

# PRELIMINARY STUDY ON MEASURES TO ADDRESS HISTORICAL DISTORTION

*Focusing on Japan's Historical distortion of Korean History*

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*This paper develops strategies to overcome pro-Japanese distortions of Korean history, a longstanding issue rooted in the influence of Japanese imperial power in the 20th century and perpetuated by Japanese historians and their Korean collaborators. These distortions, intensifying in recent years, threaten Korea's national identity and societal well-being. The paper reviews significant distortion cases from the late 20th century, including war indemnities, school history textbooks, Dokdo Island, and imperial-era sex slavery, while analyzing Korean responses such as government protests and social movements through the lens of social movement theory. It proposes a new countermeasure system based on four interconnected elements—subjects, aims, resources, and targets—designed to enhance the effectiveness and outcomes of social movements combating historical distortions.*

## I. THE PROBLEMS AND SCOPE OF RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>

This study offers a preliminary exploration of the phenomenon of distortion in historical narratives. It does not aim to analyze and rectify the content of distorted historical accounts themselves, but rather responds to the question: “How to best respond to distorted historical narratives?”

While the issue of distortion in historical narratives lies within the realm of historiography, developing the countermeasures to these distortions as a contemporary task requires a sociological approach.

Debating historical distortions [역사왜곡 歷史歪曲] and corresponding countermeasures is not unprecedented in Korean

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history. For example, late Joseon-era Silhak [실학 實學] scholars, such as Hong Daeyong [홍대응], criticized Joseon's Sadaejjuui [사대주의 事大主義, the tributary diplomacy] emanating from Chinese Sinocentric worldview and argued for the autonomous identity of the Korean people.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, during the colonial rule under Imperial Japan, nationalist historians such as Danjae [단재] and Baekam [백암] criticized colonial historiography and its distortions, highlighting the significance and legitimacy of Korean national history. This trend continued with thinkers like Widang [위당], who advocated the “Joseon Studies [조선학] Movement,” emphasizing the Korean spirit [얼] in the same context.<sup>3</sup>

However, why does this issue resurface over a century later? Two key facts merit attention. First, history possesses a fundamental importance for a nation. A statement by a Goryeo-era pioneer likening history to a nation's “soul” [혼 魂] and the state to its “body” [형체 形體] aptly illustrates history's significance in the composition and healthy development of a national society (Yi Am 2019, 204). If the “soul” can be likened to “spirit” in Western terms—according to Hegel, the highest level of human consciousness (Jung Mira 2018, 155)—then the gravity of historical distortion becomes even more apparent. In other words, just as the soul holds profound importance in human life, history serves as a critical core factor for the existence of

national societies. Numerous states have risen and fallen throughout history; when their spirit faltered, they faced crises or perished, but when their spirit remained robust, they thrived and prospered.

Second, the resurgence of the issue can be understood in light of new developments. Japan's distortions of Korean history had somewhat subsided following its defeat in World War II but intensified since its rise to an economic powerhouse by the late 20th century. Likewise, since achieving political stability and economic development in the 21st century, China has actively reinvigorated its Sinocentric ideology and promoted initiatives like the Northeast Project to expand its historical and territorial claims over the Korean Peninsula. A more concerning problem lies within Korea itself, where foreign-dependent pro-Chinese and pro-Japanese factions perpetuate self-distortion of Korean history. These overlapping distortions of history, compounded and exacerbated within national society, inflict profound wounds on the national spirit and jeopardize the country's identity. In this theoretical and practical context, exploring ways to overcome historical distortions is immediately required for safeguarding the healthy development and prosperity of a nation.

<sup>2</sup> Hong Daeyong (1731–1783) criticized the Sinocentric worldview based on a relativistic understanding that the Earth is spherical and rotates, thus lacking a fixed center (Korean Philosophical Society 2000, 191)

<sup>3</sup> Refer to the following sources: Shin Chaeho (2010), Park Eunsik (2000), Cho Donggeol et. al. 2007, 172–181).

Accordingly, this study aims to analytically examine extant approaches to counter historical distortions and explore new alternative strategies to improve upon existing countermeasures. It must be acknowledged that there exist inevitable limitations in presenting comprehensive alternatives. The scope of research spans a vast temporal and spatial range, whereas systematic and analytical research results remain relatively scarce. Therefore, the proposals of this study are more exploratory and preliminary in nature. It focuses primarily on domestic pro-Japanese factions' distortions of Korean history, with an emphasis on recent developments since the late 20th century.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The exploration of strategies to counteract historical distortion begins with a clear definition of the term “distortion” [왜곡 歪曲]. According to the Korean dictionary, it is defined as “interpreting facts differently from their true original state or misrepresenting them.”<sup>4</sup> In the context of historical narratives, it refers to inaccuracies in descriptions or intentional twisting, including exaggeration or minimization, manipulation or concealment, and glorification or denigration in the recording and interpretation of facts.

This definition encompasses two dimensions: one concerns the objective description of facts, and the other pertains to the involvement of value judgments or subjective preferences in their interpretation. For instance, the examples related to the objective recording of facts include the birth story of Dangun [단군 檀君], the territorial boundaries of Goryeo [고려 高麗], and the existence of the Japanese Government of Imna [임나일본부 任那日本府]. On the other hand, distortions stemming from differing interpretations of facts include debates on the statehood of Gojoseon [고조선 古朝鮮], skepticism of early records in *Samguk Sagi, The History of Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea* [삼국사기 三國史記], the interpretation of the inscriptions on the Gwanggaeto Stele [광개토대왕비문 廣開土大王碑文], and the meaning of the Chiljido sword [칠지도 七支刀]. Of course, these two forms of distortion may occur simultaneously.

The issue of objectivity in describing and interpreting facts is closely concerned with the viability of historiography as academic scholarship. Since Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886) laid out the foundation for modern historiography, the issue of objectivity remains a subject of ongoing debate. An illustrative case is the *Annals of Seonjo* [선조실록 宣祖實錄], initially compiled under the leadership of the Northern Faction [북인 北人], and later revised under a regime dominated by the Western Faction [서인 西人]. This demonstrates the practical limitations of objectivity (Lee Hangu 2017,

<sup>4</sup> “사실과 다르게 해석하거나 그릇되게 함” ([https://dic.](https://dic.daum.net/word/view.do?wordid=kkw000189623&supid=kku000239305)

[daum.net/word/view.do?wordid=kkw000189623&supid=kku000239305](https://dic.daum.net/word/view.do?wordid=kkw000189623&supid=kku000239305))

13 & 45). Ultimately, the objectivity of historical narratives is not rigidly fixed but determined and revised through ongoing criticism and oversight within specific political and social contexts (Lee Sangshin 1991, 26–27). In this light, history can be seen as a continuous dialogue and interaction between historians and historical facts, as well as between the past and the present (E. H. Carr, 45).

The concept of historical distortion has distinctive characteristics. First, it centers around the involvement of negative values. Emotional factors also tend to amplify the process. Although well-intentioned distortions may exist, they can still be perceived negatively from an opposing perspective. Thus, the second characteristic of this concept is its bilateral nature, meaning it arises and intensifies in processes of communication imbued with emotions on both sides.

When historical distortion ultimately transforms into bilateral actions, it creates a responsive relationship, often escalating into competition, social conflict, or confrontation beyond cooperative interaction. This encompasses a broad spectrum of interactions, ranging from collaborative relationships to hostile confrontation. The nature or form of the response is determined by the agents and targets of distortion, its content and severity, and various environmental factors. For example, responses may take the form of academic countermeasures by researchers, enlightenment initiatives by educators, or direct resistance and challenges against the distorting parties.

Behavioral responses, in turn, can vary significantly depending on the intensity of resistance and the practical methods employed.

From an institutional perspective, responses can be categorized into institutionalized and non-institutionalized actions. In legal terms, this distinction translates to lawful and unlawful acts. When non-institutionalized, unlawful actions are organized and sustained for specific purposes, they are defined as social movements. However, this binary categorization is not always clear-cut. New technologies and practices, as well as delays in legislative responses to regulate them, highlight the inevitable gap and friction between institutional and non-institutional actions. For instance, the phenomenon of sexual exploitation via SNS only becomes legally and institutionally addressable after it manifests as a social issue. This illustrates the unavoidable gap between emerging social problems and the legal frameworks established to regulate them.

On the other hand, the variable and indeterminate characteristics of non-institutional approaches provide an opportunity to explore possibilities for new changes. The coexistence of inevitable gaps and dissonance can serve as a catalyst for transformation and progress. This may lead to potential exits from conflict, as it highlights the practical necessity, development potential and logical validity of social movements that focus on non-institutional issues. For instance, even within the distorted realities of historical

narratives, though they may initially seem discriminatory or unilateral, relationships free from emotional bias can evolve into rational and open-minded debates and discussions. In the process of knowledge development, competition and intense conflict may arise between academic schools, making mutual comparison and communication difficult (T.S. Kuhn 1995, 155 & 166). Yet, it is also true that when this process is mediated by open discussion and rational norms, it can lead to the development of more valid knowledge. Therefore, distortion can be mitigated or resolved through open debate and mutual understanding. Human history suggests that progress often involves transitioning from the outright rejection of the other toward recognizing differences and fostering coexistence, and ultimately overcoming contradictions to advance into higher stages of integration and creation.

Building upon this conceptual discussion, this study adopts the following theoretical frameworks. First, it critiques the misunderstandings of positivist historiography [실증사학 實證史學] championed by the proponents of the pro-Japanese colonial historical perspectives [식민사관 植民史觀] and highlights the positive potential of nationalist historiography [민족사학 民族史學] which emerged as a countermeasure to the former. Second, it incorporates the open perspectives of public history [공공사학 公共史學]—a field that emerges from a critical perspective on the insular limitations of traditional historiography. Third, it utilizes the sociological framework of social movement theory to

develop a countermeasure system as a practical strategy against historical distortions.

First, pro-Japanese positivist historians have significantly misunderstood Rankean historiography, which they cite as the foundation of their approach in historical studies. It is true that Rankean positivist historiography emphasizes rigorous selection and objective interpretation of historical sources at a fundamental level. However, it also acknowledges the importance of the researcher's values and worldview in giving meaning and artistic dimension to historical narratives. Ranke himself stated, "Historiography is a science when it comes to collecting, discovering, and investigating facts, but it becomes an art when these facts are reassembled and narrated" (requoted from Heo Seungil 2009, 70). Furthermore, Ranke's historiography criticized the universal worldview of imperialism and emphasized the importance of respecting the historical and cultural uniqueness of specific nations. According to him, traditional historiography often privileged the existence of modern nation-states and reproduced national ideologies by consolidating histories as narratives of nation-states (Kim Heonki 2011, 284).

Korean positivist historians, however, misinterpreted Ranke's theories and adhered to a methodological objectiveness rooted in the concept of pure science and a universalist historical perspective. In the process, they disregarded the uniqueness of their nation's history, embracing an anti-nationalist stance (Lim Jonggwon 2020,

462 & 472). They are criticized for ignoring the identity of their own nation and narrating history through the lens of Japanese perspectives under the guise of universal historiography.

Second, the dominant trends in Korean historiography show a tendency toward external insularity. In other words, mainstream Korean historians restrict their scholarly activities to the insular sphere of professors and students within universities, thus responding to the evolving social realities defensively and with a closed-minded attitude.

The insularity of mainstream historiography underscores the context for the global rise of public history (Ko Seokgyu 2022, 35). The movement encourages engagement with the broader public through the increased presence of historical content in mass media, the rapid growth of historical site tours, and the professionalization of historical experts working in museums and exhibitions distinct from university historians. The dismantling of traditional historiographical boundaries, which once centered on military, national, and political histories, now extends into fields such as cultural history, oral history, social history, and the history of everyday life. This expansion represents a meaningful wave of openness (Heo Youngran 2022, 231–237; Lee Hana 2021, 390). Notably, in their effort to establish a desirable historical narrative, German public historians, for instance, have combated blatant historical distortions by far-right groups and

emphasized moral efforts to reconcile conflicting memories (Na Inho 2018, 96).

Finally, this study emphasizes the sociological theory of social movements, given the significant challenges and obstacles in devising countermeasures from within the existing institutional framework. These challenges stem from the fact that the pro-Japanese colonial historiography cultivated under Japanese colonial rule has deeply rooted itself as a rigid framework within major institutional sectors of modern Korean society, such as the academic and educational fields and other related institutions of national history (Lee Dukil 2014; 2013). Given the reality that pro-Japanese forces have systematically embedded themselves in these key institutional areas, a central focus on social movements characterized by their non-institutional nature seems to be a more efficient strategic approach. For social movements are grounded in the primal social power of the citizens, which serves as the foundation of institutional structures.

Particularly noteworthy is that even during the Japanese imperial occupation of Korea, when some Koreans succumbed to external forces and became pro-Japanese collaborators, the Korean public demonstrated a resilient national spirit, fiercely resisting the brutal oppression of Japanese imperialism through a remarkable history of independence movements. This provides a hopeful outlook for social movements. Indeed, the driving force behind Korea's unique achievements in industrialization and democratization among numerous post-

colonial nations in the late 20th century can arguably be attributed to the strength of its citizens. Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to systematically construct countermeasures against historical distortions from the perspective of social movement theory. This involves extracting various elements related to countermeasures from a broad foundation, analytically examining the functions, roles, and overall effects of these elements, and structuring their meaningful relationships between these elements into a unified relational system. In other words, it attempts to build a countermeasure system.

Viewed through the lens of sociology's resource mobilization theory, the construction of this countermeasure system can be understood as a process of rationally mobilizing human, material, and symbolic resources associated with social movements to establish a system of practice. Human resources include members, supporters, and leadership; while social activists functionally take the lead, it is essential to adopt an open stance that allows broad participation from various fields such as media, culture, academia, politics, administration, and industry (Na Kahnchae 2016, 68–70; Im Huiseop 1999, 86–92). This aligns with the idea of public history, which is emerging in Western societies. Material resources encompass various elements necessary for practical activities, including venues for gatherings, equipment, broadcasting and sound systems, and funds for purchasing various items. Symbolic resources include the specific goals of movements or assemblies, promotional materials, and

cultural items utilized in events. The basic framework of so constructed countermeasure system involves practical methods that integrate actors, targets, goals, and resources, ultimately creating and implementing an organic system of interactions among these elements.

However, this countermeasure system does not rely solely on the resource mobilization theory of sociology; additional theoretical concepts encompassing significant elements of social movements can also be introduced. For instance, the concept of historical collective identity, which reactivates and contextualizes forgotten historical consciousness within the members of society, can play a role. Similarly, the concept of framing at multiple levels can be effectively utilized to reconstruct and adapt a general countermeasure system to suit specific situations, while concepts like frame alignment and frame extension can further enhance the effectiveness of this system (Snow and Benford 1992; Snow et. al. 1986).

### III. REVIEW OF PRECEDENT COUNTERMEASURES

The distortion of Korean history by Japanese colonial historiography has been developed around various themes based on a long historical background. Similarly, Korea's responses to these distortions, often led by civilian initiatives, have also been marked by significant criticism and

**Figure 1.** Korea’s Response Patterns to Historical distortions

<b>Distortion Content (Period)</b>	<b>Agents</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Reparations from Japan (1952–62)	Civilian Government	Japanese Government	Fair compensation	Government negotiations, civilian resistance social movement	Resolved between governments	Unresolved in civilian sector
Japanese History Textbooks (1953–Present)	Civilian	Japanese government and publishers	Partial correction of distortions	Collective civilian demands for corrections	Partial resolution	Partially resolved
Territorial Sovereignty over Dokdo Island (1951–Present)	Civilian	Japanese government	Securing Korea’s territorial sovereignty	Protests against Japan	Conflicting opinions, in stalemate	Ongoing conflict
Imna Japanese Government (1949–Present)	Civilian	Colonial and Japanese academic historiography	Policy adoption to rectify distortions	Resistance movements, Expert opinions	Ongoing	Active criticism by North Korean academia
Battleship Island UNESCO Registration (2015–2021)	Media	Japanese government	Objection to registration application	Protests to Japan, submission of opinions to the UN	Registration postponed	Successful
Forced Labor Compensation (1999–Present)	Civilian	Mitsubishi Corporation	Compensation for forced labor victims	Site visits demand, protests, fundraising	ROK concession, passive response	successful fundraising



challenges. While government responses have varied depending on the administration, it is undeniable that they have generally exhibited a passive approach.

Figure 1 summarizes the past countermeasures of Korea in response to Japan's historical distortions since the late 20th century. The range of Japan's distortion cases is presumed to be so vast as to be difficult to fully verify. The most prominent cases during this period include issues such as the claims for reparations in the early 1950s, territorial sovereignty over Dokdo, the content of Japanese history textbooks,<sup>5</sup> the inclusion of Battleship Island [군함도] on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, compensation for forced labor victims, and the Imna Japanese Government issue.<sup>6</sup>

When evaluating Korea's responses to the above cases of historical distortion, we can find a few common characteristics and trends. First, one of the distinctive trends in the Korean response methods is the rapid development of civilian actions into intense and radical forms. For instance, large-scale nationwide protests and explosive resistance actions that unfolded around issues such as claims for reparations from Japan, history textbook distortions, and the territorial sovereignty of Dokdo fall into this category. This can be interpreted as a result of historical

experiences between the two countries accumulating in the Korean psyche *over a long durée* (Braudel 1990, 27).

Second, various cases of historical distortion across different fields may have had a cumulative and diffusive effect on adjacent areas over the course of history. During the Japanese colonial period, the anti-humanitarian oppression and exploitation perpetrated by the Japanese, along with the indomitable spirit of resistance demonstrated through the Korean independence movement, may have deeply permeated the foundations of Korean society across various sectors, ultimately manifesting in later generations. This resistance and struggle appear to have transitioned into a broad range of areas, including politics, economics, geography, culture, and textbooks.

Third, from the perspective of the response agents involved, it can be observed that the primary forces behind Korea's responses to Japan's historical distortions have been young students and the general public. Examples include nationwide rallies and demonstrations by young students regarding reparations from Japan, widespread and active resistance by the general public to issues like the distortion of Korean history in Japanese history textbooks and the forced labor and sexual slavery during the Japanese colonial

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<sup>5</sup> Examining only the content of textbooks, it is easily predictable that there are numerous distortion cases in middle and high school history textbooks.

<sup>6</sup> Considering controversies over the nature of the Imna Japanese Government, the locations of Imna-Gaya states, and the existence of Gimun State [기문

국 己汶國], Chimmidarye Confederation [침마다례 枕彌多禮] in the Honam region, this Imna issue also include diverse distortion cases and diverse civic movement organizations addressing each of these issues.

period, as well as the involvement and participation of intellectuals and the general public in issues such as the Imna Japanese Government and the history of Gaya. These response cases reveal the diversity and breadth of the agents involved in response movements. Moreover, the active interest of the Korean government and parts of the political sphere holds potential as a significant resource for future movements against historical distortions. For example, during the Campaign to Halt the Publication of *Jeolla Millennium History* [전라도 천년사 폐기운동] in 2023, the proactive participation of local congresses and the National Assembly—especially the National Assembly’s focus on the issue of historical distortion during a national audit—amplified the controversy to a nationwide level, which is particularly noteworthy.

Fourth, the form of movements can be analyzed in terms of the scale of participation and the duration of activities. In terms of scale, movements exhibit a wide range of variations, from one-person protests to large-scale rallies and demonstrations. One-person protests are a popular and appealing form of demonstration because they do not require notifying authorities of an assembly, thereby minimizing preparation and costs. Nevertheless, one-person protests can sometimes produce effects comparable to large-scale gatherings, particularly when the social prominence of the protester is significant. This is often the case when prominent religious leaders incorporate protests into religious rituals or when

individuals with significant political or economic influence carry out protests. However, it is undeniable that large-scale public demonstrations represent a typical form of social movement. Utilizing unique symbolic resources such as candles or torches during such assemblies often generates significant public resonance. The symbolism of candlelight protests in Korea, for instance, has undeniably attained a level of global historical significance.

Regarding the form of movements, the duration of activities is also an important consideration. While movements can be broadly categorized into short-term and long-term efforts, this aspect requires systematic examination during the planning stage, based on subjective, objective, and environmental factors.

Another aspect of movement forms to examine is the intensity of movements, focusing on the degree of rigor and aggressiveness in their actions. While this often correlates with the agency of the movement, movements generally tend to begin with relatively moderate approaches and gradually develop into more intense and aggressive forms. For instance, in the case of the Jeolla Millennium History Protest Movement, the initial phase focused on discourse struggles through critical statements from various sectors. As the resistance intensified, it progressed to protest rallies, sit-ins, and eventually more confrontational action-based struggles during the sit-ins.

In addition to such aggressive actions, noteworthy are the efforts at addressing issues within the political spheres for

problem solving. Examples include setting agendas within national tasks and legislative campaigns. These activities serve as resources for exploring the ecological aspects of movement theory development.

Finally, it is necessary to evaluate the outcomes of movements. This is particularly important because social movements must not remain as one-time responses; instead, they should provide the foundation for further progress based on continuous and cumulative achievements. Response movements to historical distortions in Korean society inherently require broad and long-term resistance mobilization. From this perspective, the outcomes of the aforementioned cases, while not entirely complete, reveal that certain achievements and partial successes have been realized.

The results reviewed above, focusing on the agents and forms of movements, suggest that social movements in Korea, particularly those addressing historical distortions, possess significant latent potential. These outcomes provide a foundation for anticipating future progress in addressing the long-term issue of countering historical distortions in Korean society. However, the case reviews also reveal certain tasks that need to be addressed. These include the internal development of movement agents, the construction of organic relational systems among agents, the development of more expansive movement fronts, and the enhancement of symbiotic and integrative capacities. Addressing these tasks is

essential for the continued evolution and success of such movements.

#### IV. A NEW EXPLORATION OF COUNTERMEASURES

The process of exploring new countermeasures begins with identifying the structure and processes of responsive practices based on the characteristics of existing countermeasures and the changing circumstances. The fundamental components that define these practices include the actors, targets, objectives, and resources utilized to achieve these objectives. If the interrelation of these components can be termed a *countermeasure structure*, the operation and effectiveness of this structure can be defined as a *countermeasure system*.

The primary direction of countermeasures investigated in this paper is to rectify distorted Korean history and establish a rightful national history. Since the characteristics and limitations of existing countermeasures have already been summarized, the focus here will be on positive and proactive factors. First and foremost, a notable attribute is the strong resilience against distortion. This resilience can be seen as the effect of a spiritual asset honed by the Korean nation-state to survive through prolonged competition with the powerful forces of China and Japan to its north and south since ancient times. This spiritual asset can

be regarded as the source of the vitality of the Korean people.

What is this spiritual asset? It manifests in tangible assets, most notably culture. The ancient cultural practices of extended festivities with singing, dancing, and drinking have today evolved into the global phenomenon of K-pop, K-dramas, and K-cinema—forms of the Korean Wave [*Hallyu*, 한류] that are blooming and spreading the vitality of Korean culture in the hearts of people worldwide.

Another expression of this cultural vitality is the intense wave of social movements demonstrated by the Korean populace in the 20th century.<sup>7</sup> The energy that sprouted economic development from the ashes of the Korean War also emerged from this fountain of passion. Similarly, the resistance and challenges that culminated in the achievement of democracy were fruits borne from this same wellspring. At its core lies the radical explosiveness powered by the collective unity and strength of the people, a primal force that has sustained the vitality of Korea's 5,000-year history. Within this force, one can discern the archetype of today's criticism and resistance movements against historical distortion. As such, the torch of Korean social movements, which blazed fiercely in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, has illuminated the world. If the Paris May

1968 Revolution provided a new perspective for Western civilization in the 20th century, the candlelight revolution in Korea—unparalleled globally—can be seen as the prototype of a new social revolution. This deeply ingrained mentality formed within the fabric of Korean culture over the long *durée* is an asset to national historiography and, in itself, a form of history.

Next, among the changing circumstances, two notable trends warrant attention. First is the extensive development of public history. Second is the formation and activation of numerous social movement actors resisting colonial historiography and rectifying historical distortions. Since public history has already been reviewed, this section will focus on social movements, which form the strategic core of this paper's approach to countermeasures.

What, then, is the strategic core of exploring countermeasures? To put it succinctly, it is the construction of a countermeasure system. A countermeasure system encompasses both the interaction among its components and their effectiveness. Thus, a countermeasure system against historical distortions is fundamentally structured around the interacting components of the countermeasure effort. Considering the characteristics of the historical distortion

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<sup>7</sup> Professor G. Katsiaficas, who collaborated with the author on Korean social movements, interprets that the waves of Korean social movements in the 1980s were a form of "Korean Wave (*Hallyu*)," influencing subsequent events in the Philippines

(1986), Taiwan (1987), Burma (1988), Tiananmen (1989), Thailand (1992), and Indonesia (1998) (Na Kahn-chae & G. Katsiaficas 2006, 16–17).

system outlined earlier, it is crucial to design a system that works efficiently. This paper identifies four primary components for examination: the actors, objectives, targets, and resources of countermeasure movements. By presenting the internal structures of these components in detail, the underlying framework of the system can be understood. Subsequently, the comprehensive configuration of the countermeasure system is established at a higher level, providing an overview of the interrelationships and operational processes involved.

The first component is the actors who constitute the movements countering historical distortions. In social sciences, “actors” refer to agents of action. These actors can be individuals (e.g., one-person protests), groups, or even abstract legal entities. Here, the term “actors of the movement” refers to movement organizations as agents of practice. A movement organization is a social entity composed of multiple members with differentiated roles, working together to form a unified system of action for the organization as a whole. While the degree of role differentiation may vary across cases, the basic role structure in social movement organizations typically includes leaders, core members, general members, supporters, and external sympathizers (Na Kahnchae 2006, 51–61). Furthermore, their composition may differ depending on organizational goals and characteristics—for example, by gender, age, region, function, or whether they operate in political, economic, or cultural-artistic domains.

An important consideration regarding movement actors is the issue of authority structures within the organization and the relationships established with external organizations. The latter is especially critical as the nature of these external relationships can significantly impact the process and outcomes of the movement, necessitating careful evaluation. The formation and trajectory of various coalition organizations during the democratization movement era in late 20th-century Korean society offer meaningful precedents. Examples of such coalition organizations include the National Alliance for Democracy and Reunification [민주주의와 민족통일을 위한 국민연합, 1979], the Youth Alliance for Democratization [민주화운동청년연합 (민청련), 1983], the National Alliance for Democratic Reunification [민주통일민중운동연합 (민통련), 1985], the National Federation of National Democratic Movements [전국민족민주운동연합 (전민련), 1989], and the National Alliance for Democracy and Reunification of Korea [민주주의민족통일전국연합, 1991]. These cases demonstrate how movement organizations can develop over time and elevate the scale of activities (Na Kahnchae 2012, 394–409). Particularly noteworthy is that the highest level of inter-organizational relationships among broad, diverse, and heterogeneous movement organizations was ultimately determined by their capacity to establish nationwide unified alliances.

The response movements of these actors can take the form of direct actions, such as protests and rallies, or exist as outcomes of such actions, like declarations

or songs. These actors, across various levels, express their determination to respond through purposive activities within a given time and space. The content and scope of these activities vary depending on the nature of the movement agents, forming highly complex and expansive movement spaces influenced by the diversity and breadth of themes, geographical particularities and uniqueness's, and temporal factors. Concerning the issues of the Imna Japanese Government and Gaya history, for example, different movement organizations tend to focus on region-specific tasks based on the unique characteristics of their areas, such as Daegu, Gyeongnam, Gyeongbuk, Jeonnam, and Jeonbuk. However, if the respective actors establish interrelated and systematic connections, they can exert greater influence. Similar approaches can be applied to textbook issues, Dokdo-related issues, and forced labor-related problems. Furthermore, there is a need to discuss the possibility of establishing interrelated frameworks across these various issues (frame extension and alignment). The ultimate task in forming movement actors is to establish an umbrella organization capable of holistically coordinating and addressing multiple issues and challenges.

The second component is goal-setting. Goals are set differentially across different levels and categories. For instance, goals can be categorized into general or specific,

long-term or short-term, and general or task-specific. General goals may involve rectifying all distortion-related issues comprehensively, while specific goals focus on addressing specific aspects of those distortions. Movement organizations, therefore, set concrete goals that align with the nature of the tasks raised, based on the levels and categories mentioned above. Goals should be rationally sound and practically achievable, taking into account the temporal and spatial specifics of the distortion issues and the nature of the actors, thereby enhancing their effectiveness.

Interviews with experts actively engaged in efforts to counter historical distortions and colonial historiography reveal meaningful insights regarding goal-setting.<sup>8</sup> When asked about the urgent and critical tasks currently facing Korean society, the Imna Japanese Government issue was identified as the top priority. This was followed by the need to strengthen counterforces against distortion, increase public awareness and civic participation, enhance political power, and establish the correct national legacy in Korean history. One interview response highlights a statement made during negotiations between representatives of Korea and Japan. According to this testimony, a Japanese representative admitted, "It is true that we created colonial historiography. However, after we left, we expected you to correct it, but you didn't."<sup>9</sup> This reveals the

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<sup>8</sup> This survey was conducted on 12 researchers and civic activists addressing colonial historiography and historical distortions in April 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Lee\*\*'s testimony (April 25, 2023).

## COUNTERMEASURES TO HISTORICAL DISTORTIONS

extent to which domestic pro-Japanese colonial historiography has infected the national spirit and underscores how deep and pervasive the roots of historical distortion are.

The third component is the target of movements. From a practical perspective, the direct targets of movements against historical distortions include researchers who produce distortions, educators who spread them, bureaucrats and businesspeople who support and protect these activities, and politicians who institutionalize them. Korea's movements to counter historical distortions are planned and implemented by targeting these various actors and their actions. These actors also form their own distortion system—or a cartel—within a closely interrelated organizational context. Therefore, countermeasure systems targeting this distortion system must be composed of organizations and activities capable of effectively opposing it.

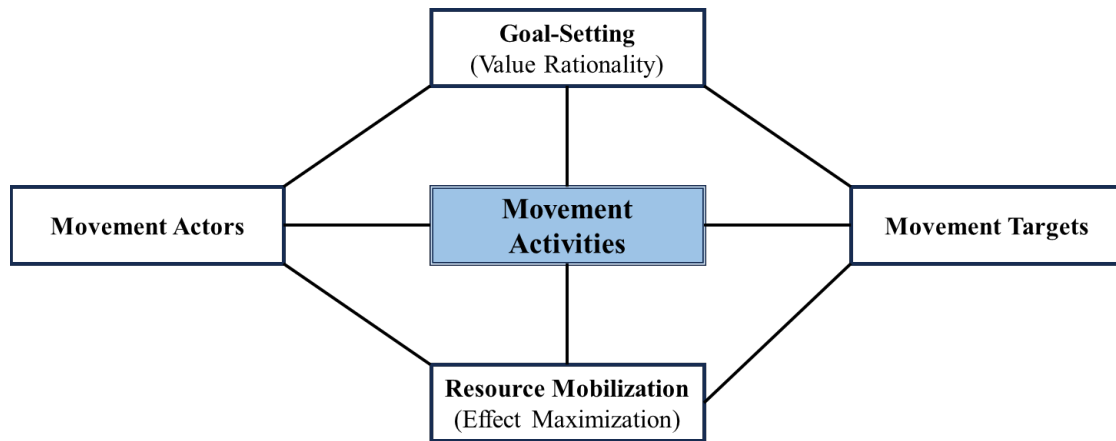
Additionally, the countermeasure system may include indifferent or less interested intermediaries and foreign-dependent masses as its targets. From a broader societal perspective, these groups hold decisive importance in the movement to rectify historical distortions because they constitute the majority of society and significantly influence public opinion. Youth, the elderly, university students, women, and laborers or farmers also become critical targets for promotion and enlightenment efforts. Raising their awareness of the legitimacy of the movement to rectify historical distortions

and helping them understand correct national history and its development can strengthen solidarity with the movement and motivate participation. This process establishes a collective identity rooted in the legitimacy of the historical movement. To achieve it, it is essential to develop a resonant and compelling interpretive frame for the cause.

The last component is the issue of resource mobilization. A variety of resources are necessary for the effective execution of movements against historical distortions. These resources can be broadly categorized into human and material resources. Human resources include core activists, members, specialists with unique skills, volunteers, and collaborators. These individuals utilize various resources to convert onlookers into supporters and supporters into members. Material resources encompass essential items such as funds, power, facilities, promotional materials, literary and artistic creations, interpretive frames, and other necessities for activities. Additionally, factors such as risks and costs that hinder participation and opportunities or rewards that promote participation must also be considered.

The significance of resources mobilization is prominent especially in Korea's response movement against historical distortions, as the opponents wield a multifaceted and comprehensive system of influence and power across academic, political, economic, and sociocultural spheres. Consequently, response movements must take into account the capabilities of distortion forces

**Figure 2.** The Composition of the Response System



and equip themselves with the strength to adequately manage and suppress them. Although the anti-national and anti-democratic behaviors of distortion forces throughout history provide response movements with ideological leverage and historical legitimacy, careful preparation to counter the tools and methods employed by distortion forces remains critical.

The concept of the interpretive frame in social movement theory warrants further elaboration. An interpretive frame in the context of social movements or collective actions refers to the conceptual framework that provides participants with justification and meaning for their involvement in the movement. It includes the movement's goals and action strategies, serving as both the movement's justification and an incentive for participation. Notably, the interpretive frame often undergoes various changes as a movement progresses. Such changes may involve modification, supplementation, expansion, or contraction, as well as the formation of alliances or

conflicts with adjacent social movement organizations. These factors must be considered carefully (Im Hquiseop 1999, 136–142).

Figure 2 illustrates the overall structure of the countermeasure system consisting of above-mentioned components. As shown in the figure, each movement unit should aim to maximize effectiveness by establishing an organically integrated relationship among the key elements and ensuring their synergistic functioning.

The countermeasure system can be formed at various levels depending on the scope, degree of abstraction, or nature of the task. For instance, a countermeasure system addressing comprehensive tasks at a nationwide level will have a broad and general character. In contrast, a system focusing on specific tasks in particular regions will adopt more field-oriented and practical content. This structural flexibility allows diverse countermeasure systems to form efficient and mutually beneficial



collaboration and integration within close-knit networks. The goal of overcoming historical distortion is a task of national historical significance, directly tied to the destiny of the nation and people over Korea's 5,000-year history. This underlines the importance of facilitating the smooth formation and development of countermeasure systems to address this critical challenge.

### **V. CONCLUSION: TASKS AND PROSPECTS**

This study recognizes the severe issue of Korea's history being distorted by neighboring countries and domestic forces aligned with external powers, seeking effective countermeasures against these distortion efforts. For Korea, situated between the powerful nations of China and Japan, countering these distortions is both critical and urgent. The more troubling reality is that Koreans themselves are often central to these distortional efforts. Specifically, the forces distorting Korean history consist of Japan's political powers and domestic vested interests aligned with them. In contrast, those resisting and criticizing colonial historiography are primarily civilian-led groups preserving the history and traditions of nationalist historiography.

Against this backdrop, this research examined major distortion cases between Korea and Japan since the late 20th century, analyzed their characteristics and trends,

and systematically explored countermeasures. The proposed new countermeasure, named the "countermeasure system," integrates complex factors systematically. These factors are categorized into four key components: actors, goals, targets, and resources. The study emphasizes the potential to maximize the effectiveness of anti-distortion movements through the organic organization and operation of these components.

Rectifying the history of subjugation to foreign powers and reclaiming self-identity and dignity is an unavoidable task for Koreans. It is a matter of national destiny and preserving the Korean spirit and soul. Korea's 5,000-year history demonstrates the enduring resilience and practical determination of the Korean people to overcome repeated crises.

In addition to this invaluable historical heritage, recent societal trends in Korea present promising prospects. These can be summarized in two points. First, rising from the ashes of the Korean War, Korea achieved both economic development and political democracy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, it has joined the ranks of advanced nations and is solidifying its position as a leading cultural nation on the global stage. This innate capacity of the Korean people inspires optimism for a bright future.

Second, movements opposing historical distortions and colonial historiography have experienced rapid growth in recent years. Numerous academic research institutes and

professional researchers are producing knowledge that is being shared with the public through the development of public history.<sup>10</sup> This, in turn, has considerably strengthened social movements aiming to eradicate colonial historiography and establish a nationalist perspective on history, as seen in the establishment of civic organizations in Seoul and other regions.<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, two critical points must be emphasized. Colonial historiographers often frame nationalist historiography as extreme chauvinism. This argument lacks validity, as Korea's nationalist historiography is fundamentally defensive and protective against the aggressive distortions of powerful neighboring nations. Examples such as Eulji Mundeok's [을지문덕] victory at the Battle of Salsu, Yang Manchun's [양만춘] defense of Ansi Fortress, and Yi Sun-sin's [이순신] triumph at the Battle of Myeongnyang illustrate this defensive nature. Nevertheless, caution is needed to ensure that nationalist historiography does not devolve into exclusivity or extreme chauvinism. One of the beautiful and remarkable traditions in the long history of Korea is the rarity of instances where it

invaded neighboring countries. In other words, the fundamental spirit of our nation is rooted in the philosophy of *Hongik Ingan* [홍익인간 弘益人間, meaning "broadly benefiting people"] and good neighborliness [선린사상 善隣思想]. This fact, when viewed against the backdrop of powerful empires driven by self-centered, instinctive ambitions for conquest, highlights the unique philosophy and history of Korea as a valuable model for the future society to aspire to. It also raises the hope that Korea can develop into a leading nation in promoting global peace and mutual coexistence on a planetary scale.

Second, the deepening antagonism between nationalist and colonial historiography in Korean society is a significant concern for the future development of the nation. Regardless of differing perspectives, a rational and open communication structure is urgently needed. Recognizing that historical distortions stem from differences in factual records and interpretative meanings, both sides must acknowledge these differences and engage in open discussions. Through communication and debate, the nation can reconcile its differences and overcome heterogeneity, paving the way for

<sup>10</sup> Examples include World Society of Hwandan History and Culture [세계환단학회], Hangaram Institute of History and Culture [한가람역사문화연구소], Institute of Ancient Joseon at Inha University [인하대 고조선연구소], Korean Gaya Buddhism Society [가야불교연구회], and so on.

<sup>11</sup> Major organizations focusing on the Imna-Gaya issue include the Right History Council for the Future (Misahyeop) [미래로가는바른역사협의회], Daehan History and Culture Association [대한사랑], Korea Culture Community [한류열풍사랑], National

Solidarity for Historical Normalization [역사교육정상화전국연대], National Solidarity for the Correction of Colonial History and Gaya History [식민사관청산가야국사전국연대] and its regional organizations, Namwon Gaya History Correction Group [남원가야역사바로알기시민모임], Sangju Hamchang Mungyeong Gaya Promotion Association [상주함창문경고령가야선양회], Gaya Cultural Promotion Foundation [사단법인 가야문화진흥원], Citizen's Coalition for Correct History [바른역사시민연대], etc. (<https://www.daehansarang.org/post/6327>).

academic growth and societal integration. Activating open public forums can raise Korean society and history to a higher level, fostering hope for a brighter future.

**Key Words**

Historical distortion, colonial historiography, positivist historiography, nationalist historiography, public history, system of distortion, countermeasure system, social movement theory

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