. As Marx (1990, 255) states regarding how capital relations *appear* on the surface: “capital is money,

“production in general” understanding of capital is that all of these categories that are (rightly) considered central to its functioning actually *predate* the rise of capitalism as a system. For the anthropological record shows that money has existed in countless forms for millennia; trading in labor services, even for money (i.e., wage-labor), also has a long history; and so does the exchange of use-values – proto-“commodities” – through barter.

These forms are, indeed, indispensable to the smooth functioning of the circuit of capital as value morphs between commodities and money; however, and this is crucial, *the preconditions for something should never be conflated with its essence* once established. So what *is* the essence of capital? Simply put, it is the *class relation* between capital and labor(-power) – the specific details of which we traced for (South) Korea in the previous chapters. Interestingly, between the rise of this capital relation and its full embedding in society as the dominant social form, a dialectical inversion takes place with respect to the preconditions listed above. On the one hand, the class relation that undergirds capital required that each of these social forms were present, if not generalized, for its rise. As Harvey (2013, 84-85) argues:

[A] whole world of commodity production and exchange, along with monetary and market forms, *had to exist before capital itself could come into being*. If there were no commodities already on the market, where would capitalists buy their means of production and workers the wage goods they need to survive? [And] exchanges of labor services for money or other commodities ... had to exist before capital could buy labor-power as a commodity. (emphasis added)

capital is commodities.” The reason that money, in particular, is viewed as capital is that, during the M-C-M’ valorization process, it is only in the money form where one can actually ascertain (or calculate) whether surplus value has been created or not. According to Harvey (2013, 83-84): “The capitalist knows how much money he laid out at the beginning of the circuit, and can easily figure the extra money he gets back.” This is much harder, if not impossible, to do at other points in the circuit. Moreover, from the view of the societal majority – wage-laborers and non-wage-laborers alike, the money form is the way in which access is gained to the use-values that sustains their lives. As such, money (or “capital”) is, ironically, viewed as synonymous with use-values in the abstract.

On the other hand, once the capital relation becomes hegemonic via the money-, wage labor-, and commodity-forms that it found ready to hand (prior to these being generalized), it qualitatively transforms these “antediluvian forms” (i.e., preconditions) in such a way as to best serve the central aim of capital: the production of surplus value. Marx argues, then, that capital – as “value in motion” – suddenly presents itself as a self-moving substance which passes through a process of its own, and for which commodities and money are both mere forms” (1990, 256).

With capital’s rise, it “encompasses a totality of socially specific categories involved in its circulation”; these “value categories” are all intrinsically related to value, including the following: commodity, money in its several forms, capital (constant and variable), wage labor, surplus value, valorization, productive labor, profit, interest, rent, and more (Murray 2019, 212). This point is crucial to keep in mind, since it is the existence of these “antediluvian forms” in pre-colonial Korea that leads contemporary South Korean nationalist scholars to claim that capitalism was alive and well in the nineteenth century. It is upon this basis of conflating trace amounts of money, use-value exchange, and wage-labor with “capital” *as class relation* that leads scholars of the “sprouts school” and others to the erroneous and anachronistic argument that the Japanese colonial period actually set (South) Korea’s “economic miracle” back by several decades.²⁰⁰ This overlooks all of the crucial aspects that made the world-historically rare transition to “developed” relations of real subsumption possible: i.e., those that we have been at pains to point out in earlier chapters.

²⁰⁰ So while “money” may have existed in pre-colonial Korea – say, in 1880 – both its quantitative prevalence within society and its qualitative social function(s) were radically transformed within a mere 100 years. An exploration of precisely how this was the case, however, falls outside the scope of this work.

Indeed, it was precisely this absence of the class relation outside of the Euro-American hearth of nineteenth-century capitalism that caused frustration for those European colonists that, on the basis of the “production in general” view, tried to replicate these historically specific capital relations elsewhere. This helps explain Marx’s seemingly curious decision to end Volume 1 of *Capital* with a discussion of “primitive accumulation.” Following from a study on the role of the colonies, Marx applauds how it was Wakefield’s “great merit to have discovered, not something new *about* the colonies, but, *in* the colonies, the truth about capitalist relations in the mother country” (1990, 932). More specifically, Wakefield uses the case of Mr. Peel, a British colonist who brought with him to the Swan River district of Western Australia seemingly all of the necessary “factors of production” to introduce capital(ism) there: i.e., £50,000 in means of subsistence and production; as well as 3,000 working-class men, women and children. But as Marx explains, “unhappy” Mr. Peel’s experiment ultimately failed because he “provided for everything *except the export of English relations of production to Swan River!*” Marx’s point – the significance of which cannot be overstated (especially vis-a-vis scholars of South Korea of the sprouts school ilk) – is this:

[I]n the colonies [i.e., non-capitalist societies], property in money, means of subsistence, machines and other means of production does not as yet stamp a man as a capitalist if the essential complement to these things is missing: the wage-labourer, the other man, who is compelled to sell himself of his own free will. *He discovered that capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things.* (1990, 932)

So, with “free” land available to these (Australian) proletarians-cum-settlers, the capital-labor relation was impossible to maintain. The solution to this dilemma from the standpoint of the Australian state and its proto-capitalist class was to place an artificially high price on land. This rendered proletarian labor necessary until such a time that one could save enough to invest in one’s own land (Harvey 2010, 302). Eventually, a nation-wide system of property would help

solidify the capital form in Australia (and elsewhere), just as the Japanese introduction of the cadastral survey and, by extension, extensive land tax system did during the colonial period in Korea. It should be noted, however, that it is not the mere existence of private property that rendered Australia, Korea and countless others “capitalist” during and after the colonial era, but rather the existence of the “antediluvian forms” of money, commodity, wage-labor etc., all working in the service of the capital *relation*. To repeat, it is a mistake to conflate (pre-)conditions with essence. Moreover, this trend does not determine the relative degree of capitalist penetration in any given society – that is, as a regime of hybrid, formal, or real subsumption.

It is important to stress how, in terms of the various antediluvian forms that are preconditions for the rise of the capital form, the *sine qua non* is the generalized commodification of labor (as *labor-power*). The “dual freedom” of labor-power – as both the source of liberation from previous fixed and oppressive social hierarchies and basis of social dependence – marks a revolutionary historical transformation that sets it qualitatively apart from all other forms of social life. Capital’s “historical conditions of existence are by no means given with the mere circulation of money and commodities,” Marx argues. Rather, “[i]t arises only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence *finds the free worker available*, on the market, as the seller of his own labour-power. And this one historical pre-condition comprises a world’s history” (1990, 274; emphasis added). Nevertheless, labor-power’s centrality to capitalism – as the “use-value for capital” that allows for the production of surplus value (Murray 1988, 188) – should never be treated as a transhistorically valid proposition for Marx. As we saw in Chapter 2 in our initial discussion of the categories of value, labor(-power)’s centrality to social life is unique to capitalism. To repeat, labor-power’s socially-mediating

character, rooted in the dominance of commodity exchange, provides, ironically, the grounds for the abstract compulsions that it faces on a daily basis.

This segues to an important final point regarding our discussion of “capital,” one which stresses Marx’s distinctive focus in Volumes I and II of *Capital*. Marx (1973, 99) argues in the *Grundrisse*, regarding fully developed capital(ist) relations, that “production predominates not only over itself, in the antithetical definition of production, but over the other moments as well. The process always returns to production to begin anew.” These “other moments” are distribution and exchange (which he sees as “particularities”), and consumption (viewed as “singularity”), all of which are seen as subordinate to production as the “generality” (Marx 1973, 108-109). A crucial aspect of this argument is that the “production” that Marx has in mind is *not* physical production, a common-but-erroneous “productivist and physicalist reading of Marx”; rather, it is the production of (*surplus*) value (Harvey 2013, 22-23). As we have argued, value is an *immaterial but objective* social category, and unpacking its peculiarities, contradictions, and the source of *surplus* value is the underlying theme of Volume 1 of *Capital*. However, the capital form is, as mentioned above, a *unity* of the other “moments” (and their associated “value categories”) in the capital circuit – all of which, though not representing the essence of capital, are nonetheless required for its operation. For Marx (1973, 99), then, it is *not* that “[p]roduction, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity.” Marx’s well-known formula for capital is this:

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{LP} \\ \text{M—C} \quad \dots\dots \text{P} \quad \dots\dots\dots \text{C—M} + \Delta\text{M} \\ \text{MP} \end{array}$$

Marx disaggregates the capital circuit into its constituent “moments” of money capital (M-C-M1...), productive capital (P-C1-M1 ...), and commodity capital (C-M-C1...) in the much-

neglected analysis in Volume 2 (Harvey 2013). This disaggregation of the capital circuit paints a much richer and complex picture of life under the sway of capital, especially as it pertains to inter-capitalist rivalry between the representatives of the circuit's different moments.²⁰¹

Combining Marx's focus on the production (of surplus value) process in Volume 1 with the dynamics and tensions inherent to the circulation process in Volume 2 in its various "moments" takes us a step further in viewing the broader societal prevalence of value/capital relations as a "way of life."²⁰²

Capitalism

We begin with two basic definitions of "capitalism." The first is a common, popular one from the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "an economic system in which a country's businesses and industry are controlled and run for profit by private owners rather than by the government." The poverty of this definition should be readily apparent. Not only does it fail to recognize the revolutionary and historically specific character of all of the social forms conveniently encapsulated (i.e., buried) by the terms "business and industry" (Murray 2016, Chapter 12), but it also poses a false opposition between private and state ownership, suggesting that the latter is somehow antithetical to the former. The second definition, offered in the *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (2009, 59), is this: "A system of wage-labor and commodity production for sale, exchange, and

²⁰¹ Cronon's (1991) chapter on meat provides a compelling example of the competing interests of these different segments of the capitalist class in regards to the nineteenth-century meat industry in the Chicago area and its "hinterland," though Cronon shares the "production in general" view of capital that does not historicize this peculiar "logic" that had been foisted upon the North American landscape.

²⁰² Marx echoes these two points – i.e., regarding both the necessity of the ante-diluvian forms *predating* the rise of the capital form, as well as the eventual *subordination* of these forms to capital's surplus value imperative in the "hidden abode" of production – in Volume 1 of *Capital*: "In the course of our investigation, we shall find that both merchants' capital and interest-bearing capital are derivative forms, and at the same time it will become clear why, historically, these two forms appear before the modern primary form of capital" (1990, 267).

profit, rather than for the immediate need of the producers.” This is much more satisfactory than the first in the sense that it stresses the commodification of social relations, the profit imperative, and the production for exchange rather than (immediate) use. Unlike the first, moreover, it suggests that “solving the economic problem” (Heilbroner 2012) might be achieved *without* generalized commodification, wage-labor and the like. That is, it treats capital(ism), correctly, as a determinate rather than as a general abstraction.

Nevertheless, both of these definitions restrict their understanding of capitalism to narrow economic phenomena, such as wages, profits etc. In defining capitalism more satisfactorily, then, we broaden the scope to refer to three key characteristics: 1) social formations (at various scales) where the logic of value holds sway; 2) the system-wide dynamics and *interdependencies* of all of those involved in value relations; and 3) an unprecedented and revolutionary *mode of life* whose full development occurred only recently. Given that we discussed the logic of the capital form in the previous section, we focus here on the latter two aspects.

Following Marx’s philosophy of internal relations, it should not be surprising that these three aspects possess inherent interconnections. For understanding capitalism in systemic terms, it is important to note how the successful operation of the value and capital forms in the pursuit of surplus value – a narrow “economic” moment that takes place at the point of production – is only possible due to much that is going in the *non*-commodified sphere outside of direct production. Consistent with our stress on value as a historically specific *social* category undergirding the capitalist system, Moore (2015, 54) rightly argues that “[v]alue does not work unless most work is not valued.” More specifically, the dialectic of the *exploitation* of labor-power at the point of production – in ever-increasing degrees of efficiency/productivity due to the coercive laws of (atomistic) competition between capitalists – requires at the same time a

massive “free” (i.e., unpaid) *appropriation* of the work/energy of “women, nature, and colonies.” If these sources were absent – for example, if domestic labor was fully commodified – the costs to capitalists would rise and accumulation would slacken. For capitalism as a system to thrive, therefore, there is an inescapable interdependence between commodified and non-commodified spheres of life, as well as between human and extra-human natures.

One implication of this proposition that is immediately germane to our previous discussion of postwar developmentalism is that, despite the US-pushed assumptions about the supposed generalizability of its own experience, the capitalist world-system can never consist solely of regimes of real subsumption, nor can commodification ever be societally ubiquitous. On the one hand, then, there is capitalism’s historic drive to achieve the “commodification of everything” (Wallerstein 2011); yet, on the other hand, were this ever to occur, the system would collapse due to its own internal (value) logic. This is a central reason why we have adopted Marx’s distinctions regarding the relative degree of penetration of capitalism’s value forms in terms of hybrid, formal, and real subsumption.²⁰³ This helps transcend the binary of development/underdevelopment that is so well ensconced today. Not only is the generalization of relations of real subsumption impossible, as we will see, it is these regimes that are the most socio-ecologically unsustainable in the long-run.

The first two characteristics of capitalism, taken together, are inherently linked to the third. When one considers the combined reach of the unity of the different moments of the capital circuit – where *production* (of surplus value) predominates yet is dependent upon other

²⁰³ This is the grain of truth in the widely popular world systems analysis of scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein beginning in the 1970s. Viewing capitalism as a global and interconnected system was a much-needed intervention; however, in addition to the usual criticisms leveled at this framework, even more damaging is the fact that no attention was paid to the revolutionary character of the social forms themselves.

moments like *consumption* and *distribution* – and the dialectical relation between the zones of exploitation and appropriation, it is increasingly clear that capitalism represents not just novel production techniques, but rather a new and revolutionary *way of life*. Here we build on our preliminary discussion from Chapter 5. So not only does the inexorable directional dynamic stemming from the contradictory dualism of capitalism’s structuring social forms beget “ongoing changes in the nature of work, production, technology and the accumulation of related forms of knowledge,” argues Postone (1993), but the sway of capital permeates myriad other spheres of society:

More generally, the historical movement of the social totality entails ongoing, massive transformations in the mode of social life of the majority of the population – in social patterns of work and living, in the structure and distribution of classes, the nature of the state and politics, the form of the family, the nature of learning and education, the modes of transportation and communication, and so on. Moreover, the dialectical process at the heart of capitalism’s immanent dynamic entails the constitution, spread, and ongoing transformation of historically determinate forms of subjectivity, interactions, and social values. (294)

A more detailed exploration of the various ways this general proposition has manifested itself in postwar South Korean society falls outside the scope of this work; however, its validity should be apparent to anyone familiar with the revolutionary changes emerging from the nation’s “compressed” modernization (Chang 1999; Chang and Lee 2006).²⁰⁴

Before moving on, a further observation is worth noting regarding the analytical usefulness of deploying the term “capitalism” in academic work. Although this term was used on rare occasions in the mid-nineteenth century by the likes of Louis Blanc and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, it was not until the twentieth century, especially after the Bolshevik Revolution of

²⁰⁴ For instance, domestic labor and child-rearing in 1880s Korea would be radically different from the form it took a hundred years later in the 1980s, despite both seemingly falling outside of the accumulation imperative.

1917, that this term gained widespread usage. It is for this reason that Braudel (1982) doubts its analytical soundness for analyses prior to c.1800. As he writes: “Ambiguous, hardly scientific, and usually indiscriminately applied, it is – above all – a word that cannot be used of the ages before the industrial period without being accused of anachronism” (231). For Braudel, then, capitalism is a “political word” that, for the system’s critics, stands as the *deus ex machina* to explain all of society’s ills; while on the other hand, it becomes so widely and loosely used that for the system’s supporters and academics it loses all explanatory power. The ubiquity of its use no doubt stemmed from the Manichean worldviews of the run-up to, and especially during, the Cold War.²⁰⁵ Indeed, the loose ways in which the term is often deployed is exactly why we have labored to clarify what we mean in our own use of it.

In one sense, Braudel is correct, but in others he is off the mark. Much of the confusion stems from how capitalism is such a complex, interconnected, and interdependent system that, depending on one’s view of what its defining feature is deemed to be (trade, wage-labor, industrial production etc.), definitions will vary widely regarding its origins and key aspects. For Braudel, capitalism proper begins with the industrial revolution in Britain and spreads geographically thereafter. This is correct insofar as capitalist relations in their industrial form represent the “full” (and contradictory) development of capitalism in terms of relations of real subsumption. As we mentioned in the previous section, however, this would have been impossible if the “antediluvian forms” had not already existed. More importantly, however,

²⁰⁵ Braudel (1982, 238) complains of how post-World War II scholars, historians in particular, “blithely disregarded anachronism” and began to search for (and frame) all manner of ancient histories in terms of “capitalism,” from ancient Babylon and China to Hellenistic Greece and Middle-Age Europe. This was partly due to the conflation of some of capitalism’s surface categories and antediluvian forms, like money, with “capital.” Again, this stems from a physicalist understanding of capital(ism) that confuses general abstractions like material wealth with determinate ones like value and capital.

Braudel's understanding echoes the widespread (yet erroneous) one of today that stresses technological factors, such as the use of steam-power and machinery, as the essence of capitalism. Against this, we have stressed how capitalism's uniqueness stems from its unprecedented *social* (class) relations. In this sense, then, the advent of the technological innovations typically viewed as capitalism's essence are really just epiphenomenal – the predictable results of the coercive competitive pressures of real subsumption.

It is for this reason that Moore (2015) criticizes the technological fetishism inherent to views such as the “Two-Century Model” explanation of our current (socio-)ecological crises: that is, the belief that it all began with the industrial revolution. Instead, Moore rightly traces the origins of capitalism, as a system, centuries before the industrial revolution. He stresses, in particular, the revolutionary shift from land to *labor* productivity (in select pockets of the world), as well as the simplifying logic that renders the qualitative world of socio-nature into quantitatively interchangeable units.²⁰⁶

There are good reasons why Braudel drew the conclusions he did, however. For it was not until the post-World War II era of the “development project” that US-style capitalist revolutions were posited as the “natural” course of economic development for all, which were then pursued zealously by the decolonizing world, albeit with uneven results. The very act of shaking off colonial paternalism, then, did much to deepen the systemic capitalist interconnections between the West and non-West. Also, Braudel's points about the recency of “capitalism” provides further support for the historical novelty of the global ubiquity of capitalist

²⁰⁶ For a more exhaustive list of pre-industrial aspects of world history's capitalist revolutions see Moore (2015, 182-187), where he enumerates twenty-seven such aspects of the capitalist world-system (c.1450 onward) that evinced central features of capitalism as *socio*-ecologically understood, such as urbanization, commodification, proletarianization.

social relations. True, the antediluvian forms have a long history, and so does the shift from land to labor productivity and market-based value relations, but the introduction of relations of real subsumption to Asia and the opening up of the Third World (or Global South) happened only in the past seventy years or so – based on the one-two punch of decolonization within the postwar “development project” and the post-1973 neoliberal assault via the debt crisis, Structural Adjustment Programs and the like (Gowan 1999; Harvey 2005). Ironically, therefore, just as capitalist social relations began achieving a global reach and deepening, capitalism as a system and analytical category seemed to vanish. That is, its historically specific dictates have become so embedded in people’s everyday lives that, in line with the “production in general” view, they are now considered “naturally given” (i.e., transhistorical).

The Socio-ecological Contradictions of South Korea’s “Over-development”

Returning now to consider South Korea in light of the previous discussion – and as a means of foregrounding the subsequent comments on the socio-ecological contradictions of value (and real subsumption, more specifically – we trace here the escalating crisis tendencies in the country.

In terms of the latter *periodization* of this work – it was something that was chosen quite deliberately. We terminate the analysis c.1985-1990, only a few years after industrial relations of real subsumption were introduced to South Korea. This may seem odd, given how much emphasis was given to the socio-ecological contradictions *of* that particular form. When considered alongside the extant literature on postwar South Korean history (especially those of an “environmental” bent), however, the rationale becomes clearer. For in those works (e.g., Byun 1983; Eder 1996),²⁰⁷ ecological degradation – narrowly conceived as mere “earth moving

²⁰⁷ Chung and Kirkby (2002) offer a valuable exception to this trend, carrying on their discussion of the links between capitalism and environmental degradation right up to the period prior to the book’s publication. Still, their Regulationist approach, despite making them conscious of the

activities” (Moore 2011a) – was viewed as stemming from the Park regime’s *neglect* of these issues due to its headlong rush for growth. In one sense, this is true enough. From a longer-range perspective, however, what makes the South Korean “miracle” regime socio-ecologically unsustainable is not the absence of environmental awareness in the earlier period of light industry of the 1960s; rather, it flows precisely from the very implementation and dynamics of its general adoption of capitalist value relations after 1945 and, more importantly, the “successful” transition to industrial relations of real subsumption in the 1970s and all this entails. As such, we have focused on unpacking the historical-geographical *genesis* of this fateful transition. As we will stress in an upcoming section, once a society is on the value treadmill, no amount of state or popular attention to “environmental issues” can abolish the socio-ecological fallout stemming from the imperative of the endless accumulation *of capital* (not use-values), which is the hallmark of regimes of real subsumption’s “full development” of the wealth/value distinction.

Although the post-1990s period falls outside the emphasis of this work, we signal here mounting socio-ecological issues that are inherent to South Korea’s capitalist revolution more generally, and “cheap labor” strategy in particular. These issues flow directly from the more abstract analysis offered in this work is an investigation of the socio-ecological contradictions of, for lack of a better term, “*over-development*.” This seemingly oxymoronic term refers to the relations of industrialized real subsumption that underpinned the “miracle” in the first place. Three issues in post-1980 South Korea stand out as germane in this regard.

specific accumulation regimes and institutional forms of each period, treats the deep structuring categories of capitalism as self-evident and unproblematic. That is, for them, there is nothing inherent to the forms themselves that bears upon the constant shifts in accumulation regime and institutional form.

First, there is the alarming issue of South Korea's escalating level of food dependence (Muller 2015). As a result of its export-based heavy industrialization drive, its level of food self-sufficiency has steadily declined – e.g., from 70% in 1980 to 55% in 2000. Compounding this problem is the spike in global food commodity prices since 2000, which has rendered the costs of procuring this imported food more burdensome to the state; meanwhile, all signs point to further escalating prices as the inputs for industrialized farming techniques show no signs of abating in a world of peak oil, diminishing resources and climate change (Weis 2010). Indeed, the severity of this situation is well appreciated by South Korea's leaders, as evidenced in its attempt to via the Daewoo corporation to purchase *half* of Madagascar's arable land in 2008 (Walt 2008; Akram-Lodhi 2012). What were the domestic dynamics that pushed South Korean leaders to pursue this food import strategy, what have been its consequences to this point, and what is its likely future trajectory?

Second, closely related to the issue are the significant dietary changes that have occurred in South Korea since World War II. While there is nothing inherently problematic about changing dietary habits – e.g., its rising consumption of wheat-based foods stemming from the influx of US food aid (Park 2013; Chung 2015) – far more worrying is the nation's post-1980 rapid increase in meat consumption. In this way, South Korea represents a particularly stark case of a more global trend of exploding livestock production and consumption. This phenomenon is what Tony Weis (2013; 2015) refers to as “meatification,” a phenomenon with deeply troubling environmental, health, and social ramifications.

The third issue stemming from South Korea's postwar “over-development” is the general issue of ecological degradation. Based on its general heavy-industry-based growth strategy, but also connected to its dietary changes (“meatification”), the country currently suffers from serious

problems such as water and air quality, waste disposal, and acid rain that, as we will see, the nation's political leaders of all stripes are attempting to address, mostly in vain. Although the socio-ecological unsustainability of the South Korean regime stems from the contradictions of its structuring *social* forms, there are nonetheless real biophysical issues and limits that need to be taken into account. How these are managed and figured into concrete issues of policy and political-economic strategy (at various scales) is worthy of pressing attention.

The South Korean State's Response to Socio-Ecological Crises

Much of this chapter is devoted to making explicit the explanatory centrality and socio-ecological significance of South Korea's capitalist revolution, highlighting in particular the contradictions inherent to the structuring social forms of labor's (real) subsumption under capital: value and, by extension, capital. In the West, despite the work of Marx and those following in the tradition of value-form analysis (e.g., Murray 2016), the revolutionary character of these forms is almost completely unrecognized. This is easy enough to explain, given that the cataclysmic shifts in Western societies' class structures took place at a great enough historical remove to be more or less forgotten. What is interesting in the South Korean case, then, is this: how can we account for a similar lack of recognition by South Korean citizens and scholars, despite the incredibly "compressed" and turbulent character of this transition to real subsumption? For in the popular imaginary, all of the preconditions that are necessary for capital accumulation to take place that we have emphasized in this work – i.e., the generalization of wage-labor via the proletarianization process and land reform, privatization of property, commodification and generalization of money etc. – are all simply taken for granted. They are viewed as changes only in degree (or quantity) rather than in kind (or quality). According to this

view: money is money; commodity is nothing more than a use-value that is exchanged; wage-labor is just a fancy way of saying work, and so on.

Nevertheless, even when attention to the socio-ecological contradictions inherent to capitalism are not consciously recognized, the mounting environmental challenges facing South Korea have been increasingly cited in the literature (Byun 1983; Eder 1996; Chung and Kirkby 2002; Hsu et al. 2014). The reasons for this are easy enough to discern. As Sungbok Yun (2013) summarizes:

Korea is the country with the highest density population in the world,²⁰⁸ and, moreover, about 70 percent of the national land consists of mountains. The overpopulation makes Koreans sensitive and competitive to land use and pollution. Under these conditions, civic experiences of environmental problems which capital and the state have, to a large extent, produced, have been enough to induce militant environmental movements to defend the life-world threatened. (157)

In other words, regardless of whether one seeks to uncover the source of the nation's escalating socio-ecological crises or not, their effects have been ubiquitous, worrying both citizens and state leaders alike.

These have been addressed by two main segments of society: the state and civil society. In accordance with our methodological framework outlined at the beginning of this work – i.e., reading empirical patterns (Ollman's level 2) via a (level-3) focus on capitalism's more abstract forms – we will focus on the former due to its disproportionate power vis-a-vis the “sustainability” question and need to concern itself with securing the successful daily and generational reproduction of South Korea's new capitalist social formation.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ This is perhaps an exaggeration, and of course these rankings depend entirely on the methodology and categories deployed. Nevertheless, the general point still stands: compared to “developed” Western societies, there is an urgency in South Korea regarding “sustainability” that flows directly from issues of geography, population etc.

²⁰⁹ A brief note regarding environmental groups operating outside of the main channel of state power (that is, working outside of the Ministry of Environment): Chung and Kirkby (2002) argue

Interestingly, the birth of the South Korean state's environmental regulation came prior to its developmental take-off under Park, beginning with the New Forest Law of 1961. When considered from the standpoint of the effects of the regional and global power dynamics discussed earlier, however, this is more understandable; for this law that called for hundreds of millions of trees to be planted was triggered by the fact that the nation's forests had been ravaged by the "Japanese occupation, the Korean War, and a fuel-starved population in the 1950s" (Eder 1996, 15).²¹⁰ Nevertheless, environmental concerns did not garner the attention of state leaders until some two decades later, when the fallout from new industrial production methods had had time to leave their marks on the population and landscape. The implicit (and often explicit) belief shared by state leaders and citizens alike was that growth must come first, which would supposedly pave the way later to address quality of life concerns such as environmental integrity. So, although Article 35 of the 1980 constitution made the following declaration – "All citizens shall have the right to a healthy and a pleasant environment: the state and all citizens shall endeavor to protect the environment" (Eder 1996, 17) – it was not until the establishment of the Ministry of Environment in 1990 that the state acted in earnest to address mounting (socio-)ecological problems, pledging \$12 billion for this ten-year plan.²¹¹

that these groups have been marginalized due to their lack of funding, schisms within the broader movement down "ideological fault-lines" (212), and increasing marginalization due to the rise of South Korea's middle class which effectively split "socio-environmental" issues into separate spheres (216). For an historical overview of the South Korean environmental movement as a whole, see Yun (2013).

²¹⁰ Other early policies included the Anti-Public-Nuisance Law of 1963, the establishment of the Pollution Control Division within the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in 1973, and more systematically with the emergence of the Environmental Preservation Act of 1978. These early laws, however, lacked any enforcement mechanisms, so compliance with them was largely absent.

²¹¹ The state promised to cover 55% of the costs of this. Prior to this, moreover, there was an uptick in state commitment with the creation of things such as the Solid Waste Management Act of 1986.

Unsurprisingly, despite these efforts, the past thirty years have witnessed an escalation of the problem. On the one hand, there are challenges stemming from issues like air and water quality, waste management etc., all of which have an immediate impact on quality of life and health. On the other hand, though relatedly, there has been a mounting awareness of more macro shifts in terms of climate change. As Rhee, Jang and Chung (2012) outline:

The average rate of temperature increase in Korea during the past century is far greater than the world average (1.7 increase from 1912 to 2008). This shows that the Korean peninsula is being directly influenced by climate change. According to a report by the Presidential Committee on Green Growth (PCGG), winter is now 22–49 days shorter and heavy rain and hot temperatures are prevalent during summer. Also 2,127 people died due to heat waves that occurred from 1994 to 2005, and 2,227 more incidents of malaria infection were observed in 2007. This experience, combined with international pressure, gave the new [conservative Lee Myung Bak] administration strong motivation to make climate change a national priority. (29)

So real are the socio-ecological challenges mounting in South Korea that, unlike in geographically large Western nations such as the US and Canada, even staunchly conservative administrations cannot afford to continue neglecting them in the new millennium.

Beginning with Bak's 2008 "Low Carbon, Green Growth (LCGG)" strategy, South Korea has experimented with a panoply of programs aimed ostensibly at "sustainable development" (Jung 2018). From experiments with "smart grid" technology on Jeju Island, the Four Major Rivers Restoration Project, the UNESCO Committee Ecological Park, the Green Technology Research and Development Comprehensive Plan, the Korea Eco-Products Institute, the Eco-Technopia 21 Project, to the Environmentally Friendly Enterprise Certification System and many others (Hsu et al. 2014, 89-91), "sustainable development" is all the rage in contemporary South Korea. As a result of the barrage of these sorts of policies, South Korea has

been popularly lauded as being a pioneer in sustainable development for the rest of the world to emulate (Hsu et al. 2014, 85; Jung 2018).²¹²

We will have occasion to critique these sorts of policies from a more robust theoretical standpoint later on, but for now two related points should be noted. The first is that the South Korean state's attempts since c.1980 to deal with socio-ecological challenges have always been undertaken from within the logic of capital accumulation. That is, the range of possible actions has been limited to those that would not hinder in any way the nation's growth objective. This trend does not stem from ideological concerns, but rather from the structural imperatives facing all capitalist regimes. This is the main reason why the form of environmentalism advocated by the state via the mass media and education system focused, like in the West, on issues of personal consumption habits, recycling, and the like (Chung and Kirkby 2002, 212) – all of which downloads onto individuals the responsibility for addressing structural problems.²¹³

The second observation is that, due to the necessity of attempting to achieve environmental sustainability in such a way that does not threaten accumulation (and, by extension, the social relations undergirding that process), the vast majority of the projects listed above and others were highly technocratic in character. Again, as in the West, what was sought was essentially technological solutions to socio-ecological issues. As a regime of real

²¹² At the time of writing (i.e., late 2020), the more left-leaning Moon Jae-In regime had recently announced its rollout of the nation's so-called Green New Deal. While surely undertaken from a more sincere standpoint than Bak's LCGG strategy when it comes to actually dealing with issues of sustainability, given that its operating from within the imperatives of capitalist value production, its potential will also be severely hampered.

²¹³ In light of South Korea's far more pressing challenges, these reformist measures have certainly been stricter than in the West. For example, the state enacted in 1994 the Act on Promoting Saving and Recycling Resources; a year later, it created the Per Bag Trash Collection Fee System, which charges households for government-approved trash bags that can be procured from convenience stores etc. (Hsu et al. 2014, 46).

subsumption engaged predominantly in *relative* surplus value strategies flowing from technological innovations (Marx 1990), this approach is not surprising. A faith in technology was also widely held by the nation's citizenry. In a 1992 survey, for instance, nearly half (i.e., 47%) of the respondents agreed with the statement: "Can environmental problems be solved or resolved through science and technology instead of changing the character of society?," while only 26% disagreed (Chung and Kirkby 2002, 214). This pursuit of creating a "technotopia" (*ibid.*, 217) in twenty-first-century South Korea – as a means of somehow "sustaining" both the nation's growth imperative and environmental integrity – is what guides the plans of leaders across the political spectrum, from Bak's Low Carbon Green Growth strategy of 2008 to Moon's Green New Deal of 2020.

The Socio-Ecological Significance of Value

In Chapter 2, we initially established the importance of the value form as *the* deep structuring category of "modern" capitalist societies, stressing abstract labor as the social mediator for the billions of commodity producers in today's globalizing world market. Subsequently, in Chapter 5, we discussed some of the implications of the temporal dimensions of value, emphasizing the accelerating speed of daily life and rise of an abstract form of social domination (i.e., one with seemingly no discernible locus for those involved). In this culminating chapter, we tease out in greater detail the socio-ecological implications of Marx's categorial critique of value and capital, ultimately arguing for value's growing anachronism as a way to regulate societies' – and ultimately humanity's – relation to nature. In this section, though, we stress only in a general way the socio-ecological significance of value. Indeed, it is difficult to overstate the importance of the "value question," not as morally or economically conceived in contemporary society's popular imagination, but in Marx's highly targeted way as the foundation of modern life. Harvey

(2010, 21) echoes this disconnect between value's socio-ecological significance and its misrecognition in popular society:

We all like to think, of course, that we have our own “values,” and every election season ... there is an interminable discussion about candidates’ “values.” But Marx is arguing that there is a certain kind and measure of value which is being determined by a process that we do not understand and which is not necessarily our conscious choice, and that the manner in which these values are being imposed on us has to be unpacked. If you want to understand who you are and where you stand in this maelstrom of churning values, you have first to understand how commodity values get created and produced and with what consequences – social, environmental, political and the like. *If you think you can solve a serious environmental question like global warming without actually confronting the question of by whom and how the foundational value structure of our society is being determined, then you are kidding yourself.* [As such,] we must understand what commodity values and the *social necessities* that determine them are all about. (emphasis added)

Moreover, Marx's concept of value sheds light on the frequent laments within the fields of environmental history and, more broadly and interdisciplinary, political ecology about the widespread binary between the supposedly separate spheres of “Humanity” and “Nature” that pervades society (e.g., Cronon 1991). As Moore (2015, 65) argues, “Marx's reading of value was ... eminently post-Cartesian”; indeed, today's prevalent nature-society schism *emerges from the dual* character of the commodity itself (i.e., use-value and value).

Significantly, what ties together various themes in our analysis – both those of the more abstract theoretical sections on method and value in Chapter 2, as well as the historical-geographical ones of the intervening chapters – is the “immanent dynamic” that the *interaction* of these dualistic forms begets. Modernization theory, technological fetishism, theories of “post-industrial society” and the like all have their roots in this dynamic peculiar to world history's hegemonic regimes of real subsumption. Given that we are ultimately concerned in this work with making the case for the long-term unviability of the capitalist mode of production in general, but of regimes of real subsumption in particular, we should distinguish between three

different sorts of dialectics popularly attributed to the Marxist tradition. The first is captured by Marx's famous statement about nature-society relations as mediated through the labor process:

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hand, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. *Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature.* He developed the potentialities slumbering within nature, and subjects the play of its forces to his own sovereign power. (1990, 283; emphasis added)

The second one refers to the interactions between the deep structures of a given society and (individual or social) practice – referring to the well-known tension in the social sciences and humanities between structure and agency (Giddens 1984).²¹⁴ While they are useful in their own ways, it is important to recognize that both are features common to *all* human societies (to varying degrees) – that is, they should be understood as general abstractions (Murray 1988).

For the specifically capitalist mode of production in its “developed” form of real subsumption, however, the most apposite dialectical relationship to investigate is a third one, which focuses on the *interactions* of its dualistic social forms. On the one hand, there are its categories of the use-value dimension – material wealth, concrete labor, and concrete time (general abstractions); on the other hand, there are those of the value-dimension – value, abstract labor, and abstract time (determinate abstractions) (Postone 1993, 287). Crucially, only this last dialectic possesses an inherent *directional dynamic*, one that flows from the contradictory interactions of these dualistic pairings (Postone 1993, 305). This undergirds the highly ambivalent character of value (and capital) as both materially dynamic and socio-ecologically

²¹⁴ Postone (1993, 304-305) refers to these first two, respectively, as the dialectics of “reflexive constitution through objectification” and of “reciprocal constitution of determinate forms of social practice and social structure.”

unsustainable. This seemingly natural telos of capital's dynamism has been widely recognized in various registers – e.g., Rostovian modernization theory – but its locus and historical specificity are not apprehended due to a focus on *one side* of these inherently dualistic forms. We focus in the following section, then, on the ramifications of the issues emerging from the dualistic tensions themselves.

The Growing Anachronism of Value

In speaking of the growing anachronism of value, we do so in two ways. On the one hand, there is the anachronism of value in its most acute case, or “developed” form, of relations of real subsumption under large-scale industry. On the other hand, there is the link between the above and the generalization of value relations since 1945, which has incurred a stark increase in (commodified) biophysical throughputs, though via regimes at lesser degrees of subsumption. We will deal with each in turn in this section; however, we stress here how the increasingly anachronistic character of value is rooted within its own historically specific logic, and that this has been brought about (and has been exacerbated) by its very global “success.” In other words, while many criticisms have been leveled at “capitalism” from a perspective external to its own logic, we focus upon its *self-imposed* undermining.

This necessitates that we pursue a rather abstract line of reasoning concerning the contradictions of capital's web of value forms. We will attempt to concretize the discussion, where possible, via historical-geographical examples; nevertheless, the pressing issue is to highlight the tensions in the forms themselves, rather than getting sidetracked by their downstream “impacts.” To begin, recall from the discussion in Chapter 2 that value is an “immaterial but objective” form (Harvey 2010, 33), a purely social category that structures and mediates the far-flung and often chaotic world of global commodity relations, one that is

temporally (not materially) grounded. The inherent duality of the commodity form means that material use-values are perforce thrown off in the process of producing, circulating, and consuming specific commodities, but that the immediate needs that these satisfy, unlike under all other societies, is not the main aim of capitalism's systemic logic.

This is an important idea, one that has eluded various mainstream "environmental" critiques of capitalism. Marx (1990) warns of this slippage in his discussion of the fetishism of commodities:

The degree to which some economists are misled by the fetishism attached to the world of commodities, or by the objective appearance of the social characteristics of labour, is shown, among other things, by the *dull and tedious dispute over the part played by nature in the formation of exchange-value*. Since exchange-value is a *definite social manner* of expressing the labour bestowed on a thing, *it can have no more natural content than has, for example, the rate of exchange*. (176; emphasis added)

The sorts of arguments that Marx was criticizing here have only become more widespread in today's world. It is one of the contradictions of the capitalist value form that, despite the fact that (exchange-)value is rooted in socially necessary labor time, one can nevertheless place a price on objects, characteristics etc. that do not contain any labor content. "Things which in and for themselves are not commodities, such as conscience, honour, etc.," Marx points out, "can be offered for sale by their holders and thus acquire the form of commodities through their price. Hence a thing can, formally speaking, have a price without having a value (1990, 197). It is this contradiction that underlies the difficulties of today's environmental movement, as well as state and corporate attempts to grapple with the socio-ecological contradictions of the system they advocate. This happens whenever they attempt to assign a "value" (understood uncritically as price) to "nature," such as in calculations of "ecosystem services" and the like (Robertson and Wainwright 2013, 893).

The value/wealth distinction is perhaps *the* central contradiction of capitalism (Holloway 2015), yet this is only fully expressed under industrial relations of real subsumption of the sort that took hold in South Korea after 1973. This is a crucial point to observe in light of the distinction through which we structure this section: between those minimal (though hegemonic) number of societies in world history rooted in fully developed relations of real subsumption and the larger capitalist system as a whole, which are subsumed less fully by its forms. In this section, then, we draw out the socio-ecological insights contained in Postone's (1993) pathbreaking work. It is important to remember, however, that his pioneering analysis in *Time, Labor and Social Domination* applies only to societies ensconced in relations of real subsumption. He does admit this on occasion, but given the world-historical rarity of these relations, Postone should have been more up front about its limited applicability. Consequently, our discussion relies necessarily on other frameworks, which is where Moore's world-ecology paradigm is indispensable.

Relations of Real Subsumption under Large-Scale Industry

We have stressed throughout this work the inherent two-fold character of capitalism's value forms. For example, the categories flowing from labor's use-value dimension include material wealth, concrete labor, and concrete time (all *general* abstractions),²¹⁵ which sit in tension with those of the value dimension, such as value, abstract labor and abstract time (all *determinate* abstractions). Once these forms have been generalized within a society, however, these two

²¹⁵ We need to be careful here. In stating that concrete labor, for example, is a general abstraction, we are not suggesting that the *types* of concrete labor that are performed under developed capitalism are not shaped by its abstract value dimension. Undoubtedly, the forms of concrete labor under capitalism are historically specific, but what we mean is that *some sort* of concrete labor process is necessary for the successful daily and generational reproduction of any given social formation. The labor process in general is, as Marx stresses, "the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence" (1990, 290).

dimensions take on an inexorable (i.e., directional) “immanent dynamic,” where the two-fold character of the forms dialectically unfurl at the level of the social totality (Postone 1993, 287-288).

This dialectic stems from the (socially necessary) *temporal*, rather than material, basis of value, which contains within it a contradiction. In a society subsumed under capital’s forms, capitalist competition leads to improvements in the means of communication and transportation. This “annihilation of space by time” (Marx 1973, 524) not only speeds up the turnover time of the various “moments” within the circuit of capital, but also extends capital’s sway to a greater and greater swath of socio-nature (now defined as “labor markets,” “natural resources,” and the like). Individual commodities, recall, are valued (and therefore sold) at the *social average* that pertains at that given time across all of the producers enmeshed in its geographical web of market relations. In line with value’s fixation on labor productivity, individual capitalists who manage to produce at a degree of efficiency above that social average reap an (ephemeral) extra amount of surplus value, while those producing below it lose some (Marx 1990, 436). Under relations of real subsumption there is, then, a structural necessity to innovate technologically so as to reap this extra amount of surplus value vis-a-vis one’s competitors. Note, however, that these competitive pressures force others to adopt the same, similar, or better technologies and/or organizational forms so as not to be put out of business. While in some ways this imperative is generalized across all forms of labor’s subsumption under capital given their shared fixation on labor productivity, it is particularly fierce and *unavoidable* under relations of real subsumption of large-scale industry. Harvey (2010) summarizes this imperative as follows:

[T]here is a tremendous incentive for *leapfrogging technological innovations* among individual capitalists. I get ahead of the pack, I have a superior, more efficient production system than you, I get the ephemeral surplus-value for three years, and you then catch up

with me or even go beyond me and get the ephemeral surplus-value through new technologies. Hence the technological dynamism of capitalism. (169; emphasis added)

The key part to note here is that the extra surplus value that revolutions in technology and organizational form allow are only *temporary*: for “[t]his extra surplus-value vanishes as soon as the new method of production is generalized, for then the difference between the individual value of the cheapened commodity and its social value vanishes” (Marx 1990, 436).

The story up to now is relatively well-known. What is often overlooked, however, is the “dialectic of labor and time” that occurs during the process, one rooted in the dynamic interaction of the dual character of the commodity form: use-value and value. The structural imperative of capitalism is to increase labor productivity, which is shaped by the *qualitative use-value* dimension of commodified labor (i.e., concrete labor). However, socially necessary labor time establishes the value that commodities will receive in the market, which is a temporal consideration that is *quantitatively* measured via abstract labor. The standardized “social labor hour” to which all producers must conform, therefore, is quantitatively fixed, *though the level of productivity that establishes that standard is ever-changing* in response to competition-induced increases in labor productivity, thereby establishing a new “base level.” In other words, according to capitalism’s peculiar time accountancy, an hour counts as simply an hour; however, the amount of biophysical throughput that is required to sustain these new “socially necessary” standards via increases in labor productivity tend to increase exponentially.

The socio-ecological ramifications of this “dialectic of labor and time” inherent to relations of real subsumption are, literally and figuratively, earth shattering, which we will take up shortly. For now, note the “*treadmill effect*” that this elicits at the “level of society as a whole,” one “rooted in the interaction of value and material wealth, abstract and concrete labor – that is, the interaction of the two dimensions of the commodity form” (Postone 1993, 289 and

291). This treadmill effect triggers two peculiar trends that are central to “developed” capitalist social formations of real subsumption. First, it sparks a constant revolutionizing in production techniques, which have widespread and dislocating socio-ecological effects, while nevertheless maintaining the same goal (i.e., value). Second, it instills the linear notion of a “march of progress,” as increasing levels of productivity give rise to endless technological marvels and cascading amounts of material wealth, but, ironically, all as epiphenomena of the value imperative. Both of these trends are rooted in how value becomes an “abstract form of domination,” where the grounds for coercion of the individual are embedded in labor-power’s function as both a form of social mediation and valorization (of surplus value) process. Once ensconced, these possess an “objective, lawlike quality that is by no means a mere illusion or mystification”; for “[a]lthough social, it is independent of [any individual] human will” (Postone 1993, 290). The historically specific relations of capitalism, therefore, come to be seen as natural, since, unlike under other modes of production, there is no *direct* (or unmediated) form of compulsion placed upon these societies’ “free” individuals. This is where the power and prevalence of the “production in general” view of economic life derives.

On the basis of the arguments above, a “puzzling” theme that has pervaded this work should come more clearly into relief. On the one hand, there are the claims of the US-pushed development era (via Rostovian modernization theory) to represent the most materially and technologically dynamic form of life ever devised, as well as a stagist model that all can ostensibly achieve. The first claim is true enough, though the second one has been roundly criticized on various grounds. Most of the arguments used to cast doubt on the teleological presuppositions of modernization theory have centered on geopolitical power relations and the like. We can see from the above, however, the structural grounds upon which these claims were

put forth and *appear* to be true. Indeed, regimes of real subsumption are the most technologically and materially advanced, based on the coercive “immanent dynamic” outlined above. Moreover, based on the technological leapfrogging through which these relations unfold, we saw how a directional dynamic emerged that appears like the inexorable “march of progress.” Those “backward” nations, the popular logic held, simply do not know how to produce “efficiently.” On the other hand, regimes of real subsumption, especially under large-scale industry, depend entirely upon less developed (i.e., subsumed) societies to procure the escalating socio-ecological inputs needed to feed their own dynamism. In this sense, their claims to generalizability do not hold. Herein lie the origins of both the truth and falsity of the development era’s claims.

Sticking with the theme of the “growing” anachronism of value for now, however, it should be stressed that it was precisely the material dynamism of modern world history’s first two national cases of industrialized relations of real subsumption – Britain after c.1800 and the US roughly a century thereafter – that underscored their economic, political, military, and ideological legitimacy. As long as the number of these dynamic social formations remained in the extreme minority, as long as the limits of transportation and communications technologies limited the “global” reach of its “satanic mills,” as long as there were enough “outsides” (i.e., frontiers) to spill into, these relations enjoyed an unprecedented degree of legitimacy in espousing their material (if not moral) superiority. Indeed, think of all of the hurdles that were surmounted during these centuries of capitalistic dynamism: medical breakthroughs, exploding levels of education (of a certain kind), technological marvels of all kinds, space travel etc. Nevertheless, all of this was incidental to the value imperatives of real subsumption, spectacular instances of use-value creation as a subordinate yet inextricably linked aspect of the commodity form’s two-sided character.

An interesting issue emerges from this relationship between the world's hegemonic regimes of industrialized real subsumption and the vast majority of the "less developed" societies. Superficial appearances and Western protestations aside, regimes of real subsumption are by far and away the world's most socio-ecologically destructive. This is because of labor's full immersion within the value logic that ceaselessly pursues productivity gains (via the coercive laws of competition) that flow from value's *temporal* measurement – i.e., greater and greater biophysical throughputs with no concomitant increases in value (Postone 1993, 197).

Yet, there are several reasons why this is denied. First, there is the real, though misleading, fact that "developed" nations must be the most ecologically progressive since they typically have the cleanest environments. This stems, ironically, from the very relations of real subsumption that created the problems in the first place: i.e., the "class struggle" that is inherent to industrial production methods leads to working-class demands for a safer and cleaner environment; the material dynamism allows these societies (usually via the state's growing tax coffers) to address these issues; and the fact that, especially under the neoliberal turn, the increasingly global commodity relations mean that Western high mass consumption, comes at the expense of ecological degradation in the Global South (e.g., Faber 1993).

The second reason is rooted, again, in the dualistic dynamics of commodified relations. For what is usually offered as "proof" of Western societies' greater "sustainability" is its *relative* (rather than absolute) resource usage. That is, their rates of "efficiency gains" are measured *per unit* of a particular commodity, which takes labor productivity as its central measure, thereby overlooking the increasingly great biophysical throughput this requires. This one-sided focus by capitalism's Western boosters on the use-value dimension of what is a two-sided dialectical relation is, indeed, the basis for the seeming counterintuitive dynamics, such as the so-called

“Jevons paradox.” This describes a situation where increases in “efficiency” lead, on the one hand, to real *per unit* savings vis-a-vis a particular resource etc. On the other hand, these efficiency gains lower the price of the resource (or commodity) in question, which actually *increases* the rate of its consumption. A more illustrative example of the socio-ecological contradictions of the commodity form would be hard to find.

The point above signals a matter of tremendous importance that is also largely overlooked: that is, the distinction between the *rate* and *mass* of surplus value (Harvey 2020, Chapter 15). Given capitalism’s growth imperative in monetary terms (again, grounded in the temporal dimension of value), popular and scholarly attention is focused on the rate of profit (or surplus value) rather than the mass. Socio-ecologically speaking, however, the latter issue is key. For example, for each annual “paltry” growth rate of, say, 2%, what that means is that all of the biophysical throughput that was created in the previous year is assumed away, and only the part that represents the “growth” portion is factored in. Of course, the concrete use-value dimensions do not factor in at all when calculating (surplus) value or growth, but the inherent two-sided aspects of the commodity form means that they are inescapably “along for the ride.” With the rise and global spread of capitalist value relations since 1945, what this signals is nothing short of a looming socio-ecological cataclysm.

To offer just one example, take the issue of China’s escalation in cement usage in the wake of the global economic downturn of 2007-2008. As Harvey (2016) points out:

Some astonishing news reports are coming out of China. The United States Geological Survey, which keeps tabs on these things, reports that *China consumed 6,651 million tonnes of cement in the years 2011–2013 compared with the 4,405 million tonnes the United States used over the period 1900–1999*. In the United States we have poured a lot of concrete, but the Chinese must be pouring it everywhere at unconscionable rates. How and why could this be? And with what environmental, economic and social consequences? (1; emphasis added)

The reason for this stark statistic stems from China's reaction to the global decrease in the demand for its seemingly endless supply of low-priced commodities – those that have been sustaining the material standard of living of most working-class Westerners since the stagnation of wages that occurred since the 1970s. Using the “underdevelopment” of its own homeland as a justification to feed its capitalist growth machine that was unleashed when the world's most populous nation adopted the commodity form as its main regulator of socio-ecological relations, the creation of countless “ghost cities” and other major infrastructural projects served as an internal “spatial fix” for Chinese state and business leaders. This served to appease the growth imperative, as well as quell the possible social discontent that would have erupted amongst its exploding working-class had no action been taken. Stated in the more boosterish language typically found in popular press accounts, China is now the “world's concrete superpower” (Hawkins 2019). The above anecdote gives a rare glimpse into the biophysical demands that lie behind the seemingly innocuous annual growth figures of approximately 6% that it enjoyed during the 2010s.

Value Relations in the Capitalist System as a Whole

As we have been arguing throughout, although industrialized regimes of real subsumption are undoubtedly the most materially, technologically, and socially dynamic the world has ever seen, their success has depended overwhelmingly upon “less developed” societies. Although not for the same reasons that we stress (informed by our value-form Marxist and world-ecological assumptions), Arrighi (2007) is right when he states: “Western success along the extroverted, Industrial Revolution path was *based upon the exclusion of the vast majority of the world's population* from access to the natural and human resources needed to benefit rather than bear the costs of global industrialization. As such, it never was an option for that majority” (386;

emphasis added). This “exclusion” that Arrighi points to, however, has been rapidly diminishing since World War II. The real cause for concern, therefore, now involves the *incorporation* of an increasingly large proportion of the world’s population under value relations in general, but of relations of industrialized real subsumption (via Western, Japanese, South Korea etc. foreign direct investment). Interestingly, Gandhi recognized the dangers of this new qualitative trajectory clearly enough, *prior* to its spread via postwar developmentalism:

God forbid that India [or China!] should ever take to industrialization after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom [England] is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million [India’s population at the time] took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world like locusts. (Guha 2000, 22; Arrighi 2007, 386)

In Moore’s (2015, 91-109) world-ecological terminology, this tendency for globalizing capitalist development to “strip the world like locusts” of the biophysical inputs (or “natures”) that are the “material carriers” of value is called the “tendency of the ecological surplus to fall.” This tendency is rooted in the dialectical tensions inherent to the zones of commodification (i.e., value relations) and those of reproduction (and appropriation), where the “free work/energy” of non- or semi-commodified sources undergird the “efficient” functioning of the value sphere (91).

With the successive hegemonic transitions of modern capitalist history, the “net of the world market” has grown increasingly wide (Arrighi 1994), and the degree of intensity of value relations has increased markedly. Unlike the US frontier strategy that underpinned that nation’s nineteenth-century capitalist dynamism, and unlike the US-led “development” and “globalization” projects (McMichael 2017) that sustained the post-World War II “Golden Age” (Hobsbawm 1994), the number of spatial fixes available for the world’s new capitalist regimes is slim indeed. In this way, contrary to the sorts of “developmental crises” that capitalism has faced in the past (e.g., from Keynesianism to neoliberalism), it looks likely that capitalism will soon

face an “epochal crisis” that catalyzes a radically new socio-ecological system, such as the one that begat capitalism’s own modest beginnings between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries (Moore 2011b, 125).

Before moving on, a word must be said about the issue of “growth,” a term that is popularly denounced by critics of capitalism, as well as one that left-leaning scholars are seeking to replace via ideas such as “zero growth” (Custers 2010) and “degrowth” (D’Alisa, Demaria and Kallis 2015) economies. These frameworks have much to recommend them, as they recognize the socio-ecological foolhardiness of capitalism’s infinite growth imperative. The problem, however, is that they too adhere largely to a “production in general” view of economic life, one that fails to register the historical specificity of capitalism’s value forms. More specifically, Marx’s critique of capital(ism) focuses on the sphere of “production,” but remember that this refers to the production of *(surplus) value*, not material wealth. *The form of “growth” unique to capitalism, then, is qualitatively distinct*: it is based on socially necessary labor *time* as the substance of value, which is “immaterial but objective” (Harvey 2010, 33). In other words: only capitalism is a system where the “adequate” way for people’s needs to be met and the socio-ecological metabolism governed is by “a mode of production whose laws can only assert themselves as blindly operating averages between constant irregularities” (Marx 1990, 196) within an anarchic markets; only under capitalism is extra-human nature’s concrete and infinitely diverse character transformed into simple “matter” – i.e. “qualitatively homogeneous bearers of objectified time” (Postone 1993, 312). Any talk of challenging capitalism’s “growth imperative,” therefore, is meaningless without coming to terms with the basis of that imperative: value.

According to Postone (1993), therefore:

[T]he abolition of the accelerating blind process of economic “growth” and socioeconomic transformation in capitalism, as well as its crisis-ridden character, would

require the abolition of value. Overcoming these alienated forms would necessarily involve establishing a society based on material wealth, in which increased productivity would result in a corresponding increase in social wealth. *Such a society could be characterized by a form of growth very different from capitalist growth.* Marx's distinction between material wealth and value allows for an approach that *relativizes the opposition* between runaway growth as a condition of social wealth, on the one hand, and austerity as a condition for the ecologically sound organization of production and distribution, on the other, *by locating this opposition in a historically specific form of social life.* If his analysis of value as the determining form of wealth and of social mediation in capitalist society is valid, then it points to the possibility that this opposition can be overcome. (314; emphases added)

Pulling all of the points above together, *it is this that we have in mind when we speak of the increasing anachronism of value.* A discussion of the sort of value structure that might replace the specifically capitalist one is an enormous topic that falls outside the scope of this work; yet the first step is surely to recognize the power and possibility inherent to Marx's categorial critique of capital(ism).

Indeed, herein lies the importance of Moore's (2016, 2017, 2018) use of the term "the Capitalocene" to depict the character of the world's escalating socio-ecological crises unique to this period of history. For the problem lies not with *humanity in the abstract (i.e., the Anthropos)* – as the popular term "the Anthropocene" erroneously suggests – but rather with a specific set of class relations and their associated social forms that have been metastasizing globally since World War II under the benign sounding term "development."

Conclusion

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci (1971) famously declared that the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 represented a "revolution against [Marx's] *Capital*" (34-37). Having taken place in a "backward" nation populated predominantly by peasants, the Russian experience had little in common with Marx's supposedly teleological schema in *Capital* regarding "how events should follow a predetermined course" (34) based on bourgeois-led industrial development. If the

Russian experience represented a stark deviation from the “classic” British path, then the South Korea experience, by contrast, should be considered very much in line with it.

Having said this, however, we should insert here a few important caveats. First, recall that Marx’s analysis in *Capital* represented an *immanent critique* of classical political economy’s assumptions and theories about capitalism in a “pure state” that has never actually been achieved – i.e., characterized by perfectly functioning markets, the generalization of its social forms etc. From our perspective, the supposed teleology contained in *Capital* should also be viewed in this light. That is, there is nothing inevitable or generalizable about the English (and then US) case(s). Indeed, we have devoted a great deal of effort in this work to demonstrating just how contingent, contentious, and unlikely this purportedly teleological and universal path has actually been in (South) Korea. Regarding at least one of the key factors in bringing about relations of industrial capitalism (i.e., real subsumption) into non-Western societies, Gerschenkron (1962) clearly recognized this: “Industrial labor, in the sense of a stable, reliable, and *disciplined group that has cut the umbilical cord connecting it with the land* and has become suitable for utilization in factories, is *not abundant but extremely scarce in a backward country*” (9; emphases added). Many other factors went into the creation of South Korea’s “miracle” regime, but Gerschenkron does put his finger on a significant one here.

In the terms of the capitalist world-system, moreover, there is nothing inevitable, generalizable, or fixed about industrialized relations of real subsumption. For one thing, “fully developed” regimes depend on their “less developed/subsumed” counterparts to procure the Four Cheaps that are necessary for dynamic accumulation, and it is often the flux, chaos, and unevenness of the world division of labor that creates new opportunities for accumulation (Smith 2008). Furthermore, conditions within an industrialized regime of real subsumption can shift in

such a way that other fractions of capital might take primacy over the sorts of “productive capital” that has typically dominated these regimes. This occurred in the West during the 1960s, for instance, when labor unions were quite strong, which shifted primacy away from “productive” capitalists like General Motors to today’s giant merchant capitalists like Walmart, Nike, and Ikea. There is, then, a strong “Manchester-bias” in Volume 1 of *Capital* that may apply to South Korea, but one that cannot hold in general. As Harvey (2013) explains regarding the forms of “super-exploitation” that have re-emerged in Western nations (and in their dealings with the Global South) since the 1970s:

As the factory system did indeed proliferate and grow, putting sometimes incredible competitive pressures on these other systems of production, then workers began to organize on the basis of factory labor, as Marx predicted. They formed unions and exerted political pressures of the sort that became generalized toward the end of the 1960s in many parts of the advanced capitalist world. It was under such political conditions that the turn toward older commercial forms of super-exploitation became far more attractive. Hence the rebirth of the merchant capitalists (and even the renewal of mercantilist practices and theories) and the proliferation of their super-exploitative networks and chains of dispersed and subcontracted production. *But, in certain arenas and areas of production, such practices had never disappeared; they had always retained their competitive edge over factory production.* Hong Kong, for example, is celebrated for such forms of workshop and family labor production – in contrast with, say, Singapore, which is more corporately organized, and *South Korea, which took the classic path into large-scale factory production*, and ended up with a strong labor movement of the sort that would be unthinkable in Hong Kong. [*Marx’s*] *teleological presumption cannot, in my view, be sustained.* (154-155; emphases added)

Second, although South Korean state and business leaders did strategically negotiate the (“internal” and “external”) opportunities and threats of the Park era to push through its specific version (i.e., HCI) of the “classic” English case of industrialization, it did so in a context and by means that differed significantly from its Western counterparts. Although the British and US cases carried out their hegemonic projects via universal rhetorics of civilization and development, the East-Asian experiences (South Korea, Taiwan etc. via Japan) represented

particular responses to external threats. Cumings (1999b) distinguishes clearly between the Western and East-Asian paths to “modernization”:

Threatened by the modern project in the form of Western imperialism, after 1868 the Japanese internalized it, made it their own, and imposed it on their neighbors. ... [T]he Japanese imposed the modern project *on themselves* – late in world time and with all the attendant uprooting, distortions, self-disciplinings and self-negations, fractured outcomes, and moth-to-a-flame terrors that mark modern Japan’s [and Korea’s] history and still play upon the national psyche. (73)

In other words, given the threat posed by the techno-scientific and material dynamism of Western regimes of real, the Japanese pursued the counter-intuitive strategy of seeking to preserve its “national” autonomy through an adoption of the very same social relations (and forms) that were threatening it. In many ways, this strategy has been pursued by countless non-Western powers ever since, as it was the essential basis of the US development project. Japan (and several of its East-Asian colonies, like South Korea and Taiwan) only succeeded in this mission, however, due to the host of contingent factors that we have outlined throughout this work.

Third, a key distinguishing factor of the East-Asian experience, though, is the *role of the state* in foisting upon its populace (i.e., “society”) these relations by physical and ideological force. This is why the East-Asian cases, following the nineteenth-century German lead, have been so interested in “state science” (*Staatwissenschaften*), something that has been largely absent in Euro-American “social science” (Cumings 1999b, 92). The historically specific and rare conditions that brought about the generalization of capitalism’s social forms in Britain and the United States – those solipsistically and uncritically assumed to represent transhistorical “economic laws” – had to be brought about by state force, which could then unleash the abstract form of social domination that the generalization of value relations begets. In this way, the developmental statist emphasis on the Park regime’s “intervention” in the economy, as well as

the market fundamentalist stress on the power of the Smithian “invisible hand” are both correct, though in a limited and problematic way.

Consequently, although our analysis shares a similar focus with the extant literature – i.e., “How did South Korea do it? – our conclusions are far less optimistic about both the short- and long-term repercussions of South Korea’s “miraculous” achievement. This is registered in several ways. First, in line with the obfuscating tendency of a nationalistic way of viewing the world, South Koreans often boast of their country’s being, despite its small size and lack of “natural resources,” one of ten largest economies in the world. This uncritical equation of national wealth and societal well-being, however, is problematic, as high GDP figures are as much a sign of a time-strapped and overworked society as it is proof of “development.” Marx (1990) put his finger on this conflation in speaking of the revolutionary shifts that took place between c.1775 and 1875 in Britain, which South Korea generally mirrored during the twentieth century: “The eighteenth century ... did not yet recognize as fully as the nineteenth *the identity between the wealth of the nation and the poverty of the people*” (886; emphasis added). We read “poverty” here not as referring to monetary income, but to the security and autonomy that were lost as a result of the mass of the population being “set free” to toil in Britain’s “satanic mills” and under capitalism’s web of value forms. This is, in essence, what (South) Koreans learned, first through the Japanese colonial experience, then through the Park regime. Today, as well, despite the material abundance in terms of the built environment and plethora of commodities to consume, the notion of “poverty of the people” rings true in various aspects related to level of happiness and quality of daily life.

Second, despite its economic achievements and acceptance into the OECD in 1996, even South Korea as a “wealthy nation” is subordinated to its Western counterparts in world-systemic terms. As Cumings (1999b) explains vis-a-vis the East-Asian region as a whole:

[T]he central experience of northeast Asia in [the twentieth] century has not been independence wherein reigns autonomy and equality, but enmeshment in another web: the hegemonic web. This web had a spider: first England-America, then (about 1975 down to the present) trilateral America. Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan industrialized mostly within this web. ... [The three countries listed above] have thus had states “strong” for the struggle to industrialize, but “weak” from the web of enmeshment: they are semisovereign states.

These are not lamentable aspects that could have been avoided or attenuated; rather, the relative degree of autonomy that South Korea won was attained *through* its negotiation of the hegemonic web and capitalist revolution.

Third, the transition to a democratic and consumer-based society in South Korea – initially viewed as a victory for labor over the capitalist class’s hogging of the spoils of development – is also not as straightforward as it may first appear. With material wealth being produced more and more by “natural forces” and machinery rather than labor, the cascading use-values spewed forth require people to consume them. The gains made in the realm of consumption are, then, a result of increasingly alienated social relations and a hollowing out of the labor process. More specifically, the rise of large-scale industry simultaneously decreases the centrality of labor in the production process, yet the remaining “good jobs” that do exist require a great deal of education and/or technical training. This tension is manifested in the current situation facing South Korea’s younger generation: education fever in the midst of vanishing job prospects. This is a concrete example of a more general contradiction that plagues “fully developed” capitalist regimes. This involves what Postone (1993) calls the “*shearing pressures*” that stem from the contradictions inherent to the two-sided character of capitalism’s value forms.

This is rooted in the “dialectic of transformation and reconstitution” that we outlined earlier. On the one hand, the ceaseless gains in labor productivity that are achieved via the coercive laws of competition’s leapfrogging technological innovations means that greater and greater amounts of material wealth (use-values) are made available to members of these societies, thereby pointing to the possibility of reducing the level of toil required to meet people’s needs and furnishing them with more “free time.” On the other hand, because labor remains the substance of value that mediates the whole system and undergirds its dynamism, this can never come to fruition. As such, capital “points beyond itself but is not self-overcoming” (Postone 1993, 298).

In sum, the speed up of everyday rhythms, the hollowing out of working life, and the suite of issues discussed above are all aspects through which South Korea now faces a looming socio-ecological crisis. The factors above help shed crucial light on the seeming paradox that we broached in Chapter 1 of this work: How can South Korea be simultaneously the “model” for the developing world to emulate *and* a country riddled with serious problems (e.g., possessing one of the highest suicide rates in the world and a population that largely hopes to escape these trappings of capitalist modernity via emigration)? Given the high degree of abstraction of our analysis, no causal claims are being asserted here; rather, they are more descriptive narrative ones that establish a context in which a host of phenomena might be better understood.

Conclusion

The central thread weaving its way through this work has been the somewhat obvious, yet largely overlooked, point that there is no such thing as “production in general.” So while all societies must mix their labor with the land in order to “solve the economic question” (Heilbroner 2012) on a daily and generational basis, the way that this is accomplished (or not) is always historically specific.²¹⁶ Each social formation, then, carries with it its own set of imperatives that give rise to certain tensions that emerge directly from the social forms that structure that society. Given the global – though socially and spatially uneven – socio-ecological crisis that is unfolding in the world today (Klein 2014), this emphasis on the contradictions intrinsic to certain social forms opens up a far more fruitful line of questioning than the extant literature on the subject South Korean “development” typically pursues. Rather than asking how a nation can “develop” based on an uncritical acceptance of the historically specific social forms defined as dominant at a given time, this work has pursued different sorts of questions, such as: what are the peculiar imperatives of this particular social order; and are the social forms undergirding these tensions the best way of satisfying the collective needs of society in a social, ecological, and ethical sense?

In this concluding chapter, we recap the main arguments of our critical reinterpretation of the South Korean development literature, reflect upon the broader lessons it provides for related debates, and signal possible paths for future inquiry that follow therefrom.

²¹⁶ To be clear, this is not meant to state the rather explanatorily vacuous point that social dynamics are always full of historical-geographical contingency; instead, it stresses the significance of the social forms through which the socio-ecological content of history and geography are mediated, which flow from particular logics and imperatives.

Summary of the Argument: History and Theory

The central argument of this work is that (South) Korea, due to a host of historical and geographical factors unique to its twentieth-century experience (forged through structure-agency tensions), allowed it by the 1970s to escape the “iron cage” of Western industrial dominance. This revolutionary transformation – typically understood through the innocuous label of “development” – is almost universally praised, since the “production in general” view of its analysts deem any negative aspects that it engenders to be aberrations to the capitalist development process, rather than inherent to it. Despite the material dynamism that this transition sparked, the analysis in this work of the *new qualitative trajectory* that it catalyzed paints a far gloomier picture of its own socio-ecological soundness, never mind its claims to being a “model” for others to emulate. Marx’s complaint in *The Poverty of Philosophy* is equally apt for the well-worn terrain of debate between, for example, market triumphalists and developmental statist: “Economists explain *how* production takes place . . . , but what they do not explain is how these relations themselves are produced, that is, *the historical movement that gave them birth*” (Lukacs 1971, 27; emphasis added). In this section, then, we offer a brief summary of the historical narrative contained in this work, then go on to state explicitly the theoretical interventions that flow therefrom.

Historical Narrative

We took as our starting point Marx’s (1973, 87) most fundamental lesson of historical materialism: that “[a]ll production is appropriation of nature by an individual within and *through a particular form* of society.” We combined that basic premise with the world-ecological tenet that capitalism, as a system of value relations, can only function within a highly uneven world made up of zones of *exploitation* (in the technical Marxian sense) and “free” *appropriation* of

the work/energy in non- or semi-commodified forms. We then further distinguished the relative degree to which capitalism's social forms structured a given society not by the problematic language of development and underdevelopment, but rather by the degree to which a society is subsumed under these forms: hybrid, formal, and real.

Historically, this complex and interdependent system only came about by the rise and spread of particular social forms that many today, both on the left and the right, view as "essential" to capitalism – that is, its "antediluvian forms" of markets, wage-labor, commodities, money etc. Indeed, these predate by several centuries the rise of the specifically *industrial* form of capitalism (i.e., real subsumption in its "most developed" form), which was ultimately rooted in a fundamentally new set of class relations. Yet once these relations arose – quite contingently, it must be stressed, in Western Europe by the late-eighteenth century (Postone 2017, 39) – their sheer dynamism sparked an accelerated global spread of capitalism in its imperial and (settler) colonial forms (McMichael 2017), as these increasingly dynamic European societies required ever-greater biophysical inputs (i.e., the Four Cheaps) for their burgeoning industrial systems.

Most important of these for the future of capitalism as a globalizing system, however, was their transplantation to the United States. This was the most fertile ground for these relations to flourish given the lack of a landed class to pose as a "barrier" to these relations, in addition to its seemingly endless "natural bounty" (Cronon 1991). As the United States spread these relations westward towards the Pacific coast over the course of the nineteenth century, its global economic, military, and (eventually) political might increased exponentially. With the threat posed by the US's (and Germany's) rise, European powers engaged in a global scramble to secure monopolistic access to the world's remaining resources via further colonial and imperial annexation in the run-up to World War I.

It was in this context that the British vanquished the Chinese in the Opium Wars after 1839. With this as an example, combined with a fortuitous “breathing space,” Japan ultimately opted to throw its lot in with the capitalist system via the Meiji Restoration of 1868. By undertaking revolutionary changes in the class structure and social forms of its society along Western lines, Japan was able to carve out a space of autonomy for itself in the East-Asian region. This was aided, in part, by Western powers’ preoccupation elsewhere, but also by Japan’s replication of colonial relations in their own regional environs. It was in this context that it pried open the so-called “Hermit Kingdom” and subsequently colonized the Korean peninsula.

Ransacked as a source of food (rice), labor, markets etc., Japan’s self-serving actions in Korea nevertheless had the (unintended?) consequence of introducing some of capitalism’s central social forms to that society: bourgeois private property via the cadastral survey; widespread proletarianization and, by extension, wage-labor via the mass exploitation of the peasantry, and the commodification of many aspects of daily life. The flux and chaos that ensued, especially as Korea’s role within the Japanese colonial project shifted from primary resource provider to labor base for its industrialization drive of the 1930s, had far-reaching consequences on Korea’s class structure. This was particularly the case in terms of discrediting Korea’s centuries-old landed elite (*yangban*), who had collaborated with the Japanese colonial state as a means of retaining its privileged position. Its final overthrow effectively came in the wake of the implementation of bourgeois land reforms after the Korean War in 1953, a policy that was passed under Cold War pressures due to the popularity of its earlier North Korean counterpart.

Meanwhile, the contradictions of the US’s own industrialized relations of real subsumption were making themselves felt at home. After the “closing of the frontier” in the late-

nineteenth century, the US sought new global frontiers to safeguard access to the Four Cheaps of labor(-power), raw materials, energy, and (to a far lesser extent) food. In the context of the global decolonization of Europe's previous landholdings, the US-led "development project" sought to "create a world in its own image," to paraphrase Marx's famous phrase. The nation-state system, economic growth (in GDP terms), and a stagist and teleological model of supposedly universal development (based, ironically, on its own unique experience) were the tools through which the world was opened up to commodified relations (McMichael 2017).

Being a central ally and, indeed, a Cold War "showcase state" highlighting the rival political economies of capitalism and Stalinism, the US provided the new South Korean state with inordinate amounts of military, financial, and technical assistance. Most crucial of these in terms of creating the cheap labor regime that would later drive Park's light-industry phase in the 1960s was the "food" aid via Public Law 480. In cheapening the cost of labor-power and accelerating the process of proletarianization due to farmers' inability to compete with the flood of cheap agricultural commodities flowing into the country from the US, as well as serving as an open market for its wares, US support both broadened and deepened South Korea's subsumption under capital's forms. Although beginning during the Japanese colonial period, during the 1950s and, especially, the 1960s, South Korea transformed from a "society *with* markets" to a full-fledged "*market society*" by the 1960s (Varoufakis 2017).

In light of a host of "fortuitous" forces aligning by the early 1970s – such as the US Nixon Doctrine, heightened North-South hostility on the Korean peninsula, and the first oil shock – the Park regime sought to wrest autonomy from the global system by rallying the nation behind a Heavy and Chemical Industrialization (HCI) plan. Although the nation's general fears of North Korean aggression and a desire to compensate for the humiliation of colonialism did

much to quell resistance to the effects of industrialized relations (of real subsumption), the Park regime still needed to suppress growing working-class discontent via the draconian Yushin political constitution. The regime's goals for the HCI plan, which seemed absurdly ambitious when announced in early 1973, were nevertheless attained by the close of the decade.

It is this achievement that forms the terrain of debate within the sprawling extant literature on the South Korean "miracle." In one sense, given the "barriers" (i.e., bulwarks?) that have historically barred non-Western societies from making this transition, it was indisputably "miraculous" in its ramifications. This is not the sense in which this phrase is typically used, however, which refers to the supposed miracle of a non-Western nation attaining the heights of Western (and therefore "world") civilization. Against this view, we will outline below the highly ambivalent ramifications of this industrial revolution (to relations of real subsumption).

Theoretical Interventions

Based on the historical sketch outlined above, several theoretical conclusions follow. First, the *partial* truths of the dominant explanations of South Korea's economic success, as outlined in Chapter 1, become easier to see. On the one hand, it is undeniable that: 1) both the state and world market were crucial in its success, though in a more dialectically interactive fashion than is usually acknowledged; 2) Confucian holdovers from the Joseon period were indeed drawn upon to discipline and mobilize labor for a nationalist economic project; 3) US postwar global hegemony played a crucial role in aiding the South Korean regime, in terms of aid, military protection etc.; 4) Japan too, as regional powerhouse, did more than any other country in triggering Korea's capitalist revolution (via colonialism), and in aiding it in more technical ways in the post-1945 period; 5) South Korea's involvement in the Vietnam War was crucial in securing US aid and support, as well as in providing invaluable technical learning experiences

that could be used at home; 6) South Korea's "early" shift to EOI in the 1960s gave it a head start over other "developing" nations. On the other hand, we submit that none of these explanations is sufficient on its own, and that, in drawing on the partial insights of each, we draw conclusions that differ markedly from all of those mentioned above. It is in this sense that this work is, at bottom, one of *critical reinterpretation*.

Second, the importance of understanding the conditions giving rise to, and the dynamics of, historically specific social forms cannot be overstated. As Marx declares in an 1868 letter to his friend Dr. Kugelmann: "Natural laws cannot be abolished at all. What can change in historically different circumstances is only the *form* in which these laws assert themselves" (Sayer 1979, 21). In the case of capitalism in particular, moreover, the greater the degree of subsumption of a society under its social forms, the more their contradictory imperatives reverberate throughout society, not just in the narrow realm of material production. Lukacs (1971) was clear on this point:

It is no accident that Marx should have begun with an analysis of commodities when, in the two great works of his mature period, he set out to portray capitalist society *in its totality* and to lay bare its fundamental nature. At this stage in the history of mankind there is no problem that does not ultimately lead back to that question and there is no solution that could not be found in the solution to the riddle of commodity-structure. ... [T]he problem of commodities must not be considered in isolation or even regarded as the central problem in economics, but as the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects. (83; emphasis added)

A valuable message for environmental historians, in particular, flows from this. For nearly the whole field proceeds from a "production in general" view of economic life. As such, their analyses focus on the appropriation and movement of biophysical content, focusing then on the environmental degradation that results from this. Given the inextricable links between form and content in socio-ecological life, however, what needs to be historicized is not just this biophysical content itself, but, more importantly, the social forms *through which* this content is

being mediated and (in the case of capital's expansionary imperative) propelled. In short, social forms must also be subjected to historical scrutiny.

Third, although the US experience has been held up as a stagist and teleological model that all can, ultimately, achieve if they would just follow the wisdom of experts like Rostow and his ilk, we have demonstrated how industrial relations of real subsumption are world-historically in the extreme minority, and that they are ungeneralizable for the following reasons. On the one hand, recall that, for Marx, it is the *formal* subsumption of labor under capital that is the essence of capitalism, where relations of real subsumption represent a more qualitatively and quantitatively intense version of this that arises only in specific contexts.²¹⁷ For systemic reasons, following from the world-ecological tenet that value on works only if most things are *not* valued, the sheer dynamism and resource hunger of relations of real subsumption in their industrial form can never be generalized in a physical world of finite "natural resources" (Bridge 2009). Recall, however, that the contradictions of industrialized real subsumption are *social* in origin – i.e., the wealth/value distinction and value's temporal (not material) measure. There are, then, real biophysical limits that need to be negotiated in the use-value realm; however, to paraphrase a well-known Marxian tenet, "the limits to capital are capital itself" – not nature – since the social logic of capitalism would collapse long before an absolute exhaustion of the world's "natural resources" (i.e., use-values) was even close to occurring. In recognizing capitalism's need to be composed of an uneven (though historically shifting) mix of social formations embedded in capitalist social relations to different extents (degrees of subsumption), moreover, goes a long

²¹⁷ An important corollary of this point is that, although in the extreme minority, once industrial relations of real subsumption arise, they command a disproportionately large part of the physical and ideological world due to their dynamism in the productive and military spheres, as in the postwar US case.

way in undermining the simplistic development/underdevelopment dualism that dominates both popular and academic discourse.

On the other hand, industrialized relations of real subsumption are further hindered from emerging in other “developing” societies due to a host of factors discussed throughout this work. To recap, they include: 1) *landed classes* in the “developing” society that would rather perpetuate their privileged standing by continuing to collect rents etc., rather than engage in the uncertainty and competition of capital accumulation; 2) *working-class groups*, at various degrees of subsumption, who are well aware of the subordination to the machine and general alienation that would likely occur, without any guarantee of decreased working time or increased access to the gains achieved;²¹⁸ 3) *global hegemonic powers* that seek to continue the existing international division labor, keeping “developing” societies in their “proper place” (i.e., the primary export sectors) in order to feed the escalating resource and labor needs of their own industrialized regimes. Taken together, these factors help explain Kohli’s (2004) argument about the rarity of significant changes to modern state forms. In instances where this does happen, however, he notes that this overwhelmingly occurs in a sudden “big bang” change, induced by cataclysmic events such as civil wars, colonialism, and military coups. It should not come as a surprise, then, that South Korea – as well as the other notable “Asian Tiger,” Taiwan – experienced all three.

Fourth, although the institution of industrialized relations of real subsumption ultimately stem from a particular set of *class relations* (especially in “late” cases, geopolitical forces), once these are ensconced, their compulsions are experienced as an *abstract* form of domination with

²¹⁸ Note that this second point applies only to the transition to real subsumption. Far more prevalent in world history has been the resistance of people to commodified relations in their entirety, but especially to commodified labor (in the “less developed” form of *formal* subsumption).

seemingly no locus (Postone 1993). To be sure, at levels 1 and 2 of Ollman's levels of generality (2003), there exist no shortage of acts of "exploitation," unfair treatment and the like, but from a level-3 perspective these ostensible "laws of economy" bear down on *all* members of that society: laborers and capitalists alike. One could argue, in fact, that the coercive pressures of real subsumption bear down even more on the capitalist class, as workers do enjoy the freedom to choose the degree to which they want to partake in capitalism's endless accumulation and consumption imperatives.

As we will discuss in greater detail in the following section, capitalism, especially in its "fully developed" form of real subsumption, gives rise to a dual notion of subjectivity. On the one hand, there is the much-lauded subjectivity that refers to individual agency, as in the subject of a sentence that acts on the world in various ways to suit their purposes. On the other hand, this is predicated upon the other meaning of "subjectivity," as in being subjected (or subsumed) under social forms that are out of their control. This is what Marx meant when he referred to how *all* individuals under capitalism must submit themselves to the "dull compulsion of economic forces," as well as becoming the "plaything of alien powers" (Tucker 1978, 34). It is precisely the abstractness of this form of coercion, where blame for the pressures and hardships stemming from one's *general* proletarian condition can never be attributed to a singular "villain" etc., that makes its dictates seem like transhistorical "laws" of nature or economy. This is the basis for the seeming self-evident character of the "production in general" view.

Fifth, there is the critique of so-called "methodological nationalism" that we stressed in Chapter 3, but one that is implied by the overall organization of this work through its scalar shifts between chapters: i.e., (Japan-led) regional, (US-led) global, and (South Korea) "national." Each of these standpoints offers an illuminating, yet inherently limited, way to analyze the twentieth-

century “South Korean” experience, as all work in dialectical interaction with one another. Simply put, the South Korean “miracle” is impossible to understand in “national” terms alone. Song (2013) puts her finger on a key aspect of this regarding South Korea’s much-lauded “developmental state.” In a trenchant critique of the fetishistic way it has been understood as a domestic, autonomous, and positive-sum-game actor working for the benefit of all the groups within a given society, she summarizes her position through a series of iconoclastic statements:

[E]ven though the *hierarchically and unevenly unfolding patterns of capitalist dynamics lay the conditions for the statist notion to arise* by enforcing states in “catch-up” conditions to act as the promoters of “national” development, it *appears* that the development orientation of the developmental state originates from the nature of the state *in itself*. Even though the *particular positioning and timing of development within the world system actually condition failure or success of capitalist development*, an autonomous and effective (developmental) state *appears* to be the main driver and determinant of outcomes of “national” development. Even though the developmental state embodies class contradictions emanating from “catch-up” capitalist development, it *appears* that the characteristics of the developmental state are the product of “national” policy choices (typically taken by national elites) and “national” distinctiveness. (1269-1270)

In short, the modern nation-state, by presenting itself as a nationally-bounded group working free of any external partisan interest, “essentially neutralises its class content or capital-serving function” (*ibid.*). It is important to note that the state’s capital-serving function does not necessarily mean that it will always side with the interests of individual capitalists. For to serve capital, especially within a regime of real subsumption, means to subordinate the entirety of that society to the production of surplus value. As such, whenever individual capitalists or capitalist fractions threaten the reproduction of the system-wide ability to produce surplus value – as measured in its surficial form of GDP growth – the state’s essential function is to remedy this by siding with workers or any other (narrowly conceived) “important” group.

One of the central conclusions to be drawn from the repeated critique of methodological nationalism throughout the dissertation, which emerges from Ollman’s third level of generality,

is that the challenges, pressures, and opportunities that people face are now shared by nearly everyone, however unevenly, through the increasing generalization of the nation-state form and GDP growth as catch-all metric of societal well-being (McMichael 2017). To continue to contemplate and address the world's mounting socio-ecological crises (e.g., climate change) through a nationally-based lens of "inter-state competition" is to miss a crucial point. That is, these issues are ones that have arisen through the spread of this nation-based framework – rooted in its capitalist social forms and their imperatives – which affect everyone involved to various degrees, regardless of state form ("democracy," dictatorship etc.) and political persuasion.

Finally, zeroing in on "South Korea" in particular, many of the seemingly "contradictory" issues that have arisen in its history are opposite expressions of the same contradictory relations. This is our response to the ambivalent and seemingly contradictory accounts of South Korea's "miracle" in Chapter 1, as both miraculous and exploitative. These include: state repression in the name of national autonomy; greater productivity and material standard of living alongside a hollowing out of work, shift to compensatory consumerism to fill this void, and acceleration of daily life; and education (and "improvement" culture) frenzy amongst decreasing job prospects. Most, if not all, of these stem from the dual character of the social forms adopted via its capitalist revolution. The popular one-sided focus on the undeniable material dynamism of these relations, however, has served to obfuscate this darker side's inherent connection to that very dynamism.

The Broader Lessons Derived from the South Korean Experience

Having made the case for the anachronism of value relations in a more general way in Chapter 6, we now draw out the wider takeaways from the South Korean experience, in particular, for a variety of contemporary debates.

First, contrary to those who view South Korea as proof of the legitimacy (and feasibility) of the tenets of modernization theory (and its subsequent incarnations), the analysis here concludes that the opposite is the case. That is to say, it undermines its teleological (i.e., stagist), generalizable, and positive-sum-game assumptions about the capitalist development process. The most “developed” set of relations of real subsumption arose in a historically contingent way in Western Europe in the nineteenth century with the Industrial Revolution,²¹⁹ yet in the post-World War II period under the US development project purported to represent development in the abstract – i.e., the US experience as transhistorically valid. Not only does the analysis here show the incredible contingency and complex intermingling of regional and global power dynamics that fomented these shifts to (South) Korea’s class structure, it also shows the socio-ecological contradictions inherent in this form of “development.” Moreover, like the rags-to-riches trope that pervades US popular culture as a means of obfuscating the reality of class inequalities under capitalism, the South Korean “model” works to decontextualize, geopolitically speaking, its own historically specific (i.e., ungeneralizable) experience. This served to perpetuate the myths of the development era that were really about the US safeguarding its access to the Four Cheaps (Moore 2015), markets etc. in a context of Cold War rivalry and decolonization.

Second, in addition to showing how regimes of real subsumption are ungeneralizable by the logic of the capitalist system itself (in that it relies on the unpaid work/energy of non-commodified zones in “less developed” societies engaged in hybrid or formal subsumption), even for those handful of non-Western regimes like South Korea that managed to institute

²¹⁹ Here we are referring to the rise of relations of real subsumption that were part and parcel of the shift to specifically *industrial* production methods in England. The greater history of capitalism – for instance, its mercantilist forms – goes much further back in time (Arrighi 1994; Moore 2015).

relations of real subsumption, they have quickly realized their ambivalent double-edged character. To reiterate some of the points from the discussion of value, relations of real subsumption are, on the one hand, the most (socially and technologically) dynamic the world has ever devised. This has undoubtedly led to increases in the quality of living for South Korean citizens, at least in the short-term. On the other hand, the very material abundance these relations have wrought stem from the contradictions inherent in the generalization of the commodity form (between use-value and value) as a way of engaging with the socio-natural world. As we have seen, from a long-term perspective, these social forms are untenable and increasingly anachronistic, as the frontier strategies or spatial fixes used historically to (temporarily) transcend them is getting harder and harder to accomplish. In this way, relations of real subsumption are akin to what Robin Wright (2004) refers to as a “progress trap.”²²⁰

Yet another contradiction stemming from our account of South Korea’s experience with relations of real subsumption revolves around the tension it foments between freedom and dependence. On the one hand, the story told here of twentieth-century (South) Korea is one of increasing freedom, as the rigid social hierarchy of the Joseon era’s class structure was dissolved through the effects of Japanese colonialism and post-World War II land reforms. As the proletarian process proceeded apace in the subsequent decades, moreover, social (and spatial) mobility and personal freedoms of all kinds increased. Furthermore, despite the often-mentioned limits to bourgeois democracy, South Korea’s capitalist revolution, undertaken from the standpoint of relations of real subsumption that requires the centralization of workers in urban

²²⁰ This term refers to social practices that, for a time, improve the method of achieving a certain goal, but at some future point wind up undermining the very aim sought.

factories, catalyzed the sorts of workers' association and organization that culminated in the democratic transition of 1987-1988.

On the other hand, these same processes of proletarianization and commodification brought about "a unique form of social interdependence" that was at the same time increasingly hard to pinpoint: offering perhaps one of the best concrete cases of Postone's arguments about value relations representing an *abstract* form of social domination (1993, 149). It was this very abstractness, moreover, that historically decontextualized the source of people's domination. In a general sense, no longer could one point to specific individuals as the source of their plight; rather, "putting food on the table" via wage-work etc. came to be viewed as a transhistorical (if lamentable) necessity, one that nevertheless required a host of specific behaviors to achieve. Echoing our insistence that capitalist value relations represent not just a set of narrow production techniques but rather a revolutionary new "way of life," the hyper-competitive, treadmill-like character of value relations manifest themselves in all manner of "cultural" realms, too. From the education system to the training of K-pop stars, the societal logic of real subsumption triggers a form of society where "every person is pitted against each other in a state of quasi-war" (Watts 2014, 403). This is captured well by Jang and Kim's (2013) invocation of contemporary South Korean society as one where everyone is caught up in the "Red Queen's race." A phrase borrowed from a Lewis Carroll novel, *Through the Looking Glass* (1872), it refers to a situation "where everyone works hard but remains in the same place" (94). As the Red Queen herself says: "If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that" (*ibid.*). Here is a concrete manifestation of the temporality and coercion inherent in value.

The third takeaway lesson deals with the popular, yet erroneous, notion that South Korea represents a progressive example for other nations in terms of sustainable development practices.

The basis for this view is the panoply of government strategies, policy initiatives, and the like that it has undertaken since c.2006 (Hsu et al. 2014; Jung 2018), as outlined in Chapter 6. Rather than being a sign of transcending the socio-ecological contradictions of a rapidly globalizing capitalism since World War II, the South Korean state's rush to these sorts of policies – again, regardless of political persuasion – is powerful testimony to the long-term *unsustainability* of the form of capitalism it has adopted (i.e., real subsumption). This is clear from the sorts of problematic evidence given for making the case for South Korea's leadership regarding sustainability. That is, what is usually cited is *quantitative* increases in the number recycling facilities, government policies etc.; however, from our perspective, this is just as much a sign of how serious the problem is as it is evidence of any sort of route to transcending the issues at hand. Moreover, many of the claims for more sustainable practices deal with *relative* reductions, not absolute reductions.²²¹ The mere creation of institutions and policies, as well as government funding, for “sustainable development” is not necessarily proof of actually achieving it, yet it is definitely a sign of looming problems.

Again, the “solutions” sought have always been hampered by the requirement that they not hinder the accumulation process (Chung and Kirkby 2002). In addition, given the inherent technological dynamism of regimes of real subsumption stemming from their dependence on *relative* surplus value strategies (Marx 1990), the solutions are overwhelmingly technology based – that is, ones that seek techno-fixes to problems that, at bottom, emerge from class structure and social form. Speaking of the Bak administration's “Low Carbon, Green Growth” strategy of 2008, Rhee, Jang and Chung (2012) observe the following:

²²¹ See, for example, Hsu et al.'s laudatory discussion of South Korea's “cleaner production” methods (2014, 52-53).

[Bak's] plans do not seriously contemplate what is really necessary for human civilization to get closer to sustainability. They just take the new trend as a change in the business environment to which a new elaborate strategy should be formulated. This lack of philosophical change will have serious impacts on the integrity of the strategy, acceptability, and the attainability of the visions and goals. (32)

This business-based approach and lack of philosophical vision regarding sustainability stem, we would argue, from the type of “production in general” that we have been criticizing throughout this work. For if there is only one way to produce, why would anyone not prefer, say, a more fuel-efficient car etc.? It is here that the explanatory power of Marx's categorial critique of capitalism's value forms is indispensable; for seeming paradoxes such as the Jevons Paradox stem directly from the contradictory dualism of these forms.²²²

Fourth, just as the nation-state scale was a useful, yet inherently partial perspective that conceals as much as it reveals when it comes to judging South Korea's management of the socio-ecological contradictions stemming from relations of real subsumption, it is crucial to look at the regional and global scales in which its experience is rooted. For South Korea has in recent decades been plagued by the same sorts of overaccumulation crises as its “developed” Western counterparts, ones that require an “outside” to help (temporarily) assuage. Speaking about South Korea in particular, David Harvey (2007) makes the following point about its rising (sub-)imperial tendencies in East-Asia and beyond that emerged from the capital surplus absorption problems that were triggered by its “economic miracle”:

What we then see is capital surpluses becoming very important in South Korea and Taiwan in the mid to late 1980s, and shortly thereafter we hear all kinds of stories of brutal labor practices attaching to Taiwanese and South Korean subcontractors operating throughout the rest of East and Southeast Asia as well as in Central America and Africa. Now, we don't normally think of South Korea and Taiwan as imperialist powers, but

²²² Foster, York and Clark (2011) gesture at various points at how this is a “paradox” specific to the capital accumulation process (e.g., Chapter 7), though they do not root their explanation in the *dual character* of the forms themselves.

what we start to see is state support for certain imperialist practices (‘subcontracted’ imperialism attaching to US corporate interests).²²³ (1128-1129)

This rising trend reflects again both the dynamism of relations of real subsumption and the impossibility of their generalization. Capitalism in its most “developed” form has pushed ceaselessly to remake the world in its own image, yet at the same time relies upon “less developed” areas and societies to allow value operations to thrive by excluding from (or freely appropriating) the work/energy of non- or semi-commodified spheres.

Again, Rosa Luxemburg (2003) rightly identified this tension more than a century ago when she wrote the following:

Capitalism is the first mode of economy with the weapon of propaganda, a mode which tends to engulf the whole globe and to stamp out all other economies, tolerating no rival at its side. Yet at the same time it is also the first mode of economy which is unable to exist by itself, which needs other economic systems as a medium and soil. Although it strives to become universal and, indeed, on account of this tendency, it must break down – because it is immanently incapable of becoming a universal form of production. (467)

As we saw in Chapter 4, moreover, the “weapon of propaganda” wielded by capitalism’s reigning hegemon during the post-World War II period was Rostovian modernization theory, as well as the less dogmatic incarnations of these general views that continue to dominate debate to this day. Interestingly, the ideological persuasiveness of this vision stemmed directly from the

²²³ At a conference that took place in 2015 at Sogang University in Seoul, Dae-Oup Chang presented a paper criticizing precisely these increasing sub-imperial practices. In that presentation, he discussed how, just as the Korean cultural wave (*Hallyu*) had been successfully exporting K-pop music, its companies had simultaneously been exporting draconian labor practices to places like South-east Asia. To make his point, Chang used the tongue-in-cheek term “K-labor,” which essentially described South Korea’s use of relations of real subsumption in its factories abroad. During the presentation, an older Korean scholar objected to his use of this term, suggesting instead that he call it “J-labor,” since Japan had first introduced these relations to the nation during the colonial era. This exchange offers a nice everyday example of both the dynamic yet oppressive character of industrial capitalism that has displayed historical *continuity* in the region, as well as the blinders inherent in framing this issue along *nationalist* lines – i.e., pointing the blame at specific nations, rather than at the social forms undergirding them.

political-economic power that the US's (and West's more generally) own relations of real subsumption created. Whether conscious of the impossibility of generalizing Rostow's teleological vision or not, the "development project" (McMichael 2017) itself provided the means by which the former colonial world and its cornucopia of Four Cheaps (Moore 2015) were procured. These were required by the US following the closing of its own frontier since the 1890s, yet which were previously off limits due to European colonial influence. The language of developmentalism, then, furnished a more progressive language to those decolonizing nations, yet at the same time incorporated these societies' people and "natural resources" increasingly into the net of the world market, leading to all manner of negative socio-ecological outcomes (especially after the neoliberal turn of the 1980s onwards).

Finally, following our repeated insistence in this work of the significance of social form, we eschew the environmental determinism of the likes of Jared Diamond and his ilk. Yet as Moore (2015, x) rightly argues: "*Geography. Really. Matters.*" As the nation with the greatest population density in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)²²⁴ (Hsu et al. 2014, 44), South Korea currently stands (alongside other US-allied "Asian Tigers" like Japan and Taiwan) as the proverbial canary in the coalmine in terms of the world's dire socio-ecological prospects. Although considered a "late" developer by Eurocentric definitions of "world time" for most of the past sixty years, it is now at the cutting edge of where the earth's most "developed" societies are heading if the relations of real subsumption continue to be held up as the universal model for all to pursue. Countries such as the US, Canada,²²⁵ Australia, as

²²⁴ It is worth pointing out here that the OECD – created at the height of the Cold War in 1961 out of an earlier agreement in 1948 – was itself essentially a who's who of the world's regimes of real subsumption, along with their allies. South Korea, for its part, was admitted in 1996.

²²⁵ An implicit caveat of this analysis that we now make explicit is this: it may appear hypocritical for a Western scholar to criticize South Korea's economic "miracle," given that it

well as the continent of Western Europe, have had the luxury of denying the socio-ecological contradictions of value relations due to the sheer vastness of their territorial containers, allowing for the spatial displacement of societal discontent, pollution etc. – as most thoroughly documented in US frontier histories (e.g., Worster 1985; Cronon 1991). With the world’s non-commodified frontiers having all but disappeared (Moore 2011a, 30), however, especially in light of four decades of neoliberalization (Harvey 2005), the logic of accumulation (as outlined in our discussion of value) will bring about unprecedented socio-ecological cataclysms in the coming years if left unrecognized and unchecked.

Directions for Future Research

“If an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself,” wrote the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, “it falls out of the dialogue.” The purpose of this section is to suggest possible areas of study that flow out of the analysis laid down in this work.

A central line of future inquiry would be comparative in character. We made the case earlier about the rarity of non-Western societies making the transition to industrialized relations of real subsumption, based on issues dealing with the structures of reigning world division of labor, geopolitical alliances and timing, and class structure. In the neoliberal period that immediately follows our focus, however, countless societies in the Global South have been exposed to relations that parallel those described in this work. This process of neoliberalization

was adopting relations deriving from the West. To be clear, then, our emphasis on South Korea is decidedly not an attack on that society in particular. Indeed, Canada is a society of real subsumption, and most of the things we say about South Korea would apply equally to it. Our focus on South Korea, as it should by now be obvious, stems from these considerations: 1) it is one of the few non-Western nations to “develop” according to Western definitions; 2) consequently, it is touted a model to be emulated by the world’s “developing” nations; 3) and as argued above, its small geographical size and large population signal the *future* of regimes like Canada and, ultimately, the world itself.

has surely served (via debt-induced structural adjustment programs), moreover, to weaken the landed classes of the Global South, as well as fold countless socio-ecological use-values into “human” and “natural” resources via commodification. With these traditional “barriers” weakened, should the world not have been witness to dozens of economic “miracles” across the Global South since c.1980?²²⁶

These experiences differ fundamentally, however, because, unlike in the South Korean case, they were undertaken at the behest of transnational corporations via foreign direct investment, which meant that the host countries have had very little control over their operations. Consequently, the profits rarely went to the local states for “developmental” purposes, and these pockets of industrial activity therefore had very little effect outside of the factories to the wider social division of labor. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study of the specific ways in which these seemingly identical production techniques affect these societies in broader ways.²²⁷ Is it merely a ruthless “race to the bottom” for these competing societies,

²²⁶ Another crucial point needs to be registered here. The South Korean case, as we have argued, follows very much the account Marx lays out in Volume 1 of *Capital*, which followed from his focus on large-scale industry in Manchester. This “Manchester-bias,” as Harvey (2010, 214-215) argues, should not be accepted uncritically. So although the world has witnessed many societal formations that took this path, such as twentieth-century Detroit and Pittsburgh, Marx’s suggested teleology on this matter is definitely problematic. Many successful capitalist formations have taken the so-called “Birmingham route,” like contemporary Hong Kong. So instead of large-scale factories, the main production form is agglomerated, small-scale workshops. It would be interesting to examine the reasons why these paths differed, as well the societal implications of these divergent paths.

²²⁷ Interesting objects of study on this front, then, would be places like contemporary China, whose current waged workforce laboring under conditions of real subsumption is surely far greater than anything that has ever existed in South Korea, however in a societal context that is much more diluted in terms of the imperatives of real subsumption. In short, it is an empirical question that can only be addressed by careful analysis via the above theoretical considerations. But in any case, the real point is about the contradiction of value – as an abstract temporal measure – with respect to greater and greater biophysical throughput and the conversion of people into means (Postone 1993, 181-182).

each attempting to underbid each other in terms of labor and production costs, or is there some more positive and lasting consequences?²²⁸

Another line of future research would investigate the countless issues that could be taken up by simply following up on the post-1985 period in South Korea. This would necessitate bringing down the degree of abstraction to the more concrete levels 1 and 2, yet while keeping in mind the structural imperatives of the capitalist social forms that now reign there. The sorts of issues that might be germane here are an open question, but a fruitful set of questions would center on the *dependent interrelations* between the value-sphere in the realm of valorization/exploitation (i.e., production of surplus value) – something that has been “over-studied” (Kohli 2004) within the South Korea literature from the standpoint of labor – with those of the *zone of appropriation*. These are the non-commodified aspects of society that are nevertheless significantly shaped by, and that shape, the society-wide dictates of value: education, child-rearing, marriage patterns and the like. These issues have no doubt been extensively treated in the previous literature, but not in the systemic, dialectical, and world-ecological manner emphasized here.

²²⁸ An interesting issue related to the above is this: if regimes of real subsumption are so dynamic, then why are many of the world’s current ones (in the West and the Tigers) stagnating economically? A preliminary answer is that these nations, despite their loss of competitiveness in many aspects of production, maintain their privileged position in light of the geopolitical power they gained based on previous economic might (i.e., the increasingly anachronistic Bretton Woods framework). Individuals or corporations who came up during the time of national/regional dynamism then reinvested in the Global South after the neoliberal turn. So we see a flourishing of regimes of real subsumption – not nation-wide like in South Korea and Taiwan, but in pockets of nations like China – in the Global South, alongside “post-industrial” societies in the West, where the manufacturing base is gone for the would-be working and an ultra-elite financial class dominates. A project examining these sorts of dynamics in detail would be most fruitful.

In sum, although this work has sought to highlight the historically specific “conditions of possibility” in which intersectional actors are forced to negotiate socio-ecological issues in contemporary South Korea (and beyond), the approach advocated here follows David Harvey’s emphasis in his masterful work, *The Limits to Capital* (1982):

A work of this sort admits no conclusion. The dialectical mode of thinking ... precludes closure of the argument at any particular point. The intriguing configurations of internal and external contradiction ... force the argument to spin onwards and outwards to all manner of new terrain. The opening of new questions to be answered, new paths for enquiry to take. (446)

It is in this spirit that this work should be considered.

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