

A Nation Born in the Barracks: Militarized Citizenship in the Republic of Korea

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Abstract

After the universal male conscription system was first introduced by the Japanese in 1943 and then re-introduced by both post-colonial Korean states in 1948-49, the obligatory military service and all the experiences linked to it became a central reference point in the life cycles of the majority of able-bodied males in both Koreas. North Korea became notorious for imposing the longest military service terms in the whole world onto its male citizens: the majority of the North Korean draftees has to spend up to 10 years in the barracks. Normally, an able-bodied male - excluding the top ranks of the governing elite - are identified as "discharged soldiers" in North Korea, "soldier" and "male citizen" being practically synonymical terms. In case of South Korea, the tightening of the draft system in the early 1970s made the outright draft-dodging - very widespread in the 1950s - extremely costly and difficult, and led the public consciousness to identify the universal conscription as the only "just and equal" system in what is universally perceived as unjust and unequal society. From the early 1970s, joining the army started to be perceived as an obligatory rite of passage for all "normal" males, and the draft objectors were subjected not only to prison sentences and harsh treatment in the hand of police authorities, but also to an enormous amount of stigmatization in the public consciousness. My presentation will examine the influence the militarized masculinity paradigm has been exerting on the Korean society as a whole, especially on gender relationships.



Vladimir Tikhonov has worked for KyungHee University (1997-2000) and for Oslo University as associate professor (2000-2006) and as a full professor (from 2006). He has published 19 monographs and translations of Korean classics into Russian, Korean, and Norwegian. His English translation of the Manhae Han Yongun Buddhist treatises (co-translated with O. Miller, SOAS) was published recently by Global Oriental (UK).

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