

## A Discussion on Paik Nak-Chung's Division System Theory\*

Lee, Byung-Soo\*\*

Professor at the Institute of the Humanities for  
Unification at Konkuk University (IHU)

### Abstract

Since the 1980s, Paik Nak-Chung's division system theory has broadened the horizons of Korean humanities by constantly reflecting upon Korean social movements. Paik argues that divided Korea is not merely a part of the Cold War but of the capitalist world system in the sense that it is dominated by US imperialism in a more unilateral fashion than other divided countries such as East and West Germany wherein the contradiction between the two Camps was merely reproduced. In order to overcome the division system of Korea, he proposes strategies with concrete and practical directions and methods, such as transformative centrism, a citizen participation model of unification. These strategies are in turn associated with his unique philosophical scholarship on a double mission of adapting to and overcoming modernity and on oriental wisdom. However, he fails to provide a detailed analysis of the mutual hostility, mistrust, and fear of the people of South and North Korea. In order to dismantle the division system of Korea, there is a need to examine the characteristics and mechanisms of the people's cognitive-practical barriers to reunification, and such are embodied in their values, emotions, and living cultures.

**Key Words :** The World System, Theory of Double Mission, Transformative Centrism, Citizen Participation Model of Unification, Wisdom Theory

---

\* "This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (MEST)" (NRF-2009-361-A00008).

\*\* bslee8885@hanmail.net

Received 28 September 2014; Revised version received 14 November 2014; Accepted 22 December 2014

## 1. Introduction: Emergence of the Division System Theory

Originally, Paik Nak-Chung developed his division system theory, *Pundanchejeron*, as part of the national literary theory, *Minjok Munhak*; however, in the 1980s, he gradually established it as an independent theory after reflecting on the practical issues of Korean social movements. National literary theory focuses first on facing reality from the people's standpoint, and, secondly, on overcoming the division of Korea in the current national situation (Paik, Nak-Chung 1990, 155-56). In other words, national literary theory is both a literature for the collective nation refusing the division of Korea and a literature based on the lives and desires of people living in divided Korea (*Minjung Munhak*). Thus, national literary theory considers one-sided both the literature that emphasizes only popular desire without considering the division and the literature that focuses on the division without considering people's lives. Viewed in this light of national literary theory, the two representative doctrines proposed by Korean social movements during the controversy relating to the character of the social formation of Korea in the 1980s, that is, NL (National Liberation) and PD (People Democracy), are considered to be biased.

Although the 'Unification First' theory of NL focuses on Korea's suffering from the division, it neglects internal contradictions specific to the respective Korean societies (South and North) by viewing the division contradiction only as a national contradiction. On the other hand, the 'Transformation First' theory of PD focuses on class contradiction but does not pay sufficient attention to the various restrictions imposed on social development by the division. Each doctrine concentrates solely on either class contradiction or national contradiction. Paik's division contradiction theory arose from efforts to overcome the one-sidedness of both doctrines and create a theory that encompasses both contradictions. However, in order to avoid unnecessary pedantic debates, which arose from use of the term 'contradiction' Paik finally introduced a new term, 'division system theory', following the June democratic uprising in 1987.

From Paik's point of view, while blatant repression by South Korea's government ceased and a procedural democracy was established by the 1987 regime, the danger of state violence began to take more clandestine and diverse forms. After the June

democratic uprising, he sought to understand social movements in the context of the division system. He characterized “the June democratic uprising to be not simply a historical event for South Korea but a historical event in the division system that includes both South and North Korea” (Paik, Nak-Chung 1999, 212). In his opinion, the June democratic uprising transitioned the division system from a stable phase to an unstable one. In the 1990s, he argued that the division of Korea was no longer merely part of the Cold War but began to comprise more dynamic and complex characteristics as the division of Korea continued to persist despite the end of the Cold War. Eventually, he claimed that the division system underwent yet another transition from the unstable phase to a dissolution phase when the inter-Korean Summit took place in the year 2000 (Paik, Nak-Chung 2006, 6).

Thus, Paik’s theory emerged during a time when the division system was being shaken by the collapse of dictatorial power in South Korea through the June democratic uprising as well as by the sudden turn in global politics due to the collapse of actually existing socialism and the end of the Cold War. While its focus has shifted at times in various ways, overall division system theory has expanded its scope and deepened its content over the past twenty years. The purpose of this paper is to examine the theoretical contents of Paik’s division system theory that have developed during this period.

## 2. What is Division System Theory?

### a) A Subsystem of the World System

Paik defines division system theory as a theory characterized by its “viewpoint which views the division of Korea as a system encompassing both South and North Korea rather than as an opposition between two systems, two ideologies, or two (conventional) nation states, and furthermore views this system not as a complete system but as a unique spatiotemporal form of the operation of the world system.” This suggests that the division system is a distinct intermediary system situated between the super-system known as the capitalist world system and the two

sub-systems of South and North Korea. First, I would like to examine the definition of the division system as a subsystem of the capitalist world system.

The division system is generally considered to be a subsystem of the Cold War rather than a subsystem of capitalism. Most theories on the relationship between South and North Korea focus on the process through which the Cold War system was reproduced in the Korean Peninsula. Thus, the division system is viewed as comprising a hostile state-to-state relationship replicating the Cold War in the Korean Peninsula. However, refusing to see the division as part of the Cold War, Paik understands the division system to be a cog of capitalist operations. According to Paik, the Cold War is not a conflict between the two world systems of capitalism and socialism, as is often understood. Rather, the Cold War merely encompasses a certain era within the long history of the capitalist world system. The contradiction between the two camps is also a mechanism by which the United States, taking advantage of the East-West competition, controls not only the Soviet Union but also Germany and Japan. The US hegemonic power affected Korea in a more direct fashion than it affected divided Germany, in which the contradiction between the two camps were merely rehashed. As a result, Korea came to embody deeper and more diverse contradictions of the capitalist world system (Paik, Nak-Chung 1994, 32-33). The singularity of the division of Korea, which is fundamentally distinct from that of Germany or Vietnam, consists in the fact that it has been affected not only by the competition between the East and the West, but also by the domination of the US hegemony (Paik, Nak-Chung 1994, 24). According to Paik, no specific structure that can be characterized as a division system is found in the case of Germany or Vietnam.

Paik's division system theory is subject to the same criticisms that were raised to Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory, on which it is theoretically based. Originally, world system theory began by questioning modernization theory, which argues that underdeveloped countries accomplish economic progresses by repeating the historical stages of advanced capitalist countries such as the US and Great Britain. World system theory disapproved of modernization theory, claiming that in reality, underdeveloped countries' imitations of advanced countries widened the gap between the two groups. The capitalist world economy is merely a functional system

of exploitation consisting of three layers: the center which monopolizes economic surplus values, the exploited periphery, and the semi-periphery positioned in between. Moreover, for world system theory, the world system is its unit of its analysis. In contrast, modernization theory is directed towards nation states. World system theory considers capitalism only as a historical system which arose at a certain place at a certain time (in sixteenth century Europe) and spread out throughout the world. From this point of view, states, nations, and classes are all understood as modern historical products that capitalism required for its maintenance and expansion.

One of the most criticized problems of world system theory is that it considers socialism to be part of historical capitalism. According to world system theory, no nation state can extricate itself from capitalism because there is nothing beyond the world system. Thus, it is pointless to define a nation state as capitalist or socialist. However, world system theory has often been criticized as being a circulation-centered approach. Sohn Ho-Chul argues, "World system theory does not simply claim that real socialism participates in the capitalist world economy, but claims that its mode of production itself is capitalist. It does not conceive of capitalism in terms of its relations of production based on the commodification of labor. It is a circulation-centered approach" (Sohn, Ho-Chul 1995, 298).

Sohn accepts the idea that real socialism, including North Korea, is part of the world system in the sense that it is part of the inter-state system; however, he denies that it is part of the capitalist world economy. Considering the fact that world system theory does not want to separate the inter-state system and the capitalist economy as a superstructure and an infra-structure, it can be said that Sohn basically rejects Wallerstein's world system theory. Sohn considers North Korea to be defined by the world socialist system, and South Korea to be defined by the world capitalist system due to the division. This perspective is shared by most Korean leftist scholars who take the difference between the systems of South and North Korea for granted.

## b) One System Encompassing South and North Korea

Furthermore, division system theory subsumes South and North Korea under one system in contrast to the common view which considers the two to be different and opposing systems. According to Paik, the division of South and North Korea is not an external relationship between two neighboring countries sharing a common border, but possesses characteristics of a single system due to their mutual influences and interdependences. Commonsensically, it is not easy to consider that both South and North Korean populations are living under the same system. In contrast to this general understanding, division system theory defines South and North Korea as together constituting one unique complex or one superior reality integrating the politics, economies, and social realities of the two heterogeneous subsystems. Since the term ‘system’ implies resilience and stability, the division system of Korea is understood as a self-reproductive system. What, then, are the theoretical grounds for the conception that there is a common frame encompassing the two different societies, or that the people of the two societies are living under one and the same system?

Division system theory “does not understand the division in terms of the opposition between the two states or their ideologies but in terms of the burdens imposed upon the majority of people by the complicated system that operates throughout the Korean peninsula” (Paik, Nak-Chung 1994, 19-20). In other words, division system theory focuses on the contradiction between the privileged classes who derive benefits from the division system and most Koreans who suffer from the division, rather than on the system differences between South and North Korea. The division system is characterized by including the anti-independent/autonomous and the anti-democratic structures that influence people’s life. Such a division contradiction is more of a contradiction between the division system and the people in South and North Korea, rather than a systemic contradiction between the two Koreas.

The term ‘division system’ is not only designed to indicate the negative realities of South and North Korea but also to imply that the division has a certain durability or self-reproductive power that is strong enough to maintain itself as a system.

The division system has “objective bases to support people’s material life and thus secure a certain level of voluntary conformity” while simultaneously providing common interests for the privileged classes on both sides. That is to say, the division system not only represses the people, it also takes root in the daily lives of the Korean people by advancing itself through system competitions and thus strengthening its ideological foundations. Such secures the symbiotic relationship between the privileged classes of South and North Korea, namely that of mutual antagonism and interdependency, due to their common interests.

Thus, South and North Korean societies are both subsystems of the division system, and therefore it is difficult to understand the political and social phenomena in these two countries without referring to the division system. This is why Paik relates the various agendas of democratic movements, such as overcoming environmental problems and sexual discriminations as well as overcoming regionalisms (especially, those arising from the conflict between South Korea’s Southwestern part, *Honam*, and Southeastern part, *Gyeongnam*) to the division system. The central criticism of Paik’s division system theory is closely connected to this issue; that is, division system theory excessively attributes almost all societal problems in South and North Korea to the division system.

First, Lee Jong-Oh (1993, 294) criticizes the division system theory as a reductionism to a division contradiction, which assumes that it is not possible to undertake social reforms or advance democratizations under the division. However, such criticism misses the key point. It is true that Paik once argued that neither South Korea nor North Korea can realize true democracy under the antidemocratic and anti-independent division system; however, he simultaneously emphasized that democratic changes under the division system are significant as they can become the driving forces for change in the division system itself. Paik merely hoped to distinguish the characteristics and level of democratization and independence achievable before unification from those achievable after it. Secondly, Sohn Ho-Chul (1995, 298) criticizes the division system theory as being a division determinism or fatalism that imputes all social evils such as regionalism, economism and sexual discrimination to the division system. However, Paik’s claim is that, although they are essentially irrelevant to the division system,

problems of sexual discrimination, repression of sexual minority rights and other social evils are deepened by the system.

Such criticisms of division reductionism and division determinism can justify themselves only by doubting the extent of the ‘mediation effect of the division system’ that division system theory presumes with regard to the realities of regionalism and sexual discrimination. In this context, it is important to carry out empirical studies in relation to the historical interactions and consolidations between issues related to the division and issues not originating from the division.

### **3. The Directions and Methods of Overcoming the Division System : Theory of Double Mission, Transformative Centrism, and Participatory Unification Theory**

#### **a) The Double Mission of Adapting to and Overcoming Modernity**

In the emergence of post-modernism and discussions about modernity in the 1990s, division system theory adopted a new form, arguing for overcoming modernity through feasible means in the Korean peninsula. Accommodating world system theory’s conception of modernity, Paik understands the modern era as an era of capitalism, which will necessarily be followed by another era in world history. He rejects modernism and post-modernism as both fail to consider capitalism. He considers globalization to be the latest phase of the modern era in which global expansion of the capitalist market has finally resulted in a uniform generalization of the capitalist social system across the world. Hence, according to him, to define globalization as post-modern (that is, as something no longer belonging to the modern era) is merely an ideological attempt to conceal the reality of capitalism. Paik criticizes any logic that divorces certain achievements of advanced capitalist countries from the context of the entire world system and considers such achievements to be defined by modernity itself. He also contends that the post-modernist claim that one kind of modernity is replaced by another disregards the big picture of capitalist modernity. Conversely, he sympathizes with Arif Dirlik,



who, outlining the latest process of modern capitalism, calls globalization a global modernism, and holds that such a concept of multiple kinds of modernity is oblivious of the existence of the single capitalist world system or is practically limited by seeking only partial alternatives (Paik, Nak-Chung 2006, 246-49).

The hypothesis that global modernism is the last stage of the modern era is strengthened by the current ecological crisis signaling the end of capitalist accumulation. Distancing himself both from the environmental managerialist concept of sustainable development and from the ecological fundamentalist idea hostile to any kind of economic and technological development, Paik embraces Indian economist Amartya Sen's concept of life-sustaining development. In particular, Paik criticizes ecological fundamentalism as being unrealistic as it urges modern society to embrace a pre-modern development-free way of life. He judges Sen's position to be more realistic as it includes a medium-term strategy while simultaneously suggesting life-sustaining development as its long-term goal (Paik, Nak-Chung 2006, 252-54).

Based on world system theory's conception of modernity, Paik proposes a double mission of adapting to and overcoming modernity. The double mission argument is directed not only against modernism, which unreservedly affirms modernization, but also against post-modernism, which neglects accomplishments of the modern era. Paik argues that the double mission does not imply two missions but rather a single mission with two sides. Adapting to modernity cannot be successful without overcoming modernity, and modernity cannot be overcome without adaptation to modernity (Paik, Nak-Chung 2006, 115). Paik applies this double mission to his division system theory. According to Paik, division system theory does not belong to post-modernism, which ignores all modern accomplishments, nor does it believe that unification will immediately lead Korea to post-modernity. Nevertheless, division system theory cannot be considered as modern since it aims at overcoming the modern; it is by overcoming the division system that we gain an important opportunity to change and challenge the capitalist world system.

The practical implication of this double mission consists in pursuing a multi-layered practice in order to analyze and integrate the following three tasks:

a core task within the context of the world system of which we are members (capitalist contradiction), a major task within the context of the division system in the Korean peninsula of which we are members (division contradiction), and an urgent task within the context of South Korea of which we are members (current issues). This triple-layered movement has a short-term mission that focuses on independence and democratization by South Koreans, a mid-term mission that focuses on overcoming the division system by South and North Koreans, and a long-term mission that seeks radical alternatives to the modern world system by people all over the world.

Overcoming the division system can be viewed as the link between the revolution of the world system and the reformation of South and North Korea. Hence, unification should not be understood from the point of view of unification-centrism. It should be understood as an establishment of a better system in Korea. Unification is an intermediary goal between the short-term goal of perpetually improving life in the two Koreas and the long-term goal of developing the world system (Paik, Nak-Chung 2006, 97). Transforming the division system has global and historical significance, for although it would not signify a withdrawal of Korea from the world system, it can negatively impact the latter since it operates through the division system.

Such an argument, however, is related to the nation-centric tradition of Korea. According to this tradition, the Korean peninsula is the linchpin of all global contradictions, and the solution to Korean problems will be the answer to all global contradictions. In other words, division system theory is nation-centric, overemphasizing the importance of changes in the division system for the revolution of the world system. In this regard, Sohn, Ho-Chul expresses his doubts, articulating that while Paik's observations of how changes in the division system may influence the world system is creative and significant, such can fall into the trap of nation-centrism just as Kim, Chi-Ha's literary work *Nam (South)* did, which privileged the history of the ordeals of Korea and the Korean people (Sohn, Ho-Chul 1995, 314).

## b) Transformative Centrism

Speaking from a theoretical point of view, discourse on the double mission of adapting to and overcoming modernity is a discussion within the context of world history. When it is applied to the Korean peninsula, it simply gives rise to division system theory. But, when it is applied to South Korean society, it becomes what Paik calls transformative centrism, namely a political centrism which continues to pursue transformations of South Korean society. Judging the division system to have transited from an unstable phase to a dissolution phase with the occurrence of the Inter-Korean Summit in 2000, Paik advocated a transformative centrism designed to integrate diverse political parties and social movements. According to Paik, the June 15th South-North Joint Declaration in 2000 marks the most progressive and reformative action taken thus far in that it granted an landmark opportunity to overcome the division system (Paik, Nak-Chung 2006, 136). Through the June 15th Declaration, an agreement was reached to pursue a peaceful and gradual unification process, which encouraged participations of various individuals and social groups. According to Paik, the June 15th Declaration itself is both a centrist document and a transformative document in that it can accelerate the process of the transformation of the division system. Criticizing various positions on the left and right for focusing on equality, peace or development without considering the issue of unification, he argues that it is necessary to seek a true middle course that will lead to overcoming the division system through the participation of various parties (Paik, Nak-Chung 2009, 178).

Paik's political centrism can be considered to be transformative (if not socialist) as it aims to overcome the repressive division system in the Korean peninsula. The transformation of the division system, according to Paik, should result in a unification that improves the quality of civic life and societal institutions in the Korean Peninsula. From his point of view, North Korea's 'strong and prosperous country' policy, *kangsŏngdaekunnon*, and South Korea's 'advancement' policy, *sŏnjinhwaron*, are equally deficient as neither relates their realities to the division system. Paik believes that his political centrism is appropriate for overcoming the division system. If the division system should be overcome through a one-time event or war, such centrism could not be deemed appropriate. However, if the

division system should be overcome through a peaceful and gradual process with extensive participation by the majority of the South and North Korean people, centrism is considered to be the most appropriate as it makes it feasible to mobilize a broad moderate force. Such is indeed a logical consequence that we could reasonably expect, especially if we bear in mind that Paik's idea of the double mission aims both at adapting to and overcoming the modern. In contrast, if our urgent task were to surmount modern capitalism itself, he would have argued for radicalism rather than centrism.

Paik maintains that the conflict between those who want to overcome the division system and those who want to retain it is different from the conflict between progressives and conservatives, a conflict characteristic of Western society. A mindless application of Western ideas of progressives and conservatives to the age of the June 15th Declaration qua the dissolution phase of the division system is hardly justifiable. Accordingly, Paik hopes to form an extensive and firm centrist force by means of a convergence between the self-reflective progressive force and the rational conservative force (Paik, Nak-Chung 2009, 279-80). Certainly, Paik does not believe that a rational conservative force can be easily formed in the current climate of South Korea, in which an extremely conservative force still continues to consider the June 15th Declaration as principally responsible for the crisis of national identity in Korea. Nor does he believe that the progressive forces in South Korea will easily change their attitude of considering the Declaration as secondary and concentrating on criticizing neo-liberalism. In short, Paik does not deny that, at least for the foreseeable future, only a minority will agree with his transformative centrism. In this sense, his transformative centrism is a long-term project, not a short-term one, that hopes to mobilize a vast civic force which can further transformation of the division system. Just as Wallerstein emphasizes the role of free will in the unstable period of a transition or in the destruction of the world system, Paik also stresses the importance of the formation of a transformative centrism in order to prevent the June 15th age, the dissolution phase of the division, from becoming a catastrophe. His citizen participation model of unification is related to the formation of the subject who is capable of transforming the division system through his/her moderate practice.

### c) Citizen Participation Model of Unification

Since he proposed the division system theory, Paik has argued for the need of a unique model of unification based on the idiosyncratic character of Korea's division system as distinct from Vietnam's, Germany's, and Yemen's. Recently he has begun to search for a unification model for Korea through the idea of citizen participation. Although he mainly used the term 'people' in the past, Paik now uses the term 'citizen', stating that he can no longer theoretically differentiate citizen from people (Paik, Nak-Chung 2009, 18). This preference of the term 'citizen' seems to have resulted from his transformative centrism which aims at mobilizing a broad civic moderate force. Paik believes that awakening of the masses and ensuring their participation is more important than awakening the intellectuals. The masses that struggled in the so-called candlelight protest in 2008 and lamented ex-president Roh, Moo-Hyun's death in 2009 were not politically immature and indeed approached the idea of transformative centrism as they were not subsumed under any conventionally existing ideologies (unlike most intellectuals) (Paik, Nak-Chung 2009, 56-57). This assessment developed from Paik's belief that the principal driving force for overcoming the division system comes less from government officials or professional activists engaged in ideological movements for unification and more from the daily practices of citizens who confront and strive to find solutions to the problems in their own lives, as such everyday problems are likewise related to the division system.

According to Paik, the June 15th Declaration is significant for Korea's unification because, by making an agreement for a peaceful and gradual unification, it opened the possibility of citizen participation, namely the possibility of a unification brought on not by military force or fiscal means, but by the awakening and participation of a majority of citizens. In other words, the Declaration made it possible to think of a scenario in which increased exchanges between South and North Korea induces a weakening of the control exerted by both governments and by foreign powers, which in turn may enlarge the space in which the masses can actively and creatively participate. The first goal of the second article of the June 15th Declaration was to enter into the intermediary stage

of unification through formation of the South-North Korea Association. The second article declined to clearly delineate any further rules, but rather preserved space within which the contents of the agreement could change through citizen participations in the future. In fact, it appears most democratic to leave fundamental questions such as whether unified Korea should be a liberal democracy or a socialism unanswered so that it can be decided by citizen participants themselves (Paik, Nak-Chung 2009, 104). Such efforts of Paik's are not to emphasize the absoluteness of a civil initiative that excludes government authorities but is directed towards rejecting governmental collusions unaccompanied by citizen participation. The goal is to expand citizen participation as much as possible, while also recognizing the role of governments (Paik, Nak-Chung 2009, 38-42).

Paik also maintains that the citizen participation model of unification gains further importance due to the international and domestic situations that have resulted from the recent six-party talks. In the six-party talks, Japan has maintained a disrupter's role from the beginning while China and Russia concentrated on maintaining the status quo. China has acted contrary to expectations and has not cooperated with the US and Japan in putting pressure on North Korea. Thus, it is expected that the US, South Korea, and the civil societies of both Koreas will be the key to overcoming the status quo. The US and North Korea are, of course, difficult to influence. However the South Korean government itself, under the leadership of Lee, Myung-Bak and Park, Geun-Hye, has shown no clear resolution to further communications and reconciliations between the two Koreas. In such a circumstance, civil movements are expected to play a decisive role.

The role of civil movements will be critical in the process of forming a loose political association that can supervise the gradual reintegration of South and North Korea. Paik believes that the immediate state formed after overcoming the division system should be an inter-state association. He prefers an inter-state association model which imposes certain restrictions on the movement of the population, to the EU model that guarantees complete freedom of population movement. According to a textbook knowledge of politics, an inter-state association is not considered to be a unification, rather it is merely an association between two sovereign states. However, in contrast to the EU, which is a union of various

sovereign nations, the people in the Korean Peninsula have a history in which they were once one nation before they were forcibly divided by foreign powers; consequently a loose association can realistically be considered the first stage of unification. Such an association may effectively oversee the Korean Peninsula which is exposed to the dangers of war and confusion (Paik, Nak-Chung 2006, 36-37). Paik predicts that the role of the civil unification movement in South Korea will be essential during the inter-state association stage.

#### 4. Epistemology of the Division System: Wisdom Theory and the Age of Wisdom

##### a) Overturning the View of Truth with Oriental Wisdom

Paik's theory of wisdom, which criticized scientific socialism's notion of truth in the early 1990s, is repeated in a new form with regard to the recent knowledge-based society. In other words, Paik's theory of wisdom has expanded its object of criticism from scientific socialism to the modern knowledge system, which internalizes modernity itself. This is based on his fundamental problematic to use heritages of East Asian civilization or oriental wisdom to go beyond the Western modern knowledge system. Such a problematic is also related to division system theory. He argues that since the division system is related not only to the long-term mission of change in the world system but also to the short-term mission of change in South Korean society, it is necessary to provide a wisdom that can comprehensively further both missions, control their speeds, and ultimately combine them.

According to Paik, while modern science defines truth either as a correspondence between knowledge and its object or as an internal coherence of knowledge, it overlooks the fact that truth is captured only within a moment or through means of practice and cannot be the grounds for legitimacy of practice itself (Paik, Nak-Chung 1990, 366). His criticism of the scientificity of modern science sympathizes with the problematic of Martin Heidegger who introduced a new

vision of truth under the banner of overcoming Western metaphysics. He accepts Heidegger's ontological concept of truth which considers truth not as propositional (as modern science claims) but as poetic. Paik does not appreciate Heidegger's quietism privileging *poiesis* since he does not want to distinguish artistic practices from revolutionary practices. Nonetheless, from Paik's point of view, Heidegger's attempts to overcome metaphysics can be more easily understood by Asians who have reasoned outside the metaphysical tradition due to their experiences of meditating upon 'Tao (道), which is not to be called Tao', and *Tathata* (眞如), which is attained after surpassing the opposition between being and non-being (Paik, Nak-Chung 1990, 339-40).

Paik believes that true scientificity can be obtained only through a realization of truth; however, truth for men cannot be separated from their practical cares. "Researchers should not seek truth through the accumulation of knowledge but try to achieve their love of wisdom by creating true works of art or by engaging in genuine revolutionary practices" (Paik, Nak-Chung 1990, 377-78). Thus, Paik presents the traditional oriental concept of truth as an alternative to the modern Western concept of truth. He focuses "not on the accuracy of knowledge but on the path on which we will have walked with endless questions ... the path that does not exist independently from the human practices that create the path, as the oriental tradition understands it through the concept of Tao" (Paik, Nak-Chung 1990, 374). Buddhism, too, imposes science to questions. Though it emphasizes laws of scientific knowledge, Buddhism simultaneously tries to abstain from descending into scientism; instead it rises to the realm of enlightenment and practice by becoming liberated from the laws themselves. It maintains that one must embody scientific attitudes while questioning the true meaning of science.

In East Asian tradition, Tao has always meant a fusion of the true and the good in which truth goes beyond propositional truth. To think that research on oriental Tao can begin only after a conversion into a knowledge-oriented modern science has been completed is to surrender to modernism. Thus, we must apply the logic of the double mission of overcoming and adapting to modernity to this question (Paik, Nak-Chung 2009, 388-90). The revival of oriental Tao does not imply a revival of a mysterious fundamental truth against objective truth. One should



maintain the attitude of asking fundamental questions rather than absolutizing objective truth. This is also why Paik does not merely talk about wisdom but about the age of wisdom; one should not simply try to revive oriental wisdom, instead one should also wisely utilize science and technology in the age in which science and technology are the leading principles (Paik, Nak-Chung 2006, 119).

### **b) The Age of Wisdom**

Paik's theory of wisdom is closely related to the age of wisdom. He defines the upcoming times as the age of wisdom. The age of wisdom is "the time in which one is assigned to face oneself in reality and accomplish self-fulfillment by realizing dreams given as a part of reality" (Paik, Nak-Chung 1994, 114). Hence, it is "the time of neither idealism nor blind realism, but of wisdom." This definition reminds us of Paik's unique centrism, which includes his argument for the double mission of adapting to and overcoming modernity. Then, why does Paik call the future "the age of wisdom" instead of "emancipated labor" or "accomplished socialist revolution"? He underlines the need to essentially change our perspective of truth as he believes it is impossible to separate truth from the practice of realizing that truth. For him, the alternative to the modern perspective of truth is inseparable from social practices that improve humanity and produce flexible and creative ideas in the face of changing reality.

Paik considers the process of overcoming the division system to include a process for developing completely different subjects from the present ones. Thus, he focuses not on a systematical theory of the division system but on the training required to realize and improve humanity and civility. He puts forth his theory of wisdom as he regards it to be necessary to utilize (to study and learn) the legacies of East Asian civilization as ideological and cultural resources. Such a problematic is also expressed by the title of his first book on division system theory, *The Path of Practice for Transforming the Division System*. What, then, is the practice (or training) that utilizes East Asian cultural resources? Certainly, it does not mean that one should train oneself on a mountaintop located far from secular society. Paik does not separate mental training from the mission of social

transformation. From his point of view, the failure of really existing socialist states resulted from failing to focus on the mental training of the people and only pursuing system reformations. Nevertheless, he does not agree with prioritizing individuals' mental training over system reformation. One without the other is alien to Paik's centrism.

According to Paik, the age of wisdom is an age which requires a possessor of wisdom, one who can amass and manage the increasingly growing amount of information and knowledge as a tool, while recognizing the limits of modern science. It is also a wise people's age in which the reformation of social institutions and mental training can coexist and interact with one another. Paik argues that while a change in the relationship of property is a necessary condition, it is not a sufficient condition for transformation. The goal should not be an egalitarian ownership of property but a liberation from the obsession with property. In short, in the age of wisdom, proper practice does not come so much from the class-conscious labor class as from the working Taoist monks. However, he does not demand that people engage in a particular or unique training that only a small number of special individuals could undergo; the training he asks for is a mental training that anyone could do once some concrete equal distribution of wealth is instituted in society (Paik, Nak-Chung 2006, 121-24).

The Western concept of truth takes as its criterion either the correspondence between the statement and the external fact or an internal coherence of the statement; however, this implies that it thinks of truth only in the dichotomy of the subject and the object. The major conception of science in modern times, which reduces truth to a matter of proof and logic, developed alongside the growth of capitalism and scientific technology, and it is still powerful today. However, according to Paik, seeking truth is not only a matter of studying nature and society, but also a matter of developing humanity through training. Our search for a truth with which we can explain and understand the world will see its fruits only with an effort to realize the truth in our individual lives and society, that is, an effort to develop our own humanity through training. Truth is found and realized not by means of contemplating the true and objective being lying outside ourselves through mediation, but by means of daily practices, such as the path on which

a man walks (Tao, 道).

Truth involves man's various historical efforts, including mind training, to realize humanity by engaging in social practice. For this reason, both as a theory without practice for social transformation, and also as a social practice for transforming institutions without self-transformation fall short of truth, or are only one-sided truths. On the other hand, escapism and asceticism, which turn their back on daily life and consider such as a sin, are no more than a divided life. Truth is rarely found through contemplation, observational experience, individual training, or practice for institutional transformation. Truth is found and realized through the process of training humanity, which includes all aspects such as reflective introspection, experience, and practice. Truth is not a fixed substance, but an activity that surfaces in the dynamic relation among man, society, and nature. Though it is never obtained through simple everyday experience, objective observation, or institutional practice nevertheless, it should not be separated from them, and in this sense, it is an endless activity of immanent transcendence. Though he adds that one should not try to recover ancient wisdom, but should wisely use scientific technology and information, nevertheless Paik sees the possibility of fundamental truth in oriental wisdom.

## 5. Conclusion : The Significance and Limitations of Division System Theory

The significance of division system theory consists not only in the fact that, through a process of reflecting upon the practical tasks of Korean social movements since the 1980s, it provides concrete and practical directions and methods to overcome the division system, such as transformative centrism and citizen participation model of unification, but also in the fact that it expands the horizons of Korean humanities by combining the humanities with more ambitious and comprehensive discourses such as the double mission of adapting to and overcoming modernity and a theory of oriental wisdom. Paik understands overcoming the division system as both an achievement of modernity and as an

active opportunity to overcome modernity, and thus expresses its meaning and importance with regard to a transformation of the capitalist world system. Furthermore, he criticizes the modern knowledge system itself, regarding the modern view of truth to have strengthened the legitimacy of the capitalist world system. He emphasizes East Asian civilizations as potential ideological and cultural resources with which overcoming the division system in the Korean Peninsula can become possible.

Paik's division system theory does not confine itself to analyzing the division of Korea simply in terms of South Korea, North Korea, and foreign powers. Instead, he attempts to understand division system theory from a complex point of view that reflects the following three layers: the world system, the division system, and the divided two state systems (Kim, Sung-Min and Park, Young-Kyun 2010, 515). His observation that the division is not merely part of the East-West Cold War system, but is part of a more complex and overdetermined system allows us to understand how the capitalist world system concretely operates through the Korean division system (its mode of operation being the Cold War and US imperialist domination). It also helps us understand the interdependence of South and North Korean politics and social phenomena: that there is a symbiotic relationship between the privileged classes in South and North Korea that appears to be in conflict with each other, and that the division system is structurally responsible for the ruins of democracy, independence, and peace in both South and North Korea.

However, while successfully examining the systematic characteristics of the division that strengthen the hostile interdependence between South and North Korea, Paik's division system theory fails to analyze how the division of Korea is internalized in the social psychology and hardships of the people's daily lives. In order for the division system to be a system per se, it must take strong root in the people's daily lives in both South and North Korea (Kim, Jeong-In 2006, 285). Paik realizes that the division system does not merely operate in politico-military terms but also negatively impacts the daily lives and psychology of the Korean people; however, he does not specifically analyze the people's everyday psychology, values, and culture. His theory does not extend further after

advocating ideas such as 'unification as a process,' 'a federal union,' and 'transformative centrism.' Certainly, he recognizes that there is a link between the division and people's mental hardships; however, he does not concretely realize nor examine the permeating scars that have resulted from the division, and which have seeped into all areas of life, including the people's subconscious (Kim, Sung-Min and Park, Young-Kyun 2010, 518).

Paik's mental training or study is not meant to pursue asceticism or individualistic discipline designed to facilitate escape from daily life. Paik does not separate people's mind training from the task of overcoming the division system because he understands the latter to be a process that should include the formation of new subjects. This is why he argues that mind training cultivates the centrist wisdom required for overcoming the division system. However, such mind training cannot sufficiently serve as a balm for the emotional and psychological scars that South and North Koreans have suffered from the division. The social psychology of unreasonable hatred and hostilities resulting from the division does not simply originate from the manipulations of the ruling classes, but from the people's unconscious internalization of the division within their daily lives. Hence, it is necessary to specifically analyze why people are so easily incited by the antagonism of South and North Korea and what triggers generate such conflicts and hostilities.

## Works Cited

- Kim, Sung-Min and Young-Kyun Park. 2010. "Critical Reflection on Humanistic Discourses for the Unification: A Critical Review on Gang Man-Gil, Paik Nak-chung and Song Doo-Yul's Discourse for the Unification". *Bumhan Philosophy* 59:507-33.
- Kim, Jeong-In. 2006. "Humanistic Reflections on the Division and the Unification". In *Universality in Us*. Edited by Kim, Kyung-Il, 266-97. Seoul: Hanul Books.
- Paik, Nak-Chung. 1990. *The New Stage of National Literature*. Paju: Changbi.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1994. *The Path of Practice for Transforming the Division System*. Paju: Changbi.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. *The division system in crisis: Essays on Contemporary Korea*. Paju: Changbi.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. *Unification Korean-Style, Present Progressive Tense*. Paju: Changbi..
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. *Where Is the Middle Way and Wherefore Transformation?* Paju: Changbi.
- Sohn, Ho-Chul, 1995. *Fifty Years of Korean Politics since the Liberation from Japan*. Seoul: Saegil.
- Lee, Jong-Oh. 1993. "Rethinking the Division and the Unification". *Creative Writing and Criticism* 80:27-46.