South Korea's Developmentalist Worldview

Representations and Identities in the Discourse of Seonjinguk

Jongtae Kim*
Korea University

Abstract

The non-West is not only the object of the Eurocentric notion of development, but also the main contributor to its global hegemony. South Koreans, for instance, make a Eurocentric hierarchy between countries according to the criteria of their developmental discourse, the discourse of seonjinguk (advanced country). This paper examines the main features of the discourse of seonjinguk in contemporary Korea, focusing on the representations and identities of countries reflected in its basic concepts. Through the analysis of newspaper editorials, it shows that the discourse constructs a world dichotomised by idealised seonjinguk and marginalised hujinguk (backward country). In this discursive framework, the West is generally referred to as seonjinguk in relation to the belittled non-West. The identity of South Korea tends to be constructed as a country near seonjinguk or "on the threshold of seonjinguk" ("seonjinguk munteok"), which provides both senses of superiority over hujinguk and of inferiority over seonjinguk. This becomes a main discursive source that keeps Korea still under the project of modernisation, with the achievement of the status of seonjinguk as its historical national mission.

Keywords

seonjinguk – hujinguk – discourse – development – Eurocentrism – identity

* This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2008-00001). I thank Prof. Jan Nederveen Pieterson for his insightful advice on this research. I am also grateful to anonymous reviewers for their helpful and thoughtful comments.
Introduction

In terms of global power relations, the past 200 years were an era in which globalisation led by the West—"Occidental globalisation"—was stronger than that by the Orient—"Oriental globalisation" (Hobson, 2012; Nederveen Pieterse, 2012). In this phase of globalisation, the West played a role as one of the most significant Others for many non-Western societies in their modernisation processes, providing the "criteria of evaluation against which other societies are ranked and around which powerful positive and negative feelings cluster" (Hall, 1996: 186). Insofar as power is reflected in knowledge (Foucault, 1980), the West-centred global power relations were supported and justified by Eurocentric knowledge claiming the superiority of the West (Shohat and Stam, 1994; Tucker, 1999).

Then, how do Eurocentric discourses operate in the non-West in regard to the representations of the West and non-West? Furthermore, in what historical context do non-Western societies adopt and utilise Eurocentric discourses? This research intends to address those questions in the South Korean context, focusing on how Koreans' dominant Eurocentric discourse represents the West and the non-West, and constructs self-national identity and national vision in relation to it.

At the global level, two notable Eurocentric discourses are discerned, which have appeared in different global historical circumstances, namely the discourses of civilisation and development. The former, which construed global relations in terms of "civilisation," supported the colonialist world order based upon a discursive hierarchy between the civilised West and the uncivilised or less civilised non-West. The discourse of civilisation, however, rapidly lost its hegemony in the wake of the tragedies and brutalities of world wars, which were committed by the so-called "civilised countries", resulting in the decline of European hegemony. Following this was the rise of U.S. hegemony, and "the United States, using arguments that echoed those of social Darwinists half a century earlier, began to project itself as the centre and driving force of Western civilisation" (Patterson, 1997: 49).

Given the power-knowledge relationship, the rise of U.S. hegemony required new knowledge justifying another Eurocentric global order centring on the U.S. After U.S. President Harry S. Truman's designation of the majority of the world as "underdeveloped areas" in 1949, global discursive focus was put on "devel-
opment”, entailing the new discursive hierarchy between the “developed” and the “underdeveloped” (Sachs, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Brohman, 1995; Andreasson, 2005; Nederveen Pieterse, 2009; Tripathy and Mohapatra, 2011). From this time on, “progress was measured in terms of economic growth [...]” (Patterson, 1997: 50) and “modernisation” modelling after the U.S. was suggested as the way to achieve economic growth or development and, eventually, the wellbeing of people (Rostow, 1960; Parsons, 1971).

Development that was promoted under American hegemony was one form of development; that is, the “Truman version of development” that assumed the “Euro-American missionary task of developing the Global South [...]” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012: 2). In this kind of development, the problematisation and stigmatisation of people and countries took place mostly in line with their “underdeveloped” conditions. Thus, many non-Western societies dreamed of achieving a “developed status” and undertook various developmental projects. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012: 12) notes, “At the centre of the African national project has been the pre-occupation with development [...]”. Developmentalists in Latin America also “saw in the developed countries many of the characteristics they aspired to for their countries: industry, autonomy, technical progress, and modernity” (Sikkink, 1991: 13). Developmentalism in the non-West was closely related to nationalism and was promoted as a way to get economic independence in many cases. In this respect, developmentalism was not necessarily a systematic idea unilaterally imposed on non-Western countries, but was somewhat actively adopted by their elites for their own national interests. It was not only a global project, but also a national project.

A different nature of power is distinguished between the “civilising mission” in the colonial era and the “developing mission” in the post-colonial era. A main point is that while the former was unilaterally carried out by the colonial administrations, the latter was, in many cases, voluntarily executed by the national elites of the countries that were the very targets of development. This difference is observed on Foucauldian terms that development operates through “bio-power” rather than “sovereign” power, that is, “through

2 Cavalcanti (2007) notes the development technicians’ stereotyping of “stupid and lazy rural people” in the Brazilian context. Andreasson (2005: 971) brings up the term “reductive repetition” to refer to the tendency of reducing “the diversity of African historical experiences and trajectories, sociocultural contexts and political situations into a set of core deficiencies for which externally generated ‘solutions’ must be devised.”

3 Sikkink (1991: 15) notes that, “One of the problems with viewing developmentalism as an ideology imposed by external forces is that this approach presents a political world in which Third World countries are treated as objects rather than subjects [...].”
the mobilisation of interests and aspiration of Third World subjects and nation-states" (Brigg, 2002: 424).

Drawing on the Gramscian notion of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), we can say that the global hegemony of Eurocentric developmentalism is not constituted without the consent of the non-West. In this sense, non-Western countries are not only the objects of the Eurocentric notion of development, but also the main contributors to its global hegemony. Setting economic development as a national goal, they have created their own development discourses incorporating their historical conditions, as well as the influence of the West. In this process, they have projected their positive developmental values into their own term of the "developed" and negative values into the concept of the "underdeveloped," creating a hierarchy between the two. This means that one significant location of the global power of developmentalism is the process in which non-Western countries respond actively to developmentalism promoted by the West and the competitive Eurocentric world order.

A main theoretical ground of this study is post-developmentalism, which focuses on the operation of Western power over the non-West especially through the discourse of development. Previous studies in this strand, however, tended to assume the nature of developmentalism basically as Western power unilaterally imposed on the non-West. We intend to move beyond this rather simplistic theoretical inclination by examining the discursive conditions of the non-Western part in relation to the operation of the global hegemony of developmentalism.

This study attends to the ways in which non-Western countries represent and identify the West and the non-West in their own developmentalist discourses. In an attempt to understand a mechanism in which the power of Eurocentric development discourse operates in the non-West, it was chosen to investigate South Korea for a case study, which is regarded as a representative non-Western country that has succeeded in economic development in the post-colonial era. In its historical experiences of rapid economic growth and modernisation, Korea has actively constructed developmental discourses that are prevalent and taken for granted around the country.

It is observed that the discourse of seonjinguk (advanced country) is one of the most dominant developmental discourses in South Korea, in which the West, the non-West and the national self are actively represented and identified (Kim, 2013). Two main concepts constituting the discourse are "seonjinguk"
and "hujinguk" (backward country); the dominant state identities and classifications are constructed around these terms. The concepts are so popularly used in the country—or frequently found in various types of texts—and the mass media are a main social player that circulates them to be taken for granted in the public.5

Given its popularity, this study intends to examine one of the most popular versions of the discourse of seonjinguk circulating in the public space. For this, it conducts an analysis of three leading Korean newspapers, the Chosun Ilbo, the Dong-a Ilbo and the Hankyoreh.6 Using the Chosun Ilbo archive and the Korean Integrated News Database System (KINDS) for the period of 2000–2008, it has obtained 525 relevant editorials of the three newspapers, which contain the term seonjinguk or hujinguk in either title or body.7 Through the analysis, this paper demonstrates how South Koreans' dominant developmentalist discourse assumes the world and national self in response to the Eurocentric hierarchy of the West and the non-West. In particular, it shows how South Korea and the non-West are represented, identified, and classified in relation to the West around the concepts of seonjinguk and hujinguk in newspapers.

5 As the "producers and messengers of meanings, symbols, messages" (Schudson, 2003: 24), the mass media play a role as a main arena of public forum in which "contending discourses, offering different ways of looking and speaking, struggle for visibility and legitimacy" (Golding and Murdock, 2000: 85). In this respect, the mass media are an important social place where popular discourses are constructed and circulated.

6 The Chosun Ilbo and Dong-a Ilbo, which were founded in 1920, are the two oldest mainstream newspapers today, and the Hankyoreh established in 1988 is considered as one of the most influential progressive newspapers in Korea. Compared with other forms of mass media, such as websites, newspaper data provide systemised and structured information and, thus, are suitable to the structure-oriented, rather than actor-oriented, analysis of discourse (Baumgarten and Gruel, 2009). Furthermore, they are well stored and classified in archives and appropriate for a longitudinal analysis. Despite their influence on public opinion, however, "newspapers are only one arena" and they do not cover "the whole media discourse" (Baumgarten and Gruel, 2009: 11). This aspect, yet, is not necessarily a weakness for the analysis of "dominant discourse", such as the discourse of seonjinguk, as the same logic in the use of elemental concepts is found in various texts of other mass media, as well as newspapers (Doty, 1993).

7 This study has limited the end of the investigation period to 2008, as the Chosun Ilbo archive does not provide a search function for editorials for the period after 2007. Taking this and manageability into account, this study has selected editorials in the biannual term for each newspaper: years 2001, 2003, 2005 and 2007 for the Chosun and years 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008 for the Dong-a and the Hankyoreh.
In the following sections, this paper demonstrates how the discourse of seonjinguk constructs a world dichotomised by idealised seonjinguk and marginalised hujinguk. It examines that the concepts of seonjinguk and hujinguk perform significant social roles as positive and negative referents respectively in various contexts, such as criticising Korean society and giving authority to arguments. In regard to national identity, it shows that the identity of South Korea is constructed as a country near seonjinguk, providing both senses of superiority over hujinguk and of inferiority over seonjinguk. This paper also demonstrates how this becomes a main discursive source that keeps Korea still under the project of modernisation, with the achievement of the status of seonjinguk as its historical national mission.

The Historical Rise and Prevalence of the Discourse of seonjinguk

Developmental discourse in South Korea (Korea hereafter) emerged to a dominant discursive status in the 1960s when the Park Chung-Hee administration enthusiastically promoted national development under the phrase of “joguk geundaehwa" (modernisation of the fatherland) (Kim, 2013). Unlike the previous period, when the degree of civilisation was the most important criterion of evaluating countries, the Park era witnessed the increasingly widespread use of developmental concepts. President Park frequently used developmental terms in his public addresses concerning national reformations, such as “jeungsan" (increase of production), "suchul" (export) or "geonseol" (construction), which had rarely appeared in former President Rhee Syng-Man's addresses (Kim, 2012b, 2013).

The rise of developmentalism accompanied the rise of the discourse of seonjinguk, as the term seonjinguk was frequently used to designate the country that was fully developed. Thus, seonjinguk was set as the national goal that Korea should ultimately achieve through rapid modernisation and industrialisation. Legitimising the society's transformation for the status of seonjinguk, the discourse of seonjinguk played significant sociopolitical roles in Korea's rapid modernisation process.

The discourse of seonjinguk is a historically-constructed developmental knowledge system based upon the concepts of seonjinguk and hujinguk (Kim, 2012b).
One of its notable characteristics is a hierarchical distinction between seonjinguk and hujinguk, in which the former assumes the latter as its alienated other. With the rise of the discourse of seonjinguk, Koreans began to evaluate the world against developmental criteria, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, according to which they categorised countries into seonjinguk or hujinguk. Setting up the status of seonjinguk as the urgent national goal to achieve, Koreans projected their positive developmental values into it, while attributing negative values into the concept of hujinguk, its alienated other. In this process, the former was increasingly idealised, while the latter was marginalised, bipolarising Koreans' perceptions of countries in the world.

The basic assumptions of the discourse of seonjinguk are still widely accepted but rarely questioned in contemporary Korea. Despite the country's current "advanced" status in economic and social developments, Koreans do not consider it as a fully advanced country. Rather, they presume their country as somewhat short of a fully developed country and still set seonjinguk as the national goal to achieve in the near future. In this respect, Koreans' historical project of modernisation is still under way and their historical mission is yet to be completed. The following speech of a senior Korean politician implies much in this regard:

What is the political party that will lead our fatherland to seonjinhwa and seonjinguk, following the wishes of President Park Chung-Hee? Isn't it the Grand National Party? In order for the Grand National Party to lead our country to seonjinguk, President Lee Myung-Bak should make a success. [...] I think that if such a power as the Roh Moo-Hyun government is established again, or if the Democratic Party, leftist party, takes power, our country would eventually fail in entering into the rank of seonjinguk.10

Grand National Party, 2010

9 Employing Foucault's (1972) idea on discourse, this study mainly understands it as a system of relations created by the rules of formation among dispersed elements. Thus, it considers that certain characteristics and identities of an object or a subject are valid only within a certain discursive framework.

10 All translations of Korean sources in this study are the author's own unless noted otherwise.
The Concept of seonjinguk: References and Social Roles

The References of seonjinguk
The term seonjinguk literally means “ahead-going country”, with the syllables “seon”, “jin” and “guk” denoting “ahead”, “go” and “country” respectively. In a similar vein, the term hujinguk means “behind-going country” with the syllable “hu” meaning “behind” or “backward”. The standard Korean dictionary (pyojun gugeo daesajeon) defines seonjinguk as “the country that is ahead in the development of politics, economy, culture, etc.” (National Institute of the Korean Language, 2012). Historically, it was the year 1938 when the term seonjinguk first appeared in the Korean dictionary. The Choseoneo sajeon (Korean Dictionary) written by Mun (1938) defined seonjinguk as “a country whose cultures and materials are developed ahead of a certain country.” However, as the discourse of “munmyeong” (civilisation) was a dominant interpretive framework in categorising countries and understanding the world at the time, the term seonjinguk was relatively less commonly used than munmyeong-guk (civilised country) in referring to an ideal country (Kim, 2012a).

The term seonjinguk began to popularise with the rise of developmentalism in Korea. Reflecting the transition of global discursive focus from “civilisation” to “development” in evaluating progress, Korea’s discursive focus moved from “munmyeong” to “baljeon” (development) in the 1960s with the rise of the Korean developmental regime led by the Park Chung-Hee administration. As noted above, the discourse of seonjinguk was a representative developmental discourse, which was based on a distinction between seonjinguk and hujinguk according to the degree of economic development. In this context, the term seonjinguk was popularised and gradually replaced the term munmyeong-guk in referring to the “advanced country”.

Since its popularisation, however, the term seonjinguk has been used in highly ambiguous and arbitrary ways. Despite its popularity, there has been no consensus on what seonjinguk is, and its references have been largely dependent on its users’ arbitrary intentions and interpretations. In the contemporary context, the use of the term seonjinguk is analytically discerned by two types according to the degree of concreteness: the concrete and abstract ones. The concrete type of seonjinguk is the case in which referents are specified in the text, and seonjinguk of the abstract type is that whose referents are not clearly mentioned in it.

11 The terms seonjinguk (先進國) and hujinguk (後進國) are made up with Chinese characters and are also used in China and Japan. They are read differently in Japan as senshinkoku and koushinkoku, and in China as xian jin guo and hou jin guo respectively, with different connotations across the countries.
As for the concrete type, *seonjinguk* frequently refers to certain countries. In newspaper data, a total of 18 countries are explicitly designated as *seonjinguk* in various contexts, including: the U.S. (66 cases), Japan (33), Britain (10), Germany (9), France (7), Korea (6), Australia (3), Sweden (3), Russia (2), Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Norway, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Ireland (1 case each). As such, countries in the West are referred to as *seonjinguk*.13

In some cases, the term *seonjinguk* refers to countries in certain international groups: for instance, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is the most frequently referred group of *seonjinguk*, and the Group of 7 (G-7) and the Group of 8 (G-8) are also often mentioned as such.

However, the term *seonjinguk* is far more frequently used in abstract ways. As its referents are not specified in the text, they are to be inferred from the context. In this regard, *seonjinguk* most commonly means an abstract country or countries (323 cases). For instance, an editorial of the Dong-a (25 March 2008) argues that, "*seonjinhwai* [becoming advanced] is far to go unless people could consume foods without concern. This is a reason why *seonjinguk* strengthens regulation on food safety and the environment [...]." As in this example, the term *seonjinguk* is conventionally used as if there is a general consensus on what it refers to. However, as there is no consensus on it, the interpretation of *seonjinguk* becomes dependent on its users' imagination. In this case, countries categorised into *seonjinguk* are imagined as having similar social conditions enough to be homogenised into a category. Furthermore, many positive attributes associated with the ideal image of *seonjinguk* are projected to the real countries categorised into it and the countries referred to as *seonjinguk* tend to be idealised.

Another frequent abstract use of *seonjinguk* implies a national goal to achieve (91 cases). The Hankyoreh (12 January 2006), for instance, mentions that, "these are problems to be solved on the way for the harmonious mature community and true *seonjinguk*." This suggests that Korea is not true *seonjinguk* yet and that achieving true *seonjinguk* is a goal to be pursued at the national level. The term of this type often accompanies certain words related to achievement and goal, such as "*jinip*" (entry), "*doyak*" (leap), "*ggum*" (dream), "*hyanghada*" (head for), "*doeda*" (become) and "*naagada*" (go forward).

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12 Korea and Russia are not referred to as *seonjinguk* in the general sense, but are regarded as *seonjinguk* in certain areas, such as information technology and soccer (Korea), and space technology (Russia).

13 Japan tends to construct its identity as a member of the West (Ashizawa, 2008; Miyaoka, 2011).
Third, it implies a national status (42 cases). For instance, the *Chosun* (13 April 2005) argues that, “this is the reason why the more a country is seonjinguk, the more it gives weight on sports in the education curriculum [...].” In this case, seonjinguk is used in reference to a country’s position, which is supposed to have certain (positive) characteristics. As an archetype in the hierarchical discursive system, seonjinguk is assumed to have desirable social conditions that other countries should emulate. In relation to this, the term seonjinguk is often combined with such words as “sujun” (level) or “hyeong” (type) to mean commendable levels or types of social aspects. Something referred to as seonjinguk sujun (seonjinguk-level) or seonjinguk-hyeong (seonjinguk-type) implies that it is of high quality, which characterises the social conditions of seonjinguk.

**The Social Roles of seonjinguk**

Since its global expansion, the West has been identified as one of the most significant Others by many non-Western societies in their modernisation processes. Encountering the threat from outside in the “age of empire” (Hobsbawm, 1987), non-Western societies faced a paradoxical situation in which they had to participate in the game set by the West in order to resist it (Sakai, 1989). With the rise of development discourse, many non-Western countries realised that they were far behind the West and set it as a positive referent to “catch-up” through their modernisation projects. For many, national development projects were perceived as a way to get economic independence and decolonisation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). In this process, the West played a significant role in providing criteria in various social dimensions, against which the countries evaluated their positions on the linear developmental path. Hall (1996: 186) notes the four main roles of the West:

First, it allows us to characterise and classify societies into different categories—i.e. ‘western,’ ‘non-western.’ [...] Secondly, [...] It functions as part of a language, a ‘system of representation’ [...] for example, ‘western’ = urban = developed; or ‘non-western’ = non-industrial = rural = agricultural = under-developed. [...] Thirdly, it provides a standard or model of comparison. [...] Fourthly, it provides criteria of evaluation against which other societies are ranked and around which powerful positive and negative feelings cluster [...].

In Korea, the referential roles of the West are well reflected in the discourse of seonjinguk, as seonjinguk virtually refers to the West. As an archetype of development, the concept of seonjinguk has played diverse roles in Korea's
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modernisation process. In the contemporary context, some are notable as follows. First, it suggests a direction for the country. The Chosun (22 August 2007), for instance, argues that, “Korea should go forward to become seonjinguk, a leading part of the world [...]”. In this example, the concept of seonjinguk as a national goal provides a point where the country should head for. As such, it prescribes the direction of national change, which is premised upon an assumption that seonjinguk goes ahead on a linear path of development. It is considered advanced in various areas, such as technology, economy, welfare and so forth. The Dong-a (9 December 2008), for instance, argues that Korea “took 13 years to have its export amount reach US$400 billion from US$100 billion (FY 1995), which is more than 4 years shorter than the average period taken by seonjinguk (17.2 years) that stepped the height of US$ 400 billion ahead of us.” As such, seonjinguk is represented as a group of countries that have already passed a developmental point where Korea is currently standing. In this respect, seonjinguk as an advanced entity shows a direction for Korea to head for on a universal linear path of development. On this ground, Korea's national identity is defined as a country pursuing seonjinguk.

Second, it provides a standard of comparison. In this regard, the Chosun (16 November 2007) mentions that, “our country's percentage of health insurance coverage [...] is short of seonjinguk’s 70–80 percent.” Here, the concept of seonjinguk is used in reference to abstract countries with no specific ones referred to as seonjinguk, and it suggests a referential point of health insurance coverage by which Korea is to be evaluated. In this way, seonjinguk, either abstract or specific, implies referential social conditions, which non-seonjinguk should refer to in their development processes. Seonjinguk also suggests a comparable point of normality: that is, what is assumed as common in seonjinguk tends to be regarded as normal and commonsensical, by which others’ degree of “normality” is to be assessed.

Third, it proposes a desirable model. The Hankyoreh (1 May 2008), for instance, argues that, “the secret of the success of Finland, which is regarded as the best seonjinguk of education, lies in its policies on teachers.” In this case, seonjinguk is specified as Finland and plays a role in providing a desirable educational model for Korean society. When the concept is mentioned in such phrases as “seonjinguk sujun” or “seonjinguk-hyeong,” it also implies a model that should be pursued in various fields of society. As such, desirability is an important characteristic associated with seonjinguk.

Fourth, it sometimes provides a simple referential case. In this referential case, it does not clearly connote desirability. With regard to the Amnesty International's criticism of the Korean government's suppression of civil demonstrations, for instance, the Dong-a (21 July 2008) argues that the Amnesty
International "does not seem to know how the police in seonjinguk, such as the US and Japan, treat demonstrators [...]." In this case, a legal custom in seonjinguk provides a point of reference for Korean society, but is not necessarily regarded as desirable.

And lastly, it suggests a global trend. When assumed as common in seonjinguk, a certain phenomenon tends to be regarded as an inevitable tendency that countries should follow to keep abreast of the times. Neoliberal policy, for instance, is frequently referred to as a global trend in relation to globalisation, which is adopted by seonjinguk and, thus, should also be accepted by Korea.

The Representations of seonjinguk

Setting seonjinguk as an advanced entity, Koreans have endeavored to "catch up" with it in their national development. In this process, they have projected their desired values onto the concept of seonjinguk, and created an ideal image of it. Thus, seonjinguk is generally represented as a perfect country that already has the societal characteristics that Koreans aspire to attain in their development process.

As the discourse of seonjinguk is a developmental discourse, the economic dimension is the most important criterion to define a country as seonjinguk or not. In regard to this, seonjinguk is described as having high income, advanced technology and big, competitive companies. However, these are not sufficient conditions for seonjinguk's economy, as it requires some important qualitative aspects. Above all, it is supposed to be fair and transparent. Freedom from corruption, for instance, counts as a main secret of the strong and competitive economy of seonjinguk. Thus, to become seonjinguk is not just a matter of raising national income, but that of establishing an honest economic system. This gives legitimacy to seonjinguk's wealth and bestows a status of a respectful country on it. An editorial states in this regard that "seonjinguk is not one which has a lot of money, large territory, or large population," but "is one that is respected in the international system" (Chosun, 26 February 2007).

In this discursive practice, there is hardly a perception reflecting that, "the achievement of development in the Euro-American zone was entwined with overseas conquest of the non-Western zones" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012: 19).

14 In a similar vein, Quijano (2000: 216) argues that, "[a]ll the forms of labor, production and exploitation were in ensemble around the axis of capital and the world market: slavery, serfdom, petty commodity production, reciprocity and salary."
In terms of economic ideology, *seonjinguk* is represented by conservative voices as a country on the principles of "liberal market economy" and "liberal democracy". For them, there is no *seonjinguk* that is not based on "free-market" ideology. Under the title "we will defend liberty and the market", for instance, the *Dong-a* (1 April 2006) argues that, "one cannot be *seonjinguk* with anti-market ideologies." The conservatives' support of market ideology leads to further assume that *seonjinguk* actively adopts neoliberalism and accommodates neoliberal globalisation. Under the title of the "2006 *seonjinguk* trend", the *Dong-a* (26 December 2006) argues that some keywords are found in the trend of *seonjinguk* policies, such as downsizing the government, privatising public enterprise, deregulation, pro-business policies and the open market. It adds that this "world trend" is summarised in a phrase of "small government, big market".

In regard to social aspects, *seonjinguk* is generally represented as a mature society, which has positive material and spiritual characteristics, such as: efficient disaster prevention systems, transparent decision-making processes, high awareness of human rights, civil consciousness and tolerance toward differences. The following criticism of Chinese society well demonstrates the image of the *seonjinguk* society:

> It is not a first-class nation just because it has the largest amount of US dollar and launches satellites into the air. When it is the situation in which a foreigner goes to the [Chinese] hospital, risking his/her life, who would respect China as a leading country of the world? [...] Regardless of its size, [China] would not be regarded as *seonjinguk* if it does not have the national consciousness of valuing human life and frankness, and a social system that punishes dishonesty and the evasion of the law.
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> *Chosun, 22 August 2007*

This argues that China is not *seonjinguk* because of its disregard for human life, lack of frankness and unjust social system, which conversely implies that *seonjinguk* has human-valuing, frank and just social systems. The law is considered as a fair mechanism that maintains social trust among people in *seonjinguk*. The *Chosun* (16 October 2003) argues that, "the degree of respect for laws and systems" is "the most important thing to distinguish between *seonjinguk* and hujinguk."

In the credible social system, people in *seonjinguk* are supposed to behave responsibly and appropriately according to their social roles. Its ruling class, in particular, is regarded as the fitting leader of the mature society. As for this, the *Chosun* (2 May 2007) argues that, "the power supporting the *seonjinguk* society..."
is said to be ‘noblesse oblige.’” People in seonjinguk are also considered to be generous towards the weak, e.g., immigrants and foreign labourers and, thus, its level of social tolerance is assumed to be high (Dong-a, 4 October 2008).

Like other spheres aforementioned, seonjinguk politics is generally assumed as normal, mature and transparent. It is portrayed as far from corruption, which is often attributed to its stable and well-managed legal systems. This reflects the assumption that seonjinguk is under the leadership of the mature and responsible ruling class. Seonjinguk is also represented as having advanced, high-quality and attractive cultural properties. These broadly range from national brand and scientific knowledge to the ability of enjoying high culture. This perception becomes an important ground for seonjinguk’s cultural hegemony and for giving justification to the opening of Korea’s cultural areas such as education.

Represented as an ideal being in various fields, the concept of seonjinguk becomes a source of “auto-Orientalism” for Koreans. Compared with seonjinguk, Korean society loses its attractiveness. Koreans tend to consider that something desired by Korean society is already existent in seonjinguk and, by contrast, some negative things existent in Korean society are absent in seonjinguk.

In relation to this, this study finds two main contexts in which the ideal representation of seonjinguk is used in Korean society. First, it is most frequently employed in the context of criticising Korean society. Compared with seonjinguk, various aspects of Korean society become unsatisfactory, which are considered as a reason why Korea is not fully seonjinguk yet. In regard to what is considered as negative in Korean society, the editorials tend to argue that, “there is no such thing in seonjinguk”. In this way, the supposedly negative aspects of Korean society raise internal shame for Koreans vis-à-vis seonjinguk and are regarded as something to be corrected as soon as possible.

Second, the concept of seonjinguk is employed in the context of justifying one’s argument. As an ideal representation, seonjinguk is a source of cultural authority in Korea and, thus, newspapers tend to rely on it to legitimise their

15 As for auto-Orientalism, Befu (2001: 127) notes that, “It is a process of accepting the Orientalism of the West [...] by the very people who are being Orientalised.”

16 In regard to the historical transition in the meanings of seonjinguk, Kim (2011) notes a general trend of increasing Eurocentrism. In the 1960s and the 1970s, the concept of seonjinguk was used in a limited sense in reference to an advanced country mainly in industrialisation and its weaknesses, such as the pollution problem, were well recognised. However, the seonjinguk’s “advanced” attributes have gradually been applied to a broader range of societal fields, such as culture, and the tendency of idealising it has increased from the 1980s to the present (Kim, 2011).
arguments. That is to say, when they promote a policy or event, an easy way to give authority to their arguments is to imply that it is “common in seonjinguk”.

The Concept of hujinguk: References and Attributes

In discourse, subjects are often constructed in binary opposition. In examining U.S. foreign policy discourse, Doty (1993: 312) notes that binary opposition constitutes the “deep structure” of the discourse, according to which “things are given meaning and simultaneously positioned vis-à-vis other things.” By its hierarchical nature, the discourse of seonjinguk shows manifest operations of binary opposition between the concepts of seonjinguk and hujinguk. In this operative principle, the image of seonjinguk is constructed in the oppositional relation to the image of hujinguk in a similar way in which the Occident is constructed as the opposite image of the Orient in an Orientalist discourse (Said, 1979). The hierarchy between the two concepts naturally appears through the process in which Koreans project their negative developmental values into hujinguk while attributing positive ones to seonjinguk. In this way, hujinguk is created as the marginalised “other” of seonjinguk and, thus, both concepts are constitutively related in the discourse.

As with seonjinguk, the concept of hujinguk is highly ambiguous as there is no consensus on it. Thus, it is used somewhat arbitrarily according to the users’ intention and interpretation. Like seonjinguk, two types can be discerned in regard to the referents of hujinguk: concrete and abstract ones. In regard to the concrete type, certain countries and regions are designated as hujinguk, such as: Korea (23 cases), Bangladesh (2 cases), China, Southeast Asia, Guatemala, Suriname and earlier Ireland (1 case each).17 In general, those designated as hujinguk are economically poor in terms of certain economic criteria, such as GDP per capita, and geographically it refers to countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia—i.e., the non-West.

In regard to the abstract type, hujinguk implies an abstract country or countries, without any real country or group specified (14 cases). Thus, it exists as an abstract form of representation. In this case, hujinguk is assumed as a

17 It is interesting to note that Korea is most frequently designated as hujinguk. This, however, shows a sarcastic attitude of self-criticism on certain aspects of Korean society. To designate Korea as hujinguk reflects an attitude to criticise that those negative aspects should not belong to Korea. In this respect, Korea is usually referred to as a certain type of hujinguk in a specific context, rather than “overall hujinguk”, such as a hujinguk of human rights, traffic, politics, disaster prevention systems, aviation policy, etc.
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country (or countries) that has various negative and undesirable attributes, such as: anti-human rights, backwardness, unhygienic conditions (8 cases each), risk and insensitivity to safety (7 cases), incapacity and irresponsibility (7), corruption (4), low women’s status (4), confusion (3), conflict, anti-trends, disorders, faults, poverty (2 cases each), lack of principles, short-sightedness, nonsense, and inefficiency (1 case each).

The way hujinguk is represented in the discourse is comparable to the way development studies construct the images of Africa by the practice of “reductive repetition”, that is, repetitively reducing its cultures to “a set of essential deficiencies” (Andreason, 2005: 981). This discursive practice underlies the Eurocentric discourses’ tendency of “consignment of ‘non-Western world’ to ‘static backwardness’” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012: 19). As such, a Eurocentric disposition to problematise the non-West is implicit in the concept of hujinguk.18

With those undesirable features, the concept of hujinguk functions as a negative referent that Korean society should not resemble. In terms of Korea’s developmental history, it is considered as the past status of Korea on a linear path, from which Korea escaped a long time ago due to its successful modernisation. When the term hujinguk is used in “hujinguk-hyeong” (hujinguk-type) or “hujinguk sujun” (hujinguk level), it implies an undesirable type or level, which Korea should not employ on its way towards seonjinguk.

The Representations of hujinguk

The negative attributes of hujinguk are well shown in the ways it is represented in regard to various societal fields. In the political area, hujinguk is characterised as having an unreliable political system, which is “confusing”, “unpredictable”, “corrupt”, “inefficient”, “irresponsible” or “incapable”. Criticising the Korean National Assembly’s way of dealing with the Free Trade Agreement with the U.S., for instance, the Dong-a (9 May 2008) designates Korea as a “hujinguk of politics”, deploring that Korean politics’ “short-sightedness and ignorance are surprising and pitiful”. Denouncing a political scandal in Korea, another

18 Lee (2002) points out that South Koreans have constructed their own “Orient” reflecting Western Orientalism and perceive other non-Western countries, such as India, through this Orientalist framework. This Orientalist image of India is, however, at odds with Indians’ own national identities based on three deep-seated identity sources: “civilisational exceptionalism, post-colonial nationalism and secular democratic tradition” (Ollapally, 2011: 206). As noted above, even South Korea is not free from the Korean version of Orientalist gaze.
editorial of the Dong-a (2 December 2008) questions “until when this kind of hujinguk-style corruption should be repeated”.

In regard to the economy, hujinguk is generally perceived as a low-income country whose economic system is non-competitive, backwards and unreliable. The Chosun (22 February 2007), for instance, defines hujinguk as a country that does not have many competitive global corporations. Thus, its economy is considered as lagging behind the global competition and trend, which is a main cause of poverty for hujinguk. In contrast with the transparent, fair economy of seonjinguk, hujinguk’s poor economy is often attributed to its own internal corruption and inefficiency. It is argued that Korea could roll back to the status of hujinguk if it does not overcome its economic problem, nor keep abreast of the “global trends”.

In terms of the social dimension, hujinguk is portrayed as an immature, dangerous society struggling with disorder, dangerousness, irresponsibility, incapacity, nonsense and unsanitary conditions. In this way, hujinguk society is considered as one that seriously lacks general conditions for decent living. As for its disorderly situation, the Chosun (7 August 2001) argues that:

The whole land of Korea is a dumping ground. [...] The solutions are the education in order and manner [...] and strict regulations on the scene of disorder. [...] Or, we will not get out of “spiritual hujinguk” regardless of the income level.

As for the safety issue, hujinguk is regarded as incapable of preventing natural or man-made disasters. In regard to a deadly explosive accident in Korea, the Dong-a (9 January 2008) argues that it is a “tragedy of the hujinguk of safety awareness and prevention system”. A hierarchy appears even among diseases, that is, there are “seonjinguk-type” and “hujinguk-type” diseases. For instance, the Chosun (8 January 2001, 17 December 2001) designated certain epidemics as “hujinguk-type”, such as dysentery, cholera, malaria and measles. Koreans take the occurrence of those “hujinguk-type” diseases as more frustrating and humiliating than others.

In regards to culture and knowledge, hujinguk is also regarded as backwards. The Chosun (24 February 2007), for instance, argues that backwardness in mathematics and science is “not knowing world common sense” and adds that “Korea should not be rolled back to the ignorance of hujinguk” by ignoring them. As such, traditional and indigenous knowledge is not much appreciated in the discourse.

As a marginalised referent, hujinguk is used in diverse contexts and, in this sense, it plays significant roles in Korean society. It is most frequently used
in the context of criticising domestic affairs. Korea is most frequently and sarcastically designated as hujinguk in regard to what Koreans think is undesirable in their society. If a domestic thing is labelled as hujinguk, Koreans tend to feel both a great shame on it and an urgent need to change it. In relation to this, the concept of hujinguk is also used in the context of supporting an argument. For instance, an easy way to raise a need for changing a policy or phenomenon is to designate it as a characteristic of hujinguk.

Overall, hujinguk functions diverse as a negative referent that South Korea should not resemble in its path of development. In comparison with its positive other, seonjinguk, the contexts in which the term hujinguk are used are parallel to those for seonjinguk but in inverse ways in terms of contents.

Korea's Identity in the Discourse of seonjinguk

Identity refers to “the images of individuality and distinctiveness ('selfhood') held and projected by an actor [...]” (Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein, 1996: 59). Constructing an identity is a cognitive process that delineates a boundary between self and others, which is most strongly affected by one’s “significant others”. Insofar as development is representation (Tripathy and Dharmabrata 2011), it provides a conceptual ground on which various developmental identities are constructed and negotiated.

In the discourse of seonjinguk, Korea's identity is mainly dependent upon two significant Others, seonjinguk (positive ones) and hujinguk (negative ones), and is underlain by both senses of inferiority over the former and of superiority over the latter. This is related to a perception that Korea has rapidly progressed from hujinguk to almost seonjinguk today on a supposedly universal path of development. In this respect, hujinguk tends to be regarded as the past of Korea and seonjinguk as its future.

In the early and mid-20th century, Korea's national identity was mainly defined as a munmyeong-guk (civilised country, especially in ethical and spiritual terms) within the framework of munmyeong (civilisation) (Kim, 2012a, 2012b). It was with the rise of developmentalism and developmental regime in

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19 Dittmer and Kim (1993: 16) note two types of reference groups: that is, positive reference groups are those with which “a state desires to associate itself” and negative reference groups are the ones “whose opposition serves to dramatise the importance of defending the values of ‘us’ against ‘them’”.

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the early 1960s when Korea's national identity began to be mainly defined along the developmental line. In this discursive change, Korea underwent a notable change in its self-identity: that is, from a munmyeong-guk to a hujinguk (Kim, 2013). In this identity, Korea's deficiency in material condition, rather than spiritual affluence, was emphasised and the country's poverty and low level of industrialisation were identified as the urgent problems that the country should overcome in the near future. Under such a slogan as joguk geundaehwa (modernisation of the fatherland), the most urgent national goal was set as the escape from the status of hujinguk, which became an important discursive basis for Korea's aggressive national modernisation project. In terms of domestic politics, the aggressive projects for national development and modernisation were a good cause for the Park Chung-Hee regime's legitimacy, which rose to power through a military coup.

Due to its successful implementation of the national development project, Korea witnessed a rapid economic growth in the 1970s. Reflecting this was a perception that the country became a kind of jungjinguk, an intermediate status between hujinguk and seonjinguk. When it came to the late 1970s, Korean developmentalists started to designate the country as located in the top-tier of jungjinguk, just in front of joining the group of seonjinguk (Kim, 2013). In this sense, Koreans have historically experienced the "realisation" of modernisation theory through their national economic development, and this may be a good historical source of their relatively firm belief in the evolutionary developmental path reflected in the discourse of seonjinguk.

Currently, Korea is sometimes claimed as seonjinguk but is more frequently identified as "nearly seonjinguk", as is conveyed in such a phrase as "seonjinguk munteok" (on the threshold of seonjinguk). This is also an intermediate identity that generates both senses of superiority over hujinguk (or jungjinguk) and inferiority over seonjinguk. While a way to overcome the sense of inferiority may be to claim it as seonjinguk, there are considerable resistances to this within the country. For instance, a former chief-presidential secretary was criticised by the Chosun for his argument that "Korea is already seonjinguk". In this case, the Chosun (26 November 2005) argued that an important criterion for judging seonjinguk was a per capita income of US$20,000, and that the number of countries above this level was 35. Thus, according to the Chosun, it was nonsense to argue that a country whose per capita income ranking of 48th (Korea) was seonjinguk. This debate well demonstrates the ambiguity of the concept of seonjinguk. For instance, a Dong-a (15 August 2008) editorial suggests US$30,000 as a criterion for seonjinguk. The currently dominant idea seems to be the criterion of US$30,000, which is US$10,000 higher than the criterion just a few years ago. It seems that the conservative newspapers tend
to create a further goal of seonjinguk for the country being close to achieving its previous goal.

Historically, Presidents Park Chung-Hee in the late 1970s and Chun Doo-Hwan in the 1980s frequently mentioned that Korea was approaching seonjinguk and the goal of seonjinguk was "just over there". National identities claimed by them in those periods are more or less akin to the identity of today's "seonjinguk munteok". In terms of the mobilisation of developmental resources, the status of "near seonjinguk" is better than that of seonjinguk. Sikkink (1991: 25) notes that, "for development to proceed potential resources must be mobilised," which involves "ideas, inspiration, leadership, and the unquantifiable qualities that motivate people to believe and to act." In this sense, it is notable that Korea has now been on the threshold of the group of seonjinguk for more than 30 years, a status advantageous for the "mobilisation of resources" under the cause of entering into the rank of seonjinguk.

It is argued that Korea's contemporary status, "near seonjinguk", has not been easily achieved. Rather, it is considered as a status to which "ex-generations have climbed up, getting bloody bruises on their knees" (Chosun, 1 July 2005). Koreans feel a sense of pride in their achievement of the status of "almost seonjinguk" in such a short period of modernisation, which is assumed as having taken hundreds of years by the West. However, it also brings up an awareness of crisis. It is sometimes perceived that Korea is now in-between the running-away seonjinguk and rapidly chasing "developing" countries, and that there is a possibility that Korea is not able to ever cross the threshold of seonjinguk. This is a ground on which conservative newspapers argue that Korea's current status is due to the previous generations' blood, sweat and tears, and that it is our generation's responsibility to make Korea a full-fledged seonjinguk. The national strategy for "moving forward", rather than "rolling back" is vigorously promoted in this regard. For this, the Dong-a (22 October 2008) argues that Korea is "on a forked road to the progress or to the retreat of 'national rank.'"

Conclusion

Focusing on the basic concepts and characteristics of the discourse of seonjinguk, this paper has argued that it imagines a world dichotomised by seonjinguk and hujinguk, in which the former assumes the latter as its alienated Other. It has found that the concept of seonjinguk is mainly used in either concrete or abstract type in terms of reference, with various connotations. In regard to the concrete type, seonjinguk generally refers to Western countries. The con-
cept of seonjinguk, however, is used far more frequently in the abstract type without any country specified. In this case, seonjinguk exists as an ideal representation, implying various things such as an abstract country (or countries), a national goal, a national status and so forth. In contrast, hujinguk is imagined as the marginalised entity in relation to idealised seonjinguk. This paper has also shown that the concepts of seonjinguk and hujinguk perform significant social roles in various contexts, such as criticising Korean society and giving authority to arguments.

In regard to Korea's self-identity, this paper has argued that the discourse generally identifies it as near seonjinguk or on "seonjinguk munteok" in the hierarchical classification system. It provides an interpretation of Korea's developmental history as that of an escape from the status of hujinguk towards seonjinguk. Thus, it assumes hujinguk as the past of the country and seonjinguk as its future, which entails both senses of superiority over the former and of inferiority over the latter.

The findings of this study, thus, suggest that the Eurocentric classification of the West and the non-West is manifest in contemporary Korea—in particular, in its developmentalist worldview. Korea's discourse of seonjinguk is a discursive location in which powers of development and coloniality interact through the hierarchical representation and identification of the West and the non-West. This demonstrates that Eurocentric hierarchy is not only imposed by the West, but is also actively constructed in non-Western countries having adopted national development projects, such as Korea. In this sense, Korea's developmental discourse or the discourse of seonjinguk is a main contributor to the global hegemony of Eurocentric developmentalism, in which the non-West including Korea itself becomes the object of the Orientalistic gaze.

Given the importance of its socio-political roles in Korea, the concept of seonjinguk is deeply related to how Koreans imagine their country and the world. It may be undeniable that the discourse of seonjinguk has contributed to Korea's rapid economic development accompanying the overall rise of living standard in the country, by providing discursive ground for its aggressive developmental projects. However, it is doubtful whether its developmentalist dichotomous structure is suitable for an interpretive framework appreciating the sociocultural diversity of the world in the current era of "development impasse". On post-colonial terms, the discourse of seonjinguk is soundly captured in the "colonial power matrix" and does not show any sign of the "decolonial turn" that is based upon the recognition of the "coloniality of power" (Quijano, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). On post-developmental terms, it is still obsessed with the Eurocentric unsustainable developmental game (Sachs, 1992; Escobar, 1995). This study raises a need for deconstructing
and reconstructing the discourse of seonjinguk to become more reflexive of the decolonial and post-developmental epistemic turn. It is time to envision a more equal, sustainable and peaceful world.

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