

## ***Ideology and Reality* by Park Chi-Woo**

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### **1. Life and Work of Park Chi-Woo**

Park Chi-Woo (1909-1949) was born in Seongjin of North Hamgyong Province in 1909, and graduated in 1933 as the 5th graduating class from the Department of Philosophy of the Keiji Imperial University. Later, he taught as a professor at the Soong-eui College of Engineering, after which he worked as a social issues reporter at the *Chosun Ilbo*. Just after Korea's liberation, he became an active member of the Communist Party of Korea (CPK) and the Workers Party of South Korea (WPSK).

Park Chi-Woo was one of the leading Marxist philosophers, together with Shin Nam-Cheol, during the period under Japanese colonial rule and just after liberation. He was sensitive to what was happening in reality and had a pathos-like passion. He emphasized that in order to investigate truth, a scholar must commit himself to research with a sense of duty and like a martyr, disregarding any harm that may come in his way. He responded acutely and passionately to reality, but at the same time, published analytical works with philosophical depth. Park Chi-Woo made life-long efforts into making the spheres of academism and journalism communicate with each other, and as a result, left numerous articles that philosophically intervene into issues faced by reality of the time.

During the colonial period, in 1933, Park Chi-Woo worked as a founding

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member of the Society of Philosophical Studies, and after writing “Philosophy in Crisis” (*Philosophy*, Volume 2, 1934), started to publish articles dealing with reality and ideological issues that were being debated by intellectual circles, rather than professionally philosophical works. In mid and late 1930’s, he actively participated in cultural criticism, including in discussions related to humanism, Eastern cultural theory, East Asia cooperation organization theory, and generation theory, and started to gain attention among intellectuals of that period.

After liberation, he committed himself to theoretical work, criticizing fascism, and theorizing on democracy and national culture, as a follower of Park Hon-Young and in line with the stance of CPK-WPSK. He was also active in journalism, strongly condemning the feudal legacy and pro-Japanese remnants, when working as the chief editor of *Hyundai Ilbo*, established in March 1946. However, in light the fact that he defected to North Korea in early 1947, it seems he was active in South Korea for only about a year.

After defecting to North Korea, Park Chi-Woo participated in establishing the Haeju Printers, and then in October, under orders from Park Hon-Young, he participated in forming the Gangdong Political Institute in order to train guerillas. The Workers Party of South Korea (WPSK), desperate after its failed attempts to bring a revolution in the South, sent guerillas trained at the Gangdong Political Institute to stage a mass rebellion in September 1949. Park Chi-Woo participated in the guerilla as a member of its political committee. He was later killed at the end of November 1949 by counter-insurgency forces composed of the military and the police.

## 2. Park’s Book *Ideology and Reality*

*Ideology and Reality*, published in August 1946, is a selection of works written by Park during and just after colonial rule, and is composed of 3 parts. The seven essays in Part One are not bound by one particular theme but consist of works written during colonial rule. Part One brings out Park’s philosophical perspective and encompasses the main contents of his ideas on cultural criticism during the 1930’s, such as humanism, classicism and generation theory.

The seven essays in Part Two are articles he wrote for magazines and newspapers after liberation, and are mainly about his theories on democracy and national culture from the CPK-WPSK stance. There were lively debates among intellectuals on democracy and national culture just after liberation and Park Chi-Woo, based on his philosophical knowledge, asserted his views clearly and convincingly. Of course, his arguments were mainly aimed at proving the legitimacy of the CPK-WPSK's stance. As an officer of the party, Park's articles were based on the August Theses, and sought to philosophically legitimize the CPK-WPSK's platform on democracy and national culture.

Part Three is composed of self-selected works among editorials and essays he wrote as the chief editor of *Hyundai Ilbo* after liberation. They mainly criticize social realities in the wake of the liberation, such as the issue of whether to abolish the feudalistic men's hairstyle ('*sangtoo*'), land reform, indiscriminate establishing of political parties and the vestiges of Japanese imperialism. For example, in "Excessive Trust on Seoul and Too Much Focus on Political Parties", he argued that in order to properly grasp the opinion of the people, it would be better to place more importance on the countryside where peoples' organizations still existed, rather than focus on Seoul, a haven for pro-Japanese traitors of the nation. Also, more attention should be paid to organizations of various social groups and strata, including those of workers, peasants, religious groups and women, rather than on political parties.

Below, I look at the main ideas of Park Chi-Woo elaborated in Part One and Part Two of his book, excluding Part Three, which mainly consists of educative contents.

### **3. Part One: Park Chi-Woo's Philosophical Perspective and Anti-Fascist Cultural Criticism of 1930's**

#### **a) Park's Philosophical Perspective**

The core aspect of Park's philosophical perspective was his emphasis on

subjective understanding of reality. He maintained that a crisis did not appear simply from an objective contradiction but from the subjective understanding of an objective contradiction. The methodological starting point upon which Park articulated his views can be referred to as the theory on subjective understanding based on the dichotomous differentiation between pathos and logos. This theory of subjective understanding was a criticism of the logos-like attitude of intellectuals who focused only on objective analyses in face of the desperation of the colonial reality, and was also a meaningful attempt to academically stimulate the integration of theory and practice.

The second aspect of Park's philosophy was that it started from the *theoria* of academism but did not stop there. Rather, he argued that philosophy had to have an ideological direction - an *ism*. This was why he published numerous works that were not so much specialized philosophical theses as philosophical inquiry into issues faced by reality of the time. The basis for his assertion that academism and journalism mutually communicate was that philosophy is a *theoria* (academism) with characteristics of an *ism* (journalism).

He differentiated *theoria* and *ism*. Whereas *theoria* is a cold and static concept, *ism* is a passionate and dynamic one. While the contents of *theoria* are theories, the contents of *ism* are ideologies. The subjects of *theoria* are scholars but the subjects of *ism* are ideologists. Strictness and exactness are required in *theoria* but solemnity and sincerity in *ism*. The truth in *theoria* is objectivity whereas the truth in *ism* is subjectivity. The value of *theoria* is determined by whether it is true or false while that of *ism* by good or evil for the nation and a particular social class. Although *theoria* and *ism* are both ideologies, compared the *theoria*, involving determination of truth, *ism*, involving good or evil, is more explicitly partisan.

Although *theoria* and *ism* can be differentiated as such, Park viewed that the two also had a close transitional relationship. *Theoria*, in order to attain an objective guarantee for its determination of truth, implicitly requires *praxis*. "This need for *praxis* brings about the transformation of *theoria* into an *ism*." For example, the theory of evolution, which is merely a *theoria*, becomes Darwinism. The transformation of *theoria* into an *ism* is innately inevitable because of *theoria*'s

nature of trying to attain an objective guarantee. Therefore, philosophy starts from *theoria* but then cannot help but show its character as an *ism*, due to the nature of the issues it has to deal with, such as those regarding life or worldview. Thus, philosophy is not simply *theoria*, but “*theoria* with characteristics of an *ism*”.

### **b) Anti-Fascist Cultural Criticism of 1930's**

The 1930's was a period when fascism was culminating worldwide and intellectuals resisting fascism were uniting their actions regardless of their different ideologies (liberalism, socialism and communism) to form a people's front. In particular, in June 1935, in Paris, André Gide and some others organized the Congress for the Defense of Culture, and the contents of this congress spread to Japan and even to colonized Korea. Under the sense of crisis regarding fascism, cultural criticism aimed at defending culture also developed in the Korean literary circles, and humanism composed of discussions on ethical conscience and sincerity was one such trend.

In his work, “Modern Philosophy and the Issue of the ‘Human’”, Park Chi-Woo wrote that the trend most characteristic of modern philosophy was the subjective interest in issues regarding the human, and he made such analysis by referring to the Renaissance in the history of philosophy. Park argued that the human, articulated during the Renaissance, was not a pure human but a civil human in a world limited in time and space of a civil society. Humanism should not become a theory on the pure human transcending socio-historical contexts but rather start from the time and space of reality, and time and space of praxis. So genuine humanism is established in historical and reality-based time and space. Park Chi-Woo's such idea of humanism can be seen as a theoretical response to the rise of fascism at the time. He viewed the period as an era of historical transition, during which modern civil order was collapsing and a new principle had to be sought. Not only Park, but majority of intellectuals at the time were immersed in the idea of transition that the modern world was being destroyed due to the rise of fascism. In “Civil Liberalism”, Park historically analyzed that, in fact, fascism was the result of internal contradictions of the civil society.

He maintained, through his analysis of the historical development of liberalism, that the liberal trend resisting fascism would not be able to bear the storm of fascism. In other words, in so far as civil liberalism itself was conceptually incomplete and as long as its historical role was coming to an end, liberalism was not an ideological alternative for the transitional period. Nor can irrationalism, negating reason, be the real solution for civil society. Park argued that because fascism was the result of internal contradiction of the civil society, liberalism, which is an ideology of the civil society, could not be an alternative. However, Park made such an argument only on a very abstract level. Park's theories on fascism of the colonial period did not contain detailed discussions on the roles and limitations of liberalism under colonial reality nor analysis into the reality of the colonized Korea. It seems that historical conditions of strict ideological repression as well as intellectual conditions of influence from Japanese ideologies constrained Park's ideas.

#### **4. Part Two: Post-liberation Theories on Democracy and National Culture**

##### **a) Theory on Democracy**

The basic platform of the CPK-WPSK, encapsulated in its 'August Theses', was the "theory on the stage of bourgeois democratic revolution". The August Theses, which could be seen as the Korean version of Leninism, reaffirmed that a socialist revolution could not take place immediately in Korea at the time. The CPK's theory of democracy, based on the August Theses, did not juxtapose bourgeois democracy and proletarian democracy but instead considered the confrontation between democracy and anti-democracy as the main challenge. Park Chi-Woo's theory on democracy also posited 'democracy vs. anti-democracy' as the main issue.

Park identified the theoretical representation of anti-democracy vis-à-vis democracy to be totalitarianism or fascism, and criticized the latter. So he defined

the ‘democracy versus anti-democracy’ conflict as one centered on fascism, and called for an anti-fascist united front. In his article, “Crisis of Ultrationalism Transforming into Fascism and the Duties of a Writer” (*Chosun Ilbo*, 46.2.11-2.12), he emphasized that the post-liberation reality of Korea provided the perfect soil for fascism to grow. He defined fascism in a new way - not in relation to “an era of monopoly finance capital” but as an “anti-historical and violent dictatorship trying to surpass an emergency state in the name of the nation”. Thus, fascism was not a fact of the past, but “It is a virus of the class-based society, always seeking opportunities as long as the nation state exists to make a fever-like attack.”

However, just because Park called for an anti-fascist united front and did not reject bourgeois democracy at the time, it does not mean he supported it. The ‘stage’, in the theory on the stage of bourgeois democratic revolution, did not have a fundamental meaning - rather, a transitional one. In other words, bourgeois democracy was a transitional stage on the way towards establishing a proletarian dictatorship of workers and peasants. So in this sense, Park’s theory on democracy was not a theory on bourgeois democracy, but on people’s democracy.

Park criticized fascism and bourgeois democracy from a philosophical standpoint. First of all, the theoretical basis of fascism is totalitarianism. The core of totalitarianism is “prioritizing the whole over the part” and the logic legitimizing this argument is the “logic of social organism”. The theory of social organism “is a convenient way of analogizing the superiority of the whole, but is fundamentally flawed in that it does not conform to reality”. Thus, totalitarianism always avoids factual proof and tries to depend on mysticism (resorting to blood and soil). Next, the theoretical basis of bourgeois democracy is individualism and liberalism. Bourgeois democracy is individualism in the sense it respects independence of the individual, and liberalism in that it considers freedom of the individual to be an absolute value. Therefore, two individuals form an equal one-to-one relationship, and this is an idea legitimized by the “logic of formality”.

So in Park Chi-Woo’s theory of democracy, two fronts were established - one against fascism and the other against bourgeois democracy. Park criticized both, and then posited people’s democracy as the true alternative for the democracy of the newly founded Korea. His idea of a working people’s democracy was not based

on formal one-to-one relationships but was a democracy that guaranteed democratic 'equity' based on 'realistic one-to-one relationships', in other words, in economic terms as well. The individual always appears in reality not as an abstract and isolated individual but as a historical and social being. Therefore, "The only logic that can rightfully treat the actions and history of humans as existing beings is dialectics as the logic of existing beings." And he legitimized a transition to people's democracy based on such dialectics. In short, the basis of fascism is totalitarianism and the 'logic of social organism', and the basis of bourgeois democracy individualism and 'logic of formality'. Along this line of argument, Park called for 'working people's democracy' and the logic of dialectics.

## **b) Theory on National Culture**

As an officer of the party, Park's theory on national culture was also based on the August Theses and consistently aimed to prove the legitimacy of the "theory of democratic national culture" as stipulated in the Theses. One notable feature of Park's theory on national culture was the social science and philosophical bases for the theory on national culture. He searched for the fundamental nature of the nation in national culture because "National consciousness cannot be formed without national culture, and a place without national consciousness is nothing other than a place without a nation." Historically, the Korea nation was mixed while the Jewish nation could remain as a nation. In this sense, blood relations or regional proximity cannot be seen as fundamental elements constituting the concept of the nation. "Therefore, a nation is neither a blood community nor a natural community but a cultural community, particularly a historical cultural community"(page 139).

Since a nation is a cultural community, if there is cultural heterogeneity among the members, then national consciousness would be weak and a nation, in the true sense, cannot be established. Cultural heterogeneity comes mainly from elements such as geographical distance as well as social distance including status and class, and it is the latter that is decisive. With rise of the modern society, differences in status have been destroyed, leading to greater cultural homogeneity. "So the



idea that the nation was founded and established only with the rise of the modern society is truly meaningful.” However, although the nation state was born from the expansion of the cultural community, the civil society gave birth to a new class conflict involving workers and peasants. Thus, national unity in the true sense had not yet been attained. The circumstances in Korea were all the more serious because feudal forces, let alone capitalists, were still very much rooted in the reality of Korea.

Park rejected the ultranationalist cultural stance, which considered the nation as transcending history and adhered only to pure and unique culture. “Wherever the origin may be from, if the producer of the culture is Korean, the culture is enjoyed by Koreans and if the culture is absorbed, consumed, digested and made into my own, then it is for certain Korean culture.” “Retrospective ultranationalist rhetoric”, which excessively emphasized something that was Korean or Eastern, was mere a repetition of racist ideas of Japanese imperialism and provided a fertile ground for pro-fascists to grow. The nation and culture are not always interconnected, as ultra-nationalists contend. There are trans-national cultures, such as the catholic culture of the Middle Ages, Soviet Union culture and American culture. In particular, the American culture is a valuable source that can prove ideas of ultra-nationalists to be wrong. The fact that American culture has now become “a highly developed capitalist culture”, far from its prior puritan culture, reveals that the arguments of ultra-nationalists, who try to find the essence of culture only from the past, are flawed. Moreover, the fact that the US is multinational also shows the error of ultra-nationalists in their linking of culture and nation.

The above arguments of Park Chi-Woo were aimed at criticizing those asserting supremacy of the nation, emphasizing “harmony of the blood” and adhering to the idea of a pure original national culture. Park said, “When ultranationalism merges with greed for power, it can easily become tyrannical fascism.” He also pointed out that the reality in 1946 Korea certainly had that possibility. Park was concerned about the “crisis of conforming to fascism” and maintained vigilance against the ultranationalist cultural atmosphere that could breed fascism. As such, Park’s anti-fascist theory was applied not only in relation to a political united front but also in terms of national cultural.