

The Korean Way of War: Within the Framework of the Strategy of Annihilation and Attrition

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

The Korean Way of War: Within the Framework of the Strategy of Annihilation and Attrition, MAJ Kwonwoo Kim, the ROK Army, 65 pages.

This monograph attempts to identify the Korean way of war by analyzing Korean military history through the framework of a strategy of annihilation and attrition. The paper assumes that Korea, a small state surrounded by strong neighbors during the last 5,000 years, was able to protect its identity, language, and culture due to its own way of war. Such a way of war was established and has been shaped by the interaction of various elements of Korea's strategic context. These elements range from geography, economic resources, history, civil-military relations, socio-political context, and strategic culture. On the contrary to the dominant discourse about achieving a quick and decisive victory within the Republic of Korea (ROK) Army, such a victory does not seem to fit in the Korean historical context. Historical cases have proved that optimistic wishes of quick and decisive victory often became a delusion that was alien to reality on the ground. The author, thus, hypothesizes that the way of war Korea has pursued throughout history is tied to the strategy of attrition and not the strategy of annihilation. Such awareness is the foundation on which the development of the future Korean way of war must reflect.

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Acknowledgements

Facing the rapidly changing international situation and the advanced science and technology that evolves day by day, the ROK Army, as the central actor for the national security, is required to adapt to this changing environment. At the heart of this adaptation is always the issue of ‘how to fight’ in order to effectively respond to various security threats of the present and future. Before asking a question of how we should fight, I thought we should ask how we have been fighting first. If there has been our own way of conducting wars and one can identify the elements that have influenced the formation of such a unique way of war, those elements should not be overlooked in developing our own way of war for the future. Therefore, I have written this monograph with the intention that the research that identifies the ways of war in the past can be a bridge between the present and the future.

Given this, firstly, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Eric Price whose disciplined guide helped me maintain my focus throughout the research and writing. I would also like to thank my seminar group leader, Colonel Diehl, for his full support and understanding my difficulties as an international student writing this monograph in a second language.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the ROK Army for supporting me to study in the United States for a valuable time of two years. When I return, I will have to do my best to apply the lessons learned here and to contribute to strengthening the security of my mother nation. Finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my beloved family, Bogeun, Seoyoung, and Sihyun who helped me to focus on the research.

Acronyms

DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
MND	Ministry of National Defense
PLA	People's Liberation Army
ROK	Republic of Korea
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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Introduction

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking for, nor trying to turn into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.

— Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

In 2017, the Republic of Korea (ROK) Ministry of National Defense (MND) announced that the new wartime operational plan of the ROK military would pursue a quick and decisive victory to annihilate the enemy regime.¹ This new war plan resonated with operational plans of the US military carried out during the Gulf War in 1991 and 2003. The similarities between ROK and US forces need to be explained in more detail, but there will be no objection that the modern ROK military resembles that of the United States. In particular, as seen by the recently announced ROK operational plan, the way of war that the ROK military is pursuing today is similar to that of the US military, which pursues a quick and decisive victory by complete destruction of the enemy through the annihilation of the enemy's military power.

Indeed, the American way of war in the modern era can be characterized as the pursuit of quick and decisive victory as manifested in Wars in 1991 and 2003.² Russell F. Weigley, in his seminal book *The American Way of War*, wrote that “when American military resources were still slight, America made a promising beginning in the nurture of strategists of attrition; but the wealth of the country and its adoption of unlimited aims in war cut that development short, until

¹ Yong-won Yoo and Minsuk Lee. “The ROK create a ROK-led operation plan capable of occupying Pyongyang within weeks of the beginning of the war,” *Chosun Ilbo*, August 29, 2017, accessed October 15, 2018, http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2017/08/29/2017082900191.html?Dep0=twitter&d=2017082900191.

² Max Boot, “The New American Way of War,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 1, 2003, accessed August 12, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2003-07-01/new-american-way-war>.

the strategy of annihilation became characteristically the American way in war.”³ In John Grenier’s explanation, the creation of the American way of war is rooted in fighting Indians in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. By 1730, Americans had created their first way of war centered on attacking and destroying Indians, including noncombatants, which has remained part of the American military heritage. In this context, Grenier argued that students of history and practitioners of the profession of arms needed to understand the nature of American martial culture by acknowledging the centrality of the American first way of war.⁴ While the American way of war reflects the way Americans live, Samuel Huntington wrote that planning to win quickly should be the American way of war.⁵ Max Boot also argued in his article ‘The New American Way of War’ that America, based on its success and myths from the first and second Gulf War, should pursue a new American way of war that aims at a quick and decisive victory.⁶

Of course, there is still an ongoing discussion in defining the American way of war, since it needs to be addressed within a more complex historical and social context.⁷ However, as many scholars have already argued, it is also clear that the US Armed Forces today have a tendency to pursue a quick and decisive victory based on their advanced technologies. With the recent announcement to pursue a quick and decisive victory, it seems that the ROK military is following the path America’s military has established.

Indeed, not only the operational plan, but today’s ROK forces resemble the US military in terms of systems, equipment, organization, and doctrine. This can be understood in the context

³ Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War* (Bloomington: University of Indiana, 1973), xxii.

⁴ John Grenier, *The First Way of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15.

⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *American Military Strategy* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1986), 15, 33.

⁶ Boot, “The New American Way of War.”

⁷ For instance, in his article “Toward An American Way of War,” Antulio J. Echevarria II argued that American way of war was more a way of battle than an actual way of war.

of the development of ROK and US relations since the end of World War II. In 1946, the United States assisted the ROK in establishing its constabulary force, which became the foundation of the modern ROK military. Immediately after its establishment in 1948, the modern ROK military experienced the Korean War, which necessitated the quick modernization of the military in response to the North Korean threat during the Cold War era. In this early phase of the modernization process, US support and aid were crucial.⁸ After liberation, in South Korea, Americanization became an axis of modernization and the basis of government policies. This trend has been in Korea for seventy years, where the United States became an entity to be imitated, especially during the Cold War and the post-Cold War eras in Korea. As a result, the strategy of annihilation that the modern US military has pursued became embedded in the ROK military's perception.

Pursuing a quick victory, however, is not merely a product of US influence. Because of its geographical proximity, Korea has been interacting with China for a long time, absorbing its ancient philosophy and culture. Several foundational philosophies such as Confucianism, Taoism, and legalism affected Korea. Sun-Tzu's theory of warfare, as a crystallization of these ancient Chinese philosophical ideas, had also been deeply embedded in Korean military thought. According to Kwangsoo Kim, Sun-Tzu's Art of Warfare was spread on the Korean Peninsula during the three kingdoms of *Koguryo*, *Baekje*, and *Silla* on the Korean peninsula in the first century.⁹ Since then, Sun-Tzu's ideas appeared in various ancient books in Korea and have been influencing Korean military thoughts. One of Sun-Tzu's many dictums is, "in war prize the quick

⁸ In-Bum Chun, "Korean Defense Reform: History and Challenges," Brookings, October 31, 2017, accessed September 6, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/korean-defense-reform-history-and-challenges/>.

⁹ 김광수 [Kim, Kwangsoo]. *손자병법* [*The Art of Warfare*] (Seoul: 책세상 [Bookworld], 1999), 459.

victory, not the protracted engagement.”¹⁰ In this sense, it is fair to say that pursuing a quick and decisive victory has been an ideal objective that is not alien to both America and Korea.

The problem, however, is that achieving quick and decisive victory through the annihilation of the enemy has never been easy. Many historical cases have often proved that optimistic wishes of quick and decisive victory became a delusion that was alien to reality on the ground. At the dawn of the Mexican War in 1846, James K. Polk, the US President, and his staff had expected a short war, which, however, lasted almost two years and resulted in thousands of casualties.¹¹ At the time of World War I, Germany’s Wilhelm II promised his soldiers who left the battlefield in August that they would be able to return home before the fall.¹² Of course, the German General Staff also made a more realistic prediction that the war would last from six months to two years. But the war lasted more than four years, and more than 10 million casualties occurred. During the American Civil War, both sides did not expect the war to be prolonged, and the volunteered soldiers at the time were required to serve for ninety days, but that period had to be extended.¹³ General McArthur met Truman at Wake Island in October 1950, asserting that the war would end soon, but the results were different from his expectations.¹⁴ Not only the Korean War but also Korea’s experience in the past, especially, manifested in its wars against invaders also proves that pursuing annihilation of the enemy does not explain how Korea has conducted war against its enemies and adversaries. Just as the above examples, as well as more historical

¹⁰ Roger T. Ames, *Sun Tzu: The Art of Warfare* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 109.

¹¹ Peter Guardino, *The Dead March: A History of the Mexican-American War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 205.

¹² Holger H. Herwig, “Germany and the “Short-War” Illusion: Toward a New Interpretation?” *The Journal of Military History*. 66, no. 3 (July, 2002): 682.

¹³ Mark R. Wilson, *The Business of Civil War: Military Mobilization and the State, 1861-1865* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 7.

¹⁴ James F. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: the First Year. United States Army in the Korean War* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2011), 212.

examples, prove, we have seen many cases of hopeful wishes became a delusion that is alien to reality on the ground.

If so, should Korea's approach to war be continued to develop in the direction of pursuing a quick and decisive victory? Is it only a wishful hope or a feasible goal to pursue a quick and decisive victory through annihilation of the enemy? If we cannot pursue this strategy, what are the alternatives? What kind of way of war has Korea been pursuing? Ultimately, what is the Korean way of war? This study has begun to seek answers to these questions.

Given this, this monograph attempts to identify the Korean way of war by analyzing Korean military history.¹⁵ The paper assumes that Korea, a small state surrounded by strong neighbors during the last 5,000 years, was able to protect its identity, language, and culture due to its own way of war. Based on preliminary research, it seems that pursuing a quick and decisive victory does not fit within a Korean context. The author, thus, hypothesizes that way of war Korea has pursued throughout history is one tied to the strategy of attrition and not the strategy of annihilation.

This paper, however, does not intend to reveal whether the Korean way of war is simply a strategy of annihilation or attrition. The study will evaluate wars throughout Korean history, using the strategic framework of ends, ways, and means.¹⁶ These criteria distinguish the strategy of annihilation and attrition. The paper will explain how ends, ways, and means of two different strategies could be different. This paper also attempts to provide qualitative and quantifiable

¹⁵ The Korean way of war herein after denotes the way of war for the Republic of Korea and its preceding dynasties. Democratic People's Republic of Korea's way of war is out of the scope of this research.

¹⁶ This does not mean that Strategy is merely about ends, ways, and means. How to define a strategy is beyond the scope of this research, and it requires examining a quite amount of study to deepen the understanding of strategy. The author sees the strategy as the evolving concept according to its circumstance. However, again, due to the limited space of this paper, this study adopts the definition of Arthur F. Lykke's "Defining Military Strategy = E + W + M" in 1989.

criteria that distinguish the strategy of annihilation and attrition.

In addition, this paper will examine the elements of strategic context upon which the Korean way of war has been reflected throughout history. As Peter L. Berger and Thomas Lukeman argue that knowledge, which includes military thoughts, are socially constructed, the process of embedding military thoughts in institutions and their members' perception is also closely influenced by the social environment.¹⁷ In this context, defining the Korean way of war cannot be understood without considering its strategic context that integrates political, social, economic, cultural, historical, and other aspects of society.

Thus, this study relies on qualitative research to identify the Korean way of war from a social and historical point of view. However, due to the nature of the topic, vast amounts of data are required to define a Korean way of war while space is necessarily limited. Therefore, this study intends to establish the conceptual framework for the long-term research that will continue. Given this point, this paper will be organized in the following manner.

First, chapter one addresses the concept of a national way of war. Based on the preliminary research, it seems that the concept of a way of war is more action-oriented than merely military thought. Also, it seems that the conceptual scope of approaching the way of war only from the dimension of military strategy may be reduced.

Therefore, in the second chapter, the paper conceptually defines the way in which a state conducts its war and examines the implication of defining a national way of war. The second chapter also introduces Hans Delbruck's concept of annihilation and exhaustion, including a long-standing discussion on the strategy of annihilation and the strategy of exhaustion, or attrition, as its primary conceptual framework. The research identifies the criteria that distinguish

¹⁷ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 15-17.

the strategies of annihilation and attrition and briefly describe what modern historical cases correspond to each strategy.

The third chapter identifies the characteristics of the Korean way of war through the lenses of annihilation or attrition by studying representative wars in Korean history: the Mongol invasion in *Goryeo* Dynasty, the Japanese invasion in *Choson* Dynasty, and the Korean War in the modern era. Each is analyzed through the framework of strategy (annihilation and attrition). This chapter will also examine the influence of different elements of strategic context, such as socio-political elements, economic resources, geography, and so on, in formulating the Korean way of war. Lastly, this paper will discuss the implication of defining the Korean way of war, suggesting further research requirements.

The Concepts of Annihilation and Attrition

The first part of this chapter addresses the concept of a national way of war, introducing previous and ongoing discussion about defining a national way of war and its implications. Since resources on how Korea conducts its war are scarce, this part presents the methodology of how the national way of war hypothesis has been proved or criticized over time and space. Then, the second part of this chapter introduces Hans Delbruck's concept of annihilation and exhaustion. This part expands the scope of discussion from Clausewitz's theory of strategy to the contemporary framework based on Delbruck's theory.

Part 1: What is way of War?

The process of defining a national way of war requires an understanding of the distinction between the universal nature of war and the particular characteristics of war. That is, while there is a common nature of war across time and space, each war has unique characteristics reflecting its own time and space, especially those of the countries involved. Clausewitz mentions the universality and particularity of war in the very first chapter of *On War*. While Clausewitz defines the universal nature of war as “an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will,” he also wrote, “the war is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case.”¹⁸ In Colin Gray's words, the universal nature of a strategy is different from particular characteristics of strategies.¹⁹ In this regard, Samuel Huntington, in his work, *American Military Strategy*, wrote, “American strategy and the process by which it is made must reflect the nature of American society.”²⁰ He further argued, “The US military establishment is a product of and

¹⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*. Edited and translated by Peter Paret and Michael Howard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 75, 89.

¹⁹ Colin Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24-27.

²⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, *American Military Strategy* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies,

reflects American geography, culture, society, economy, and history...one should not be swept off one's feet by the romantic illusion that American can be taught to fight wars the way Germans, Israelis, and even British do."²¹ In other words, the process of defining a national way of war is based on the assumption that a particular country has characteristics that distinguish it from other countries in the way it uses national instruments of power in the phenomenon of war. Given this, one can infer that each war can be understood in its particular context and that the way each nation performs war can also be defined in the particularity of its context.

Therefore, in order to define the manner in which a war is carried out by a state, it is necessary to identify the continuity of these distinguishing features, if any. In addition, identifying the variables that have affected such distinguishing features and continuity should be followed. Above all, it is important to understand the dynamic interplay of a national way of war and the variables that affect it and vice versa.

Discussions on national ways of war have been extensive, based on a wide variety of perspectives. These existing discussions have also dealt with various causal factors that determine a national way of war. In addition, various claims have been made about how these causal variables play a role in the relationship between continuity and particularity of the national way of war.

The concept of a national way of war dates from the 1930s when Basil H. Liddell Hart published *the British Way in Warfare*.²² Liddell Hart argued that there has been a distinctively British practice of war, based on experience and proved by three centuries of lessons learned. From its awakening in the Elizabethan age to the Napoleonic wars, Liddell Hart argued, British

University of California, Berkeley, 1986), 15, 33.

²¹ Huntington, *American Military Strategy*, 13.

²² Lawrence Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1.

historic practice was based on economic pressure exercised through sea-power.²³ In Liddell Hart's explanation, the British way of war was the practice of the British strategy in wars. His strategy, however, did not mean merely a military strategy, but a concept of grand strategy that is broader than the use of the military, encompassing the political and economic realms. Liddell Hart also explained that the British understood and practiced this concept of grand strategy due to its natural conditions. That is, Great Britain, an independent island nation within Europe, was able to distance itself in intervening on the continent. In particular, Liddell Hart said, "By our practice, we safeguarded ourselves, where we were weakest, and exerted our strengths, and the enemy was weakest."²⁴ Focused on the economic realm, Great Britain had also pursued a strategy based on an indirect approach. Such an approach imposed pressure on the enemy through the maritime domain or maximized its influence through economic support for all possible allies. In short, the British way of war, according to Liddell Hart, was close to the strategy that encompasses not only the use of force but also the political and economic spheres. Its particular geographical condition was also a determinant factor in shaping the British way of war.

In Liddell Hart's description, the national way of war is a state's practice of strategy in war. Such an attempt to identify the British way of war became a model for others in defining their own national way of war afterward.²⁵ One of following attempts was Russell Weigley's approach to identify the American way of war.

In his classic work *The American Way of War*, Weigley viewed American war history since the American Revolutionary War to define US strategy in the history of warfare. Weigley argued that, in order to understand the way America has conducted its warfare, one must consider

²³ Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *The British Way in Warfare* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1932), 37.

²⁴ Liddell Hart, *The British Way in Warfare*, 39.

²⁵ Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War*, 2.

the practical application of strategic thinking in the war the United States has been pursuing.²⁶ That is, one needs to trace back the history of ideas expressed in action. Accordingly, Weigley argued that the United States, unlike Britain, has traditionally pursued a strategy of using military force to destroy enemy troops. Weigley, however, also wrote, “when American military resources were still slight, America made a promising beginning in the nurture of strategists of attrition; but the wealth of the country and its adoption of unlimited aims in war cut that development short, until the strategy of annihilation became characteristically the American way in war.”²⁷ In other words, the American way of war has been determined by its military and economic capabilities. As a result, the destruction of an enemy’s armed forces became the leading principle as American military and economic capability became great enough to make the destruction of an enemy’s armed forces an object worth contemplating. Weigley’s approach that a national way of war is the practice of strategy shaped by environmental variables was not much different from that of Liddell Hart.

Apart from the credibility of Weigley’s claim, his work became the starting point of academic discussions that subsequently identified the American way of war. Max Boot contended that America’s military has practiced more than one way of war. Unlike Weigley, Boot argued that the US military has been involved in small-scale wars such as the Boxer Rebellion, the Philippine Insurrection, and interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Somalia.²⁸ These small-scale wars contributed to the rise of the United States as a world power, thus, should be a tradition, the American way of war. Meanwhile, Eliot Cohen argued that the conflict in Kosovo revealed a distinctive new American way of war. Reflecting the age of high tech, low politics, and public

²⁶ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, xx.

²⁷ *Ibid*, xxii.

²⁸ Max Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), xv-xvi.

inattention, the new American way of war is characterized by aggressiveness and a propensity to seek decisive battle and typified by a greater preference for precision bombing.²⁹ Antulio J. Echevarria further argued that American strategic thinkers tend to bifurcate and separate the military professionals and policymakers. That is, while military professionals concentrate on actual fighting, policymakers focus on the diplomatic struggles. The new American way of war, thus, should be able to turn combat success into favorable strategic outcomes.³⁰

Despite these abundant existing studies, this chapter, however, is not intended to explain what the American way of war is. Rather, it pays more attention to the process by which the previous researchers have identified the national way of war. These claims either support or criticize Weigley's argument, analyzing multiple variables of history, technology, and political and social context. It can be seen that their arguments draw different conclusions depending on which variables are weighted. Other studies that have considered more causal factors besides natural conditions and military and economic capabilities in explaining a national way of war.

In a similar vein, Robert M. Citino surveyed Prussian and German war-making within the broad context of the seventeenth century to the twentieth century. According to Citino, there are distinct and continued characteristics of the German way of war. First, the German way of war had developed to be an aggressor rather than a defender. Due to its geostrategic condition, surrounded by strong neighbors such as Austria, France, and Russia, Germany had to be proactive to take initiative. Second, the German way of war also pursued the enemy's flank or rear to achieve a decisive victory through annihilation. As demonstrated in the Franco-Prussian War, the

²⁹ Eliot A. Cohen, "Kosovo and the New American Way of War," in *War Over Kosovo: Politics and Strategy in a Global Age*, edited by Andrew J. Bacevich and Eliot A. Cohen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 38-62.

³⁰ Antulio J. Echevarria, "Toward an American Way of War," Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2004, 17-18, accessed September 13, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11199>.

First World War, and the Second World War, the German army attacked relentlessly, to give the enemy no rest. Third, *Auftragstaktik* was another distinct feature of the German way of war that maximized the independence of subordinate commanders. It is noteworthy that Citino pointed out *Auftragstaktik* reflected Prussia's social system, the distinct social contract between the king and the Junker nobility.³¹ While the Junkers swore fealty, the king, in return, allowed them near-total dominance over the serfs. This social arrangement to preserve the sovereignty of the Prussian nobility also applied to the relations between the king and generals. Lastly, the German way of war always pursued a short war due to Germany's lack of resources to sustain a long war. Citino wrote, "A long war meant a war of attrition, and poor, small Prussia would always find itself at a disadvantage against larger, better-heeled neighbors."³² In this regard, Citino identified the continuity of the German way of war as affected by its broad context of geographical condition; social, political, and historical dimensions; and economic resources.

The complexity of understanding a national way of war lies not only in its broad context but also in its changing dynamics of context. As the state and society are open systems, traditional characteristics of a state can evolve into new characteristics with external influences over time. Therefore, identifying a national way of war should take into account not only the history of military strategy applied in the war but also the context of political and social history that has changed due to political and external influences.

Walter Pintner in his description of the evolution of Russian military thought argued the Russian way of war has developed based on the interaction between two schools of thought.³³ On

³¹ Robert Citino, *The German Way of War* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2005), 308.

³² Citino, *The German Way of War*, 311.

³³ Peter Paret, Gordon Alexander Craig, and Felix Gilbert. *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 354.

one hand, the Russian national school, represented by the Peter the Great, Alexander Suvorov, and M. I. Dragomirov, adopted the Frederician model that put emphasis on loyalty and morale. The national school recognized the defense in depth as part of the Russian tradition. On the other hand, pro-western theorists and practitioners including Colonel A. A. Neznamov believed that the goal of war remained the destruction of the enemy in a quick and decisive battle. Pinter further argued that Russian social and political transformation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries along with humiliation in the Crimean War and Russo-Japanese War affected Russian strategic thought. That is, while the interaction between Russia and the West served as the two pillars, Russian strategic thinkers had to grapple with the threefold problem of the glorious Russian military past, the depressing contemporary experiences, and their wish to gain worldwide recognition.³⁴ In short, Russian way of war, according to Pinter, should be understood within the continuity of the interaction between tradition and Western concepts and within the broad context of the country's particular social and political development.

China has also developed its unique way of war over a long time, interacting with its broad and changing contexts. To understand the evolution of China's way of war, it is necessary to understand the major changes in ancient, pre-modern, and modern Chinese society.

Ancient Chinese military thought, which is the basis of China's way of war today, reflects the chaotic political situation of the Spring and Autumn period. Chinese foundational philosophies such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism had already been formed around 700 BC. Since then, the contention of the 'Hundred Schools of Thought' has provided theoretical foundations of Chinese military thought reflected in seven military classics: *Sunzi Bingfa*, *Wuzi*, *Simafa*, *Six Secret Teachings*, *Weiliaozi*, *Three Strategies of the Duke of Yellow Rock*, and

³⁴ Paret, Craig, and Gilbert. *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 374.

*Questions and Replies between Tang Taizong and Duke Li of Wei*³⁵ Especially, *Sunzi Bingfa*, the Art of Warfare, crystallized these philosophies and provided the basis of China's way of war. Sun-Tzu regarded the military as a means for achieving the objective of grand strategy and emphasized that using military force is not the best way. Thus, he claimed, "to win a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the highest excellence; the highest excellence is to subdue the enemy's army without fighting at all."³⁶ In this regards, Sun-Tzu's guide for warfare was to focus on establishing a strategic advantage (*Shih*). Such lessons were the reflection of the political and social contexts of the mentality of the Spring and Autumn period when rulers often indulged in military adventures with irrationality.³⁷ Ironically, Sun-Tzu never once mentioned the importance of technology or weapons systems. According to Kwangsoo Kim, the lack of emphasis on technology and weapons systems is also relevant to the context of the time, which did not undergo a radical technological revolution.³⁸ Thus, the ancient Chinese way of war rooted in Sun-Tzu's theory was humiliated by modern Western technology and professional military during the Opium Wars and the Sino-Japanese War.

From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, as Western imperialism and Communism penetrated into China, the traditional Chinese way of war began to be influenced by the Western powers. Mao Tse-tung unified China through a new form of warfare that combined the extraordinary richness of China's ancient strategic legacy and Marxism.³⁹

³⁵ David Andrew Graff, and Robin Higham, *A Military History of China* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), 97-99.

³⁶ Ames, *Sun Tzu*, 111.

³⁷ Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War*, translated by Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 8.

³⁸ 김광수 [Kim, Kwangsoo]. *손자병법* [*The Art of Warfare*] (Seoul: 책세상 [Bookworld], 1999), 46.

³⁹ Timothy L. Thomas, "China's Concept of Military Strategy," *Parameters* 44, no. 4 (Winter 2014-15), accessed January 3, 2018, <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital>

Since then, China has demonstrated the power of Chinese troops in regional conflicts, including the Korean War, through the new China's way of war. Today, the Chinese army is reborn as one of the best modern armies, qualitatively and quantitatively, based on enormous capital and Western technology. As such, China has developed its own way of war in the context of economic and political transformation. The process of development of China's way of war shows how the military thought of one country has evolved and interacted in the context of a broad range of politics, society, economy, and culture over time.

The task of identifying a national way of war needs to consider how the periodic strategists and military thoughts interact with not only the broad, but also changing and evolving, contexts of politics, society, economy, and history of the time. Recent studies have explored the continuity and particularity of these broad contexts by applying the concept of culture.

Victor Davis Hanson, in his book *The Western Way of War*, argued that Western dominance derives from its culture, which prioritized and exploited technological advancement. Hanson argued that the origins of the Western way of war originated in the ancient Greek infantry battle. "Like the classical Greeks, who employed no reserves, flank attacks, or rear guard," wrote Hanson, "American [Western] thinkers have given more importance to the immediate application of power against the enemy than the arts of maneuver and envelopment."⁴⁰ He expanded his claim by examining the wars from the ancient Greek to Vietnam. Hanson argued that the underlying values of Western culture such as rationalism, individualism, and civic duty led to its significant advantages, in terms of technological dominance, military organization, discipline, morale, initiative, flexibility, and command.⁴¹ Hanson's argument pointed to Western culture as a

library/articles/article.html/190449/pdf.

⁴⁰ Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: The Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 10.

⁴¹ Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power*

major cause of victory, especially in regard to technology development.

Isabel V. Hull explained the evolution of the German way of war within the more holistic context of its ‘military culture.’ Military culture, by her definition, is “a way of understanding why an army acts as it does in war.”⁴² Hull argued, seven main factors determine how the general military culture fashioned itself over time. These seven main factors include the military’s place in state and society; its task; hierarchical and rigidly imperative organization; the resources at its disposal; its gender constituent; and its past history.⁴³ In the case of Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, its military culture developed with a lack of civilian oversight and cohesive governance that reinforced the military’s solipsism.⁴⁴ Hull also introduced other causal factors, such as technology, ideology, racism, and imperialism that could have affected the German way of war. These considerations, according to Hull, however, provided less convincing arguments in explaining the critical role of military culture that determines the German way of war.

Hull’s approach to defining the German way of war within the more comprehensive context of military culture resonates with recent studies. Scholars recently pay more attention to strategic culture and its impact on the national way of war. In addition to the natural condition, military and economic capability, history, and social and cultural aspects, these scholars argue that the strategic thought and behavior of any nation stems from its distinct ‘strategic culture.’ Jack L. Snyder, who first proposed the concept of strategic culture, defined strategic culture as “the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviors that

(New York: Doubleday, 2001), 20-22.

⁴² Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 93.

⁴³ Hull, *Absolute Destruction*, 98.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 325.

members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other.”⁴⁵ Given this, Snyder further explained “unique historical experiences, distinctive political and institutional relationship, and a preoccupation with strategic dilemmas” produced the unique mix of strategic beliefs and a unique pattern of strategic behavior, thus, the Soviet way of war.⁴⁶ Significant to note from his conclusion is that “the content of strategic culture is not cast in concrete for all time.”⁴⁷ That is, despite the unique continuity of strategic culture, a specific situation will also affect the way of war. The national way of war, therefore, could be dynamic rather than static.

In the immediate aftermath of the Vietnam War, according to Lawrence Sondhaus, mainstream strategists did not pay much attention to Snyder’s strategic culture approach. They thought strategic culture provided a too broad and somewhat ambiguous analysis in explaining a national strategy. Mainstream opinion, thus, advocated a realist approach such as that of Kenneth Waltz who paid little attention to national identity and culture. These realists argued that actors’ behavior is shaped by their tendency to form or reform the balance of power.⁴⁸

Sondhaus in his work, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War*, summarized the discussion on strategic culture and its implication on a national way of war. Sondhaus introduced the utility of strategic culture in understanding a national way of war within the preceding debate between realist international relations scholars and culturalist historians. Refusing to accept a realist versus culturalist dichotomy, Sondhaus concluded that “true utility of strategic culture lies in how it can

⁴⁵ Jack L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1977), 8, accessed October 10, 2018, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/reports/R2154.html>.

⁴⁶ Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture*, 38.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 40.

⁴⁸ Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War*, 3.

help us understand observed behavior in the present (rather than predict future behavior), for the historian of war and diplomacy such concepts offer a useful framework for understanding the recent as well as the more distant part.”⁴⁹ Sondhaus, thus, argued that a comprehensive framework of strategic culture could help understand the way war is conducted by one country. It also acknowledges, however, that this analysis is unlikely to be generalized to predictions for the future.

In a similar vein, Colin Gray further extended the utility of culture in defining a national way of war. In his response to *The American Way of War*, Gray raised a question about Weigley’s claim that there has been a dominant American way of war.⁵⁰ In contrast to Weigley’s timeless and culturally mandated American way of war, according to Grey, other theorists claimed that the American way of war has been changing, according to political circumstances and changing technologies. In Grey’s words, it was useful to postulate these two opposing positions. In this regard, the trajectory of the military transformation takes place within the framework of a culture. Thus, military practitioners who will implement military transformation to achieve its political aim “should not harbor the strategic and military culture can be fixed or radically altered” by their act of will.⁵¹ He tried to identify the continuity and the particularity of the national way of war in a more comprehensive framework of culture. Therefore, it is essential to understand the strategic culture within which the national way of war is shaped.

Gray’s strategic culture, however, is unlikely to be a tool for predicting the way war would be conducted in the future. Gray’s argument was against the relatively simple approach that the American way of war was either fixed or changing according to its given circumstances.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 13.

⁵⁰ Colin S. Gray, “The American Way of War,” in *Rethinking the Principles of War*, ed. Anthony McIvor (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 14.

⁵¹ Gray, “The American Way of War,” 14.

In a similar vein with Sondhaus, Gray was also vigilant in predicting the future way of war in the framework of strategic culture. However, it is still useful to understand and analyze the strategic culture by claiming that the way of conducting future warfare will not be easily changed within the framework of strategic culture.

In sum, as mentioned above, many scholars from different perspectives have identified various causal factors that shaped and determined the national way of war. These previous studies have some implications in defining the Korean way of war. First, in order to discuss how Korea conducts war, it is necessary to understand the unique characteristics of Korean society, in which the Korean way of war has been shaped. These characteristics include geography, military capabilities, economic resources, history, and social and cultural dimensions, especially strategic culture.

It would be not difficult to identify the national way of war that is revealed as an outcome. However, the fact that various causal factors affect shaping and formulating a national way of war means that a holistic approach is needed. Analyzing the various causal factors and their interactions will likely pose challenges in identifying a national way of war within the broad and complex contexts. There may be various analyses as to why the national way of war is the result of specific causes. Different analyses would depend on which variables are weighted.

Second, this research is by no means intended to predict how Korea should conduct war in the future, based on this complex context. The defined Korean way of war, of course, would provide a useful framework for explaining past and present strategies, as Sondhaus claimed. This identified Korean way of war, however, cannot predict how Korean military should perform in the future since the complex context, in which the way of war is shaped, would change over time as well. Considering its contextual character, the national way of war is hardly bound by a traditional way of war. In this context, Alexander Andreevich Svechin emphasized the evolution of military art and warned against any effort to create closed systems on the basis of past combat

experience. The Korean way of war should shift in response to stimuli from contextual changes. In short, a way of war is an evolving concept within an open system.

However, the final implication and the most important point is that, as Gray pointed out, the determination of current policy makers and strategists to shape the military transformation for the future can not be completely free from the way war has been conducted in the past. It is because the Korean way of war is a reflection of the interplay of various elements from the past to the present. The proper focus of a way of war study is the study of those tendencies shaping future war.⁵² Therefore, the task of defining the Korean way of war is a very important work that connects past, present, and future.

Part 2: Attrition and Annihilation

Existing research suggests that the way a war is carried out by one state must be defined and understood in the complex and changing context of the state. However, most scholars agreed that the national way of war is a strategy that is applied to the execution of the war by the state. Then, what is the strategy? Answering this question would require an in-depth discussion, and there could be different approaches in defining the strategy. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, this study attempts to extend the debate on strategy and the national way of war, starting from Hans Delbruck's strategy of annihilation and the strategy of attrition.

Delbruck argued that the nature of strategy leads to the two basic forms of all strategic actions, the strategy of annihilation and the strategy of attrition. According to Gordon A. Craig, the majority of military thinkers in Delbruck's day believed that the annihilation of the enemy's forces accomplishes the aim of war and is the end of all strategy.⁵³ In this context, this form of

⁵² Alexander A. Svechin, *Strategy*, edited by Kent D. Lee (Minneapolis, MN: East View Publications, 1927), 24.

⁵³ Paret, Craig, and Gilbert. *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 341.

strategy Delbruck named *Niederwerfungsstrategie*, the strategy of annihilation, which is “to set out directly to attack the enemy armed forces and destroy them and to impose the will of the conqueror on the conquered.”⁵⁴

Delbruck’s definition of the strategy of annihilation resonates with Clausewitz’s view on war and its aim. Clausewitz defined strategy as “the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war.”⁵⁵ He further argued, “of all the possible aims [purpose] in war, the destruction of the enemy’s armed forces always appears as the highest.”⁵⁶ According to Liddell Hart, Clausewitz’s rule acquired its dogmatic rigidity through the influence upon the minds of Prussian soldiers, particularly Moltke.⁵⁷ As Prussia triumphed in wars in 1864, 1866, and 1870, the Prussian system and the strategy of annihilation became the standard of the modern European military.⁵⁸ The majority of theorists and practitioners in Delbruck’s time and afterward accepted Clausewitz’s idea of complete destruction of the enemy’s force as the ultimate ends and combat as the only means. Thus, the strategy of annihilation that pursues the destruction of the enemy’s main forces on the battleground has been the prime tenet of military doctrine for almost two centuries.

Clausewitz’s phrase, however, as Liddell Hart pointed out, invited misinterpretation more than most. Although Clausewitz emphasized that the destruction of the enemy’s forces is the ultimate aim in war, one needs to examine how Clausewitz reached his conclusion. Clausewitz wrote that the ultimate goal of the war is to be controlled by political objective and probability and that “the value of this [political] object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in

⁵⁴ Hans Delbruck, *History of The Art of War: Within the Framework of Political History*, vol. 4, *The Modern Era*, translated by Walter J. Renfroe, Jr. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 109.

⁵⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 177.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 99.

⁵⁷ Liddell Hart, *The Strategy*, 339.

⁵⁸ Paret, Craig, and Gilbert. *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 344.

magnitude and also in duration.”⁵⁹ Clausewitz also wrote “in war, many roads lead to success” and that “it is possible to increase the likelihood of success without defeating the enemy’s forces.”⁶⁰ Clausewitz laid out several different options that ranges from the conquest of enemy’s territory, to a temporary occupation or invasion, to project with an immediate political purpose, and finally to passively awaiting the enemy’s attack. It is noteworthy that Clausewitz also considered how to influence the enemy’s expenditure of effort to make the war costly to the enemy. In short, Clausewitz, before reaching to his conclusion of the strategy of annihilation as the ultimate aim in war, did not exclude the other forms of warfare and stated, “the choice depends on circumstances.”⁶¹

Nonetheless, the strategy of annihilation was the only correct strategy in the nineteenth century. The believers in the strategy of annihilation celebrated Napoleon’s victory through a quick and decisive battle as evidence to support their claim. Especially when Napoleon crushed the Austro-Russian army at Austerlitz, completely in accord with annihilation theory, Austria signed a peace agreement within the month, losing one-sixth of its territory including lands in Italy, the Balkans, and Germany.⁶² To Napoleon and his revolutionary army, according to Michael A. Bonura, maneuver was only useful if it led an attack; similarly, the defense was only important if it led to an attack of the enemy’s main force.⁶³

This preference of the attack and pursuing a quick and decisive victory created a unique

⁵⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 99.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 92.

⁶¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 94.

⁶² Michael V. Leggiere, *Napoleon and the Operational Art of War: Essays in Honor of Donald D. Horward* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 170.

⁶³ Michael A. Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon: French Influence on the American Way of Warfare from the War of 1812 to the Outbreak of WWII* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 36.

doctrine, called the French combat method. Military theorists such as Antonio Henry Jomini and Ardant du Picq further strengthened this cult of the offensive by theorizing it. In the Jominian view, strategy was “the art of making war upon the map, and comprehends the whole theater of operations.”⁶⁴ His illustration of the concept of the political objective points even proved that political objective points should be subordinate to strategy, at least until after a great success has been attained.⁶⁵ Du Picq also insisted that everything depended on the emotional and moral and that, thus, only the attack could make the defender “disconnected, wavering, worried, hesitant, and vacillating.”⁶⁶ As the doctrine of the offensive became official French policy, according to Lawrence Freedman, it later became to be described as a cult of the offensive.⁶⁷ From this point of view, only quick and decisive winning mattered. It also epitomized and strengthened the claim of the strategy of annihilation, which further separated politics and military operations.

The strategy of annihilation has been pursued by numerous theorists and practitioners. In America, Dennis Mahan, educated in France and the leading teacher at West Point, produced his own theoretical instruction entitled *Composition of Armies and Strategy* that provided fundamental elements of the French combat method.⁶⁸ At the same time, Jomini’s *Art of War*, written in 1838 also influenced America pervasively. These theories and practices were revealed in the American Civil War. Despite the fact that the North enjoyed twice the population and far greater industrial strength than the South, both fought against each other with the same

⁶⁴ Henri Antoine Jomini, *The Art of War*, translated by G. H. Mendell and W. P. Craighill (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott & Co., 1862), 69.

⁶⁵ Jomini, *The Art of War*, 91.

⁶⁶ Ardant du Picq, “Battle Studies,” in *Roots of Strategy*, Book 2, edited by Curtis Brown (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1987), 153.

⁶⁷ Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 112.

⁶⁸ Michael A. Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon: French Influence on the American Way of Warfare from the War of 1812 to the Outbreak of WWII* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 125-130.

intellectual framework, the strategy of annihilation and the French combat method. According to Weigley, General Grant accepted a Napoleonic strategy of annihilation as the prescription for victory in a war of popular nationalism. Thus, he planned to concentrate all the force possible against the Confederate armies in the field by eliminating as many as possible of the garrisons scattered for defensive purposes along the Confederate borders.⁶⁹ The strategy of annihilation became the American way of war since then.

As mentioned earlier, it was in Prussia, which later became Germany, where the strategy of annihilation began to sprout. Moltke, influenced by Clausewitz, argued that, given the geostrategic position of Germany, it must achieve a quick and decisive victory. Moltke admitted that war is a continuation of policy by other means, however, once the war began, political advisors and their consideration should play no role in military strategy.⁷⁰ Moltke's view demonstrated the predominance of the strategy of annihilation in the Prussian General Staff and, later, general Western military thinking, as Hanson and Weigley stated, which saw war principally as a means of "doing what politics cannot."⁷¹ Alfred von Schlieffen also epitomized this view. The Schlieffen Plan demonstrated the German General Staff's perception that the enemy could be annihilated through a quick and decisive battle in forty days. In hindsight, none of the plan's assumptions made sense. At the time, however, wrote Holger H. Herwig, the idea of a gigantic battle of encirclement and annihilation (*Kesselschlacht*) against French forces now became an idea fixed with Schlieffen.⁷² As Delbruck observed the first German drive fall short of

⁶⁹ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 141-43.

⁷⁰ Helmuth Graf Von Moltke, *Moltke on the Art of War Selected Writings*, edited by Daniel J. Hughes (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 36.

⁷¹ Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 22.

⁷² Holger H. Herwig, *The Marne, 1914: The Opening of World War I and the Battle That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2009), 35.

its goal in 1914, he became convinced the strategy of the High Command would have to be modified. It was apparent that the conditions on the western front approximated those of the strategy of attrition. The challenges for Delbruck were to get German generals to contemplate anything other than a quick and decisive victory to annihilate the enemy army.⁷³ However, his frustration saw a dearth of political leadership and a growing military despotism led by Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who still thought solely in terms of annihilation. In this context, Gordon A. Craig wrote, “The High Command had failed in 1918 and had lost the war because it had disregarded the most important lesson of history, the interrelationship of politics and war.”⁷⁴ The German offensive and its failure, in Lawrence Freedman’s words, was “the culmination of a century of developments in military thought and practice,” called the strategy of annihilation.⁷⁵

Ironically, although advocates of the strategy of annihilation cited Clausewitz to support their claim, Clausewitz never intended to separate the military affairs from the political sphere. The freedom of military leadership from political restriction, that Moltke argued, was opposite to Clausewitz’s dictum. The military and political strategy must go hand in hand. As mentioned earlier, despite the fact that Clausewitz prescribed the destruction of the enemy’s force as the ultimate aim of war, he did not exclude the other forms of strategy that could achieve the political objective.

Delbruck returned to the Clausewitz dictum and argued that the strategy must be conditioned by the political aim. He realized that such annihilation was impossible in reality and that a different strategy ruled the field for a long time. This second form of strategy Delbruck defined *Ermattungsstrategie*, the strategy of exhaustion or attrition.⁷⁶ Delbruck distinguishes the

⁷³ Freedman, *Strategy*, 109.

⁷⁴ Paret, Craig, and Gilbert. *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 352.

⁷⁵ Freedman, *Strategy*, 114.

⁷⁶ Paret, Craig, and Gilbert. *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 341. Delbruck’s *History of The Art of*

strategy of attrition from the strategy of annihilation as follows:⁷⁷

The first natural principle of all strategy is to assemble one's forces, seek out the main force of the enemy, defeat it, and follow up the victory until the defeated side subjects itself to the will of the victor and accepts his conditions, which means in the most extreme case up to occupation of the entire country or even only to besiege the enemy capital. The conduct of the war in this manner [strategy of annihilation] presupposes a sufficient victory but still is not great enough to take over the entire country or even only to besiege the enemy capital. It is also possible that the opposing forces are so equal that from the start only moderate success can be expected. One may not so much place his hopes on completely defeating the enemy as on wearing him out and exhausting him by blows and destructions of all kinds to the extent that in the end he prefers to accept the conditions of the victor, which in this case must always show a certain moderation. This is the nature of the strategy of attrition.

Delbruck further described the strategy of attrition in which “the generals decide from moment to moment whether he is to achieve his goal by battle or by maneuver, so that his decisions vary constantly, so to speak, between the two poles of maneuver and battle, now swinging toward one pole and then to the other.”⁷⁸ That is, the sole aim of the strategy of annihilation was the decisive battle and the battle was only means to achieve the political ends. In the strategy of attrition, however, the battle is one of several means of attaining the political ends. The strategy of attrition, Gordon Craig wrote, was neither a mere variation of the strategy of annihilation nor an inferior form.⁷⁹ Gordon Craig further argued that the strategy of attrition was the only form of strategy that could be employed in a certain period, and it imposed on the commander a quite difficult task as that required of the exponent of the strategy of annihilation. In addition, according to Delbruck, great generals in history had been proponents of the strategy of attrition. Among them were Pericles, Belisarius, Wallenstein, Gustav Adolphus, and Frederick

War, translated by Walter J. Renfro, Jr wrote this as the strategy of attrition. Russell Weigley in his book *the American Way of War* wrote either the strategy of attrition or exhaustion. However, as this paper points out later, attrition and exhaustion has different connotation today.

⁷⁷ Delbruck, *History of The Art of War*, 293-94.

⁷⁸ Delbruck, *History of The Art of War*, 109.

⁷⁹ Paret, Craig, and Gilbert. *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 341.

the Great.⁸⁰ These generals could achieve victory other than directly destroying the enemy's force. The strategy of attrition, therefore, was by no means an inferior form of strategy. Unfortunately, in the late nineteenth century and twentieth century, the German officers who believed the strategy of annihilation was the only correct strategy rejected Delbruck's concept of the strategy of attrition.

In Delbruck's context, *Ermattungsstrategie* meant longer duration and indirect means other than combat.⁸¹ Clausewitz's attrition, from which Delbruck derived his concept of *Ermattungsstrategie*, also entails "wearing down the enemy in a conflict means using the duration of the war to bring about a gradual exhaustion of his physical and moral resistance."⁸² In this context, the strategy of attrition is similar to what can be defined as protracted war or strategy of exhaustion in today's terminology. When Russell Weigley, in *The American Way of War*, introduced Delbruck's concept of the strategy of attrition, he wrote "the strategy of attrition, exhaustion, or erosion, which is usually employed by a strategists whose means are not great enough to permit pursuit of the direct overthrow of the enemy and who therefore resorts to an indirect approach."⁸³ Both Delbruck and Weigley used the terms attrition and exhaustion in the same connotation, based on Clausewitz's idea.

One might already have acknowledged, however, that adopting Delbruck's annihilation-attrition/exhaustion model confuses definitions of terminology today. While the strategy of annihilation is consistent in its meaning in various texts, *Ermattungsstrategie*, the strategy of exhaustion or attrition is not. Modern scholars differentiated these terms—attrition and

⁸⁰ Ibid, 342.

⁸¹ Delbruck, *History of The Art of War*, 293-94.

⁸² Clausewitz, *On War*, 93.

⁸³ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, xxii.

exhaustion—in their meaning. Brian M. Linn, in his critique on Weigley, wrote, “The Delbruck-Weigley definitions of annihilation and attrition/exhaustion are not those currently used by most American military analysts.”⁸⁴ According to Linn, a strategy of attrition seeks “the gradual erosion of the combat power of the enemy’s army,” and a strategy of exhaustion seeks “the gradual erosion of the enemy nation’s will or means to resist.”⁸⁵ In a similar vein, Antulio J. Echevarria clearly distinguishes the meaning of the two terms. Attrition strategy, according to Echevarria, means reducing an enemy’s physical capacity to fight while exhaustion strategy entails wearing down the enemy’s willingness to do so.⁸⁶

Thus, while attrition focused more on the physical aspect, it can be said that exhaustion focused on the psychological aspect. J. Boone Bartholomees, Jr., in his article *The Issue of Attrition*, wrote, “Attrition tends to be associated with the destruction of military forces while exhaustion refers to the gradual degradation of a broader range of national capabilities (military forces, economic or industrial power, will, etc.)”⁸⁷ Bartholomee added that “modern practitioners generally use the terms attrition and exhaustion interchangeably,” and that the distinction between attrition and exhaustion is often very difficult to determine and of little real importance to most practitioners, provided they understand that both approaches are possible and how they work.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, this paper, considering its future utility to inform strategists and possible confusion due to terminology, defined and distinguished the terms in Table 1.

⁸⁴ Brian M. Linn, and Russell F. Weigley, “The American Way of War Revisited,” *Journal of Military History* (April 2002): 504.

⁸⁵ Linn, and Weigley, “The American Way of War Revisited,” 504.

⁸⁶ Antulio J. Echevarria, *Military Strategy: A Very Short Introduction* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), 38.

⁸⁷ J. Boone Bartholomees Jr., “The Issue of Attrition,” *Parameters* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 9.

⁸⁸ Bartholomees Jr., “The Issue of Attrition,” 9.

Table 1. Comparative analysis on ends, ways, and means of strategy

	Annihilation	Attrition	Exhaustion
Ends	Unlimited military aim, sometimes not aligned with political goal. The destruction of the enemy's main force	Limited military aim to achieve political goal. Negotiated peace, but the destruction of the enemy force is not excluded.	Wear down the enemy's will, psychologically and physically
Ways	Quick and Decisive Battle (Focused on physical aspect)	Gradual and protracted approach (Focused on physical aspect)	Gradual and protracted approach (Focused on psychological aspect)
Means	Battle (Mostly Military Means)	Battle + Other military means ("blows of all kinds")	A broader range of national capabilities (Military, Economic, Diplomatic, etc.)

Source: The Author.

While a quick and decisive battle attracted many military theorists and practitioners, attrition and exhaustion sound like bad words. Their reputation, however, is ill-deserved through history. Napoleon suffered in Spain because he faced an enemy that employed a strategy other than annihilation. Clausewitz wrote, "Inability to carry on the struggle can, in practice, be replaced by two other grounds for making peace: the first is the improbability of victory; the second is its unacceptable cost." In this sense, it was clear that with their markedly unequal strength, the Spanish insurrection chose the second option in the hope that the enemy would tire. Spain's *La guerrilla* was, in Lawrence Freedman's expression, geared to an *Ermattungsstrategie*, strategy of attrition or exhaustion.⁸⁹ Likewise, in 1812, Russia did not pursue the direct and physical confrontation with Napoleon's army. Instead, exchanging time and space, the Russian army exhausted Napoleon's army until they finally had to return to France. In the American-Mexican war, Mexican irregulars fought based on their tradition to fight against Comanches also posed a challenge to their American opponents. At the time, American volunteer forces expected

⁸⁹ Freedman, *Strategy*, 179.

conventional battles in which their bravery, honor, and marksmanship would win a war within a day or few hours. Mexican guerilla warfare that was aimed at exhausting American forces presented a different challenge to the volunteers' psyches.⁹⁰ The American experience in Vietnam also demonstrated how strategies other than annihilation could be implemented to repel the stronger enemy.

In sum, it seems that the strategy of annihilation has the following characteristics in terms of ends, ways, and means. The military theorists and practitioners often sought solely for an unlimited military end, the destruction of the enemy's main force. Napoleon, Jomini, Du Picq, Grant, Moltke, Schlieffen, and Ludendorff were the proponents of the strategy of annihilation. To them, a quick and decisive victory was almost the only way, and battle was the only means to achieve such ends. In addition, the strategy of annihilation was also apolitical. That is, the political goal was often negated by the military-dominated decision making process. In the battlefields, however, they saw the ambitious beginning of the strategy of annihilation often transition to the strategy of attrition. That was the reality and history.

On the other hand, the strategy of attrition and exhaustion emerged from the failure of the strategy of annihilation. The aim of an attrition/exhaustion strategy is subjugated to the political aim and is limited. In the strategy of attrition and exhaustion, battle, characterized by maneuvering and firepower, is not a means of achieving military strategic goals, but rather involves the use of other military means or instruments of national power. These strategies are also based on more realistic assumptions that war is less likely to be concluded in a short period. In particular, we have witnessed a number of wars, such as World War I, in which the war that started with the strategy of annihilation for both sides transitioned to the war of attrition and

⁹⁰ Guardino, *The Dead March*, 126.

exhaustion.

Of course, this does not mean that an attrition or exhaustion strategy is the only realistic alternative. The strategy of annihilation clearly provided its achievement over time as a paradigm, and, as mentioned earlier, no modern nation hopes to continue the war for a long time. What is important is, according to Lawrence Freedman, “to be flexible when deciding upon a strategy, to attend to the political realities of the time, and to not rely on a military strategy that might be beyond practical capacity.”⁹¹

⁹¹ Freedman, *Strategy*, 108.

Analyzing the Korean Way of War

This chapter examines the Korean way of war in Korean history through the lenses of annihilation and attrition and the criteria of ends, ways, and means. This chapter looks at the major wars on the Korean peninsula since the *Goryeo* dynasty and also addresses how the elements of strategic context played a role in the formation of a certain way of war. First, *Goryeo* is the dynasty that unified most of the Korean peninsular territories occupied by the two Koreas today. Built after the fall of *Goryeo*, *Chosun* is the most important pre-modern dynasty in understanding modern Korea. In addition, the latest war on the Korean Peninsula, the Korean War, is a turning point in the history of modern Korea.

Part 1: Mongol Invasion to *Goryeo*

Strategic Context

The *Goryeo* dynasty was established in 918 and lasted until it was replaced by the *Chosun* dynasty in 1392. Considering almost 500 years of *Goryeo* history, it would not be easy to see all elements of strategic context mentioned in the preceding chapters. However, some important features that characterize the *Goryeo* period should be considered in identifying the *Goryeo* way of war.

First, the international order of Northeast Asia during the *Goryeo* era frequently transitioned power. The *Tang* Dynasty of China was periled in 907 and the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period began. Then, the *Song* Dynasty took over the fragmented era in 960. The division of states in Chinese helped the *Goryeo* dynasty to establish its foundation without the intervention of foreign powers in its early period.⁹² The foreign relations of *Goryeo*, however,

⁹² Woo Keun Han, *The History of Korea*, translated by Kyung-shik Lee, edited by Grafon K. Mintz (Seoul: The Eul-Yoo Publishing Company, 1970), 127.

were mostly conditioned by the political situation in China.⁹³ While Goryeo contacts with the Song Dynasty continued, the nomadic *Khitan* tribe was expanding its territory and influence along the upper Liao River. As seen in the Ten Injunctions of *Wang Kon*, the first king of *Goryeo*, *Goryeo*'s institutions have been modeled upon those of *Tang*. The *Khitans*, however, were deemed as "a nation of savage beasts."⁹⁴ Thus, the relations between *Goryeo* and the Liao state, established by the *Khitans*, were not smooth. In this context, the *Khitans* invaded *Goryeo* continuously to subjugate *Goryeo* and to isolate the *Song*.⁹⁵ However, as shown in the cases of foreign diplomacy of *So Hui*, and the victory of general *Kang Kam-chan*, the *Goryeo* dynasty responded effectively to the ongoing invasion of *Khitan*. Not only the *Khitans* but also a group of tribes called *Jurchen* inhabiting southern Manchuria also made occasional raids on the *Goryeo* border area.⁹⁶ These continued invasions from the outside evoked the necessity of national defense since the foundation of the *Goryeo* dynasty.

Since these border clashes with the outer tribes such as the *Khitans* and *Jurchen* almost from the beginning, military affairs of the *Goryeo* dynasty were of great importance and the armed forces were constantly being strengthened. At the time, the military forces were composed of two armies and six divisions stationed in the capital along with the various district units.⁹⁷ While the capital troops of military elites were guarding the city and palace, the district units were charged with the national defense. In response to continued foreign invasions, *Goryeo* built an outer wall around the capital in 1029. By 1044, a stonewall stretched all the way from the

⁹³ Han, *The History of Korea*, 126.

⁹⁴ Peter H. Lee, *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization*. Vol. 1. *From Early Times to the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 264.

⁹⁵ The *Khitan* invaded *Goryeo* on three separate occasions between 993 and 1018.

⁹⁶ Han, *The History of Korea*, 151.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 135-36.

mouth of Yalu River on the west coast to Kwangpo on the east coast was built to defend the northern border.⁹⁸ The *Goryeo* policy was to overpower these invaders by force when possible, and when not possible, to entice them to submission with promises of gifts and honorary government posts.⁹⁹ Although this policy was moderately successful, the problem lay in the fragmentation within *Goryeo*'s domestic politics.

Indeed, as the international situation was being transformed, the tension between the military and civilian officials grew significantly. While *Jurchen* established the *Jin* dynasty in 1115 and threatened *Goryeo* and other neighbors, serious factional strife was developing in the *Goryeo* government.¹⁰⁰ The pragmatists insisted on reconciliation with the rising *Jin* Dynasty, but for the most part, the government officials claimed that accepting the *Jin*, barbarians, as a humiliation.¹⁰¹ Amid this political fragmentation, military officials continued to suffer the dominance of the civilian bureaucracy.

In 1170, the success of a military coup brought important political and social changes to *Goryeo*. As the military coup triggered political instability, the impoverished peasantry, slaves, and monks rebelled, hoping to redress their own grievances and to further their own interests.¹⁰² Although the Choi house rose by quickly suppressing these uprisings, it had its own internal power struggles. Indeed, the political and social conditions continued to deteriorate as military generals contended among themselves for power. In this situation, the finest soldiers belonged to military generals as private armies, and those in the government army were all thin, weak, and

⁹⁸ Han, *The History of Korea*, 151.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 152.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 154.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 156-7.

¹⁰² Lee, *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization*, 329.

useless.¹⁰³ *Goryeo* found itself in such a situation during the Mongol invasion.

The Course of War

The Mongol invasion of *Goryeo*, started with the first invasion in 1231, continued intermittently for almost thirty years until the conciliation between *Goryeo* and Mongolia in 1259. In August 1231, Mongolia attacked *Goryeo* by sending an army on the pretext of the murder of the Mongolian envoy to *Goryeo*. This was the first time Mongolia invaded *Goryeo*, but Mongolia had previously sent troops to *Goryeo* in 1218 to defeat the *Khitans* who had fled to *Goryeo*.¹⁰⁴ In response, *Goryeo* sent three armies and defeated the *Khitan* army, and the *Kitan* army withdrew to the Kangdong province east of Pyongyang. In 1219, the *Goryeo* army, allied with the Mongol army, captured Kangdong. Thereafter, Mongolia demanded tribute for having driven out the *Khitans*. However, the demand was too excessive to be accepted in terms of frequency and quantity of goods and tributes required. Under these circumstances, the Mongolian envoy was killed in the Amnok River basin while returning to Japan in 1225.

The Mongol army, led by Sartai, came to *Goryeo* in August 1231 through the northern border along the Yalu River. At the time, the *Goryeo* consisted of three armies; the first battle took place between the *Goryeo* army and the Mongolian army in Dongseon, Hwangju. In this battle, the *Goryeo* army was surprised by the attack of 8,000 Mongolian soldiers but eventually won the battle, supported by the peasants. The *Goryeo* army, who defeated the Mongols in the Battle of Dongseon, went to *Anbuksung*, a military base in the northern part of the country. However, overwhelmed by the Mongol cavalry attack, the *Goryeo* army lost. In this battle, the majority of the army was killed or wounded. The Mongol army, after winning the Battle of *Anbuksung*, advanced to Kaegyong and Chongju. As the Mongolian army was stationed in the

¹⁰³ Ibid, 340.

¹⁰⁴ Han, *The History of Korea*, 166.

suburbs of the capital, the *Gorye* government sought reconciliation with Mongolia in early December. As a result, Sartai set up seventy-two *Darugachi*, Mongol officials, to manage the principal cities of the *Goryeo*.¹⁰⁵ After the withdrawal of the army in 1232, the first invasion was completed.

Afterwards, general Choi, who was a de facto ruler of the time, discussed the transfer of the capital to Ganghwa Island in order to cope with the Mongolian army, which was considered weak in maritime capability.¹⁰⁶ Despite the objections of political rivals, Choi transferred the capital and even killed Mongolian officials, which led to the second Mongolian invasion in 1232. Again, the Mongols occupied all of the territories north of the Han River. Although it withdrew after *Sartai* had died in the battle, the Mongol invasion continued intermittently. There were four separate attacks between 1253 and 1257. The Mongols demanded the re-transfer of the capital, the investigation of households, the establishment of transportation bases, the provision of grain, and the installation of Mongolian administrative institutions. Meanwhile, the sixth invasion continued unexpectedly over a long period of time. In this regard, pacifists, who advocated reconciliation with Mongolia rather than fighting against it, emerged in opposition to the Choi's military regime.

As the war became prolonged, the *Goryeo* dynasty and Choi regime, again, were divided internally. As Choi's regime collapsed, the political power returned to the king, and a hardening treaty was signed between *Goryeo* and Mongolia.

In accordance with the demands of Mongolia, the *Goryeo* dynasty relocated the capital to Kaegyung. In this process, *Goryeo*'s Special Patrol Troops, called *Sampyocho*, who were

¹⁰⁵ Andrew C. Nahm, *Korea: Tradition and Transformation—A History of the Korean People* (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1996), 90.

¹⁰⁶ Han, *The History of Korea*, 167.

veterans of the military regime and led the uprising against the Mongols, refused to obey the royal order to disband their units. They declared to continue to fight against the Mongols and the *Goryeo* dynasty, if necessary. The resistance continued until February 1273 when the Mongol and *Goryeo* coalition attacked Jeju island and crashed the *Sampyocho*.¹⁰⁷

The War against the Mongols, which lasted from 1231 to 1273, was brought to an end by the suppression of the *Sampyocho*. Since then, the *Goryeo* and Mongol relationship was shaped by strong political intervention and oppression, guaranteeing *Goryeo*'s status as a state based on the submission of *Goryeo* to Mongolia.

The *Goryeo* Way of War

Goryeo's military strategy in the war against the Mongols seemed to be defensive and reactive. Indeed, as noted above, *Goryeo* was extremely weak in defending the border, due to the unstable domestic political situation. The major military elites became the private forces of the ruling class. As a result, the capital was seized during the first invasion in 1231; the entire country was devastated—it could not even conduct a single well-organized counterattack. It seemed that there was no coherent military strategy at all.

It is worth noting, however, that *Goryeo* continued resistance for more than 30 years against the Mongol invasion, which had an absolute advantage in terms of number and power. Even though Mongolia constantly forced the surrender, the *Goryeo* military regime and the whole population resisted without giving in to it. Thus, the basis of persistent resistance is closely related to the *Goryeo* way of war.

The *Goryeo*'s military strategy shown during the Mongol invasion was to attrit a superior enemy for a long time. As mentioned earlier, *Goryeo* built walls along the border and

¹⁰⁷ Nahm, *Korea*, 88.

strengthened regional defenses in order to prepare for frequent invasions of the *Khitans* and *Jurchen* in the past. From this fortified defensive position, the enemy's attack was checked. The offensive was conducted according to the situation. In other words, if the enemy attack was prolonged and the supply was reduced accordingly, the defenders transitioned from the defense to the offense to exploit an opportunity. During the first invasion of the Mongols in 1231, for instance, Pak So of Guju province effectively defended against the Mongolian army even though it attacked for more than thirty days and nights. He even attacked out of the fortification when the enemy's offensive was weakened.¹⁰⁸ The Mongolian army continued to attack afterward, but the *Goryeo* army including *Pak So* never surrendered until the king of the *Goryeo* had to persuade him. Meanwhile, the *Goryeo* military regime did not surrender to the Mongols and moved the capital from Kaegyung to Ganghwado to continue resistance. It also wore down the enemy, avoiding the enemy's strength on the ground while exploiting the maritime weakness of the Mongols.

Goryeo's prolonged attrition strategy was not solely implemented by the regular forces. Almost the whole population of *Goryeo*, including civilians, slaves, and even monks, resisted the invasion of Mongolia. Even when the elite armed forces of the aristocracy class surrendered or retreated, some slaves and soldiers resisted the Mongols until the end. In fact, it was a monk Kim Yun-hu, a skillful archer who shot and killed the Mongolian general Sartai.¹⁰⁹ At that time, Buddhism, which dominated the *Goryeo* society as the official state religion, did emphasize fighting against the Mongols, and even monks and the elderly participated in the Mongolian resistance.¹¹⁰ *Sampyocho's* uprising is another good example of *Goryeo's* protracted attrition

¹⁰⁸ Lee, *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization*, 350-52.

¹⁰⁹ Han, *The History of Korea*, 167.

¹¹⁰ Nahm, *Korea*, 77.

strategy and resistance spirit. After the military regime was overturned, the king of *Goryeo* surrendered to the Mongols and moved the capital from *Kanghwado* to the mainland in 1270. Although *Sampyocho* led by *Pae Chungson* was called the rebels, the uprising of *Sampyocho* against the Mongols has been recorded as a symbol of resistance to invaders to this day.

In short, the *Goryeo* resistance against the Mongol invasions was mostly reactive, and it may be difficult to see a consistent military strategy applied. In fact, *Goryeo*'s resistance was not organized and was sporadic. However, it is also unreasonable to explain the basis of persistent resistance at the regional level and the driving force of the fact that the *Goryeo* regime had not surrendered for thirty years simply as a reaction to the situation. Park Hwilak noted that *Goryeo*'s military strategy is derived from the *Goguryeo*'s *Cheongyaippo*.¹¹¹ *Cheongyaippo* was an attrition and exhaustion strategy that makes it difficult for the enemy to supply food by removing all the food on the enemy's invading route and defending it from the fortified position. In other words, *Goryeo*'s military strategy pursued a peace negotiation as ends through the ways of physical and psychological exhaustion of the enemy. All the means available to the whole population, not just the regular army, were mobilized and employed to achieve this end.

¹¹¹박휘락 [Hwilak Park], “한국의 전략문화와 전쟁수행방식: 청야사상을 중심으로,” [“Korean Strategic Culture and Korean Way of War: Focused on Cheongyaippo”] (paper presented at the Seminar of the Korean Military Academy, Seoul, November 2009).

Part 2: Japanese Invasion to *Chosun*

The invasion of Japan in 1592, known as the *Imjin War*, and the subsequent seven-year war was one of the most tragic experiences in the Korean peninsula's history. Hundreds of thousands died and the entire country was devastated. When *Chosun* was invaded by Japan, there are many similarities with the situation of *Goryeo* during the Mongol invasion. It failed to recognize the changing international situation, and factionalized domestic politics overlooked strengthening the national defense.

Strategic Context

The situation of the Korean peninsula in the 16th century could not be considered separately from the situation in mainland China. China's situation affected not only the foreign relations of the Korean peninsula but also the economics. The Ming dynasty had the utmost importance in shaping the politics and economics of the *Chosun* dynasty. After the Mongols had been driven out, the Ming dynasty was founded in 1368. The new Ming rulers continued to demand tribute from the *Chosun* Dynasty. In return for *Chosun*'s submission, the Ming would provide a monopoly on *Chosun*'s trade with China.¹¹² At the time, ruling the *Chosun* dynasty without Ming support or at least toleration was less likely. One of the first actions of the first king of *Chosun* was to send an envoy to the Ming court, asking for recognition of his rule.¹¹³ It seemed that *Chosun* had accepted vassal status. The relations with the Ming, however, were only nominally for peace and trade with China. While being careful to confront the Ming directly, the *Chosun* court took advantage of the Ming's weakness to control the Liaotung peninsula and restored its northern border. That is, *Chosun* maintained vassal relations with China externally, however, promoted internal development.

¹¹² Han, *The History of Korea*, 219.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 221.

On the other hand, unlike the Ming Dynasty, *Chosun* maintained relations with Japan on an equal basis. On many occasions, Japanese piracy, which began in the early thirteenth century, was troublesome and required the *Chosun* court to coordinate with the Japanese.¹¹⁴ While demanding to control piracy, *Chosun* exchanged envoys with the Shogun's court via the lord on Tsushima Island in the Korea Strait. Trade and cultural exchange between the two also developed in consequence.¹¹⁵

While Japanese piracy in the south caused problems, the *Jurchen* tribe in the north remained constantly troublesome to the *Chosun* court. Accordingly, the *Chosun* court was supposed to pay more attention to strengthening the national defense. In the beginning, while the Three Armies were responsible for the defense of the capital, four regional militaries were established at four strategic places.¹¹⁶ In the fifteenth century, the *Chosun* court further strengthened central control over the military. The Three Armies were replaced by the Five Guards. The Privy Council, the Supreme Headquarters of for the Five Guards, and the Military Training Institute were established.¹¹⁷ All males between the age of sixteen and sixty were obliged to serve in the military.

In the 16th century, the military power of *Chosun* began to weaken. This is closely related to changes in the socio-economic situation. As central control of the *Choun* court loosened over time, the aristocracy increased their possession of private land, a symbol of wealth. At that time, land was the means that the king gave to control the aristocracy. Thus, land had to be provided to maintain control over the aristocracy.¹¹⁸ As the private property of the aristocracy

¹¹⁴ Nahm, *Korea*, 91.

¹¹⁵ Han, *The History of Korea*, 224.

¹¹⁶ Nahm, *Korea*, 99.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Han, *The History of Korea*, 256.

increased, so did the demand for slaves to manage it. By the 16th century, the government collected taxes in exchange for the military exemption of personnel to manage the land or to concentrate on economic activities. Over time, however, the tendency to avoid military service became stronger, which made it increasingly difficult to maintain military forces in the provinces.¹¹⁹

Meanwhile, at the end of the 16th century, factional strife deteriorated the domestic politics of *Chosun*. The struggle between political parties was so severe that it was difficult for the king to run state affairs. Since its establishment, the *Chosun* court experienced continued succession disputes among princes and royal relatives that resulted in bloodshed and rebellions.¹²⁰ The aristocracy was divided and there was a continuing uneasiness about the legitimacy of subsequent rulers.

While *Chosun* was plagued by domestic factionalism, the international situation was changing rapidly. During the sixteenth century in Japan, Toyotomi Hideyoshi unified the warring states and sought internal political consolidation. Hideyoshi pursued the goal of invading the Ming with *Chosun* as a stepping-stone to overcome the domestic political situation.¹²¹ Some of the *Chosun* envoys dispatched to Japan at that time noticed Hideyoshi's intention to invade and suggested that *Chosun* should be prepared. The *Chosun* court, however, was mired in consumptive factional strife that blinded itself to the rapidly changing international situation.

The Course of War

On April 13, 1592, when the Japanese army landed in Busan with the vanguard of Konishi Yukinaga and Soo Yoshitoshi, *Chosun* was not ready for war at all. The Japanese army

¹¹⁹ Han, *The History of Korea*, 259-60.

¹²⁰ Nahm, *Korea*, 107; these incidents were in 1398, 1400, 1453, and 1467.

¹²¹ Han, *The History of Korea*, 268-71.

was organized into nine units with about 150,000 and equipped with a modern rifle. Meanwhile, due to continued peace, the *Chosun* military was converted from a standing army to a reserve system, and 84,000 of the *Chosun* army were not ready for war.¹²²

The *Chosun* army lost most battles or fled without fighting. General Jeongbal and Song Sanghyun, who were defending Busan, first fought the invaders, but they could not hold the position. Jeongbal even thought that the Japanese fleet was the tribute from Japan and did not prepare for the battle at all.¹²³ On the following day, Busan was taken and Song Sanghyun died. The Japanese army marched to the north rapidly. In the capital city of Hanyang, modern Seoul, the *Chosun* court did not know of the Japanese invasion for four days. As a temporary measure, the king dispatched General Lee Il and others in an attempt to block the advance of the Japanese army. When the news of General Lee Il's defeat at Sangju and the defeat of the elite army of Shin Ip in Chungju, the *Chosun* court decided to evacuate from Hanyang. The king and his administration reached Pyongyang through Gaeseong. Hanyang fell within two weeks of the beginning of the invasion. When the Japanese army arrived in Pyongyang, they headed to Eouju, a town on the northern border of the Korean peninsula. They thought that the Ming Dynasty would protect them. After having gathered in Hanyang, the Japanese decided to go north toward Pyongan Island and Kiyomi Kiyomasa to the Hamgyeongdo. The rest of the Japanese army attempted to take control of the *Chosun* Dynasty.

Meanwhile, the *Chosun* navy led by Admiral Yi Sun-sin was having rather more success than the army. Yi Sun-sin, one of the great heroes of Korean history, had developed the turtle ship, the first iron-clad in history.¹²⁴ Being impervious to any Japanese weapons at the time, turtle

¹²² Han, *The History of Korea*, 270.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 271.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*.

ships sank a large amount of troop and supply ships.¹²⁵ Thus, the tactical success of the *Chosun* navy seriously hampered Japanese sustainment in the rear area.

On the ground, Korean hatred of foreign invasions began to manifest itself through strong resistance of the people. Confucian scholars, Buddhist monks, and guerilla forces rose up all over the country. No Japanese troops were safe from guerilla attacks, and Japanese lines of communication were under constant threat. The Ming also sent troops to help the *Chosun*. Pyongyang, once fallen to Japanese occupation, was retaken by the Ming army in January 1593.

Through all these difficulties, the Japanese agreed to peace negotiations with the Ming. While *Chosun* was excluded from the process, the Ming and Japan proceeded to negotiate a peace agreement. However, neither side would agree to any implication that it had been defeated. The negotiation process dragged on for years.

In 1597, Japan resumed its attack with some 150,000 troops, but could not get beyond the southern provinces. During the second invasion by Japan, Admiral Yi Sun-sin led the *Chosun* navy, which disrupted the enemy's line of communication effectively. Until Toyotomi Hideyoshi died in August 1598 and the Japanese army withdrew, the combined forces of *Chosun* and Ming effectively blocked the offensive of the Japanese army.

The impact of the war was enormous. *Chosun* completely collapsed, resulting in economic disruption and corruption of the bureaucratic organization. The amount of land under cultivation had been reduced to less than a third of the pre-war amount, which resulted in a serious lack of grain.¹²⁶ As the government failed to function, the social system was disrupted and the social class system was in confusion. Numerous cultural legacies, buildings, and records were destroyed. Most of all, undying hatred of the Japanese became the legacy of the war that was

¹²⁵ Han, *The History of Korea*, 271.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 273.

handed down from generation to generation.

Japan benefited considerably. Korean captives, stolen books, and cultural arts contributed to Japan's own development. After the death of Hideyoshi, Tokugawa Ieyasu who opposed the invasion emerged and opened the Tokugawa Shogunate era. On the other hand, the Ming were weakened, facing the growing power of the *Jurchen* in Manchuria. While the Ming and *Chosun* were negating the Manchu situation, the leader of the *Jurchen*, Nurhachi, was enhancing his power in Manchu area. In 1616, Nurhachi proclaimed the state of Later Chin, which became the Qing Dynasty.

The *Chosun* Way of War

During the invasion of Japan, the military situation of *Chosun* was not much different from that of *Goryeo* during the Mongol invasion. At the beginning of the *Chosun* Dynasty, the basis of the centralized military system was established, and the conscription system for the entire nation was implemented. Since the sixteenth century, however, the military became localized and the conscription system was disrupted. This was due to the weakening of the centralized power and the empowerment of the aristocracy derived from factionalism in domestic politics. The conflict between civilian officials and military officers still existed as in the *Goryeo* period. Civilian bureaucrats had a great influence on most policy decisions, even though there were more military personnel involved in the military decision-making process.

Along with the growth of the aristocracy, changes in the economic and social structures were another cause of weakening military power. The accumulation of the private property of nobles and the failure of land distribution required a corresponding increase in the workforce, which resulted in a lack of human resources to fulfill the duty of national defense. Due to the lack of human resources, the *Chosun* regime imposed a commuting system, an appointment of reserves and tax payments to exempt the armed forces. However, these did not have a great effect due to the prevalence of corruption caused by the disruption of social discipline. Also, the use of

reserve resources was not adequate to prepare for a massive enemy surprise due to the slow mobilization rate.

The military strategy of the *Chosun* Dynasty was based on *Cheongyaippo*, occupancy and defense of strategic locations by exhausting the enemy. However, this defensive strategy has not been successful because it has fallen to the attack of a large enemy's army bypassed the defended locations. Thus, the military strategy of *Chosun* failed to effectively cope with the invasion of the Japanese army, which caused the tragedy of transferring the capital again due to the rapid maneuvering of the enemy. *Chosun*, however, did not surrender easily despite its weakness and failure to respond to the Japanese invasion. The *Chosun* naval forces made great achievements in disrupting the offshore supply lines of Japan on the southern coast. Admiral Yi Sun-sin led the *Chosun* navy to constantly inflict damage, which played a major role in slowing down the advance of the Japanese army. In particular, Japan faced difficulties in supplying and receiving grain due to the disruption of the marine line of communication.

Furthermore, the entire population of *Chosun* was at the forefront of the military and resisted the Japanese invasion. In particular, despite their inferior numbers and equipment, the nationwide uprisings of guerilla units forced continued damage to the Japanese troops. The guerrilla army, consisting of scholars, monks, and peasants, gradually weakened the Japanese forces. Like *Goryeo*'s war against the Mongols, *Chosun*'s approach to exhaust the enemy eventually led the Japanese army to hasten to seek a peace treaty to conclude the second invasion. Thus, as the *Goryeo*'s war against the Mongols, the war against Japan was 'a total war' that used all the means available not only to the regular military but also to the entire population to alter the enemy's intention by forcing long-term damage to the enemy.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Tracing back to German general Erich Ludendorff's *Der Totale Krieg*, total war denotes warfare that mobilizes all of the resources of society including civilian resources and that includes noncombatants involvement in a war.

Part 3: The Korean War in the Modern Era

Strategic Context

The Korean War was an international war that informed the reorganization of the international order centering on the United States and the Soviet Union after World War II. It was also a civil war, in which one nation was divided into different political ideologies. The precursors to this division date back to the 1940s when World War II was in full swing. The Cairo Declaration of December 1943 guaranteed the independence of *Chosun*, which was reaffirmed in the Potsdam Declaration of July 1945.¹²⁸ However, achieving independence was conditional. Under this circumstance, on August 15, 1945, Japan surrendered, and the Korean peninsula was divided and occupied by the United States and the Soviet Union on the boundary of the thirty-eighth parallel for military convenience.¹²⁹ In December 1945, the three foreign ministers of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union met in Moscow. They agreed on a trusteeship of the Korean peninsula for five years. In response, the Korean people opposed strongly, but political chaos arose as the leftists, supported by the Soviet Union, supported a trusteeship.¹³⁰

As the two Koreas established their respective political regimes, the division of Korea became official. At the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in November 1947, the UN formed a temporary Korean Commission and decided to hold a general election for the two Koreas under its supervision.¹³¹ However, the commander of the Soviet army, who occupied North Korea, rejected the entrance of the committee. In May 1948, only South Korea conducted

¹²⁸ Nahm, *Korea*, 329-30.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 330.

¹³⁰ Han, *The History of Korea*, 500.

¹³¹ Nahm, *Korea*, 356-7.

an election. In August, the Republic of Korea (ROK) government was established. At the third UN General Assembly in December 1948, the ROK was approved as a legitimate government with a general election. On the other hand, in North Korea, Kim Il Sung held the election of the Supreme People's Assembly, and in September 1948, the Soviet Union and other communist countries approved the election of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Thus, in the Korean peninsula, the two Koreas formulated separate governments.

The military balance between the Soviet Union and the United States on the peninsula changed as Koreans built their own governments. After the establishment of the government, North Korea immediately demanded the withdrawal of foreign troops on the peninsula, and in response, the Soviet Union withdrew its troops in October. However, the Soviet Union, unlike the US, had geographical proximity. That is, it could deploy its troops anytime and sooner than the US after its withdrawal. In the south, the ROK government requested the US forces to continue stationing in South Korea. As a result, the US military withdrawal was delayed, but in June 1949, the US withdrew most of its troops and left only about 500 military advisors.¹³²

Political confusion continued in South Korea, while North Korea was building up its military strength with the support of the Soviet Union and preparing to unify the peninsula under its rule. In the south, leftists, nationalists, and independence activists were distrustful of each other and their numerous political parties led to a political confrontation. It was not easy to convert a political culture formed under authoritarian rule into a Western democracy. Most people, based on the prevailing concept and practices of *kwanjon minbi*, considered the government as superior and the people inferior.¹³³ It seemed that most Koreans were still living

¹³² Han, *The History of Korea*, 374.

¹³³ Nahm, *Korea*, 377.

with the mental heritage of the Yi Dynasty.¹³⁴

Neither social or economic conditions were stable. The liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule left almost nothing to South Koreans. While Japanese rule almost devastated Korean economics and resources, most heavy industrial facilities and resources remained in the north. For instance, the north supplied 90 percent of electric power used by South Koreans.¹³⁵ South Korea had nothing to export, no money to import, but had an increasing population.¹³⁶ The growing population created a shortage of supplies, sanitation problems, and growth in crime rates.

In such chaotic circumstances, criticism against the first president Rhee and his administration grew along with fragmentation within domestic politics; Communist activities in the South gave great impetus to the promotion of democracy in South Korea. The communists in South Korea instigated rebellions throughout the country. The incidents in *Jeju* Island, *Yeosu*, *Sunchon*, and South *Cholla* Province resulted in tens of thousands of deaths. The defeated rebels fled into the mountains of *Chiri* and continued guerilla activities. Thus, the ROK military had to deploy its troops to the south to suppress the communist-led mutiny while facing real threats in the north.

The situation of the ROK military was no better than the other parts of society. The ROK National Defense Forces were formed in August 1948. Army and Navy headquarters were established in November 1948. The Korean Marine Corps and the Air Force were formed in 1949. As the government established a conscription system, all men above the age of twenty were conscripted for two years of military service. Facing North Korean threats, the ROK government was anxious to expand its military readiness, but a lack of funds retarded the process. Some

¹³⁴ Ibid, 374.

¹³⁵ Nahm, *Korea*, 380.

¹³⁶ Population in South Korea grew from 15 million in 1945 to 21 million in 1948. During this time, people returned from Japan and China, and even fled from North Korea.

67,600 soldiers were poorly manned and equipped.¹³⁷ The Army, especially, with its eight infantry divisions also had to deal with communist guerilla activities. Thus, when the Korean War broke out, despite constant intelligence that the North would soon invade, the ROK forces could not cope with the aggressors.

The Course of War

The Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950, and lasted almost three years until the armistice was signed on July 27, 1953. The war took place across eighty percent of the entire country from the *Nakdong* River in the south and the *Yalu* River in the north. The Korean War could be distinguished in four major stages: the North Korean offensive; the United Nations counterattack; the Chinese army offensive and the UN counterattack; and stalemate.¹³⁸

The first stage was a one-sided offensive by the North Korean army. The ROK military was helpless in defending against North Korea's offensive because it had already deployed four of its eight divisions in the rear area and it had relatively few troops and poor equipment. Against South Korea, which did not have a single tank, North Korea, with its T-34 tanks, marched south relentlessly and seized South Korea's capital, Seoul, in just three days. The ROK Army, which had been forced to retreat to the southern part of the Han River, failed to respond properly, but delayed the North Korean attack for six days in the area along the Han River, creating conditions for the reinforcement of the US forces and subsequent counterattack operations.¹³⁹ During this North Korean one-sided offensive, the ROK troops and some of the US military reinforcements were pushed to the *Nakdong* River defense line, but they were looking for an opportunity to

¹³⁷ Nahm, *Korea*, 374.

¹³⁸ The ROK Joint Forces Military University, 6.25 전쟁사(上) [*The History of Korean War(Part I)*] (Daejon: The ROK Joint Forces Military University, 2013), 1-1.

¹³⁹ The ROK Joint Forces Military University, 6.25 전쟁사(上) [*The History of Korean War(Part I)*], 1-5.

counterattack by implementing delaying operations.

With the entry of US troops, the aspects of the war changed, which was the beginning of the second stage. On July 13, 1950, with the formation of the United Nations Command and the transfer of command of the ROK Army to the US Army on July 15, the United Nations combined forces prepared to counterattack.¹⁴⁰ The North Korean army suffered massive troop losses due to continuous battles; the combat power of each division was reduced to 50–60 percent and sustainment did not follow.¹⁴¹ Even worse, the line of communication was cut off by the United Nations Air Force. Accordingly, the United Nations' forces, which were defending the Nakdong River defense line, later called the Walker Line, transitioned to a counterattack following the Incheon landing operation on September 15. On September 27, the United Nations' forces recaptured Seoul after ninety days, and on October 1, crossed the 38th parallel and continued to attack toward the north.

During this phase, the operations plan of the United Nations' forces was to advance to the limit of advance linking Chongju and Hungnam.¹⁴² The ROK military was supposed to be responsible for the north of the limit of advance. However, with the smooth advance of the United Nations' forces, which occupied Pyongyang in mid-October, the plan changed and all troops were headed to the border with China. On October 26, the 6th Division of the ROK Army reached the Yalu River.¹⁴³ At that time, UN forces believed that unification was in sight and that the war would end before Christmas, but this was an illusion.

At the end of October, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) had attacked UN

¹⁴⁰ Nahm, *Korea*, 391.

¹⁴¹ The ROK Joint Forces Military University, 6.25 전쟁사(上) [*The History of Korean War(Part I)*], 1-6.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 1-12.

troops with a total of about 300,000 troops in thirty divisions.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, the UN forces had to transition to defensive and take a full withdrawal. The UN forces withdrew back to the thirty-eighth parallel in mid-December and built a defensive line. At that time, the United Nations' concept of defensive operations was to plan several defenses from the thirty-eighth parallel to the *Nakdong* River in preparation for a new offensive while weakening the Chinese and North Korean forces gradually. The battle repeated in the south and north. In the end, the frontline was fixed and the war became attritional in the form of local battles.

The Korean Way of War

Like the wars analyzed in the previous chapters, the ROK did not have a coherent military strategy that could be called a Korean way of war. After the liberation from Japanese colonial rule, the Korean Peninsula was a place where the geopolitical interests of the two superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union, collided. Backed by these external powers, the domestic political factions were divided over the rule of the Korean peninsula. The chaotic domestic political situation and the poor economic and social conditions hampered strengthening national defense.

Consumptive factional strife blinded Koreans to the rapidly changing international situation. Despite the North Korean threat posed, the lack of capital and resources poised the army for a lack of readiness. Moreover, the guerrilla activities of the communists in the rear area scattered the even scarce troops. Therefore, when North Korea made a surprise attack, the forces in front were defending a too broad frontal line with insufficient troops.

In this situation, at best, the military strategy was maintaining the defensive line or delaying enemy attacks. Front units defended strategic locations utilizing terrain and natural

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 1-13.

obstacles, which were not effective against enemies that were rapidly bypassing or attacking with massive forces. As in the *Goryeo* and *Chosun* dynasties, the capital city had to be escaped and the ROK army continued to withdraw. The shape of the war so far was not much different from the preceding wars of ancient dynasties.

The difference from the previous wars, however, was the participation of the international community led by the United States. While the ROK troops were struggling, delaying the enemy's advance, and inflicting damage on the enemy, the United Nations combined forces were reinforced. The ROK launched unprecedented offensive operations as part of the United Nations' forces. Despite the intervention of the PLA, the ROK was able to restore its lost territory to a large extent. The ROK military offensive employed a strategy of annihilation that pursued the destruction of enemy power through maneuver and firepower that was not seen in the previous two wars. However, it is difficult to explain the counterattack of the UN forces at the time as a consistent strategy of the ROK military. The ROK military was part of the United Nations forces, and the commander of the United Nations Command held the operational control of the ROK military.

On the contrary, the ROK military operated more independently during the stalemate. The military strategy at that time was an attrition strategy that forced the enemy to bleed to the maximum extent in order to shape favorable conditions before signing the peace treaty.¹⁴⁵ In fact, during the last three years of the Korean War, over two years were dedicated to attritional battles.

In short, although South Korean President Lee Seung-man may have claimed the destruction of North Korean forces and regime and the reunification of the Korean peninsula, the ROK military power at that time was inferior and incapable in all aspects of troop and equipment

¹⁴⁵ The ROK Joint Forces Military University, *6.25 전쟁사(上)* [*The History of Korean War(Part I)*], 1-21.

to pursue such an annihilation strategy. The applied strategy at the beginning of the war was an attrition strategy that delayed the advance of the enemy as much as possible before the UN reinforcements arrived. Most of the time, the majority of the war proceeded in the form of a consumptive war, which was achieved through the application of an attrition strategy that forced the enemy to take long-term and gradual damage in order to achieve the strategic ends of signing a peace treaty.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes the research on the three major wars in Korean history, identifying the Korean way of war. At this point, it is worth revisiting the research questions. What is the way Korea conducted its war and how has such a unique way has formed? The three wars analyzed in this paper had occurred over a period of several hundred years. Although three wars took place, confined within the specific space of the Korean peninsula, the dynasty or state that ruled the Korean Peninsula at the time were different from each other.¹⁴⁶ The strategic context that affected the way a dynasty and a modern state conducted their respective war was also different. The elements of strategic context such as the international situation, the domestic political system, economic and social conditions, and culture changed and evolved and, thus, were different over time. There were particular characteristics of each period that shaped and formed its own way of war. Nevertheless, *Goryeo*, *Chosun*, and the Republic of Korea clearly have ethnic and cultural continuity inherited from the specific space of the Korean peninsula. Identifying these particularities and continuities has significance in understanding the Korean way of war.

Continuity and Particularity of The Korean Way of War

First, in the three wars analyzed above, the geopolitics of the Korean peninsula is an important strategic context. This is not to say that the geography of the peninsula itself forms a specific way of conducting a war. While geography is a constant physical reality, geopolitics is the strategic value within the geography. Geopolitical interest can change slowly, depending on the situation. Thus, according to Jakub Grygiel, geostrategy, which is the geographic direction of

¹⁴⁶ In order for this study to be more persuasive, it is necessary to study the continuity of *Goryeo*, *Chosun*, and the Republic of Korea, and the process of forming a Korean identity.

state foreign policy, should be aligned with the underlying geopolitics.¹⁴⁷ Otherwise, a state begins its decline.

In this regard, the Korean Peninsula has provided strategic advantages as a gateway to the ocean for the continental powers such as China, Mongolia, and the Soviet Union. On the contrary, for maritime forces such as Japan and the United States, it has provided strategic advantages to block or advance into the continent. Therefore, the massive wars on the Korean peninsula should find cause in terms of the international geostrategic dimension surrounding the Korean peninsula rather than merely the domestic factors. In other words, wars on the Korean Peninsula have always been seen as an invasion or, at least, the intervention of foreign forces.

The invasion or intervention of such external powers had a great influence on a dynasty and a state that existed on the peninsula in terms of the domestic political situation. In other words, the domestic politics of the Korean peninsula has always been divided by conflicts of forces that sympathize or oppose external forces. Domestic politics, of course, have an intrinsic feature that conflict with various causes such as ideology, political interests, power struggles, and personal animosity. Thus, it is a flawed claim that the intervention of external forces is the sole cause of the division of domestic politics. However, as we have seen, the various factions within a dynasty or a state were exploited by external forces to maximize their internal political leverage. Such an internal division made it difficult to form a consistent and coherent national or military strategy.

In addition, the conflict between the military and the civilian sectors was also an element of this domestic political split. The research on three major wars demonstrates that the military, civilian bureaucrats, and politicians were against each other before the wars. In the *Goryeo*

¹⁴⁷ Jakub Grygiel, *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 23.

Dynasty, civilian bureaucrats almost ignored the military, which led to the military coup in 1170 before the Mongol invasion. In the *Chosun* Dynasty, it was civilian officials who led and decided military policies even though the proportion of military personnel was larger. These conflicts and gaps in civil-military relations were far from Samuel Huntington's modern concept of objective control. The military did not have room to focus on the military profession. Neither did the civilian officials support them. A lack of unity among these groups seriously hampered forming a consistent and coherent national and military strategy.

Thus, in the absence of a coherent military strategy, the readiness of the military was lacking as well. As mentioned earlier, during the invasion of the Mongols, *Goryeo* was forced to withdraw without a single organized counterattack, which was also the case during the invasions of the Japanese and the North Koreans. In three wars, the dynasties and a state of the Korean peninsula were inferior to enemies in all aspects, including manning, equipment, level of training, and the ability to sustain a war. The enemy has always taken the initiative in war. In such a situation, it was actually impossible to annihilate the enemy.

There were not many military options to choose from in such a situation where an enemy could not be destroyed. A military strategy applied at the time of *Goryeo*, *Chosun*, and the ROK was to preoccupy defensive positions in order to preserve combat power and to gradually enforce damage on the enemy. During the Mongol invasion, it took almost forty years. At the time of Japan's invasion, it was seven years. During the Korean War, the North Koreans continued to suffer damage for three years until they reached a peace agreement. Of course, as shown in the Korean War, Koreans also pursued the destruction of the enemy through maneuvers and firepower, which was done at the tactical level. At the level of strategy, the dynasties of the Korean peninsula achieved the ends of recovering their pre-war status through long-term attrition rather than a decisive battle against superior enemies. Thus, the dynasties and state of the Korean peninsula were able to cope with the annihilation strategy of enemies prevailing in maneuver and

firepower through a strategy of attrition/exhaustion.

The achievement of the prewar status through the application of this attrition strategy is not to say that it was simply because the Koreans were always inferior to the enemy. As we have seen before, the application of this attrition strategy was not a national strategic approach but rather a manifestation of resistance of the entire population. In the *Goryeo* Dynasty, while the regular army withdrew a great number of people, it was common people such as slaves and monks that fought against the Mongols. In the *Chosun* Dynasty, the self-organized troops constituted not only the regular armies but also commoners. As such, the massive wars on the Korean peninsula have all taken the form of a total war, which has led to the voluntary resistance and participation of the whole population. This is a considerable difference when compared to contemporary Western wars.

Predicting The Korean Way of War

Does this imply that the strategy of attrition or exhaustion is Korean way of war? The answer is yes and no. As analyzed in this paper, unlike the many other nations' way of war, at least, three wars on the Korean Peninsula always led to a total war that involved almost entire populations across the whole country. In this regard, the Korean way of war was not merely military thoughts expressed in action but the way of a nation's survival. Such a unique way was a product of the interaction of elements of particular contexts that continued throughout Korea's history. Considering this, the Korean way of war in the past was close to the strategy of attrition or exhaustion. However, it does not connote that the strategy of attrition or exhaustion is or should be the Korean way of war in the future. Despite its certain continuity mandated by relatively fixed elements such as peninsular geopolitics and fragmented political culture, the Korean way of war has been changing. Contemporary political circumstances and rapidly developing technologies should be considered in assessing an evolving Korean way of war. It is hard to imagine that the current Korean military would conduct a war not that different from the

three wars a in this paper. Thus, the current trajectory the ROK military is pursuing is distant from the strategy of attrition/exhaustion.

Nonetheless, one should be vigilant about the prediction, using a simple approach that the way of war is either culturally mandated or merely changing in response to its circumstances. Military practitioners, as Gray wrote, should not harbor that the way of war can be fixed or radically altered.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, it is important to know that the way of war should be understood within its context and that the evolving concept of a way of war should reflect the dynamics of evolving political, economic, and military circumstances. In short, the Korean way of war, to paraphrase Samuel Huntington, must be appropriate to its evolving history and institutions, both political and military.¹⁴⁹ It must not only be responsive to national needs but also reflect Korea's national strength and weaknesses that are identified in the past and present. It is the beginning of wisdom to recognize both.

¹⁴⁸ Gray, "The American Way of War," 14.

¹⁴⁹ Huntington, *American Military Strategy*, 13.

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