

# MASS DICTATORSHIP IN THE 20TH CENTURY



## MASS DICTATORSHIP AND MODERNITY

Edited by Michael Kim, Michael Schoenhals  
and Yong-Woo Kim



## Mass Dictatorship and Modernity

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DICTATORSHIPS

# Mass Dictatorship and Modernity

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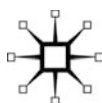
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This book, the second volume of a series on mass dictatorship, began with a conference called 'Mass Dictatorship and Modernity' that Jie-Hyun Lim hosted at Hanyang University, Korea, in June 2007. The Research Institute of Comparative History and Culture (RICH) at Hanyang University organised six consecutive 'mass dictatorship' conferences between 2003 and 2008 and co-sponsored a seventh conference in the series, 'Imagining Mass Dictatorship: The Individual and the Masses in Literature and Cinema', at Lund University, Sweden, in 2010. Other themes included 'coercion and consent', 'political religion and hegemony building', 'everyday lives between desire and delusion', 'gender politics', and 'coming to terms with the past'. The fifth conference addressed the issues of modernity and the public sphere. The mass dictatorship project was inspired by a scholarly shift from the conception of 'dictatorship from above' to 'dictatorship from below'. This project assembled a trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific scholarly constellation with the aim of a global study of dictatorship but without any claim to comprehensiveness.

Without the help of many friends, colleagues, and institutions this book would have remained only in the realm of ideas. The Korean Research Foundation (KRF) was the principal sponsor that financed the project and multiple international conferences. We express our special thanks to the programme managers and administrative staff of the Humanities and Social Sciences Section of the KRF. Hanyang University also contributed funding. Dr. Kim Chong Yang, the former president of Hanyang University, was highly supportive of the project. More than a hundred scholars from various corners of the world participated in the conferences, including most of the contributors to this volume. We are grateful particularly to Charles Armstrong, Stefan Berger, Paul Corner, Roger Griffin, Minoru Iwasaki, Konrad Jarausch, Kyu Hyun Kim, Claudia Koonz, Volodymyr Kravchenko, Marcin Kula, Peter Lambert, Alf Lüdtke, Robert Mallet, Hiroko Mizuno, Karen Petrone, Martin Sabrow, Naoki Sakai, Feliks Tych, and Michael Wildt for their multiple commitments. Unfortunately, there is not enough space here to list and acknowledge all of the wonderful colleagues who participated in the mass dictatorship project.

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# 1

## Introduction: Mass Dictatorship and the Radical Project for Modernity

*Michael Kim and Michael Schoenhals*

As a twentieth-century phenomenon, mass dictatorship developed its own modern socio-political engineering system, which sought to achieve the self-mobilisation of the masses for radical state projects. In this sense, it shares a similar mobilisation mechanism with its close cousin, mass democracy. Mass dictatorship requires the modern platform of the public sphere to spread its clarion call for the masses to overcome their collective crisis. Far from being a phenomenon that emerged from pre-modern despotic practices, mass dictatorship reflects the global proliferation of quintessential modernist assumptions about the transformability of the individual. Mass dictatorship therefore utilises the utmost modern practices to form totalitarian cohesion and to stage public spectacles in the search for extremist solutions to perceived social problems.

Global history suggests that mass dictatorship is far from a result of deviation or aberration from a purported 'normal path' of development but is in itself a transnational formation of modernity that emerged in response to the global processes that swept through the twentieth century. As Jie-Hyun Lim argued in his series introduction, 'Mapping Mass Dictatorship: Towards a Transnational History of Twentieth-Century Dictatorship', the near ubiquitous presence of mass dictatorship in so many parts of the globe and disparate historical circumstances argues against the *Sonderweg* dichotomy of a particular/pre-modern/abnormal dictatorship in the 'Rest' and a universal/modern/normal democracy in the 'West', while reducing fascism and the Holocaust to manifestations of essentialist characteristics that pervade the 'Rest'.<sup>1</sup> Mass dictatorship is ultimately but one of many

manifestations of global modernity that stem from our fervent desires to construct a utopian social world. As such, one of the contributions of this series and this volume in particular is to highlight the linkages of colonial and post-colonial circumstances with mass dictatorships that share a radical trajectory in their common pursuit of modernity.

In this volume, the contributors examine the phenomenon of mass dictatorship along many different lines of inquiry. The first section attempts to theorise the specific structural mechanisms that enabled mass dictatorships. Jie-Hyun Lim and Roger Griffin map out a theoretical framework for grasping the relationship between mass dictatorship and modernity in both its colonial and fascist forms. On the broader arena of global modernity, the desire for colonising power and the corresponding fear of being colonised were unquestionably two powerful engines that drove twentieth-century mass dictatorships. While mass dictatorships on European soil were shaped by the push for imperialist expansion, non-European dictatorships were also driven by the desire to acquire colonial power and the fear of being colonised. As Jie-Hyun Lim emphasises, global perspectives on mass dictatorship as a transnational formation of modernity render the Holocaust, fascist atrocities, and post-colonial genocides visible as a composite whole within a single continuum that begins with the initial unleashing of colonial violence.

Hui-yu Caroline Ts'ai and Michael Schoenhals, on the other hand, provide us with distinctly ground-level views of how colonial Taiwan and the post-civil war People's Republic of China deployed various modern practices of control and surveillance. Populations had to be disciplined, exhorted, and mobilised to transform individual subjects into a collective totality. The specific techniques that the two regimes pioneered allowed them to watch over and encourage the 'voluntary' compliance of their populations and, by extension, to regulate their individual behaviour. The expansion of the state apparatus to engulf the everyday emerges as a critical feature of mass dictatorship, and these views from non-European examples provide us with insights into the global scale of the technologies of domination that were so vital for manufacturing 'consent' and perpetuating authoritarian rule.

The second part of this volume explores the critical role of the public sphere in enabling colonial as well as totalitarian politics. The public sphere in the modern era, imagined or real, has been a space for obtaining and securing legitimacy ever since the idea of *Öffentlichkeit* became an integral part of modernity. Mass dictatorships attempted to shape public opinion and organise public spectacles to establish their



own *agora* for the development of powerful capillary organisations at the grass-roots level. Many of the chapters engage the problem of applying Habermasian conceptions of the public sphere to mass dictatorships. Habermas's normative model of rational discussion is a controversial issue for historians who have cast doubt on the utility of the concept for historical analysis. Few historical periods seem to produce unfettered rational discussions, and those who are excluded from participating in the public sphere inevitably far outnumber those who are permitted entry. Nevertheless, a public sphere that claims to be the sole source of rationality and legitimacy certainly existed within mass dictatorships, and an examination of its conceptual terrain become paramount for understanding the violent excesses of the twentieth century.

The contributors to this volume alert us to the ways in which the public sphere can be transmuted to fit the particular needs of mass dictatorships. Paul Corner explores the inherent contradictions of applying Habermasian notions to fascism and argues for the presence of a choreographed and staged public sphere that is a central feature of all mass societies of the twentieth century. Kyu Hyun Kim extends the discussion of the public sphere into wartime Japan and suggests ways to reconceptualise the notion into another idiom to understand this critical period of Japanese history. Hiroko Mizuno shows how volunteer firemen in Austria formed their own public sphere in the nineteenth century to gain hegemony over their localities and how the structural constraints of this 'non-political' process ultimately aided the spread of National Socialism in the twentieth century. Hae-dong Yun and Michael Kim discuss further the limitations of the colonial public sphere in Korea under Japanese occupation. Through careful and in-depth examinations of colonial Korea, both authors highlight the appropriation of the colonial public sphere by colonial subjects and demonstrate its latent mass mobilisation potential. Often it was this space for appropriation between dictatorial regimes and the ordinary people where we witnessed the most interesting interactions within the public sphere. Ultimately, the public spheres of mass dictatorships became not only levers of political hegemony but also spaces for the (fictive) self-empowerment of the masses. This complexity requires careful elaboration through the kind of comparative analysis that the contributors of this volume provide across a wide gamut of historical circumstances.

The third part calls for a reconsideration of the totalitarian self as shaped and disfigured by state power and ideological practices. The chapters reveal an overdetermined characteristic of the ambivalent

modern self that ultimately eludes attempts to form a totalitarian whole. State-controlled in all aspects, the attempt to shape the totalitarian self inevitably leaves disruption in its wake. Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone provide a historiographic overview of the debates regarding subject formation within the Soviet Union to reveal a composite picture of Soviet subjectivity. Peter Lambert examines the question of elite agency to show that the crisis of subjectivity that accompanied the rise of National Socialism was classically modernist in its conception. Finally, Cheehyung Kim explains how an attempt to construct an infinite subject emerged from the North Korean regime's attempt to merge society and subjectivity into a single seamless totality.

The volume as a whole deals with numerous case studies and provides diverse perspectives from its contributors. The mass dictatorship regimes analysed include Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, interwar Austria, Imperial Japan, colonial Korea, colonial Taiwan, Stalinist Russia, Maoist China, and North Korea. The academic contributors to the volume were trained in seven different countries on three different continents: Asia, Europe, and North America. Their interplay of analytical ideas and transnational perspectives conjure forth new interpretations of key questions in the histories of colonialism, socialism, nationalism, and fascism. Just as the individual chapters address many different areas of global history, they also all share a common concern with exploring the theoretical basis and specific practices that enabled mass dictatorship to come to such prominence during the past century.

Jie-Hyun Lim begins this volume with his main thesis: that global perspectives on the transnational formation of modernity help us to see the grotesque violence in mass dictatorship, such as the Holocaust, within a wider historical continuum that begins with the first instances of colonial violence. The racial hierarchies and the willingness to inflict violence on segregated populations were governing practices that incubated on an institutional scale in the colonies. He emphasises that while mass dictatorships on European soil were shaped by imperial projects, non-European mass dictatorships were driven both by the desire for colonial power and the fear of being colonised. This explains why the 'follow and catch up' strategy was adopted not only by socialist regimes but also by post-colonial developmental dictatorships. These regimes proclaimed that their historical task was to follow and catch up with the Western colonial powers at all costs. Under these circumstances, those victimised by Western colonial genocides became themselves victimisers, perpetuating various post-colonial genocides on others.

Roger Griffin builds on the classic theory of totalitarianism proposed by Friedrich and Brzezinski and more recent work by Emilio Gentile to offer his take on the theoretical basis of mass dictatorship. Griffin distinguishes two types of mass dictatorship, the *authoritarian* one, which aims to contain the anarchic forces released by the rise of the masses and the impact of modernisation within a coercive regime masquerading as a modern populist state, and the more radically utopian *totalitarian* one, which pursues the transformation of the whole of society and the creation of a new man within an alternative modernity. Having underlined the different roles played by propaganda and coercion in the two types of regime, totalitarianism is then identified with the ambition of political forms of modernism to create a healthier, more meaningful society immunised against the chaos of liberal modernity. The totalitarian mass dictatorship in his view is hence equated with 'the modernist state'.

Whereas Lim and Griffin offer us broad theoretical perspectives on the relationship between mass dictatorship and modernity, Hui-yu Caroline Ts'ai and Michael Schoenhals provide detailed empirical studies on the specific practices located at the heart of mass dictatorships. Hui-yu Caroline Ts'ai examines the 1925 Taipei police exhibition and its attempt at 'policising the masses' and 'massifying the police'. Rather than rely solely on violent coercion, the colonial police hoped to achieve the 'self-policing' of the local Taiwanese population through the projection of a kaleidoscope of visual images. She shows through her textual analysis of the exhibition that there is only a thin line between governmentality and social engineering in the colonies. Japan's colonial governmentality in Taiwan ultimately took the form of 'social management', which partly reflected Japan's determination to bring Taiwan into line with its own conception of the 'Asian modern'. Colonial policies in Taiwan, she suggests, had a major impact primarily because they appealed to both Japanese interests and Taiwanese concerns – in the name of 'enlightenment'. Therefore it is this space of 'everyday coloniality' that deserves more analytical attention to understand the complex mechanisms that sustain colonial rule.

Michael Schoenhals posits the existence of a nexus of modernity and surveillance in the People's Republic of China in the untidy post-civil war decade of the 1950s. He identifies the state's interception and perusal of ordinary people's correspondence for the purpose of discovering what they were thinking as a central component of that nexus and illustrates this identification with contemporary data culled from recently declassified archival material. He argues that the creation of an

alternative modernity – labelled communism but defined by discipline and quantifiable order rather than simply by ‘freedom from want’ – was attempted by China’s then communist party leadership but ultimately abandoned in favour of the quiet consolidation of ‘really existing socialism’ with Chinese characteristics.

The second section aims to shed new light on the essential role of the public sphere in mass dictatorships. Paul Corner engages the discussions over the public sphere as envisaged by Habermas to argue that, while mass dictatorships – Italian fascism in particular – denied any democratic participation in the political process, the need for popular legitimation compelled dictatorships to invent a ‘fascist public sphere’. By denying any role to the individual when divorced from the collectivity and the state, and by refusing to recognise the existence of a private sphere, fascism incorporated everything into the public sphere. He highlights a seeming paradox in that the ‘people’ under fascism were more politically present than ever before and the town square formed the core of fascist rallies. It was precisely in the choreography and orchestration of ‘spontaneous enthusiasm’ that we can witness fascism’s political theatre. Corner reaffirms that the public displays under fascism are not a Habermasian public sphere. Instead he argues that such developments can be seen as representing what Habermas termed the ‘re-feudalisation’ of public life, where the people were present only as audience and consumers of public spectacles.

Kyu Hyun Kim examines the Japanese ‘national public sphere’ during the decade and a half between 1931 and 1945. His chapter draws upon the theoretical critics of Habermas and the works of contemporary thinkers such as Charles Taylor, as well as the scholarly literature on European histories of the 1930s, but is firmly grounded in recent Japanese-language scholarship and primary sources. While the 1930s were clearly a period of neither democracy nor liberalism, civil society in Japan, through its engagement with mass politics and culture, resisted being dominated by the state. Yet despite the persistence of the essential underpinnings of a democratic system, Japan continued on its path towards total war. In addressing the public sphere in this period, his chapter examines government-based source materials that serve to illustrate the nature of the ideological and discursive conflicts within the state, such as internal reviews and reports of the Imperial Rule Assistant Association, as well as a set of civilian journals, many of them difficult to classify easily as ‘left’ or ‘right’. Through his analysis, he discovers that wartime Japan did not in any way appear ‘special’ or ‘unique’ in terms of how the critical

functions of the public sphere became challenged and undermined by the increasing push towards authoritarianism. Ultimately, wartime Japan may have to be understood as a case where war mobilisation took place within a constitutional structure.

Hiroko Mizuno focuses on the 1860s and the many Volunteer Firemen Associations (*Freiwillige Feuerwehr*) that came to be established at the time in almost every local community in the Austrian monarchy. One of the most important missions of these associations was to protect their own home town as well as their properties from fire-related catastrophes. Varying in size and in formation, most of the associations consisted of male inhabitants who belonged to the middle class. The association of Hohenems, a town in the region of the Vorarlberg, was co-established by some Jewish burghers and may in this sense be understood as a symbol of the liberalism of the times. Financially supported by and cooperating with the town council, the Hohenems association won wide recognition for its voluntary activities and eventually dominated the local public sphere. Yet over time, the structural constraints of the relationship between the firemen and the local authorities led them towards greater accommodation with state power, until the associations became an integral part of the National Socialist system. This chapter considers the historical roles of the Volunteer Firemen Associations in the shaping of the Austrian liberal public sphere and highlights the areas where liberalism and fascism overlap.

Hae-dong Yun's contribution to this volume discusses a long-running debate among mostly historians in Japan concerning the presence or absence of the public sphere in colonial Korea. Rather than accept the problematic assumptions behind a Habermasian public sphere, Yun offers the concept of 'publicness' as a suitable substitute for analysing the multiple dimensions of colonialism. A public sphere in the civic society sense could not and did not exist under colonialism, he argues. However, this does not mean that colonised subjects lacked a sense of publicness that ultimately served the interests of the colonial state as well as offered opportunities for Korean appropriations. Therefore, Yun explores alternative venues for discovering notions of 'publicness' in colonial Korea and highlights several neglected aspects of the period for further consideration.

Michael Kim expands upon Yun's discussions to explicate the discursive mechanism of the colonial public sphere. The Japanese often explained that they could not implement certain policies in Korea because of the low *mindō*, or cultural and economic level, of the Korean population. This denigrating term then became internalised among Korean

participants in the colonial public sphere, and they often expressed views that the Korean public was backward and not able to fully express its collective political will. However, Korean pundits did not accept their fate quietly, and a critical public debate developed within the limits of the dominant colonial rationality, especially over the perceived failures of colonial policy. The discourse of *mindō* changed rapidly with the outbreak of World War II, as Koreans would later claim that their level of civilisation had finally become high enough to achieve equality with the Japanese. Political pressure for colonial reforms continued to build even at the height of World War II and assumed a different character under the particular circumstances of wartime mobilisation. Through an examination of the trajectory of *mindō*, we may gain insights into the 'alternative rationalities' of the colonial order that shaped the colonial public sphere.

Switching to the theme of totalitarian selfhood in the third section, Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone propose in their review essay to interrogate the notion of the modern self as a historical category and see how historians working within the Anglo-American tradition of historiography on Russia and the Soviet Union have used it as an entry point to reach a deeper understanding of that society and culture. Chatterjee and Petrone marry various, nuanced, and ultimately complementary models of the self to arrive at a composite picture of Soviet subjectivity. Only when notions of the individual are seen in dynamic interaction with the others in their particular collectives and with the wider public can one imagine Russian and Soviet experiences of selfhood. It is in this interaction that both Soviet selves and Soviet power were made.

Peter Lambert embarks on a more specific historiographical discussion to distil a sense of agency among the German 'old elites' of the Weimar Republic and the prelude to Hitler's accession to the office of Chancellor. The old elites had survived Germany's defeat in 1918, the revolution, and the birth of the democratic republic with their power, which was deeply rooted in the underlying structures of Germany, essentially intact. Given their undiminished commitment to authoritarianism, they wielded that power first to undermine democracy and then, fatefully, to hand Hitler the keys to office. He highlights the German historian Detlev Peukert's contention that, far from being overburdened with pre-modern vestiges, the Weimar Republic had met the criteria of what he called 'classical modernity': advanced industrial capitalism, a welfare state, vast bureaucracy, faith in science as a 'cure-all', and mass-participatory politics. Embedded within that condition, however, was a 'dark side' of pathological potential, which was

unleashed as Germany entered a crisis of classical modernity. Other historians have since argued that the 'old elites' had no collective agency in producing the outcome of a Hitler-led government. Lambert, however, contends that the significance of the old elites is important for understanding the modernist dimensions of the crisis that led to the rise of fascism in Germany.

Finally Cheehyung Kim gives us a view of 1970s North Korea to witness the beginnings of a single-leader system accompanied by a single-ideology system based on *chuch'e*, the guiding rationality and paradigm attributed to Kim Il Sung. *Chuch'e* was tantamount to an ontological orientation of the subject and the nation, a totality within which that same subject became the actor. He explains that the nation in the North Korean context arose as a specific kind of totality, abstract and dependent on positivistic characteristics of society as autonomous. The cinema and paintings of this period point out both the objectivity and ambiguity of a reified social totality. In art, the social refuses to be categorised or, more specifically, totalised. Nonetheless, society indeed appears as a real 'thing' autonomous from the state. The impossibility of constructing an absolute subject, however, also affirms a lesser truth in that hegemonic totality is equally impossible. Cheehyung Kim posits that this impossibility is not a limitation but rather a moment of rupturing. The socialist art of North Korea from the 1970s was state-controlled in all aspects, but it nonetheless provides us with a glimpse of the infinite quality of the subject.

The contributors to this volume interrogate the myriad of ways in which radical attempts to achieve modernity are fraught with contradictions and unrealised promise. Rather than view the history of twentieth-century dictatorships as aberrations from a normative model, the contributions to this volume greatly expand our horizons to the immanent potential of modernity to follow multiple paths, some of which inevitably lead to a totalitarian direction. Instead of 'us' v. 'them', the aim of this volume is to see the potential for self-empowerment, violence, and everyday oppression within the collectivised attempts to realise our modernist utopian visions.

## Note

1. Jie-Hyun Lim, 'Mapping Mass Dictatorship: Towards a Transnational History of Twentieth-Century Dictatorship', in Jie-Hyun Lim and Karen Petrone, eds, *Gender Politics and Mass Dictatorship: Global Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3–4.

# **Part I**

## **Radical Projects for Modernisation**



# 2

## Mass Dictatorship: A Transnational Formation of Modernity

*Jie-Hyun Lim*

### Neither *Sonderweg* nor diffusionism

The term 'mass dictatorship' implies the attempted mobilisation of the masses and puts forth the position that dictatorships frequently secured voluntary mass participation and support.<sup>1</sup> The peculiarity of mass dictatorship as a twentieth-century phenomenon can be found in its modern socio-political engineering system, which aims at the voluntary enthusiasm and self-mobilisation of the masses for state projects, the same goal shared by mass democracies. Mass dictatorship appropriates modern statecraft and egalitarian ideology and pretends to be a dictatorship from below; the study of this phenomenon needs to be situated as a broader transnational formation of modernity. Mass dictatorship as a working hypothesis denies the diffusionist conception of modernity as a movement from the centre to the periphery. Rather, it focuses on the transnational aspects of modernity through global connections and interactions of the centre and periphery, and of democracy and dictatorship.

Once placed in the orbit of global modernity, twentieth-century dictatorships cease to be inevitable products of deviation or aberration from a normal path to modernity. Mass dictatorship as a transnational formation of modernity argues against the *Sonderweg* thesis, which seeks to set Nazism and other manifestations of fascism apart from the parliamentary democracies of the 'West'.<sup>2</sup> The *Sonderweg* dichotomy of a particular/pre-modern/abnormal dictatorship in the 'Rest' – quintessentially represented by Germany – and a universal/modern/normal democracy in the 'West' strengthens a Western claim to exceptionalism, according to which democracy, equality, freedom, human rights, rationalism, science, and industrialism promulgated by

the European Enlightenment are phenomena unique to the 'West'. The normative presupposition inherent in the *Sonderweg* thesis implies Eurocentrism, suggesting that the 'West' has achieved the maturation of the unique historical conditions necessary for democracy and human rights. In the 'Rest', by contrast, these conditions remained un- or underdeveloped.

In explicating twentieth-century dictatorships, this sort of Eurocentrism is profoundly misleading, encouraging us to believe that fascism and the Holocaust can be reduced to manifestations of peculiarities of the pre-modern 'Rest'. The argument serves as a historical alibi of the modernist 'West', which is thus exempted from association with a barbarism defined *ab initio* as pre-modern.<sup>3</sup> Mass dictatorship occupied the position of the 'East', while democracy remains 'Western' in this imaginative geography.<sup>4</sup> A shift from the 'reified geography' of the dichotomy of East and West to the 'problem space' of the co-figuration of East and West would make it possible to see both mass dictatorship and mass democracy as transnational formations of modernity.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the East/West or dictatorship/democracy divide does not make any substantial difference, since both dichotomies co-evolved within the same 'problem space' of modernity. This is precisely why mass dictatorship should be mapped onto the transnational history of modernity.

It is on this historical topology that the dictatorships of the 'East' and the democracies of the 'West' converge as transnational formations of modernity. The historical singularity either of a dictatorship or of a democracy can be analysed from global perspectives on the emergence of the modern state. Once conscripted to modernity's project,<sup>6</sup> each version of the modern state is the result of negotiations among various draftees of modernity in different regions. Viewed from global perspectives, the sophisticated discourses of 'alternative modernity', 'retroactive modernity', 'modernism against modernity', 'capitalism without capitalism', 'anti-Western modernisation', 'antimodern modernisation', and so on were rampant in the metaphorical language of mass dictatorship. They reflect a consciousness that 'oscillated furiously between recognising the peril of being overcome by modernity and the impossible imperative of overcoming it' in the latecomers' society.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the desire for colonising power and the fear of being colonised are two locomotives that drive mass dictatorship.

It is in the transnational formation of modernity that transnational and post-colonial perspectives meet to allow for new insights into mass dictatorship. To state that 'the transnational meets the post-colonial' is not to imply a linear continuity in a simplified understanding between

German colonialism in South-West Africa and the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup> The Holocaust should not be reduced to another peculiarity of German colonialism. Global perspectives on the transnational formation of modernity help us to see the Holocaust on the same continuum with 'Western' colonialism, as Hannah Arendt suggested when she articulated the concept of 'administered mass killing' (*Verwaltungsmassenmord*) in respect to the British colonialist experience.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the Holocaust can be better explained from the transnational perspectives of Euro-colonialism than by recourse to German peculiarities. More broadly, one cannot miss the history of primitive accumulation, full of conquest, enslavement, plunder, murder, and all forms of violence in the making of the modern nation state. The emergence of capitalism and democracy in the 'Western' nation state should be viewed as having taken place, in Marx's terms, 'under circumstances of ruthless terrorism'.<sup>10</sup>

If the mass dictatorships on European soil have been shaped by the latecomers' imperial projects, non-European mass dictatorships have been driven by the desire for great-power status, the regret of not being colonisers, and the fear of being colonised. That explains why the 'follow and catch up' strategy has been adopted not only by socialist regimes but also by post-colonial developmental dictatorships. These regimes proclaimed their historical task to follow and catch up to the Western colonial powers at all costs. Often their achievements resulted from the conceptions of 'little imperialism', secondary Orientalism, non-European forms of Eurocentrism, and eventually hegemonic regionalism. It is under these circumstances that those victimised by Western colonial genocide can become victimisers and perpetrators of similar genocides. Various post-colonial genocides in the peripheries can be grasped within this broader context.

Indeed, interrogating mass dictatorship as a transnational formation of modernity upends conventional dichotomies of East/West, dictatorship/democracy, particular/universal into a historical convergence of modernity. The criticism of the conventional diffusionist discourse that describes a movement of modernity from Europe to non-Europe does not necessarily justify the counter-diffusionist reaction from non-Europe to Europe. From this perspective, one can overcome the dichotomies of European democracy and non-European dictatorship and diffusionist discourses that posit the existence of a centre-periphery relationship. Once liberated from these conventional conceptualisations, mass dictatorship and mass democracy can then appear on the same historical horizon.

## A colonial Korean Marxist in the Via Nazionale of Rome, 1933

The observations of a colonial Korean intellectual, Yi Sun-t'ak (1897–1950?), who was a leading Marxist economist, can help reveal this common trajectory between colonialism and mass dictatorships. During the 1920s, he studied economics at Kyoto Imperial University in Japan under Kawakami Hajime (河上肇), a well-known Marxist economist who translated *Das Kapital* into Japanese. After returning home, Yi Sun-t'ak taught economics at Yŏnhŭi College in Seoul (Yonsei University today). As a Marxist economist he had engaged wholeheartedly in popularising Marxism among colonial Koreans and published more than 60 articles in various journals and newspapers. In 1938, he was arrested for his leading role in the 'red professors group', and his employment was terminated. Among his writings, what draws my attention the most is a travelogue. He travelled around the world, visiting 17 countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and North America in the nine months between 24 April 1933 and 20 January 1934. During his travels, Yi sent contributions at regular intervals to a Korean daily newspaper, the *Chosŏn Ilbo*, which were published as a book in 1934.

This travelogue, entitled 'A Recent Travel Around the World', was written as a comprehensive report on the contemporary world, touching on geography, history, ethnography, customs, religion, art, politics, economy, and society.<sup>11</sup> As a colonial intellectual, Yi felt deep compassion for independence movements in China, India, Poland, Ireland, and Egypt and other African countries. But his empathy with the national liberation movements of the colonised was accompanied by his contempt for the savage 'natives' who are the supposed subjects of the national movements.<sup>12</sup> He reprimanded the unpatriotic Chinese who were willing to sell out their country for money and admonished the Indians to stop the class struggles and religious conflicts that had been manipulated by the British divide-and-rule policy. Upon embarking at the port of Aden, Yemen, he deplored how Africa had become the prey of the 'white people', despite Africa's great historical contribution to world civilisation, along with Asia.

Yi's distress over Africa's predicament ran through a similar line of deep regret for the backwardness of colonial Korea, which 'did not open her eyes to the foreign market...did not think of great national leadership to overcome the poisonous political partisanship'.<sup>13</sup> His denunciation of colonialism and war could not conceal his envy of the great imperialist civilisations. A deep regret that 'we should have been the West' was

paired with that envy. It was this ambivalence towards negation and mimicry of Western civilisation, desire and fear of the colonial powers, and oscillation between self-empowerment and self-Orientalism that underlay Yi Sun-t'ak's travelogue. That ambivalence is not peculiar to Yi; it is rampant among both right-wing and leftist colonial intellectuals, as post-colonial studies have shown.

One peculiar point in this colonial Korean Marxist's travelogue is Yi's idiosyncratic view of contemporary Europe, especially his explicit sympathy for Fascist Italy. Except for a couple of reservations about the personality cult of Mussolini and political oppression, Yi could not conceal his admiration for Italian fascism. Yi's direct encounter with Italy betrayed his expectation of gangs of beggars, pickpockets, and thieves. According to Yi, that anticipation was a result of past prejudices 'because the army and police of Mussolini repress wrongdoings completely, thus social justice and public righteousness is greatly improved over the era of parliamentary democracy'.<sup>14</sup> Yi also recorded his cheerful conversation with a young Italian about Mussolini. When he asked a young Italian passer-by near the Garibaldi monument 'if Mussolini can be a second Garibaldi', Yi received the answer that 'Mussolini is better than Garibaldi'.<sup>15</sup>

Yi twice visited the exposition that commemorated the tenth anniversary of fascist rule on the Via Nazionale in Rome. In a humorous manner, he explained his rather pragmatic motivation to receive a 70 per cent discount train ticket voucher as a reward for exposition visitors, which had led him there twice. But this propaganda exposition of fascist achievements certainly made a deep impact on him. Yi was duly impressed by the cooperative state which made the Italian economy leap forward: the balanced budget, the recovery of credit, the successful negotiations to reduce foreign debts, the dramatic reduction of unemployment, a shift from dependency to autarky in the agrarian sector, the well-built infrastructure, the steady growth of the population, and a proper migration policy. Yi noted that all this successful restructuring of the economy made Italy a member of the 'Gold Bloc' that stood firmly against the USA.<sup>16</sup>

Italian colonialism did not lead this leftist colonial intellectual to any critical thoughts about fascism, perhaps because its colonial cruelty had yet to become apparent. But Yi's ultimate interest was whether or not the Italian fascists' desire for a Second Roman Empire could be realised. Any leftist value judgment remained suspended in his account of Italian fascism. The leftist value-ridden achievement, if any, was the admiration of the successful building of a self-sustaining economy by the fascist

regime. For this Korean colonial Marxist, a shift from dependency to autarky might have been the most valuable lesson. It was thought to be a first step towards the independence of colonies against the colonial expansion of the advanced capitalist countries. When he returned home after his travels around the world, Yi visited the headquarters of the newspaper *Chosŏn jungang ilbo*, which had provided financial support for his travels. In an interview, he stated explicitly that 'what impressed me the most is the transformation in Italy'. Under the title, 'He Saw the Hope for the Korean Nation in the Future', the *Chosŏn jungang ilbo* published an article about Yi's visit to the newspaper's editorial board and his interview.<sup>17</sup>

Yi discovered a development model for colonial Korea in Fascist Italy. It is not difficult to see the strong lust for power and modernity in Yi Sun-t'ak's account of Italy. But his desire was not so simple as to be reduced to a longing for Western modernity. Yi's praise for Italian fascism was in stark contrast to his sharp criticism of London. He saw London as a dirty cosmopolitan city tainted with beggars, the unemployed, and pollution. Despite its past glory, it seemed to him that the British Empire was in decline.<sup>18</sup> Certainly, Yi projected his desire for power and greatness onto Fascist Italy rather than the British Empire. This did not mean that he thought Fascist Italy was more developed than Great Britain. Perhaps Fascist Italy's remarkable advance 'from a proletarian nation to a bourgeois nation' might have appealed to him. The Marxian view twisted from class struggle to national struggle in fascist ideology was not alien to some colonial Marxists who regarded socialism as the means to realise rapid modernisation and national liberation. Polish irredentist socialists, who invented the term 'social patriotism' in the late nineteenth century, might be the predecessors of those colonial Marxists.<sup>19</sup>

Yi Sun-t'ak was not the only colonial Marxist who discovered a model for the independence and modernisation of a poor and underdeveloped colony. It is intriguing to find that Subhas Chandra Bose, an Indian independence fighter, travelled to the Soviet Union, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Imperial Japan in search of an alliance against the British Empire during the Second World War. He founded the Free Indian Centre in Berlin while broadcasting on the German-sponsored Azad Hind Radio. Bose succeeded in creating the Indian Legion of some 4,500 British Indian prisoners of war in North Africa. Disappointed by Hitler's intention of using his Indian Legion only for a propaganda war, Bose left Germany in February 1943 on board a German submarine and changed to a Japanese submarine on the sea between the Cape of Good Hope and Madagascar. In Japan, he was engaged in the ideological movement