

**“‘Hetero-Authoritarianism’:
Toward Embodied Histories of State and Society in ‘Hot War’ South Korea”**

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Abstract

This presentation deploys “hetero-authoritarianism” to transcend disembodied approaches to illiberal development. In addition to sexual relations between men and women, this concept includes the roles of gender conformity, anatomical coherence, and related ideologies of normative compliance. Such conventions, I argue, served as unnamed structures and intangible scripts guiding South Korea’s path of militarized development. Hetero-authoritarianism reveals how materialist and gendered structures worked through bodies and minds, whose “(im) proper” development as individual citizens were judged as advancing (or derailing) the collective fate of their industrializing nation. An ideology of biopolitical authority, it did so by extracting (re) productive value from the psychosomatic parts of South Koreans, all of whom were expected to promote capitalist development, military defense, and hetero-patriarchal familism. As such, even such seemingly natural words as “man” and “woman,” “solider” and “mother,” and “able-bodied” and “disabled” must be studied in relation to state-led industrialization, political illiberalism, and androcentric kinship. In addition to its top-down nature, I also analyze hetero-authoritarianism as an everyday target of censure and negotiation by stigmatized actors. A re-embodied analytic and a critical metric of capitalist development, this concept ultimately aims to enable reassessments of historical and ongoing experiments of corporeal control and mental compliance.

Biography

Todd A. Henry (Ph.D., UCLA, 2006; Assistant/Associate Professor, UCSD, 2009-Present) is a specialist of modern Korea with an interest in the period of Japanese rule (1910-1945) and its postcolonial afterlives (1945-present). His first single-authored book, [*Assimilating Seoul*](#) (University of California Press, 2014; Korean translation, 2020), which won a 2020 Sejong Book Prize in History, Geography, and Tourism, addressed the violent but contested role of public spaces in colonial Korea. Dr. Henry also edited *Queer Korea* (Duke University Press, 2020; Korean translation 2023) and researched/produced the short film, “Paradise” (2023), with director Hong Mingi. His second single-authored book is *Profits of Queerness: Media, Biomedicine, and Citizenship in Authoritarian South Korea, 1950-1980* (University of Hawai’i Press, July 2026). Currently, Dr. Henry is writing a follow-up study, tentatively entitled *Bodies of Excess: Sex Tourism, the AIDS Crisis, and Transgender Advocacy in Globalizing South Korea, 1980-1995*, and directing a feature-length documentary on South Korea’s first male fashion designer, André Kim (1935-2010), and his relationship to post-1945 Hawai’i as well as the broader Asia-Pacific world.

Over the last twenty years, research on South Korean economic development, lionized by some scholars as “The Miracle on the Han River,” has often focused on institutions, policies, and persons promoting and/or contesting militarized capitalism. For example, social scientists have examined the roles played by Park Chung Hee (1961-1979), corporate conglomerates (*chaebŏl*), and state-driven programs of export-led industrialization.¹ In contrast to such top-down studies, social and cultural historians have interrogated marginalized persons and bottom-up practices as forces that resisted illiberal forms of Hot War modernization as well as reestablished procedural democracy and a more equitable system of wealth distribution. For example, Charles Kim has shown how male students overthrew the reign of Syngman Rhee (1948-1960), while Hwasook Nam analyzed the unionism of their working-class counterparts in the shipbuilding industry.² For their part, feminists have questioned both male-dominated narratives, emphasizing instead the androcentric and patriarchal nature of industrial development, military defense, and access to education.³ Such revisionist accounts show how young girls and adult women, especially of the working classes, were subjected to gendered institutions, policies, and practices of masculinist sexism. They also expose the innovative ways in which female actors contested male domination

¹ See, for example, Hyung-A Kim, *Korea's Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-1979* (London: Routledge, 2004); and the essays in Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (eds.), *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). In Korean, see Yi Pyŏng-ch'ŏn (ed.), *Kaebal tokjae wa Pak Chŏng-hŭi: Uri sidae ŭi chŏngch'i kyŏngjejŏk kiwŏn* (Seoul: Ch'angbi, 2003); Kim Po-hyŏn, *Pak Chŏng-hŭi chŏngkwŏn kyŏngje kaebal* (Seoul: Kalmuri, 2007); and Cho Hŭi-yŏn, *Tongwŏn toen kŭndaehwa: Pak Chŏng-hŭi kaebal tongwŏn ch'eje ŭi chŏngch'i sahoejŏk ijungsŏng* (Seoul: Humanit'asŭ, 2010).

² Charles Kim, *Youth for Nation: Culture and Protest in Cold War South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017); and Hwasook Nam, *Building Ships, Building a Nation: Korea's Democratic Unionism under Park Chung Hee* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

³ Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); and Ruth Barraclough, *Factory Girl Literature: Sexuality, Violence, and Representation in Industrializing Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). In Korean, see Kwŏn In-suk, *Tahan minguk ũn kundae da: Yŏsŏnghakjŏk sigak esŏ pon p'yŏnghwa, kunsajuŭi, namsŏngsŏng* (Seoul: Ch'ŏnghyon haksul, 2005); and Kim Wŏn, *Yŏgong 1970, kŭdŭl ŭi pan-yŏksa* (Seoul: Imaejin, 2006).

in order to promote their interests as well as those of their natal families and local communities.

Taken together, the aforementioned research provides vital insights into the structural mechanisms of capitalist development, on the one hand, and various social costs among workers and students, on the other. But most scholars have done so by reifying concomitant expressions of gender, sex, and sexuality into normative, ableist, and heteropatriarchal narratives. As a result, they have tended to obscure, rather than illuminate, even more marginalized actors whose lives fell outside of corporeal and mental conventions. To overcome these epistemological limitations, I coined the term “hetero-authoritarianism,” a concept that merges social scientific discussions of political-economic illiberalism and humanistic critiques of hierarchized citizenship. In addition to sexual relations between biological men and women, the concept considers the crucial roles of gender conformity, anatomical coherence, and related ideologies of psychosomatic compliance. These embodied norms, I contend, served as unnamed structures and intangible scripts guiding South Korea’s singular path of militarized development. With careful historicization, hetero-authoritarianism can also be applied to other postcolonial nations in East Asia, including those of the capitalist world (i.e., Taiwan) and the communist bloc (i.e., North Korea). The recent push to limit gender, sex, and sexuality to binaries under the second administration of Donald J. Trump suggests its vital relevance to such nominally liberal but actually illiberal societies as the U.S. Regardless of region, this concept reveals how materialist and gendered structures that, to date, have interested social scientists and humanities researchers worked through bodies and minds, whose “proper” (or “improper”) development as individual citizens were judged as advancing (or derailing) the collective fate of their industrializing nation. A complex ideology of biopolitical authority, it did so by extracting (re) productive value from the psychosomatic parts of South Koreans, all of whom were expected to promote capitalist development, military defense, and

heteropatriarchal familism. Considered in this way, even such seemingly natural words as man and woman, soldier and mother, and able-bodied and disabled must be studied as historic terms that advanced state-led industrialization, political illiberalism, and androcentric kinship. Like queerphobia, I analyze hetero-authoritarianism as a regular target of censure and negotiation by stigmatized actors. A re-embodied analytic and a critical metric of capitalist development, the concept will, I hope, enable pressing reassessments of South Korea's experiments of corporeal control and mental compliance, among other forms of biopolitical regulation. Even after the reestablishment of democracy in the 1990s, norms inherited from the authoritarian period, today promoted by fundamentalist Christians and other hetero-nationalists focused on the alleged sins of LGBTI citizens, continue to disempower "gender/sexual minorities" (*söngsosuja*) – whom self-designated activists have sought, albeit with limited success, to empower through rights advocacy.⁴ I offer this queer history as critical fodder for today's (post) authoritarian struggles.

Profits of Queerness draws on queer, transgender, intersex, feminist, and related methods to demonstrate how South Korea's illiberal formula of militarized capitalism heavily relied on heterosexist, gender-normative, ableist, and related ideologies of embodied conformity. To this end, Part I foregrounds marginalized individuals and their hyper-visualized lives to reveal how the Korean War disrupted but did not overturn (pre) colonial norms of heteropatriarchy, a system of social control that combined mandatory heterosexuality and patrilineal reproduction. Part II traces how embodied conventions that reemerged in the disruptive aftermath of the war undergirded export-led industrialization, anticommunist militarism, and androcentric reproduction

⁴ On these efforts, see Youngshik D. Bong, "The Gay Rights Movement in Democratizing Korea," *Korean Studies* 32 (2009): 86-103; Hyun-young Kwon Kim and John (Song Pae) Cho, "The Korean Gay and Lesbian Movement 1993-2008: From 'Identity' and 'Community' to 'Human Rights,'" in Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Chang (eds.), *South Korean Social Movements: From Democracy to Civil Society* (London: Routledge, 2011): 206-223; and Tari Young-Jung Na, "The South Korean Gender System: LGBTI in the Contexts of Family, Legal Identity, and the Military," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 19:2 (Fall 2014): 357-377.

during the late 1960s and 1970s. The unruly underside of hetero-authoritarianism, the multiple “profits of queerness” suggested in the title highlight these analytical payoffs, each of which I elaborate on below. The first profit involves the interpretive benefits of pursuing queer studies and allied approaches. To date, most scholars of (South) Korea have yet to fully deploy these analytical tools. Adopting gender/hetero-normative, non-intersex, and ableist assumptions, they have tended to erase stigmatized peoples and groups in favor of elite actors and institutions.⁵ Elsewhere, I have discussed the reasons for and consequences of such neglect.⁶ Below, I call this first profit heuristic insofar as it allows for a necessary reexamination of South Korea’s past according to three interrelated methods: “minoritizing,” “universalizing,” and “provincializing.”

First, I place a sustained emphasis on marginalized citizens who did (or could) not adhere to sex binarism, gender conventions, and heteropatriarchal reproduction.⁷ And yet unlike most minoritizing studies of queer history, I avoid framing their complex and changing subjectivities primarily in terms of homogenous or stable identities which, I argue, did not play a defining role in the social, economic, and family histories traced in this book. Embodied variance, of course, existed as one part of personhood between 1950 and 1980, but none of such identitarian terms as LGBTI existed as *categories of practice* in this era. Nor did “queer,” which I carefully deploy as

⁵ Notable exceptions include Kwïö iron munhwa yön’guso moim (ed.), *Chendö üi ch’aenöl ül tollyöra* (Seoul: Saram Saeng’gak, 2008); Kwön/Kim Hyön-yöng, et. al., *Namsöngsöng kwa chendö* (Seoul: Chaüm kwa moüm, 2011); Kwön/Kim Hyön-yöng, et. al., *Söng üi ch’öngch’i, söng üi kwöllli* (Seoul: Chaüm kwa moüm, 2012); Eunjung Kim, *Curative Violence: Rehabilitating Disability, Gender, and Sexuality in Modern Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Yonse taehakkyo chendö yön’guso (ed.), *Küron namja nün öpta: Hyömo sahoe esö han’guk namsöngsöng chilmun hagi* (Seoul: Owöl üi pom, 2017); Hë Yun, *1950 nyöndaeh han’guk sosöl üi namsöng chendö suhaengsöng yön’gu* (Seoul: Yönnak, 2018); O Hye-jin et. al., *Wönbön ömnün p’ant’aji: P’eminisütü sigak üro ingnün han’guk hyöndaeh munhwasa* (Seoul: Humanit’asü, 2020); and Todd A. Henry (ed.), *Queer Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

⁶ Todd A. Henry, “In This Issue - Queer/Korean Studies as Critique: A Provocation,” *Korea Journal* 58:2 (Summer 2018): 5-26; and “Introduction: Toward a Field of Engagement” in Todd A. Henry (ed.), *Queer Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020): 1-52.

⁷ For the minoritizing approach and its critique, see Michael Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

a *category of analysis* (and place in scare quotes) to denote persons who departed from expected norms or practices.⁸ As discussed below, South Korean idioms of bodily and mental variance under hetero-authoritarianism were framed almost exclusively through external views of nosy journalists, imperious police officers, pathologizing doctors, and vigilante citizens. I deconstruct such stigmatizing expressions by emphasizing how they reestablished normative practices of sexual dimorphism, gender conformity, patriarchal nationalism, and attendant ideologies of militarized capitalism. But at times, I retain their outsider character to show how these oft-cited words wielded discursive power to narrowly define the parameters of gender/sexual deviance.

For example, such terms as “male-dressed women” (*namjang yōja*) and “female-dressed men” (*yōjang namja*) worked to minimize the undeniable reality of gender variance, insisting on sex-binary bodies as the legal and cultural basis of citizenship. Other etic (outsider) terms – for example, *chungsōng* (literally, “in between the sexes or genders”) – denoted atypical expressions of what I prefer to call “female-born (or gender nonconforming) men” and “male-born (or gender nonconforming) wo/men.” Moreover, I deploy “social man” and “social woman” to counter the anatomical determinism of such derogatory labels as male-dressed women and female-dressed men. But because “queer” South Koreans rarely left self-authored accounts before the 1980s – usually, to avoid social recognition and the consequences of public exposure – we know far less about their emic (insider) terms of identification. For example, “Ms. Pants” (*paji-ssi*) and “Ms. Skirt” (*ch’ima-ssi*), in-group names used to call feminine- and masculine-presenting women in homoerotic relations with one another, respectively, and “fag” (*pogal*), a self-sexualizing word “gay” men invented by reversing the epithet for low-class prostitute (*kalbo*), only rarely appeared

⁸ “Categories of practice” and “categories of analysis” are drawn from Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

in most archives. When they did, the writer likely benefited from insider access to the subcultural worlds of “queers” or was a member of at least one of those communities, sharing emic terms to authenticate a given report’s facticity and/or to promote the author’s professional *bona fides*.

This discussion of individual identity and related terminologies under illiberal conditions of hetero-authoritarianism reveals, even more broadly, that queerness cannot be separated from mainstream institutions and majoritarian values of which, I argue, it formed a constitutive, albeit critical, part. As such, I more frequently adopt universalizing methods that connect collectivizing processes of economic development to the lived reality of most South Koreans, with stigmatized actors best revealing the disempowering effects of an extensive stratagem of biopolitical rule.⁹ According to this second approach of queerness, persons engaging in same-sex sexuality, gender variance, or embodying an intersex condition did not primarily appear as social minorities who could or did organize themselves into political constituencies. Transcending “ghettoized” views of psychosomatic differences, universalizing methods reveal how anti- or quasi-normative actors and their everyday practices allow scholars to reassess institutions that wielded authority over all citizens, regardless of gender, sex, or sexuality. Approaching queerness as a non-atomized force allows us to grasp how mainstream organizations unevenly distribute power, happiness, and ease as the cultural lures and social costs of mass coherence. To this end, I adopt the notion of “queer fugitivity” from Stephen Dillon, a scholar of the U.S. prison industrial-complex to explain how nonconforming wo/men in hetero-authoritarian South Korea, especially those of the working classes, were subjected to repeated capture and release for presenting and/or laboring in clothes and styles assumed to only be used by biological women.¹⁰ During the 1970s, authorities even

⁹ This term derives, in part, from the pioneering work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet, Second Edition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Stephen Dillon, *Fugitive Life: The Queer Politics of the Prison State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

added bangs that covered the ears to misdemeanor laws that criminalized male effeminacy, the self-feminized presentation “queer” sex workers used to attract male clients and compete with their female-born counterparts. This underexamined micro-history of bodily compliance forces scholars to revisit such gender-binary practices as the haircut degree (*tanballyŏng*) – assumed hitherto to limit the free expression of male students and other bourgeois actors (i.e., *avant-garde* artists). Universalizing approaches underscore how forced trims not only interfered with the ability of social women to labor but also negated their self-feminization. Moreover, this method shows the uneven effects of political illiberalism, sex binarism, and other corporeal ideologies.

The third approach of queerness showcases its provincializing potential – that is, the payoff of studying non-Western histories of embodied difference to design new theories that do not uncritically replicate those used to describe contemporary North America and Western Europe.¹¹ Colonized by Japan, occupied by the U.S., and still at war with North Korea, South Korea offers a generative vantage point from which to develop culturally-specific notions of familism, labor, militarism, and other collectivizing projects in postcolonial, neo-imperial, and Hot War nations. As discussed above, many minoritizing analyses, particularly those focused on a liberal “West,” emphasize stable formations of LGBTI identity and their activist use in visibility and recognition politics that, according to progressive scholars, challenge heteronormativity. And yet, in hetero-authoritarian South Korea, where human embodiments were tied to military service, patriarchal (re) production, and other communal tasks, nonnormative citizens struggled to transform their alienation into public expressions of defiance. That is not to say that non-Western “queers” were or could not be political; in fact, many South Koreans acted in such ways. But I insist that their

¹¹ For examples of this approach, see Petrus Liu, *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Anjali Arondekar and Geeta Patel, “Area Impossible: Notes toward an Introduction,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22:2 (April 2016): 151-171.

politics be located in broader institutions of socioeconomic domination and seemingly individual practices that often prioritized cultural conformity over personal initiative. As discussed below, nonnormative selves, especially those of the middle and upper classes, are very difficult to access under conditions of hetero-authoritarianism because of the fragmented and limited nature of most available sources and more powerful agents who mediated them according to their own logics. As such, reports of queerness must be analyzed imaginatively but also with caution so that they are not misunderstood as “authentic” voices of embodied variance. As mentioned above, “queer” subjectivities did not tend to coalesce around differences of gender, sex, and sexuality before the restoration of procedural democracy in the 1990s. Constrained by political illiberalism until that time, marginalized citizens, particularly those from prestigious families, also did not ordinarily publicize their semi-hidden existence or use their stigmatized status to engage in public activism, lest they suffer queerphobic backlashes from social forces designed to hetero-normalize them.

Inspired by Kadji Amin’s suggestion that scholars “de-idealize” our predetermined search for radically queer pasts, this observation is also not to say that South Korean minorities did not attempt to distinguish themselves from their normative counterparts, either when surrounded by like-minded people or when faced with outside oppression.¹² Women who married one another in public but legally unsanctioned ceremonies, for example, underscore what I refer to as “under-the-radar” or non-institutionalized politics. For female couples, gender-normative expressions of matrimonial dress as “Ms. Skirt” and “Ms. Pants” aimed to culturally dignify and economically stabilize their precarious relationships in the eyes of family members and close friends, all of whom expected a bride and groom on wedding day. Although some same-sex partners adopted

¹² Kadji Amin, *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

children in the creation of alternative kinship arrangements, their non-reproductive unions could not produce biological heirs to advance patrilineality, which obviously distinguished them from their heteropatriarchal compatriots. Faced with repeated detentions for violating misdemeanor laws, gender nonconforming service workers, for their part, upbraided an androcentric regime that regulated heterosexual prostitution but refused to recognize male-born people who labored as social women. Although I have yet to locate records of “queer” entertainers protesting, make-shift practices of self-protection did produce critiques of violent police officers, pathologizing doctors, imperious judges, and voyeuristic media consumers. The same can be said of intersex patients, whose feminizations and masculinizations by urologists disrupted their lives as either male- or female-registered citizens. Under hetero-authoritarianism, surgically recreated “women” and “men” were encouraged to proceed as if they had never experienced embodied difference, forced to readjust to gendered/sexualized relations with family, friends, coworkers, and lovers. Such pressures often created protracted suffering for intersex persons, leading them to denounce anatomical dimorphism and other demands of bodily coherence as inhumane and impoverishing.

These micro-histories of everyday struggle suggest that hetero-authoritarianism did not always silence marginalized actors, nor did it necessarily force them to countenance normative solutions to embodied concerns. But because differences in gender, sex, and sexuality were not usually articulated as matters of personal or collective identity, the pre-democratic politics of queerness in South Korea did not normally lead to the complete expulsion of individuals or groups from mainstream institutions. Scholars of this era must, therefore, locate politicized expressions of bodily difference inside these same institutions, rather than outside of them. Having lost male wage earners in the war, some women, for example, chose to present as social men to earn higher pay than that available to most female-born people. This observation is not to

say that some masculine-presenting women preferred tonsorial and sartorial styles used by male-born people; some did, while others used a nonnormative gender to attract women for romantic relations, cohabitating arrangements, and unofficial weddings. It is difficult, if not impossible, to verify which of various factors led to their “queerness,” nor do I attempt to pinpoint one over the other. Instead, I trace how commentators articulated atypical embodiments, which ranged from queerphobic forms of criminalization to queerphilic methods of heroization. Male-appearing merchants were, for instance, typically framed as swindlers, thus delegitimizing the struggles of enterprising women. By contrast, female-born proletariats contributing to their households as masculine-dressed “sons” were praised for their filial piety. Meanwhile, social men attracted to biological women used their unmarried status to pursue same-sex relations – twisting an andro-centric family system to pursue life paths that, I posit, regulatory actors could never fully control.