

Beyond the “Long Partition” –from divisive geographies of Korea to the Korean “meta-culture”

Valérie GELÉZEAU, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS)
China, Japan, Korea Joint Lab (UMR8173 CNRS-EHESS)
gelezeau@ehess.fr

About 9200 words + 2 figures

Abstract

This paper addresses the importance of the post-colonial division of Korea between North and South in shaping not only territorial structures, but also geographical interpretations of contemporary Korea. Starting by a critical analysis of the Korean “meta-border” (Foucher 2007), the paper then discusses how traditional approaches in Korean geography consider the “long partition” (Zamindar 2007) as a backdrop affecting South and North Korean societies. Until the 1990s, this divisive paradigm has been expressed in South Korea by the focus on various embodiments of the developmental State at the national scale with a great attention on Seoul, or its alternative, the regional problem (*chiyŏk munje*). Recent trend in Korean studies, and the shift to critical geographies of Korea brought different scales and themes acknowledging the peculiarities of the Korean socio-spatial dimensions (“a Korea in fragments” Gelézeau 2004, Armstrong 2007) that disturb multi-scaled borders and boundaries, either geographical (the peninsula and its regions), national (two Korean States), or ethnic (the transnational, the diaspora). The paper finally argues that, in the classical paradigm, the division between North and South Korea, internalized at all levels of the socio-spatial spheres, acted as an essential matrix for shaping not only both societies but their narratives in the social sciences. This calls for a new geographical approach of Korea, by going beyond the borders of the partition, from territorial borders between North and South to epistemological borders within Korean geographies, or Korean studies themselves, in order to better grasp the notion of a “Korean meta-culture” (Bonnemaison 2000).

Keywords: Korea, North/South Korea, territory, nation, culture, partition, borders, boundaries, geography, epistemology.

Spatial proximity and social distance of the two Koreas (introduction)

Since the German reunification and the emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Korean border remains a somewhat fossilized outcome of the Cold War, which degree of openness or tension is sometimes a barometer of the state in inter-Korean relations. Concretized by the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone), a 4 km-wide and 248 km-long no-man's land ribbon winding along and around the 38th parallel, still one of the closest on the planet, the inter-Korean border, sets both the *spatial proximity* of two neighbour Korean States (formerly unified people or *minjok* of the peninsula) and the *tremendous political and economical distance* of two societies parted by over 50 years of division¹.

After more than 30 years of economic growth, the Republic of Korea (or South Korea, *Taehan min'guk* or *Han'guk*) is an emerging world power, a developed and (post)industrial nation that encountered a rapid democratization since the late 1980s. A socialist country engaged on the path of economic reforms since the late 1990s, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea, *Chosŏn minjujuŭi inmin konghwaguk* or *Chosŏn*) remains a dictatorship and, although an East Asian "dragon" of the 1960s, it is now struggling with a profound crisis of its economic and political systems. In the new geopolitical post Cold-War context, and despite regular outbursts of the nuclear issue in North East Asia, both Korean States evolved during the 1990s towards rapprochement – movement which was symbolised, in the South, by the engagement policy known as the "Sunshine Policy" (*haetpyŏt chŏngch'aek*) initiated by late President Kim Dae-Jung in 1998.

Although the equilibrium of forces (on all levels, from the economy to the cultural) are now in favour of South Korea, both Koreas have acted as development models: analysis of the South Korean economic miracle speaks for itself, but North Korea too was once an example (political, social and economical) for several countries in the world, especially in Africa and South East Asia, being a recognized member – if not leader – of the "non-aligned countries". Yet, today, North Korea is struggling with what could be labelled as "counter-development" – expressed in the evolution of several indicators since the late 1980s, from the degradation of basic life indexes to the recent and rapid "ruralisation" of the country (Ducruet & Roussin 2007). Such a clash of geographical proximity and politico-economic distance (as it exists elsewhere in the world, for example on the Mexican-American border, or on both sides of the Mediterranean) is usually explained by different trajectories, development paths and geopolitical backdrop. Although all those factors play an important role in explaining the current situation in the peninsula, I would like to consider it here as a spatial paradox that the geographical discourse, and more generally, the social sciences may further engage.

¹ The expression « spatial proximity and social distance » is inspired by a well-known article analyzing individual strategies of social differentiation in French apartment complexes (Chamboredon and Lemaire 1970).

This paper² thus questions the importance of the post-colonial division of Korea between North and South in shaping not only territorial structures, but also geographical interpretations of contemporary Korea, by trying to reflect on the relationships between the border, the partition and geographical discourses on Korea? What are the tools and concepts we have to think this peculiar situation of a border that is both inter-national and intra-national and yet, no even a border? How can we analyze the division today?

To address those questions, the paper starts by reflecting on the nature of the Korean border, which is a complex geographical object: set on a “DMZ” (Demilitarized Zone), it is thus an incomplete border, a “non-border”, and still in the making. Yet, as the last “meta-border” of the Cold War (Foucher 2007), it is much more than a simple State border and, as such, it structured what can be labelled as a “Long Partition” (Zamindar 2007). Stemming from the example of Western geographies of Korea, the paper will then show how scientific discourses on Korea embodied the very nature of this border and how that changed in the past decade, along with the inter-Korean rapprochement and the de-bordering of the Cold War frontier going on in Europe³.

² Methodologically, the paper draws from various secondary sources (see list of references) and intertwined research results. Its main pillars are of two kinds. First, my own research that focused since 2004 on the South-Korean border regions, and engaged field research. In Kyōnggi province, Paengnyōn Island (the Northernmost Island of the Kyōnggi Bay) and Pa’ju City (a fast growing border city) and Yōngch’ōn county (a rural county of Kyōnggi located next to P’aju) have been investigated as case studies in 2004 and in 2008; in Kangwōn province, Ch’unch’ōn City (the provincial capital, farther away from the border but still influenced by it) has been investigated in 2007, and Ch’ōrwōn County (a divided border county transferred from North to South between 1945 and 1953) in 2009. The methodology of this fieldwork, which has been developed in previous work in urban geography (Gelézeau 2003) is based on two types of primary sources: a heterogeneous body of written primary sources (statistics, reports, maps, and so on), gathered locally, and the production of original primary sources via an ethnographic approach sustained by about 30 interviews with inhabitants and actors of development.

The second main pillar of this paper is a pluri-disciplinary project entitled “North / South interfaces in the Korean peninsula” sustained mainly by the French National Research Agency and the University Institute of France, and implemented at the Centre for Korean Studies at EHESS since 2006. This project gave way to various scientific encounters, including with North Korean partners, and exposed its first finding during an international workshop on the topic in Paris in December 2008.

³ It may be here necessary to precise that the purpose of this paper is not to critically discuss the relationships between disciplines of the social sciences (ie. geography, sociology, anthropology) and Korean Studies as a discipline –see in particular the book edited by D. SZANTON (2002) for a comprehensive and general approach of the well-addressed debate between disciplines and area studies. Rather, his paper tries to reflect on the relationship between the division of the country, and scientific research on Korea, by focusing on certain disciplines in the social sciences (especially geography). In this article the term “Korean studies” (no capital s) will thus refer more generally to research about Korea, be it in various disciplines of the social sciences, or strictly in Korean Studies (with a capital S) as a discipline.

The inter-Korean border: a division in the making inscribed in space

Geographical research about borders, borderlands, and related concepts such as boundaries and frontier, is tremendous⁴: it is indeed difficult to set for an unanimous definition of this complex spatial object, even if we consider only political or State borders, that is the space limiting two countries⁵ which would be translated as *kukkyōng* in Korean⁶. But in the vast border literature about political borders, three important things are generally admitted and worth mentioning here: first, historically, the development of political borders is to be linked, in Europe since the 17th century and elsewhere, with the rise of the Nation-States⁷; second, beyond the various existing types of political borders⁸, all contemporary borders are social constructs in a broader sense. To wrap up in one sentence some of M. Foucher analysis, I would recall that, as territorial discontinuities with a function of political delimitation, borders are also “traces of Time inscribed in Space or, more specifically, traces of a particular time inscribed in particular and singular spaces” (Foucher 1991 p. 96), of which the Korean border set on the 38th parallel is a good example.

The status of the inter-Korean border is rather peculiar: it is based on a military demarcation line between two countries that are still technically at war – no peace treaty having been signed yet between the two Koreas since the end of the Korean War that ended in 1953. To some extent, it is not even a border; it is a “non-border”⁹. And its formation was rather a lengthy process that goes beyond the well-known milestones of the colonial liberation (1945) or the creation of both Korean States (1948).

Technically, the division of the peninsula at the 38th parallel was sealed during the night of August 10-11, 1945, by two young American colonels who were given 30 minutes to find a line parting American and Soviet occupation to disarm defeated Japan (Cumings 1997: 186-192). This emblematic moment symbolizes now, in both South and North greater narratives, the unjust and somewhat hazardous division of an ethnically homogenous proto-nation-state considered unified since at least the 15th century. But in fact, the process of border formation is much more complex and

⁴ See in French Guichonnet and Raffestin 1974, Foucher 1991 and 2007, Renard 1997; in English, see Rumley 1991, Newman 2003 and 2006, Paasi 2005, Chen 2005. In Korean, the literature on borders is focused on the Korean case, even in books that deal with general issues as well, see for example Chang 2005 and Park 2005. I refer here mostly on geographical research. A massive literature has been produced about borders and boundaries in other field of the social sciences since the early 1990s when those issues became trendy in academic field.

⁵ See the definitions of “border” in Gregory & Johnston 2009 p. 52-53; the definition of “*frontière*” in George 1990 p. 213-214, Brunet 1993 p. 227-228, Lacoste 2003 p. 175-176, Lévy and Lussault 2003 p. 384-385.

⁶ This word does not stand in the translation in Korean of the Johnston dictionary, which kept two entries: *kyōnggye* (boundary) and *pyōn'gyōng* (frontier), see *Hyōndae inmun chirihak sajōn* 1992 p. 16-17 and 154-155. Geographical research in Korean also widely uses the word *chōpkyōng* (borderlands) that does not stand in that dictionary (see Park 2005, Kim 1997).

⁷ This does not mean, of course, that State borders did not exist before the rise of the modern states and, as M. Foucher recalls, the invention of political borders, including linear borders, dates back from Antiquity (Foucher 1991).

⁸ Many criteria have been used to establish typologies of borders: geohistory (beyond the obsolete distinction between “natural” and “artificial” borders), the degree of legitimacy and stability (opposing cold and “hot” borders where conflicts may erupt), the relationships between the concerned States (opposing closed and opened borders). See notes 3 and 4 for the basic references.

⁹ P. George’s dictionary starts the definition of border with “[A border] is the limit of a State, set by an international treaty”, George 1990 p. 213. All translations into English of French or Korean sources are mine.

has to be understood at a longer time scale that finds also Korean roots during the colonial time and the anti-Japanese guerrilla which radicalized local conflicts between political parties. Then, the impossibility for the Allies to reach an agreement upon the future of colonized Korea at the end of World War II and the growing fracture between the U.S. and the Soviet Union which, in the competition triggered in Asia to disarm Japan, agreed upon the 38th parallel only to bargain for other territories, such as the Kouriles islands. As a result, and after being ruled by two foreign-military led governments between 1945 and 1948, separate elections held in respective zones eventually gave birth to the ROK on August 15, 1948, and to the DPRK on September 9 the same year (Lee Jongsoo 2006); after a period of repeated incidents and guerrilla fighting at the border that culminated in important border battles during the summer of 1949, the two countries clashed in the Korean War (1950-1953), one of the hottest wars of the so-called “Cold War”. At the end of the Korean War, the border was set: although close in situation to the previous 38th parallel straight division line, it was now determined by a Military Demarcation Line (MDL) set on the sinuous cease fire line close to the 38th (Matsuda 2007).

This long story is not told for the sake of details: it reflects that during the years between 1945 and 1953, the 38th parallel was the epicentre of a division in the making, of the war violence and the focal points of the great migrations triggered by this period of havoc in the peninsula¹⁰. It also points out that in the rather long process of division, regions changed sides, sometimes several times. Located in the DPRK and crossed by the 38th parallel, Kaesŏng, most famous historical capital of medieval Korea, shifted from South to the North. Located in the ROK, Ch'ŏrwŏn county (*kun*), which was a very busy town in pre-modern and colonized Korea, shifted from North to South, and still bares numerous heritage of its Northern episode such as the famous Korean Workers Party Building.

And the border continues to evolve: according to the 1953 Armistice Agreement signed between North Korea, China and the United Nations to end the Korean War and designate the Military Demarcation Line (MDL), a 4 km wide DMZ (Demilitarized Zone sometimes called *pimujang chidae* in Korean) was created. A theoretically neutral and disarmed territory devoid of any human settlement, the DMZ is limited on the North by the Northern Border Line (NBL, *pukpang han'gye sŏn*) located 2 km North of the MDL and on the South by the Southern Border Line (SBL, *nambang han'gye sŏn*), 2 km South of the MDL. However, on the field (fact that have been confirmed on several occasion throughout my field research), the DMZ has in fact shrunk in many of its portions, when both North and South tried to push its limits to expand their territories.

To some extent, the Korean border is still in the making: it is indeed an unfinished border of an “unfinished war”.

“Hot border”¹¹ of an “unfinished war” – multilayered space and questioned territories

As a consequence, the inter-Korean border is, contrary to most linear political borders, a composite spatial region organized by several limits in direct connection to the Armistice Agreement. Beyond the DMZ, territorial limits have been established by

¹⁰ The war cost about 3 millions Korean lives (military and civil) and created major forced migrations: the major flux happened between 1950 and 1951 and drew about 1 million persons from North to South.

¹¹ “Hot borders” (M. Foucher 1991) designates unstable borders where military tension is high and where a conflict may erupt; they are opposed to “cold borders”, that is pacified and stable border.

the national governments of North and South Korea respectively. In North Korea, the border region within 50 km from the border line is a special military region. In the South, the South Korean Secretary of Defense established the Civilian Control Line (*min'ganin t'ongje sŏn* or *mint'ongsŏn* - CCL): running South 10 to 15 km away from the MDL and limiting the Civilian Control Zone (*min'ganin t'ongje chiyŏk*), where civilian access and settlements are strictly controlled¹². Also delineated by the Secretary of Defense, the Military Installations Protection Districts (*kunsa sisŏl poho kuyŏk*) are special districts (usually including military bases and neighbouring settlements) designated within areas up to 50 km away from the MDL. As a consequence, the spatial structure of the border region is multilayered, characterized by several limits and zones, and scattered by different types of enclaves (Gelézeau 2008b), as illustrates the case of P'aju City (**Figure: Zones and enclaves in P'aju City**). Some enclaves are military enclaves, such as the military bases (purple rounds) or the military exercise areas, in light brown; other enclaves are tourists spots (green rounds), some of which are accessible freely, like the Odusan observatory in P'aju City, others on designated bus tours, such as the series of spots behind the Civilian Control Line, next to Torasan (including the 3rd invasion tunnel, the Torasan observatory, and Reunification Village/*T'ongil ch'on*), or Haemaru Village a little further East. In the DMZ itself, only JSA (military enclave also visited by tourists on controlled tours) is accessible, whereas the two villages nearby, Taesong-dong in the South, and Kijong-dong in the North, are off limits for the average visitor. Finally, the Kaesong industrial complex in the North is also an enclave which access is restricted to both North and South Koreans, except those working there.

Another consequence is that the inter-Korean border region includes territories of questioned and contested status, which characterizes military borders¹³. The case of Paengnyŏng Island, combining the constraints of a border location with an extremely strategic and symbolic location as an outpost of South Korean national territory, provides a clear example of such a situation.

Located just below the 38th parallel, less than 25 km from the North Korean coast, Paengnyŏng Island is part of a group of South Korean islands included in one rural county of Inch'ŏn Metropolitan City located 250 km away. In 1953, the Armistice Agreement did not determine maritime limits beyond the estuary of the Han River, and neither North Korea nor South Korea could agree on one until now: they did not negotiate after the 1982 Montego Bay conference changing international maritime law, as all states having such intricate maritime limits were supposed to do. The so-called NLL (Northern Limit Line), appearing on South Korean maps and many Western international maps, which is connected to the land MDL and runs northwest in the Yellow Sea, is a "limit" established *de facto* in 1958 by the ROK, primarily to protect their own fishing boats for sailing to dangerous waters. On its own side, North Korea unilaterally proclaimed in 1977 a 50 miles military sea zone that actually encompasses the five ROK islands (Lee 2001). As a consequence, in the absence of an agreement over the definition of territorial waters, most of the ocean around the five islands is a "grey area" of very ambiguous status.

The naval clashes that erupted around the island in June 1999, September 2002 and November 2009 (Roehrig 2009) are thus the direct expression of the "hot border". In the current state of affairs, and the impossibility for both Koreas to settle

¹² For a travel writing account full of historical data about the Civilian Control Zone, see the recently translated work by Lee Si-Woo, whose activist action actually led to prison for several months in 2007 (Si-Woo LEE 2008).

¹³ See for example Chang 2005, chapter 3, pp. 57-118.

their maritime borders without a peace treaty, those ambiguous maritime territories are the weak points where the border actually inflames, almost independently of the state of inter-Korean relations: in 1999 and 2002, the relations of the two countries were facing some tension, in an broader period of rapprochement; on the contrary, 2009 is a phase of improvement within a general trend of colder relations since 2007.

Post-colonial and fossilized “meta-border” of the “Long Partition”?

Fibally the inter-Korean border is, as several borders of the world were and still are, a post-colonial border born from the Cold War equilibrium. In his recent work describing the intense bordering of the world since the 1990s, the French geographer and border specialist M. Foucher elaborates on the concept of “meta-border” (Foucher 2007): it is not a conventional land border, but a border that goes way beyond the local or the national scales, and refers to, or even creates, a system at large. M. Foucher identifies a few meta-borders in the World History; among them an early “meta-border” established during the Age of Discovery is the one set by the 1495 Tordesilla Treaty splitting between Spain and Portugal the New World and future territories to rule – this border, a totally imaginary line, was traced before the land to conquer were even reached by the Western powers. Yet, it did create a system at large, reflected for example in the contemporary linguistic division between Portuguese-speaking Brasil and the rest of Latin America.

More recently, the so-called Iron Curtain can be identified as a meta-border of the Cold War that opposed not only the two Super Powers, but also (and on a more global scale) capitalist nations and the socialist block during a long 20th century. In their book tracing the stages of the expansion and territorialisation of communism in Europe from 1917 (the October Revolution) to 1961 (construction of the Berlin Wall), S. Cœuré and S. Dullin (2007) show how the diplomatic and military establishment of State borders created internalized dynamics of ideological frontiers (that sometimes took the form of violent armed conflicts such as the Spanish Civil War) and communist enclaves (for example the so-called “red suburbs” in France). Since the disruption of the European “meta-border” after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dislocation of the USSR in 1991, the inter-Korean border still remains one of the most apparent dividing lines of those two great political, economical and social systems (capitalism and socialism) that structured the 20th century and, as such, appears not only as a fossilized meta-border Cold War (which is over), but also as an explicit and active meta-border of it: many works in the social sciences show how the ideological opposition between capitalism and socialism that once divided Europe faded much slower in the social and cultural levels than in the official political or economical agendas, thus identifying a “wall in the head” (see Bleiker 2004 or Grésillon about Berlin 2002). But in the Korean peninsula, the opposition between capitalism and socialism is still very alive between the two States (Han Jin’gõn 2007). What is evident in the official State discourses is also reflected in the geographical structures of both countries that have imprinted the logics of their respective development models (Gelézeau and Delissen 2002, Ducruet and Roussin 2007).

This geographical analysis of the inter-Korean border highlights the a-typical, complex and polymorphic nature of this border: I demonstrated that it is first a “non-border” of an “unfinished war”, while being a metamorphic frontline of a division still in the making; at the same times, paradoxically, it is a perfect example of a meta-border inscribed in the past Cold War system at large. As such, it is strongly connected to what I may label a Korean “Long Partition”, expression which I borrow to a fascinating

monography in historical anthropology (Zamindar 2007) about the partition between India and Pakistan. The book analyses the way that the new States emerged from the partition of India in 1948 organized massive migrations of populations while engaging concrete actions (using legal, cultural, economical tools) to build their borders by constructing and consolidating national difference, especially in the regions where the cultural or historical peculiarities were less apparent. As for Korea, the idea of a “Long Partition” designates less the length of the political division (over 50 years is not such a long time in the general realm of human history) than its deep and durable inscription in the socio-spatial structure of the parted States, which fits also well the Korean case.

In the peninsula, the polymorphic border of a “Long Partition” not only separates two different States, it also fractures two competing socio-spatial expressions of the Korean nation (*minjok*) and the Korean identity – namely that of *Han’guk* and that of *Chosŏn*. In fact, considering the ethnic significance of “nation” (*minjok*) in both Koreas (Shin Gi-Wook 2006), one could actually argue that, in the absence of peace treaty and until a conventional State border is established between the two Koreas, the border between them is actually not an international border, but an intra-national one.

The “Long Partition” and divisive geographies of Korea

As can be expected, the very nature of this border (altogether meta-, inter-, and intra-Korea) embodied in the scientific discourses on Korea, as the example of geographical literature and particularly Western general geographies of Korea may illustrate.

Since the 1970s epistemological turn in the social sciences (and M. Foucault’s work in particular) the power of scientific discourse that contributes to construct or create what it pretends to be only neutrally analyzing can not be ignored. For example, I recalled in the introduction of *La Corée en miettes* (Gelézeau 2004: 5-6) the somewhat disturbing conclusion of P. Bourdieu stating that in geographical works, the notion of region is largely the object of a performative discourse that creates what it is studying: in short, regions would not exist outside geographical narratives. After years of critical research in regional geography, radical postmodernist positions of total relativism have been attenuated in that discipline (Staszak 2001: 11) and other social sciences: geographers, in France (Di Méo 1998) and Korea (Ryu 2007a and 1998 in particular) now tend to agree that geographical regions encompass certain realities (an intermediate space where cultural and social practices emerge, or an area defined by economic flows) but that the analysis of regions, for example that of their specificity and their limits, reside in scientific discourse – which is also rarely devoid of ideological bias.

Likewise, the political and territorial division of Korea in two States has naturally created Korean geographies of the division, which the analysis of some examples of a geographical “genre”, namely general and regional geographies of Korea in French or English, may illustrate. From the early 19th century and the adventure of the first French “*géographie universelle*” (world geography) by Malte-Brun (1810-) to the latest one (see Pezeu-Massabuau 1994 in Brunet 1990-) or more recent regional or general geographies of Korea in English (McCune 1980; *Korea. the Land and People* 2000¹⁴), or French (Balaize 1993), all those projects are

¹⁴ This book (*Korea. The Land and People*) was produced for the 2000 International Geographical Congress, which was held in Seoul for the first time that year under the general theme “Living in diversity”.

characterized by a normative approach, which an explicit or implicit pedagogical project motivates – the “knowledge” of Korea as a country. In early geographical work by cabinet geographers (Malte-Brun) or traveller geographers (Reclus 1882), irrigated by long lasting images of the peninsula (one being the comparison with Italy that stands in the 1835 Malte-Brun geography), Korea is considered as a secondary country in East Asia: largely unknown, the peninsula does make an independent chapter, but is addressed either between China and Japan (Malte-Brun 1835¹⁵, Reclus 1882), or after (Vidal 1829); the major regional contrast evoked is not the opposition between North and South, but the opposition between mountainous and flatlands devoted to paddies. The emphasis on the country’s homogeneousness stand as well in the conclusion of the massive work by German geographer Herman Lautensach (1945) – as the translators E. and K. Dege remind (1988), the most comprehensive geography of Korea written in Western language dates back from before the country was divided. In the conclusion, after recalling the demographic and topographic contrasts between North and South, the author notes¹⁶:

“In contrast to this (opposition of demographic density between North and South), the basic features of the traditional Korean cultural landscape are nearly the same all over the country. Differences between the south and the north like those existing around the time of the birth of Christ in the “period of the Three Hans” have disappeared during the last 2 millennia. [...] The style of the Korean culture is surprisingly similar everywhere. [...]” (p. 486).

Although the statement focus on the cultural sphere, and although the conclusion recalls again the many contrasts of the three types of Korean regional changes (continental/maritime, east/west, peripheral/interior), the final words are those of homogeneity:

“[Korea’s] latitude at the transition from the subtropics to the temperate zone predestines it, however, to have a great wealth of forms. Its mountainous nature and the diversity of the seas surrounding it multiply this wealth, and the historical development of the past 60 years has increased it further. Nevertheless, on the whole this country gives the impression of homogeneity, for its plurality can be summarized from a few interrelated standpoints.” (p. 492).

Published like the Lautensach volume during the division period of the peninsula, but during the Korean War in 1953, the chapter on Korea in *L’Asie* by French geographer P. Gourou echoes the former’s conclusions with an attention to the variety of regions, but the emphasis on homogeneousness:

“Korea can not be easily divided between North and South, East and West; to say, for example, that the North of Korea is opposed to the South by various aspects is forgetting the capital fact that the plains of Pyongyang and Seoul are not so different.” (p. 216).¹⁷

In Western countries, a “geography of division” that emerged after 1953 since the partition was naturally constructed from and about South Korea. Inspired by an in depth knowledge of Korea before the division¹⁸, famous American geographer S. McCune, who was born and bred in Korea, naturally parts the regional chapters of *Korea’s Heritage. A Regional and Social Geography* (1956) into North and South (after eight chapters of thematical approach). In 1972, the geography by P. Bartz,

¹⁵ For example, Korea occupies a section with the Ryu-Kyu island in the Malte-Brun geography (“Royaumes de Corée et de Lieou-Kieou”: “Kingdoms of Korea and the Lieou-Kieou Islands, p. 254).

¹⁶ Cited pages are from the translated book by E. and K. Dege published in 1988.

¹⁷ Similar conclusions are to be found in Zaichikov geography of Korea which was published in 1951 and translated in 1952 in English by A. Parry (notes and introduction by S. McCune).

¹⁸ “Having been born in Korea, I might be classed as a Korean geographer, but I cannot make that claim. As an American, I have studied Korean geography with a different slant. Other western geographers, for example, Lautensach and Zaichikov, also, study Korea from a different non-Asian approach.” (McCune 1980: 176).

who also lived in Korea before the division (she was evacuated from Seoul in 1950) solidifies the divisive paradigm by focusing exclusively on the ROK, as the title states: *South Korea*. Expressive also of the logic of this divisive paradigm is one of the first geographies of Korea published in English by South Korean geographers, *Korea – Geographical Perspectives* (Kim and Yoo 1988). The book, published by the Korean Educational Development Institute during the 1980s (the Olympic decade marking the emergence of South Korea on the international scene thus calling for such disseminated knowledge in English) does not cover the DPRK at all (because of the lack of data), but the title symbolically encompasses the whole peninsula. This Korean “geography of division”, is particularly well-expressed in 1980s school geography textbooks (which in both South and North Korea are delivering State-controlled official knowledge), who both tend to deny the existence of the other one as the legitimate Korea while solidifying the fault lines between the two countries (Gelézeau 2004: 6-9¹⁹).

The example of geographical literature suggests how the division between North and South has been powerfully embodied in the general narrative of Korean studies, in various social sciences or in “Korean Studies” strictly as a discipline²⁰. This classical paradigm of Korean studies has absorbed and consolidated the division in their research perspective, while somewhat assuming the uniqueness and coherence of the Korean identity: this was also reflected in the scale of the research themselves focused either at the local scale or the national scale. The local scale focuses on the village, locus of traditional Korean identity and its eventual modernization (see for example Guillemoz 1983 in anthropology or Lee Joonsun 1992 in geography); the national scale focuses on the national development, and its emblematic places such as Seoul, or its alternative the *chiyŏk munje* or the regional problem²¹, especially in its economical dimension (uneven regional development, discrepancy between Seoul and the provinces) or political expressions (regionally-based political parties for example). As a consequence in geography, the intermediate scale of the relation of space and society (for example mid-sized cities, or counties – *kun*) was less thoroughly studied (Yoo and Son 2000). In that general perspective of Korean studies, the division is considered as an external backdrop, and either the Southern part of North Korea, or the Northern part of South Korea are considered in relation to the other – which somehow makes an ideological fault line a scientific one.

From the bi-polar divisive paradigm to the Korean “meta-culture”

One important factor of that situation is of course that the division indeed naturally divided Korean studies that were themselves practically structured by the meta-border until the early 1990s. Depending on their position in the largely bi-polar Cold War world, Korean geography, along with the general trend of Korean studies, evolved in two different narratives that are much more explicitly identified in Korean

¹⁹ In contrast, history and geography school textbooks since the late 1990s have changed, see below and particularly DELISSEN 2008.

²⁰ As stated in the note 2 of the introduction, the purpose of this paper is not to discuss the relationship between the social sciences and Korean Studies as disciplines, but to examine how the division of the peninsula has been expressed in research focusing on Korea, which “Korean studies” (with a minuscule s) here designates.

²¹ In South Korea, the *chiyŏk munje* is addressed by a considerable body of literature, in geography, political sciences, history, sociology. See Gelézeau 2004 for a pluri-disciplinary and French/Korean cross-cultural approach. See Park Bae-Gyoon (2003) for a renewed analysis in political geography.

than in Western languages, whereas the name “Korea” can actually stand for both countries depending on the context.

The paradigm presents a double bi-polar structure: on one side, language and knowledge of *Han’guk*, or South Korea, developed from South Korea itself and the Western block, constructing and creating *Pukhan* while largely ignoring if not discriminating *Chosŏn*. On the other side, almost a mirror to the previous one, language and knowledge about *Chosŏn*, or North Korea, developed from North Korea and the Eastern Block, constructing and creating *Nam chosŏn*, while largely ignoring if not discriminating *Han’guk*. *Han’guk* coupled with *Pukhan* opposed with *Namhan* / *Chosŏn* coupled with *Namchosŏn* opposed with *Pukchosŏn* – the very existence of two lexical and epistemological fields designating the Koreas is significant of this situation. The Korean Studies classical paradigm does not only refer to the two Korean States, it actually creates four Koreas: South Korea constructed from the South (*Han’guk hak*, and EHESS Centre for Korean Studies named *Han’guk yŏn’gusent’ŏ* belongs to that episteme); North Korea constructed from the North (*Chosŏn hak*); North Korea constructed from the South *Pukhan hak* (which has its “hauts-lieux” of archives and study, such as the *Pukhan charyo sent’ŏ* or the *Pukhan taehakwŏn taehakkyo* in Seoul); and finally, South Korea constructed from the Northern research on the South (*Nam chosŏn hak*). During a rare seminar on “North/South interfaces in the Korean peninsula” held at EHESS (June 2007) involving North Korean participants assembled under the Korean Association for Social Scientists (*KASS Chosŏn sahoe kwahakcha hyŏphoe*), a “*Namchosŏn yŏn’guwŏn*” was briefly mentioned.

But indeed, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the development of a post-Cold War logic in Europe, contributed to imperceptibly change the scientific border dividing Western and Eastern Korean studies by developing and allowing circulations of people, concepts, and knowledge among European scholars. In that enterprise, the role of the Association for Korean Studies in Europe (AKSE) is to be mentioned – let us not forget that it had set from the beginning among its goal to overcome the Iron Curtain in Korean studies. A North Korean delegation was often invited to the biennale conference and usually present. In Europe, the work of scholars from Eastern European countries who had long developed North Korean studies (for example, R. Frank in economy, or A. Zhebin in history, etc.) and had a direct experience of the North with an understanding from within the system, that circulated more and more to Western European countries since the late 1990s, has been of crucial importance.

At the same time, the traditional paradigm of Korean studies focused on the uniqueness and coherence of the Korean culture (again, whether *Han’guk* or *Chosŏn*) has greatly evolved, at least in the Western academia since the early 1990s. In geographical works, this evolution is perceptible since the early 2000s, even in the genre of general and regional geographies of Korea. For example, although the perspective is exclusively a South Korean perspective, the book published on the occasion of the IGU 20th congress in Seoul, which general theme was labelled “Living in diversity”, mixes contemporary thematical analysis of South Korea with a regional approach, including some North Korean regions, that tends to deviate from the traditional systematic focus on provinces (*to*). And today, Korean geography is also developed from in a wide range of sub-disciplines (Park Bae-Gyoon in political geography, Ryu Je-Hun in historical and cultural geography, Shin Hyun-Bang in urban geography) that focuses more on a strong theory-based analysis and where case studies (indeed here South Korea) allows not only to develop knowledge on a

country, but in a disciplinary field. More generally in Korean studies, the complex geometry of the Korean culture that expands well beyond the national territory and that encompasses a diaspora is now widely recognized and analyzed, at many different level – to the point that Korea is qualified, to recall the words of C. Armstrong (2006), a “nation in fragments”. At the infra-national scale, geographical regional studies discuss the diversity of Korean regions, and places, as it is expressed in several recent works (Gelézeau 2004, Tangherlini and Yea 2008, Ryu 1998, 2007a, 2007b) At the supra-national scale, numerous studies on the diaspora or the new cultural exchanges in Asia reflect the same shift to analysis that disturbs traditional borders and boundaries either geographical (the peninsula and its regions), national (two Korean States), or ethnic (the transnational, the diaspora).

The idea of “nation in fragment” or multiple Koreas would echo the concept of “meta-culture” developed by the cultural geographer J. Bonnemaïson: contemporary cultures, especially those involving intense migrations past or present, and the existence of a diaspora, expand by nature beyond a largely fantasized “national” territory; they create a cultural landscape organized in a nexus of places and communities to be analyzed as a network of spaces rather than a spatial continuous area (Bonnemaïson 2000)²². Not denying a somewhat playful use of the neologism “meta” in this paper, I wish to draw the reader’s attention on the fact that this prefix is nonetheless a significant ad-on. The concept of “meta-culture” is very different from the idea of “Korea in fragments” or simply multiple Koreas. It does not only refer to a Korea into pieces, instead it helps express that *Korea is both very coherent although highly multiple*. Every expression of Korean identity is related to the other ones – they are not standing as such by themselves and, to refer once again to the North/South Long Partition, many examples of national development considered as autonomous and separate can actually be interpreted as formed and in-formed by the division, as it has been noted also about other partitioned countries in the field of international relations (Greenberg 2004). To take only here the case of Seoul and Pyongyang urban development, we know what many features of each capital city owes to the shadow of the Other nearby (see Kim & Choe 1997, Schinz and Dege 1990): the depth of the subway that would serve (both in Seoul and Pyongyang, although the dizzying distance in Pyongyang may reflect the siege mental state of the country) as a shelter in case of war; the drive to the South in Seoul and the post 1970s segregations that positioned the Han river as a secondary protection from a possible Northern invasion for wealthier areas; the 1988 Seoul’s Olympic Games followed by the 1989 Youth and Student festival in Pyongyang, both sportive and cultural event creating new residential and functional poles in each city (Chamsil-Kangnam in Seoul and Kwangbok in Pyongyang).

Among many possible, a representation of the Korean “meta-culture” emerged from the research project implemented at EHESS in 2006 about “North/South interfaces of the peninsula” – interfaces being defined in a very broad sense as « all contact areas between the two Koreas »²³.

²² An anthropological view on meta-cultural contemporary societies is given by A. Appadurai’s analysis of so called “ethnoscapes” (Appadurai 1996).

²³ For a synthetic presentation of the research project general results, as well as the theoretical framework that makes its underground, see report to the French National Research Agency, referenced ANR-05-JCJC-0006: *Les interfaces Nord/Sud dans la péninsule coréenne* (North/South interfaces in the Korean peninsula), May 2009. Also on file with the author.

Scientific interest for the study of contacts reflects the two tendencies suggested in previous sections: the expansion of border studies beyond the geopolitical arena, and the shift in the classical paradigm of Korean studies worldwide from the Cold War binary paradigm to a post-Cold War paradigm acknowledging the multiplicity of Korean culture. It also reflects of course the evolution of inter-Korean relations since the 1970s, and more specifically the inter-Korean rapprochement since the 1990s. But in grasping the well-studied theme of contacts, the research tried to divert from the already well-developed approaches in political sciences or economy about inter-Korean political and economic relations. Instead, it focused on different types of contacts, including spatial area of contacts like the border, and immaterial and symbolic ones (for example the image of the Other in official discourse and in unofficial discourse), and confronted them all. It soon appeared that most interfaces are in fact happening on multiple levels (social, spatial and symbolic): for example, the inter-Korean border is a contact region, where inter-Korean relations can develop (the Kaesong industrial complex), which also triggers encounters between North and South Koreans that may also change the image of each country into individual's minds. So, the border zone is altogether a spatial and a social interface. As the project evolved, the diverse interfaces were analyzed via specific case studies privileging the study of one type of contacts in different disciplines of the social sciences: social interfaces involving encounters and interactions between people of both countries (Bidet 2009, De Ceuster 2008, and Rivé-Lasan 2008), narrative interfaces involving discourse of each Korea about the Other (Delissen 2008, Fruchart-Ramond 2008, Joinau 2008), and spatial interfaces involving territorial contacts (Chabanol 2008, Colin 2008, Gelézeau 2008).

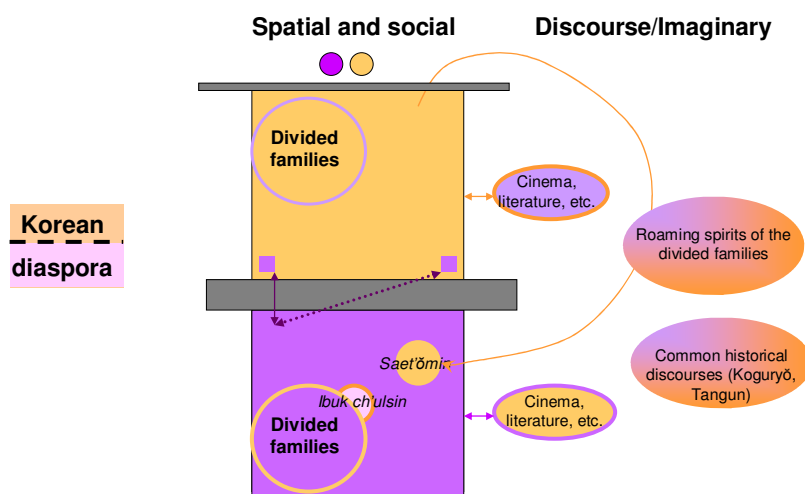
Placing the analysis in the very area of contacts helped to better identify the heritage power of a divisive perspective in Korean studies. Furthermore, the concept of "interface" which was essentially of heuristic use, highlighted that the partition is not a simple backdrop, but that it has been internalized in both societies: the "meta-border" is naturally embodied in many aspects of the "meta-culture", as this schematic representation tries to express. Even in the case of two systems (North and South) that hardly communicate with each other, the couple of rupture/contact is to be found in many levels of the society.

(Figure of the geometry of the meta-culture, see below)

This scheme, which tries to represent different types of encounters between the two Koreas, expresses the particularly complex nature of the relationship between the two countries, which is far from being a simple contact encapsulated in the political or territorial borders of the peninsula. On a strictly spatial level, it is even displaced far away from the peninsula, for example in Japan, or in Central Asia, where the Korean diaspora is more than ever confronted with the dual presence and competitive strategies of both Koreas to be the unique identity reference of the diaspora (Yim 2008). Two spatial enclaves of South Korea, the Kaesŏng industrial complex, and the Kŭmgangsan tourist complex have been developed within North Korea since the early 2000s. There are social enclaves of the North in the South: about 15 000 North Korean immigrants/refugees (*saet'ŏmin*) live currently in South Korea (Bidet 2009); and, in each country, descendants of the other side's lineages who migrated during the border making time of 1945-1953 (called *ibuk ch'ulsin* in the South) also form social enclaves seldom studied as such, even in the more accessible South. At the same time, while producing official discourses about the other one (in school textbooks, in press agency releases) or fictional (cinema, literature), both Korean States seem to agree on a few range of common narratives:

for example, the foundation myth of the Korean people (Tan'gun), or the history of Koguryo (where both States join on a somewhat common battle against Chinese historical interpretations).

The Korean « meta-culture » and the pervasive division



Invitation as a conclusion

Created by the post-colonial division of a formerly unified Korean State, the border between the ROK and the DPRK is in fact a paradox. From a geographical perspective, this border has been identified altogether as a non-border (the simple cease-fire line on an “unfinished war”), an intra-national border (of the Korean *minjok* or nation in an ethnic sense), and a “meta-border” (Foucher 2007), that is a border set way beyond a particular territory (here, the peninsula), and referring to a system at large. As a “meta-border”, the Korean border between the ROK and the DPRK is a fossilized border of the Cold War system in a post-Cold War world, prolonging the clash between socialism and capitalism that characterized a long 20th century but gradually disappeared (or took different forms) in other parts of the world since the early 1990s. This border is finally that of a “Long Partition”, which designates less the length of the political division than its deep and durable inscription in the socio-spatial structure of the divided Korean States.

Not restricted to territorial structures, the border also created divisive geographies of Korea and, more generally, divisive Korean studies – defined broadly in the paper as the scientific work taking Korea as an object of study, from various disciplinary perspectives. In the classical paradigm, the division between North and South Korea, internalized at all levels of the socio-spatial spheres, acted as an essential matrix for shaping not only both societies but their narratives in the social sciences. From the case of geographical studies, we may define a more general paradigm: the partition is not only inscribed in the national and social landscape, it is inscribed in the Korean psyche on both sides, and eventually constructed by the Korean studies narratives. The very nature of the border, in fact, may define certain aspects of the divisive paradigm: the division strongly shapes discourses and

interpretation on an ideological level (meta-border), while the ideological posture is ignored, unclearly addressed, if not negated (non-border).

Until the early 1990s, this divisive paradigm has been expressed in South Korean geography by the focus on various embodiments of the developmental State at the national scale with a great attention on Seoul, or its alternative, the *chiyŏk munje*. But recent trends and the shift to critical geographies of Korea, or more theory-led based geographical work, brought different scales and themes acknowledging the peculiarities of the Korean socio-spatial dimensions (“a Korea in fragments”) that disturb multi-scaled borders and boundaries, either geographical (the peninsula and its regions), national (two Korean States), or ethnic (the transnational, the diaspora). This calls for a new geographical approach of Korea, by going beyond the borders of the partition, from territorial borders between North and South to epistemological borders within Korean geographies, or Korean studies more generally, in order to better grasp the notion of a “Korean meta-culture” (Bonnemaison 2000), which geometry is much more complex than the existence of two nation States – even including the diaspora – might suggest.

More generally in Korean studies, “situated knowledge” can hardly be vaguely and generally “Koreanly-situated”. It is either situated in the North or in the South. This invites scholars to continue developing a scientific discourses that may question the duality (or multiplicity) of Korea, while locating both expressions of the Korean culture or nation on the same level of legitimacy, and accepting their plurality. Future developments in Korean studies would be taking the full measure of the Long Partition and the meta-culture that have emerged. No matter what happens politically or economically tomorrow or the day after, it is a division profoundly inscribed in the national psyche and the social landscape (in the broader sense). The condition of understanding the Koreas’ multiple pasts and presents will reside in the scientific community’s capacity of mobilizing this awareness.

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