

DEMOCRACY AS THE LEGITIMATE “FORM” AND “CONTENT”:  
*MINJUNG MISUL* IN DISSIDENT NATIONALISM OF SOUTH KOREA

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Hyejong Yoo

May 2011

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Hyejong Yoo, Ph.D.

Cornell University 2011

This study delineates *minjung misul*'s (“the people’s art”) *sotong* (“dialogue”) in re-envisioning Koreans’ modernism and nation-state during the 1980s’ democratization movement of South Korea. Aligned with the postcolonial dissident movement and the democratization movement, the *minjung* artists’ multilayered dialogue with the sociopolitical, economic, cultural-intellectual, and spiritual realms articulated the artists’ underlying operational logic and aspirations—the creation of a legitimate Korean modernism and modernity—in the form of dissident nationalism. In contrast to the state’s ethnic nationalism, dissident nationalism, which inherited the Korean desire for democracy from the nationalist movement, engaged in political and aesthetic-ethical contemplations of democracy.

With democracy as their central principle, the *minjung* artists radically reexamined and reconceptualized democracy and other “familiar” yet ambiguous and multi-layered notions/discourses in their reworking of Korean modernism and everyday/national community. In exploring the *minjung* artists’ aesthetic, discursive, and activist endeavors, I demonstrate that the *minjung* artists attempted to create a competing model of modernism and modernity that would have moral legitimacy over the existing Western and Korean modernisms and modernities. I explore how their structural critique of art ideology and of the art establishment developed into a reenvisioning of everyday community and of the democratization of the Korean nation-state. By interrogating the *minjung* artists’ principle values,

humanism/democracy, the study shows that the artists' imagining of the people's nation-state sows the seeds for a new vision of the transnational.



## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Hyejong Yoo holds a B.A. in Art History from the University of California at Los Angeles, awarded in 2002. She completed her M.A. in the Department of Art History and Visual Studies at Cornell University in 2006.

*This dissertation is for my mom and my dad.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been imagining the blissful moment of writing my acknowledgments from the day I began writing my dissertation. At last, I have reached that moment, and I am thrilled to acknowledge the people who have supported and nurtured my work over the years. Most of all, I wish to thank my advisor, An-yi Pan, for his enthusiastic guidance, and for his warmest encouragement and patience during my graduate study at Cornell. I began to contemplate my future dissertation project in my engagement in Taiwan's political history and contemporary art, similar to South Korea's, through his fascinating exhibition *Contemporary Taiwanese Art in the Era of Contention*. I was able to further develop my interests in contemporary Korean art in his excellent direct reading of modern and contemporary Chinese art in comparative terms. He has supported my project tremendously and gave me crucial suggestions for in-depth investigation. Furthermore, despite my long contemplation on (and confusion over) the project, he unwearingly waited for me to bring out my own voice in the writing.

My committee member Iftikhar Dadi has provided and shaped the foundation of my study on Korea's modernism and modernity through his superb seminars, direct readings, and casual discussions. His groundbreaking works on Muslim and Pakistani modernism have continued to inspire me and guide my project. My committee member Thuy Tu has helped me to conceptualize my project through her trans-disciplinary approaches to her exciting seminar and direct readings with me. Her suggestions were very helpful as I revised my dissertation. I feel truly blessed to have met my committee member Jacqueline Pak and to be working with her. Although I didn't meet her until the later phase of my writing, her untiring commitment and generosity made the experience of writing the dissertation extraordinary, and so humane. She has invited me into fascinating discussions, challenged me with her intellectual fierceness and originality, and shared her joy and passion for learning. And

her unwavering faith and infectious visions have kept me working through the tough times, focused on my project.

Professor Daniel McKee, who graciously agreed to be a reader, opened and engaged in my dissertation in comparative terms by bringing to it his expertise in Japanese studies. His insightful suggestions were very helpful to thinking through my project with more careful, balanced viewpoints.

I would like to extend my thanks to Rich Keller, Keeley Boerman, and Jessica Smith for their warmth and administrative support, which made my school life much easier. In addition, I wish to thank my editor, Kristen Ebert-Wagner, for her excellent editing and insightful comments. Her timely and effective collaboration has been invaluable to clarifying my ideas and to crafting my writing.

I would like to deeply thank Yu Yeongpyo, the vice chairman of the Permanent Committee of the Korea Democracy Foundation, and Jo Seongwu, the assembly president of the Permanent Committee of the Korean Council for Reconciliation and Cooperation. They have introduced me to people who helped me conduct my research, clarified facts about the dissident movement, and encouraged my project with the utmost enthusiasm. The dissident journalist and ex-vice president of *Han'gyeore Daily*, Yim Jaegyeong, patiently listened to my rough idea on Korea's modernity and shared his insights. I would very much like to thank the dissident pastors Park Hyeonggyu and Won Gijun for extensively sharing their *minjung* church mission through interviews. I wish to acknowledge the staff members Yun Hyejun and Yun Sohee at the Archives of Korean Art at the Hoam Art Museum for their support of my research.

Kim Yongtae, the ex-president of the National Artists Federation, especially helped me to meet *minjung* artists in the National Artists Association. Many *minjung* artists, not all of whom I can acknowledge here, genuinely welcomed and invited me

to their meetings, for which I cannot thank them enough! I wish to acknowledge the *minjung* artists Yim Oksang, Hwang Jaehyeong, Kim Bongjun, Ju Jaehwan, Gang Yobae, Ryu Yeonbok, Hong Seon'oung, Shin Hakcheol, Park Heungsun, Yeo Un, Choe Byeongsu, Mun Yeongtae, and others and the art critic Seong Wan'gyeong for providing me with interviews/casual meetings, research materials, and their generosity with their time and their openness. I would also like to show my profuse thanks to several *minjung* artists, Yi Jongryul, Kim Unseong, Kim Seo'gyeong, and their child, Kim Soheun; and Kim Seongsu, Yi Guyeong, Wi Jongman, and Han Yujin for their warmest support and friendship. In particular, Kim Yun'gi helped me immensely during every part of my project; without his help, I could not have come this far.

I have been fortunate to be surrounded by wonderful friends and colleagues at Cornell. My beautiful friend Thembinkosi has been there for me always, sharing humbling moments with silly jokes and laughs, and sympathetic hearts. His brilliance and visions have constantly inspired and moved me. Fun-loving Claudia has lightened up my life so much with her wicked humor and endless "weird" ideas. Also, being an innovative thinker, she made our conversations intense learning experiences. My dear friends Soraya and Derek have been heartfelt mentors, and exemplars of scholarly work and integrity. In particular, Soraya has been so caring and wise in giving me advice and suggestions at every important stage of my study here. Isaak and Esther have been the joy and comforts of my heart and have been walking with me from the first day I arrived at Ithaca. I cherish their friendship immensely! Saam and Lily, and their beautiful baby Aslan, have been so generous and supportive. Saam's passion for and perseverance of his study and Lily's strength and compassion have continued to inspire me. I also wish to extend my great thanks to Arshiya, Soumya, Bo, and Abe, for their friendship and support.

My parents in South Korea have been the most steadfast supporters of my project and study in the United States. I cannot quite express how thankful I am for their years of immeasurable devotion to, faith in, and patience with me. Their profound interest in my study and personal growth has been my greatest encouragement and inspiration. Most of all, their life principles and values have always given me a firm foundation for my action and thoughts, and as a result I am able to carry on my work with conviction and sincerity. I dedicate my dissertation to my mom and dad with my deepest appreciation for their love and faith. My sister and brother also deserve many thanks for their support and inspirations.

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## **PART I: MULTIFACETS OF DISSIDENT NATIONALISM**

**INTRODUCTION:**  
**QUEST FOR LEGITIMACY:**  
**REMAPPING KOREA'S MODERNISM AND MODERNITY**

As a prominent art movement of the 1980s, *minjung misul* (“the people’s art”) holds a unique place in the development of contemporary Korean art and in Korean art historiography. *Minjung misul* emerged in the late 1970s, when Koreans’ yearning for freedom and democracy culminated in mass protests after decades of authoritarian dictatorship. Critical of institutional art practices, the movement was an attempt to communicate the social and political realities of artists (and Koreans) that had been shaped by Japanese colonialism, civil war, the national division, and rapid modernization. Moreover, the movement was incorporated as a tactical instrument in the anti-government and pro-democracy protests of the post-Gwangju 1980s [Figure A.1]. For its enthusiastic artistic and political interventions, *minjung misul* has increasingly been reevaluated as “a truly modern Korean art,” clearing away some of the earlier, negative assessments of the movement (i.e., its lack of artistic quality and its subordination to political ideology).<sup>1</sup>

Despite its essential role in contemporary Korean art history, *minjung misul* has only recently begun to receive attention in the art history scholarship of South Korea. Its anti-institutional, anti-state quality makes *minjung misul* stand out among other contemporary Korean art but has limited its exploration in terms of its avant-garde character. In addition, its critique of Korean modernism has been read narrowly as a desire for the indigenization of Western art and as an expression of chauvinist ethnic nationalism. Furthermore, its emphasis on dialogue with the social and political

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<sup>1</sup> Yun Nanjie, “Honseong gonggan euroseo ui minjung misul” [“Minjung misul as Hybrid Space”], in *Han’guk hyeondae misul 198090* [Contemporary Korean Art 198090], edited by Han’guk hyeondae misulsa yeonguhoe (Seoul: Hak’yeonsa, 2009), 111.



realities is simply understood as realistic representation. These characterizations have continued to befuddle art critics and historians and have prevented them from going beyond its surface. In a violent and chaotic political atmosphere of ideological polemics, *minjung misul*, which propagated a dissident political ideology, has been an unpopular subject of art history study.

Such rigid identification has often been produced by studies of other contemporary Korean art forms whose authors were mindful of *minjung misul*'s critique of the subjects of their studies. Their new readings on Korean modernism opened other avenues for interpretation but reenacted preconceived ideas about *minjung misul*. In addition, even when one defines so-called post-*minjung* artists, those believed to inherit *minjung misul*'s spirit of social critique, their artistic practices in the late 1990s and 2000s are routinely compared with those of the “ideological” *minjung* artists, as the term post-*minjung* art suggests. Because Korean modernism has been written through or against the view of *minjung misul*, it is crucial to examine the multifaceted nature of *minjung misul* beyond its appearance.

At the core of these art historians' and critics' simplified or distorted interpretation is the issue of understanding nationalism in *minjung misul*—its underlying operational logic and principles. In postcolonial Korea, many artists strived to create an autonomous Korean art by integrating Korean aesthetics into a Western form; therefore, contemporary Korean art has never been free from nationalism. Dissident art critics (and, later, *minjung* art critics) criticized the conventional art practices for their lack of critical reinterpretation. However, such an assessment has been understood as a mere expression of parochial nationalism in the modernist view of ethnic nationalism: *minjung misul*'s challenge for a more indigenized art. In particular, its emphasis on the people-nation, community, and traditional agrarian culture and the like seems to justify the modernists' evaluation.

However, *minjung misul*'s critique is based on "dissident nationalism," my concept, which defines the prominent force in the dissident movement. This nationalism is political as well as cultural. Dissident nationalism is genealogically connected to the national movement during the colonial era in terms of the two movements' shared desire for a sovereign nation-state based on democratic principles. Although the cultural nationalism of dissidents seems to be entwined with the state's ethnic nationalism, its consciousness of Koreans' experiences in modern Korean history makes it a unique brand. Unraveling and unfolding the relationship between *minjung misul* and dissident nationalism will reveal the realities, aspirations, and envisioning of *minjung misul*. This study will demonstrate that *minjung* artists launched a far more ambitious and extensive project with other dissident forces during the 1980s: reimagining legitimate modernism in the process of creating the Koreans' sovereign nation-state.

### **Democracy as a New International Language**

In the 1980s, the two decades of the South Korean dissident movement culminated in a broad-based movement for democratization. It was during this time that the *minjung misul* blossomed. The May 18, 1980 Gwangju Uprising and campus liberalization in December 1983 were decisive turning points that enabled university students and activists to organize themselves as the *undonggwon* (*lit.*, the movement-sphere), sharing strong anti-government and anti-American sentiments. South Korea's democratization movement was not necessarily a separate national syndrome or regional movement. Instead, it exemplified a widespread phenomenon, termed "Democracy's Third Wave" by Samuel P. Huntington.<sup>2</sup> More than thirty countries

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<sup>2</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 12–34.

transitioned to democracy between 1974 and 1990, doubling the number of democratic governments in the world.<sup>3</sup>

South Korean dissident intellectuals were influenced by or influenced other international democratization movements, especially those in South Africa, the Philippines, and Taiwan. All were exploited by the United States' Cold War politics, and their governments actively manipulated anti-communist sentiment to justify authoritarian rule. Just as televised images of the Vietnam War had given momentum to the earlier anti-war movement, the new protest images became rallying points for international liberation collaborations.<sup>4</sup> However, the Korean press was pressured by the ferocious KCIA to publish a minimum of information about these events because publication might trigger Koreans' desire for democracy.<sup>5</sup> Instead, this information was covered by the progressive press and mainly discussed and circulated among the dissidents. Although Koreans became aware of the international democratization movements, they focused mainly on their own nation's internal problems until June 1987.<sup>6</sup>

Pictures from Soweto, where in June 1976 police and soldiers mercilessly oppressed protesters with "dogs, whips, guns, and armored vehicles, were broadcast internationally."<sup>7</sup> The picture of photographer Masana Sam Nzima on the front page of the Black South African-run newspaper *The World*—showing the dying thirteen-year-old Hector Pieterse being carried in the arms of Mbuyisa Makhubu—became the iconic image of the government's savagery as well as of the South African people's anti-Apartheid struggles.<sup>8</sup> This image foreshadows a photo of the dying South Korean

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>4</sup> John Pepper, *Art and the End of Apartheid* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xix.

<sup>5</sup> My discussion with Prof. Jacqueline Pak and ex-journalist Yu Jihyeong.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> John Pepper, xix.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 56.

university student Lee Hanyeol, killed by a police teargas grenade in 1987.

Furthermore, some Koreans (i.e., *minjung* artists) learned of the atrocity of Apartheid through the traveling exhibition “Anti-Apartheid” in Seoul.<sup>9</sup> In April 1994, South Africa’s century-long movement for racial equality was partially fulfilled through “a negotiated transition to a unitary, nonracial democratic state.”<sup>10</sup>

Images of massive numbers of Filipino protesters and news of the “People Power Revolution” of early 1986 were perhaps most critical in motivating Koreans toward a democratization movement and presaged the popular democratic uprising. The movement in the Philippines was triggered by the assassination of the popular exiled politician Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino.<sup>11</sup> Filipinos who resisted the Marcos dictatorship initiated campaigns of non-cooperation and civil disobedience, resulting in the “People Power Revolution” of February 22–25, 1986.<sup>12</sup> The fervor for democracy carried over to Taiwan. The Taiwanese, living under the imposition of martial law and subsequent “white terror” policies, which were perhaps akin to the McCarthy-era politics of the United States, arose and pressured their government to end martial law in 1987.

Within this broad democratization movement, critical writers, artists, and cultural activists produced art in service to the cause of liberation, such as South Africa’s silk-screened banners and T-shirts, and political critiques conveyed in theater, song, and art galleries.<sup>13</sup> Dissident South Korean intellectuals, especially writers and cultural activists, occasionally collaborated with international intellectuals and church organizations. They created a common front to pressure dictatorships, accomplishing

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<sup>9</sup> *Minmihyeop 20nyeonsa* [Twenty Years of National Artists Association], edited by Minmihyeop (Seoul: Minmihyeop, 2005), 59.

<sup>10</sup> Kurt Schock, “People Power Unleashed: South Africa and the Philippines,” in *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 68.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> John Pepper, xix.

such feats as saving the Korean poet Kim Jiha and the politician Kim Dae Jung from the authoritarian government's abuse of power (i.e., from a death sentence, and kidnapping and possible assassination, respectively).

The *minjung* artists facilitated and organized the "Unification Exhibition" as a step toward the unification of South and North Korea. From 1986 on they also participated in the JAALA (Japan, Asia, Americas, Latin Americas, Africa), an art festival of socially conscious Third World artists, organized by the JAALA Solidarity Committee, a Japanese non-governmental organization critical of Japan's aggression in Asia during World Wars I and II. The *minjung* artists met other political artists from Palestine, Thailand, the Philippines, Bangladesh, and Japan, and shared common artistic concerns, such as absorption of avant-garde art into the institution and the Third World art as a possible breakthrough to the limits of modern art and culture.<sup>14</sup>

### **Dissident Nationalism**

The democracy movement of the 1980s was heir to the anti-imperialist national movement of the colonial era (1910–45) in that the Korean desire for democracy was historically inherited. Korean nationalists had deliberated on creating a modern nation-state since the late nineteenth century, when imperial nations were vying for dominance. The nationalists deployed their transnational networks for independence and future nationhood, conceiving the global origin of the Korean nation.<sup>15</sup> They yearned for a modern nation-state that would harness constitutional democracy, a

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<sup>14</sup> Through their biennale "The Third World and Us," JAALA reflected Japanese art's lack of dialogue with contemporaneity, the Japanese artists' need to understand the economic aggression of Japan and the Third World's realities and their art; absorption of the avant-garde and anti-art into the institution and the Third World was a way to break through the limits of modern art and culture. Thus, they promoted exchanges among artists in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, joint studies, biennale exhibitions, etc. *History of JAALA 1977–1993*.

<sup>15</sup> Jacqueline Pak, *An Ch'angho and the Nationalist Origins of Korean Democracy*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1999.

capitalist economy, and military development.<sup>16</sup> Even after liberation, democracy was considered indispensable to the new Korean nation-state, as the long-standing nature of the democratization movement suggests.

After liberation, the nationalists' yearning for a sovereign nation-state had been only partially fulfilled: the Republic of Korea (1948–) was founded through the national division, and its government was undemocratic. The authoritarian government of Rhee Syngman (1948–60) was toppled by the April 19, 1960, Student Uprising. Nonetheless, democracy would have to wait; a military junta led by Park Chung Hee seized power on May 16, 1961, and Park remained in power for eighteen years (1961–79). Park mobilized Korean nationalism to his advantage by emphasizing the unique characteristics that Koreans' shared culture, history, and language bestowed upon them. Reflecting the state's crucial role in state-controlled modernization, his collectivistic nationalism subordinated the people-nation under the state as an organic oneness.<sup>17</sup> His government strengthened restorative, conservative ideologies such as Confucianism and militaristic values and placed the "national" interest above the constitutional rights of the individual.<sup>18</sup>

Dissident nationalism is the struggle for the principles of nationalism—democracy—against its becoming the state's particular political ideology.<sup>19</sup> In opposition to Park's authoritarianism, many nationalists, who now were active as post-colonial dissidents, had initiated a new dissident movement (*jaeya undong*). After liberation, those dissidents contributed to the democratization of Korean society. They were faithful to the Confucian and socialist notions of the intellectual's role in society, and made tight connections among themselves that enabled them to create a firm basis

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 106.

<sup>18</sup> Jeon Jaeho, *Bandongjeok guendae chuuija Park Chung Hee* (Seoul: Chaek saesang, 2000), 86.

<sup>19</sup> Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1992), 10.

for their movement and to draw a battle line against the dictatorships. Their activisms were expanded, diversified, and deeply polemicized during the 1980s as various realms of dissidents as well as the younger generation (the *undonggwon*, or “the movement-sphere”) joined for democracy. For the purposes of this dissertation and for the sake of convenience, both dissidents and *undonggwon* are referred to as dissidents except where it is necessary to distinguish between them.

In the formation of dissident nationalism, the multiple yet entwined notions of *minjung* (the people), nation, tradition, *sotong* (dialogue), *gongdongche* (community), democracy, and the nation-state are principal. Although in the 1970s and 1980s these terms, except for scant efforts to define *minjung*, were used and disseminated as given, it is crucial to explicate their organic relations because they created a cognitive and discursive map of dissident nationalism. These terms, particularly *sotong* and *gongdongche*, are not defined in scholarly writings. Thus, their theorization is based on my careful reading of primary sources on *minjung misul* and other dissident movements. While the cluster of these notions serves as my conceptual frame, they will be incorporated into and become part of my central argument on *minjung misul* as well. Here, I will succinctly define and draw out their relationship for further discussion in the following chapters.

The Korean nation-state, viewed through the lens of dissident nationalism, consists of an anti-people state and a people-nation. Here, the dissident idea of the Korean people-nation was either borrowed from the state-administered national body or recovered from the state’s appropriation of the nationalists’ original aspirations of struggle. Unlike the state, which defines the nation as an everlasting and supreme being, dissident intellectuals saw the nation in terms of historical change over time. Nonetheless, the two visions are similar in their insistence on the nation’s transcendental nature: the state’s based on a homogeneous culture, history, and

language, on the one hand, and the dissidents' based on the people's/nation's collective sufferings and their overcoming of these, on the other. Moreover, if the state perceived "tradition" and culture to be the repository of Koreans' ethnic and cultural essence, the dissidents viewed them as expressions of Koreans' lives and historical predicaments.

According to the dissidents' vision, the people are the legitimate members of the Korean nation-state. However, Koreans' realities suggest otherwise. In the gap between the people's lives and the dissidents' discourse, the dissidents conceived the notion of the *minjung*. In practice, they did not distinguish between real people and the *minjung*, and appeared to consider these terms to be synonymous. The discourse of *minjung* is firmly grounded in the dissidents' perception of modern Korean history, particularly in its failure to build a sovereign nation-state after liberation in 1945. Accordingly, the legitimate foundation of the Republic of Korea was obstructed by the re-entry of pro-Japanese collaborators into politics and by anti-communism, by the division of the nation into South and North Korea under the U.S. Army Military Government, and by dictatorships and foreign interventions. Thus, the notion of the *minjung* was formulated through Koreans' collective suffering as a result of these sociopolitical, economic, and cultural oppressions. Nevertheless, Koreans were capable of rising up against oppression, and against any anti-life force, as the sovereign power of historical progress.

In addition, university students and dissident activists created the idea of the *minjung* beginning in the mid-1970s through their labor *hyeonjang* ("the real site") activity and their support of democratic unionization and labor strikes. In their involvement, the dissidents were aware that the *minjung* had become the oppressed in the transition from an agrarian to an industrialized society. In their binary of the agrarian versus the modern, and under the influence of the Christian church mission



and socialism, they identified the *minjung* mostly with laborers and farmers. The May 18, 1980, Gwangju Uprising led the dissidents to define the *minjung*, or “the common people,” in more ideological terms, as revolutionary actors with strong class consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Laborers were thereby conceptualized as the vanguard force of *minjung* but were thought to be unaware of their political potential. Thus, it became urgent for the avant-garde *undonggwon* leadership to guide and unify the people’s struggle through their *hyeonjang* work and the democratization movement.

In this process, the *minjung* came to symbolize the *undonggwon*’s discourse, and the political ideology itself, for their democratization movement. If the 1970s’ dissidents brainstormed to define the *minjung*, in the 1980s such efforts were not much in evidence; instead, the *minjung* were inherently embedded in the reform/revolution ideology and in the social-scientific analysis of Korean society. The term *minjung* therefore could be another way to refer to dissidents’ vision of historical progress and strategies and tactics. As a result, real people were replaced by, and instead became the object of, *minjung* ideology.

As the dissidents envisaged Koreans’ predicaments in terms of the *minjung*, they also visualized the *minjung*’s realities and their overcoming of those realities through the twin notions of *sotong* (dialogue) and *gongdongche* (community). If the former term stresses the historical and political sovereignty of the people, the latter two emphasize the operational logic of the Koreans’ struggles and aspirations—rebuilding the legitimate Korean nation-state based on humanism and democratic principles. Like the *minjung*, *sotong* and *gongdongche* were also envisioned through the dissident view of Koreans’ experiences of modern history.

In the face of the people’s wretched living conditions, the dissident intellectuals and university students saw their predicaments as the embodiment of

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<sup>20</sup> Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), 52.

alienation, inhumanity, division, and incommunicability: for instance, the omnipotent state control of communication; the compressed modernization; the consumerist, decadent culture; dictatorship and the national division. In the discrepancies between the Koreans' living realities and their aspirations (i.e., a sovereign nation-state, human-centered life), I propose that the dissidents conceptualized the notion of *sotong* to describe their working toward the closing of these gaps.

*Sotong* is already embedded in the notion of *minjung*. *Minjung* implies multitudes of individuals sharing similar experiences, as well as a common language, culture, and history. Thus, it premises forming communalism through dialogues among people without hindrance or boundaries—a condition that might be possible in the traditional agrarian village. The dissidents perceived the process and state of *sotong* as community (of the people). They imagined a humane dialogue as acts of protest and of community-making against the state, its alienating modernization, and Western and popular culture. Further, they conceptualized the communal dialogue as a working model for re-envisioning everyday life and the Korean nation-state. The notion of *sotong* and community thus delineates the sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and religious landscape of Koreans on multiple levels and maps out an alternative vision of Koreans' nation-state based on democratic ideals.

The dissidents conceptualized democracy as the essential spirit/expression of the Korean nation-state. From the dissident viewpoint, democracy is both procedural and participatory and/or evolves from procedural to participatory, “with ramifications of and for the *minjung* as historical sovereignty.”<sup>21</sup> Under the dictatorships, however, Koreans were prohibited from exercising their constitutional rights as citizens, and, further, any form of critical dialogue and protest was oppressed. In such circumstances, art and culture became a viable source for brainstorming a new society

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<sup>21</sup> Jacqueline Pak's comments in my discussion with her.

and for practicing democracy in the political imagination of art. In conjunction with the democratization movement, various dissident movements (i.e., the national culture movement, the church mission, the living community movement) ingeniously interpreted democratic ideals in their normative vision of humane community, with cultural, religious, and spiritual traditions. What is so fascinating about their nation-building is how the dissidents appropriated and reconfigured the idea of democracy in indigenous expressions of humanism in fluid and eclectic dialogues with Korean society. In particular, when the dissident's ideas of democratic ideals and values were translated into art's and culture's form, those notions were articulated in more nuanced and subtle ways of *sotong*.

At the core of the dissidents' yearning for *sotong* is an ardent quest for harmonious dialogue/union between "form" and "content," similar to the quest to unite the discrepancy between the realities and the ideals of Koreans. This idea can be exemplified in a number of ways: as the relationship between art's form and subject matter, as art's dialogue with the social and political realities, as deliberations that connect economic development to the democratization of society, and as rereading the Bible as "the text" of God's words in "the context" of the Korean *minjung*. I argue that the dissidents read the state of the Republic of Korea in tandem with the relationship between art form and content.

The Republic of Korea had developed a form of modern nation-state (i.e., the state apparatus and technology to control and manage the population, the state-administered body of the nation, and the geographic national boundary). Nevertheless, the dissidents believed that it neither exercised democratic principles and values nor realized its potential and promise, the substances of a legitimate nation-state. For that reason, the legitimacy of the foundation of the Republic of Korea and the undemocratic regimes that followed (1948–92) has long been contested. I contend that

the yearning to bridge “form” with “content” was the dominant impulse of dissident nationalism, and that the degree of unity between them determines the degree of the nation’s moral legitimacy as well. In addition, as the notion of community is the basis for re-envisioning the daily/national community, I argue that the dissidents applied their vision of community—humanism and democratic ideals—to their imagining of the international community of the Third World people in their anti-imperial, anti-dictatorship movement.

### ***Minjung Misul: Reimagining Humanism/Democracy***

*Minjung misul* embraced and operated closely with/in dissident nationalism. But why has ethnic nationalism been thought to be its preeminent force, and if it is, why was its “reality” vigorously articulated in the form of a democratization movement? How can one reconcile this discrepancy, or can we trace the relationship between “presumed” ethnic nationalism and the realization of *minjung misul*? Why was democracy ruled out as the principle of Korean nationalism in the study of *minjung misul*? Where is the mechanism of exclusion generated in our investigation?

I hypothesize that this exclusion has resulted from, first, conventional ways of defining *minjung misul* and, second, a failure to examine the operational logic and aspirations in *minjung misul*’s aesthetic, discursive, and activist endeavor. These two are in fact intertwined. As a by-product of a highly fluid, dynamic, and chaotic political era rife with ideological polemics, the surviving definition(s) of the term *minjung misul* are diverse and unsettled, even among *minjung* artists and critics. Thus, a true definition tends to be substituted with descriptions of the artists’ activities—what they represented and how they “did” it as social acts (e.g., intervening, responding, participating)—descriptions that provide, at best, rough interpretations of the term. Instead, in this study I define and explore *minjung misul* through a cognitive

and discursive map of dissident nationalism whose visions metamorphosed into many forms in all realms of society.

The constellation of concepts comprised in dissident nationalism—*minjung*, nation, *sotong*, tradition, community, democracy, and the nation-state—are essential in envisioning *minjung misul* as well. Because art did not respond to Korea's sociopolitical realities until the late 1970s, it appropriated and repurposed the existing dissident concepts for its formation. Although it emerged late in the dissident movement, contemporary Korean art had never been exempt from the discourse of nationalism. In post-colonial Korea, the desire for autonomous Korean arts and culture was urgently shared among artists against the legacy of colonialism and was accompanied by a fervent yearning for participation in the international art world. Many artists aimed to create contemporary Korean art by integrating Korean-ness—the ethnic and cultural essence of their common ancestry, culture, history, and language—into Western contemporary art forms (i.e., *Informel*, Monochrome, *Objet*, etc.). Instead, the dissident art critics in the 1970s envisioned a national art that reflected the Koreans' historical crisis and their struggle.

The dissident art critics (and *minjung* artists and critics in the 1980s) saw modern and contemporary Korean art as experiencing a state of alienation and inhumanity.<sup>22</sup> If Western modernism was a product of its own modernity, Korean modernism was derivative because of its “perceived” lack of dialogue with Koreans' sociopolitical realities. Here, it is crucial to note that such critics did not refer to Western modernism as a superior comparative point or example but instead wished to indicate that its aesthetic form had emerged and developed from its dialogue with the West's modern experiences. In order to overcome the incommunicability of modern Korean art, *minjung* artists and critics imagined *sotong* between form and subject

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<sup>22</sup> Kim Yunsu, “Yesul gwa sowe” [“Art and Alienation”], *Changjak gwa bipyeong*, 20 (Spring 1971): 201–13.

matter, art and viewer, art and the people-nation. In their insistence on dialogue, they presumed that human beings are naturally capable of appreciating art, and that therefore the ability to appreciate art is a defining characteristic of being human.<sup>23</sup>

I argue that their idea of *sotong*/community and humanism makes several assumptions: first, that the viewer understands what s/he looks at and can engage in a dialogue with art; second, that artists, art, and viewers engage in voluntary and horizontal dialogue; third, that this notion of dialogue premises the democratization of art, the road to creating art of, for, and by the *minjung*; and fourth, that their *sotong* expands into its structural critique in the art institution, the envisioning of the everyday community, and the democratization of the Korean nation-state. Thus, their effort to create an art of *sotong* is parallel to the dissidents' determination to close the gap between the "form" and "content" of the Korean nation-state.

Many socially conscious artists did not deal much with the discourse of the *minjung* and did not call their art *minjung misul* until well after 1985. As a result of the state suppression of a socially conscious art exhibition in 1985, their art was publicly known as *minjung misul*, a term coined by the cultural minister Yi Wonhong, which these artists then appropriated for themselves.<sup>24</sup> In their art, the *minjung* are not only represented as a historical sovereignty but also envisioned as producers, consumers, and patrons of a new art. Thus, *minjung misul* was easily interpreted as art for, of, and by the people and as a representation of the *minjung*. Nonetheless, in order to grasp *minjung misul*, one should explore how *minjung* artists contemplated a legitimate art in their dialogue with modern Korean history. However, the sweeping critique by some *minjung* critics of Korean modernism using the rhetoric of national/*minjung*

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<sup>23</sup> Baik Nakcheong, "Munhakjeog'in geot gwa inganjeog'in geot" ["About Literature and About Humanness"], *Changjak gwa bipyeong*, 28 (Summer 1973): 428–59.

<sup>24</sup> Jang Seokwon, *80nyondae misul ui byeonhyeok: Jang Seokwon misul pyeongronjip* [Art's Reform in the 1980s: Art Critique of Jang Seokwon] (Gwangju: Mudungbang, 1988), 179. Please see chapter three.

art—art reflecting the national crisis and the Koreans’ overcoming of it—led them to ignore art’s particular mode of working, such as its use of metaphors and allegories in imagining other worlds.

The dissidents’ envisioning of a new art was contested among diverse political positions (i.e., the state and art institutions). Even among *minjung* artists, there was competition for legitimacy regarding art forms, subject matter, political activisms, and scientific analysis of Korean society. In fact, *minjung misul* could be read as a process of imagining itself through these multiple stances. Furthermore, *minjung* artists both enforced and challenged the modernists’ center-periphery model by imagining their alliances with other Third Worlds. Nonetheless, in the prioritization of art’s political utility, some artists’ “new imaginaries” of Korean modernism and worlds did not go beyond the “formulaic of the ‘progressive’ leftist” positions or “beyond the urgency of immediate events.”<sup>25</sup> Their lack of contemplation on aesthetics caused *minjung misul* to lose impetus as an art movement after the democratization of the 1990s. Thus, one aim of this study is to explore the fissures between and incongruities in the artists’ diverse visions of art and the political.

Non-Western art history has been studied largely within the boundaries of the nation-state. A few recent studies have attempted to remedy the situation by recovering transnationalism in narratives of Third World modernisms. This study also tries to capture the fluid relationship in *minjung misul* between the national and the transnational through the language of humanism. In his groundbreaking work *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* in 2010, the art historian Iftikhar Dadi delineates the formation and development of modernism by artists “associated with ‘Pakistani’” since the early twentieth century.<sup>26</sup> He examines the emergence of artistic

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<sup>25</sup> Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1.

subjectivity in the multiple conceptual frameworks of nationalism, modernism, cosmopolitanism, and “tradition.” Through a careful exploration of several artists, he demonstrates that they engaged in both “broader Persinate and Islamicate cultural and religious legacies” and cosmopolitanism, exploring modern subject formation beyond the national border.<sup>27</sup> Thus, his project forms “a new narrative of a transnational South Asian Muslim modernism from within a national art history.”<sup>28</sup>

Although not a discussion of globalization per se, Joan Kee’s dissertation at New York University in 2008, “Points, Lines, Encounters, Worlds: *Tansaekhwa* and the Formation of Contemporary Korean Art,” brings out a different view of the world beyond the conventional world of nation-states through *tansaekhwa* (or monochrome painting; in my discussion, I used “*dansaekhwa*” instead of *tansaekhwa* for consistency of romanization)<sup>29</sup> [Figure A.2 and Figure A.3]. Counter to reading the illegibility of *tansaekhwa* as incommunicability and alienation, Kee calls attention to its abstract form as a way to subvert the government’s omnipotent control. Further, by creating a space between a work and its audience, one in which the government cannot intrude, Kee argues, *tansaekhwa* granted the audience agency in viewing art. Further, such an encounter between art and audience, between art and art, forms new worlds, “including, but not limited to, contemporary Korean art, contemporary Asian art, and the possibility of a truly global art world.”<sup>30</sup>

These studies open up non-Western modernisms and defy their center-periphery model with transnationalism, whether in terms of the artists’ modern art practices or in terms of the imagining of new worlds from the viewpoint of artworks. In comparison, my dissertation seems to take a traditional approach to non-Western

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Joan Kee, “Points, Lines, Encounters, Worlds: *Tansaekhwa* and the Formation of Contemporary Korean Art,” Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., vii.



modernisms: it insists on the nation-state as a point of departure for the artistic and political imagination. However, it also attempts to unfold and tease out the existing nation/community by paying attention to *minjung misul*'s normative vision of the everyday/national community. The key principle of community in *minjung misul*—humanism and democracy—applies to the *minjung* artists' imagining of a new modernism and of the people's nation-state and international community. In other words, the Korean nation-state is a working model of the Third World's transnational community. Nonetheless, it is critical to note that the nationalism of *minjung misul* was very much provincial until the 1990s, although the *minjung* artists took heed of international collaborations.

### **Literature on *Minjung Misul***

The artist and art critic Park Chan'gyeong shared his surprise when he found that even senior art students had not heard of *minjung misul* and that no lectures on it were offered in art schools.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to the abundant production of critiques on *minjung misul* during the 1980s, there has been a serious lack of academic study of this subject matter in the ideologically polemicized landscape of South Korea, aside from a few recent Ph.D. dissertations. However, the situation seems to be slowly changing, as the number of academic articles and exhibitions on the topic is increasing.

The earliest yet most comprehensive narrative on *minjung misul* is the art critic Choe Yeol's 1991 book *History of the Contemporary Korean Art Movement*. In his discussion on the historical development of political art from the colonial era, *minjung misul* appears to be a product of historical dialectics. As he belonged to the radical factions of *minjung* artists and alienated with the *undonggwon*, he narrates the

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<sup>31</sup> Park Chan'gyeong, "'Criticality' of Korean Art and the 'Interests' of Artists: *Minjung* Art and the Present," *Journal Bohl*, 10 (2008): 21.

development of *minjung misul* with the Marxist-Leninist perspective on aesthetics.<sup>32</sup> Through his writing, he was directly engaged in the fierce debates on art and politics within the *minjung misul* camp, which I further discuss in chapter three. Although his book extensively covers *minjung misul* as an art movement, he does not pay much attention to women *minjung* artists and their issues in its development. In fact, this situation is not exceptional among the writings of other *minjung* art critics and art historians. Recovering and explicating the women's art movement in the hegemonic dissident (art) movement will require future in-depth study of women's *minjung* art.

If Choe focuses on *minjung misul* as the activist art movement, the art historian Seo Seongrok delineates *minjung misul*'s stances in opposition to the international aspiration of modernism in his short article in *Contemporary Korean Art (Han'guk ui hyeondae misul)* published in 1994.<sup>33</sup> He evaluates *minjung misul* as a regional and anti-modernist movement rooted in (presumably state) nationalism. He writes that although the movement made a critical intervention in institutional art, the commitment of *minjung* artists to the democratization movement put their art at risk of becoming merely propaganda. Although he brings out *minjung misul*'s anti-modernist characteristics, his emphasis on the binary of regional and anti-modernist versus international and modernist reiterates what *minjung misul* has been commonly known for.

More-balanced studies on *minjung misul* have been produced in a few Ph.D. dissertations abroad and in South Korea. Their authors address several aspects of *minjung misul* that had not been explored earlier. In doing so, they elicit other stories outside the binary of art and politics. In her dissertation "The Visual Culture of Haunting: The Ethics and Aesthetics of the Real in Modern South Korea" at

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<sup>32</sup> Choe Yeol, *Han'guk hyeondae misul undongsa [History of the Contemporary Korean Art Movement]* (Seoul: Dolbegae, 1991).

<sup>33</sup> Seo Seongrok, *Han'guk ui hyeondae misul [Contemporary Korean Art]* (Seoul: Munye Publishing, 1994), 220–32.

Goldsmith College, University of London, in 2003,<sup>34</sup> Park Soyang explores the core of the *minjung*'s long-repressed memories and voices through selected works by the artists Oh Yun and Yim Oksang. She assesses these works as the site of an "emergent culture" in which the specters of the *minjung* dialogically converse with and envision a hopeful future, as their repressed memories influence and collide with the present and the future.<sup>35</sup>

It is interesting to follow how Park theorizes the *minjung*'s trauma-entrenched mind and its futuristic potential for liberation in psycho-historical terms. And these theories enable Park to bridge Koreans' particular experiences with a broader understanding of other oppressed peoples. At the same time, if she were to bring out more concrete sociopolitical and cultural circumstances of the people around *minjung misul*, her discussion would be richer and more nuanced.<sup>36</sup> She assesses Yim's and Oh's works as vernacular *minjung misul* and some *minjung misul* as espousing the radical politics of the Left failed to have such quality. Nonetheless, she does not clearly explain why other artists whose works embrace qualities similar to those of Yim's and Oh's were not part of a vernacular *minjung misul*.

If Park looks into the internal landscape of the Koreans, Han Jin looks at the creative interventions of South Korean social realists in art and society. In "Nationalism and Modernism: The Rise of Social Realism in South Korea (1980–1988)," published at CUNY in 2005,<sup>37</sup> Han Jin demonstrates how "the first and second

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<sup>34</sup> Park Soyang, "The Visual Culture of Haunting: The Ethics and Aesthetics of the Real in Modern South Korea," Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Historical and Cultural Studies, Goldsmith College, University of London, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>36</sup> For instance, in discussing *minjung*'s future in vernacular terms such as *haewon* ("resolving *han*") and *sangsaeng* ("coexistence"), Park brings again a set of psychoanalytic theories to explicate their meaning without mentioning its strong ties to the national culture movement.

<sup>37</sup> Han Jin, "Modernization and Nationalism: The Rise of Social Realism in South Korea (1980–1988)," Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 2005.

generation of the social realist artists”<sup>38</sup> scrutinized the disjunctions between the ideals and the reality of state-led modernization. Borrowing the idea of Fredric Jameson’s national allegories, Han asserts that these artists engaged the sociopolitical realities with their personal narratives, positing critical views of formalist art conventions and the standardizing ideology of multinational capitalism.

He discusses their art under the rubric of social realism. In doing so, unlike the previous studies, he distinguishes it from *minjung misul* on the grounds of social realism’s privileging of individualism and personal narrative over communalism. Nonetheless, *minjung misul* is a term that broaches the confluences of diverse aesthetic and political approaches by socially conscious artists. In other words, it is not social realism that includes *minjung misul* but the other way around. Although Han opens up different impulses in *minjung misul*, he does not further probe how social realist (or socially conscious) art became *minjung misul*. In addition, by examining the social-realist artists in terms of “nationalizing Western art,”<sup>39</sup> he equates the nationalism of *minjung misul* with the state nationalism of other contemporary Korean art.

If Han Jin explicates the artists’ personal narratives in their social critiques, the art historian Yun Nanjie tries to rescue *minjung misul* from the rigid discourse of Korean nationalism, as contemporary Korean art has been normally discussed in that context. In the 2007 article “Minjung Misul as the Hybrid Space,”<sup>40</sup> Yun presumes that *minjung misul* reflects sociopolitical reality, yet she is also interested in other realities that this art does not directly articulate. Defining Korean society of the 1980s as “the archetype of the Third World hybrid space,” she argues that *minjung misul*,

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<sup>38</sup> Han Jin perceives the art collectives Reality and Utterance, Imsulnyeon, and the artist Shin Hakcheol (1943–) to be “the first and second generation of the social realist artists.”

<sup>39</sup> Han Jin. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Yun Nanjie, “Honseong gonggan euroseo ui minjung misul” [“Minjung Art as Space of Hybridity”], *Hyeondae misul nonjip* [Collection of Studies on Contemporary Art], 22 (2007). Yun Nanjie, “Honseong gonggan euroseo ui minjung misul” [Minjung misul as Hybrid Space], *Hanguk hyeondae misul 198090* [Contemporary Korean Art 198090], edited by Han’guk hyeondae misulsa yeon’guhoe (Seoul: Hakyeonsa, 2009), 111.

which aspired to be “pure” national art, is in fact a record of “impure” realities.<sup>41</sup> Further, its “pure-bloodism” is a cultural by-product of “the crisis of mixed blood” in the Korean nation.<sup>42</sup> Thus, she sees *minjung misul* as honestly representing the site of hybridity as truly Korean modern art. However, she also does not contemplate the art’s nationalism, which is different from the state nationalism of other contemporary Korean art.

These earlier studies examine *minjung misul* mainly within the art world and the world of political activism. The most recent dissertation, Chae Hyoyeong’s “A Study of the Background of *Minjung Misul* of the 1980s: Focusing on its Relation to Korean National Literature of the 1960s–70s,”<sup>43</sup> published at Seongsin Women’s University in 2008, explores the art’s entwined relationship with other dissident movements. As its title suggests, it is an empirical study of *minjung misul*’s relationship with the national literature. Given that even archival research of *minjung misul* is in the preliminary stages, she contributes by laying a foundation for future studies. Because she mainly focuses on narrating the development of *minjung misul* in a chronological order, however, she does not elicit its operational logic, dissident nationalism. Besides, although the national literature did play a crucial role in the forming of *minjung misul*, her narrative assigns it an unnaturally important role.

### Overview of the Dissertation

Building on the foundation of the earlier studies, my inquiry attempts to elicit what they did not address and to remedy misinterpretations by looking at the sociopolitical, economic, cultural-intellectual, religious environment of post-1945 Korea and the

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<sup>41</sup> Yun Nanjie, 109.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>43</sup> Chae Hyoyoung, “A Study of the Background of Minjung Misul of the 1980s: Focusing on Its Relation to Korean National Literature of the 1960–70s,” Ph.D. dissertation, Seongsin Women’s University, 2008.

1980s' democratization movement, the dynamics within the *minjung misul* camp, and dissident nationalism, among other forces. I will look into mechanisms that move the entire sphere of society through the viewpoint of *minjung misul*, and vice versa. Nonetheless, this project could not be conceived without a radical re-examination and re-conceptualization of "familiar" yet ambiguous and multi-layered notions and discourses in the extremely polemicized atmosphere of that era.

This dissertation does not attempt to treat the *minjung misul* movement in a comprehensive manner, but rather seeks to delineate it through accounts of five major *minjung* artists. The artists' multi-layered dialogues with the sociopolitical, economic, cultural-intellectual, and spiritual realms reveal their operational logic and aspirations—the creation of a legitimate Korean modernism and modernity—in terms of the dissidents' concepts of democracy, *minjung*, nation/alism, tradition, *sotong* (dialogue), *gongdongche* (community), modernity, and modernism. I show that the *minjung* artists attempted to create a competing model of modernism and modernity that had moral legitimacy over the existing Western and Korean modernisms and modernities. Their structural critique of art ideology and of the art establishment developed into a re-envisioning of everyday community and of the democratization of the Korean nation-state. By interrogating the *minjung* artists' principle values, humanism/democracy, the study indicates that their vision of the people's nation-state becomes a working model for reenvisioning the transnational. My examination concentrates on the works and activities of five major *minjung* artists during the 1980s: Oh Yun, in his conception of the national art and culture (1969 and the 1970s); Yim Oksang, contemplating a *sotong* of art through structural critique and through communication with the artist's social realities (1979–81); Kim Bongjun, in relation to *minjung misul*'s imaginative exploration of the everyday community of the people (1982–84); Oh Yun, imagining the people's historical predicaments and unfolding

their vernacular idioms of utopia (1984–85); Hwang Jaehyeong, making his art, activism, and the people’s lives one, in his *hyeonjang* activity in mining towns (1986–89); and Choe Byeongsu, in the June 10, 1987, Democratization Movement and making of *minjung misul*.

These artists were critical to the art institution, to existing art practices, and to art education, exhibition, and criticism. They were profoundly influenced by the dissident movement (i.e., the national culture movement) as well as *hyeonjang* (“the real site”) and the democratization movement. Their aesthetic, discursive, and activist endeavors contemplated and conceived of *minjung*, *sotong*, and community—dissident nationalism—as the basis of their new art and of the people’s nation-state.

The first chapter explores key elements in the formation of dissident consciousness and dissident nationalism: post-1945 Korean history, dissidents, the historical view of Koreans’ predicaments, *minjung*, the root of dissident nationalism, and dissident art. Chapter two looks into the operational logic and aspirations of dissident nationalism in the entwined concepts from *sotong*/community/*hyeonjang* through the national cultural movement. Confronting the continued suffering of Koreans and their desire for democracy, the dissidents contemplated how art and culture could create a communal dialogue on humanism and democracy. In this process, art provided a space for social discourse and protest, as exemplified by the national literature and culture, *madangguk* (modernization of the traditional mask-dance with contemporary issues) and the “national” art.

Chapter three delineates the re-envisioning of socially conscious art as *minjung misul* in the dialogical process of remaking the national community in the peak moment of the democratization movement, 1986–88. Unlike the conventional notion of *minjung misul*, *minjung misul* was created in the contentions between the state, institutional art, and among the *minjung* artists. Thus, by exploring the quintessential

moment of *minjung misul* as well as the democratization movement, this chapter aims to introduce how socially conscious art became *minjung misul* for the following discussions of *minjung misul*'s development in the 1980s. Its imagining took place mainly in discourse rather than in art itself, so I look into three discursive and activist moments of *minjung misul* in conjunction with the sociopolitical milieu at that time: the "1985, Korean Art, the 20s' 'Power'" exhibition in 1985; Choe Byeongsu's *Bring Hanyeol Back to Life* as part of the martyr Lee Hanyeol's funeral during the June 10, 1987, Democratization Movement; and the contention between the older and younger generations.

Chapter four examines the imagining of *sotong* by the artist Yim Oksang and the art collective Reality and Utterance from 1979 to 1981. Dovetailed with the sociopolitical circumstances after the 1980 Gwangju Uprising and Chun Du Hwan's dictatorship, they contemplated *sotong* in a structural critique of the art institution and reflected their everyday realities in their works as a way to break away from art's closed structure. Their deliberations of *sotong*, however, often translated into national art and a conventional notion of Korean-ness, and became a point of contention for the younger generation from the mid-1980s on.

If the interventions of Yim and other members remained critiques of the art ideology/institution, chapter five demonstrates the artworks and activity of Kim Bongjun and the imaginative exploration by his art collective, Dureong, of the people's everyday community during the period 1982–84. He expanded the notion of *sotong* into a conceptual frame for radically rethinking and reformulating art and the people's community with humanistic values and democracy based on the traditional Korean agrarian village. Deeply influenced by the national culture movement, the *minjung* church, and other indigenous religions and philosophies, the collective perceived their works as the site of reclaiming the *minjung*'s lives. They brought



attention to bear on everyday lives in the cycle of communal working, eating, and sharing. This developed into the dissidents' taking on alternative approaches to their (and other movement participants') own lives.

Unlike Kim and Dureong, who found a humane way of life in the agrarian tradition, the most prominent *minjung* artist, Oh Yun, perceived the tradition instead as the living expressions of everyday people whom he encountered casually. Their differences are most succinctly articulated in their visions of a normative community. Chapter six explores Oh's imaginative *sotong* with the people's predicaments in a way to unravel and unfold the vernacular idioms of utopia—in which one's human dignity is expressed in the most liberating sense. In the years 1984–85, as the democratization movement grew increasingly ideologically armed and militant, he came to believe that art should expand the world to allow people to communicate with their inner and outer worlds. As opposed to the Marxist-Leninist or the dissidents' concept of the *minjung* as collective suffering, Oh perceives the *minjung* as the common people, or their life itself, and tradition as part of their cultural and spiritual expressions. As he dialogues with the people's past, present, and future, his works explore their utopian future not in terms of vernacular images of community such as *daedong* ("Grand Union") and *haewon* (wish-fulfillment, or cure of repressed feelings) but in the emotional and spiritual states of *han* (bitterness, sorrow, and grudges) and *shinmyeong* (irrepressible joy and ecstasy).

If Kim Bongjun operated his art and community activity from the perspective of a normative vision of Koreans' living and national community, Hwang Jaehyeong (or Hwang Jai-Hyoung) has tried to create art and community in the humble *hyeonjang*. Chapter seven explores Hwang Jaehyeong's art and *hyeonjang* activity in mining towns during the period 1986–88, the peak of the democratization movement, and beyond. Hwang, who is known as the "miner artist," has made his art, life, and

neighbors/people dialogue in his artistic and community work. His endeavors have centered on the miners' everyday lives, remaking the mining towns as their "hometowns" while supporting democratization. Skeptical of some activists' organizational and ideological approaches, he collaborated with people he knew based on trust and daily interaction.<sup>44</sup> Instead of subordinating art to political purposes, he created art that embraced the humanism in his neighbors' lives.

Aside from the ambiguous and loaded concepts summoned in devising *minjung misul*, the very lack of scholarship on the trauma-ridden 1980s makes a study of *minjung misul* greatly challenging. For instance, histories of the 1980s, as well as of post-1945 South Korea, which are the basis of this study, were often written by praxis-oriented historians. Their *minjung* historiography has been distorted or appropriated for political and ideological struggles. Nor have other intertwined realms of the dissident movement, such as the national culture movement and the church mission, received much attention. As a result, in-depth discussions of them were sometimes infeasible because of a lack of primary and secondary sources.

The situation is no different when it comes to *minjung misul*. As an outcome of decades of political oppression and censorship as well as general disinterest in the maintenance of records and archives, many *minjung misul* pamphlets, catalogues, and bulletins published by art collectives and associations have been discarded or destroyed. They are, unfortunately, lost forever. A rare exception is the collection of *minjung misul* in the Hoam Art Museum in Yong'in, outside Seoul. Ironically, the Hoam Museum is owned by the Samsung Corporation, which has been vehemently criticized by the *minjung* artists for its symbiotic relationship with the Korean dictatorships and establishment. It has archived important materials contributed by the *minjung* artist Kim Jeongheon or acquired by other routes. These materials concentrate

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

on several major *minjung* artists and art collectives who used oil on canvas and woodcut prints as their primary media and who displayed their works in the gallery and museum. However, some of the primary sources on citizens' art schools and *minjung misul* in the democratization movement, except for some National Artist Association bulletins and the Gwangju citizens' art school, are missing and unlikely to be recovered. Compared with the state of primary sources on *minjung misul*, there is an abundance of art critiques on it in the context of an art movement. As if reflecting *minjung misul*'s collective nature, however, there are few critiques or studies on individual artists, except for a few writings on eminent *minjung* artists.

My inquiry is based mainly on research in the archives of the Hoam Art Museum in Yong'in and of the Korea Democracy Foundation in Seoul, historical records and materials owned by several *minjung* artists and the National Artists Association, and other primary and secondary sources on art and other fields that the dissidents might have read, cited, and discussed during the 1970s and 1980s. In addition, I conducted interviews and informal meetings with numerous *minjung* artists and critics, several dissidents, and a few pastors, and participated in in/formal meetings and took notes at meetings of the National Artists Association.

In contemporary Korean history, only a few periods share the intensity and magnitude of the 1980s in the dissidents' (and Koreans') fervor to remake the sovereign nation-state. The dissidents aimed toward fundamental structural reforms based on their critical (and ideological) reflections on Korea's modernity, fiercely putting forth an alternative vision of modernity with moral legitimacy. *Minjung misul* embraced and grew with their operational logic and aspirations in the democratization movement. Although the *minjung* artists appear to have reapplied the conventional concepts of nationalism as well as modernism, they contended with and reinterpreted those familiar notions and remade modernism through dissident nationalism. The

study of *minjung misul* is thereby a truly unique comparative point for other modernisms as well as avant-gardes in the rethinking of art and worlds.

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### **THE FRAME OF HISTORY, THE CANVAS OF NATION**

The history of Korea after 1945 was central to the rise and development of dissident consciousness and nationalism. The dissidents' perception of the post-1945 era evolved from their dissatisfaction with and distress over the condition of the majority of Koreans at that time, which they saw as having been continuously shaped by the distorted history of colonialism, the ensuing dictatorships, foreign interventions, and modernization. While these intellectuals had agreed that industrial development was a prerequisite for a sovereign nation, those whose political consciousness was formed by the April 19, 1960, Student Uprising and the subsequent political struggles had disagreed on how Korea should be modernized and further reimagined as a legitimate Korean nation-state with an alternative view of modernity. Their different assessments of Korea's past and present and their vision for its future formulated and reconfigured all realms of society, including art and culture.

Instead of the state as the agent of modernization, the dissidents saw Koreans as the true source and reservoir of historical sovereignty for the envisioning of a modern nation-state. Challenging the legitimacy of the successive dictatorial governments, they struggled for the cause of democracy as their principal value, which I propose as the operational logic of their dissident nationalism for my discussion of *minjung misul*. At the same time, in their building of a new nation-state, the dissident art critics imagined a new national art or Korean modernism that would reflect Koreans' struggle with and overcoming of their predicaments in the symbiotic relationship between art and democracy.

This chapter explores key elements in the formation of dissident consciousness and dissident nationalism: Korean history after 1945, the revisionist history, the

dissidents, the emergence and the making of dissident nationalism, the roots of dissident nationalism, and dissident art. By exploring the multifaceted constituents of dissident nationalism in an organic manner, I try to lay the basis for an understanding of its conceptual structure and principles. In addition, I explore the dissident discourse of Koreans' modernity, while investigating how dissidents' brand of nationalism was interconnected with state nationalism. In examining their relationship, this chapter elicits another critical aspect of dissident nationalism and *minjung misul*: political nationalism. Then, I succinctly trace the dissident critics' logic for creating a new model of modernism that would compete with existing modernisms. Finally, this chapter presents a short overview of the development of *minjung misul* in the 1980s. Connected with this discussion, the following chapters examine the dissidents' invention and envisioning of an operational logic and aspirations—*minjung*, *sotong*, *gongdonche*—in their national culture movement and the democratization movement.

### **The Rise of Dissident Consciousness: The Post-Colonial Era**

At the end of World War II in 1945, Korea was liberated from Japanese colonialism (1910–45) through the intervention of the United States and the Soviet Union. Korea was, of course, soon divided into South and North under the trusteeship of the two superpowers, which would usher in the Cold War era. South Korea fell under the sphere of influence of the United States and its containment policy, whereas North Korea became a Stalinist state under the influence of the Soviet Union. In light of the fierce geopolitical and ideological struggle of the incipient Cold War, Koreans' long-held dream of founding a new independent republic was suppressed. The Republic of Korea was formally established on August 15, 1948, with the controversial Rhee Syngman as its first president.

Initiated by North Korea on June 25, 1950, the Korean War would last for three years. The war resulted in immense human and material loss, and greatly shaped the Korean sociopolitical discourse and psyche. It also facilitated the conditions for land reform, which was begun by the U.S. Military Government. The land reform helped alleviate rural poverty and was imperative for Korea's eventual industrialization.<sup>1</sup> During the transition to industrialization, many young men and women moved to the cities to work, and the countryside was depopulated and the agrarian way of life devalued.<sup>2</sup> The Korean economy was supported by U.S. aid, state bureaucrats, and dependent capitalists. However, President Rhee's lack of interest in industrialization, as well as the corruption and incompetence of his government, resulted in economic stagnation.<sup>3</sup>

Rhee Syngman's domination of the official administrative and military positions undermined South Korea's incipient democracy. His regime manipulated the National Security Law (1948), used the police and right-wing student groups, and censored or shut down newspapers to enforce stability. In 1960, President Rhee attempted to secure a third term through a fraudulent election and the use of violence. Students and urban intellectuals arose against his regime, a movement that culminated in the April 19 Student Uprising in 1960. They demanded the eradication of the ills of the Rhee dictatorship. They insisted on legislative enactment of a special law to punish those responsible for the deceitful election as well as those who fired on the protesters. They also called for eradication of illicit fortune hunters and pro-Japanese collaborators. After a decisive loss of Korean popular will and American support, Syngman Rhee was forced to leave office, and lived in exile in Hawaii.

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<sup>1</sup> Historian John Lie argues that land reform was also a key to the success of other industrialized countries in Asia, such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. John Lie, *Han Unbound: The Political Economy of South Korea* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>3</sup> Koh Kwangil, "In Quest of National Unity and Power: Political Ideas and Practices of Syngman Rhee," Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1963, Chapter 5.

Jang Myeon, who was elected president in July 1960, advocated economic development first and foremost and sought to eradicate corrupt bureaucrats and businessmen. The May 16, 1961, military coup orchestrated by Park Chung Hee and his coterie of Korean Military Academy graduates, however, thwarted the protesters' demands for real representation of the people's democratic desires. Following the success of the coup, Park and his Military Coup Committee advocated a "Koreanizing democracy" and aimed first to eliminate poverty and hunger.<sup>4</sup> His primary goals were to improve rural life and to establish a self-sufficient economy, achievements that would justify his military rule.<sup>5</sup> The First Five-Year Plan (1962–67) operated on the basis of an import-substitution and export-oriented industrialization strategy, based on a light industrial economy. However, the results of the plan fell short of expectations.

As part of America's Northeast Asia military strategy and to attract foreign grants and loans for economic development, Park Chung Hee agreed to a normalization treaty with Japan in 1965, offered military deployment to Vietnam from 1964 to 1972, and exported miners and nurses to West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. These moves enabled the Park regime to obtain desperately needed grants and commercial loans for the Second Five-Year Plan (1967–72). Expanded economic trade with Japan, that is, free-trade zones, helped to integrate South Korean industry into the international market and Japan's "economic cooperation sphere."<sup>6</sup> The Vietnam War boom also tremendously benefited export-oriented enterprises such as Samsung and

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<sup>4</sup> After the 5.16 military coup in 1960, Park Chung Hee's Military Coup Committee announced six public pledges that can be summarized as follows: anti-communism as a national policy; solid ties with the U.S. and its allies; eradication of all corruption and evil; improving the people's economic plight and founding an independent national economy; strengthening the possibility of national unification; and turning over power to a civilian government. In addition, the coup leaders declared that they had inherited the legacy of the 4.19 uprising and would complete the revolutionary project through modernization. Park Chung Hee, *Our Nation's Path* (Seoul: Dong'a, 1962), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Park Chung Hee, *The Country, The Revolution and I* (Seoul: Hollym, 1970), 29.

<sup>6</sup> Yi Changbok, "Teukbeol reupo: Masan suchul jayu jiyeok ui siltae" ["Special Report: The Reality of Masan Free Trade Zone"], *Changjak gwa bipyeong*, 34 (Winter 1974): 1191–259.



Hyundai. The South Korean economy critically depended on trade with Japan and the United States until the late 1980s.<sup>7</sup>

From 1971 to 1979, overlapping with the Third Five-Year Economic Plan (1972–77), the state pursued development of the rural economy, heavy industrialization, infrastructural development, and export growth. As the state became the most powerful agent for industrialization, it established public enterprises and supported (and “disciplined”) *jaebeol* (corporate conglomerates) through the use of its capital, technology, and bureaucratic administration.<sup>8</sup> The 1970s witnessed the dramatic growth of *jaebeol*.

Park Chung Hee evidently achieved enormous gains in economic development, an accomplishment often referred to as “the Miracle of the Han River.” These gains nevertheless came at a high cost: the exploitation of cheap labor, deterioration across the countryside, and the oppression of civil society. As the state focused on urban industrialization, it ignored the rural sector, causing depopulation and income loss. Park, who promoted himself as the “son of a farmer,” attempted to remedy the situation with the New Village Movement (*Saemaul undong*), a comprehensive campaign to enhance the spiritual and material well-being of the entire population, particularly people in farming villages.<sup>9</sup> The government ingeniously integrated its project into the pre-existing desires of the people to modernize their villages by using a competition-reward system.<sup>10</sup> It also reconfigured them as modern subjects through a leadership program, educating everyone as equals, regardless of social or economic

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<sup>7</sup> John Lie, 67.

<sup>8</sup> John Lie, 93.

<sup>9</sup> Hwang Byeongju, “Minjung, huisaengja inga gongbeomja inga: Park Chung Hee sidae ui gukga wa ‘minjung’” [“Minjung, Are They Victims or Collaborators: Park Chung Hee’s Nation-State and ‘Minjung’”], *Dangdae bipyeong*, 12 (September 2000): 55.

<sup>10</sup> Please see Kim Yeongmi, *Geudeul ui saemaul undong* [*Their New Village Movement*] (Seoul: Pureun yeoksa, 2009).

status.<sup>11</sup> In reality, however, the training program and the accompanying movement mirrored the coercive top-down command system of the Park dictatorship.<sup>12</sup>

Following the South–North Korea Joint Declaration on July 4, 1972, Park Chung Hee declared martial law in October, instituting the Yusin system. The Yusin system reflected the growing democratic will of the people and the internal/external challenges for the Park regime at the time: laborer Jeon Taeil’s self-immolation in 1970, the opposition of the students and the middle class, the erosion of the farmers’ support, the U.S. withdrawal from the Korean military assistance program, and the seventh Korean presidential election. The Yusin government dissolved the National Assembly and suspended the Constitution. In an era of “Emergency Decrees,” Park sought to exercise unchecked power by uniting the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government.<sup>13</sup> Amidst the growing demonstrations, which were gaining unstoppable momentum, especially in the cities of the Gyeongsang province near Park’s hometown, the Yusin period was abruptly ended by Park’s assassination on October 26, 1979. It was a watershed moment that articulated the ardent yearning for democracy across all sectors of Korean society.

However, Chun Doo Hwan, Park’s protégé, and his *Hanahoe* (Oneness Association) members staged a military coup on December 12, 1979. Several months later, martial law was expanded, spreading across the entire country by May 17, 1980, and state security agents began in earnest to arrest opposition politicians, dissident intellectuals, and students. While the rest of South Korea was silent under martial law, in Gwangju, university students demanded campus democratization and political

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<sup>11</sup> Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Narratives of Nation Building* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 56.

<sup>12</sup> Han Dohyeon and Park Jindo, “Saemaeul undong gwa Yusin cheje: Park Chung Hee jeonggwon ui nongchon saemaeul undong eul jungsimeuro” [“The New Village Movement and the Yusin System: Focusing on the Park Chung Hee Regime’s New Village Movement”], *Yeoksa bipyeong*, 47 (Summer 1999): 37–80.

<sup>13</sup> Lee Namhee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, New York, and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 35.

reform, confronting special airborne commandos. As the soldiers brutally beat and arrested protesters, the students' movement turned into a popular uprising against the state's extreme violence and in support of democracy, lasting ten days. More than 200 were killed officially (though it is possible that the actual numbers exceeded 2,000, according to Gwangju citizens), hundreds went missing, and thousands were injured.

### **Dissident Discourse, *Minjung* History**

The history of South Korea after 1945 is a discursive ground in the formation of the dissidents and their activisms as well as their political ideologies. The dissidents reread and reformulated the state-sanctioned Korean history from the perspective of Koreans' historical experience of modernity.<sup>14</sup> Such alternative—and sometimes even aggressively revisionist (and admittedly at times highly inaccurate, problematic, and controversial, such as Bruce Cumings' *Origins of the Korean War*)—interpretations became the center of contention between the state and the dissidents.

Their revisionist version of history can be generally outlined as follows. The dissidents believed that the Korean experience of modern history was shaped by Japanese colonialism, foreign intervention, national divisions, civil war, modernization, and dictatorships. Rightly or wrongly, they assumed that since the pro-Japanese collaborators under the U.S. Army Military Government joined the foundation of the Republic of Korea in 1948, that foundation was morally compromised. They believed that the collaborators shifted the nationalist versus anti-nationalist rhetoric to one of communist Left versus capitalist Right.

In the dissidents' view, the republic had established a basis for subsequent dictatorships and for constant foreign interventions. Hence, they had long challenged the moral legitimacy of various undemocratic regimes of South Korea, or the Republic

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 24.

of Korea. Over time, such an alternative or revisionist history would also be challenged and questioned as too naïve, simplistic, and problematic, even by the dissidents themselves. Yet, at the time, these dissident historical views remained influential as a political and ideological tool. In their ideological reading of Korean history, dissident intellectuals could identify themselves as an anti-state force and further develop the dissident movement in diverse realms. Even today, they remain as part of a historical orthodoxy among some leftist intellectuals in Korea.

### **The Dissidents, 1960–80**

Etienne Balibar observed that the family-school dyad is important not only in the reproduction of labor forces but also in the production of “fictive ethnicity,” referring to “the community instituted by the nation-state.”<sup>15</sup> Balibar claims that, in producing ethnicity, universal school education achieved the socialization of individuals.<sup>16</sup> The educational system became the very site of inculcation of a nationalist ideology, or a contested place.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, schools helped to bring literacy to Koreans, “the minimal requirement for full citizenship,”<sup>18</sup> and educated them with a strong sense of Korean-ness. At the same time, print-capitalism, high levels of literacy and a fervent desire for education, especially university education, became a breeding ground for anti-government dissent.

The dissident intellectuals (in the 1960 and 1970s) and *undongwon* (in the 1980s; literally translates to “the movement sphere” or individual student activists) were college-educated. In a sense, being a university student articulates the collective

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<sup>15</sup> Etienne Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology,” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, edited by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 96.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ernest Gellner, “Nationalism,” in *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964), 67.

experience of modernization, including the desire for material success and privilege, among post-war Koreans. Education has long been considered the surest way to achieve class mobility in Korea. During the 1970s, anyone with a university diploma was in a privileged position, given the general level of education in South Korea.<sup>19</sup> The graduates of three elite universities in particular—Seoul National University, Yonsei University, and Korea University—were privileged with leadership positions as government officials and technocrats. Thus, family members commonly sacrificed themselves to send their male offspring to university, by selling farmland and sometimes sending female siblings to work in factories. In this way, males who attended college embodied their family's hopes and obligations.

Some groups of intellectuals, however, decried the discrepancy between modernization and distributive justice. They believed that intellectuals had a moral obligation to guide people toward social justice and democracy. Finding affinity with the ethical obligations of Confucian scholars of the Joseon (or Chosun) dynasty (1392–1910) and the intelligentsia of socialism, they opted to abnegate the privileges to which they were entitled in order to serve a greater purpose, sometimes even disconnecting from their families.<sup>20</sup> Such extreme measures were more often found among the 1980s' (student) activists, or *undonggwon*.<sup>21</sup>

After the April 19 Student Uprising, especially through the 6.3 protest against the Korea–Japan Normalization Treaty in 1964, the dissident intellectuals and students began to identify themselves as an anti-dictatorial force. Against the Yusin system in 1972 and the Park government's omnipotent control, anti-government journalists, lawyers, theologians, writers, professors, cultural activists, and university students

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<sup>19</sup> In 1971 only one in 212 was enrolled in college, but by 1982 the ratio had grown to one in 60. Takizawa Hideki, *Kankoku shakai no tankan* [Brevity of Korean Society] (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobo: 1988), 19. Quoted in John Lie, 133.

<sup>20</sup> Namhee Lee, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

formed and expanded their collectives into the anti-dictatorial, dissident movement (*ban dokjae, jaeya undong*). However, they were unable to involve average citizens in their political movement, and their separation from the general public continued until the 1987 Democratization Movement.

Many of these dissidents were born in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and experienced the colonial and post-liberation eras. Some even joined the national movement for independence and painfully saw their fervent desire for a sovereign nation-state go unfulfilled. Under Park's dictatorship, their aspirations for a democratic nation-state again led them to act as dissidents. Their political activism suggests the roots of dissident nationalism—the national movement during the colonial era—and their shared aspirations for the Koreans' nation-state based on democratic ideals and industrial development.

If university students often worked with/in other dissident organizations in the 1970s, they emerged as the preeminent force, *undonggwon*, in the mid-1980s. The student activists, the post-war generation, learned that the earlier desire to build an independent nation-state was obstructed by the Japanese collaborators and the intervention of the superpowers after liberation. And they saw the failure of that desire to come to fruition as a primary source of the current misfortune. Based on their historical assessment and contemplation of Koreans' predicaments, the *undonggwon* became fiercely involved in the social-scientific analysis of Korean society and the ideological struggle based on Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Throughout the 1980s, the dissident force ("the first generation") and the *undonggwon* ("the second generation") coexisted. However, they were not often in accord, because of their dissimilar ideologies, strategies, and tactics, and so forth. Despite their differences, both considered mobilization of the masses to be critical to achieving democratization, and it became a central agenda for the success of their

movement. Compared with the dissidents' separation from the general public, the *undonggwon* witnessed the student population's sympathy with the democratization movement, and even so, they worked with little support from the masses until the 1987 popular uprising. In continuation with the 1970s' national culture movement, they actively carved out a counterpublic sphere through their discourse, values, rituals, and culture, in opposition to or as an alternative to the dominant culture and values.<sup>22</sup>

For the purposes of discussion, terms describing the 1980s' dissident movement need to be distinguished. Instead of "anti-dictatorial, dissident movement," the term "democratization movement" was used beginning in 1985, when confrontations between the state and the *undonggwon* were sharply articulated. The term *minjung* movement, which was used interchangeably with the term democratization movement, indicated widely popular uprisings and general strikes such as the June 10, 1987, Democratization Movement. This term is also used to refer to the church mission or any community activities involving local residents.

### **Emergence of Dissident Nationalism**

In discussions of Korean nationalism, the notions of nation and ethnicity were often interchangeable, and they belonged to both dissident and state discourses of the people. If the dissidents did not perceive the illegitimate state to be part of the people's nation, the Korean state, quintessentially expressed by the Yusin system of President Park, conceptualized the nation and the state as one and further subordinated the nation under the state. Park believed that modernization would establish "a unified, self-sufficient Korean nation."<sup>23</sup> He fused national security and development into "a

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<sup>22</sup> Kim Won, *Itchyoejin geudeul e daehan gieok : 1980nyeondae han 'guk daehaksaeng ui hawi munhwa wa daejung jeongchi* [Memories of the Forgotten: The 1980s' University Low Culture and the Public Politics in Korea] (Seoul: Ihu, 1999), 35.

<sup>23</sup> Park Chung Hee, *Toward Peaceful Unification* (Seoul: The Secretariat for the President, Republic of Korea, 1976), 21–22. Quoted in Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 105.

patriotic mission,” calling it the “modernization of the fatherland.”<sup>24</sup> Park prioritized economic growth over the distribution of wealth and democratic processes. The development plan was founded on a “Hegelian organic view of nation and state”<sup>25</sup>: the nation as “a biological organism with infinite life” and the state as “the guardian of the nation.”<sup>26</sup> His government strengthened restorative and/or conservative ideologies such as Confucianism and militarism and placed “the national” interest above the constitutional rights of the individual.<sup>27</sup> Park’s brand of nationalism was succeeded by that of Chun Doo Hwan.

Although the dissidents were opposed to state nationalism, dissident nationalism, too, mobilized the state’s national body as the premise for their nation. Or, it can be read otherwise: the post-colonial and dictatorial Korean state appropriated the national body earlier imagined by the nationalists after liberation. The Korean nation, for example, was conceived by the state as a homogeneous body of people bonded by a common language, culture, and history. The state regarded the nation as a legitimate unit of struggle for historical progress with little scrutiny. Nonetheless, the dissidents viewed Koreans’ common language, culture, and history not only as the composite of a unique Korean cultural entity but also as the collective expression of Korean experiences and aspirations.

In fact, the overlapping national body and shared culture have led some to assess *minjung misul* as reflecting state nationalism, rather than dissident nationalism. Such an evaluation perhaps was inevitable, especially as *minjung misul* took the Korean people-nation as a given, and as it was committed to its totality. These characteristics are found in the historical avant-garde as well: Jacques Rancier

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Jeon Jaeho, *Bandongjeok guendae juuija Park Chung Hee* [Reactionary Modernist Park Chung Hee] (Seoul: Chaek sesang, 2000), 86.



criticizes the historical avant-garde as presuming viewers to be constituted as a homogeneous collective.<sup>28</sup> These avant-gardists mobilized the people with a unified identity and consciously produced art and culture that would transform viewers' perceptions and worldviews based on a common reception.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the historical avant-garde was compromised and manipulated under fascist and totalitarian regimes.<sup>30</sup> Instead, Jean-Luc Nancy proposes relationality, or "spacing," that functions as a community that is internally plural and multiple.<sup>31</sup> His notion of "spacing" interrupts the totalitarian form of identification and generates a community constantly repartitioning and reorganizing itself.<sup>32</sup> In a sense, dissident nationalism embraces these dissimilar aspects: dissidents presume that the Korean people-nation is a coherent body, yet it is constantly remaking and reorganizing itself by re-appropriating the state-administered body of the people.

Although the dissident discourse assumes its members' equal visibility, which member is in reality represented as a sovereign power is a different matter. The strategies and objectives of many Korean activists were grounded in their abstract and totalistic notion of the people's issues. Here, the notion of "the people" is not merely a matter of appearance that conceals reality, but is rather an effective mode for materializing the people.<sup>33</sup> The dissidents privileged the anti-dictatorial political struggle of the people over the diverse issues of minorities. Often, the activists understood that the articulation of multiple objectives and organizations could be detrimental to their collective aims. As a result, although women were accepted as the

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<sup>28</sup> Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick, "Introduction: Communities of Sense," in *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, edited by Beth Hinderliter, William Kaizen, Vered Maimon, Jaleh Mansoor, and Seth McCormick (Durham, North Carolina, and London: Duke University Press), 12.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 9.

most oppressed, women existed more often than not as the symbolic embodiment of their movement's discourse.

Male activists often used the metaphor of “the mother” when describing the Korean nation-state. Or, women were conceptualized as mothers, daughters, and sisters—in relational or familial terms. If women were conceived of as daughters and sisters, they were also usually portrayed as being violated by “the enemy” (i.e., the state), igniting the anger and revenge of sons.<sup>34</sup> This clear gender division can be seen in the forms that activism itself took, partly because of the violent, militant protests.<sup>35</sup> In reality, their people-nation might be initially or limitedly identified as a community of male subjects or actors. Thus, dissident nationalism should aspire to realize the people's fuller sovereignty beyond the mainstream patriarchal discourse of dissidents, particularly the *undonggwon*. Nonetheless, the failure of many dissidents to reflect on the patriarchal and militaristic logic of their nationalism kept it from functioning as a real liberating force for many women.

### **The Roots of Dissident Nationalism: Ethnic Nationalism versus Political Nationalism**

The possible entwinement of dissident nationalism and state nationalism has often concealed another critical aspect of *minjung misul*, the national cultural movement in South Korea, and the democratization movement: political nationalism. Dissident nationalism endeavored to establish the people's nation-state on democratic principles. In order to examine its essential nature, we must probe dissident nationalism in the context of Korea's unique historical experience, especially in terms of ethnic nationalism versus political nationalism. To demonstrate the historical and intellectual

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<sup>34</sup> Jeon Huigyeong, *Oppa neun piryo eopda: jinbo ui gabujangje e dojeonhan yeojadeul iyagi* [Don't Need Brothers: Story of Women Who Challenged the Patriarchy of Progressives] (Seoul: Imaejin, 2008), 133.

<sup>35</sup> My discussion with the *minjung* artists Yi Gyeong, Kim Seogyong, and Kim Unseong.

lineage of modern Korean dissident nationalism, the two nationalisms, that is, ethnic nationalism and political nationalism, are distinguished here.

In *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*,<sup>36</sup> Gi-Wook Shin sees Korean nationalism as a modern invention that came about through the historical process of contesting particular social relations and ideological claims. Shin asserts that ethnic nationalism achieved prominence during the Japanese colonial era over other forms of collectivity, such as Pan-Asianism, Japanese (colonial) racism, and international socialism/communism. According to Shin, in the division between South and North Korea, ethnic nationalism has been a powerful instrument with reference to which each side has claimed political legitimacy over the shared nation. On the other hand, civil society challenged state nationalism through a *minjung* discourse imbued with anti-American ethnic nationalism. In the global era, Shin calls for the development of a more inclusive nationalism corresponding to civic/political nationalism, a change that could foster cultural and social diversity.

Here, Shin's "ethnic nationalism" as applied to modern Korean history might be based on certain misconceptions. If the blood-notion of ethnicity was employed in the discourse of the Korean nationalist movement, it seems to have been utilized only at the level of metaphor. Rather, anti-colonial Koreans perceived themselves as a nation because of their shared culture, language, and history. In this regard, such a position of ethnic nationalism might be considered culturalism, or cultural nationalism.<sup>37</sup> In addition, Shin commits the logical fault of applying "ethnic nationalism" as the historical roots of post-colonial dissident nationalism, especially as he indicates that the state's ethnic nationalism and dissident nationalism shared a

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<sup>36</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 12.

common genealogy.<sup>38</sup> In addition, Shin examines the anti-American sentiment of the dissidents as a case of privileging Korean ethnic unity over democracy. However, anti-American feeling increased because the dissidents saw the United States as an obstacle to rebuilding the people's sovereign nation-state.

The historical roots of dissident nationalism, or *minjung* nationalism, which derived its inspiration from the quest for independence of the colonial period, would be more a "political nationalism" in search of sovereign democracy and moral legitimacy. Based on her study of Korean nationalist leadership, movement, and strategy from the late nineteenth century to the liberation, historian Jacqueline Pak's concept of "political nationalism" would apply here.

Pak's work *The Founding Father: Ahn Changho and the Origins of Korean Democracy* was one of the most widely discussed in the field of Korean Studies in recent decades, as a result of new findings from the unearthed archival sources of the Korean nationalist movement of the early 1990s. The true nature of Korean nationalism, including the leadership and movement, has been debated ever since liberation. However, the debates have featured a lack of information and have been characterized by ideological distortion. Pak asserts that the nature of anti-colonial and patriotic Korean nationalism was fundamentally political and civic. In her research based on the papers of Ahn Changho and other leading Korean nationalist revolutionaries made available for the first time, she explores how the ideas of democratic republicanism and constitutional nationalism were introduced and shaped by the chief nationalist figure Ahn Changho through his "comprehensive vision and systematic strategy" for Korean independence and democracy.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, "Imin Chu'i and 'Modernization of the Fatherland,'" in *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 103–9.

<sup>39</sup> Jacqueline Pak, "Ahn Changho and the Origins of Korean Democracy," presentation at Woodrow Wilson Center of International Scholars, Washington, DC, 2001.

Defining Ahn Changho as a “revolutionary-democrat,” she delineates how he envisaged a modern Korean nation that would harness constitutional democracy, a capitalist economy, and robust military development. His transnational networks of nationalists already articulated the global origin of the Korean nation from its conception. Pak underscores how both political/civic nationalism and culturalism are embedded in the development of an indigenous form of Korean nationalism. She thus challenges the biases of Western scholarship in applying the concept of nationalism in East Asia, that is, the West’s civic, political nationalism versus the despotic East’s “organic-mystic or spiritual cultural nationalism.”<sup>40</sup>

Unlike what some of the alternative *minjung* historiography might suggest, Jacqueline Pak’s study demonstrates that the Korean nationalist movement did not work on the basis of a crude ideological division of “Confucian-left-patriot-militarist-righteous army vs. Christian-right-collaborators-cultural nationalist-patriotic enlightenment.”<sup>41</sup> Hence, she affirms that the Korean nationalist movement operated in a far more fluid and eclectic manner in formulating the nationalist ideologies and strategies. The legacy of the nationalist movements of Ahn and others lived on through the April 19 Student Uprising and beyond. Many nationalist figures, who became active as post-colonial dissidents, participated in the anti-dictatorial and democratization movement. Hence, dissident nationalism should be perceived as a genealogical development of the Korean nationalist movement, with the two sharing a desire for democracy.

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<sup>40</sup> Jacqueline Pak, “An Ch’angho and the Nationalist Origins of Korean Democracy,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1999, 20. Her forthcoming book is titled *The Founding Father: Ahn Changho and the Origins of Korean Democracy*.

<sup>41</sup> Jacqueline Pak, “Cradle of the Covenant: Ahn Changho and the Christian Roots of the Korean Constitution,” in *Christianity in Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 124. The *minjung* historiography has an ideologically reductionist approach to historical facts, and seeks “a political correctness of ideological purity, or self-righteous ‘historical rectification’ in search of historical correctness.” Ibid., 123.

## Dissident Art

Many dissident (and later, *minjung*, in the 1980s) art critics saw Korean modernism as developing in parallel with Koreans' experiences of modernity: as distorted, truncated, and illegitimate. They were critical of the art establishment and of formalistic art practices as well as of pro-official and pro-state attitudes among South Korean artists. In their anti-establishment and political activisms, *minjung misul* was often read in the context of the avant-garde. Although the avant-garde is a defining characteristic of this art, I argue that what the dissident critics and artists essentially contemplated and yearned for was to create legitimate modernism in the process of rebuilding their new nation-state. For now, I mainly attempt to locate their envisioning of a new art within the dissidents' engagement in the Western and Korean modernisms through reference to Iftikhar Dadi's theorization of modernism in his *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*.

As these artists and critics fiercely contested the modernists, however, they neither called their art modernism nor equated it with competing forms of modernism. This does not mean that they called their art avant-garde, either, since some artists who were challenging a streamlined institutional art with other artistic forms called their art avant-garde. The dissident artists understood modernism unilaterally as aesthetic experimentation based on their negative evaluation of Korean modernism and their limited knowledge of international avant-garde art. Although such a view would help them create a clear battlefield against institutional art (or modernist art), it has not allowed many *minjung* artists and critics to reflect on the premises of their aesthetics and discourse or on their relationship with existing modernism.

In his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* in 1974,<sup>42</sup> Peter Bürger conceptualizes avant-gardism as anti-establishment, and modernism as artistic-style movements. He sees the

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

avant-garde as critically challenging aesthetic formalism and art's conservative ideology, and as reconnecting art to social practices. Distinguishing the neo-avant-guard in the post-war era from the historical avant-garde, he believes that the former de-validated the latter by institutionalizing it, from a retrospective viewpoint.<sup>43</sup> Unlike Büger, in his first major essay, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," which had appeared in 1939, the American critic Clement Greenberg (1909–94) claims that avant-garde's aestheticism was actually a response to the corruption of mass culture and to ideological confusion and violence.<sup>44</sup> Modernism intentionally opts to create its own aesthetic world by incorporating high culture. Its artistic avant-garde had proposed a new kind of art for a new kind of social and perceptual world in metaphor and analogues, not in reflection and description.<sup>45</sup> By the end of the 1960s, the concept of "avant-garde" or "artistic modernism" became hegemonic in the international art world as well through circulations of contemporary American art such as Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism.<sup>46</sup>

### **Reconfiguring Korean and Western Modernisms**

Under the strong political and cultural influence of the United States, artistic modernism, or avant-garde, became a pervasive form of art practice in post-war South Korea. Many artists voraciously absorbed information on the current art world through Japan as an intermediary to the West. They worked on various abstract art styles (i.e., *Informel*, Monochrome, objet, happenings, etc.) to create new visual languages, to contest the establishment, and to reflect their personal/social realities. In addition, in

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>44</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Pollock and After*, edited by Francis Frascina (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 48–60.

<sup>45</sup> Raymond Williams, "The Politics of the Avant-Garde," in *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London; New York: Verso, 1980), 51.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Wood, 11.

post-colonial Korea, many artists tried to produce autonomous Korean art by creatively interpreting Korean aesthetics in a contemporary Western art form.

However, given the colonial legacies in art education, the hegemonic struggles among artists, and a stylistic approach to contemporary art, many dissident critics criticized Korean modernism for failing to engage in social and political realities and for a lack of artistic autonomy. Similar to the dissidents in their view of modern Korean history, the critics saw Korean modernism as truncated and alienated from the people's realities. They narrated the history of Korean modernism roughly like this: the import and development of Western-style painting during the era of Japanese colonialism, the perpetuation of Japanized Academic Impressionism and its becoming the art establishment, the artists' separation from the colonial realities, the colonial art institution and its legacies in post-colonial Korea, the appropriation of "easy" styles and the formalistic imitation of Western contemporary art, indifference to artists' direct environment, and the institutional artists supported by the dictatorial government.

As is obvious, the dissident art critics believed that art and the nation-state should be in a symbiotic relationship, and that both should evolve in the direction of historical progress with moral legitimacy. In more familiar terms, one can say that they believed that modernism should reflect and embrace its own modernity. At the center of the dissidents' contention is the issue of the relationship between modernities and modernisms of the Third World.

Third World modernisms have been routinely compared with those of the West, which is considered the exclusive source of universal modernism and modernity. As a result, modern non-Western art is viewed as lacking "fully realized modernist subjectivity" and as a belated and inauthentic derivative of Western



modernism.<sup>47</sup> Tabish Khabir points out that one tends to separate the modern from capitalism, although the latter is “the underlying motor of aesthetic and political change.”<sup>48</sup> The hegemonic capitalist West has shaped people’s recognition and view of modernism and modernity. In the relationship between the modern and the traditional, the West’s “inherent” correlation with capitalism, on the one hand, is viewed as rendering its modernity a “modernization” of its tradition.<sup>49</sup> The non-Western modernities that introduced capitalism through colonialism, on the other hand, are thought to be disjointed from their tradition.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the two temporalities cannot coexist in the conceptualization of a present and future Third World.<sup>51</sup>

Khabir’s arguments on the relationship between modernisms and capitalist culture, between modernity and tradition, have much relevance to the dissidents’ evaluation of Korea’s modernism. In the 1970s the dissidents saw this modernism as derivative of Western modernism and as truncated from their tradition. Although they appeared to perpetuate the center-periphery model, as they traced the “origins” of Korean modernism, their critiques of it ran concurrent with their negative reviews of Western modernism and colonial modernity. Thus, they suggested that Korean modernism was innately flawed by the limitations of the Western and Japanese modernisms and modernities, the continuing artistic sources for Korean artists. Therefore, the dissidents believed that while they were rebuilding the Korean nation-state from its foundation, Korean art should be revised and reconfigured as well to fit their vision of a new national culture. Nonetheless, as their idea of the national art was more strongly rooted in the moral legitimacy of dissident nationalism than in other aesthetic criteria, their assessments are destined to be crude and sweeping.

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<sup>47</sup> Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

For instance, the dissident art critic Kim Yunsu writes that the West's modernism developed in the post-revolutionary atmosphere of the 19th century—a period that saw the emergence of reactionary powers and the bourgeoisie's expansion of the market economy through imperialism/colonialism—so it was innately anti-realistic, anti-people, and alienating.<sup>52</sup> When the West's modernity was received by Korean elites during the colonial era, he says, they tended to separate Western culture from its imperial politics and, thus, presumed that they could participate in international modernism on equal terms.<sup>53</sup> He argues that this tendency had continuously shaped the Koreans' perception of art.

On modern Korean art's lack of interaction with the social and political realities, the literary critic Baik Nakcheong (or Paik Nak-Chung) approaches the reworking of art by questioning what humane elements are contained in literature (and art).<sup>54</sup> Referring to Leo Tolstoy's discussion of art and humanism, he agrees that human beings are naturally capable of appreciating art/aesthetics, and that “art is one of the means of intercourse between man and man.”<sup>55</sup> Based on Baik's discussion, Kim Yunsu perceives formalistic modern art, which only a few select audiences can appreciate, to be inhumane and anti-popular at its core.<sup>56</sup> The sharing and active making of art for the people is a way one can transform alienating modern art to “healthy art,” as Kim proposes.<sup>57</sup> His and Baik's conceptualization of art and humanism suggests how new art, called the national art in the 1970s, should be

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<sup>52</sup> Kim Yunsu, “Han'guk guendae misul: geu bipanjeok seoseol” [“Modern Korean Art: Introduction of Its Critique”], in *Han'guk hyeondae misul ui banseong* [Reflection on Contemporary Korean Art], edited by Minjok misul hyeopuihoe (Seoul: Han'gyeore, 1988), 14.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>54</sup> Baik Nakcheong, “Munhakjeog'in geot gwa inganjeog'in geot” [“About Literature and Humanism”], *Changjak gwa Bipyeong*, 28 (Summer 1973): 428–59.

<sup>55</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?*, translated by Aylmer Maude (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & CO Publishers, 1899), 43.

<sup>56</sup> Please see José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968). Print.

<sup>57</sup> Kim Yunsu, “Yesul gwa sowe” [“Art and Alienation”], *Changjak gwa bipyeong*, 19 (Spring 1971): 213.

envisioned: it should invite common people to dialogue through engaging, familiar, or legible forms about their everyday and national conditions.

In the early 1980s, initially a group of artists and art critics such as Seong Wan'gyeong (i.e., Reality and Utterance) proposed structural interventions in institutional art ideology and its interaction with society as a way to achieve art's *sotong*. However, with the dissidents' reorganizations for anti-state struggle and some *minjung* artists' involvement in the democratization movement, art's relation to the Korean nation-state was once again emphasized.

For its Spring 1983 issue, the journal *Quarterly Art* asked nine art critics to write about the colonial legacies in Korean art and to propose ways to exterminate them.<sup>58</sup> The colonial legacies they target for elimination include Korean art historiography with a colonial historical view, art's pro-official/state position, and the inertia of academicism and its perception of the avant-garde and realism as disquieting. In response, thirty-six art organizations issued a statement in two daily newspapers (*Joseon Daily or Chosun Daily* and *DongA Daily*, April 21, 1983) [Figure B.1]. They claimed that these critics' views were an "unspeakable false report" made under the fictional idea of a "national art" (*minjok misul*).<sup>59</sup>

Kim Yunsu, one of the nine critics, states that for a distorted Korean art, recovering "national art" is the foremost critical assignment.<sup>60</sup> Here, what does he mean by "national art," and why does he use that term rather than "Korean art"?

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<sup>58</sup> Kim Yunsu, Mun Myeongtae, Yi Gyeongseong, Yi Guyeol, et. al., "Han'guk misul ui ilje sikmin janjae reul cheongsan haneun gil" ["Road to Eradicate Japanese Colonial Legacies in Korean Art"], *Gyegan misul*, 25 (Spring 1983): 99.

<sup>59</sup> [http://www.ohmynews.com/nws\\_web/view/at\\_pg.aspx?CNTN\\_CD=A0000207960](http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000207960). Although several critics responded to these conservative artists' sweeping attacks, the controversy around the colonial legacies, pointed out by the nine critics of *Quarterly Art*, was shut down as a result of pressure from the art-world establishment. This quickly regained "peace" ironically testifies that the colonial legacies were more deeply entrenched in the art world than many people were aware of.

<sup>60</sup> Kim Yunsu, "Ilje sikmin janjae reul cheongsan ha'neun gil" ["Road to Eradicate Japanese Colonial Legacies"], in *Han'guk hyeondae misul ui banseong*, edited by Minjok misulin hyeopuihoe (Seoul: Hangyore, 1988), 110.

Borrowing the literary critic Baik Nakcheong's definition of national literature, Kim coins this term:

“National art” [transcends] its superficial implication as an art created by Korean people and art depicting something unique about Korea, and instead embodies modern consciousness through which we historically recognize and cope with the nation's critical situations. In this respect, national art attains the necessity and significance of its own existence, while our contemporary art has been suffering from not only colonial history but also from colonial relationships with Western art.<sup>61</sup>

From his definition, Korean art is mostly classified in terms of the artist's nationality and in terms of its “indigenous” content and form. These elements are thought to be unchangeable and fundamental to what makes art Korean art. On the other hand, Kim perceives “national art” as capturing the historical consciousness of Koreans, collectively responding to their crisis. Further, Kim and many others view the symbiotic relationship between art and the nation or its reality as the foundation of a new art. Here, it is noteworthy that although they originally intended to call it *minjung misul*, they used the term “national” art because of the state's negative reception of the term “*minjung*.”

### **Realism, Reality, and Dissent**

Seong's and Kim's assessments have been perceived as too rough and simplistic, however, by some modernists and art critics/historians. Oh Sanggil, who was once a member of the art collective Meta-Vox,<sup>62</sup> says that although it is common for Korean artists to be exposed to information about international art and its influences on art-making, the similarity in content, medium, and appearance between Korean and

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<sup>61</sup> Baik Nakcheong, “Minjok munhak yi'nyeom ui shinjeon'gae” [“New Development of the Notion of the National Literature”], *Wolgan JoongAng*, July 1974. Quoted in Kim Yunsu, 31.

<sup>62</sup> Oh Sanggil, “Interview with the Artist Kim Gurim,” in *Han'guk hyeondae misul dasi ilgi II: 6,70 nyeondae misul undong'ui jaryojip* [Rereading Contemporary Korean Art II: Collection of the 1970–70's Art Movement], edited by Oh Sanggil (Seoul: ICAS, 2001), 21–22.

Western contemporary art has been often equated with imitation. Rather, he argues that one should examine why the artists were interested in certain artistic expressions and media but not others as way to explore Korean artists' ingenious contribution to the creation of contemporary Korean art.

If Oh tried to tackle the question of the imitation or hybrid, the art historian Joan Kee discusses art's *sotong* in terms of *dansaekhwa*'s (monochrome painting) "dis/engagement" with society [Figure B.2]. *Dansaekhwa*'s illegibility has often been interpreted as silence on and further cooperation with Park's Yusin system. Instead, Kee argues, the *dansaekhwa* artists chose illegible forms in order to create worlds between painting and viewers into which the government's surveillance could not intrude. By giving the viewer agency in viewing abstract work, *dansaekhwa* carried greater political urgency, and allowed the imagining of different worlds. Like Joan Kee, Charles Altieri insists that the value of modernism is realized in its enactment of a metaphoric utopia within the work itself.<sup>63</sup> In imagining utopia and other forms of worlds, the existing and dissident modernism (*minjung misul*) surely shared faith in art's unique way of existence.

Nonetheless, the *minjung* artists and critics saw Korean modernism as a stylistic experimentation at best and as living off the state and official institutions at worst. At the center of the *minjung* artists' critique is how one sees and engages in reality and realism. Realism connotes its relation to reality. Because perceptions of reality are diverse, among artists there are contestations on what reality is and how art engages in it.<sup>64</sup> For instance, in an interview with Park Seobo, the most prominent member of the Korean art establishment, his student Jang Seog'won asks whether it is time to insist on art for art's sake. In response, Park replies, "This matter can be

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<sup>63</sup> Dadi, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Paul Wood, "Realisms and Realities," in *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art between the Wars* (New Haven, Connecticut, and London: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 1993), 245.

interpreted in the opposite direction. Although it is said that art is a reflection of society, [ . . . ] rather, by disconnecting with it, it paradoxically reflects its reality.”<sup>65</sup> Park and other *dansaekhwa* artists indicated that they focused on the realities of the private self to articulate their sociopolitical circumstances.

For these socially conscious artists, however, “reality” meant the artists’ (and supposedly *minjung*’s) everyday and sociopolitical (or national) circumstances. Thus, when *minjung* artists criticized the modernists for their lack of dialogue with reality, it was a reality very much based on their particularistic and ideological view of Koreans’ modernity. On the other hand, as in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere, the *minjung* artists’ realism was invested with a sense of the collective and the public, and it was profoundly bound up with the individual and communal imagining of their society through democratization of art.<sup>66</sup>

These artists’ use of realism carried a particular political connotation at a time when social and communal dialogues, especially any visible signs of dissent, were forbidden under the omnipotent control of the state. Under such circumstances, the *minjung* artists would have asked how much imagining of other worlds of modernism would be feasible for bringing direct changes to their individual and national conditions. Further, they suspected that such a metaphoric and allegorical approach to the social and political realities might in fact be easily manipulated by the state’s cultural policy, *dansaekhwa* being its most obvious example. Thus, they opted to choose a clearer statement as an act of dissent against the government.

The *minjung* artists made efforts to communicate “individual and communal visions [of the people], to provide ‘examples’ and ‘object lessons’ as well as the

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<sup>65</sup> Jeong Heon’yi, “1970nyeondae ui han’guk dansaekjo hoehwa e daehan sogo: chimmuk ui hoehwa, geu mihakjeok jausik,” in *Han’guk hyeondae misul dasi ilgi III: 70-yondae han’guk gwa ilbon ui hyeondae misul damron yeongu* [Rereading Contemporary Korean Art II: Collection of the 1970–70’s Art Movement], edited by Oh Sanggil (Seoul: ICAS, 2001), 361.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 256.

pleasures of sensuous recognition.”<sup>67</sup> In addition, for the purposes of cultural democracy, such as citizens’ art schools (art school for everyday), the *minjung* artists helped the people to express and to speak for themselves and their communities as a path to self-empowerment.<sup>68</sup> In sharing their stories or those of everyday people, the artists found that narrative and legible forms were more accessible to people than were abstract forms. Through their sharing of diverse views of their living conditions and society, they came to believe that *minjung misul* could generate new visions of the Korean nation-state in communal terms.

### **Milieu of *Minjung Misul* in the 1980s**

A decade after the dissolution of the Reality Group in 1969, socially critical artists created the art collectives Reality and Utterance (1979), Gwangju Freedom Artists Association (1979), Imsulnyeon (1982), Dureong (1982), and the Seoul Art Community (1984). Their socially conscientious art was alternately referred to as “1980s’ figurative art,” the “New Art Movement,” “living art,” and the “art of life.”<sup>69</sup> These artists used oils, acrylics, or traditional inks on canvas or mulberry paper. Woodcut print was also a popular medium. They made efforts to bring art to people’s everyday lives through the establishment of citizens’ art schools, although their own works were mainly displayed in galleries and museums.

Among them, the art collective Reality and Utterance (*Hyeonsil gwa baleon*), created in 1979, consisted of nineteen artists and art critics in collaboration. They tried to intervene in the art establishment/ideology as well as the existing art practices of

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<sup>67</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, “Trojan Horse: Activist Art and Power,” in *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, edited by Brian Wallis (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Boston: D. R. Godine, 1984), 347.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>69</sup> Choe Taeman, “Jeonmang sangsil ui sidae e jeonmang chatgi ui eoryeoum” [“Difficulty of Searching for Perspective in the Era of Loss of Direction”], in *Minjung misul 15nyeon, 1980–1994* [*The Fifteen years of Minjung Misul, 1980–1994*] (Seoul: Sam gwa kkum, 1994), 243.

formalist experimentation. The members contemplated structural critiques and groped for the invention of a new visual language for dialogue in their daily environment. In their works, they depicted their living realities and tried to respond to them more directly and concretely.<sup>70</sup>

In Gwangju, a traditional periphery of the art center, Hong Seongdam, Choe Yeol, Kim Sanha, Yi Yeongchae, and Gang Daegyul founded the Gwangju Freedom Artists Association in September 1979. If Reality and Utterance was interested in intervention into art as an institution, they chose to create art with the “power of testimonial and speech.”<sup>71</sup> They commented that their participation in the Gwangju citizens’ struggles—spraying messages on cars and trucks, and making placards—radically changed the perception of art.<sup>72</sup> However, since their artworks during group activities were not known to the public through publications on their works, it is difficult to examine how their ideas of art were realized.

Another art collective, Imsulnyeon 98,912 eso (the name refers to the lunar calendar year 1982 and the total area of South Korea), emerged a few years later. Its members, Hwang Jaehyeong, Song Chang, Lee Jonggu, and Park Heungsun, were graduates of the Art College at JoongAng University. Their aim was to represent multi-layered realities of the contemporary in an honest manner.<sup>73</sup> The members used mainly photo-realism in their works, and their depictions of reality possessed a cold and objective feel and expressed feelings of discomfort, horror, and fear. Their main medium was oil on canvas, and their works were displayed in exhibitions.

Hwang Jaehyeong, who was once a member of Imsulnyeon, worked and lived in a mining town for thirty years. Hwang, known as the “miner artist,” has made his

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ra Wonsik, “Miteuro buteo ui minjung misul undong” [“The *Minjung Misul* Movement from Below”], in *Minjung misul 15nyeon 1980–1994*, 23.

<sup>72</sup> Numerous *minjung* artists have shared their doubts about whether Hong Seongdam and his members participated in the Gwangju Uprising by producing banners and murals.

<sup>73</sup> Their first exhibition was in Seoul, October 29, 1982–November 13, 1982.



art, neighbors, and community work one. He became involved in the everyday lives of miners, remaking mining towns as their “hometowns” while supporting their democratization movement. Shin Hakcheol, who did not belong to an art collective, created a series depicting modern and contemporary Korean history events with striking photo-montage images [Figure B.3].

The artists Kim Bongjun, Jang Jinyeong, Yi Giyeon, and Kim Junho founded the art collective Dureong in October 1982. They integrated principles and aesthetics of the national culture movement into their art. The collective name Dureong, meaning “ridges in the rice field,” reflects the members’ wish to create art that could be loved and supported by the common folk, such as farmers. In their vision of a living aesthetics out of a model of traditional agrarian community, they viewed community-building as inherent to the process of art-making. Kim and his friends opened an “*ae-o-ge* citizens’ art class” and sought to foster communalism through collective production and consumption. The members’ curriculum consisted of traditional brush work, folk painting, mask-making, and *madanggeuk*.

The loosely grouped socially conscious artists and their works were known as *minjung misul* as a result of the state’s oppression of the “1985, Korean Art, the 20s’ ‘Power’” (July 13–July 22, Arab Art Museum) exhibition.<sup>74</sup> The Seoul Art Community organized the exhibition with the aim of the “establishment of *minjung*, *national* art” and the “democratization of the art world.”<sup>75</sup> In response to the exhibition’s “disquieting” nature, the police arrested several artists and forcefully removed some of the displayed works.

After the “Power” exhibition, 120 artists and critics founded the National Artists Association in November 1985. The members of Reality and Utterance,

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<sup>74</sup> The Cultural Minister Yi Wonhong remarked that these artists identified themselves with the *minjung* and used their art as an instrument of struggle.

<sup>75</sup> The Manifesto of “1985, Korean Art, the 20s’ ‘Power.’”

Imnulnyeong, Dureong, and Gwangju Visual Medium Study played an active role in the association from its inception. The National Artists Association took part in the ongoing democratization movement. Its members experienced the arrest of Lee Eunhong for her comic strips, as well as the arrests of those participating in the Sinchon-Jeongreung mural incidents, and others. In addition, they published the bulletin *National Art* and opened the art gallery Min (February 1986). At the gallery, they held exhibitions such as “Anti-Torture,” “Political Propaganda,” “Oh Yun Prints,” and “Women and Reality.” Beginning in 1986, they participated in the annual exhibition of the Third World artworks organized by the Japan Asia Africa Latin American Solidarity Committee (JAALA).

*Minjung* artists produced art for the purpose of protest in the democratization movement (i.e., banner painting, murals, and prints). Choe Byeongsu’s banner painting *Bring Hanyeol Back to Life* (as part of the June 10, 1987, Democratization Movement) [Figure D.1] is an excellent example. Along with protest art, *hyeonjang* art was also developed. Especially from 1985 on, many *hyeonjang* activities emerged as crucial branches of the democratization movement. Its art activities consisted of *minjung misul* education, *hyeonjang* support activities, and struggles against the state oppression of *minjung misul*.<sup>76</sup> The *hyeonjang* art was rooted in the local as part of the community.<sup>77</sup> The July–September Great Workers’ Struggle (1987) prioritized the laborers’ class consciousness in *minjung misul*. The *minjung* artists’ radical works and activism aligned with major political lines of the *undonggwon* (i.e., NL for National Liberation and PD for People’s Democracy) based on social-scientific analyses of Korean society.

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<sup>76</sup> Gwon San, “Geori ui misulgadeul” [“Artists on the Street”], in *Minjung misul 15nyeon 1980–1995*, 101.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

The June 1987 Popular Uprising led to promises of constitutional reform (for a direct presidential election) and other measures by Roh Tae Woo's June 29 Declaration of that year. Although the situation was favorable for the dissidents to win a presidential election, they failed to create a progressive government because of divisions in the camp with regard to progressive presidential candidates. The bitter feelings and resentful antagonisms were felt also among the *minjung* artists and other progressives. The younger generation of *minjung* artists who aligned with the student activists heavily criticized the "conservativeness" of the older generation's practices (i.e., exhibition-centered, traditional fine art medium, etc.).<sup>78</sup> Reflecting the ideologically polarized politics of the *undonggwon*, they hotly debated the role of art and artists in the democratization movement. Their irreconcilable differences resulted in the founding of the pan-national National People's Art Movement Federation by the activism-oriented artists and the student activists in October 1988.

The 1987 Popular Uprising and the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games gave much room to dissident cultural activities, as the legalization of the pan-national Korean National Artists Federation exemplified.<sup>79</sup> *Minjung* artists moved their art from the *hyeonjang* to gallery exhibitions and experimented with new mediums and subjects. In addition, alternative art spaces, programs, and curatorial experiments intervened in the existing art galleries and museums and earlier curatorial practices. The large-scale exhibition "Minjung misul 15 Years, 1980–1994," at the government-sponsored National Museum of Contemporary Art, was held in 1994 under the first civilian government, led by President Kim Young Sam (1992–97). Although it was a groundbreaking event, this exhibition was negatively reviewed by both the *minjung misul* camp and the news media for its undemocratic process of organization, and for

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<sup>78</sup> Choe Yeol, "Jeon'guk jojik geonseol gwa misul undong ui hwaksan" ["Establishment of National Organization and Expansion of Art Movement"], in *Minjung misul 15nyeon 1980–1995*, 96.

<sup>79</sup> Jeong Jichang, "Minjung munhwa undong sog'eseo ui minjung misul" ["Minjung misul in the People's Culture Movement"], in *Minjung misul 15 yeon 1980–1995*, 264.

its failure to provide a critical evaluation of *minjung misul* and its prospects. This exhibition was perceived to signal the movement's institutionalization and even its end by some critics.

### **Summary**

This chapter delineated how multifaceted elements of dissident nationalism were organically structured and worked together based on the dissidents' common perception of Korea's modern history. In order to provide a basic framework for further investigation of the internal and external operational logic of dissident nationalism, this chapter explored Korean history after 1945, the dissidents, the emergence of dissident nationalism in its entwined relationship with state nationalism, the roots of dissident nationalism, and dissident art. In their re-envisioning of the people's nation-state based on democratic principles, the dissidents deliberated to recreate Korea's modernism as legitimate visual expressions for a new nation-state.

**CHAPTER TWO:**  
***MINJUNG, DIALOGUE, COMMUNITY:***  
**HUMANISM AT THE PEOPLE'S LIVING SITE**

The decade of the 1970s began with two spectacular opening ceremonies, the first for Pohang Steel, Asia's largest steel factory, on April 1, 1970, and the second for the Gyeongbu Highway, connecting Seoul to Busan, on July 7, 1970. They became a driving force behind the extremely rapid economic development of South Korea, known as "the Miracle of Han River." If state-directed industrialization was often praised for its successes, it also violently transformed Koreans' lives, especially the lives of those in rural areas, through the loss of their lands, the deterioration of farming communities, and the resultant massive migrations to the cities. Those migrants became low-wage workers, a group that consisted of great masses of urban poor.

The modernization of Korea occurred so rapidly and in such a compressed manner that it achieved in one generation "the same magnitude of change that took a whole century in most European societies."<sup>1</sup> As a result, the ever-expanding supply of cheap labor ensured the success of the state's export-oriented economic policy. When the dramatic increase of labor-intensive exports resulted in an increase in labor wages, it was inevitable that the state would suppress the workers' demands using the rhetoric of nationalism and national security.<sup>2</sup> In the main export-manufacturing industries, such as rubber goods, wigs, and textiles,<sup>3</sup> over 70 percent of workers were female in

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<sup>1</sup> Hagen Koo, *Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Im Hyeokbaek, *Sijang, gukka, minjuui: Han'guk minjuhwa wa jeongchi gyeongje yiron* [*Market, State, Democracy: Korea's Democracy and Econopolitical Theories*] (Seoul: Nanam chulpan, 1994), 30.

<sup>3</sup> During the period 1962–66, exports increased 43.8% each year, and their value grew from 50 million to 1.07 billion dollars. Il SaGong, *Korea in the World Economy* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 1993). In terms of total exports, the percentage of manufacturing was boosted as well, from 27% in 1962 to 72.5% in 1967, to 87.9% in 1972. By the late 1960s, South Korea was a

the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>4</sup> During the 1970s, most of these female factory workers were rural migrants and were single, semi-skilled laborers in their late teens and early twenties.

These young women were often subjected to inhumane working conditions, verbal and physical abuse, and gender-based oppression. They worked up to 16 hours a day and, if work piled up, were often forced to work day and night for as many as three consecutive days. They were sometimes given drugs or shots to keep them awake. As many as 15 girls worked in a tiny room (about 72 square feet), some of which had been converted from a narrow attic space to maximize space and reduce expenses. These workers earned wages of less than 30 dollars a month (at the 1970 exchange rate). Because they worked long hours in narrow, unventilated spaces, many suffered from tuberculosis, ulcers, and other chronic diseases.<sup>5</sup>

In the face of the workers' abject situation, the dissident intellectuals and university students were sharply aware that the realities of the people's everyday lives did not correspond to their entitled rights as legitimate members of the Korean nation-state. In the discrepancy between the lives and ideals of the majority of Koreans, they conceived the notion of the *minjung* in the early 1970s. In conjunction with life conditions under modernization, their discourse of the *minjung* is firmly grounded in their perception of modern Korean history, particularly in Korea's failure to build a sovereign nation-state after liberation in 1945. Thus, *minjung* is formulated through Koreans' collective suffering under the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural oppressions that resulted from the distorted historical development. Nonetheless, the

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major manufacturing export country. Yi Okchi, Gang Insun, and Han'guk Yeoseong nodongjahoe hyeopuihoe, *Han'guk yeoseong nodongja undongsa* (Seoul: Haneul Akademi, 2001), 32.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Hart-Landsberg, *The Rush to Development: Economic Change and Political Struggle in South Korea* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993), 178–81.

<sup>5</sup> Park Chansik, "Yaman ui sidae, In'gan haebang ui hwetbul Jeon Taeil" ["The Era of Savageness, Human Torchlight of Liberation Jeon Taeil"], in *20 Segi Han'guk ui yaman [Savageness of the Twentieth-Century Korea]*, edited by Yi Byeongcheon and Lee Gwang'il (Seoul: Ilbit, 2001), 172–76.

*minjung* were thought to be capable of standing up to oppression and any anti-life force.

As the dissidents translated the Koreans' predicaments into the *minjung*, I argue, they invented the twin notions of *sotong* (dialogue) and *gongdongche* (community) to describe the people's determination to close the discrepancy between the reality and their ideals and the fulfillment of those ideals, humanism. In short, if *minjung* is a discursive and symbolic representation of the people as sovereign, then *sotong* and *gongdongche* are the underlying operational logic in mapping dissident nationalism. These concepts were most visibly contemplated and explored in the national culture movement, the church mission, and the living community movement, especially at the people's *hyeonjang* ("the real site").

This chapter focuses on the national culture movement as a response to the incommunicable and alienating circumstances Koreans experienced under the dictatorships and modernization, and this movement was deeply related to other *hyeonjang* activities. In the discussion, I address the following questions: Given that the state suppressed any form of critical dialogue or protest, how could one create a communal discussion about humanism or struggle to live with dignity? Why should art become the crucial source of both social dialogue and protest tactics for the redefining of humanism and democracy? How can one embed the logic and determination of liberation in art for their humanizing project? How was the idea of humanism defined, formulated, and legitimated in the intellectuals' discourse and activism? This chapter is composed of two parts—*minjung* and the national culture movement—yet they share a similar discursive image of the discrepancy between reality of the people's lives and the ideal. My inquiry of the *minjung* is limited to the 1970s' discourse for now.

## **The *Minjung* as the People of Suffering and Hardship**

In the rise of dissident nationalism, the concept of the *minjung*, or the common people, became the core of determinations and aspirations. Despite its discursive significance in all realms since the early 1970s, the notion of the *minjung* was not much discussed in depth at that time (except in the church). It continues to receive inadequate attention to this day, in part because of its eclectic sources, its nebulous nature for rhetorical effect, and the general condition of studies on the 1980s.<sup>6</sup> Given the lack of records and studies, my investigation of the *minjung* aims not to conduct an exhaustive study but to explore its essential notions.

The term *minjung* consists of *min* (“people” or “common people”) and *jung* (“multitudes”), and its meaning has changed over time. The *min* were once the subjects of a king under the neo-Confucian philosophy of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910). The *min* included commoners, merchants, peasants, middlemen, butchers, slaves, and so forth. They were subjugated under caste oppression but could rise up as a collective force, as the numerous cases of Joseon peasant uprisings suggest. From the late nineteenth century onward, the feudal meaning of *min* was transformed into something that signified the citizens of a modern Korean nation. During the colonial era, the term referred to both the citizens of the future independent nation-state and the members of the national community united against Japanese colonialism.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1970s, the dissident notion of the *min* or *minjung* redefined the Marxist notion of the people in terms of Koreans’ experience of modernity. It has been discussed and loosely defined as those oppressed by and alienated from the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural institutions (i.e., literature, history, culture, economy, and religion), carrying the earlier notion as well. Wary of perceiving the

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<sup>6</sup> Please refer to the introduction.

<sup>7</sup> Please refer to *Han’guk minjungron* [*The Discourse of the Korean Minjung*], edited by han’guk sinhak yeon’guso (Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1984).



concept of the *minjung* merely as an ideology, cultural activists and writers in particular opened up its discussion beyond historical materialism. Such a stance developed into two major concepts in the 1970s: first, the notion of the *minjung* was built on the shared experience of oppression and loss of historical sovereignty of Korea and other Third Worlds; second, the community of the *minjung* was envisioned as a dialogical site for new operational logic or as a working model of everyday/national community. For the former, I look into the discourse of the *minjung*, while for the latter, I reconceptualize the *minjung* with notions of *sotong* and community in the national culture movement. If the earlier attempts to define the *minjung* have habitually focused on the term itself, this study explicates it through its multilayered relations to and manifestation through its neighboring concepts.

The historian, thinker, religious philosopher, and dissident Ham Seokheon (1901–89) recalls his experience of teaching Korean history at Osan School, well-known for its patriotic activism, during the colonial era:

Since I taught history to junior high school students, I made efforts to instill the glorious history of the motherland into their young hearts. However, it was useless. I spoke loud the name of General Gang Gamchan that I had learned at a young age. But the sound of moaning from the five thousand years of Korean history was too loud to be buried by [the name of the General]. . . .<sup>8</sup>

[Our nation] does not have a monumental legacy like the Pyramids or the Great Wall of China, or inventions that contribute greatly to the world. Although there are figures, we do not have such people whom we can say created drastic change in the world history. . . . Instead, [what we have] is a history of oppression, shame, tearing, division, loss, and falling down.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ham Seokheon, *Tteuro bon han'guk yeoksa* [Korean History through the Viewpoint of Will] (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1996), 113.

<sup>9</sup> Ham Seokheon gi'nyeom saeophoe, *Minjok ui keun sasangga Ham Seokheon seonsaeng* [The Nation's Foremost Philosopher, Ham Seokheon] (Seoul: Hangilsa, 2001), 78.

Ham views Korean history as filled with hardship and suffering. He defines it as “a history of *gonan* (suffering and hardship)” from the perspective of the Bible.<sup>10</sup> His Biblical reading of Koreans’ experiences is further developed by the concept of *Ochlos* in the New Testament through *minjung* theology or the theology of *minjung*—rereading the Bible by shifting the focus from its text, God’s words, to the context of the *minjung*.

Ahn Byeongmu, the *minjung* theologian, reinterprets the Bible through the social and political realities of a group of low-status people, *Ochlos*, at the site of Jesus Christ’s teaching.<sup>11</sup> He believes the social character of these followers of Jesus, as well as the context of Jesus’ works, to be crucial to finding the reality of the *minjung*.<sup>12</sup> *Ochlos*, whom the Gospel of Mark distinguishes from *laos*, the Jewish ruling class, consists of tax-collectors, sinners, prostitutes, and women.<sup>13</sup> However, Ahn states that Jesus shared a life with the oppressed and despised *ochlos*, or the Galileans, and fought with them for liberation.<sup>14</sup> The Biblical conceptualization of the *minjung* is similar to contemporary Chinese writers’ and filmmakers’ articulation of the “people” through the depiction of suffering.<sup>15</sup>

The cultural theorist Rey Chow states that the people’s suffering becomes “an alternative political language” with which to assert “individual rights and freedoms

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<sup>10</sup> Ham Seokheon, “ttueuro bon han’guk ui ohneul” [“Contemporary Korea through Will”], in *Saenggak haneun baekseong iraya sanda* [Only the People Who Think Can Survive], edited by Ham Seokheon, Gye Hunje, et al. (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1996), 53.

<sup>11</sup> Ahn Byeongmu, “Jesus and *Minjung* in the Gospel of Mark,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharajah (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1995), 85. Quoted in Kim Ilmok, “A Critical Analysis between Salvation and Social Justice in *Minjung* Theology,” Ph.D. dissertation, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2008, 71.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Kim Ilmok, 71–72.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>15</sup> Rey Chow, “We Endure, Therefore We Are: Survival, Governance, and Zhang Yimou’s To Live,” in *Ethics after Ideal: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 115.

against totalitarianism.”<sup>16</sup> Along the same lines, the poet, thinker, and activist Kim Jiha defines the *minjung* in terms of their shared experiences of oppression and great potential for emancipation, which is appropriated by the *hyeonjang* activity of the Christian Church:

[It] is not a social class isolated in an ideological aspect but the oppressed that is produced in the confrontation against all sorts of oppressors in a distorted human history. [ . . . ] Concretely speaking, *minjung* is the reality of the Third World, which is formed by the process of exploitation and in resistance. They are the people who are promised to a new world, light, and life.<sup>17</sup>

The *minjung* of the Korean nation and of other Third Worlds are oppressed, yet they are the source of true liberation in their struggle for humanism. Here, in reality, the dissidents did not distinguish between what it means for a people to have historical sovereignty and what it means for them to *be* historical sovereignty. It was mainly because the discourse of the *minjung* was not about the *minjung* themselves but more about the dissidents’ historical perception of the Korean people-nation. The *minjung* were thought to be both the symbolic and the discursive embodiment of dissident nationalism and historical actors in their narratives of historical progress. It was crucial for the dissidents to educate the *minjung* about their potential and to “transplant” qualities of the *minjung* into the common people (including themselves) in order to be true *minjung* rather than merely having the status of the *minjung*.

However, the common language of the *minjung*, suffering, also strengthened the parochial nature of Korean nationalism, as many dissidents assigned the Koreans an unnatural moral privilege based on their experiences. For instance, in his *The Song of the Sailor in the Southern Land* in 1985, which the *minjung* artist Oh Yun illustrated [Figure C.1], Kim Jiha (or Kim Chiha) writes that a unifying religious group (*tong’il*

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Kim Jiha, *Namnyeok ttang betnora: Kim Jiha iyagi moum* [*The Song of the Sailor in the Southern Land: A Collection of Stories by Kim Jiha*] (Seoul: Dure, 1985), 23.

*sindan*) and a harmonious government (*johwa jeongbu*) will be built in the south of the Korean peninsula. According to him, the unifying religious group will embrace all kinds of deities and gods, and the harmonious government, or the democratic federation of all nations, will deal with global issues, reforming and reconstructing heaven and earth.<sup>18</sup> Although the *minjung* include all Third World peoples, many South Korean dissidents and the *minjung* artists stress that the Korean *minjung* stand out because of the insurmountable and unique hardships they have experienced as members of a divided nation. Initially, they could move away from the ethnic blood-notion of Korean-ness, but they particularized and transcended Koreans' experiences again, now using the language of suffering. In a way, their internationalism thereby remained at the level of rhetoric, except in the case of the Church's world coalitions.

### **The *Minjung* as the Dialogical Site**

In the dissidents' imagining of the national community, Korea has two entities in one body: the *minjung*-nation and the state. In his essay "From Their Nation-State to Everyone's Nation-State," the philosopher Kim Sangbong points out that the people have never been fully considered citizens of the Republic of Korea but have been seen instead as its "potential enemies" by the state authority.<sup>19</sup> Even during the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, the military fired on the protesters when the national anthem was broadcasted from speakers in the Gwangju city hall.<sup>20</sup> Against the state's atrocities and its refusal to acknowledge the people as its legitimate members, the dissidents carved

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<sup>18</sup> Kim Jiha, "Guritgol gihaeng: jeungsan sasang yiran mueotinga" ["What is Jeungsan Philosophy"], in *Sasang gihaeng [Journey of Philosophy]* (Seoul: Silcheon munhaksa, 1999), 238.

<sup>19</sup> Kim Sangbong, "Geudeul ui narae eseo uri modu ui nara ro," in *5.18 geurigo yeoksa: geudeul ui nara eseo uri modu ui nara ro [May 18th and History: From Their Nation-State to Everyone's Nation-State]* (Seoul: Kil, 2008), 322–73. Hyejong Yoo, "The Candlelight Girls' Playground: The 2008 Candlelight Vigil Protests in South Korea," Peer-reviewed online journal *Invisible Culture*, 15 (2010).

<sup>20</sup> Hyejong Yoo. I could not identify who turned on the national anthem at the site.

a new vision of the Korean nation-state within the existing one, one that finds affinity with the Indian nationalists' anti-colonial nationalism.

Partha Chatterjee proposes that the Indian nationalists separated “the world of social institutions and practices” into the material and the spiritual spheres.<sup>21</sup> The material was the domain of the outside, economy, science, and technology, where the Western colonialists traditionally showed dominance. In the inner or “spiritual” domain, the nationalists imagined “modern” national culture, bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity that could not be intruded on by Western colonialists. Although the state was still occupied by the colonial power, in its spiritual domain the nation was already a sovereign being.<sup>22</sup>

Similar to Indian nationalism, the Korean dissidents imagined the community of the *minjung* with/in a domain of the nation-state. However, in the post-liberation era, when the oppositional power was not a foreign state but was their own state, the dissidents deliberated to create their *gongdongche* (everyday/national community). The dissidents often used the notions of community and people-nation interchangeably. The term *gongdongche* consists of three characters, referring to *gong* (oneness), *dong* (sameness), and *che* (body), and denotes the “organic” oneness in the common language, culture, territory, and history of the Korean people-nation. Although the state was officially a representative of the Koreans, in reality, the Korean state was perceived as not belonging to the true Korean nation-state.

The dissidents therefore needed to replace the existing state with the people's state and to further reconfigure the *minjung*-nation using a new logic of the nation-state: *sotong*, or humanism in the indigenous reinterpretation of democracy. This study proposes that their notion of *sotong* is based on their perception of Koreans' historical

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<sup>21</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

predicaments. They saw the living conditions of Koreans as the embodiment of alienation, inhumanity, division, and non-communication: including the national division and the failure to found an independent nation-state; the omnipotent state control of channels of interaction; the use of military or authoritarian *top-down* communication; the compressed modernization and subsequent deterioration of the people's lives; the consumerist, decadent culture; the conservative art institutions; and contemporary Korean art's focus on formalist experimentation.

The dissident idea of *sotong*, I argue, could articulate the discrepancy between the Koreans' lived reality and their relentless desire for the communal building of a sovereign nation-state. The working toward their unification and its fulfillment are conceived as *sotong*/community. Just as *minjung* is defined as sovereignty based on the perception of modern Korean history, *sotong* and community are identical concepts, yet they describe the operational logic or map of dissident nationalism. At the everyday level, *sotong* is conceptualized as communal dialogue without hindrance or boundaries—a condition that might be possible in the traditional agrarian village—in the dissidents' vision of community-making. Further, it means the reworking of basic premises of daily life such as healthy eating, a communal lifestyle, and direct exchanges. At the national level, *sotong* is thought to recreate the existing nation-state as the people's nation-state, based on democratic ideals.

Within the political reality of non-communication and alienation, art and culture became a crucial source of both social interactions and protest tactics. In the following discussion, the national cultural movement as a reflexive and critical *sotong* is illuminated. The artistic and political principles, concepts, and tactics of the national culture movement gave *minjung misul* an aesthetic and discursive foundation. Because *minjung misul* emerged two decades later, however, it is difficult to make a direct connection between the art and the national culture movement at this moment. Thus, I

aim at reviewing critical issues of the national culture movement that were ingeniously incorporated into *minjung misul* in the subsequent chapters.

### Participation Literature in the 1960s

The dissidents contemplated culture's social role, and their new vision for culture was first articulated in participation literature (*chamyeo munhak*) of the 1960s. Following the April 19, 1960, Student Uprising against President Rhee Syngman, the Jang Myeon administration was established. The defeat of its progressive party in the July 29 general election, however, thwarted the protesters' demands for a democratic government—a true representative of the people's interests.<sup>23</sup> The explosive energy for social change nonetheless created a favorable atmosphere for the military coup led by Major General Park Chung Hee on May 16, 1961. After the coup, Park's emergency government made "six revolutionary pledges"<sup>24</sup> for the reconstruction of Korea, including a peaceful transition to a civilian government. However, Park and his Military Coup Committee, under the guise of a civilian party, instead established an authoritarian government in 1962.

Such a political atmosphere fostered heated debates on the issue of pure literature (*sunsu munhak*) versus participation literature (*chamyeo munhak*). Among the supporters of participation literature, the literary critic Kim Byeonggeol stated that even pure literature can exist only in its dialogue with society.<sup>25</sup> The literary critics

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<sup>23</sup> Many Koreans demanded special legislation to punish those responsible for the fraudulent election and for the firing on the protesters, as well as illicit fortune makers and pro-Japanese collaborators.

<sup>24</sup> After the coup, Park Chung Hee's Military Coup Committee announced six public pledges that can be summarized as follows: anti-communism as national policy; solid ties with the United States and its allies; eradication of all corruption and evil; improvement of the people's economic plight and founding of an independent national economy; strengthening of the possibility for national unification; and turning over of power to a civilian government. In addition, the coup leaders declared that they hereby inherited the legacies of the 4.19 uprising and would complete the revolutionary project through modernization.

<sup>25</sup> Kim Byeonggeol, "Sunsuwa ui gyeolbyeol" ["Farewell to Purity"], *Hyeondae munhak*, 10 (1963), quoted in Park Inbae, *Gyeokjeong sidae ui munye undong: munye undong 30 nyeonsa* [Art Movement in

Hong Sajung and Kim Wujong criticized pure literature's disengagement with the historical moments after the April 19 Student Uprising and the May 16 Military Coup because they believed that literature's "neutral" attitude itself constituted a political decision to support the ruling class.<sup>26</sup>

Hence, they proposed that participation literature should attempt to expose injustice and corruption and to dialectically achieve a new reality. Disclosure in true participation literature should be instrumental to the creation of new ideals, not just disclosure for the sake of disclosure.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, criticizing the genre's "impure" aims, many pure-literature supporters pointed out that participation literature compromised artistic quality for the sake of social critique. Sharing such concerns, the dissident literary critic Yeom Muong remarked that participation literature should overcome its rigid stereotypic image, such as simply reporting reality. He further proposed that writers should create a more genuine participation literature through an aesthetic articulation of their social and political realities.<sup>28</sup>

The debates surrounding the issue of participation versus pure literature also embodied a continuing exploration of the ideas of freedom for many writers at a time when a form of Western democracy was being painfully tested, as well as exploited, on Korean soil. The literary critic Park Inbae points out that the pure-literature supporters limit their definition of freedom to the individual level without a concrete historical perception of literature, and that they do not define an actual condition of

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*the Era of Passion: the 30 Years of the Art Movement*], edited by Yi Juho (Seoul: Hanguk yesulin chong yeonhaphoe, 2006), 17.

<sup>26</sup> Hong Sajung, "Han'guk munhak ui saeroun jeonmang" ["New Prospects of the Korean Literature"], *Hanyang*, 1965. Quoted in Park Inbae, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Chang Iru, "Chamnyeo munhak ui teukseong" ["Characteristics of Participation Literature"], *Hanyang*, 1964. Quoted in Park Inbae, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Yeom Muong, "Oraedoen jeohang ui munhak" ["Literature of Long Resistance"], *Sedae*, 2 (1966). Quoted in Park Inbae, 20.



“freedom.” Moreover, he asserts, writers need to distinguish the freedom espoused by 4.19 from the earlier understanding of it, and to enrich it through their literary works.<sup>29</sup>

In his essay “New Attitudes of Creation and Criticism” in the progressive journal *Creation and Critique* (*Changjak gwa bipyeong*) in 1966,<sup>30</sup> the editor and literary critic Baik Nakcheong insists the notion that art is independent from reality, in fact, is “a product of a particular age and particular ideology. And such an idea reflects a certain attitude toward life.”<sup>31</sup> Baik emphasizes that art’s true freedom is generated by its active response to the demands of real life. By creatively responding to reality, art can act not as a passive instrument but as an active participant in the historical reality. His and other literary critics’ idea of literature and art—that art articulates certain existing structures and ideologies, and can claim its authentic life through its direct involvement in social reality—also became a basic premise for a new art in the early 1980s, in the cases of the art collectives Reality and Utterance and Imsulnyeon.

### **Culture Alive in the National Fate**

These critics’ concept of *sotong* was initially realized in two performances during the protests against the South Korea–Japan Normalization Treaty during the period 1963–65. The Park Chung Hee government sought monetary loans from Japan for further industrial development in Korea. Less than twenty years had passed since the end of Japanese colonialism, so Koreans fiercely opposed Park’s plan. They were concerned over the potential for colonial re-encroachment. Along with the April 19 Student Uprising, the 6.3 protest against the Korea–Japan Normalization Treaty in 1964 and related cultural performances and events (i.e., the “Funeral for nationalist democracy”) provided rich ground for the future national culture movement.

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<sup>29</sup> Park Inbae, 55.

<sup>30</sup> Baik Nakcheong, “Saeroun Changjak gwa bipyeong ui jase” [“New Attitudes of Creation and Criticism”], *Changjak gwa bipyeong*, 1 (1966): 5–38.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

For instance, the “Ritual for the invocation of the dead for native consciousness” (*Hyangto-uisik-chohongut*), performed at Seoul National University in 1963, satirizes the lives of the farming village. The “Ritual” reinterpreted a traditional mask-dance by incorporating contemporary events into the tradition. It was then turned into a funeral performance in front of the 4.19 Tower at Seoul National University in protest of compradors and the attitude of slavish submission to the United States and Japan. Another performance, in 1964, the “Funeral for nationalist democracy” (*Minjokjeok minjujuui jangresik*), whose script Kim Jiha wrote, harshly criticized Park Chung Hee’s false and deceitful notion of Koreanized democracy.<sup>32</sup> For the May 20, 1964, funeral performance, many banners commemorated the “Funeral of nationalist democracy” at the College of Arts and Sciences of Seoul National University. More than 3,000 students and 1,000 citizens congregated on campus, and four students carried a coffin. Led by the coffin carriers, more than 1,500 people walked with the black coffin up to the city center, chanting their demands for democracy.<sup>33</sup>

With these protest experiences behind them, the dissident intellectuals could further explore traditions with a heightened sense of nationalism. Furthermore, they learned how cultural events could be seamlessly incorporated into the new means of dialogue and protest. Similarly, these early cultural experiments set the tone for the coming art evolution in its engagement with the national condition, reinterpreting tradition into dissident visual languages, and becoming a tactical art for protest in *minjung misul*. Choe Byoungsu and other *minjung* artists, particularly from the mid-

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<sup>32</sup> Park Inbae, *Gyeokjeong sidae ui munye undong: munye undong 30 nyeonsa* [Art Movement in the Era of Passion: the 30 Years of the Art Movement], edited by Yi Juho (Seoul: Han’guk yesulin chong yeonhaphoe, 2006), 24. The official rhetoric of “Korean democracy,” based on the history and values of neo-Confucianism in traditional Korea, was invented to legitimize Park Chung Hee for the new Yusin Constitution in 1972. By extending his presidency to a third term, the dictator Park solidified his political desire to become the leader of Korea for life.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 25.

1980s on, strived to bring art to the heart of the democratization movement through their propaganda art.

### **Humanism Reverberated in the 1970s**

On November 13, 1970, Jeon Taeil, a 22-year-old tailor's assistant in the garment district known as Pyeonghwa Market, set himself on fire. He poured gasoline over his body in the midst of a small worker protest. His body swathed in shooting flames, he shouted, "We are not machines! Let us rest on Sunday! Abide by the Labor Standard Laws!" and "Don't exploit workers!" He was holding up a booklet of the Labor Standard Laws, which he had been studying for a couple of years.<sup>34</sup> From his self-study, Jeon learned that these labor laws decreed that employers must provide workers with humane working conditions and wages. He and his friends had written many letters to President Park Chung Hee, to the Seoul City governor, and to the Ministry of Labor asking these authorities to force employers to abide by these laws. They also made an appeal to well-known church pastors.

However, Jeon came to the painful realization that these authorities were not interested in the workers' horrible conditions. Furthermore, the workers' struggles to live with dignity were met with brutal oppression by the police and the security guards in the market. In light of the desperate situation, he decided to reveal the labor workers' realities to the public "through his body, through his death."<sup>35</sup> Jeon Taeil's self-immolation greatly shocked intellectuals and workers, as well as church members. They also learned how much he wanted to have intellectual friends while he was studying the labor laws by himself. This incident became the impetus for the 1970s'

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<sup>34</sup> I could not obtain an image of this event.

<sup>35</sup> Ahn Byeongmu, *Minjung sinhak ui chulbanjeom* [*The Beginning of Minjung Theology*] (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1993), 314.

laborer–student collaborations in the dissident movement, which will be discussed further.

If Jeon’s death articulates the inhumanity behind Korea’s successful economic expansion, Kim Jiha’s *damsi* (a short version of *pansori*, a one-person traditional drama performance) “Five Enemies (Ojeok)” (1970) satirizes the five elite types most responsible for the suffering of the majority of Koreans.<sup>36</sup> They are the businessman, congressman, government official, general, and minister. Here, “Five Enemies” originated as a degrading term for the five ministers of the Joseon dynasty who signed the Treaty of Eulsa in 1910, beginning the era of colonialism. Likewise, Kim calls his five characters “five enemies” for their “selling out” of South Korea in the name of modernization. Kim repurposes the historically loaded term to suggest that colonial history is perpetuated even after liberation. As way to break its continuity through artistic imagination, he deploys satire and *damsi* as literary devices.

Although the relationship between conglomerates (*jaebeol*) and Korea’s modernization is far more complex, Kim Jiha’s binary rhetoric is effective in archotyping social evils, as was the mask-dance.<sup>37</sup> He wrote the satiric poem after reading the article “The Thief Town of Dongbinggo-dong” (the rich residential area of Seoul, where high-ranking officials and businessmen built luxurious mansions with the superfluous money from the dispatch of Korean troops to the Vietnam War, war imports, and economic aid provided by the United States and Japan).<sup>38</sup>

In “Satire or Suicide,” Kim envisions satire, or “resistant satire,” as an aggressive form of poem created in conflict with “materialistic violence.”<sup>39</sup> He argues that satire should grasp the core of the *minjung* as a premise for expressing and

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<sup>36</sup> Kim Jiha, *Oh jeok [Five Enemies]* (Seoul: Sohl, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> The mask-dance is discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>38</sup> Kim Jiha, *Huin geuneul ui gil [The Road of White Shadow]* (Seoul: Hakgojae, 2003), 164.

<sup>39</sup> Kim Jiha, “Pungjanya jasalinya” [“Satire or Suicide”], in *Minjok ui nora, minjung ui nora* [*Song of the Nation, Song of the People*] (Seoul: Donggwang, 1984), 173.

overcoming the contradictions in their social reality.<sup>40</sup> If satire is envisioned as the emotional and expressive foundation of a “new people’s poem,” Kim’s creation of *damsi* articulates fundamental principles in imagining the “national/people’s” culture in communal terms. Its communal character is innately embedded in the aesthetics of *pansori*, *damsi*’s original “substance.”

*Pansori* consists of *ah-ni-ri* (narrative) and *chang* (song). The *pansori* performer Yim Jintack, a close friend and the junior of Kim Jiha, points out that *ah-ni-ri* is more important than *chang*, although many people think otherwise.<sup>41</sup> He proposes that *chang* flourished when the *yangban* (scholar elite) class became its chief patron.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, *ah-ni-ri* is constantly accumulated and renewed by people throughout history, so their stories can be recovered and shared in these narratives.<sup>43</sup> The collective quality of *ah-ni-ri* (and, thus, *pansori*) is the very opposite of the unilateral mode of communication between Park’s dictatorship and the mass media, and the people.<sup>44</sup>

Kim’s ingenious interpretation of tradition, which reformulates it as a new form of *sotong*, was a radical gesture. It is not only an attempt to fashion a new critical language; but also through fresh readings of *pansori* and other traditions, he brought forth a different imagining of the current world. Such allusions to tradition and his efforts to transform the political reality with humanistic values find much similarity in the works of other *minjung* artists, such as Oh Yun and Kim Bongjun in their exploration of the *minjung* in art.

Although the government did not understand the complexity of Kim Jiha’s interventions, his blunt critique was enough to draw its watchful attention. When

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<sup>40</sup> Chae Hwiwan, “Yiyagi wa pansori” [“Stories and Pansori”], in *Minjung yeonhui ui changjo* [Creation of Minjung’s Entertainment] (Seoul: Changbi, 1990), 189.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 189.

“Five Enemies” was published in 1970, Kim Jiha was charged with and imprisoned for supporting North Korea’s propaganda activities and for breaking the anti-communist law. After his release, Kim published his first collection of poems, *The Yellow Earth (Hwangto)* (1970). For this collection, his friend and the future *minjung* artist Oh Yun designed the cover, which depicts a young man with glaring eyes [Figure C.2]. In 1971, the Park Chung Hee government invoked the Garrison Act, deploying armed forces to campuses and arresting dissident students. The dissident intellectuals and students were united by the Citizens’ Association for the Protection of Democracy in 1971. They shifted the center of their anti-dictatorship movement from the opposition party to the dissidents’ coalitions.<sup>45</sup>

### **The National Literature**

On July 4, 1972, when the government issued the South–North Korea Joint Declaration, many people responded with great hope for the future of the divided nation. Reflecting the political atmosphere, national literature became a focal point in the field of participation literature. Baik Nakcheong comments that the historical circumstances demanded that literature respond to the national crisis and articulate its determination to resolve them.<sup>46</sup> When literature realizes such historical demands for a nation, he believed, it should be called national literature.<sup>47</sup> His notion of national literature was applied in conceiving national/*minjung* art, which was first initiated by Oh Yun and a few other socially conscious artists and dissident literary and art figures in 1969. The relationship between national literature and art is further discussed in the chapter on Oh Yun.

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<sup>45</sup> Kim Jeongnam, *Jinsil, gwangjang e seoda: minjuhwa undong 30nyeon ui yeokjeong* [Truth, Standing up in the Plaza: the History of Thirty Years’ Democratization Movement] (Seoul: Changbi, 2005), 24.

<sup>46</sup> Baik Nakcheong, “Minjok munhak ui hyeondangye” [“The Current State of the National Literature”], *Changjak kwa bipyeong*, 35 (Spring 1975): 36.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Baik Nakcheong proposes that when historical conditions change, the idea of national literature should be either abandoned or absorbed into a higher concept—hence moving away from the state’s notion of the nation as an ahistorical and transcendental entity.<sup>48</sup> By conceptualizing the nation as malleable, the dissident literary critics could easily reinterpret the national literature as seeds for world literature in the rapid transformations the world faced in the 1970s. The international events at the time, including the Oil Crisis, the Nixon Doctrine, the Vietnam War, and the emerging power of the Third World on the world stage, helped several critics to view the national literature’s struggle in line with the anti-imperial nationalisms of other Third World countries.<sup>49</sup> Their national literature was thought to be an intellectual and activist engagement with all of humanity’s problems, providing new perspectives as an example of world literature.<sup>50</sup> In the coming events, Kim Jiha’s works and his international collaborations exemplify how national literature could serve as a dialogical point in the world.

The 7.4 Common Declaration initially seemed to reflect the government’s changed attitudes toward North Korea. However, it turned out to be Park’s pragmatic strategy in response to the internal and external political situation at that time: the normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and China, the Nixon Doctrine and the withdrawal of U.S. armed forces, and the seventh Korean presidential election. Three months later, Park declared martial law, instituting the Yusin system.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Baik Nakcheong, “Minjok munhak ui sin jeon’gae” [“New Development of National Literature”], *Wolgan JoongAng*, July 1974; quoted in Kim Yunsu, “Han’guk geundae misul: geu bipanjeok seoseol” [“Critical Introduction to Modern Korean Art”], *Han’guk hyeondae misul ui banseong* [Reflection of Contemporary Korean Art] (Seoul: Han’gyeore, 1988), 33.

<sup>49</sup> Baik Nakcheong, “Jae samsegye wa minjung munhak” [“The Third World and the People’s Literature”], *Changjak gwa bipyeong*, 53 (Fall 1979): 50.

<sup>50</sup> Baik Naekcheong, “Ingan haebang gwa minjok munhwa undong” [“Human Liberation and National Culture Movement”], *Changjak gwa bipyeong*, 52 (Winter 1978): 6.

<sup>51</sup> He declared the Yusin Constitution to be the first step toward political reform that would prepare the stage for reunification of the two Koreas. He claimed for himself immense powers, such as the power to dissolve the National Assembly at will and to take whatever emergency measures were needed in response to any threats to the national security or the public safety. Yi Chaeoh, *Haebang hu han’guk*

The dissident intellectuals and university students vehemently opposed the Yusin Constitution, and further organized the Headquarters for Petition of the Constitution's Revision for a one-million-signature movement in 1973. In response, the Park government issued the first and second emergency decrees in 1974.

While fleeing to the Gangwon province, the mountainous and remote region of the east coast, Kim Jiha worked to found a pan-national student organization—the Democratization Student Association (DSA)—with the activists Jo Yeongrae, Na Byeongseok, Yi Cheol, Yu Intae, and Seo Jungseok. He and thirty-one others were soon arrested and sentenced to death. In the end, the death sentences for Kim and four others were commuted to life imprisonment, and the remaining prisoners were freed. Following the incident, Kim Jiha became widely known to the world as an activist poet. And the international supporters of Kim Jiha and South Korean dissidents built a common front to pressure Park's regime and to liberate Kim through a worldwide coalition.<sup>52</sup>

Soon after he was released, Kim Jiha wrote a series of prison notes, published in *DongA Daily*, titled “Suffering . . . 1974.” Sharing his torturous experiences, Kim indicates the possibility for imagining a new politics and art. He describes his emotions at the moment of his death sentence. When he was sentenced with his colleagues,<sup>53</sup> one of them calmly said, “It was an honor.” After his colleague's statement, he confessed that he initially felt confused but soon became aware of its meaning:

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*haksaeng undongsa, 1945nyeon buteo 1979nyeon kkaji* [History of the Student Movement after Liberation, from 1945 to 1970] (Seoul: Hyongsongsa, 1984), 23.

<sup>52</sup> In Japan, Korean-Japanese writers created “Meeting to Save Kim Jiha,” and on June 16, 1974, they began a hunger strike in Suiyabasi Park in Tokyo against the Park government. Many international intellectuals, including Jean Paul Sartre, Howard Zinn, Noam Chomsky, and others demanded Kim's liberation.

<sup>53</sup> They are Kim Byeonggon and Seo Jungseok.



We finally overcame death. Those hellish days, while we were writhing with pain, spattered all over with blood, we were struggling with death at every single moment. We ended up overcoming the fear. It was not that Gyeongseok, Byeonggon, and I each won, but that we collectively won [ . . . ]. By accepting death, we won. By voluntarily choosing it, we could win an eternal life [ . . . ]. It was a historical moment. No, it was not just historical. It was a religious feeling of heaven. No, it was not just religious. It was also a culmination of artistic emotions. It was a brilliant moment, which one could not describe, when all the humane values and all the highest spiritual things came together . . . <sup>54</sup>

Kim Jiha called this instant a moment of “political imagination” in which politics and art fused in harmony and unification. Although he confessed that his intense feelings at that moment were exaggerated, he strongly believed that “political imagination” was the demand of all humanity. It proposed a totally new politics/ethics and economics/nature through a new culture and imagination.<sup>55</sup> Such a radical imagining of art and politics was fertile ground for the creation of dialogical art, *minjung misul*. *Minjung misul* had worked with other dissident movements and realized itself by reimagining art and the Koreans’ everyday and national realities with humanism/*sotong*. The urgency of artists and cultural activists for *sotong* emerged from their diagnosis of the alienating and incommunicable conditions under which they lived.

### **Tensions in Communication and Communicability**

Under the Yusin system, all anti-government activities, even simple critiques, were prohibited. Hence, the news media were the first target of the Park regime’s control and became its mouthpiece. The newspapers were told what to report by the KCIA or were forcefully shut down. Awakened by the university students’ rallies for anti-

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<sup>54</sup> Kim Jiha, *Huin geuneul ui gil: Kim Jiha hoegorok* [*The Road of White Shadow: Recollection of Kim Jiha*], vol. 2 (Seoul: Hakgojae, 2003), 365.

<sup>55</sup> Kim Jiha, “Gohaeng . . . 1974” [“Suffering . . . 1974”], in *Kim Jiha Jeonjip* [*Series of Kim Jiha*] (Seoul: Silcheon Munhaksa, 2002), 577.

dictatorial free journalism in 1971, the *DongA* journalists declared, “Freedom for Journalism,” igniting the Free Journalism Movement. It was widely supported throughout society. However, the government squelched the movement by issuing the first and second emergency decrees in 1974, pressuring for the cancellation of advertisements in 1974–75, and laying off dissident journalists during the period 1975–79. Those fired journalists of *DongA* and *Joseon* (or *Chosun*) became key figures in the dissident movement.

Such omnipotent control of information also influenced how people interacted with each other in their daily lives. Koreans could communicate mainly through the limited channels that were permitted by the government. In light of the government’s will to eradicate anti-government activities, even in conversations among close friends one needed to be careful to ensure that no one was nearby eavesdropping for the police.<sup>56</sup> Under these circumstances, communications were mostly one-sided and uniform, although they appeared to be efficient and speedy.

Although the government oppressed the news media, it promoted mass culture through the creation of several TV broadcasting companies.<sup>57</sup> This was, as President Park predicted, the most powerful example of the military government’s successful modernization.<sup>58</sup> In addition, it was an effective instrument for propagating the “revolution” of his regime.<sup>59</sup> The initial TV broadcasts resulted in the public’s frantic enthusiasm for TV and its entertainment programs (especially comedies and soap operas).<sup>60</sup> TV was integral to workers’ leisure; their harsh working conditions did not

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>57</sup> They are KBS-TV (1961), DBC (1963), RSB (later TBC, 1964), and DTV (TBC-TV, 1964).

<sup>58</sup> Kang Junman, *Han’guk hyeondaesa sanchaek 1960, no. 2* [Walking into Contemporary Korean History 1960, no. 2], 103. The Information Office Chief Oh Jaegyeong proposed the establishment of TV broadcasting. He believed that it would help the citizens to see concrete images of modernization.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Yu Seong, “Gajeong bulhwa ui yuhaengbyeong TV,” *Sasanggye*, April 1962; Mun Hyeongseon, “Yigyeon: TV Sibi,” same issue of *Sasanggye*; *DongA Daily*, February 18 and 27, 1962; quoted in Kang Junman, *Han’guk hyeondaesa sanchaek 1960, no. 2* [Walking into Contemporary Korean History 1960, no. 2], 108.

allow them to enjoy the reading of novels or the viewing of Picasso's paintings.

Typical workers, although they worked from 8 a.m. until 9 or 10 p.m., watched TV on average for two hours and 48 minutes per day on weekdays, and three hours and 37 minutes per day during the weekend.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, 58 percent of Koreans viewed TV positively, commenting on its usefulness in killing time with entertainment and in recovering from long hours of work.<sup>62</sup>

However, many dissident intellectuals grew concerned with TV's becoming a favorite pastime of a majority of people and with mass culture's alienating effect. The gap between the images workers saw on TV and the realities they lived was vast. A worker and activist from Dongil Textile, Seok Jungnam, pointed out that many daily soap operas, which portrayed the lives of the rich and the powerful, created a feeling of alienation and rejection in viewers.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, the people's literature (*minjung minhak*), unlike mass literature, was not a popular form of entertainment with laborers.<sup>64</sup> Because its readership included intellectuals, it was often abstract and too literary for workers. The dissident intellectuals therefore faced the challenge of creating a people's literature and culture that laborers and other *minjung* would feel was their own.

Because the workers' culture was very much configured by mass culture, the dissident intellectuals argued that it was important to appropriate and repurpose mass culture. In their deliberations, many intellectuals perceived humane interaction (*sotong*) as a prerequisite to breaking Park's authoritarian regime and to helping

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<sup>61</sup> Seoul University Newspaper Research Institute, *Gukmin saenghwal sigan josa* [Survey of the Koreans' Daily Life], quoted in Kim Taeho, "Han'guk nodongja munhwa undong ui jeongae wa seonggyeok," in *Gongdongche munhwa* [Culture of Community], 3 (1985): 139.

<sup>62</sup> Han'guk gyohoe sahoe seon'gyo hyeopuihoe, *Nodongja ui imgeum gwa saenghwal siltae josa* [Survey of Laborers' Wages and Reality], quoted in Kim Taeho, "Han'guk nodongja munhwa undong ui jeon'gae wa seonggyeok," in *Gongdongche munhwa* [Culture of Community], 3 (1985): 76.

<sup>63</sup> Han Wansang, Park Useop, Kim Yunsu, Seok Jeongnam, et al., "Jwadam: daejung munhwa ui hyeonhwang gwa sae banghyang" ["Roundtable Discussion: The Present Condition of Mass Culture and Its New Direction"], *Changjak gwa bipyeong*, 53 (Fall 1979): 21.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

people live with dignity and freedom. The university students and dissident intellectuals thereby imagined alternative opportunities for *sotong* in “the people’s tradition.” They perceived that “the people’s tradition” was articulated from the 17th through 19th centuries, and they particularly favored the mask-dance and *madanggeuk* as quintessential *minjung* expressions. Their figuration of *sotong* was often made by reinterpreting agrarian village culture, and their exploration of its communal culture was easily translated into an envisioning of national community as in the cases of Kim Bongjun and Oh Yun.

### **Imagining Other Worlds in Communal Building**

Unlike the state-funded studies on folk tradition, the dissident scholars organized and re-evaluated the traditional literature and cultural heritages, especially those from the 17th through the 19th centuries. Cultural activists and university students explored the living traditions of the mask-dance, farmers’ music (*nongak*), one-person musical dramas (*pansori*), and the shamanistic ritual (*gut*). They visited farming villages in order to conduct ethnographic research or to learn those traditions from farmers themselves.<sup>65</sup> The literary critic Park Inbae points out that many university students who were familiar with urban Western culture approached folk traditions with a romantic attitude.<sup>66</sup> In addition, in the military-stationed campus, they felt liberated through performing the mask-dance, which articulates strong social critique with sarcastic colloquial languages, as well as with humanistic values.<sup>67</sup>

Among them, the mask-dance (*talchum*) gained great popularity beginning in the late 1960s among university students. The mask-dance originally flourished when the Joseon’s rigid class system was challenged. Thus, its predominant subject matter

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<sup>65</sup> Lee Namhee, 192.

<sup>66</sup> Park Inbae, 53

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

was social satire directed toward the ruling classes, including corrupt high-government officials, the immorality of Buddhist monks and scholars, and aristocrats' ignorance and self-indulgence. The dialogue of the mask-dance consists of colloquial language of common people, and includes an abundance of witty talk, puns, and crude language and expressions. If the cultural activists initially concentrated on restoring tradition, from the 1970s on they transformed the mask-dance into *madanggeuk* by reinterpreting its creative spirit to serve contemporary needs.

*Madanggeuk* emphasizes the place of performance. If Western plays usually consist of a script, a story, a stage, and an audience, *madanggeuk* is composed only of *madang* (stage) and audience, and the relationship between the two is very flexible. Here, *madang* commonly refers to the front or backyard of a house. In *madanggeuk*, it becomes a situational space in which the current affairs of community members are brought out into the open.<sup>68</sup> Unlike conventional plays, which usually separate the viewer from the play through some spatial or temporal division, *madanggeuk* is created through people's active interaction with the performers or through their full participation in the play *as* performers. Intervention in the play by the audience makes it hard to distinguish between the inside and the outside of a play. Thus, the audience's involvement can change a play each time it is performed. And as the relationship between play and reality becomes more ambiguous, *madanggeuk* transcends the limits of the play and diverges into reality.<sup>69</sup>

The communal spirit of sharing continues to be refined or modernized, as both the content and format of *madanggeuk* can take on a subversive quality in its critique of an oppressive government, as was the case in the late Joseon period. Beginning in

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<sup>68</sup> Yim Jintaek, "Saeroun yeon'geuk eul wihayeo: 'madanggeuk' e gwanhan myeot gaji gyeonhae" ["For New Play: Several Opinions on 'Madanggeuk'"], in *Minjung yeonhui ui changjo: Yim Jintaek pyeongronjip* [Creation of the People's Entertainment: Yim Jintaek's Critique] (Seoul: Changjak gwa bipyeong, 1990), 19.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 34.

the 1970s, *madanggeuk* provided a contested site of sharing and intervening in urgent issues of the time in the most direct sense. Thus, the assignment of any *madanggeuk* was to articulate the main conflicts in Korean society through archetypes, focusing people's collective energy on solving those problems.<sup>70</sup> Given that the alienation of art was a critical issue, its communal aspect was especially emphasized and treasured by dissident intellectuals and students. If "democratic" means that the majority of people's opinions are reflected in the decision-making process, *madanggeuk*'s form and content can be said to be democratic.<sup>71</sup>

As it envisioned a different dialogical space, *madanggeuk* fostered a new way of living in the unity of work and play. The *madanggeuk* practitioner and critic Chae Hwiwan saw the mask-dance as having originated from *dure*.<sup>72</sup> *Dure*, literally meaning "circular cooperation," was a village organization of cooperative labor, recreation, and ritual.<sup>73</sup> Because of its communal spirit, the dissidents viewed this pre-modern farming culture as a nostalgic site for acknowledging and celebrating a disappearing past and for imagining a new community in vernacular terms. Some *minjung* artists tried to bring its communalism into their art forms, art-making, and communal activity. I examine this matter further in chapter five, on communal art and the living community movement. In addition, other cultural activists and later *minjung* artists worked in people's everyday *hyeonjang*, and even lived as one of them, as in the case of the *minjung* artist Hwang Jaehyoung.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Chae Hwiwan, "70 nyeondae ui munhwa undong" ["The Cultural Movement of the 1970s"], in *Munhwa wa tongchi* [Culture and Ruling], edited by Han'guk gidokgyo sahoe munje yeonguwon (Seoul: Minjungsa, 1982), 213.

<sup>73</sup> Chu Ganghyeon, *Han'guk ui dure* [Dure of Korea], vol. 2 (Chimmundang, 1997). Quoted in Lee Namhee, 200.

### The People's "Real Site" as *Sotong*

*Madang* in *madanggeuk* is a physical and situational site that provides a space for communal dialogue and radical critique, and that fosters humanity in harmony between play and work. I argue that this cultural expression can be translated as well into the people's *hyeonjang* ("the real site") in places of labor and in slum neighborhoods. For the activists, *hyeonjang* was a humbling yet frustrating site where they could meet people on the bottom rung of society and deliberate on what it meant to be one of them. In living and working with laborers, as in the *madanggeuk*, they listened to those people's predicaments and tried to help them become aware of their rights as dignified human beings. The idea of *hyeonjang* evolved from the activists' labor *hyeonjang* activity, the living community movement, and especially the Christian church mission.

Park Chung Hee's increasingly authoritarian rule forced the progressive Christian Church to expand its role beyond the church in the 1970s. Ji Haksun, the bishop of Wonju, and other Catholic priests, followers, and dissidents, around 1,500 all together, protested against Park's corruption in October 5, 1971.<sup>74</sup> On Easter eve, 1973, Pastor Park Hyeonggyu and other young ministers and students attempted to protest at the Namsan open-air music hall but were unsuccessful.<sup>75</sup> In retaliation, government officials charged them with "conspiracy" to subvert the government, and arrested and tortured people.<sup>76</sup> The international churches dispatched investigators and reported on the situation in South Korea to the world, while overseas Christians supported the Korean church.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Park Hyeonggyu, *Na ui mideum eun gil wie itta* [My Faith is on the Road] (Seoul: Changbi, 2010), 199.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 217–21.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 222–28.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 232.

The church's involvement in the dissident movement can be traced back to Christian students' social participation in the late 1960s' ecumenical movements such as the University YMCA and YWCA.<sup>78</sup> The laborer Jeon Taeil's self-immolation in 1970 shocked university students and intellectuals. It became a decisive moment for collaboration between the student and labor movements. The students and dissident activists went into factories and farming villages to work with people at their *hyeonjang*, by serving as staff members of the interdenominational farming and labor organizations of the Christian church.<sup>79</sup> In interacting with laborers, university students and intellectuals adopted the Brazilian critical educator, theorist, and activist Paulo Freire's method of conscientization.

Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*<sup>80</sup> was widely circulated in the 1970s among the dissidents. Freire was born to a middle-class family in Recife, in the northern part of Brazil, in 1921. However, he experienced poverty and hunger from an early age. Through his association with poorer neighborhood children,<sup>81</sup> he became convinced that education should allow the oppressed to regain their humanism and to work toward their true liberation. He emphasized conscientization because knowledge did not necessarily lead one to action, but conscientization based on a dialogue of equality between students and teachers or among members did.<sup>82</sup> He encouraged students to critically engage in their lived experiences in a social context through collective dialogue. The students could investigate the world with in-depth knowledge, discover socioeconomic contradictions, and broaden individual and group

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<sup>78</sup> The author's written interview with Pastor Park Jongryeol on December 23, 2009.

<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, some young seminary students and ministers had already been involved in the Korean Catholic Farmers' Association for the Assurance of Rice Production Fee (1975–77) and the Hampyong Sweet Potato Compensation Movement (1976–May 2, 1978).

<sup>80</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter one.



consciousness. As a result, people would be able to transform themselves by putting their collective knowledge into action.<sup>83</sup>

Because the labor movement was illegal, the dissident students, ministers, and activists organized casual meetings, night schools, and cultural activities for the laborers. The activists analyzed newspaper articles and discussed issues affecting the workers' everyday lives, such as wages, working conditions, and labor unions. The members of the UIM (Urban Industrial Mission) and JOC (*Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne*, or Young Catholic Workers) provided conscientization in the guise of cultural education. They believed that articulating their own issues in a cultural form helped the workers to clarify their political agenda through collective brainstorming. Some of the most important cultural events were "Solve the Problem of Dongil Textile" and "The Light of the Factory" in 1977, both of which dealt with the infamous Dongil Textile's violence against its female laborers.<sup>84</sup>

Dongil Textile, the majority of whose workers were female, saw the first successful election of a female union leader in the history of labor unionization in 1972. Since then, the company had attempted to disband the union, without success. Despite brutal oppression and arrests, its female workers continued to struggle for minimal human rights. On February 21, 1978, the day of the election of labor representatives, female workers walking into the polling place were greeted by four male workers and thugs who sprayed and poured excrement on them and even threw excrement into their mouths.

After such unspeakable abuse, university students such as Kim Bongjun became involved in the fired workers' reinstatement struggles. They also helped the workers to create a play to disseminate information about the company's inhumane

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Chae Hwiwan and Yim Jintaek, *Hanguk ui minjunggeuk: madanggut yeonhuibon 14 pyeon* [Korea's Minjung Play: Fourteen Scripts of Madanggeuk] (Seoul: Changjak kwa bipyeong, 1985), 65.

treatment. In working on their script, because the workers were not familiar with script-writing, the female workers made their own lines in colloquial language. Then, students recorded them and brought the lines together. Thus, their “script” was filled with everyday colloquial expressions, rather than the awkward literary styles or translated sentences often found in theater scripts.

The play was staged in the Christian Assembly Hall in the fall of 1978 with literary, culture, and religious figures and activists in attendance. In the climactic scene, actors posing as company-hired thugs threw and poured fake excrement onto the female workers/actors and onto the audience. This scene stirred anger and sorrow in both the audience and workers. The female workers cried, chanting their demands, joined by the audience. The play metamorphosed into street protests: its speeches and songs became protest slogans and songs, and its title banners became protest banners.

The future *minjung* artist Kim Bongjun witnessed how art and politics, or culture and the labor movement, became one in the process of transforming the workers’ lives into the play into the protest, as well as transforming artworks into propaganda.<sup>85</sup> Here, the fact that the play intersected the realms of art, activism, and the people’s lives does not simply imply that art/culture can be an effective propaganda instrument. In fact, what Kim Bongjun witnessed affirms *minjung misul*’s (as well as the national culture’s) political dissent and its envisioning of the people’s community in collective dialogue.

## Summary

Chapter two explored the internal and external operational logic of dissident nationalism in the entwined concepts from *sotong*/community/*hyeonjang* through the

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<sup>85</sup> Kim Bongjun, *Supeso chajeun ohraedoen mirae: Kim Bongjun hwabaek ui mokpanhwa iyagi* [Searching for the Future in the Forest: Woodcut print of the Artist Kim Bongjun] (Seoul: DongA Ilbosa, 2001), 104.

national cultural movement. Confronting the continued suffering of Koreans and their desire for democracy, the dissidents contemplated how art and culture could create a communal dialogue on humanism. In the desire to resolve the discrepancy, writers and cultural activists conceptualized a reflective *sotong* on art from the perspective of the people's predicaments. The artistic and political principles, concepts, and tactics of the national culture movement became the foundation of *minjung misul*. In the dialogical process, art provided a space for social discourse and protest, as exemplified by the national literature, *madanggeuk*, and the "national" art.

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### REIMAGINING ART INTO *MINJUNG MISUL* WITH LEGITIMACY

The most dramatic and turbulent period of post-Gwangju Korean politics, 1986–88, was marked by a *bona fide* “democratic revolution” between the *undongwon* and the government. It culminated in the June 10, 1987, nationwide democratization movement and the subsequent July–September Great Workers’ Struggle (*7-9 wol nodongja daetujaeng*). Yet, because of leadership-related and ideological divisions among the dissident camps, such epochal democratic momentum did not result in the materialization of a progressive democratic government. It was a time of great frustration and loss of hope.

In the months leading up to June 1987, the brutality of the Chun Doo Hwan regime manifested itself through the deaths of dissident university students Park Jongcheol and Yi Hanyeol. Park Jongcheol, a student president in the Linguistics Department at Seoul National University, was killed by water torture while being interrogated on the whereabouts of an upper-class student on January 15, 1987. Yi Hanyeol, who was protesting in support of the impeachment of Park Jongcheol’s torturer and against the state’s protection of the undemocratic Constitution, was killed by a direct-shot teargas grenade on June 9, 1987. Their deaths shocked and enraged the public and brought unprecedented multitudes of people together into the streets to protest.

For the June 10 Democratization Movement, Choe Byeongsu, who was once a carpenter, created the banner painting *Bring Hanyeol Back to Life* [Figure D.1], a portrait and prints of Yi Hanyeol, with other activist students and *minjung* artists. He produced woodcut prints and silkscreens so that people could carry them or wear the images on their chests. His banner painting, which measures 393.7 by 295.3 inches

and is made of cotton cloth, binder, and paint, was created based on a photographic image of the bleeding Yi Hanyeol being held by a friend.<sup>1</sup> His reproduction was truly a “landmark” in the public demonstrations and funeral ceremony for the martyred Yi Hanyeol, setting the stage for and becoming part of the protesters’ political actions. His art manifested art’s organic integration into the funeral *cum* protests. Further, it demonstrated how art could be re-created as *minjung misul* in the process of rebuilding a Korean nation-state based on democracy.

The nationwide uprising in June 1987 led the citizens to victory in the campaign for reform of the Constitution and other measures, made official in Roh Tae Woo’s June 29 Declaration in 1987. Despite the direct presidential election, which would have naturally favored the dissident leadership, a serious split occurred between the opposition leaders, the presidential candidates Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam. The failure of the two divided the progressive camp into factions, making room for a third candidate, Mun Ikhwan. The division helped Roh Tae Woo, an ex-general and a hand-picked successor to Chun, win the election and become president.

The wide divisions that had emerged within the progressive camp grew fiercer and more irreconcilable after the collective failure to effect a true regime change. The *minjung misul* camps, separated by their support of their respective presidential candidates, shared in the profound disappointment and anger of other dissidents. Reflecting the *undonggwon*’s conflicts with the older dissidents, the *minjung* artists’ envisioning of a true *minjung misul* became intensely polemicized in the next few years, especially in tensions between the older and younger generations. In the bitter ideological atmosphere that ensued, their *minjung misul* became a rather staid reflection of doctrinaire *undonggwon* ideology; they could little realize art’s unique potential for political imagination.

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<sup>1</sup> Park Gibeom et al., *Byeongsu neun gwangdaeda* [*Byoungsu is a Clown*] (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2007), 275.

Within two weeks of the June 29th Declaration, labor arose in a mass movement that culminated in a series of strikes known as the Great Workers' Struggle. The strikes, which began in the manufacturing industry, spread to other industries such as mining, transportation, and the service sectors.<sup>2</sup> The labor movement had mainly developed in Seoul and its surrounding regions.<sup>3</sup> During the labor unrest, however, Ulsan and other southern coastal regions where the heavy industry was located became "the epicenter," and the strikes reached Seoul and other small-scale light-manufacturing cities.<sup>4</sup> This historical event brought a massive increase in democratic union organizations and put the labor movement at the center of the democratization movement.<sup>5</sup> If female light-industry workers were leading actors in the 1970s' labor strikes, in the 1980s, male workers in the heavy industries directed the labor movement without much help from student-labor workers.<sup>6</sup>

In the context of this turbulent sociopolitical milieu, I delineate how socially conscious art evolved into *minjung misul* with a competing sense of legitimacy in its contentions among the state, the art establishment, and the *minjung* artists in the years 1986–88. In the artists' dialogue with other realms, the artists' conceptualization of *minjung misul* took place mainly on the level of discourse and activism rather than on the level of art itself. Their critical engagements illuminate the development of the movement's aesthetic, discursive, and activist endeavors, in conjunction with multiple contentions around *minjung misul* in and outside of the art world. In the *minjung* artists' contemplations of true *minjung misul*, the complex nature of the artists' choices and their involvement in the polemics on art's and artists' roles are revealed. In concert with dissident nationalism, the *minjung misul* movement mirrored the

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<sup>2</sup> Hagen Koo, "Engendering Civil Society: the Role of the Labor Movement," in *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy and the State*, edited by Charles K. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 2007), 79.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 79–80.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 80.

reimagining of the Korean nation-state. However, their fierce artistic and political advocacy quickly lost momentum as progressive politics and *minjung misul*'s aesthetic sensibilities were confronted by the emergence of civil society in the 1990s, and by the ensuing changes in the socio-cultural atmosphere.

In order to trace *minjung misul*'s development, this chapter mainly focuses on the discourses and political events related to *minjung misul* in the Koreans' democratization movement. I look at its three major artistic and political junctures: the "1985, Korean Art, the 20s' 'Power'" exhibition in 1985; the June 10, 1987, Democratization Movement and artist Choe Byeongsu's work *Bring Hanyeol Back to Life* at the martyred Yi Hanyeol's funeral; and the debates between the older and younger generations of *minjung* artists against the backdrop of their failure to realize a progressive government and the serious divisions in the *minjung* camps in the late 1980s.

My discussion on them does not entirely fit into the time frame of 1986–88. This chapter begins with diverse contentions between the state and *minjung* artists, and between the modernists and *minjung* camps around the "Power" exhibition incident in 1985. In addition, the conflicts among *minjung* artists were articulated even before the 1987 democratization movement, and their violent disagreements resulted in the crisis of the National Artists Association in 1988. However, many of the *minjung* artists' debates were not published in their bulletins until 1989, so my discussion is based on these later published articles.

### **The Road to Democracy**

Influenced by the "People-Power" movement of the Philippines in 1986, Koreans were galvanized toward democracy in an unprecedented manner, despite the strict

censorship imposed by the Chun Doo Hwan regime.<sup>7</sup> The South Korean dissidents, especially the *undonggwon*, further consolidated in 1986. They worked more coherently, although their position on alliances with established political parties was divided. They were fervently involved in the ideological struggle, mixing Marxist-Leninist and North Korea's *juche* (sovereign) ideologies. The democratization movement was marked by strong anti-Americanism following public exposure of the U.S. role in the suppression of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising.<sup>8</sup> At the time, a number of students and laborers also committed suicide by self-immolation, driven by despair and grim determination to make a public statement on the current Korean situation.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the dissidents' collective efforts for democratization, the Chun regime announced on January 16, 1986, that no amendments of the Constitution would be discussed until after the close of the 1988 Olympic Games.<sup>10</sup> With the first commemoration of their election victory on February 12, 1986, the New Korea Democracy Party (*Sin han minju dang*, with Yi Minu as its president) proclaimed the initiation of the Ten Million Signature Movement to amend the Constitution in order to allow direct presidential election. The movement was strongly supported by the pro-democracy-movement organizations, as well as by activists, churches, journalists, professors, and many citizens. On May 3, in the Incheon Assembly of the New Korea Democracy Party, varied political lines, especially the *undonggwon*'s, contended with each other for their different stances, and the assembly participants' protests were joined by citizens.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kim Jeongnam, *Jinsil, gwangjang e seoda: minjuhwa undong 30nyeon ui yeokgyoeng* [Truth, Standing in the Public Space: The 30 Years' Democratic Movement] (Seoul: Changbi, 2009), 553.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 555.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 556.

<sup>10</sup> Yi Sangwu, "Chun Doo Hwan eun 'newin' eul kkumkkuda" ["Chun Doo Hwan Dreamed 'Newin'"], *Sin DongA*, June, 1992, 225. Cited in Kang Junman, *Hanguk hyeondaesa sanchaek 1980, no. 3* [Walking into Contemporary Korean History 1980, no. 3] (Seoul: Yinmul gwa sasangsa, 2003), 17.

<sup>11</sup> Kang Junman, 29.



The Chun regime saw these events as violent political congregations, and soon dispersed them through police oppression. At the time, a disguised student-laborer, Gwon Insuk, about whom it was later discovered that she was a victim of sexual torture, was arrested. The New Korea Democracy Party blamed the radical dissident force for the state's disproportionate reaction.<sup>12</sup> The dissidents viewed the Party as "opportunistic" and as unworthy of occupying a position of leadership in the anti-government and pro-amendment movement.<sup>13</sup>

A few months after a massive roundup, Gwon Insuk publicly exposed her sexual torture at the hands of a petty police officer, Mun Gwidong. Virtually everyone from every sector of Korean society condemned the horror of her treatment and supported her. The press, supporting the government's position, reported that her story was concocted and that the *undongwon* even used sex as a "weapon" to advance their political agenda. The incident demonstrated not only the heavily censored state of the Korean press but also underscored the deep-seated problem of patriarchal attitudes that existed even within the dissident movement.

As distorted reports of Gwon Insuk indicate, the press and the government were inseparable. And not only in the case of Gwon; it also turned out that Chun's Public Information Bureau had sent instructions to the press on all politically sensitive news articles and broadcasts. The *Han'guk Daily* journalist Kim Jueon provided the press with instructions from the Cultural Public Information Bureau from October 19, 1985, to August 8, 1986. The fired *Gyeonghyang Daily* journalist Hong Suwon organized and studied the government instructions for three months and wrote an article that was published in the journal *Mal* (lit. *Speech*), a bulletin of the Democratic Journalists Association.<sup>14</sup> In the September 6, 1986, special edition of *Mal*, the journal

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<sup>12</sup> Kim Jeongnam, 531.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 532.

<sup>14</sup> Please see Kim Taehong, *Jaggeun manjok yi areum dapda* [*A Little Satisfaction Is Beautiful*] (Seoul: Indong, 1999), 116–17.

exposed the existence of the government's censorship instructions in the article "Press Guidance—Conspiracy between the Power and the Press."<sup>15</sup> With the collaboration of the Catholic Priests Seeking Justice, Kim Jueon exposed the government's press censorship at Myongdong Cathedral on September 9, 1986.<sup>16</sup>

On October 28, 1986, two thousand students from more than twenty universities held the inaugural meeting of the "National Anti-Imperial, Anti-Dictatorial Patriotic Student Struggle Association" at Geon'guk University. They aimed to amend the Constitution to institute direct presidential elections and the exercise of democratic rights. Nevertheless, the police laid siege to the university and put down the protesters on the fourth day of the students' station inside the Geon'guk campus. Employing a large-scale operation, the police arrested 1,290 students—an unusual case, especially in terms of the sheer number of arrestees.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Minjung Ideology: The Worldview of the Undonggwon***

The Geon'guk University situation took place in the midst of heated debates between the two ideological lines known as the NL (National Liberation) and the NDR (National Democratic Revolution; later CA, Constituent Assembly). The lines were determined by dissimilar analysis of the structural contradictions in Korean society, the major forces of *minjung*, and reform theories that had emerged from the student and labor-movement sectors. The political ideologies articulated the *undonggwon*'s heroic missions and belief in and aspirations for historical progress. Unlike in the 1970s, the *minjung* were defined within or even equated with the ideologies and subsequent strategies and tactics of the 1980s. Hence, it was thought to be of the

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<sup>15</sup> Please see Special Edition *Mal: gwolryeok gwa eummo, gwolreok yi eollon e bonaeneun bimil tongsinmun* [*Mal: Power and Conspiracy, the Power's Secret Correspondence to Journalism*] (Seoul: Minju undong eollon hyeopuihoe, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> Yi Inu and Sim San, *Sesang eul bakkugo sipeun saramdeul* [*People Who Want to Change the World*] (Seoul: Hangeure sinmunsa, 1998), 37–38.

<sup>17</sup> Kim Jeongnam, 561.

utmost significance for *minjung* artist-activists to articulate them in their works to advance the society to democracy.

In the 1970s, the dissident university students and activists conceptualized the *minjung* based on their labor *hyeonjang* activity and lateral support of laborers' democratic unionization and strikes. Based on their experiences, the dissidents conceived of the *minjung* as the people who were historically oppressed, and who continued to be, in the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. Unlike the 1970s, when many dissidents tried to probe what *minjung* was, such efforts were not much in evidence in the 1980s, as definitions of the concept are rare in the discourse of the period. Instead, the *minjung* became inherently embedded in the students' and activists' reform/revolution ideology. Thus, the *minjung* came to symbolize the *undonggwon*'s discourse and political ideology itself as well as an ideological expression of their vision for a Korean nation-state and of their strategies and tactics.

Despite their dissimilarity, both the dissidents of the 1970s and the *undonggwon* explicated a notion of *minjung* based on their shared view of Koreans' experiences of modern history. As the *undonggwon* diagnosed and reinterpreted the post-1945 era with praxis in mind, modern Korean history was mobilized initially to strategize the early 1980s' movement, and it evolved into a social-scientific analysis of Korea and a tactical instrument from the mid-1980s on. Although the divergent assessments of the post-1945 Korea were called ideologies, they can in fact be read as various versions of revisionist histories that assume particular ideological or scientific stances. However, their positions were surprisingly similar, so their ideological struggles appeared at times to be wasteful. In addition, they identified the revolution's main and collaborative actors with a broad-based *minjung*, including the middle-class public.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the *minjung* came to include virtually any individuals and groups

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, in "the debates of CNP" that will be discussed soon, the three ideological positions, CDR (Civil Democratic Revolution), NDR (National Democratic Revolution), and PDR (People's

who created a collective counterforce against the military dictatorship, conglomerates, and “neocolonial” powers.<sup>19</sup> Because the *minjung* cannot be defined as an entity separate from the *undonggwon*’s political ideology, I will trace the major moments of their debates in the 1980s.

The May 18, 1980, Gwangju Uprising had made the laborer class predominant among other alliances of the people. On the last day of the Gwangju citizens’ resistance, those who remained in the provincial building and fought until the end included laborers, hoodlums, lumpen proletariats, and others at the bottom of society. The term *minjung* was thereby revised from its earlier definition, “common people,” to mean revolutionary actors with strong class consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Besides, in the context of the United States’ involvement in the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, the dissidents perceived *minjung* to be the majority of Koreans who were adversely affected by the national division and who were, by extension, subordinated by the neocolonial interventions of the United States and Japan.<sup>21</sup> This spawned anti-Americanism in the democratization movement. By the late 1980s, the United States had been reconfigured as an “imperial power” in the dissident discourse.<sup>22</sup> The problems of

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Democratic Revolution), defined the dynamic force of the reform/revolution movement into sovereign, solidarity, and coalition forces. The CDR sees sovereign power as a collaboration of *minjung* (laborers, farmers, the urban poor, progressive intellectuals) yet it did not mention what the other two are. The NDR views the labor class as the sovereign power; farmers, the urban poor, progressive intellectuals, young students as a solidarity force; and the middle class, petite-bourgeoisie, and liberalists as a coalition force. Similar to the NDR, the PDR defines the labor class as sovereign; farmers and the urban poor as a solidarity force; students, progressive intellectuals, and urban middle class as a coalition force. Choe Yeon’gu, “80nyeondae haksang undong ui yi’nyeomjeok, jojikjeok baljeon gwajeong” [“Ideological and Organizational Development of the 1980s’ Student Movement”], in *Han’guk sahoe undongsa: han’guk byeonhyeok undong ui yeoksa wa 80nyeondae ui jeon’gae gwajeong* [Korea’s Social Movement: History of Korea’s Reform Movement and Its 1980s’ Development], edited by Jo Huiyeon (Seoul: Hanul, 1990), 255.

<sup>19</sup> Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, New York, and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>21</sup> Choi Jang Jip, “Political Cleavages in South Korea,” in *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*, edited by Hagen Koo (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 17, note 6.

<sup>22</sup> Namhee Lee, 118.

Korean society were therefore seen within the framework of U.S. capitalism and its global dominance as well as the Korean dictators' complicity with the United States.<sup>23</sup>

After the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, the student activists reflected on Gwangju with a great sense of guilt and despair. They were groping for initiation of the democratization movement despite living under the government's iron-fisted control. The students envisioned their strategic moves, and their different strategies divided them into two major activist lines: refusal to directly confront the government and to create alliances with the public for the longer term (the *murim* faction) versus support for direct political struggle, with the student leadership as the vanguard (the *hakrim* faction).<sup>24</sup>

Their debates also brought to light other issues such as labor *hyeonjang* preparation, a shift in focus from economic to political struggle within the labor movement, and so forth.<sup>25</sup> Despite the preliminary radicalization of the dissident movement, Chun's military dictatorship effectively suppressed the dissidents through arrest, threats, imprisonment, and the passing of undemocratic laws. Even so, the two factions' discourses continued to shape later discussions of the strategies and tactics of the political actions. But in their initial stages, contemplation of *minjung* and revolutionary forces was yet to occur.

The 1983 booklet "Perception and Strategy," decisive in ideologizing the student movement,<sup>26</sup> analyzes Korea as a neocolonial society and at a stage of state-

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Park Seonghyeon, "Muhak nonjaeng," in *80nyeondae han'guk sahoe daenonjaeng*, edited by JoongAng Daily (JoongAng Ilbo, 1990), 241–3. The origins of the terms *murim* and *hakrim* are not clear. It is said that when the police invested the underground circles at SNU, they could not find any substantial information. Thus, they gave the underground circle of activists the name *murim*, which literally means "forest in the fog." *Hakrim* is said to be speculated from gatherings of dissident students at Hakrim Café, located in Dongsungdong where the old SNU campus was located.

<sup>25</sup> Please see *Haksaeng undongsa* [*The Student Movement*], edited by Ilsongjeong (Ilsongjeon, 1988), 29–34.

<sup>26</sup> Choe Yeon'gu. "80nyeondae haksang undong ui yi'nyeomjeok, jojikkeok baljeon gwajeong" ["Ideological and Organizational Development of the 1980s' Student Movement"], in *Han'guk sahoe undongsa: han'guk byeonhyeok undong ui yeoksa wa 80nyeondae ui jeon'gae gwajeong* [Korea's

led subordinated capitalism. Further, it sees Korea as existing under the contradictions of the national division, dictatorships (as a puppet state), and the imperialism of the United States and Japan. It strives for a revolution for national liberation.<sup>27</sup> With the campus liberalization in December 1983, many expelled senior students and *hyeonjang* student-activists returned to campus and created student organizations.<sup>28</sup> They contemplated fundamental structural problems of society and detailed the contents of reform and revolution, the sovereignty of reform, and strategies and tactics.

In April 1984, the Democratization Movement of Youth Association held “CNP Debates” (or Debates on Democratization Reform), which continued until 1985. Three of the major ideological stances were the CDR (Civil Democratic Revolution), the PDR (People’s Democratic Revolution), and the NDR (National Democratic Revolution). The CDR perceived Korean society as a subordinate capitalist society and believed that laborers, farmers, small businessmen, the urban poor, and the like should unite under the leadership of the middle class to establish a democratic government. The NDR saw Korean society as a neo-colonial monopoly comprador economy and believed that Korea’s main contradiction lay in its fascist government and the *minjung*. Similar to the CDR, the NDR believed that under the leadership of the middle class, the people should be united as one national force and then proceed to social revolution. The PDR believed that the people should lead an anti-fascist, anti-imperial movement through solidarity between multitudes of people and vanguard intellectuals. In their debates, the NDR gained a potential victory in the *undonggwon*.

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*Social Movement: History of Korea’s Reform Movement and Its 1980s’ Development*], edited by Jo Heeyeon (Seoul: Haneul, 1990). 249.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Kim Dongseong, “Undonggwon eul haebuhanda” [“Dissecting the Undonggwon”], in *Han’guk nondan* [*Korean Forum*] (Seoul: Han’guk haksul jeongbo, 1994), 88. The major participants were Kim Geuntae, Park Wuseop, Choe Yeol, Jang Yeongdal, and others.

The CDR, NDR, and PDR perceived the predominant force of *minjung* to be the labor class. In addition, they identified its democratic alliances—divided into sovereign, alliance, and cooperation forces—with nebulous groups of *minjung* such as farmers, the urban poor, dissident students and intellectuals, the middle class, and so forth.<sup>29</sup> This vague category of democratic collaboration or *minjung* reflects the relationship between laborers and activists in *hyeonjang* activity in the 1980s. In the labor *hyeonjang*, student-activists juxtaposed laborers with their revolutionary ideal of the *minjung* and further guided the laborers to “awaken” their political conscientiousness. As the dissident activists reconfigured the laborers, they also undertook the challenge to reformulate themselves as laborers, as they were not familiar with the life of laborers.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the earlier rigid distinction between *minjung* and intellectuals became malleable through conscientization.

From the mid-1980s on, there were numerous ideological debates, inspired by and modeled after Lenin’s “What Is to Be Done?”<sup>31</sup> In addition, it was the time when North Korea’s *juche* ideology, with its emphasis on autonomy and self-reliance, began to circulate as a “possible utopian alternative” to the social structure of South Korea, in conjunction with rising anti-Americanism.<sup>32</sup> The ideological struggles were reflected in comprehensive debates on the political theories, organizational theories, strategies, and tactics of the democratization movement.<sup>33</sup> However, what was available for their debates were “extremely truncated Marxism and Leninism, which one scholar called ‘pamphlet Marxism.’”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, there were few books available for student activists that critically engaged Marxism and Leninism.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Please see Choe Yeon’gu, 255.

<sup>30</sup> Please see Chapter 7 of *The Making of Minjung*.

<sup>31</sup> Lee Namhee, 256.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

Instead, Marx and Lenin were directly juxtaposed with the contemporary issues, and Lenin's writings were believed to be "absolute science" by many activists. Little effort was made to analyze, criticize, or debate his writings. Rather, they were simply to be absorbed. One former activist shares his experience: "Theories defined reality, and reality was redefined according to Marxism and Leninism."<sup>36</sup> The divisions among numerous circles and organizations were so serious that it seems almost impossible for political unity to have occurred. Further, the disturbing of opposition-group meetings and the exercise of physical violence were frequent occurrences, especially during the period 1985–86.<sup>37</sup>

In late 1985, a group of *undongwon* came forward with the AIPDR (Anti-Imperial People's Democracy Revolution; NDR line), arguing the necessity for a direct struggle against U.S. imperialism.<sup>38</sup> With an agenda similar to the AIPDR's, or national liberation from imperialism, another group, the NLPDR (National Liberation People's Democracy Revolution), appropriated the revolutionary line of Marxist-Leninist and *juche* ideology for socialist revolution.<sup>39</sup> In 1986, the SNU's League of Patriotic Students created the Anti-American, Anti-Fascist Democratization Strike Committee for open activities (*jamintu* in Korean; NLPDR line; *juche* ideology), which became an NL faction. It entered into an ideological struggle with the Anti-Imperialism, Anti-Fascist National Democracy Strike Committee (*minmintu*; NDR line; Marx-Leninism), which later split into the CA (Constituent Assembly) and the PD (The People's Democracy).

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>38</sup> They produced pamphlets such as "Let's Resurrect as Leader of Anti-Imperial National Liberation Struggle" and "Democracy Revolutionism." Even among *undongwon*, they said, "These leaflets seem to be produced by someone from Pyeongyang [the capital of North Korea]." Kim Dongseong, 90.

<sup>39</sup> They printed out North Korea's "Oppression and Great Outcry," and they listened to radio broadcasts denouncing South and North Korean books.



The *jamintu* assessed Korea as capitalist in its economic structure but as colonial/half-feudal in its social nature. This ideological faction perceived society's basic contradictions as emerging out of conflicts between imperial power and the *minjung*, and saw the Korean state as a puppet state of imperial nation-states. Thus, the *jamintu* argued that the Korean reform movement should be in the anti-imperial and anti-feudal direction for national liberation and the people's democratic revolution.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, the *minmintu* saw Korean capitalism as already reaching the stage of monopoly under state-led economic development, thereby disconnecting itself from feudalism. The imperial power exercised its power indirectly through a local government, so the *minmintu* supporters defined Korean society as a form of neocolonial state-monopoly capitalism. They saw Koreans' basic contradiction in terms of class tensions between monopoly capitalists and the labor class. They argued that their reform movement should be anti-imperial, anti-monopoly, and anti-fascist.<sup>41</sup> The *minmintu*'s ideological lines continued to develop within the historical 1987 democratization movement.

### **The Birth of *Minjung Misul***

In heated ideological debates and struggles, art was also actively reconfigured in the dissident visions of the Korean nation-state. This situation made it easy for the state to impose its political apparatus on socially conscious art. The "1985, Korean Art, the 20s' 'Power'" exhibition was a decisive moment in which to bring *minjung misul* to the public arena. *Minjung misul* began to shape and be shaped by its *sotong* with the state and the public, with the art world, and with the larger democratization

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<sup>40</sup> Jo Huiyeon, "80nyeondae hanguk sahoe undong ui jeon'gae wa 90nyeondae ui baljeon jeonmang" ["Development of the 1980s' Social Movement of Korean Society and Its Prospects in the 1990s"], in *Han'guk sahoe undongsa: han'guk byeonhyeok undong ui yeoksa wa 80nyeondae ui jeon'gae gwajeong* [Korea's Social Movement: History of Korea's Reform Movement and Its 1980s' Development], edited by Jo Huiyeon (Seoul: Haneul, 1990), 255.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

movement. In fact, it was how the loosely grouped, socially conscious figurative and realist artists were re/defined by the state as *minjung misul* and became known to the public by its narrow term—as ideologically armed, aggressive propaganda art. In addition, the clashes between the artists and the state brought sharp divisions in the art world to the surface through debates between the modernist and *minjung* camps.

The Seoul Art Community organized the “1985, Korean Art, the 20s’ ‘Power’” exhibition (July 13–July 22, Arab Art Museum)<sup>42</sup> [Figure D.2]. The exhibit aimed at the “establishment of a *minjung*, national art” and “the democratization of the art/culture field.”<sup>43</sup> On July 20, five police detectives barged into the exhibition hall, forcibly removing some “disquieting” works and closing the exhibition. Several artists were arrested, interrogated, and even imprisoned. That same day, at the general meeting of the Artists Association, Cultural Minister Yi Wonhong remarked, “Among artists, there are some who support and align with the anti-government, anti-establishment movement because they identify themselves with poor, hungry *minjung*. . . . As a result, I feel that some culture and the arts are used as ‘instruments of struggle.’”<sup>44</sup>

The National Cultural Movement Association, the Citizens’ Coalition for Democratic Media, and other organizations issued several public statements condemning Yi Wonhong’s remarks and the artists’ detention.<sup>45</sup> Through the controversy in the aftermath of the “Power” exhibition, the term *minjung misul*, coined

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<sup>42</sup> The Seoul Art Community was founded in September 1984 by Park Jinhwa, Ryu Yeonbok, Park Bultong, Son Gihwan, Ju Wansu, and others. They strived toward communication with viewers through rich forms of artistic expression. They considered the artistic and social potential of prints, comics, and murals, and they also had a plan to create local art communities and expand them to the national level. They held a yearly art festival in the form of an old market from 1985 to 1988. Jo Insu, “Jicheonmyeong” Exhibition, May 19–30, 2010, Gallery 175. Please also see “1985, *han’guk misul*, 20 dae ui ‘him’” [1985, *Korean Art, the 20s’ “Power”*], 1985.

<sup>43</sup> The Manifesto of “1985, *hanguk misul*, 20 dae ui ‘him’” [1985, *Korean Art, the 20s’ “Power”*], 1985.

<sup>44</sup> Jang Seokwon, *80nyondae misul ui byeonhyeok: Jang Seokwon misul pyeongronjip* [Art’s Reform in the 1980s: Art Critique of Jang Seokwon] (Gwangju: Mudungbang, 1988), 179.

<sup>45</sup> Please see Minju eollon undong hyeopuihoe, *Munhwa tan’ap baekseo* [Issue of Cultural Oppression] (Seoul: Minju eollon undong hyeopuihoe, 1985).

by Yi Wonhong, was ironically appropriated by the political artists for their own art. In addition, the term was introduced to the public and generated discussions about the relationship between art and politics in the press and in art journals.<sup>46</sup>

For example, the news article “Art Should Be Worthy of Art” summarized art specialists’ critique of *minjung misul*: it was too much inclined towards *minjung* ideology and lacked artistic quality.<sup>47</sup> Critics pointed out that *minjung* artists tended to omit the process of studying and mastering artistic technique and did not employ a “process of filtration” either in their forms of expression or in the display of their political messages.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, based on *minjung* ideology, these artists appropriated iconographic expressions as a way to gather artists “under one banner.”<sup>49</sup> Although the establishment was not free from charges of “pushing *minjung misul* to the extreme,” they agreed that whatever messages one wanted to transmit, art should be ultimately articulated as “art worthy of art”—that “art should be beautiful.”<sup>50</sup>

A few journal articles introduced more substantive debates between the modernist and *minjung* critics. In “The Rough Gale of the 80’s Art: Diagnosing the Young Artists’ Art Movement,”<sup>51</sup> Yi Il and Seong Wan’gyoung discuss how to understand the young artists’ new movement in the 1980s. Seong, the art critic for Reality and Utterance, points out that 1970s’ modernists’ slogans “Koreanization of

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<sup>46</sup> The art critic Kim Bog’yeong stated at the seminar of the Seoul Contemporary Art Festival that promoting *minjung misul* as an art movement was a misnomer. Rather, it should be understood as a specific genre of figurative art grafted onto traditional subject matter with critical social statements. “Minjung misul: eotteokke bolgeosinga” [“Minjung Misul: How to Look at It”], *Han’guk Daily*, December 27, 1984. Although Yi Il acknowledged that it was inevitable that art would reflect the *minjung*’s realities in the broader political climate, he warned that if art was combined with ideology it would be dangerous. “Yesul gwa sahoe undong eun gubyeol deoya” [“Art and Social Movement Should Be Separated”], *DongA Daily*, July 25, 1985.

<sup>47</sup> “Misureun misul dawaya handa” [“Art Should Be Art”], *JoongAng Daily*, July 24, 1985.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Seong Wan’gyoung, Yi Il, “‘80nyondae misul ui geosen dolpung” [“The Rough Gale of the 80’s Art: Diagnosing the Young Artists’ Art Movement”], *Gyegan misul*, 33 (Spring 1985): 37–64.

Contemporary Art” and “Korean Art’s Contemporaneity” reflected art’s lack of communication with social reality.<sup>52</sup>

For *dansaekhwa*’s supporter Yi Il, it was no different in the case of *minjung misul*. Yi remarks that under the ambiguous slogan of *minjung*, all figurative artworks had been defined as *minjung misul*, thereby distorting the concept of art itself.<sup>53</sup> Seong agrees with Yi’s point: “The term ‘*minjung*’ is abstract and politicized, and resulted in ‘*minjung* minimalism’ and ‘*minjung* abstraction’ . . . *minjung misul* should be understood as a dialogue of thoughts and imagination from one’s experiences through art forms.”<sup>54</sup> His position articulates the dissimilarity of his view of *minjung misul* with that of the younger generation, who he thought did not respect art’s particular nature.

In “*Minjung Misul*, Questioning Its Rights and Wrongs,”<sup>55</sup> the art critic Oh Gwangsu similarly posited that the concept of *minjung misul* and its artistic direction were not well defined, so at one extreme one could say that it did not exist. In response, the dissident critic Kim Yunsu argued that since the notions of *minjung* and *minjung misul* had circulated for several years, any discussion of *minjung misul* had to be premised on its existence. Oh Gwangsu problematized *minjung misul* insofar as it allowed propaganda to dominate art, whereas socially conscious art, such as Social Scene Art; Otto Dix; and Jean Fourier, in the West, was based on universal humanism. Although Oh did not define what universal humanism was, he believed that *minjung misul*’s ideological and particularistic nature prevented it from seeing the larger picture. Not only did he ignore the fact that political art in the West was a product of its particular situation, but he also naïvely believed in universal humanism as a given.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 44–45.

<sup>55</sup> Kim Yunsu, Oh Gwangsu, “‘Minjung misul,’ gue sibiruel ttajida” [“‘Minjung misul,’ Questioning Its Right or Wrong”], *SindongA*, 9, 1985, 324.

Samir Amin succinctly argues that universalism, the idea that all human beings share an essence independent of cultural, gender, and class differences, was a European invention.<sup>56</sup>

It is interesting to observe how Oh Gwangsu maneuvered the binary logic of the universal and the particular to dismiss *minjung misul* while using the same logic to promote *dansaekhwa* as the true contemporary Korean art. *Dansaekhwa*'s appropriation of Korean or traditional aesthetics is understood as the internationalization of regional characters, and its cultural particular is seen as a dialogical point to the international art world. If the universal is the imaginative point at which all people can interconnect despite their differences, then the international art world theoretically becomes the universal point at which each mode of art encounters others with their regional particulars.

On the other hand, *minjung misul*, which represents the *minjung*'s realities, is seen as particular, based on the flawed notion of universal humanism. The *minjung* artists apply the people's predicament, instead of Korean aesthetics, as a point of interaction with other Third World peoples and the West. At the same time, the *minjung* artists' use of "traditional" culture occurs not because it is a cultural signifier but because it is a living expression of Koreans. Oh thereby failed to identify different visions of the world on the part of the modernist and *minjung* artists because he equated the modernists' nationalism with *minjung misul*'s dissident nationalism.

Oh Gwangsu's critique of the universal and the particular also raises the issue of the artistic quality of *minjung misul*, based on applying "universal" artistic standards. Oh argued that, although the *minjung misul* movement started with anti-

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<sup>56</sup> Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989). Samir Amin writes that Eurocentrism was a highly fabricated ideological construct for dominance of the West and its collaborations with capitalism. He argues that Eurocentrism is "anti-universalist" since it does not seek "possible general laws of human evolution" out of different cultures and people in the world, while it presents itself as universalist and claims that the rest should be molded according to the Western model.

formalism, its standard subject matter such as historical events, portraits of peasants and laborers, commercial images of mass industrial society, and so on proved that the *minjung misul* artists had fallen into another extreme of formalism.<sup>57</sup> He also points out that the artists tended to depict the dark side of human life, agitating viewers for their own political purposes.<sup>58</sup> Kim Yunsu contended that artistic quality should be based on how messages are conveyed in an aesthetically moving form.<sup>59</sup> However, Oh's comments on the artistic quality of *minjung misul* should not be easily dismissed, as rough and awkward expressions alienated viewers.

The oppressions of and debates around the “1985, Korean Art, the 20s’ ‘Power’” exhibition succinctly delineate how art was remade into *minjung misul* through its dialogue with the state, the art establishment, the public, and the democratization movement. The state responded to the exhibition, perceiving that the displayed art was stepping outside the boundary of art, aligning with *minjung* ideology. At the same time, the modernist art critics were concerned about questions of how art should exist, in terms of art's unique autonomy and system. The modernists asked when art stopped being art in its engagement in the political and how it could retain the quality of “universal humanism” and avoid the danger of falling into the particular (i.e., *minjung* ideology). The modernists' views on art and politics resulted from their imaginings of the nation and the international based on the state's ethnic nationalism. Coalescing with the dissident movement, *minjung misul* engaged in dialogue with the predicaments of Koreans and other Third World peoples in the dissidents' worldviews.

After the oppression of the exhibition the “1985, Korean Art, the 20s’ ‘Power’” exhibition, the newly anointed *minjung* artists realized that they needed an

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<sup>57</sup> Oh Gwangsu, *Hanguk misul ui hyeonjang* [*Korean Art's Real Sites*] (Seoul: Choson Ilbosa, 1988), 85.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

organization through which to collectively respond to government suppression. In November 1985, more than 120 *minjung* artists and critics founded the National Artists Association. In their founding manifesto, they declared that they aimed to create a national art in an era of historical transition and to expand their dialogues. Furthermore, this association would work for the protection of its members' rights and well-being.<sup>60</sup> The members of Reality and Utterance, *Imnulnyeong*, *Dureong*, the Seoul Art Community, and the Gwangju Visual Medium Study were active in the inception of the National Artists Association.

### **A *Minjung* Banner: "Bring Hanyeol Back to Life!"**

The artist Choe Byeongsu was born in 1960 in Seoul and was raised in poverty. While at school, he was unable to adjust to school life and often missed classes. He dropped out of school when he was a junior high school student. After leaving school, he worked as a manual laborer and held nineteen jobs such as Chinese-food deliveryman, electrical and boiler technician, construction worker, carpenter, and the like. His friend Kim Hwan'yeong, who was studying in the art department at Hongik University, took notice of his artistic talents and encouraged him to draw and to attend art school.

In 1986, Kim Hwan'yeong and his friends from Hongik University (Park Gibok, Song Jinwon, Kim Yeongmi, Nam Gyuseon, and Gang Hwasuk) created a team for mural painting at Sinchon, the university town, in Seoul. Kim invited Choe to their collective because they needed a carpenter who could make ladders for their mural project. On July 10, 1986, these six members, who also belonged to the Seoul

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<sup>60</sup> In the big debate in the Suyuri Academy House in November 22, 1987, Reality and Utterance, *Dureong*, Gwangju Jayu misulinheo, *Imnulnyeong*, the Seoul Art Community, and 120 people participated. President Son Jangseop, the secretary general Kim Yongtae, the manager Hong Seonoung, and the assistant administrator Choe Yol, with eleven steering committees and thirteen sub-departments, were selected. Their manifesto declared that the National Artists' Association would aim at [developing] the national art's methods of practice, and promoting the rights and interests as well as improving the welfare of the members themselves.

Art Community, created the mural *The Unification and Working People* (Choe called it *Joy of the Unification*) [Figure D.3] on the wall of a three-story building near Sinchon, but it was removed by the police.<sup>61</sup> After the destruction of the mural, the artist Ryu Yeonbok organized another mural on his own wall at Jeongreung. Choe was invited again to join the project team. On August 4, 1986, five members of the National Artists Association (Ryu Yeonbok, Kim Jinhwa, Hong Hwanggi, Kim Yongman, Choe Byeongsu) painted a mural called *A Painting of Living Together* (*Sangsaengdo*) [Figure D.4], for which Choe painted azaleas and forsythias, but the mural was destroyed.<sup>62</sup>

After the Jeongreung incident, Choe Byeongsu and those involved were arrested and cross-examined. The police and prosecutor asked him absurd questions, such as whether the number of azaleas in the mural was the same as the number of martyrs. In the middle of his interrogation, he was recorded as a “painter” to fit the police scenario so that charges could be filed against those involved.<sup>63</sup> His experiences of the Sinchon and Jeongreul mural incidents changed his worldview.<sup>64</sup> After that, he began to read progressive books and journals such as *Mal* (*lit. Speech*) and learned of

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<sup>61</sup> Six members of the Seoul Art Community (Nam Gyuseon, Kim Hwanyeong, Park Gibok, Song Jinhyeong, Gang Hwasuk and Kim Yeongmi) painted a mural on a three-story building next to Sinchon, in an area marked for redevelopment. On the wall of the first floor, they painted a flower-selling woman and young men standing shoulder to shoulder. On the second floor, they depicted the Cheonji (crater lake) of the Baikdu Mountains and a happy gathering of laborers, office workers, and farmers, representing wishes for unification. Although these painters received prior permission from the owner of the building, suddenly, on July 7, the artist Yi Dongyeop, who rented it, claimed it had been erased because of its ideological nature. On July 9, workmen under the instruction of the police and district office painted the mural white at around 11 p.m. Minjok misul hyeopuihoe [National Artists’ Association], “Sinchonyeok ap dosi byeokhwa pagwe cheolgeoreul hang’uihada” [“Opposition to Destruction of the Urban Mural in Front of Sinchon Station”], *Minjok misul* [National Art], 2 (September 1986): 10.

<sup>62</sup> Minjok misul hyeopuihoe [National Artists’ Association], “Yeon yieun byeokhwa ui pagwewa hwaga ui ipgeon eul gyutanhandu” [“Impeach the Consecutive Destruction of the Mural and the Arrest of the Artists”]; *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>63</sup> Choe Byeongsu and Kim Jinsong, *Moksu, hwaga ege malgeolda* [Carpenter, Talking to Painter] (Seoul: Hyeonmun seoga, 2006), 58. Park Gibeom et al., *Byeongsu neun gwangdaeda* [Byeongsu is a Clown] (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2007). The artist’s biographical information comes from these two books.

<sup>64</sup> Choe, *Moksu, hwaga ege malgeolda*, 53–54.



the many problems in Korean society.<sup>65</sup> Grappling with the question of what he should do with art, he attended exhibitions, met *minjung* artists, and visited their art studios.<sup>66</sup> At the “Daedong Festival” organized by the National Artists Association in 1986, he submitted four or five works, making his debut as an artist.<sup>67</sup>

Choe states that he had few ideas about being an artist but had a desire to articulate the injustice and anger he felt in his day-to-day life. While living at the bottom of society for thirteen years, he understood that his living conditions were ultimately born of socio-economic contradictions. He needed a weapon in order to “take revenge,” and he thought art could be such an instrument for his struggle. Although he did not learn how to paint, he said he was confident with using a sculpture knife.<sup>68</sup>

Even if he came to understand why *minjung* artists painted such political art, he did not necessarily agree with their representation of the *minjung* or with the artistic quality of *minjung misul*. Choe Byeongsu commented on his first impression of it:

There were works which I liked, but some works were too rough and others were too detail-oriented with too many images. I didn’t like them. The citizens’ prints from Gwangju were too strong, and their lines were too thick, so that it was painful to look at them. At that time, I didn’t understand why such works should be expressed that way.<sup>69</sup>

Spoken from the perspective of a laborer/viewer, Choe’s comments suggest that there was a discrepancy between what *minjung* artists believed to be *minjung misul* and the art that real *minjung* would identify with. He found a similar gap between its representation of laborers and the real laborers he had known. He clearly articulated

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 70–71.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>68</sup> Choe, *Moksu, hwaga ege malgeolda*, 88–89.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 86.

this point in his observations on *minjung misul* in casual talks with the art critic Ra Wonsik:

They are painted in agony and suffering. The laborers I've known were nice and honest but there were also many lazy ones. They were wearing white shoes [fashionable shoes which one would wear for party and clubbing]. However, when the artists only represented suffering people, I didn't like them. After a few years, I asked those artists if they had experiences of manual work. Many of them confidently answered that they did worked on construction sites and other similar sites for a week . . . There were only a few working for a month. I laughed to myself. I could see why they represented laborers in suffering. Even if people have worked for years and if s/he takes a month-break and returns to work again, it would be very difficult for him. If [one works] for one week or fifteen days, how challenging can it be? As part-timer, if one goes to construction and carries [building materials], one doesn't have choice but feeling suffered. In the end, they painted themselves yet calling [their images] as laborers. That's why I could not understand [the laborers in their works].<sup>70</sup>

Living as a manual laborer with only an elementary school diploma qualified and prepared him to become the ideal image of the *minjung* artist, as was the case with the laborer-poet Park Nohae. In simplistic terms, Choe could rightly claim to create art of, by, and for the people. However, he was truly “reborn” as a quintessential *minjung* artist through his production of propaganda art following the tragic death of Yi Hanyeol as part of the June 10, 1987, Democratization Movement. This event manifested art's amalgamation into the political action and its taking on an activist role. Further, his propaganda art demonstrated how *minjung misul* realized itself through its *sotong* with re-envisioning the people's national community based on democratic principles.

On January 14, 1987, a Seoul National University student, Park Jongcheol, was killed by water torture during an aggressive investigation into the whereabouts of his senior compatriot, Park Jonggeun. When his purportedly accidental death was reported to the press, many people were suspicious, as brutal torture was widely

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 51–52.

assumed to be part of the police “regime” against the activist students. The *DongA Daily* on January 16 questioned his death by pointing out the dozens of bruises on his body.<sup>71</sup> The Headquarters of the National Police was forced to investigate the incident and concluded, “As [the detective] smacked the table, Park just died.” Such a remark aroused public ridicule and provoked deep rage against Chun’s dictatorial regime.

After the seventh memorial for the May 18 Gwangju massacre at the Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul, the chief priest, Kim Seunghun, issued a public statement. In the name of Catholic Priests Seeking Justice, he declared that the official narrative of Park Jongcheol’s death had been fabricated. The exposure led to serious repercussions. On May 20, opposition party members, dissidents, and members of religious organizations created a pan-national, united-front organization, called the Headquarters of the National Movement for the Struggle of the Democratic Constitution. They planned to hold a rally to protest Park’s death on June 10, the same day that Chun Doo Hwan would nominate his successor, Roh Tae Woo, to the leadership of the Democratic Justice Party.

A day before the protests, a Yonsei University student, Yi Hanyeol, was directly hit by a teargas canister in the head, and fell into a coma. This again demonstrated the state’s brutality and undemocratic nature and inspired the nationwide democratization movement. Wu Sangho, then the student-council leader at Yonsei University, recalled that as the news of Yi Hanyeol’s brain-death circulated, many students and citizens reached the consensus that “the situation cannot continue as it is now.”<sup>72</sup> Although there were pervasive doubts about the victory of the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Yim Chang’yong, “Yeondaesaeng Yi Hanyeol: ‘Choerutan huisaeng’ 6wol hangjaeng simin chamyeo gyegiro” [“The Yonsei University Student Yi Hanyeol: ‘Sacrifice of Tear Gas’ as the Momentum for the Citizens’ Participation in the June Uprising”], *Daehan Daily*, November 27, 1988. Cited in Kang Junman, *Han’guk hyeondaesa sanchaek 1980, no. 3* [Walking into Contemporary Korean History 1980, no. 3] (Seoul: Yinmul gwa sasangsa, 2003), 159.

democratization movement before June 9, this new tragedy led to mass street protests in the heart of the city of Seoul.

On that day, the carpenter/artist Choe Byeongsu learned of Yi Hanyeol's tragic injuries while he was spreading leaflets that announced, "On June 10, Let's Meet at City Hall!" The next day, he saw a picture of the bleeding Yi Hanyeol published by Reuters media, and felt great anger. He and a student, Mun Yeongmi, decided to print images of Yi Hanyeol, one depicting his face and another depicting him wounded and bleeding. Choe produced small woodcut prints with another artist, Min Youngtae, and several students. On June 11, mothers in the Democratization Family Association and the Yonsei Student Committee wore these prints on their chests to protest the state's lethal use of teargas. Choe said that many people were surprised that woodcut prints were available just a day after the newspaper photograph was printed. After 380 prints, the original woodcut plate wore out, so Choe, Mun, and the students made it into a silkscreen.

On June 13, Choe Byeongsu and several students began working on a banner painting of 393.7 by 295.3 inches. They debated whether to use a copy of Yi's photo or the woodcut/silkscreened print for the banner painting. Choe insisted on the latter because they could save a lot of time by just enlarging the woodcut print. By reproducing a woodcut print, he could exaggerate the quality of physical violence and brutality articulated in Yi's body from his photographic image. Furthermore, instead of employing the narrative style of a Buddhist painting, which many banner paintings appropriated—representing the suffering of the people (past), their struggle (present), and liberation (future)—his banner painting confronts the viewer with its powerful visuality at the moment one glances at it. Choe and several other students completed the work in 24 hours, and then sent it to the Guro Textile factory to have ropes added for hanging.

At noon on June 15, Choe Byeongsu and the student activists hung the banner at the Student Assembly Hall. Choe described the intense process of working while gripped by a spirit of protest:

I just painted the image without thinking. . . . When the banner was raised up on the building, I was immensely touched and excited. [Painting a banner] is very different from painting a mural. In order to paint a mural, it takes a long time . . . but for a banner, one should paint it using blitz tactics and hang it. At that moment, I felt like a guerrilla. Ah! It was a guerrilla war. I felt that way. As I've heard somewhere, I was excited at the thought that the banner was the essence of propaganda, and it could be a powerful weapon. I could see that art could be a true weapon.<sup>73</sup>

They also produced picket signs depicting Yi Hanyeol and sold thousands of handkerchiefs for fundraising.

In the early morning hours of July 6, Yi Hanyeol finally passed away. On the following day, the Democratic Citizens Funeral Committee decided to hold a funeral for Yi Hanyeol and to call it the Democratic Citizens Funeral. The students and citizens wore armbands of hemp cloth and black ribbons to express their condolences, and collected people's signatures. Choe and several student-activists worked on a large portrait of the deceased (90.6 x 70.87 inches) [Figure D.5] while the artist Choe Minhwa and other students created a banner painting, *You Are Still Awake* [Figure D.1], with university students. When Choe Byeongsu planned the funeral procession, putting his carpentry skills to use, he made a wooden frame with hinges<sup>74</sup> [Figure D.6]. On that day, the funeral car could pass through an overpass with the portrait lying down, and the protesters enthusiastically applauded its smart design.

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<sup>73</sup> Choe Byeongsu, *Moksu, hwaga ege malgeolda* [Carpenter, Talking to Painter] (Seoul: Hyeonmun seoga, 2006), 101.

<sup>74</sup> For instance, the funeral car's height was 2 meters, so the painting could be no more than 2.3 meters high to pass under an overpass. Because most overpasses were 4.4 meters high, to carry the painting to the city of Gwangju, Choe installed hinges on the frame, which allowed the painting to lie on top of the bus.

On July 9, the funeral began in front of the Student Assembly Hall, where Choe's banner painting was hung. At the ceremony, the pastor and activist Mun Ikhwan called out the names of all the martyrs sacrificed in the democratization movement, one by one. Mun's cries were so heart-wrenching that funeral participants grew solemn and sobbed. Yi Hanyeol's mother cried out, "Han, don't you want to spring up? Killer Chon Du Hwan, Roh Tae Woo, rascals! Han [yeol], let's go now to Gwangju [his home town]!" On the way out of campus, at the spot where Yi Hanyeol fell, the dancer Yi Aeju comforted his spirit with a *han*-exorcizing dance to the tune of the song "March with My Loved One."

The Yi Hanyeol funeral procession moved to Seoul City Hall [Figure D.7], with his portrait leading the way. The funeral cars and buses were lined up with a million people marching behind them. They would go on to Mangwoldong, Gwangju, where the victims of the Gwangju Uprising were buried and where Yi's hometown was. Yi's funeral car was encircled by men dressed in white folk clothing, and Choe Minhwa and his fellow activists carried a banner painting, *You Are Still Awake*. Behind them, prominent dissidents marched, followed by a procession of hundreds of elegy banners. Yi Hanyeol's funeral was the biggest rally in contemporary Korean history.<sup>75</sup> This democratization movement demonstrated *minjung misul*'s *sotong* to the fullest sense in its integration into the remaking of the Korean nation-state. As the dissidents yearned to overcome the tension between the "form" and the "content" of the Republic of Korea, Choe Byeongsu's collective art bridged a gap between art form and subject matter, between art and Koreans' aspirations. In its working toward humanism and democratic ideals, his art could truly realize *minjung misul* with a sense of legitimacy.

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<sup>75</sup> The participants were one million in Seoul and a half million in Gwangju—all together, 1.6 million.

## Contending Legitimacy: Debating Politics and Art

The citizens' street protests in June 1987 led them to victory in the campaign for reform of the Constitution and other measures, made official by the June 29, 1987, Declaration of Roh Tae Woo. Many Koreans were thrilled at the prospect of a democratic government. Nonetheless, the failure of the two main opposition leaders, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung, to reconcile their differences divided the progressive camp into factions. As predicted, their split made Roh Tae Woo the president. The *minjung misul* camps, separated by their support of their respective presidential candidates, shared in the profound disappointment and anger of other dissidents. Their divisions were translated into envisioning *minjung misul* to legitimate their competing political and ideological approaches to democracy.

Many artists brainstormed and experimented with art's potential as a protest tactic. However, *minjung misul* was overburdened with a sense of ideological rightness, coupled with the dissidents' self-assigned role of guiding the people to liberation. Such aspirations were best articulated in the form of agit-propaganda art among other forms of *minjung misul*. This position's hegemony was achieved not only by contemporary demands but also by the discursive contentions of the younger, radical artists against the "conservative," older generation. Their debates were very complex and divergent, so this chapter concentrates primarily on debates over the relationship between art and political activism.

The banner painting *Under the Foot of the Baikdu Mountains and the Dawn of the Unification* [Figure D.8] was created by Jeon Jeongho and Yi Sangho in 1987. However, this painting was seized by the police on account of its disquieting nature, and the artists were arrested.<sup>76</sup> The work represents the *minjung*'s struggles against U.S. oppression through the image of two men cutting down an American flag using

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<sup>76</sup> The date of the incident is not recorded.

sickles. The *minjung* art critic Ra Wonsik criticizes *Baikdu Mountains* as a mere diagram of political ideology. Although the artists used realism, he criticizes the work as disregarding the sociopolitical realities of the real people by molding their struggle to conform to an ideological totality. Ra notes that when one does not approach the political with an artistic imagination, art often ends up being a mere reproduction of an idea of ideated progressivism with a low level of artistic quality.<sup>77</sup>

The art critic Choe Yeol, a member of the Gwangju Visual Medium Study, to which the two artists belonged, argues on the other hand that *Baikdu Mountains* articulates the *minjung*'s struggle most appropriately. He further comments:

The powerful, vivid representation of the laborers and farmers will arouse the conscience of the *minjung* who are not yet conscious [of reality]; will cause shock among the petty-bourgeoisie who live under the system; and will create fear among the ruling class. Nonetheless, for the masses [he means *minjung* in this context] who have already advanced to the forefront of history, it is the shape of their brothers who are the most beautiful and compassionate. If such representation can be defined as hackneyed and diagrammed, can't all living, moving things be likewise?

On the battlefield, the experiences of *minjung* who marched with devotion indicate that such a fight is never either a repetitive cliché or mere illustration. If one's assignments and conditions are all different [depending on the situation], how can [the viewer or the *minjung*] perceive [the image] as a boring, repetitive image of themselves? . . . Such accusation of triteness should be distinguished from an archetype of the *minjung* achieved in *minjung misul*.<sup>78</sup>

He pointed out that those artists who were critical of *Baikdu Mountains* failed to see its vitality due to the limitations of [the intellectuals'] "class and material base."<sup>79</sup> I wonder, however, whether Choe Yeol's belief that the laborers would show great

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<sup>77</sup> Ra Wonsik, "Hyeondan'gye minjok minjung misul undong ui myeot kkaji munjejeom" ["Several Problems in the Current Stage of the National, Minjung Art Movement"], *Minjok misul* [National Art], 5 (1988): 71.

<sup>78</sup> Sigak meche yeon'guso, "Jeonhwan'gi ui minjok misul" ["The National Art in the Era of Transition"], *Misul undong* [Art Movement], vol. 17 (Seoul: Gongdongche munhwa sinseo, 1988), 12.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 13.



affection for “their” repetitive, rough images might stem from his romanticized view of the *minjung* or his arrogance toward them.

Choe Yeol tends to shift the discussion away from visual articulation to the viewer’s recognition of *minjung* images, the artists’ middle-class status, and the artists’ reluctance to participate in social transformation. His position suggests that it is not merely a matter of visualizing political ideas with artistic imagination but more a question of what *minjung misul* should become. In such a view of art, he complained, the artists, especially the Reality and Utterance members, remained involved in “*sotong*’s democratization,” or in communicating living realities of common people through critical representation.<sup>80</sup>

Choe Yeol’s assessments are often perceived, however, as a sweeping counterattack against negative evaluations of sometimes rough and ideological *minjung misul* by the older generation. Examples of their critiques include “insistence on the radical logic of the movement” (Won Dongseok), “a focus on crude and abstract or proclamatory subject matter” (Kim Yunso), and “stiff ideological inclination and subject matter” (Seong Wan’gyeong).<sup>81</sup> Won Dongseok says that Choe speculated that these critiques were directed toward the radical factions of the *minjung* artists with whom he aligned himself.<sup>82</sup>

To justify his position, according to Won, Choe distinguished the elements in *minjung misul* between those who exhibited fervent revolutionary aspirations and those who merely critiqued and represented reality. He called the latter, by which he categorized Reality and Utterance and other exhibition-oriented *minjung* artists, “critical realism.” He saw them as supporting “petite-bourgeoisie liberal

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<sup>80</sup> Choe Yeol, *Han’guk hyeondae misul undongsa* [Korean Contemporary Art Movement] (Seoul: Dolbegae, 1991), 192.

<sup>81</sup> Won Dongseok, “80nyeondae misul ui gyeolsan gwa gwajae: minjok minjung misul undong ui seonsang eso,” [“The Evaluation and Assignments of the 1980s’s Art: from the Minjung Misul Movement’s Viewpoints”], *Minjok misul*, 7 (December 1989): 10.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

democracy.”<sup>83</sup> At the same time, he disparaged some of their works for their “limited worldview and lack of reality consciousness”<sup>84</sup> and for their “separation of form and content.”<sup>85</sup> Such failures were seen in contrast to the work of the artist Hong Seongdam and the Gwangju Free Artists Association (1979–82; Choe Yeol and Hong Seongdam were both founding members) in establishing a national art and enriching realism.<sup>86</sup>

Choe Yeol’s championing of them intersects with two issues: First, he challenges the conventional view of Reality and Utterance as the “beginning” of *minjung misul*, attributing that to the Gwangju Free Artists Association in his *History of the Contemporary Korean Movement* in 1991.<sup>87</sup> Second, his book is not merely a “history” of political art but also actively struggles to justify his faction’s aesthetic and political positions. Besides his faction’s artistic position, which diverged from that of the National Artists Association, the existing divisions over presidential candidates resulted in the creation of the National People’s Art Movement Federation by Choe, Hong, and other artists and students.

Sim Gwanghyeon, like Choe Yeol, believed that Reality and Utterance’s ambiguous *sotong* and Dureong’s *minjungism* could not produce a *minjung misul* informed by a genuinely scientific perspective. He writes that the problem was somewhat resolved after the July–September Great Workers’ Struggle of 1987.<sup>88</sup> With renewed class consciousness, Sim argues, *minjung misul* could respond to the labor classes’ struggles, attaining a new materialist and aesthetic sense informed by the

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<sup>83</sup> Won Dongseok, “1980nyeondae misul bipyeong ui nolli wa sanghwang” [“The 1980s’ Art Critique’s Logic and Circumstances”], *Han’guk geundae misul sahak* [History of Modern Korean Art], 15 (2005): 273.

<sup>84</sup> Choe Yeol, *Han’guk hyeondae misul undongsa* [Contemporary Korean Art Movement] (Seoul: Dolbaegae, 1991), 188.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>87</sup> Choe Yeol, *Han’guk hyeondae misul undongsa* [Contemporary Korean Art Movement] (Seoul: Dolbaegae, 1991).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 27.

historical dialectics. By examining the development of *minjung misul* in its linear progression, Sim insinuates that *minjung misul*'s most advanced form is propaganda art (albeit not entirely free of problems), again placing it within the framework of Marxist historical materialism.<sup>89</sup>

Many tend to see propaganda art as un-artistic, according to Sim Gwanghyeon. Such attitudes gave birth to bipolar positions, art's culturalism (or art embedded in the socio-cultural ideology of the bourgeoisie) versus art's subordination under a political ideology.<sup>90</sup> All art produced under such strictures is similar in its failure to achieve status as true propaganda art.<sup>91</sup> He thus defines culturalism:

By overemphasizing the arts' particulars and expertise, [culturalism] avoids or ignores the fact that social (or historical) change is inevitable. A new art is possible only through struggle against old politico-economic relationships and the construction of new ones. [ . . . ] [Culturalism] proves the immense influence of the previous [conception of art]—with bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie conceptions of art—and of the ideology of the ruling class culture. Furthermore, by combining the people's concepts of art with the necessity of its popularization, [these intellectuals] contributed to uncritically following the masses.<sup>92</sup>

On the other hand, perceiving art as an instrument for political struggle, Sim asserts, causes one to ignore art's relative freedom and unique nature. His discussion of propaganda art is fairly self-explanatory and is similar to what one might see in Marxist-Leninist aesthetics. However, he devotes little time to explaining how his ideas could be translated into visual form. Such inattention to art or to the integration of art and ideas is nothing unusual among many activism-oriented artists and critics. However, it came to be seen as a very serious matter for the older generation of art critics and more "moderate" *minjung* artists.

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<sup>89</sup> Sim Gwanghyeon, "Jeongchi seonjeon seondong gwa misul undong" ["Political Propaganda and Instigation and Art Movement"], *Minjok misul*, 7 (December 1989): 26–27.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 28–29.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 33.

Won Dongseok depicts the younger generation as applying Marxist-Leninist ideology as a way to claim its primacy over the older generation, who were not familiar with such a social-scientific worldview.<sup>93</sup> However, he says that many young artists who lacked artistic expertise and knowledge ended up producing shallow and schematic diagrams of ideology. Since their art movement was meant to achieve their political agenda through the medium of art and artistic imagination, it could be developed only through a synthesis of reality with a mastery of their medium. Though the term “expertise” implies institutional practice as well as individualism, he suggests that art’s professionalism and activism should not be seen in opposition to but rather as part of a necessary unity.<sup>94</sup> He also criticizes the younger generation for, in their class-consciousness and factionalism, refusing to ally with the middle class, even after the failure of the 1987 presidential election.<sup>95</sup> If they had been aware of the urgent need to expand their circle of allies, they would have rethought and reconfigured their artistic and activist endeavors.

Such a view of art is shared by the artist Yim Oksang, who indicates that although many *minjung* artists believed that exhibition art ended up in exhibition spaces, art could be reproduced in people’s everyday lives through prints and other means of dissemination.<sup>96</sup> Hence, the potential for both exhibition and reproduction should not be underestimated. After all, from the mid-1990s on, the *minjung* artists witnessed *minjung misul* increasingly being introduced into the context of galleries and museums, as opposed to being consumed exclusively on the street. Moreover, the

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<sup>93</sup> Won Dongseok, “80nyeondae misul ui gyeolsan gwa gwajae: minjok minjung misul undong ui seonsang eso” [“The Evaluation and Assignments of the 1980s’s Art: from the Minjung Misul Movement’s Viewpoints”], edited by *Minjok misul* (Seoul: Minjok misul hyeopuihoe, 1989), 7–18.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>96</sup> Seong Wan’gyeong, Yim Oksang, and Kim Bongjun, et al., “‘Hyeonsil gwa baleon’ Jwadam” [“Round Table Discussion of Reality and Utterance”], *Minjung misul eul hyanghayeo: Hyonsil gwa baleon 10nyeon ui baljachwi* [Toward Minjung Misul: Traces of Reality and Utterance’s 10 years], edited by Hyeonsil gwa baleon pyeonjip wiwonhoe (Seoul: Gwahak gwa sasang, 1990), 83.

investing of art with a rigid sense of legitimacy was scarcely welcomed by young artists. They were eager to experiment with diverse subject matter and new media that had been largely ignored in the ideologically entrenched atmosphere. Many *minjung* artists viewed the introduction of *minjung misul* into institutional or commercial spaces as a loss of impetus in the changed socio-political and cultural landscape of the 1990s.

### **Summary**

Chapter three traced how socially conscious art was re-envisioned as *minjung misul* by engaging multiple contentions within and outside the art world during the peak moment of the democratization movement, 1986–88. The *minjung* artists' imagining of *minjung misul* took place mainly on the level of discourse and political activism rather than on the level of art itself. Thus, I have examined its three crucial moments in dialogue with the socio-political milieu at that time: the “1985, Korean Art, the 20s’ ‘Power’” exhibition in 1985; Choe Byeongsu’s *Bring Hanyeol Back to Life* as part of martyr Lee Hanyeol’s funeral in the June 10, 1987, Democratization Movement; and the contention between the older and younger generations. These junctions demonstrate that in Koreans’ relentless struggle for democracy, this art realized itself (even in the most contentious moments) as legitimate visual language(s), embracing new visions of art and the nation-state.

**PART II: CONCENTRIC CIRCLES OF DIALOGUE IN ART AND  
COMMUNITY-MAKING**

**CHAPTER FOUR:**  
**YIM OKSANG:**  
**MULTILAYERED *SOTONG* AS THE SPIRIT OF *MINJUNG MISUL***

The Yusin period ended abruptly with the assassination of President Park Chung Hee by the KCIA director Kim Jaegyu on October 26, 1979. It took place in the midst of fierce anti-government street protests in the southern coastal cities of Busan and Masan. However, the Yusin establishment and the Martial Law Command were still in power, so some dissidents expressed hope for as well as uneasiness about the prospects of democracy. While the opposition politicians Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung were divided by their political struggle for hegemony, presuming that democracy would be instituted, new military authorities were preparing to stage a military coup. A week after Park's funeral, Acting President Choe Gyuha made a special announcement that the Yusin Constitution would be amended to promote democracy and that the National Conference for Unification, which had been chaired by the late Park himself, would elect a president.<sup>1</sup>

This proclamation incited deep anger and despair among the dissidents. Park Jongryeol, a son of the dissident pastor Park Hyeonggyu and administrator of the KSCF (Korean Student Christian Federation), prepared a mass assembly with Democratic Youth Association members in the guise of a wedding.<sup>2</sup> Under martial law, only religious rituals and wedding and funeral ceremonies were allowed. In their phony wedding at the YMCA auditorium on November 24, at least five hundred dissidents gathered, enthusiastically chanting their demands for a democratic Constitution and presidential election, and for the eradication of the Yusin legacies

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<sup>1</sup> Kim Jeongnam, *Jinsil, gwangjang e seoda: minjuhwa undong 30nyeon ui yeokgyeong* [Truth, Standing in the Public Space: The 30 Years' Democratic Movement] (Seoul: Changbi, 2009), 342.

<sup>2</sup> Park Hyeonggyu, *Na ui mideum eun gil wie itta* [My Faith is on the Road] (Seoul: Changbi, 2010), 354.

(i.e., the National Conference of Unification) and the establishment of a pan-national democratic cabinet.<sup>3</sup> In the middle of the ceremony, the martial-law military barged into the auditorium and arrested more than one hundred forty participants.<sup>4</sup> Some organizers and major dissidents were severely tortured and sentenced to prison terms of from several months to three years.<sup>5</sup>

On December 6, 1979, the National Conference for Unification elected Choe Gyuha the tenth president of the Republic of Korea. However, less than a week later, on December 12, 1979, Chun Doo Hwan, the National Defense Commander, and his *Hanahoe* (Oneness Association) members staged a military coup. The coup leaders deployed military units without notifying the commander of the American–Korean Combined Forces Command (CFC).<sup>6</sup> Chun Doo Hwan, who was already the National Security Commander, was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General and took the position of Acting Director of the KCIA on April 14, 1980.<sup>7</sup> Despite the emergence of the new military authorities, the period from Park’s assassination to May 18, 1980, “the Spring of Seoul,” provided space in which to articulate Koreans’ desire for democracy across all sectors of society, such as the miners’ strikes in Sabuk, Gangwon Province; the Cheon’gye Textile Union workers’ strike; and the campus liberalization movement led by university students.

By May 1980, the university students who had earlier focused on campus issues protested in public for an end to martial law, the release of arrested dissidents,

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<sup>3</sup> Kim Jeongnam, 335.

<sup>4</sup> Park Hyeonggyu, 355.

<sup>5</sup> Kang Junman, *Han’guk hyeondaesa sanchaek 1970, no. 3* [Walking into Contemporary Korean History 1970, no. 3] (Seoul: Yinmul gwa sasangsa, 2002), 296.

<sup>6</sup> John Kie-Chiang Oh, *Korean Politics: The Quest for Democratization and Economic Development* (Ithaca, New York, and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 79. New military authorities arrested the Chief of the General Staff and Martial Law Commander Jeong Seunghwa on the charge of collaborating with Kim Jaegyu. Kim Jaegyu was sentenced to death and executed in haste on March 6, 1980, despite the efforts of dissidents and the Catholic Church to save him.

<sup>7</sup> Yi Gyeseong, *Ji’neun byeol tteuneun byeeol: choengwadae silrok* (*Han’guk munwon*, 1993), 311–12; cited in Kang Junman, *Hanguk hyeondaesa sanchaek 1980, no. 3*, 69.



and a rapid transition to a civilian government. The public's democratic hopes notwithstanding, on May 17 Chun Doo Hwan expanded martial law across the country, and ruthlessly arrested political activist students and leaders. Despite the expansion of martial law, in Gwangju, university students demanded campus democratization and political reform, a demand that was met with disproportionate violence by special airborne commandos on May 18. The students' initial movement turned into a ten-day popular uprising against the state's massacre of its own citizens and in support of democracy.

It was during this politically turbulent time that several future members of Reality and Utterance came together. The art collective Reality and Utterance (*hyeonsil gwa baleon*; 1979–89) and the artist Yim Oksang adopted the idea of *sotong* to envision a new art. Reality and Utterance, to which Yim belonged, is often viewed as the wellspring of *minjung misul*. These artists and art critics challenged the art establishment and deliberated to communicate their sociopolitical realities with viewers and the outside world. In their efforts to create a dialogical art, *sotong* was understood as art's reference to artists' (and people's) living reality in legible forms. Nonetheless, the members had never envisaged or advanced such *sotong* so directly.

Their artistic and discursive endeavors have been interpreted from the perspectives of the earlier notions of national art or of the later *minjung misul*, which was praxis-oriented; they both aimed to create a legitimate Korean national/people's art. In order to reveal the true nature of their interventions, this chapter explicates how their idea of *sotong*—structural critique—was conceived and mobilized in their dialogues with modernist art, the earlier dissident art critics, and later *minjung* artists. In my exploration of Reality and Utterance, I pay particular attention to the works of its member Yim Oksang, one of the most well-known *minjung* artists. He ingeniously articulated a direct and concrete response to the post-Gwangju realities with powerful

visual metaphors, while critiquing the institutionalization of the contemporary Korean art world. In comparison to the work of other members, his oeuvre, which intersected with diverse issues of the earlier dissident critics and *minjung* artists, effectively navigated the multifaceted nature of the emergence of *sotong* in the early 1980s. By delineating the contentions around Reality and Utterance, this chapter demonstrates a far more complex picture of its dialogue as a core expression of *minjung misul*.

### **A New Form of *Sotong***

A decade after the failure of Reality Group (1969), Reality and Utterance was formed by sixteen artists and art critics, including Yim Oksang.<sup>8</sup> Their collective was initially formed through the future members' casual meetings in a publication office at Gwancheoldong, Seoul, which was moved after the discontinuance of the art journal *Art and Living* (*misul gwa saenghwal*).<sup>9</sup> The ex-*Art and Living* journal reporter Ju Jaehwan recalled of his meetings with the future members: "[There was a] great diversity of . . . opinions on the established art world and for changing art."<sup>10</sup> At that time, the art critic Won Dongseok initially brought up the idea of staging an exhibition for the twentieth anniversary of the April 19, 1960, Student Uprising. Won, who supported the Free Journalism Movement, criticized the silence of artists, contrasting

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<sup>8</sup> The Reality and Utterance members were Noh Wonhui, Seong Wan'gyeong, Sim Jeongsu, Won Dongseok, Kim Geonhui, Son Jangseon, Oh Yun, Yun Beommo, Kim Jeongheon, Min Jeonggi, Yim Oksang, Ju Jaehwan, Kim Yongtae, Baik Sunam, Shin Gyeongho, Choe Min, sixteen members all together. However, the number of members often changed as new members entered or old members dropped out.

<sup>9</sup> The journal *Art and Living*, which was shut down in 1978 after ten issues, was thought to set the critical tone for their art collective. Its editor was Yim Yeongbang, and several founding members, such as Ju Jaehwan, Kim Yongtae, and Yun Beommo, tried to address questions about how art could interact with society and the proper role of artists. Also, foreign-educated critics translated crucial writings on the relationship between art and society. Ju Jaehwan and Kim Yongtae created a subcontract publishing company after the journal's demise. With that, began the series of meetings and other events that would result in the founding of Reality and Utterance, led by Ju Jaehwan, Son Jangseop, Park Hyeonsu, Kim Yongtae and Kim Jeongheon, "'Jakga Oh Yun' e daehan Chueok" [Memories of Artist Oh Yun], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongnae saram* [*Oh Yun: People of the World, People of Towns*] (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2010), 93.

<sup>10</sup> Kim Unseong, Kim Yun'gi, and Yoo Hyejong, et al., "Interview with Ju Jaehwan: Geureon saenggak yi deuro [I think that way]," *Misul gwa saenggak*, 1 (2008): 10–30.

their irresponsiveness with the activism of writers and literary critics as well as journalists.<sup>11</sup> However, the artists and critics were concerned that it was too early for art to become politically engaged; instead, they decided to work on several structural issues of the contemporary Korean art world they had faced.

Although the members' decision was influenced by the political situation, it was shaped more so by their shared dissatisfaction with and concerns about the state of contemporary Korean art. They viewed its structural weakness as the most serious issue in the art world, as the members' critiques of university art education, *gukjeon* (the national art fair), and the existing art system indicated. The art critic Seong Wan'gyeong perceived that South Korea's modernist and avant-garde art<sup>12</sup> was feeble and deformed. He found a clear example of this in *dansaekhwa*. The *dansaekhwa* critics connected the color white with "Korean-ness" or Korean aesthetics, and this became a representative brand of contemporary Korean art.<sup>13</sup> Further, Seong assessed that many Korean artists understood art as a realm separate from society and that therefore Korean art could not create a healthy relationship with society. Under such circumstances, the notion of *sotong* seems to be the most viable option for inventing new visual languages.

Although the idea of dialogue now seems self-explanatory, it was not received as such by the contemporary artists of Reality and Utterance. Moreover, its notion was grounded in or promoted a particular method of dialogue, belittling other forms of *sotong*. Reality and Utterance's *sotong* evolved, gaining greater currency among activist *minjung* artists in the 1980s, as the latter connected it with a sense of moral

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>12</sup> In the South Korean art context, the distinction between avant-garde and modernist art had never been clear-cut. For instance, a younger generation of artists in the late 1960 and 1970s engaged in new art forms, such as *objet*, installation, and performance, against the monolithic *Informel* art movement. However, as *dansaekhwa* became prominent through several exhibitions in Japan, these artists were streamlined under *dansaekhwa*, becoming the hegemonic power.

<sup>13</sup> The author's interview with Seong Wan'gyeong on December 28, 2009.

legitimacy. However, as the artistic dialogue narrowed for the purposes of political ideology beginning in the mid-1980s, diverse forms of *sotong* were contested in the tension between art and politics, which are delineated throughout this dissertation.

The members' vision for an art of *sotong* is well captured in their group name also. When they discussed names for their artists' collective, the suggestions included "Humans and Freedom," "Recovering Humanity," "Reality," "Fact," "Minjung and Fact," "Reality and Statement," and so forth. In the end, they decided to adopt Seong's "Reality and Utterance" for their group name. In their debates between "Reality and Utterance" ("Utterance" refers to the French term "*prise de parole*") and "Reality and Expression," they chose the former in order to include expressions of both professional artists and everyday people who were not part of the art world. Furthermore, "utterance" emphasizes a more direct and concrete response to reality by a diverse body of people, as opposed to "expression," which implies a more contemplative space inhabited by professional artists.<sup>14</sup>

Based on their group discussions, Seong Wan'gyeong and Won Dongseok wrote a manifesto for their collective, and contacted numerous artists. Their seminar meeting took place in a chilling political atmosphere: they met on December 13, 1979, immediately following the military coup one day prior, known as the "12.12 Incident." Some of the initial members dropped out soon thereafter, sensing they might be in danger for their role in taking a critical artistic stance. The remaining members, including Oh Yun, Yim Oksang, and other artists and critics, created the art collective Reality and Utterance.

In terms of age and experience, the members had all graduated from universities, so their varied school backgrounds and work experiences enriched their collective. This was unusual at the time; most art collectives were homogeneous

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

groups who shared the same alma mater. They were in their early- to mid-thirties and had been making a living for several years in the art world, grappling with problems of contemporary Korean art. Their art education and experiences made them skeptical of current art practices, as they searched for a breakthrough in their own art.

The members' university years, in the late 1960s—a period of revival of the mask-dance—largely shaped their perception of the role of art and artists in society. Within the conservative atmosphere of university art education, without activities in the folk tradition, Yim and his art-college friends had been involved in a Western theater group.<sup>15</sup> In such a cultural environment, it was natural for them to employ “Western” artistic media and forms in their art. In turn, this led them to be accused of being too “intellectual” and “Western” by the younger artists, whose university years were shaped by the political and intellectual atmosphere after the 1980 Gwangju Uprising. The political development in its aftermath profoundly reconfigured and reformulated the dissident students' and intellectuals' perception of the Korean people-nation in relation to the dictatorship, conglomerates (or the comprador economy), and “imperial” U.S. power.

### **Repositioning Korea through Gwangju**

On August 29, 1980, Chun Doo Hwan was elected the eleventh president of South Korea by the National Conference for Unification, and in September the Fifth Republic was inaugurated. The Fifth Republic was similar to the earlier dictatorial regime of the Yusin Constitution, for it, too, governed using oppressive machinery. Yet it was much more naked and vicious in its exercise of power.<sup>16</sup> Chun and his

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<sup>15</sup> From the author's interview with Yim Oksang on July 12, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Kim Chiha, *huin geuneul ui gil*, 3, 70. John Kie-Chiang Oh, *Korean Politics: The Quest for Democratization and Economic Development*, 87. The presidential election was preceded by an indirect election to the Electoral College. Chun exercised omnipotent control through the Emergency Decree, and dissolution of all the assembly, administration of law, and the Constitution Committee. The Fifth

coterie weakened the KCIA, which exercised omnipotent power during the Park regime, while strengthening military intelligence and the riot police.<sup>17</sup> The Chun regime waged purification campaigns supposedly to deal with hooligans, gangsters, and other “social evils.” In reality, many innocent people were dragged to re-education military camps and suffered and even died while being subjected to inhumane training regimens. On January 15, 1981, the Chun government created both the ruling and opposition parties, both of which were controlled by the KCIA (even in its reduced capacity) and other public-safety machinery.<sup>18</sup>

Chun Doo Hwan, who negotiated for a visit to America with Jimmy Carter’s government, finally made it to the White House at the invitation of the newly elected U.S. President Ronald Reagan on January 22, 1981. His high-profile visit and manipulation of the American position greatly contributed to rising anti-Americanism in South Korea. After the establishment of the anti-American Ayatollah Khomeini regime in Iran in 1979, the Carter administration seemed more concerned with stability and order than with democratization, although it stressed human rights.<sup>19</sup> Reflecting such changed policy, the United States did not actively intervene in the Chun government’s brutal oppressions. When the U.S. government stationed its Seventh Fleet with an aircraft carrier in Busan, the people in Gwangju believed that its purpose was to warn General Chun to restrain his use of force. However, it turned out that the U.S.–South Korea Combined Forces Command (CFC) exercised no measures to stop the new military authorities’ massacre of the Gwangju people.

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Republic also amended the National Security Law, the basic law of journalism, the Law on Assembly and Demonstration, the Law of Social Protection, and the Labor Law in general.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce Cummings, “The Abortive Abertura: South Korea in the Light of Latin American Experience,” *New Left Review* 173: 10–11; Quoted by John Lie, 123. The Chun government discharged and replaced 300 senior KCIA agents and nearly 5,000 low-level government bureaucrats.

<sup>18</sup> On January 15, 1981, Chun created the Democratic Justice Party. Within two days, he founded the opposition parties as well—the Democratic Korean Party (Yu Chisong was president) and the Korean Citizen Party (Kim Jongpil was president).

<sup>19</sup> John Kie-Chiang Oh, *Korean Politics: The Quest for Democratization and Economic Development*, 84.

The United States feared giving the impression that it was in alliance with the new military regime, as the U.S.'s "irresponsiveness" to the desire of the Gwangju citizens could be easily read as such. Although the United States called publicly for restraint on the part of security forces and for a peaceful resolution on May 22,<sup>20</sup> the state-controlled radio broadcast reported that the United States "approved" the deployment of the CFC special troops.<sup>21</sup> Further, Korean media highlighted the comments of General John A. Wickham, the commander of the U.S. and U.N. forces, and William H. Gleysteen, the U.S. Ambassador to South Korea: Wickham called Koreans "lemmings" who needed to be led by a strong leader, and Gleysteen characterized the demonstrating students in Gwangju as "spoiled brats."<sup>22</sup>

With the Korean press reports, the Gwangju Uprising revealed to many Koreans the U.S. role in the division of the Korean peninsula and in Korean politics. U.S. President Ronald Reagan approved the course of action taken by Chun Doo Hwan and his subsequent emergence as the leader of South Korea.<sup>23</sup> Through the question of the role of the United States in Gwangju, the United States' position as ally and its status in the intellectuals' cognitive map had been greatly challenged.<sup>24</sup> As the first signal of anti-Americanism, several students at Jeonnam University in the South Jeolla province set fire to the Gwangju American Culture Center in 1980 to criticize the American responsibility for Gwangju and its support of the Chun dictatorship.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See Lee Yeonghui and Im Heon'yeong, *Daehwa [Conversation]* (Gyeonggido pajusi: Hangilsa, 2005); Park Migyeong, "Gwangju *minjung* hangjaeng gwa miguk ui gaeip gujo" ["The Gwangju *Minjung* Uprising and the U.S.'s Structural Involvement"], in *Gwangju minjung hangjaeng yeogu* (Seoul: Sagejeol, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> Lee Namhee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, New York, and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 110.

<sup>25</sup> The participants included Im Jongsu, Jeong Suncheol, Kim Donghyeok, Park Sihyeong, and Yun Jonghyeong, and others.

During the period 1980–82, South Korean universities across the nation were swamped by the movement of campus liberalization fueled by universities’ endorsement of pro-government professors, the reinstatement of expelled students and dissident professors, and the refusal of many to undergo military training.<sup>26</sup> Their campus protests shifted to a political struggle against Chun’s military dictatorship. At Gyeonghee University, radical students produced anti-government leaflets and initiated campus protests, actions that were repeated at other universities in 1980. On December 11, 1980, Seoul National University students spread “The declaration of anti-Fascist student struggle” amid the campus protests, which led to the *Murim* Incident in 1980. Beginning with the arrest of nine students, more than eighty underground circle members were arrested, interrogated, and in some cases forcefully conscripted. On March 9, 1981, an “Anti-Fascist declaration for the state of the situation” was read at SNU and other university campuses.

At the same time, there were ideological debates between different factions on the university campus, which were largely summarized as the *murim* and the *hakrim*. The *murim* faction, from which the SNU activists took their guiding ideology, strategies, and tactics, believed that activists should not give the Chun regime any excuse for its violent oppression. Instead, aligning with the public, they argued that they should achieve democratization through the process of revising the Constitution, holding direct elections, and bringing the progressive party into rule.<sup>27</sup> The *hakrim*

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<sup>26</sup> Gang Sincheol, *80nyeondae haksang undongsa* [*The History of Student Movement in the 1980s*] (Hyeongseongsa, 1988), 21. Their propaganda and campus protests continued throughout April and May. On May 27, the SNU students tried to hold a “Commemoration for the Victims of the Gwangju Incident” at noon. However, obstructed by the police and the university, they instead protested for three hours. The martyr Kim Taehun killed himself by jumping from the railing of the library, chanting anti-fascist slogans as he fell. His suicide galvanized the protesters into a high spirit, who continued their demonstration for three days (until the 29th). They advanced to the Silrimdong area. Quote no. 4 in *Ibid.* 21.

<sup>27</sup> Park Seonghyeon, “Muhak nonjaeng” [“Debates on Literature”], in *80 nyeondae han’guk sahoe daenonjaeng* [Big Debates of the 1980s’ Korean Society], edited by *JoongAng Daily* (JoongAng Ilbo, 1990), 241.



argued that they should wage a militant struggle for revolution, mobilize student activists as the vanguard, and collaborate with senior student activists working in the labor *hyeonjang*.<sup>28</sup> In the 1980s, the *hakrim* became the mainstream political line of the *undonggwon*.

### Artistic Dissent by Candlelight

Before Reality and Utterance's founding exhibition took place, several other artists had already articulated their shock and anger at the Gwangju massacre. For instance, at the Seoul Contemporary Art Festival,<sup>29</sup> Choe Cheolhwan displayed *Citizens* in a sculptural piece, alluding to Gwangju citizens; in an independent exhibition at the National Contemporary Korean Art Museum, Kim Jangseop displayed a beast covered with blood and a black-colored figure.<sup>30</sup> Seventy-six young artists and actors from Hongik Art College staged a resistant gesture by equating Hamlet with Kim Jaegyu and by coining the term "guerilla aesthetics," at the "Bundo Contemporary Art Festival" (November 9–15, 1980).<sup>31</sup>

Even though such critical voices grew louder, the efforts undertaken by Reality and Utterance were seen as disquieting and dangerous in their divergence from the standards of the time. The collective's members, both artists and critics, brought their works to their founding exhibition, as they wanted to combine art practice and theories. However, Choe Min, who experienced imprisonment and torture under the emergency decree of the Yusin, was concerned that the members might be hurt. Thus, they self-censored some strong works such as Yim Oksang's *Newspaper* [Figure E.1].

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 241–43.

<sup>29</sup> This took place at the assembly hall of the Arts and Culture Foundation. I could not ascertain the date of the exhibition.

<sup>30</sup> Choe Minhwa, "ouulhan gwanggi" ["Depressing Madness"], *Minjung misul 15nyeon 1980–1994* [Minjung Misul 15 Years: 1980–1994], 31.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

The members' founding exhibition was to be held at the state-funded Cultural and Art Promotion Hall, from October 17 through October 23, 1980, but it was abruptly cancelled. The Cultural and Art Promotion Department was created in 1973, based on the laws of Culture and Art Promotion in 1972, and was aimed at supporting art and cultural project and activities, encompassing basic cultural fields and nonprofit experiments.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, their exhibition was cancelled a day before its scheduled opening by its art council committee. The committee, which consisted of people in the art and culture field, feared that the collective's socially critical artworks would irritate the military authorities. The committee then tried to stop the exhibition by cutting off the hall's electricity and prohibiting guests from entering the space.

Still, even such dramatic official action did not stop the members from furtively admitting their friends by candlelight.<sup>33</sup> One member, Kim Jeongheon, recalled that it was so dark that those in the audience could only steal a glance at the art.<sup>34</sup> A month later, the members continued their exhibition at the Dongsanbang Art Gallery on November 13 through 19, 1980, in Seoul. Many viewers were delighted to find that the Reality and Utterance artworks commented on sociopolitical reality, although some thought the collective's artistic expressions too rough to be considered art.<sup>35</sup>

In the displayed works, the Reality and Utterance member Kim Jeongheon criticized modernization and consumerist culture by creating the photomontages "Walking with Tomboys" [Figure E.2] and "For Affluent Life... Lucky Monoryum" [Figure E.3]. Both works juxtaposed the life of farmers with that of refined urban

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<sup>32</sup> [www.kcaf.or.kr](http://www.kcaf.or.kr).

<sup>33</sup> Their guests included, among others, the professor/journalist Rhee Yeonghui, the art critics Kim Yunsu, Kim Inhwon, Yu Junsang, and Lee Guyeol, the poets Hwang Myeonggeol and Choe Harim, the publisher Lee Giwung, and professor Park Hyeonsu.

<sup>34</sup> Kim Jeongheon, "Sureul neomu jinghage meok'eotta" ["We Drank Too Much"], *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongne saram* [*Oh Yun: People of the World, People of the Town*] (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2010), 147.

<sup>35</sup> The author's interview with Shin Hakcheol on July 14, 2008.

dwellers, demonstrating their disparate lifestyles and wealth as well as the intrusion of modernization in farming villages. Yim Oksang used a newspaper that reported the throes of “Seoul’s Spring” at the university campus. He mockingly placed eyes and a stuck-out tongue on it, as if laughing at the authorities. This newspaper reappeared as part of another work, his renowned *Newspaper* (1980).

Reality and Utterance members such as Ju Jaehwan and Oh Yun addressed a problem in the current art world: artists’ minimal engagement with society. Ju pokes fun at *dansaekhwa* in *The Beginning and End of Ship Typhoon Avant-Garde* [Figure E.4]; the title includes the name of a ship (*Taepung Avant-garde ho*). However, the ship is not included in the pictorial representation. This work, a series of marked boxes, reminds one of *dansaekhwa*, as it shows repeated lines or the doodling of circles on a monochrome background. As the viewer “appreciates” the boxes/*dansaekhwa*, s/he comes to find that they are the visual rearrangement of pieces of a picture of a man lounging in the summertime. The boxes (*dansaekhwa*) partially show microscopic parts of the larger picture, so they distort and erase its political and cultural implications. Oh Yun, who expressed stronger criticism of the contemporary art practices, submitted a woodcut print of a mother and child with a hard hat hovering above them in the air [Figure E.5]. He cynically writes about how “empty” artworks were reborn within webs of collective actions by artists, critics, galleries, and the mass media.

Despite the initial difficulty, subsequent works by Reality and Utterance were well received in conventional art galleries. The members actively participated in individual and group art exhibitions, such as the “Contemporary Art Workshop” (June 1981) and the “City and Vision” exhibition at the Lotte Gallery (1981). Also, Yim Oksang, Kim Jeongheon, and Sim Jeongsu displayed their works based on the recommendations of art critics in the exhibition “Nomination of the Year 1981

Problematic Artists” from January 6 to February 12, 1981, at the Seoul Art Museum.<sup>36</sup>

It is important to note that during the first half of the 1980s, when the dissident art critic Kim Yunsu was its director, this museum introduced socially conscious art and works of the French New Figuration. Moreover, several works by Reality and Utterance members were introduced through articles in *Quarterly Art* such as “The Real Sites of Eleven Artists, New Figuration” (1981) and “Today’s Twelve Young Artists” (1982).

### **Other Networks beyond the Barricade**

The artworks or “utterances” of Reality and Utterance were perceived as breaking a common protocol of communication at that time. Any clearly legible forms of expression with easily interpreted messages were subject to censorship and oppression by the authoritarian Park and Chun governments. Not surprisingly, newspapers were the first target of the Chun government. The Freedom Journalism Movement, initiated by the *DongA* journalists in 1971, was expanded during “the Spring of Seoul” from October 26, 1979, until right before the 1980 Gwangju Uprising by *DongA Daily*, *JoongAng Daily*, the Journalist Association, the Christian Broadcasting Association, and others. However, following the declaration of martial law on May 17, the Chun Doo Hwan regime charged conscientious journalists with the crime of circulating groundless rumors, or conspiracy to incite a riot.<sup>37</sup> The military government also closed down 172 periodicals in the name of the “Resolution for Voluntary

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<sup>36</sup> For the exhibition, eleven young art critics (all under forty years old) chose one artist each and three of his/her works that represented important trends in the development of contemporary Korean art. This exhibition was an experiment for art critics insofar as the usual practice of critics was to merely compliment or confirm artists’ works without much intervention. This curatorial experiment was made possible because the Seoul Art Museum was built in 1981 by Yim Setaek, a former member of Reality and Utterance, and was the nation’s the first non-commercial gallery.

<sup>37</sup> Jeong Unhyeon, “Eolron tongpehap” [“Closure and Unification of the Press”], *gokpilro bon haebang 50nyeon* (Haneul, 1995), 371.

Purification” on July 30, 1980, including the influential journals *Creation and Critique* and *Voices of Seeds*.<sup>38</sup>

During the Gwangju Uprising of 1980, newspapers reported the dictated words of the coup-established government, despite resistance on the part of some conscientious journalists. The Gwangju citizens were characterized as communists, armed violent mobs, and reactionary factions. Because all newspapers and media were heavily censored by the military authorities, some conservative newspapers, such as the *Joseon Daily*, even praised the deployment of the military to protect the safety of Gwangju citizens.<sup>39</sup> Tightly controlled by the Chun government, the media coverage distorted and silenced the unspeakable pain and sorrow of the people of Gwangju. It is not surprising that the protesters burned down the Munhwa Broadcasting Company (MBC) for airing soap operas and entertainment programs amid the state’s ruthless killing of its own citizens.<sup>40</sup>

While the state controlled and blocked information about the Gwangju uprising, it also cut off any possible connections that Gwangju citizens had to the outside, thoroughly isolating Gwangju from the rest of the country. Under these circumstances, Gwangju citizens created their own *Fighters’ Newspaper* (*Tusa hoebo*) and *Democratic Citizens’ Newspaper* (*minju simin hoebo*).<sup>41</sup> Because of their complete isolation, however, they were unable to appeal to others for relief from the appalling violence, as the Chun government had all the advantages following the massacre.<sup>42</sup> Catholic Priests Seeking Justice (*Jeong’ui guhyeon sajedan*) tried to

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<sup>38</sup> Kim Jeongnam, *Jinsil gwangjang e seoda: minjuhwa undong 30 nyeon ui yeoksa* [Truth Standing in a Public Sphere: The 30 Year-History of the Democratization Movement] (Seoul: Changbi, 2005), 392.

<sup>39</sup> Kang Junman, *Hanguk hyeondaesa sanchaek 1980. no. 1* [Walking into Contemporary Korean History 1980. no. 1] (Seoul: Yinmul gwa sasangsa, 2003), 173.

<sup>40</sup> *Jeugeumeul neomeo sidae ui eodumeul neomeo: Gwangju minjung hangjaeng ui girok* [Overcoming Death, Overcoming the Era’s Shadow: Record of the Gwangju Uprising], recorded by Hwang Seok’yeong, edited by Jeonnam sahoe undong hyeopuihoe (Pulbit, 1985, 1995), 77.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>42</sup> Choe Jeong’oun, *Ohwol ui sahoehak* [Sociology of May] (Pulbit, 1999), 159.

expose the situation in Gwangju, but several major figures—Oh Taesun, Yang Hong, Kim Taekam, Ahn Chungseok, Jang Deokpil, and others—were arrested for “spreading rumors.”<sup>43</sup>

Despite the blockage of *sotong*, foreign journalists and international church networks rekindled dialogue between the Gwangju citizens and the world. Pastor Park Hyeonggyu, who was accused of conspiracy to foment rebellion, first learned of Gwangju at the World Council of Churches meeting in Australia in 1980. While in flight from Tokyo, he learned of the details from the television news footage of Gwangju that was being covered on the spot by the German journalist Jürgen Hinzpeter of ARD-NDR.<sup>44</sup> The recording of this program was broadcast on May 22 in West Germany, and the Gwangju massacre was soon known to the world.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, the Japanese journal *Sekai* provided a series of “Correspondences from Korea” by an anonymous “TK Student” from 1973 to 1988.<sup>46</sup> This recurring dispatch was the result of successful collaborations among the managing editor of the journal, Yasue Ryosuke, several priests and pastors, and dissident intellectuals in Korea and Japan, whose identities were kept under tight guard.<sup>47</sup> With the support of the WCC (World Council of Churches), many foreign missionaries worked and protested with families of the political prisoners, met with the American ambassador, and sent sensitive news to the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the

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<sup>43</sup> Kim Jeongnam, 382.

<sup>44</sup> Park Hyeonggyu, *Na ui mideum eun gil wie itta*, 363.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 362.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 367. It has been said that the KCIA tried strenuously to learn the identity of TK Student, but it failed. Although more people were involved over the long years of publication, the major process of the publication can be attributed to the following individuals: the NCKK’s Pastor Kim Gwangseok (gathering information and sending it to Japan); Prof. Oh Jaesik (materials delivered to him); Prof. Ji Myeongwan (writing an article in Japanese); and chief editor Yasue Ryosuke (copied Ji’s writing to disguise the handwriting style). When Korean writings were sent, Prof. Wada Haruki translated and sent them to the editor-in-chief. All the materials were secretly saved at the UIM office of the Christian Assembly Hall in Japan. They were donated to the National History Compilation Committee. Park Hyeonggyu, 370.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

*Christian Science Monitor*.<sup>48</sup> They even created fact sheets on human rights abuses and spread them around the world.<sup>49</sup> The government's press censorship, in fact, allowed the Gwangju citizens, the progressive Christian Church, and other dissidents, as well as their global supporters, to create their networks in reality and in their cognitive map. If they configured their international counterpublic sphere, how did art mimic and bring it out in artistic language and dialogue with viewers? The Reality and Utterance member Yim Oksang took the challenge by recreating a visual newspaper for maximum *sotong*.

### **Repurposing the Newspaper for the Utterance of Reality**

Yim Oksang was born in 1950 in Buyeo, Chungnam province, in the southwestern region of Korea. Although he did not live in affluence like many of the post-war generation did, his course as an artist followed an elite path. He was admitted to the painting department at Seoul National University, and in 1974, two years after earning his bachelor's degree, he graduated from the same university with a master's degree. From his early career on, Yim painted the Korean sociopolitical realities, shaped by the devastating war experiences and post-war reconstruction and modernization. He was employed as an art professor at Gwangju Educational College from 1979 to 1981, and from 1981 on, he taught at the Department of Arts at Jeonju University. He held his first and second solo exhibitions in 1981 and 1983, both of which were well received by the press. In 1984 when the *undonggwon* and *minjung misul* were beginning to be radicalized, unlike other *minjung* artists who became more involved in political activism, he studied abroad at the Angouleme Art School in France for two years, by chance. His experience as a minority allowed him to connect to other

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 373.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

minorities in French society, as demonstrated by the grand scale of his scroll painting, *Modern History of Africa* [Figure E.6].

Yim Oksang, who dwelt in dialogue with other social minorities later, initiated art's *sotong* by communicating with the painful experiences of many Koreans, such as the Gwangju Uprising. Yim, who lived in Jeonju, just several miles away from the city of Gwangju, attempted to contemplate what art is and how it can engage with unspeakable violence. In particular, he wondered, in an environment in which any visual and written signs that arouse the state's suspicions can cause one to be arrested, tortured, and/or imprisoned, how can art exist at all in a dialogical way? He felt an urgent need to address the issue of *sotong*, by acknowledging and responding to the tragedy and by expressing the paradoxical role of newspapers through his art.

Yim's collage work *Newspaper* remakes itself into a "visual" newspaper by assembling seemingly unrelated interactions between "readers" and newspapers [Figure E.7]. A man reading a newspaper is already "blind" and looks at things through the lens of a pro-government newspaper, as his glasses are already covered with "newspaper" (*shinmun*) and "daily news" (*ilbo*) in Chinese characters. Appropriated from the earlier work *Newspaper* (1980), his newspaper with the eyes and stuck-out tongue suggests either that it is laughing at its readers' stupidity as it exhibits confidence in its overwhelming influence or that the artist is mocking the silliness of a newspaper pretending to be an unbiased source of information. This "scornful" newspaper also elicits annoyance. It is impossible to take this shallow paper seriously, so it "helps" one instead to commit oneself to constructively engaging with the issues of the time. Ironically, only when these "leaflets" are used in people's everyday lives—such as for wiping their butts, blowing their noses, or smoking cigarettes—do they serve any useful purpose in people's lives.



Yim questions conventional art practices as well: although newspapers retain their “form,” they have little “content” (or facts). They exist for the sake of nothing more than their own existence. Similarly, Yim believes that contemporary Korean art was alienated from everyday life because it limited its potential as a medium of discursive expression through formalistic experimentation.<sup>50</sup> Here, what he problematizes is not artistic experimentation itself but the stylistic posture of many artists as a means of hegemonic struggle. His central issue is the possibility that art can stimulate one to rethink the relationship between the individual and society, especially by taking the form of an emphatic dialogue between artist, viewer, and their reality.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, following the Gwangju Uprising, he could not afford to make his art appear to be too analogous to reality.

Yim Oksang’s work *Newspaper*, produced after Gwangju, is his urgent and angry statement in response to the government’s atrocities. At a time when much of the information about these events was being distorted and silenced, his work plays the role of an actual, objective newspaper. It also carries the voices of the people into the future, when they will learn the truth about Gwangju. At first glance, his casual use of Chinese characters and ink stone suggests that newspapers are useful primarily for practicing calligraphy. However, Yim gives the Chun government a stern warning, using a proverb. He writes: “Strong Yang people (or Liang in Chinese, 502–587) are destined to lose; a person who thrives on force perishes by force.” Thus, he declares that after what the government did in Gwangju, there is no way for it to stay in power.<sup>52</sup> By including this proverb as though it were his own “utterance,” the artist

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<sup>50</sup> Han Unseong, Oh Yun, Kim Jeongheon, Yim Oksang, et al., “Jwadam: Misul ui sunsuseong gwa hyeonsil uisik” [“Round Table Discussion: Art’s Purity and the Reality Consciousness”], *Sigak gwa eoneo*, 1 (1982): 279.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> From the author’s interview with Yim Oksang on July 17, 2008.

recreates his painting as a site of dissent that would never be tolerated in a public space.

### Opening the Closed Circuit

As Yim Oksang's work suggests, the idea of *sotong* involves inviting the viewer into dialogue with the artist about their respective (and possibly shared) realities. For this reason, *sotong* is often considered to be an artistic reference to the social and political. This does not necessarily imply, however, that realism or figuration is the only appropriate artistic form. For instance, the members of the Youth Artists Federation, who experimented with *objet*, installation, happenings, and Op Art, marched in the streets with picket signs on December 12, 1967. Reflecting their critical attitudes concerning the existing art world and social conditions, they carried signboards with slogans such as "artworks after abstract art," "artists who act," "figurative *gukjeon*," and "Korea without a contemporary art museum."<sup>53</sup>

If these messages made their performance "legible," the Reality and Utterance members and others still believed that much of contemporary Korean art existed in a vacuum. Seong gave this example from the works of *Informel* artists: right after April 19, 1960, at an art exhibition on the wall of Deoksu Palace in Seoul, *Informel* artists continued to display the same kinds of artworks as their earlier works.<sup>54</sup> Against such a perception, as mentioned earlier, Joan Kee demonstrates how the *dansaekhwa* works themselves imagined different worlds under the oppressive Yusin regime. Similarly, the prominent *dansaekhwa* artist Park Seobo contends, "By intentionally isolating art from society, [*dansaekhwa*] paradoxically reflects the social realities."<sup>55</sup> Here, one

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Kim Migyeong, *Han'guk ui silheom misul [Korea's Experimental Art]* (Seoul: Sigongsa, 2003), 48.

<sup>54</sup> From the author's interview with Seong Wan'gyeong on December 27, 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Yun Nanjie, "Jungseong gujo wa 'yiron ui jongmal': 'mannam ui hyeongsanghak' eseo gukjejuui e yireugikkaji" ["From Phenomenology of Encounter to Internationalism"], 9. quoted in Jeong Heon'yi, "1970nyeondae ui han'guk dansaekjo hoehwa e daehan sogo: chimmuk ui hoehwa, geu mihakjeok

might ask, if these artists were heavily involved in the institutional struggle (e.g., the Hongik faction, or the Park Seobo coterie) and were supported by the state, what would be the basis for thinking that their works would operate outside of their pro-establishment mechanism? If such a thing were feasible, how much autonomy should one invest in his or her art, and how would the envisioning of worlds between viewer and artworks constitute its self-critiquing? To Yim and other members of Reality and Utterance, it did not seem viable to ask for such critical reflection from Korean modernism.

Belying the conventional view of *sotong*, the Reality and Utterance artists perceived the core of *sotong* to be a structural critique of that which constitutes the field of art, not merely a description of the external world. In the roundtable discussion “The Young Generation’s New Figuration” (1981), Kim Bog’yeong, the critic of the art collective S.T. (an experimental art group engaging in *objet*, installation, and *dansaekhwa*), and Choe Min, the art critic of Reality and Utterance, discuss the hyperrealism of South Korea. Kim Bog’yeong challenges the presumption that South Korean hyperrealism is merely a stylistic imitation. Kim argues that young artists replaced their *objet* with an “*objet*” on canvas or by using the canvas itself as an *objet*. Furthermore, Kim observes that these artists attempted to capture an emotional sensibility in their works—unlike the cold, objective hyperrealist works of the West.<sup>56</sup> The issue of Korean modernism as an imitation of Western modernism is further investigated later in this chapter.

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jauisik” [“Contemplation on 1970s’ Korean Monochrome Painting: Painting of Silence, Its Aesthetic Self-Consciousness”], in *Han’guk hyeondae misul dasi ilkki III: 70 yeondae han’guk gwa Ilbon ui hyeondae misul damrom yeon’gu* [Rereading Contemporary Korean Art: Studies of the 1970s’ Discourse on Contemporary Korean and Japanese Art], edited by Oh Sanggil (Seoul: ICAS, 2003), 361.

<sup>56</sup> Choe Min and Kim Bog’yeong, “Jeonsihoe ribyu: Jeolmun sedae ui saeroun hyeongsang, mueot eul wihan hyeon’san inga” [“Exhibition Review: Form by the Young Generation, For What It Exists”], *Gyegan misul*, 19 (Fall 1981): 139–46.

Choe Min acknowledges that the young artists respond to foreign styles in order to intervene in the art world of that time. However, he comments that their subject matter, such as bricks, sand, and grass, is value-neutral [Figure E.8 and Figure E.9]. Their indifference to depicting subject matter beyond form was very much like that of the abstract artists whom they challenged.<sup>57</sup> They are similar as well in substituting realistic representation for formalism.<sup>58</sup> He questions whether avant-garde art practices that share a similar ideological structure with what they seek to defy could ever achieve their goals, as evinced by the Western avant-garde's absorption into the establishment.<sup>59</sup>

Rather, the Reality and Utterance way of envisioning new art was based, first, on its institutional critique, and second, on its engaging with the sociopolitical reality through their personal narratives. The Reality and Utterance members were not dictating the form and subject matter that their art should take. Nonetheless, the hegemonic modernist practices made figurative form accompanied by social critique workable as a dialogue. In "Ben Shahn: The Gaze of Compassion and Anger toward Reality,"<sup>60</sup> Choe praises Shahn for his effort to investigate his true self by harmonizing the individual and universal values as concrete living realities.<sup>61</sup> Although Shahn practiced social realism, as seen in *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*<sup>62</sup> and in his work under the Farm Security Administration (FSA), he became suspicious of social realism in the 1930s.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. Seong views the failure of the Western avant-garde to be a result of its failure to reexamine art as a separate entity and its intermediary system (i.e., art schools, museums, markets, and information systems). The interlaced relationship between the two (art and the intermediary systems) generates and enforces the idea of art as a peculiar and highly specialized sphere by experts. Thus, art itself becomes reality, and artists cannot create art except for art's sake.

<sup>60</sup> Choe Min, "Ben Shahn: The Gaze of Compassion and Anger toward Reality," in *Gyegan misul*, 23 (Fall 1980): 63–78.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>62</sup> This work represents the trial of two anarchist Italian immigrants, Nicola Sacco and Bartolommeo Vanzetti, convicted of murder on flimsy evidence. They were tried for robbing and killing two payroll officers on April 15, 1921. They were executed in 1927.

Choe writes that Shahn diagnoses the failure of social realism not as a result of the ways in which artworks manifest sociopolitical realities or express the idea of social reform, but as a result of the incongruity of political ideology with art. Shahn acknowledges that only individuals' artistic imaginations, not some collective view, can truly make art engaging. Choe's positive evaluation of Shahn's transformation also marks a similarity with the Reality and Utterance artists' depiction of their own realities: being city dwellers in their thirties. Their position, however, became a point of contention among the younger generation of socially conscious artists who believed that their art should represent the collective Korean experience and future. In addition, as the art historian Han Jin points out, Choe's omission of Shahn's leftist and Marxist activities is an acknowledgment that Reality and Utterance members carefully dissociated themselves from Socialist Realism and other ideological formulae.<sup>63</sup>

If Choe concerns himself with the space of art between the individual and the social, Seong Wan'gyeong rethinks the role of art in mass, industrialized society. Prior to two exhibitions on French New Figuration, "Movements in Contemporary European Art" (April 24–May 30, 1982) and "French New Figuration Painting" (July 10–August 15, 1982), Seong, who had recently studied in France, introduced a group of critical figuration artists in the 1960s and 1970s, the *Nouvelle Figuration*.<sup>64</sup> He writes that this art movement was ushered in and influenced by the events of May 1968, "the first signal that predicted a refusal of universal formalism created in the

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<sup>63</sup> Kim Jeongheon, interview by Han Jin, October 8, 2002, New York City, New York. Quoted in Han Jin, 176. Examples of Shahn's activism include his involvement with the John Reed Club School of Art, the Artist's Union, the Artists' Committee of Action, and the radical journal *Art Front*.

<sup>64</sup> As the title suggests, Seong Wan'gyeong introduces "another aspect" of Western contemporary art, which breathes with society. By doing so, he implies that Korean artists' reception of Western art turned into "academicism" and became "kitschified" or "mutated." Such "distortions" in the development of contemporary Korean art resulted from limited channels of reception, art's theorization and its abstract critique, and the expansion of international art institutions, and the like. Seong Wan'gyeong, "Oneul ui eureop misul eul suyong ui sigak euro bon seogu hyeondae misul ui ttodareun myeonmo" ["New Aspect of Western Contemporary Art from the Perspective of Receiving Today's European Art"], in *Gyegan misul*, 21 (Spring 1982): 127–66.

Western techno-bureaucratic society.”<sup>65</sup> He discusses several art collectives that attempted to break the division between art and everyday life, to question the ideology of art as well as avant-garde’s true nature, and to reflect upon the rich visual culture of contemporary society. He concludes that Korean art should assume a dialogical form in the process of producing social and cultural values.

To achieve a breakthrough in new art, Seong Wan’gyeong proposes “maximum *sotong*” outside the closed circuit of the existing art establishment in the exhibition catalogue “Shape of Happiness” (1982).<sup>66</sup> He defines maximum in contrast to minimum *sotong*. Minimum *sotong* is conceptualized in terms of individualism, originality, or particular styles. He says that when many Korean artists received Western modernism, they chose something “non-angular,” which is easy to follow and safe, among other things based on their idea of art’s autonomy—lyrical, charming, and abstract.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, maximum *sotong* perceives art as energy that operates organically in the context of reality.<sup>68</sup> Thus, art aims to unite the real and imaginative spaces, eliminating any forces obstructing the unity between them, which he defines as *sotong*.<sup>69</sup> He conceptualizes it as a key to liberating art and artists from institutional oppression and to making a new art.

The members’ interest in an expansive form of *sotong* can be found in their studies of comics, illustrations, commercial art, architecture, and cinema. For instance, Kim Jeongheon, who explores murals as viable examples of everyday/democratic communication,<sup>70</sup> completed a mural project, “Prayers for Dreams,” for the prison at

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>66</sup> Seong Wan’gyeong, “Choedaehan ui sotong gwa Choesohan ui sotong” [“Maximum Dialogue, Minimum Dialogue”], *Guerim gwa mal* [Art and Speech], 1982: 33.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Seong Wan’gyeong, “Misul jedo ui banseong gwa geureup undong ui saeroun yi’nyeom” [“Reflection of Art Institution and New Discourse of Art Collective”], *Guerim gwa mal*, 1982: 90.

<sup>70</sup> Kim Jeongheon, “Hwan’gyeonjeok komyunikeishyeon” [“Environmental Communication”], *Guerim gwa mal*, 1982: 38–43.

Gongju, Chungcheong province, in 1985. Kim Yongtae admired posters for their mass communicability and relationship to the city's landscape in his writing.<sup>71</sup>

### **Embracing Korean-ness in Figuration**

The members of Reality and Utterance focused on inventing a new dialogical language in everyday communication. However, their endeavors were easily aligned with dissident art critics' contemplation of national art. As a matter of fact, their assessment of Korean modernism—as lacking engagement with society and featuring stylistic imitation—intersected with the dissidents' critique of modern Korean art. What differentiated Reality and Utterance from the dissident art critics is that the dissident critics wanted to apply art within the boundary of the nation. Despite the dissimilarities between the two groups' visions of art, the fervent nationalist atmosphere made their different approaches to *sotong* indistinguishable to many. This situation is no different from the lack of distinction between dissident and state nationalism in the discussion of *minjung misul* and the existing modernism. For instance, the figurative form that the socially conscious artists often appropriated was read as a signifier of state nationalism because of its legibility and its depiction of “national” events.

Within an environment dominated by abstract painting, some young artists experimented with hyperrealism in the 1970s. Kim Hyeonggeun's *Target* (1970) [Figure E.10] is often considered “the origin” of hyperrealism in South Korea, and the artist received a presidential award at the Nineteenth National Art Competition at Gukjeon in 1970.<sup>72</sup> *Target* is the image of a target with three arrows represented on a

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<sup>71</sup> Kim Yongtae, “Posteo neun gilgo gin toron eul daesinhaan iksal” [“Poster that Replaces Long Debates with Humor”], *Guerim gwa mal*, 1982: 58–63.

<sup>72</sup> Kim Migyeong, “Hanguk dansaekjo ihu, ‘sinhyeongsang’ ui uimi” [“After Dansaekjo, Meaning of ‘New Figuration’”], in *Han’guk hyeondae misul 197080* [Contemporary Korean Art 197080], edited by Han’guk hyeondae misulsa yeon’guhoe (Seoul: Hakyon munhwasa, 2004), 77.

canvas that mimics a wooden wall. Its meticulous execution and minimum sense of space emphasize its photographic detail as well as its flatness. Thus, it exists in the space between illusion and formalism, between “thing-ness” and art.<sup>73</sup> Despite its distinctive characteristics, *Target* won a prize in the traditional category of figuration at Gukjeon. The arrows and target were viewed as expressing *hwarang*’s spirit during the Silla kingdom (57 B.C.–991 A.D.), located in the southeastern part, or Gyeongsang province, of the peninsula. Here, the term *hwarang* refers to an elite youth group whose members practiced the self-cultivation of mind and body that contributed to the unification of the Three Kingdoms (676 A.D.). Thus, the subject matter well corresponded to President Park’s fostering of military strength and patriotism.<sup>74</sup>

Against reading figuration as a “crucial document of Korean-ness,” the art historian Yun Nanjie argues that hyperrealism should be viewed through the prism of “realism” in general rather than “Korean realism.”<sup>75</sup> She argues that, because of its universal aesthetics, hyperrealism, or photographic description, could not be easily “Koreanized.”<sup>76</sup> Here, the indigenization of hyperrealism needs to be subdivided into a transcendental Korean aesthetic and a dialogue with its “context.” When Choe Min and the dissident critics allude to the imitation of hyperrealism, they mean the latter. Thus, it is crucial to distinguish between state nationalism and dissident nationalism in the discourse of imitation if one is to grasp the critical stances of *minjung misul* that are different from those of other contemporary Korean art forms.

Because of hyperrealism’s limited ability to drastically change itself to “Korean” art in appearance, Yun Nanjie perceives that it has been an easy target for

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<sup>73</sup> Yun Nanjie, “Han’guk geuksasilhwa ui ‘sasipseong’ damron” [“The Discourse of ‘Realism’ in Hyperreal Paintings of Korea”], *Misul sahak*, 8 (2000): 75.

<sup>74</sup> Kim Migyeong, 78.

<sup>75</sup> Yun Nanjie, 78.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.



critiques of “imitation.” Yet, without distinguishing between the state and dissident nationalism, Yun opines that a dissident Kim Yunsu voices the nationalists’ position, whose supreme task is to find “ours.”<sup>77</sup> She interprets Kim’s “indigenization” as such, quoting Kim: “[the artists can’t] find a new figuration which is indigenized. [They are] swept away by the foreign popular trends.”<sup>78</sup> Employing similar logic, defining 1980s’ Korea as an “archetype of the Third World Hybrid Space,” Yun Nanjie argues that *minjung misul* is the visual articulation of a “purity complex” that developed in reaction to “the crisis of mixed blood.”<sup>79</sup> She thus discusses deliberations within Reality and Utterance as an example of chauvinistic ethnic nationalism.

Because such observations were offered at a time when *minjung misul* was little studied, one needs to pay closer attention to the relationship between state and dissident nationalism, as well as to that between socially conscious art and *minjung misul*. Since Yun’s analysis emerged more than a decade after democratization in 1987, the aims and aspirations of the collective were retrospectively read in a *post hoc* manner, by aligning with the later *minjung* artists. At the same time, such a lumping-together demonstrates the sociopolitical situation in which Reality and Utterance became intertwined in the public mind with other socially conscious artist groups of the early 1980s.

### **Between Art, the People-Nation, and Humanism**

Just as the Korean nation was conceptualized in opposition to internal and external “enemies” by the dissidents, the people-nation was emphasized through its collectivity and through certain cultural and political practices. Yim Oksang and his colleagues

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>79</sup> Yun Nanjie, “Honseong gonggan euroseo ui minjung misul” [“Minjung Misul as Space of Hybridity”], *Hyeondae misul nonjip* [Collection of Studies on Contemporary Art], edited by Han’guk hyeondae misulsa yeonguhoe (Seoul: Hakyeonsa, 2009), 109.

also dealt with Korean history and contemporary developments, beyond the issues pertaining to art institutions and to mass as well as consumerist society. However, they repudiated any interpretation of their *sotong* as an expression of transcendental Korean-ness. Instead, they perceived their artworks as enlarging their connection with others in an artistic expression of humanism.

In his article “Is Korean Art Simple (and Honest)?” Yim Oksang criticized the notions of traditional aesthetics, such as “beauty of sadness and line,” “simple and honest,” for their lack of historicity and a rigidity that disallowed other forms of expression.<sup>80</sup> He problematized the idea of simplicity in Korean art based on agrarian aesthetics. Instead, he opined that a unique Korean aesthetics could be developed out of their interactions with historical, socioeconomic, and cultural circumstances, expanding their horizon to all of humanity. Thus, Yim concluded that it is most characteristic of Korean art to create freely without being circumscribed by tradition and or blindly following foreign art trends.<sup>81</sup>

The Reality and Utterance idea of *sotong* and artworks was reassessed by several younger artists who called their and common people’s art “living art.” For instance, influenced by the national culture movement, the art collective Dureong (meaning “ridges in the rice field,” 1982–)<sup>82</sup> asserted that art should synthesize the collective life of the people with their legitimate future. The members of Dureong diagnosed their era as rampant with commercial and alienating culture. In the formation of a new national art, they considered the aesthetics of folk tradition to be crucial. Although laborers made up seventy percent of the national population, they also saw that no labor culture existed. The Dureong members decided to create such a

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<sup>80</sup> Yim Oksang, “Han’guk misul eun sobakhan ga” [“Is Korean Art Simple (and Honest)?”], *Guerim gwa mal*, 1982: 52.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>82</sup> According to Kim Bongjun, a Dureong member, their collective has never been disbanded, although its members no longer work as a group.

culture, one free of ideological premises.<sup>83</sup> In addition, they argued that by emphasizing collaborations in art-making, art could become a communal *sotong*, breathing with the *minjung*'s life as "living art."<sup>84</sup> Kim Bongjun and Dureong are discussed further in the following chapter.

The contention of these younger artists can be glimpsed in a roundtable discussion that took place several years later, "What Have the People's/National Art Groups Sought?," in 1988.<sup>85</sup> Yim Oksang affirmed that by connecting art with the individual's life and imagination, the content of their works became enriched and diversified.<sup>86</sup> The art critic Sim Gwanghyeon, nonetheless, suggested that by privileging the individual's viewpoint over the structural or ideological perspective,<sup>87</sup> their *sotong* became unscientific, self-regulated, and arbitrary, easily devolving into culturalism.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, it was alleged that Reality and Utterance represented the *minjung*'s sociopolitical reality with an intellectual perspective and specialist Westernized forms of expression.<sup>89</sup> It is important to note that the Reality and Utterance members had not used the term *minjung*, nor had they called their art *minjung misul*.

Yim Oksang's *Earth IV* (1980) and *II* (1981)<sup>90</sup> [Figure E.11 and Figure E.12] will be examined to scrutinize such dissimilar positions on a visual and discursive level. His works, which depict the sufferings of Gwangju citizens, appear to reflect Kim Yunsu's definition of national art. The Reality and Utterance members

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>84</sup> Art collective Dureong, "*Sal'a itneun misul undong eul wihayeo*" [*For a Living Art Movement*], 1984.

<sup>85</sup> Yim Oksang, Kim Bongjun, et al., "Minjung minjok misul gureup undong eun mueot eul chuguhae watneunga" ["What Has the People's/National Art Group Movement Sought?"], *Gyegan misul*, 46 (Summer 1988): 63–76.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>87</sup> The art critic Kim Yunsu asks whether their efforts for *sotong* might be directed primarily at intellectuals like themselves, not made accessible to the general public.

<sup>88</sup> Yim Oksang, Kim Bongjun, et al., 68.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> The production years of the *Earth* series do not correspond to the numerical order of the series.

nonetheless distinguished themselves from other *minjung* artists who view their works as aligned with a national and *minjung* ideology or with Marxism-Leninism. This work actually provides multiple points of entry, precisely by its refusal to be anchored to certain cultural and political practices or certain standards of discourse such as Western versus Korean, modern versus traditional, or intellectual versus *minjung*. By first walking into Yim's *Earth*, it was my intention throughout this chapter to demonstrate the context of the dialogical formation and process of *minjung misul*, through the debates between him and other younger artists, which took place beyond his canvases.

### **The Bleeding Earth**

Ah ah, Gwangju, Mount Mudeung

Between death and death  
Shedding tears of blood  
Our eternally youthful city.

Where are our fathers,  
Where are our mothers,  
Our sons,  
Where are they killed and buried,  
Our lovely daughters  
Where they lie down with their mouths open  
And where our ghosts  
Are torn up and broken into pieces.

[ . . . ]  
Gwangju,  
Even the God and a flock of birds abandoned,  
But only true men  
Survive day and night  
Collapse and rise again.  
The city of our bloodshed  
Through death, [we] overcome death  
Through death, [we] regain life

Ah ah, the southern province of wailing  
A phoenix (from the ashes), phoenix, and phoenix.

[ . . . ]

Ah ah, our city  
Our songs, dreams, and love  
Are sometimes surged like waves  
Sometimes buried like graves  
Ah ah, Gwangju Gwangju  
Bearing the cross of this nation  
Crossing over the Mount Mudeung  
Crossing over the Golgotha,  
Ah ah, the son of God  
Whose whole body is nothing but wounds and death.

[ . . . ]

Jesus was dead once  
And resurrected once,  
Live until today and live forever  
However, after hundreds' death  
Our true love will resurrect a hundred times  
Our light, glory, and pains  
[ . . . ]

—Kim Juntae's "Ah ah, Gwangju, Our Cross!"

Kim wrote this poem on the overhead bridge, sobbing at the street scene of bloodshed, in Gwangju. The state's atrocities were horrific, far beyond the capacity of artistic expression to convey. Even so, Yim views art as a feasible means of sharing pain and trauma with the viewer. Yim, who as noted lived just several miles from the city of Gwangju, wrote, "Gwangju allowed no word. . . . When we are driven to a situation in which we cannot communicate in words certain truths or facts, painting can be, I believe, more effective than words as a way of communication."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Seong Wan'gyeong, "Dugae ui munhwa, dugae ui jipyeong" ["Two Cultures, Two Horizons"], in *Minjung misul, modeonijeum, sigak munhwa: saeroun hyeondae reul wihan seongchal* [*Minjung Misul, Modernism, Visual Culture: Reflection for New Modern*] (Seoul: Yeolhwadang, 1999), 89.

Yim Oksang's *Earth IV* articulates Gwangju citizens' experiences of atrocities in metaphors that evoke an almost physical sensation in their vivid and raw quality. In the oil painting, the green farm field is violently gouged by machines. The land that is dug up is strikingly red, as if bleeding and victimized. Moreover, the land's "bare skin" suggests the clotty feeling of real blood. Because of its striking fluorescent red and green colors, juxtaposed with the simplified landscape, this work exudes such a textural, sensory feeling of the wounded earth that the viewer's emotional response to it is immediate. This work enables the people who knew and experienced the incident to initiate dialogue among themselves and beyond, thus expanding the dialogical horizon of the Gwangju community.

Another painting of Yim Oksang's, *Earth II* (1981), captures historical narratives of the people's predicament through the land. It embeds this regional tragedy in their enduring history of oppression, while also underscoring the continuity with contemporary oppression. It represents the Man'gyeong plain in northern Jeolla province, where the city of Gwangju is located. The farm field and its surrounding mountains are executed in traditional Korean landscape-painting style, exuding an air of tranquility and harmony. Yet half of the land is totally devastated, with rough abrasions and cut-throughs, as if to imply the continuing misery of the Jeolla people.

At the center is a reservoir built during the colonial era. "The lifeline" of this agrarian community alludes to its regional history. The Man'gyeong plain of the Jeolla province, the largest breadbasket in Korea, has endured a long history of exploitation, from landlords to the local government of the Joseon dynasty to the colonial government to recent military dictatorships.<sup>92</sup> The unfortunate fate of the Jeolla people

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<sup>92</sup> This region was developed as a center of trade and shipping of grain by the Japanese colonial government. In order to supplement the shortage of grain in Japan, an increase in rice productivity was actively pursued by the colonial regional offices. Nonetheless, because the Man'gyeong plain is a fertile alluvial plain, the region easily suffered from flood damage. For the purposes of water control management, starting in 1922 several reservoirs were constructed, changing this region into well-irrigated grain paddies. As a result of these forced public works, plus excessive rice delivery to Japan,

was not improved by modernization. They were discriminated against by the central state through biases and prejudice against them, and such systematic regionalism became a hallmark of the Park Chung Hee regime. This was manifested in the exclusion of Jeolla province from economic development, not to mention from prominent political positions.<sup>93</sup> The mass media perpetuated negative images of the Jeolla people as untrustworthy, lazy, aggressive, and subversive.<sup>94</sup> The Gwangju Uprising was an outcome of such negative propaganda from the autocratic state as well as of long-brewing resentment against the regime by the Jeolla people.

Yim Oksang could visualize, as the art historian Park Soyang notes, the internal and external landscape of the Gwangju people and its historicity in a quite disturbing yet intensely emotional way. Such an affecting quality must have been noticed by the art critics. The painting *Earth IV* was introduced with ten other figurative works, including a few works of the members of Reality and Utterance, in the pictorial article “The Real Sites of Eleven Artists, New Figuration” in *Quarterly Art* (Summer 1981).<sup>95</sup> The police also placed Yim Oksang under their watchful eye, after viewing the works. It is not surprising that his works are difficult to categorize or associate with a particular set of ideas, that is, ideas about how socially conscious art or *minjung misul* should manifest itself.

If the critiques of Reality and Utterance are juxtaposed with Yim Oksang’s *Earth IV* or *Earth II*, a viewer can observe that the critiques were directed at external elements of his works, not at the works themselves. What were the “unscientific, individualized, and arbitrary” elements that Yim’s works supposedly possessed, according to the critics’ views? Neither *Earth IV* nor *Earth II* visualizes the national

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the peasants suffered severely from low wages, food shortages, excessive land fees and debts, and the loss of their lands.

<sup>93</sup> Lee Namhee, *The Making of Minjung*, 49.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> “11 in ui hyeonjang, sae gusanghwa” [“The Real Sites of Eleven Artists, New Figuration”], *Gyegan misul*, 18 (1981): 91–100.

predicament from the *minjung*'s perspective of historical sovereignty or from the perspective of social-scientific analysis. Instead, these artworks open themselves up to a process of dialogue with the viewer's historical pain and emotional trauma. In fact, an attempt to articulate the stance of the *minjung* cannot help but be intellectual and polemical, as it re-conceptualizes the people as the subject of a collective ideology with a political agenda.

The accusations that Yim Oksang's works were specialist and Westernized might be justified by his use of a Western medium such as oil painting. Not only does painting in oils require long years of academic training, but also oil paintings are typically displayed in gallery and museum settings. Some political artists, for this reason, considered such art to be part of or to serve the existing art world. At the same time, their binary notion of oil painting versus traditional brush painting overly simplified or reduced the actual complexities encompassed in the development of Korean modernism regarding the "origins" of artistic medium. The works of Yim and other members could not be easily placed within the increasingly rigid frame of dissident nationalism. They attempted everyday dialogue with the common folk. Yet, the nebulous nature of their *sotong* appeared to be out of sync, when the entire society was marching toward a unified aim: democracy.

## **Summary**

The envisioning of *sotong* by the artist Yim Oksang and the art collective Reality and Utterance from 1979 to 1981 has been examined thus far. Its development is often regarded as the beginning of *minjung misul*, because the period of its existence dovetails neatly with the South Korean sociopolitical situation at that time. Its inception, for example, corresponds with the collapse of the Park Chung Hee dictatorship in 1979 and the emergence of Chun Doo Hwan's worsening dictatorship,



following the Gwangju Uprising in 1980. Due to the chilling political atmosphere, the collective concentrated their intervention on the institutionalization of art and formalistic experimentation by breaking away from its closed structure. The interest of Yim and the collective's members was often misperceived as falling in line with national art or with a conventional notion of Korean-ness, although they refused to be categorized as such. At the same time, their works became a point of contention among the younger generation of artists bent on creating a legitimate Korean national/people's art.

**CHAPTER FIVE:**  
**KIM BONGJUN:**  
**CONCEIVING OF LIFE IN EVERYDAY COMMUNITY**

The Chun Doo Hwan regime in 1982 lifted the curfew that had been imposed in 1945 during the chaos that followed the liberation by the U.S. Army Military Government and that continued throughout the Rhee Syngman and Park Chung Hee administrations. Under the curfew, Koreans endured decades of transportation chaos; all were required to be at home before midnight or risk being detained at a police station until four in the morning. Now, people could enjoy a degree of freedom that previously they had been privileged to exercise only on Christmas and New Year's days. The nightclub and sex industries flourished, and color TVs became a part of everyday life. The Chun government, hoping to appease the public by manipulating mass culture, established professional baseball teams and aggressively promoted the sport through the press, transforming baseball into the national pastime for every generation. The Park regime had actually begun such practices in order to provide Koreans with an outlet for their mass frustration over the lack of democracy.<sup>1</sup>

While the rest of society appeared to be somewhat satisfied by the new relative freedom and economic affluence, the dissident university students and intellectuals grew deeply bitter. They agonized over the Gwangju Uprising and what they saw as atrocious behavior on the part of the dictatorship and the involvement of the United States. The Gwangju Uprising and its aftermath shaped, dominated, and revised dissident historical and political consciousness in the coming years.

On December 9, 1980, several students in Gwangju set fire to the Gwangju American Cultural Center, but the government concealed the event, citing an electrical

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter three in Kang Junman, *Han'guk hyeondaesa sanchaek 1980, no. 2* [*Walking into Contemporary Korean History 1980, no. 2*] (Seoul: Yinmul gwa sasangsa, 2003).

problem. It was only the first of many such incidents that show the continued unhappiness with American intervention. Fifteen months later, on March 18, 1982, Korean Theology Seminary students Mun Busik, Kim Eunsuk, Yi Miok and others committed arson at the Busan American Cultural Center. In their eyes, the United States had colluded with domestic industrial conglomerates and the military dictatorship, thereby obstructing democratization, social reform, and unification in Korea.<sup>2</sup> This incident raised the Gwangju issue from the regional to the national level in the public mind.

The Gwangju experience also contributed decisively to the forming of the “May culture movement” in all realms of arts and culture throughout Korea. Soon after the tragedy, poems about Gwangju began to be produced by the poets Kim Juntae, Kim Namju, and the poetry collective May Poem and other collectives.<sup>3</sup> These Korean poets aimed to reveal the reality of the massacre, to replace regional isolationism with “Gwangju pan-nationalization,” and to place Gwangju in the historical context of national division and imperial intervention.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, protest songs thrived on university campuses. University students and dissidents changed the lyrics of familiar songs (such songs with changed lyrics were referred to as *gaesagok*) or composed new songs to describe the tragedy of Gwangju.<sup>5</sup> Through these songs, they demonstrated their determination and attempted to appeal to the conscience of the people, including those who continued to be government sympathizers. Compared

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<sup>2</sup> *Saryo ro boneun 20 segi hanguksa* [*The 20th Korean History through Historical Records*], edited by Kim Sam’oung (Seoul: Garam gihoek, 2001), 307; Please see Mun Busik, “‘Gwangju’ 20 nyeonhu: yeoksa ui gieok gwa in’gan ui gieok” [“Gwangju, After 20 Years, Historical Memories and Human’s Memories”], in *Gwanggi ui sidae rul saenggakham: ileo beorin gieok eul chajaseo* [*Contemplating the Era of Gwangju: Searching for Lost Memories*] (Seoul: Samin, 2002), 22–49.

<sup>3</sup> Its members included Kim Jin’gyeong, Gwak Jaegu, Park Monggu, and Yi Yeongjin, among others.

<sup>4</sup> Some poets collaborated with artists in a print-poem exhibition (Gwangju Academy Art Museum, August 1983) and in a collection of print-poems, *Flowers Blossom in the Heart*. Bae Jongmin, “Ohwol hangjaeng gwa munhwa undong” [“The May Uprising and Culture Movement”], in *5.18 geurigo yeoksa: geudeul ui naraeseo uri modu ui nararo* [*5.18 and History: Their Nation-State to Everyone’s Nation-State*] (Seoul: Gil, 2008), 252–53.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

with poems and songs, however, novels and art were slow to respond to the Gwangju Uprising.<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1970s, intelligence agents, detectives, and the police had occupied and patrolled universities in South Korea. Professors were also mobilized to guide their assigned students to avoid the protests. Nonetheless, student activists organized the Democratization Movement of Youth Association (*minjuhwa undong cheongnyeon yeonhap*) in September 1983 and worked with laborers and the dissident opposition party.<sup>7</sup> With the campus liberalization of December 12, 1983, the resident police were withdrawn from the campuses, and more than one hundred professors and thirteen hundred students were reinstated to their universities. Because of the state's disproportionate reaction to any anti-government activities, however, student activists emphasized working with the student public, developing a more systematic and binary opposition ideology, and taking a step-by-step approach rather than engaging in a blunt political struggle.<sup>8</sup>

This measure was preceded by the February 25, 1983, lifting of a ban on political activities that had shackled many politicians. Nonetheless, Kim Young Sam, Kim Dae Jung, and other dissident politicians remained in exile, under arrest, or imprisoned. On the occasion of the third commemoration of May 18, the day of the Gwangju Uprising, Kim Young Sam began a hunger strike. This was the first open confrontation against Chun, and expanded into a common dissident front.<sup>9</sup> Kim Dae

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>7</sup> Kim Dongseong, "Undonggwon eul haebuhanda" ["Dissecting the Undonggwon"], *han'guk nondan* [*Korean Forum*] (Seoul: Han'guk haksul jeongbo, 1994), 88. The major participants included Kim Geuntae, Park Wuseop, Choe Yeol, Jang Yeongdal, and others.

<sup>8</sup> Gang Sincheol et al., *80 nyeondae haksae undongsa* [*The Student Movement in the 1980s*] (Seoul: Hyeongseongsa, 1988), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Yi Gyeongjae, "Minjung ui seungri: 5.17 eseo 6.29 kkaji" ["Victory of Minjung: From 5.17 to 6.29"], *Sindonga*, August 1987, quoted in Kang Junman, *Han'guk hyeondaesa sanchaek 1980 Vol. 2*, 147. Kim Young Sam demanded the release of political prisoners and a lifting of the ban on political activities; the reinstatement of fired professors, students, and laborers; freedom of the press; and revision of the Constitution and the National Security Law. Kim Sam'oung, "1988/Kim Daejung-Kim

Jung, who was exiled in the United States, supported Kim Young Sam, and they simultaneously issued what was known as the “Kim Dae Jung–Kim Young Sam 8.15 Joint Declaration” [the date refers to the date of independence from colonialist Japan] in both Seoul and Washington, DC.

Reflecting the growing national consciousness among the dissidents during the period 1982–84, Kim Bongjun actively appropriated the notion of a people-nation for his art, a concept that would entail merging “national” culture and art (or folk tradition) and the community movement in the making of the people’s art. This chapter delineates how Kim Bongjun expanded the idea of *sotong* into a conceptual frame for radically rethinking and reformulating his art and the people’s everyday community. His art was modeled on what he perceived to be the humanistic values of a traditional Korean agrarian village in opposition to the alienating urban and Western culture of modern society. In his notion of humanism, he underscores democratic principles and ideals, and he realized them both in his personal and in his collective artistic endeavors.

Sharing this idea with several others, Kim and his friends from the national culture movement created the art collective Dureong (“ridges in the rice field”; 1982–). As the name of the collective implies, its members wished to create art that would be loved and supported by the common people. Deeply influenced by the national culture movement, the living community movement, and the *minjung* church’s CO (community organization) strategy, he and other members contemplated articulating communalism/humanism in their artwork, art-making, and community activities. Their notion of communalism embraced democratic ideals in opposition to the dictatorial and materialistic values of the state and of capitalism. In addition, Kim and other activists called attention to the everyday lives of people who follow a cycle

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Young Sam 8.15 gongdong seon’eon” [“1988/Kim Dae Jung–Kim Young Sam 8.15 Joint Declaration”], in *Saryoro boneun 20segi han’guksa*, 368–69.

of communal working, eating, and sharing, encouraging an alternative approach to life. Despite the significant role played by the church mission, its effects on *minjung misul* have not received the attention they deserve in the relevant studies. Thus, I consider in particular the *minjung* church's confluence of multiple cultural and social constituencies in relation to Kim and the Dureong collective's vision of a humane community.<sup>10</sup>

### **Fermenting a Vision of the National/People's Art**

Kim Bongjun's celebration of the ideal of the farming village and its communal culture was more or less built on his postwar experiences and encounters with the national culture movement in his formative years as an artist. Kim Bongjun recalled that, on his way to the Yongsan high school, which was located near a U.S. military base, he witnessed Korean sex workers hanging out with American soldiers on the street. Long after he was a college student, he became aware of such scenes as the outcome of the Korean War and the subsequent unfortunate conditions in which Koreans found themselves.<sup>11</sup>

In the mid-1970s, during the repressive Yusin era, he encountered performances of *pungmul nori*, or traditional peasant percussion music. He expressed his feeling at that time by saying, "If art could help me meet the self within, *pungmul* and the mask dance opened me to reach beyond myself."<sup>12</sup> Because the well-known Art College of Hongik University, at which he was a student, had no *pungmul* group, he joined an inter-campus *pungmul* club at Seoul National University. It was there that he met such literary and cultural figures as Chae Hwiwan and Yim Jintaek, the

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<sup>10</sup> Ahn Byeongmu, "Minjung sinhak ui chulbaljeom" ["The Beginning of Minjung Theology"], in *Minjung sinhak eul malhanda* [Discussing Minjung Theology], vol. 2 (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1993), 314.

<sup>11</sup> Kim Bongjun, *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae* [Old Future Found in the Forest] (Seoul: DongA Ilbosa, 2001), 98.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 99.

creators of *madanggeuk*. These activities were soon suppressed by the authorities as subversive. In fact, Kim's anti-dictatorial struggle began with the state's suppression of *pungmul*.

Kim Bongjun firmly believed in the slogan "the most national is the most global."<sup>13</sup> He was mesmerized by "traditional art which revealed the fullness of human touch and natural beauty."<sup>14</sup> He believed that artistic traditions should be selectively inherited; those selected might include Buddhist painting, genre painting, and shamanist and folk painting. He learned traditional art forms, such as traditional brushwork, multiple and reverse perspectives, and other artistic principles of Buddhist painting, folk painting, and so forth, whenever he had the opportunity. As he studied sculpture in the Western Art curriculum of Hongik University, which boasted of its preeminent position in contemporary Korean art, he felt a deep conflict between his artistic endeavors and the reality of the art world.

When the Gwangju Uprising took place in May 1980, Kim Bongjun worked at the dissident journal *Creation and Critique*. At that time, he received numerous phone calls from Gwangju citizens about the enforcement of martial law and government atrocities, although his contacts were soon cut off from the outside world. Since he knew more about the Gwangju Uprising than others, he wrote a pamphlet exposing the state-perpetrated massacre. After this incident, he hid for the better part of a year in fear of being hunted as a wanted criminal. With the end of the Yusin system, he gave himself up to the authorities in order to end his fugitive life and was imprisoned for a month. In the spring of 1981, he began to create woodcut prints such as *Mom, I Came Back Home* [Figure F.1] and *Ancestor in the Wooden Pillory* [Figure F.2] for pamphlets and posters advertising plays and *madanggeuk* performances.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

He had worked as a caricaturist for the Korean Catholic Farmers Association in 1981. In order to create comic books representing agrarian life, Kim participated in many farmers' meetings and visited numerous villages. In 1982, he published the first farmers' comic book, *The Farmers' Ballad*, which explained farmers' current situation and the government's agrarian policies<sup>15</sup> [Figure F.3]. Countering the art collective Reality and Utterance, which he thought to be too Western, Kim Bongjun and his artist friends Jang Jinyeong, Yi Giyeon, and Kim Junho founded the art collective Dureong in 1982 [Figure F.4]

### **Strolling the “Ridges in the Rice Field”**

Kim Bongjun and his friends aimed at creating “living art” (*san misul*) or “art which can contribute to life,” in light of sociopolitical realities that they perceived to be plagued with commercialism, elitism, and decadence. They believed that human relationships had suffered from rapid modernization and political oppression. Furthermore, they felt that the ways in which the government had long manipulated the arts and culture reflected and accelerated the inculcation of the inhumane conditions under which human relationships has lost their traditional underpinnings. The Dureong artists felt that if they could create “living art,” they could help to recover human life—in the everyday sense, not in ideological terms, which would soon be contested. In art's imagining of humanism/democratic ideals, the members could conceive *sotong* in art that directly touches upon and restores the lives of the common people.

In envisioning a “living art” or a new national art, the members very much emphasized farmers' culture. They believed that this culture was a part of the people's daily lives. In addition, they speculated that if Korea's modernity had not been

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 133–36.



truncated and distorted under colonialism, the Korean War, and the national division, so-called folk art would have evolved into a contemporary (national) art. In stressing the *sotong* of art and life, of art and the nation, they imagined a “living art” that could channel Koreans’ collective life, through which the people could envision their future and which would evolve in the direction of historical progress—to a direction of human-centered philosophy.

Yet if the members’ ideas about art—and about the past, present, and future that Koreans faced—were informed by a sense of moral justification, how could art exist and operate in such an ideological space? How and why did they yearn to use their new art as a way to make this constellation of notions coalesce into a concentrated unity, and where did such a desire come from? Was there a space for art in imagining other realities outside the legitimate visions for the people’s art? How could the Dureong artists recontextualize and explicate their vision of art in parallel with the dissidents’ political ideology? What is the relationship between individuals and collectives, and between minorities and the larger community, in “living art”? And how does a folk tradition evolve in contemporary society in the first place?

The Dureong members applied the binary logic of bodily art (involving one’s whole life) versus formalistic art (appealing only to one’s eyes) to compare folk art with contemporary Korean art. Kim Bongjun writes that an overwhelming tendency to engage in formalistic experiments means that one’s art is determined by form rather than content.<sup>16</sup> The artists argued that artistic formalism appeals mostly to the “eyes,” while folk art was supposed to engage with a narrative of people’s lives in a holistic practice of art.<sup>17</sup> They viewed folk art as innately collective in terms of both production and consumption, and emphasized its community-building potential. In other words, they saw folk art as actively dialoguing with all those involved in making

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<sup>16</sup> Dureong, *San geurim* [*Living Art*], vol. 1, 1983, Manifesto.

<sup>17</sup> Dureong, *San misul* [*Living Art*], vol. 2, 1984.

and sharing in the whole process. In these terms, folk art is not merely a collection of traditional objects, customs, and subaltern ideologies but rather a “dynamic dramatization of collective experiences.”<sup>18</sup>

Such ideas about the binary of “body” and “formalistic” art were not unusual. The Third World intelligentsia had assessed Westernization/modernization against the touchstone of an ethnic past. Folk tradition provided a nation with “a cognitive basis” and “moral purpose” that represented a continuous endowment of its “cultural heritage and vision.”<sup>19</sup> As a result, folk tradition would elevate “formerly passive people” to the level of sovereign subjects through new communal self-definitions and political agendas.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Dureong perceived folk tradition to be immensely powerful in its supposedly immutable humanistic core. These artists imagined humanism modeled on an agrarian village within an ideological conception of the Korean predicament. As a result, they failed utterly to examine how folk tradition was reconstructed by and incorporated into capitalist society.<sup>21</sup>

Dureong perceived that folk tradition had declined in modern Korea. Reflecting on the members’ assessment, it is worthwhile to note the analyses of folk crafts by the anthropologist Nestor G. Canclini in his *Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity and Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*.<sup>22</sup> He contends that the development of technology and telecommunication has not suppressed folk traditions but rather has expanded and transformed them.<sup>23</sup> He argues that, in order to explain the survival and flourishing of a folk tradition, one must consider it not through the binary of arts and crafts but by interrelating elements of

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<sup>18</sup> Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*, translated by Lidia Lozano (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 27.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno; Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 65.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>21</sup> Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, translated by Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. Lopez (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 151.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*; Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

“economic and cultural capitalism” in a dependent economy, as in the case of Mexico.<sup>24</sup> Capitalist modernization appropriates, restructures, and reorganizes meanings, symbols, and functions of folk objects, thereby reaching a population that was not yet integrated into the hegemonic industrial society.<sup>25</sup>

There is also an industrial or commercial imperative at work in using traditional symbols and objects to expand a consumer base. Folk tradition is therefore maneuvered to invest the dominant group with legitimacy through the reorganizing and sealing-off of ethnic, class, and national differences.<sup>26</sup> By stressing a historical, political, and cultural unity, Dureong in fact deployed logic similar to that of the state, although their notion of folk tradition would articulate the Koreans’ shared experiences and unique Korean cultural entities. Because they took the Korean people-nation as a given, and committed their art to its totality, their project was destined to be detrimental to the agendas of minorities, the most obvious being women’s issues.

If Dureong speculated on the decrease of craft production by the common people, Canclini’s study demonstrates that village residents would continue to produce crafts as a source of income, with state support.<sup>27</sup> As many folklorists have revealed, “folk” objects can coexist with popular culture in various systems of symbolic practices in both the synchronic and diachronic senses.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the people are not simply victims of modernization but actively create their own socioeconomic spheres in interaction with contemporary changes, sharing desires for a modern life of economic affluence. At the same time, in continuously emphasizing the deterioration and alienation of Koreans’ lives, Dureong failed to elicit these people’s explorations of other ways of living in and adjusting to an industrial society.

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<sup>24</sup> Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*, 37.

<sup>25</sup> Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, 153.

<sup>26</sup> Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*, viii.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>28</sup> Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, 156.

### **New Culture, New Community: *Sotong*, Love, and *Hyeonjang***

The term “living” in the expression “living art” suggests several meanings. In the context in which Kim Bongjun and other cultural activists were working, it refers in particular to *sotong* with the common people, to engaging with their lives at the humble sites where they live, and to responding to their views. As *hyeonjang* activity provides a space for communal dialogue and radical critique, it fosters possible friendship and trust between those intellectual-activists and the people in workplaces and slum neighborhoods. Those *hyeonjang* participants believed that the Korean people at the bottom rung of the social ladder were more humane and had greater potential to realize their sovereignty than those of a higher socioeconomic standing. This idea evolved from the *hyeonjang* activities and community-building, especially in the Urban Industrial Mission.

In 1968, under the flag of “Renewing Korea,” members of the ecumenical movement, the University YMCA, the University YWCA, and the Korean Student Christian Membership (KSCM) agreed that they should work in slums, in labor *hyeonjang*, and in farming villages, emulating Jesus Christ.<sup>29</sup> Christ lived among the Galileans, the people of the lowest social strata, and fought for their liberation.<sup>30</sup> In undertaking their *hyeonjang* activities, the Christian students believed they were practicing Christ’s work. In 1970, the University YWCA and the Catholic University Student Association held a meeting titled “April 19, 1960: Student Uprising and the Resurrection.” This meeting became a platform for doing “God’s work” in the spirit of 4.19.<sup>31</sup> Some young seminary students and ministers became involved in the Korean

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<sup>29</sup> The author’s written interview with Pastor Park Jongryeol on December 23, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Jo Byeongho, *Han’guk gidok cheongnyeong haksae undong 100nyeon sanchaek* [Walking into the 100 years of the Korean Christian Student Movement] (Seoul: Ttange sseusin geulssi, 2005), 35.

<sup>31</sup> Many large churches were also involved in the urban mission, although young seminary students and ministers were at its center. They built churches in *hyeonjang*; examples are the Saemunnam, Yeongdong, Ahyeon, Dongdaemun, and Jeongdong churches. Seo Namdong, *Minjung shinhak ui tamgu* [Study of Minjung Theology] (Seoul: Han’gilsa, 1983), 23.

Catholic Farmers' Association for the Assurance of Rice Production Fees (1975–77) and the Hampyeong Sweet Potato Compensation Movement (1976–78).<sup>32</sup>

Jeon Taeil's martyrdom may have sparked the dissident conceptualization of the historical Jesus as one of the *minjung* and as the progenitor of collective *minjung* actions. The *minjung* theologian Ahn Byeongmu theorizes that, just as Jeon appealed for the amelioration of the laborers' plight by immolating himself, so did Jesus submit to crucifixion in the midst of a liberation movement. Through such a new liberation movement, Jesus would again be resurrected by the *minjung*'s following in his path.<sup>33</sup> According to *minjung* theology, Jesus' resurrection was not a one-time event that happened two thousand years ago, but was rather a continuous series of events throughout world history—as if the *minjung* events were constantly exploding through “chains of volcanoes.”<sup>34</sup> However, equating Jeon and student activists' suicides with Christ's crucifixion and resurrection is viewed by some as too emotional or as incongruous. In a way, glorification and adulation of self-immolation among the dissident activists are thought to have influenced numerous activists' suicides on campuses in subsequent years.

In their efforts to reenact Jesus' work, the people-centered *minjung* theologians radically shifted their emphasis from “the text” of God's words (*idée* and *logos*) in the Western Biblical tradition to “the context” (events and praxis) of the historical Jesus and the Bible. Reconceptualized from transcendental figure, or the embodiment of God's words, to historical figure, or being, Jesus became allied with the most oppressed through their historical suffering. Perceiving *han* as the essence of Koreans,

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<sup>32</sup> Yi Sangseong, “The Korean Church as People's Movement: Construction of the Ecclesiology of Minjung Theology,” Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1998, 79–90.

<sup>33</sup> Ahn Byeongmu, “Hyeonjon ha'neun buhwal sageon” [“Real Incidents of Resurrection”], *Minjung sinhak eul malhanda* [Discussing Minjung Theology], vol. 2 (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1993), 415.

<sup>34</sup> *Jeonhwan'gi ui minjung sinhak : Jukje Seo Namdong sinhak sasang eul jungsim euro* [Minjung Theology in the Transitional Era: Jukje Seo Namdong's Theology], edited by Seo Namdong and Jukje Seo Namdong moksa gi'nyeon nonmunjip pyeonjip wiwonhoe (Chungnam Jeonan'gun: Han'guk sinhak yeon'guso, 1992), 49.

the *minjung* theologian Seo Namdong defined *minjung* theology as “*han*’s theology,” which aimed for salvation of the people.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in reading the Bible through Korean realities, Seo said that *minjung* theology testified to the “confluence” of the outcasts’ historical liberation in the Bible and Korean history.<sup>36</sup> This also served as a way to challenge the perceived imperialism of Western theology by communicating the living realities of Koreans in reading the Bible.<sup>37</sup> The *minjung* theologians incorporated the *minjung*’s lives and *han*, represented in their arts and culture (e.g., the mask-dance), into their understanding of the people.

Within the dissident movement, church ministers, university students, and dissident intellectuals thus came to join together the urban and farmer missions. Because urban poverty became a serious problem following the waves of rural-to-urban migration, an urban–rural missionary committee was founded in 1971. With the introduction of the CO (Saul Alinsky’s Community Organization in the urban environment) by Pastor George Todd in 1968, young Korean Christians were trained by Pastor Herbert White beginning in the same year.<sup>38</sup> At first, the Korean Christian ministers traveled to the workers’ communities to hold services. These ministers soon realized that they needed to work for and live among the *minjung*, so they located *minjung* churches in the slum areas, beginning in the early 1980s (e.g., the Seongmunbak Church in Seoul and the Sarangbang Church in Incheon).

The theologian Hyeon Yeonghak recalls that living in these neighborhoods posed a challenge for many Christian ministers and theology students who had never

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Seo Namdong, *Minjung sinhak ui tamgu* [*Exploration of Minjung Theology*] (Han’gilsa, 1983), 11.

<sup>37</sup> Seo Jinhwan, “Minjung sinhak ui taedong gwa jeon’gae” [“Emergence of *Minjung* Theology and Its Development”], in *Minjung sinhak ipmun* [*Introduction to Minjung Theology*] (Seoul: Ha’neul, 1995), 14.

<sup>38</sup> David Alinsky’s pedagogy is aimed at implanting self-esteem and awareness of people’s rights and equality in the hearts of the poor and the powerless. In addition, it is intended to train the people to organize themselves to act on their problems in a collective manner on their own. Saul David Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Random House, 1971).

lived in such abject circumstances. He recalls his mission in Cheon'gyecheon, where many low-wage workers lived, before its dirty waterway was covered with asphalt:

The Christian ministers and students began their mission activities in the seventh and eighth road, where shanty houses which might be demolished anytime were jumbled up close together. We arranged a shack and used it as a mission office, as well as for church services. Of course, all meetings took place at the site. For theologians like me, being in and out of the district for meetings was drudgery. It was so unsanitary and such a different world [from what I know] that [I] felt uneasy, and [I] was afraid of the people's attitude toward us.<sup>39</sup>

However, as he became more deeply involved in their everyday lives, Hyeon began to understand that what initially seemed nasty and immoral was born out of their strong attachment to life.<sup>40</sup> Pastor Park Jongryeol remarked that the young ministers and students learned that “the *minjung* are the subjectivity of history, and they are the figure of Christ coming to us. Fighting alongside them for their rights and freedom is Christ's mission.”<sup>41</sup> They also began to see the *minjung*'s “epistemological privilege,” through which “life's community, life's strength, life's truth, and life's beauty” were revealed.<sup>42</sup>

Despite their praises of the people's resilience, many *minjung* Christian ministers struggled to learn the daily language of the people and to live among them, as very few could achieve it.<sup>43</sup> The *hyeonjang* images of *minjung* later developed into the standard by which the activists of the 1980s and the 1990s often measured their ingrained character as intellectuals and to which they aspired. Such notions of the people were the ministers' basis for imagining a new community that would enable

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<sup>39</sup> Hyeon Yeonghak, “Minjung, gonan ui jong, huimang” [“Minjung, Slaves of Suffering, Hope”], in *1980nyeondae minjung sinhak ui Jeon'gae* [Development of 1980s' Minjung Theology], edited by Han'guk sinhak yeon'guso (Seoul: Han'guk sinhak yeon'guso, 1990), 15.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>41</sup> The author's interview with Park Jongryeol on December 22, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Hyeon Yeonghak, 20.

<sup>43</sup> Ho Byeongseop, “Minjung sasil e gwanhan yeongu” [“Study of Minjung's Truths”], *Gongdongche munhwa* [Community Culture], edited by Gongdongche, vol. 1 (Seoul: Gongdongche, 1983), 52.

true *sotong* among the residents and themselves. At the same time, some ministers and activists who came to the *hyeonjang* with idealized notions of the people were shocked and dismayed by the discrepancies between the representation and the reality of the *minjung*.

In their urban mission, the *minjung* Christian missionaries and the dissidents hoped to help the *minjung* conceive a “new culture” in contrast to the culture of individualism, selfishness, materialism, and authoritarianism that marked Korea’s post-war era. As the COs’ code of conduct states, “a [good] human nature/character is developed out of a healthy culture”; such a “new culture” can be thought of as a new operational logic whereby one is reborn as a new person.<sup>44</sup> According to *minjung* theology’s principles and code of conduct, what interlaces “culture” and “community” is human/e interactions. The urban CO aspired to interact with residents to such a degree that they would know the local residents’ facial expressions, preferences, and leisure activities. They highlighted *sarang* (love) as a crucial technique for eliciting the creative expression of the people’s reality and a new humanistic community. This is exactly what the Dureong and many other *minjung* artists attempted to achieve in their art: the art of *sotong*. Here, love was the dynamic source of understanding the people’s *han* and pain and of further relieving their suffering through humanistic values and principles.

### **Communalism as Form and Content**

Kim Bongjun’s colored woodcut print *Dureong* (1983) depicts farmers cheerfully eating lunch and drinking raw rice wine [Figure F.5]. The field, the site of their work, is where work, play, and rest become one. Likewise, its depiction of the mix of generations typical of agrarian life indicates that the earth is not simply a place for

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<sup>44</sup> Park Jongryeol, “21-segi ssi-o’s cheolhak (yeongseong), bangbeomnon, jeolryak, jeonsul” [“The 21st Century’s C.O.’s Philosophies, Methodology, Strategies, and Tactics”], unpaginated.



food production but is an organic part of these people's lives. To capture such interconnectedness, Kim used a subtle ivory-colored mulberry paper such as one might see in an old Korean home used as door-paper or folk art. Instead of black-and-white, he applied colored print that viewers would see as relatively more pleasing than a harsher, black-and-white print. He also maneuvered the flow of traditional brushwork to achieve a softening mechanical effect with woodcut knives. He said that he used the woodcut medium in order to be able to disseminate his paintings widely and cheaply, so that people could hang his work in their houses.<sup>45</sup> "When I came to this small town . . . my goal was to produce artworks which could be quietly hung in farmers' houses without any [emotional] burden [imposed by strong political messages and expressions]."<sup>46</sup>

Kim Bongjun and the other Dureong members also contemplated how art could be applied in the people's own self-expression and become part of their lives. They were joined in their efforts by other socially conscious artists who did not particularly agree with Reality and Utterance's aesthetic and structural approaches. Some of these artist-allies later became known as the younger generation. The Gwangju Freedom Art Association (Hong Seongdam, Choe Yeol, Park Gwangju, etc.), founded in 1979, worked toward the democratization and "mass-ification" of art through the active production and consumption of art by the common people.<sup>47</sup> They utilized print media for its ease of mass production and consumption and low cost, as well as for its powerful visual effect in the service of art education for the *minjung*.<sup>48</sup> The artists listened to the experiences of night-school teachers, discussed Paulo Freire's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and developed their own pedagogy for

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Kim Bongjun on May 30, 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Kim Bongjun, *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae*, 88.

<sup>47</sup> Ra Wonsik, "Miteuro buteo ui misul munhwa undong: gwangju jayu misulin hyeopuihoe wa misul dongin 'dureong'" ["Art Movement from the Bottom: The Gwangju Freedom Artists Association and Art Collective Dureong"], *Minjung misul 15 nyeon: 1980–1984* (Seoul: Salm gwa kkum, 1994), 25.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

*minjung* education.<sup>49</sup> Later, these efforts resulted in the establishment of the Seongnam citizens' art school (January 23–29, 1984), a youth art school (February 6–12, 1984), and university art schools<sup>50</sup> [Figure F.6].

In order to invite people to join them in making art, the Dureong members opened an “Aeoge citizens’ art class.”<sup>51</sup> For their founding exhibition, they produced several collective works (e.g., the mural *All Kinds of Events under Heaven*) [Figure F.7], colored prints of *Arirang Hill*, the painting *Cultural Asura*, and masks and mask-dance performances.<sup>52</sup> Although the name of the art school implied that it served average citizens, its students were mostly art majors who later created training programs for folk art in universities. The Dureong curriculum consisted of traditional brushwork, folk painting, and mask-making and mask dances (or *madanggeuk*), with which ordinary people would not be familiar. Although they practiced collective art-making and applied aesthetic principles of folk art, the process was far from satisfactory for many participants.

The curriculum Dureong employed indicates that their idea of art might have been rooted in intellectual-artists’ beliefs about the proper form, content, and visions of *minjung* art and culture.<sup>53</sup> They also replaced the binary of farmer versus mass-consumer culture with the discourse of humane versus inhumane culture. In doing so, they failed to consider the social and cultural environment of the people that was actively forming and formed by popular culture. Instead, it appears that they opted to invent their own “people’s culture” based on their nostalgic notion of agrarian culture.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Choe Minhwa, “Ooulhan gwang’gi” [“Depressing Madness”], *Minjung misul 15 nyeon: 1980–1984* (Seoul: Salm gwa kkum, 1994), 35.

<sup>51</sup> I could not find any photographs of the Aeoge citizens’ art school. Instead, I have provided a photograph of the Gwangju citizens’ art school.

<sup>52</sup> Ra Wonsik, “Miteuro buteo ui misul munhwa undong: gwangju jayu misulin hyeopuihoe wa misul dongin ‘dureong,’” 25.

<sup>53</sup> Dureong, *San geurim I*, Manifesto.

In the citizens' art schools, teachers introduced the drawing of human faces as the starting point for creating "living art" [Figure F. 8]. Because anybody could draw faces, the participants would learn that art is not something acquired only through long years of schooling but rather is an ordinary expression of emotion and thought.<sup>54</sup> In addition, because one communicates with facial expressions, paying attention to faces is a literal effort to transform art-making into an act of *sotong*. It finds much similarity with the method used by the COs in the *hyeonjang* churches.<sup>55</sup>

The point of this face-drawing was not to sketch randomly chosen faces as a mere exercise. The art-school participants were asked to choose archetypal figures representing social classes to investigate aspects of class and gender. Despite its very naïve form and content, Dureong's archetype of an everyday face is ideologically constructed, and only certain representations of "everyday life" were allowed to be constituted as such. Thus, Dureong's notion of *sotong* was often preconceived and one-sided, without inviting participants' responses: there was no process of brainstorming with the students about what they wanted to depict. Although this might seem to be a secondary issue, it led to an estrangement between the members' ambitions and the participants' casual interest in art. One example of this is their collective work *Seoul Landscape* in 1984, which aimed to explore the complexities of the participants' urban lives. It was executed in a traditional brushwork and screen format.<sup>56</sup> After completing a week's work (research, brainstorming, sketches, and painting), the participants commented on their working experiences: they noted the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> The *minjung* Christian ministers believed that they should know residents' faces, or facial expressions, personalities, and preferences, to forge complete relations with them. Park Jongryeol, "21-segi ssi-o's cheolhak (yeongseong), bangbeomron, jeolryak, jeonsul" ["The 21st Century's C.O.'s Philosophies, Methodology, Strategies, and Tactics"], unpagel.

<sup>56</sup> The participants were assigned to observe and sketch their neighborhoods at various times (early morning, afternoon, evening, etc.). After several rounds of observing and sketching, they drew and painted their materials in the format of a traditional screen using brushwork techniques they learned in their folk-painting class.

difficulty of finding common viewpoints, a lack of enthusiasm for voluntary participation, insufficient mastery of folk-painting techniques, and so forth.

Based on the participants' assessments, one needs to ask: Did these evaluations suggest that the Dureong idea of art was hard to realize beyond the discursive level? Were the participants convinced of the value of applying traditional brushwork and other forms of expression from folk painting, instead of using more familiar forms of expression? Why should they use art, and not other cultural forms or modes of political activism, to imagine a humane art and community? These questions persisted throughout the 1980s. Some modernists doubted whether the *minjung* artists could bring out particular ways of art's working in their art and activism.

On the other hand, the Dureong members saw the students' representation of everyday people, that is, farmers, as bearing both universal and particular characteristics. They interpreted such depictions to indicate that the participants had "shared memories" of farmers yet with individual characteristics. The Dureong members' excitement over the rich and lively expressions of their students was similar to the enthusiasm expressed by other artists and cultural activists for "*minjung*" expression: Although the *minjung* were not trained, they could archetype their experiences in rough yet honest, moving ways.<sup>57</sup> This response was already ingrained in the instructions given in the Aeoge and other citizens' art schools, however. As the cultural practitioners and artists encouraged workers to carve out their daily experiences at factories and in the fields, the Dureong members would repeatedly witness archetypal images of daily oppression in their work [Figure F.9].

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<sup>57</sup> For instance, the cultural practitioner Yu Inryeol suggests, "Because they have so many things inside, the pain of their lives has overwhelmingly many stories, [so] their expressive powers are quite amazing." Kim Jiha, et al., "Minjung mihak simpojium" ["Symposium for Minjung's Aesthetics"], *Gongdongche munhwa* [Communal Culture], 3 (1985): 35.

### The Feasibility of “Living Art”

Although the endeavors of Dureong and other, similar artist groups received positive feedback, their failure to examine their aesthetic/discursive base and operations inevitably provoked criticism. The art critic Won Dongseok positively reviewed Dureong’s effort to incorporate “the people’s tradition” into contemporary art. He noted that what mattered was not just the form of folk art itself but the values and principles embedded in it.<sup>58</sup> Seong Wan’gyeong praised Dureong’s determination to replace the current art-education model. The collective stretched the usual boundaries of art by maneuvering diverse visual forms and by speaking in a “common language.”<sup>59</sup>

Because their works were informed by a strong impulse to narrate stories, however, it is perhaps more appropriate to say that they were creating art for “reading” rather than art meant for “looking.” In addition, Seong pointed out that Dureong recognized life’s reality in terms of an archetypal narrative of folk art. For instance, the laborers’ difficulties were narrated in terms of their overcoming of challenges and fueling collective wishes for a brighter future. The unrealistic and mythical nature of the work tended to neutralize and even minimize the violence and complexity of contemporary problems.<sup>60</sup>

Yim Oksang problematized the Dureong members’ prioritization of community. Emphasizing community as they did would allow only certain styles to

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<sup>58</sup> Won Dongseok, “1980 nyeondae misul bipyeong ui nollu wa sanghwang: misul undong gwa yeon’gyedoen bipyeong hwaldong eul jungshimeuro” [“Logics of Art Critics and Circumstances of the 1980s: Focusing on Art Movement and Critiques”], in *Han’guk guendae misul sahak* [History of Modern Korean Art], 15 (2005): 261. Print. Won says that the traditional agrarian society, which Kim and other young artists emulated, was based on a feudal system that incorporated its own rigid class system. Thus, it was crucial to eradicate feudal elements by unifying artistic and scientific visions. In addition, Yim Jintaek and Jang Mancheol argue that cultural practitioners should maneuver popular culture to reach a wider audience base (i.e., the middle class). Kim Yunsu, Jeong Jichang, Chae Hwiwan, et al., “Minjung yesul undong, ije b’uto ui gwaje” [“Minjung Art Movement, Assignments from Now on”], *Changjak gwa bipyeong*, 63 (Spring 1989): 8–62.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 70.

gain legitimacy for expressing “the national sensibility,” leading to “national minimalism” or “*minjung* fascism.”<sup>61</sup> He suggests that the virtuosity of professional artists as well as the visual environment of industrial society should be considered for the enrichment of *minjung misul*. The artist Yi Taeho complained that the Dureong members assumed that the *minjung* were not capable of understanding complex works.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, the *minjung* artists produced works that could be grasped at once, perhaps another condescending expression of their intellectual superiority to the masses.<sup>63</sup>

In the rural fields, drawing human faces and making masks was an “archetypal” program for cultural activists. By looking at the village-based program of face-drawing, one can glimpse the incongruity between the Dureong and other young artists’ visions of art and its reception among the “*minjung*.” After the activists conducted the program with village residents, they concluded that it did not rise above the level of curiosity and fun. Also, they agreed that the art activists needed to develop the face-drawing into other activities such as mask-making, giving participants a sense of achievement along the way.<sup>64</sup> Their evaluation seems to match a farmer’s response to an activist:

Activist: “What was it like when you drew?”

Farmer: “As I drew. . . . It’s been ten years since I last did. At my age, [I asked myself] what were we doing? . . . ”

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<sup>61</sup> Yim Oksang, Kim Bongjun, et al., “Jwadam: minjung minjok misul geureup undongeun mueot eul chuguhae watneun’ga” [“What *Minjung Misul* Has Been Seeking”], *Gyegan misul*, 46 (Summer 1988): 76.

<sup>62</sup> Kim Yunsu, Yu Hongjun, Jeon Junyeop, et al., “Jwadamhoe: hyeonsil uisik gwa misul roseo ui silcheon: ‘hyeonsil gwa baleon’ eul jungsim euro bon 80nyeondae misul ui jeon’gae wa jeonmang” [“Praxis with Reality Consciousness and Art: The Development and Perspectives of 1980s’ Art from the Viewpoint of ‘Hyeonsil gwa baleon’”], *Hyeonsil gwa baleon: 1980nyeondae ui saeroun misul eul wihayeo* [*Hyeonsil gwa baleon: For a New Art in the 1980s*] (Seoul: Yeolhwadang, 1985), 40.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Unspecified, “Nongchon dure hwaldong bogoseo” [“The Report of the Farming Dure Activities”], *Gongdongche munhwa* [*Communal Culture*], 2 (1984): 359.

A: “What do other people think of [the art activities]?”<sup>65</sup>

According to the activist, the farmer viewed drawing as a silly pastime, and he was embarrassed to be drawing at his age. One can easily imagine how alienated from the art the farmers must have felt when they compared it with their daily farm work or with the popular culture surrounding them.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, one can speculate that the reason for this alienation might not have been the drawing itself but rather its subject matter—faces—executed in formulaic rigidity and simplicity, an activity that was not well suited to the cultural maturity of the participants.

### **Everyday Living Community**

How then did the artists, cultural practitioners, and activists re-envision everyday community within their social reality during the period 1982–84, a time of political oppression soon after the Gwangju Uprising? Before looking into their deliberations for creating a living community, I view Kim Bongjun’s banner painting *Let’s Pick the Stars* as an entry point for discussion [Figure F.10]. This work allows one to glimpse what the activist-artists re-imagined communal life to be—by showing a communal table as a metaphor for the sharing of rice/life. By deflecting the emphasis on a conventional political-ideology movement to the people themselves, Kim and other activists shifted their attention to the people’s daily lives. They developed the idea of an everyday community that would embrace organic cultivation, direct relationships between producers and consumers, exchanges of goods between cities and villages, and so forth. Although this work does not describe these practical resolutions, it represents the possibility of a more-or-less utopian future.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

*Let's Pick the Stars* articulates the *minjung*'s oppression, struggle, and liberation by imitating the tripartite narrative structure of a Buddhist painting. In addition, its banner-painting format (*geolgae geurim*) is Kim Bongjun's reinterpretation of *kwebul*, a Buddhist painting hung in a front yard for the purposes of outdoor ritual. Kim, who studied the Buddhist painting technique for four years under the tutelage of the monk Manbong at Bongwon Temple, coined the term *geolgae geurim* by translating the meaning of the Chinese character *kwe* (Korean pronunciation for the character) into the Korean equivalent "hanging."<sup>67</sup> Banner-painting became a popular propaganda art form at protest sites in the 1980s.

In the upper part of the banner painting, a man clothed in traditional peasant attire is sitting, wearing a heavy pillory, symbolizing the oppression of the people. The man in the pillory is connected to a scene of the people's liberation. In the intermediary space, which resembles a tunnel, between the ancestor and the liberated people, is a text declaring: "Let's pick the stars, let's pick the stars, holding the heaven, let's pick the stars," as if to suggest their highest aspirations. From this central space, all inhumane and alienating forces, such as money, armbands (representing power in Korean culture), guns, swords, propaganda, and other symbols of alienation, are pushed to the side. After having vanquished these evils, the people are holding festivals with *pungmul nori* to recover a sense of communal life—humanism/*sotong*—as the filling of the rice bowl clearly indicates.

Kim Bongjun does not show his religious preference, but in his appropriation of religious motifs, what ultimately matters to him is how these religious and cultural expressions imagine life with equality, social justice, and human dignity—the indigenous reinterpretation of democracy. Because he worked particularly closely with the church mission, the rice bowl in the painting could be read in concurrence with

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<sup>67</sup> Kim Yeongna, *20segi ui han'guk misul 2: byeonhwa wa dojeon ui sigi* [*The 20th Century Korean Art 2: The Era of Transformation and Challenge*] (Seoul: Yegyeong, 2010), 286.



Jesus' referring to his body as "bread" at his communal table, as such a saying cannot be understood without a friendly dialogue among people. As the seed of life, Jesus gave himself to the oppressed and the outcasts in the form of Passover bread, and created a new community-life through meal-sharing—a concrete act of love and solidarity, as well as of repentance.<sup>68</sup> Jesus' table fellowship, with its "messianic significance,"<sup>69</sup> does not see the Kingdom of God as futuristic or even as a realized event but as "a concrete socio-historical process in the expectation of its eschatological fulfillment," aborting the existing structure.<sup>70</sup> In God's kingdom, the vested rights of the present system (politics, ethics, and church) cannot be acknowledged.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, the fact that the ancestor's oppression is connected with contemporary liberation should not be considered a simple progression in social transformation. It additionally implies a revolution in human civilization with an alternative logic that rejects linear historical progress. In depicting the intertwined relationships of past, present, and future, this work represents the common people's determination to overcome their alienation by living life in the immediate present, not in the past or the future. This concept becomes clearer as the idea of returning rice to the *minjung* is examined in Korean neo-Confucian ancestral rites, explored by the *Donghak*'s second leader, Choe Haewol. Here, Donghak refers to "Eastern Learning," a mixture of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shamanism, and the like. It was created against a backdrop of nineteenth-century Christianity and other forms of "Western Learning" by Chae Jaewu. He taught *in-nae-cheon*, meaning "there is heaven in the human" or "to be human is heaven."

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 135.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ahn Byeongmu, *Minjung sinhak eul malhandha* [Discussing Minjung Theology], vol. 2 (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1993), 79.

In the Confucian ceremony, the people set the offering table against a wall. They bow in front of the table, which is filled with their harvested food, entrusting their labor, dreams, and relations to others behind the wall or in the future. Kim Jiha believes that, in their concentration on the past and the future, the present becomes secondary.<sup>72</sup> However, Choe Haewol turned the offering table toward the *minjung* and toward the here and now. This idea was conceived through fresh re-conceptualization of the relationship between life and labor.

As heaven creates the universe, *in-nae-cheon* is conceptualized insofar as the people and heaven are “working beings.”<sup>73</sup> Positioning labor as the essence of life itself, Choe Jewu views rice, the result of the *minjung*’s labor, as an “eternal truth.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, life can be understood as an endless cycle of communication between labor and food, between labor and play, while the anti-life or “artificial death” (*jugeum*)<sup>75</sup> formulates the world according to a binary and hierarchical logic, such as culture and labor, mind and body. By turning an offering table to the *minjung*, work not only fills a gap between laborers and rice in the act of creating life<sup>76</sup> but also represents the potential to change the world as lived from the roots up [Figure F.11 and Figure F.12].

Kim Jiha’s (and Dureong’s) humanist notion of labor is very similar to Hegel’s discussion of labor. For Hegel, labor is a distinctively human (“spiritual”) activity, as it controls and refines human basic desire in the process of creating a mediated relationship with one’s environment. Humans reproduce themselves in the world or create the world in their image, thereby becoming “reflective, self-conscious

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<sup>72</sup> Kim Jiha, *Saengmyeong gwa jachi : saengmyeong sasang, saengmyeong undong iran mueot inga*. [*Life and Sovereignty: What Are Life Philosophy and Life Movement*] (Seoul: Sol, 1996), 23.

<sup>73</sup> Kim Jiha, “Ilhaneun haneulnim” [“Laboring Heaven”], in *Kim Jiha Jeonjip*, edited by Kim Jiha jeonjip balgan pyeonjip wiwonhoe, vol. 1 (Seoul: Silchon munhaksa, 2002), 150.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>75</sup> Kim Jiha, “In’gan ui sahoejeok seonghwa” [“Sacred Flame of Human Beings”], in *Kim Jiha Jeonjip*, edited by Kim Jiha Jeonjip pyeonjip wiwonhoe, vol. 1 (Seoul: Silcheon munhaksa, 2002), 54.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 30.

beings.”<sup>77</sup> Further, labor is always and necessarily social, since it involves others and brings in organization of labor forces that would be a model for other social structure as well.<sup>78</sup> One can say that labor embraces communalism as part of its innate character. However, labor is also a source of grave suffering and alienation for many people, especially those on the bottom rung of the social ladder. Kim’s and Dureong’s indifference to this aspect succinctly reflects the intellectuals’ naïve and utopian idea of labor in the fields. Or, they are too eager to see traditional farming as alternatives to, for instance, factory work and the current commercialized farming practices using pesticides. In addition, they tend to see labor as sacred, in alignment with the centralization of labor in the Marxist theorization of capitalism. However, such sanctifying of labor has been historically manipulated by the state and capitalism to mobilize people through the use of nationalistic rhetoric and a sense of economic security.

In Kim Bongjun’s work, the ancestors and the people are connected through the organic form of a tunnel. This tunnel opens the space between them, leveling off any hierarchical relationship. The people push away the evil forces, and thus the tunnel widens, allowing their past, present, and future to fuse together. In the congregation of a group of people, a woman is dancing with a rice bowl on her head. This suggests that these people eat and play together, and that their communal table expands into *dure*, communal labor or cultivation. Their cycle of “work-rice-play” becomes life itself (*saengmyeong*).

In their collective working and sharing, the *minjung* practitioners imagined and reconfigured everyday life. The activists focused on the idea of rice (*bap*) and speech (*mal*); both are powerful concepts of the collective *sotong*. Rice, the symbol of

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<sup>77</sup> Sean Saters, “The Concept of Labor: Marx and His Critics,” *Science and Sociality* 71, no. 4, October 2007: 436.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

collective work, eating, and sharing,<sup>79</sup> is a premise for two simple ideas: first, eating rice in an appropriate amount; second, producing rice through healthy means (i.e., organically). This simple logic suggests communal living without endangering the environment, in addition to being a sharp critique of contemporary socioeconomic conditions plagued by dictatorships, human greed, insensitivity, violence, and environmental hazards.

The critique of pesticides by activists of the living-community movement in the 1980s was intertwined with indictments of other, larger, political and economic “evils” such as conglomerates, global capitalism, and neo-colonialism:

In reality, our rice is messed up with pesticides, and its pollution is getting serious, thus affecting the people’s lives. A decade ago, people did not talk about normality or abnormality [of babies], but now people are concerned about it. The reason is that a few corporations that worshipped “advancement” and “development” forced unlimited production and consumption. . . .<sup>80</sup> In other words, it is the quintessential aspect of worshipping quantity [*mulryang juui*], egoism, the logic of the survival of the fittest and an anti-life civilization. Also, for long years of colonization and neo-colonialism, the white civilization, which has taken away and over-eaten the Third World’s “rice,” considers both the people and life itself as objects for theft and domination. . . .<sup>81</sup> In order to create a healthy eating culture, one should work toward anti-pollution activities: consumer movements, collaborations between farmers and the labor movement. Also, to consume rice properly, the production of rice should be divided well. . . . A few powerful [conglomerates’] monopoly of rice is a very serious symptom. In order to break from the evil of exploitation, the farming/agrarian community should work on collective labor organizations and collective purchase of machines . . .<sup>82</sup>

As the excerpt suggests, the supporters of this idea believed that rice producers (the farmers) and consumers (the workers) should collaborate to reconceptualize how rice

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<sup>79</sup> Jeong Ho’gyeong, “Saenghwal gongdongcheran mueosinga” [“What is Living Community”], *Gongdongche munhwa* [Community Culture], 3 (1986): 52.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 54.

is produced, exchanged, and consumed for life-centered philosophy and distributive justice in contemporary Korean society.

Their binary logic of life and evil/death, however, might be far too crude when it simplistically condemns the conglomerates and global capitalism. It is crucial to distinguish life, or life-creation by rational and scientific means, from Dureong's notion of true human nature (discovered in agrarian villages or in alternative living and quasi-religious, eschatological terms). For instance, Michel Foucault conceived the notion of "biopower," a technology and apparatus for organizing and managing the life of an entire population.<sup>83</sup> Foucault argues that biopower emerged with the formation of the modern nation-state and capitalism. The traditional mode of power was based on the threat of death from a sovereign through public spectacle. As a way to control the bodies of the subject and the population, beginning in the eighteenth century, the state maneuvered diverse techniques and means: its methods could include the regulation of sexuality, the management of health and reproductive practices, and the like. In other words, biopower has been utilized with an emphasis on the protection of life by control over the human body through rational and scientific means.

Because the Dureong members did not explore their notion of life in the context of biopower or of the intertwined relationship of the two, their idea of life is seen as too idealized and abstract to be rooted in the soil of the people's contemporary lives. In addition, one needs to ask whether it is justifiable and accurate to call the rational means of organizing life downright evil/death when there are other ways of conceptualizing life.

Along with rice, speech (*mal*) is crucial for communal living based on democratic dialogues between members. The living-community supporters believed

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<sup>83</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1998), 140.

that speech should be truthful, not deceitful, so as to reveal the truths of individuals and the nation-people. Because democratic ideals were ingrained in their emphasis on horizontal, egalitarian communal dialogue, their dialogue was subversive in its critiques of both the authoritarian state and capitalism.<sup>84</sup> Democratic interaction is the quintessential element of living together and enacting a healthy communal culture. As a result, the essential teaching of communal life is: “Let us talk, then [we will be] cured and liberated, and become one!” Whereas slogans such as “Silence is golden” and “Talking too much is red [communist]” were propagated by the state and the establishment.<sup>85</sup>

### **From the Mundane, From the Personal**

The Korean dissidents’ views of everyday community had a direct impact on how *minjung* artists and activists were expected to engage with local people. Many activists found that it was crucial to approach locals as if they were themselves part of the communities they attempted to serve. Kim Bongjun describes his drinking with farmers and workers thus: “If [your] speeches and body gestures are different, they think, ‘That guy is different from us,’ and then they avoid any heart-felt conversation.”<sup>86</sup> In addition, Kim commented on a serious gap between the activists and the farmers when it came to resolving the economic problems of agrarian villages. For instance, the farmers were already interested in organic farming and direct transactions in the early 1980s.<sup>87</sup> The activist leadership, however, approached the farmers’ issues through the lens of anti-dictatorial political struggle. Because the

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<sup>84</sup> Kim Jiha, “Ingan ui sahoejeok seonghwa” [“A Sacred Torch of Humanity”], 56.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>86</sup> Kim Jiha, Kim Bongjun et al., “*Minjung mihak simpojjum*” [“Symposium of Minjung Aesthetics”], *Gongdongche munhwa* [Community Culture], 3 (1986): 32.

<sup>87</sup> Kim Bongjun, *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae*, 137.

farmers were just barely making enough income, such political and ideological positions did not appeal to them.

In a similar vein, the director of the Catholic Peasant Association, Jeong Seongheon, mentioned in 1983 that when the activists attempted to incite the peasants to fight for medical insurance, they were unsuccessful. This caused the activists to complain about and even despise the farmers. However, if one initiated everyday conversation with the farmers, such as “Why are you feeling ill?” they could more gracefully talk about their own issues related to medical insurance. Then they began organizing themselves to resolve the issues with concrete demands.<sup>88</sup> Respecting the residents’ potential to act, some activists concentrated their work on fostering communalism and educating farmers to tackle the current problems through alternative means of farming and economic transactions.

For instance, the farmer-activist Choe Jaeyeong and some villagers initiated organic farming. This allowed them to sell their crops at higher prices, despite a general nosedive in food prices.<sup>89</sup> In the living-community movement in Seoul,<sup>90</sup> the participants enthusiastically shared their daily concerns about such issues as pollution, synthetic foods, and the lack of humane treatment of the elderly. They also discussed putting collective pressure on unethical companies by boycotting products and sending letters.<sup>91</sup> Others worked on direct dealings with farming villages, as exemplified by the farmer/activist Park Jaeil’s all-village production of cabbage and direct selling with Catholics in a church in Daegu.<sup>92</sup> Their transactions were not about cutting margins and wider distribution but rather about buying and selling goods at affordable prices

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<sup>88</sup> Park Jaeil et al., Jwadam: “saenghwal gongdongche, geu pyeongga wa jeonmang” [“Round Table Discussion: Living Community, Its Evaluation and Prospective”], *Gongdongche munhwa* [Communal Culture], 3 (1985): 72.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>90</sup> This movement was initiated by Father Jeong Ho’gyeong of Myeonmokdong Church in 1985.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 71.

with people they personally knew. Thus, the medium of exchange became a method for building community.<sup>93</sup> They believed that they could, to some extent, overcome the capitalist logic of commodification and its vast control over human life.

Some activists criticized the living-community movement for weakening greater political causes and for its lack of interest in structural problems. In addition, they pointed out that the notion of community was feudalistic and reactionary. In response, the community supporters argued that people who judged society through a social-scientific lens tended to divide social issues into major and minor parts.<sup>94</sup> Such conceptualizations inevitably led to the naïve belief that if society were fundamentally restructured, other problems, such as gender oppression, would be resolved as well.<sup>95</sup> The structural nature and meta-language of the political activists did not provide a language that was adequate for articulating everyday issues “scientifically.”<sup>96</sup> Jeong Ho’gyeong contends that although some perceived the *minjung* to have historical sovereignty, in reality the dissident intelligentsia did not trust the people; instead, they were easily tempted to manipulate the people for their own political goals.<sup>97</sup>

### Questioning “Our” Community

The male-dominated culture of the *undongwon* determined its political agenda by emphasizing a monolithic “us” over individuals or even diverse groups of people. Often, the activists understood the articulation of multiple objectives and organizations as detrimental to their collectives. They oppressed minority voices by charging them with being separatists or by persuading them to work for collective aims. Such

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>94</sup> Jeon Huigyeong, *Oppa neun piryo eopta : jinbo ui gabujangje e dojeonhan yeojadeul iyagi* [Don’t Need Brothers: Stories of Women Who Challenged the Patriarchy of Progressives] (Seoul: Imaejin, 2008), 56.

<sup>95</sup> Jeong Hogleong, “Saenghwal gongdonche ran mueot inga” [“What is a Living Community”], 48.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.



approaches were found also in the activities of farming communities. Instead of supporting the establishment of a women's farmer association, for example, many activists expressed reservations about and even opposed a separate organization of women for the aforementioned reasons.

Whether oriented toward politics or community activism, the strategies and objectives of many activists were grounded in their abstract and totalistic notions of the people's issues. This made it all too easy for them to avert their eyes from the issues of gender or of minorities, and specifically, women's issues, given the daily oppression embedded in the patriarchal culture and material base of the farming village. In the deserted farming villages, it was mostly elders and women who were left behind, while others migrated to the cities. The women farmers were not only the breadwinners and housewives but also the objects of the state's mass mobilization for the New Villages Movement. They were overworked and had no cultural life apart from television. They also suffered from undernourishment, pesticide poisoning, and health problems. In the male-dominated communities in which they lived, they were estranged from the decision-making process and had little or no say on issues such as village beautification, financing, and market transactions.<sup>98</sup>

Although Kim Bongjun worked in the farming villages, and although the Catholic Farmer Women's Assembly was founded as early as 1977, he did not address women's issues at all. For instance, Kim's *Dureong*, *Byeol ttase*, *The Cross of Liberation* and other pieces depict either the general suffering of all people or the people's festivals after all oppression has disappeared [Figure F.5, Figure F.10, Figure F.13]. Although he engaged in debates over everyday versus political struggles, his failure to recognize women's issues shows that he did not thoroughly assess the *minjung* ideology with which he aligned himself. Kim Bongjun's representations and

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<sup>98</sup> Yi Jieun, "Oneul ui nongchon yeoseong" ["Today's Women in Farming Villages"], *Changjak gwa bipyeong*, 52 (Summer 1979): 67.

activism directly reaffirmed the conventional activists' discourses: If the social structure is reformed, the oppression of women will end; independent organizations of women farmers are separatist, weakening the farmers' movement itself.<sup>99</sup> While Kim's artistic and community endeavors were aimed at conceiving a new community, they reinforced the oppressive structure that constituted dissident nationalism itself.

## Summary

Kim Bongjun and Dureong deliberated to explore the people's art and their everyday community in the process of envisioning humanism/democracy in its indigenous form. They were keenly aware of the national predicament and envisioned an art that would engage in dialogue with Korea's modern history. In opposition to alienating modernization and foreign interventions, they wanted to rebuild human relationships through their artwork, art-making, and activism. In order to re-imagine artistic form and content for the people's art and to foster communalism, they appropriated folk traditions, the national culture movement, and the church's *hyeonjang* activities/*minjung* theology as their aesthetic, discursive, and activist basis.

Dureong's notion of a new community, which is rooted in humanism and democracy, provided a philosophical and theological foundation for the reconfiguring of people's daily lives. In addition, Kim and other activists called attention to people's everyday lives in the cycle of communal work, including eating and sharing, as an alternative mode of living on communal terms. Without scrutinizing the dissidents' idealistic vision of *minjung* (community), however, Kim Bongjun and Dureong could not represent in the artists' works the voices of the so-called weaker gender or of minorities, such as women farmers, and their daily oppression.

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<sup>99</sup> Eom Yeong'ae, *Han'guk yeoseong nongmin undongsa: nongmin saengjon'gwon wigi wa yeoseong nongmin ui jojikjeok tujaeng* [History of Korean Women Farmers' Struggle: Crisis of Farmers' Right to Live and Their Organizational Struggle] (Seoul: Namu wa sup, 2007), 132.

**CHAPTER SIX:**  
**OH YUN:**  
**UTOPIA IN THE BREATH OF DANCE**

A year after his hunger strike in 1983, the dissident politician Kim Young Sam and his erstwhile political rival Kim Dae Jung created the New Korea Democracy Party (*shin han'guk minju dang*) on December 12, 1984, for the forthcoming general election. They won a landslide victory, emerging as the majority opposition party on February 2, 1985. University campuses, which were very much involved in the general election, were also abuzz with passionate campaigns for the upcoming student-government presidential election. Student activists were involved in heated debates divided by the question of whether to form an alliance with the opposition party.

The Democratization Movement of Youth Association (*minjuhwa undong cheongnyeon yeonhap*), founded in September 1983, held “CNP Debates” (or Debates on Democratization Reform) on the revolutionary lines of Korean society. The CNP debates were developed from the earlier Flag debates and continued until 1985. The Flag Sect’s NDR (National Democratic Revolution) was widely accepted over what many students perceived as the “petite bourgeoisie,” the “opportunistic” CDR (Civil Democratic Revolution; from everyday struggle to political struggle), and the “reckless” PDR (People’s Democratic Revolution) as the ideological basis of organizational strategies and tactics.<sup>1</sup>

The Democratization Promotion Committee (*minjuhwa chujin wiwonhoe*; “Flag Sect”) was formed by reinstated senior students and active junior student activists after the campus liberalization in April 1984. They urged a direct political struggle against the Chun dictatorship and argued against collaborating with any

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed discussion on the CDR, NDR, and PDR, please refer to chapter three.

constituencies of Korean society, including the opposition politicians. They thus supported the occupation of the headquarters of the ruling Democracy Justice Party (*minju jeong'ui dang*) in April 1985 and the occupation of the American Culture Center in Seoul in May 1985. In contrast, the members of the “anti-Flag Sect,” which grew out of the SNU (Seoul National University) student movement, argued that the most urgent priority for the student movement was to guide and educate the public and to forge solidarity with them.<sup>2</sup> On April 17, 1985, the Pan-National Student Alliance (*jeon'guk haksang yeonhap*) was established, consisting of three committees corresponding to three principles of the people's democracy and national unification: the *minjung*, the nation, and democracy.

Beginning in May 1985, the “Gwangju” question became a central issue among the pro-democracy forces. The Democracy Unification *Minjung* Alliance (*minju tong'il minjung yeonhap*) issued a public statement on the Gwangju Uprising and initiated public demonstrations. On May 17, at more than eighty universities nationwide, 38,000 students joined fierce protests, demanding to hear the truth about the Gwangju Uprising. On May 23, the SNU student Ham Oun'gyeong and seventy-three other students, who were members of the Pan-National Student Alliance, took over the library on the second floor of the American Culture Center for seventy-two hours. They demanded that the United States apologize publicly for its role in the oppression of the Uprising and discontinue its sponsorship of the Chun dictatorship. The Chun regime tried to separate the public from “radical” student activists by propagating a negative view of them because the regime feared that the *undonggwon* had gained a sympathetic alliance with the public. This incident brought public attention to the role of the United States in the Gwangju Uprising.

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<sup>2</sup> Ahn Byeongyong, “Gitbal nonjaeng” [“Debates of the Flags”], *80nyeondae han'guk sahoe daenonjaengjip* [The 1980s' Ideological Debates of Korean Society], edited by JoongAng Ilbosa (JoongAng Ilbo, 1990), 246.

At the same time, coalitions of labor groups and student activists brought increasing pressure that led to successes in the labor movement. The Chun government promoted unbridled capitalism, so it outlawed and suppressed democratic unionization.<sup>3</sup> To raise workers' awareness and help them organize, the students and labor activists became involved in *hyeonjang* activities, and they were nearly four thousand strong.<sup>4</sup> They organized strikes at Daewoo Automobile plants to promote the democratization of unions in 1984, as well as at the Guro industrial complex in 1985. The labor movement shifted to the public arena, foreshadowing laborers' predominant role in the 1987 Great Workers' Struggle. Similarly, farmers in the Hampyeong and Muan regions experienced economic hardships under the government's unfair policy on the growing of onions and sweet potatoes.<sup>5</sup> They protested with the support of the Catholic Farmers Association and the Christian Farmers Assembly in 1984, and their persistent protests resulted in the government compensating them.<sup>6</sup>

In the milieu of the radicalizing dissident movement, the oeuvre of the prominent *minjung* artist Oh Yun (1946–86) appears to be discordant with the political developments at that time. However, it is precisely the dissonance where he could

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<sup>3</sup> Kim Injae, “Banminjujeok beopryul ui gaepewa sabeopminjuhwa” [“Closure of Anti-Democratic Law and the Democratization of Law”], in *6wol minju hangjaeng gwa han'guk sahoe 10nyeon II: 6wol minju hangjaeng 10 ju'nyeon gi'nyeom haksul daetoronhoe jaryojip* [Korean Society after Ten Years of the June Democratization Movement II: Academic Conference Materials for Centennial Commemoration of the June Democratization], edited by haksul danche hyeopuihoe (Seoul: Dangdae, 1997), 53–54.

<sup>4</sup> Kim Yeongsu, “Gyegeup juche hyeongseong gwajeong euroseo ui 1980nyeondae nodong undong” [“The 1980s' Labor Movement as a Process of Subject Formation”], edited by Yi Haeyeong, *1980 nyeondae hyeokmyeong ui sidae* [The 1980s, The Era of Revolution] (Seoul: Seroun sesang, 1999), 253. The government distributed “blacklists” of laborers to factory managers. Anyone involved in the labor movement (i.e., in support of increased wages or democratic unionization) was blocked from reemployment. Many workers thereby lost their livelihoods. The haste with which the student activists tried to mobilize workers suggested their superior socioeconomic status.

<sup>5</sup> Their problems were interconnected with imported agricultural goods, arbitrary decisions on the part of the Agricultural Association, increased household debt, and a freeze in government purchasing of crops. The farmers demanded withdrawal of farmland taxes, the government's purchase of all sweet potatoes, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Park Segil, *Dasi sseuneun hanguk hyeondaesa 3* [Rewriting Contemporary Korean History 3] (Seoul: Dolbegae, 1992), 155–56.

contemplate humanism/life between the *undonggwon*'s political ideology and the people's everyday life through artistic imagination. This chapter explores the artistic and discursive deliberations of Oh Yun during the period 1984–85, his most productive years before his premature death in 1986. Although his work has been discussed and exhibited (posthumously) more often than that of any other *minjung* artist, only the most “obvious” characteristics of his aesthetic and discursive endeavors have been identified. As its true character is teased out further, however, his work reveals an intricate *sotong* (“dialogue”) with the emotional and spiritual worlds of common people between their living realities and the dissident discourse of the Korean “people-nation.”

For this chapter, I concentrate on the question of how he imagines humanism in dialogue with Koreans' predicaments and the vernacular idioms of community/liberation, such as *daedong* (the grand union between all living creatures) and *haewon* (the resolving of sorrow and grudges). Oh Yun did not describe the oppressions of Koreans and their utopian world per se, but rather explored the emotional and spiritual core of the people, the undercurrent in the state of *shinmyeong* (excitement, joy, and ecstasy), as the basis of the people's community and liberation. He used folk tradition to craft not only his own visual language and aesthetic tactics, but also a new way of imagining life that created dialogical spaces beyond the binary of past and present, tradition and modernity, artist and viewer. The simultaneity of the past and present in Oh Yun's artistic form and content does not simply confirm the continuous wretchedness of Koreans, but also points toward new possibilities in the future.

## Reality Group in 1969

Oh Yun was born to the realist writer Oh Yeongsu and his wife Kim Jeongsun in 1946. Oh Yeongsu is known for writing short novels, full of lyricism and sentiment, about the lives of Koreans. With great compassion for the common people, he delved deeply into life's joys and sorrows, contemplating the relationship between people and nature, the loss of humanism through modernization, and the recovery of human values.<sup>7</sup> His artistic world greatly influenced the formation of his son's artistic direction, although Oh Yun became more of a social critic.

Oh showed strong emotional attachment to the humble life of the people and to “tradition” from early on. His profound interest in them came not only from an innate leaning but also from his cultural environment: he met and conversed with numerous literary and cultural figures through his sister Oh Yeongsuk and her friends. At a time of brewing feelings against the Korea–Japan Normalization Treaty in 1963, Oh Yun met Kim Jiha, his lifelong friend and “brother,” in his senior year of high school. Stunned by Oh's work, in excitement, Kim Jiha began to “request” that Oh study Buddhist painting (particularly *Goryeo* Buddhist paintings and *Dunhuang* paintings), the genre painting of Kim Hongdo and Shin Yunbok, and the socially conscious art of Mexico's David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera, seeing in this admixture of styles and approaches the basis for a “national art.”

Oh was accepted into the sculpture department at Seoul National University in 1965, but he rarely attended class, like many students at that time, not only because of his dissatisfaction with the school curriculum, but also because of the frequent closure of campuses under the Park regime. Instead, Oh liked to visit important historical sites and studied traditional art with several scholars and artists. For instance, he traveled to

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<sup>7</sup> Oh Taeho, “Haeseol: yokmang gwa hyeonsil eul gilhang haneun seojeongjeok rieolijeum ui segye” [“The World of Lyrical Realism that Antagonizes with Desire and Reality”], in *Oh Yeongsu jakpumjip* [Collection of Oh Yeongsu's Writing] (Seoul: Jisik eul mandeuneun jisik, 2010), 11–27.

Chongryeong Temple, the base camp for *Namsadang-pe* (an all-male troupe of strolling actors) in the town of Ahnseong.<sup>8</sup> In addition, he was enthusiastic about contemplating a healthy national culture and art and about discussing sociopolitical issues such as the national unification and Korea's modernity in gatherings with his sister, Kim Jiha, Kim Yunsu, and others. Their meetings developed into a group called PONTRA ("Poem on Trash"), in 1969. In these meetings, the idea of a national art was first brought to fruition through the founding of the art collective Reality Group (*Hyeonsil dongin*).<sup>9</sup>

Oh Yun ignited the future of *minjung misul* by founding Reality Group in 1969 with his college friends Oh Gyeonghwan, Yim Setaek, and Gang Myeonghee under the guidance of Kim Jiha and Kim Yunsu. Initially, their preparations for exhibitions went smoothly. However, their posters and manifestos were mistakenly revealed to professors at Seoul National University. Many conservative art professors there perceived them as expressing socialist tendencies. They summoned the art college president, Seong Wan'gyeong, to cancel the exhibition.<sup>10</sup> Although the group's exhibition fell through, their manifesto was influential in the later emergence of socially conscious art.

The manifesto, written by Kim Jiha and edited by Kim Yunsu, takes a critical stance on the current art scene. It contends that academicism, naturalism, and avant-garde art experimentation share a common failure to dialogue—with sociopolitical realities. Instead, Kim Jiha champions *hyeonsil juui* (realism) as the right artistic style

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<sup>8</sup> Kim Munju, *Oh Yun: Han eul saengmyeong ui chum euro* [*Oh Yun: Dance of Life in Heaven*] (Seoul: Minjuhwa undong gi'nyeom saeophoe, 2007), 46.

<sup>9</sup> Kim Jiha, *Huin geuneul ui gil: Kim Jiha hoegorok* [*The Road of White Shadow: Recollection of Kim Jiha*], vol. 2 (Seoul: Hakgojae, 2008), 156–59.

<sup>10</sup> Yet, even after the exhibition was canceled, Oh Yun and his two friends were arrested and released after being warned by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency.



and spirit for the Korean nation.<sup>11</sup> He defines this form of realism as “the concrete reflection of dynamic reality” that is born of taking on its challenges.<sup>12</sup> However, the manifesto does not explain what *hyeonsil juui* is in terms of aesthetic form and content. One can speculate that it might take any form capable of communicating with the national past, present, and future, preferably through realistic representation. The new national art was to be achieved by reinterpreting tradition to fulfill contemporary needs.<sup>13</sup>

For the “failed” exhibition, Oh Yun had depicted the April 19 Student Uprising in a painting titled *1960 Ga* (1969) [Figure G.1]. This painting depicts the tragic lives of Koreans victimized by modernization and the Rhee Syngman dictatorship. Juxtaposed with the inhumane conditions under which they live, groups of young men and students are protesting, presumably intended to represent the April 19 event. Just as the multitudes of people rose against Rhee for his third presidential term, Oh’s painting predicts a similar uprising against the Park regime at the end of the Yusin Constitution: the Busan and Masan Uprising in 1979.

For this work, Oh adapted the artistic style of Diego Rivera. He viewed Rivera’s mural painting as a superb example of a national art, embracing what he saw as a successful interpretation of indigenous tradition adapted to play a crucial role in post-revolutionary Mexican society. Similar efforts were made by other contemporary artists as well in integrating “Korean aesthetics” into a Western form (e.g., *Informel* and *dansaekhwa*). However, Oh problematized many works as deficient in their artistic expressions of Koreans’ living realities, while experimenting superficially through style only. In other words, what matters is neither whether a work is Western

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<sup>11</sup> Kim Jiha used the term *Hyeonsil juui* to refer to realism and to distinguish it from naturalism, or the realistic description of objects without reference to society.

<sup>12</sup> Kim Jiha and Kim Yunsu, *Hyeonsil dongin seon’eon* [*Manifesto of Reality Group*], 1969.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

(or Japanese or Chinese), nor whether foreign influences are properly interpreted and appropriated. His interest in art's dialogue with Koreans' lives brought up a few questions that continue to be pursued: art's relation to the Korean people-nation, cultural expressions of Koreans as individuals and as a collective, and art's capacity to imagine worlds, unconfined by national boundaries.

### **Interrogating the Image of Happiness**

A decade after the failure of Reality Group in 1969, Oh Yun became a founding member of its successor, Reality and Utterance, with Yim Oksang, Ju Jaehwan, and other artists and critics. Oh diverged from other members in exploring “the tradition,” or what he perceived to be the people's living expressions. In a way, his artistic exploration during the Reality and Utterance period is a continuation of Reality Group in the pursuit of *sotong*, but he did not directly incorporate the notion of nation at this time. He saw that pursuing *sotong* touches upon what it means to be human in art, being able to overcome the current art's inability to communicate with the lives of Koreans. Oh thereby aimed at recovering the linguistic function from art. He writes:

My long assignment is how art recovers the function of language. Thus, in art history, numerous art movements have been mute for a long time. The era has been complex, partitioned, and radically changed. . . . Why are such things not replaced by artistic expression? Why can we articulate them in daily conversations, but find it impossible to express them with an artistic language?<sup>14</sup>

In his emphasis on *sotong*, Oh opted for prints and paintings as his mediums. Although he majored in sculpture, because sculpture is heavily confined by its medium, and because it is difficult to use sculpture to spontaneously respond to artists'

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<sup>14</sup> Oh Yun, “Misul ui eon'eo” [Language of Art], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongne saram* [Oh Yun: People of the World, People of the Village] (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2010), 492.

sociopolitical realities,<sup>15</sup> the sculptor Ahn Gyucheol speculates that Oh's decision to create prints and paintings might be connected to these dilemmas.<sup>16</sup>

The efforts of Oh and other members to create such art form and content were exemplified in their exhibitions "Visuals and the City" (1981) and "Shapes of Happiness" (1982). In "Shapes of Happiness," the Reality and Utterance members attempted to explore what happiness means and how it can be visually expressed in people's lives at both the individual and collective levels. For the exhibitions, the group's members juxtaposed their art with writings as an intertextual creation. The artist Kim Jeongheon depicts a nuclear family having a meal together, a representative image of a happy family in an urban setting [Figure G.2]. He suggests that such images became an effective means of persuading people to participate in the state's modernization policy to attain an affluent lifestyle above the standard of living at that time.

About a painting of a traffic jam [Figure G.3], another member, Min Jeonggi, writes that representations of happiness were mass-produced and perpetuated by print technology, the techno-bureaucratic system, and popular culture.<sup>17</sup> As a product of the social apparatus, happiness became a commodity in a form that alienated it from people's lives, while enforcing the state's and the media's propagandistic message. Oh Yun points out that many people voluntarily endured absurdity in various forms to acquire "happiness" without much reflection.<sup>18</sup> Building on their critique of such representations of "happiness," the group's members examined how the fictional idea

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<sup>15</sup> Ahn Gyucheol, "80nyeondae han'guk jogak ui daeahn eul chajaseo," in *Minjung Misul eul hyanghayeo: hyeonsil gwa baleon 10nyeon ui baljachwi* [Toward Minjung Misul: Traces of 10 Years of Reality and Utterance], edited by Hyeonsil gwa baleon pyeonjip wiwonhoe (Seoul: Gwahak gwa sasang, 1990), 148.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>17</sup> The catalogue for "Shapes of Happiness," *Guerim gwa mal*, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 16.

of art and its transcendental system created a hyperreality and deceived people into believing in it,<sup>19</sup> investing their value and energy in a futile search.

The members' interrogation of everyday life and art was considered too narrowly focused within the art world and thus insufficiently relevant by the later *minjung* artists, in light of the more militant and ideological development of the dissident movement, after 1983. Nonetheless, instead of working on dialogical art in the shifting artistic and political paradigms, Oh Yun reimagined art and the people according to alternative models of both aesthetics and the world. He explored the notion of life (*saengmyeong*) and its related religious-spiritual and cultural traditions, which became central to his artistic and political imagination. As he moved into a life-centered philosophy, his art of *sotong* aspired to dream and embrace the people in their most humble and spiritual expressions beyond art's referential to the reality or structural critique or envisioning the national community.

### **The Dandelion Seeds, Kim Jiha, the Poet of Life**

Oh Yun was naturally suspicious of the ideological and collective inclinations of the arts and of activism. It was logical, then, that his conceptualization of art and the world/s was influenced by or intersected with Kim Jiha's radical philosophical turn to the issue of life in 1980. Kim Jiha had been imprisoned again for revealing the truth about the Inhyeokdang Incident in his prison notes titled "Suffering . . . 1974."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>20</sup> The Inhyeokdang Incident occurred in the midst of investigations into the National Democratic Student Federation (Jeon'guk *minju* cheongnyeong haksae yonmang). The KCIA made a public issue that forty-one dissident journalists, professors, and students, and the like created the Inhyeokdang Reconstruction Committee directed by North Korea on August 14, 1964. In February 1974, Kim Jiha, Yi Cheol, and many members of the National Democratic Student Federation were released or their sentences reduced. However, Do Yejong and seven other prisoners were sentenced to death and executed within 24 hours.

Although Kim Jiha was able to get by in the first few years of his imprisonment, he suddenly began to suffer from claustrophobia. Despite this, because he was under a 24-hour watch in a special-security prison, and because officials constantly tried to “persuade” him when they detected any signs of weakness, he felt he should keep everything inside.<sup>21</sup> Facing an “existential crisis,” he saw plant seeds that had rooted and sprouted in a small hole in the iron-and-cement wall of his cell.<sup>22</sup> From this observation, he thought if the prison wall or a watchful prison guard could not stop life from growing, how could he, a more spiritual being than dandelion seeds, be writhing in agony behind the wall?<sup>23</sup>

After this epiphany, Kim Jiha concentrated on promoting his vision of life, or *saengmyeong*. He saw life as always encompassing death, so that even if an individual life ends, because one’s being is entwined with the earth and the cosmos, life itself does not end.<sup>24</sup> He declared that the notion of life is a turning point and a new paradigm in human civilization, as discussed in the Eastern Learning or *Donghak* emphasis on the endless cycle of life and now. According to him, the world is advancing toward an era of life and spirit, contemplation and revolution, demanding a new synthesis of Eastern and Western thought, pursuing the ancient and the future at once.<sup>25</sup> As Donghak taught that the human is Heaven, Kim believes that the re-creation of Donghak can be a radical reconceptualization of humanism or human civilization.

Embracing the idea of life, Kim Jiha set about creating a true grassroots movement, intervening in the most fundamental elements of living by promoting the production and distribution of organic vegetables, direct face-to-face transactions, and

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<sup>21</sup> Kim Jiha, *Saengmyeong gwa jachi* [*Life and Autonomy*] (Seoul: Sohl), 30.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 33.

the living-community movement.<sup>26</sup> However, many activists and the *undonggwon* were perplexed because they thought of Kim as a radical communist as a result of his portrayal by state propaganda. But Kim had never been a full-fledged supporter of socialism or communism. Given the urgent need of the dissident movement for an influential leader, his idea of life was received by many as a sign of resignation and betrayal that made him a counterrevolutionary. They subsequently satirized and cursed Kim and his work to such a degree that Kim remembered later, “Indeed, anti-intellectual fascism is more serious among the so-called *undonggwon*.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Touching the Life, Feeling the Heart**

We see Kim Jiha’s innate refusal to embrace sectarian and dogmatic approaches as well in his critique of the 1980s’ national culture movement: “Many people misunderstood the low quality of propaganda as the political use of art and declared that art is an instrument of struggle. Aesthetics thereby returned to worn-out naturalistic realism, and I don’t see any hope.”<sup>28</sup> Oh Yun, a longtime friend to Kim Jiha, also opposed the use of art simply to serve politics and even expressed his aversion in formal meetings.<sup>29</sup> Oh observed that representing the people’s lives is not easy for artists and intellectuals, so one should respect such limitations with sympathy.<sup>30</sup> Instead, he believed that art could be an imaginative way to approach and reconceptualize the world we have known as well as worlds beyond.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>28</sup> Kim Jiha, *Saengmyeong gwa jachi*, 75.

<sup>29</sup> Yi Cheolsu, “Yin’ganjeok’in guerim” [“Humane Painting”], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongne saram*, [*Oh Yun: People of the World, People of the Village*], vol. 1 (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2010), 255.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 225.

In his 1984 writing “Artistic Imagination and Expansion of the World,”<sup>31</sup> Oh Yun argues that art needs to expand the world through genuine *sotong* [his word] with that world. He writes that science opens up an unlimited potential for progress in modern society, but that the current science-centered view of life tends to “thingify,” frame, and stuff objects with knowledge.<sup>32</sup> According to him, such a view often results in a “reduction(s) of the world” or of art’s freedom to imagine other worlds.<sup>33</sup> Due to this shrunken view of the world, in his view, even studies of tradition focus on a formalistic logic rather than grasping the world behind it.<sup>34</sup> The realism that had long accompanied socialism was a rigidified realism.<sup>35</sup> Hence, Oh asserts, one needs to recreate a version of realism that can reflect both spiritual and mental forms of expression.<sup>36</sup>

For the cultivation of art’s new potential, Oh Yun paid attention to people in their daily lives, unformulated by political ideology and the discourse of the *minjung*. In visualizing life, Oh Yun saw people as archetypal figures both in personal and in collective terms. His friend Lee Seokwu observed that Oh did not like to use the term “*minjung*” or “the people,” nor did he want to confine its meaning to the oppressed and alienated class in capitalist society or to the notion of historical sovereignty in the national culture movement and the democratization movement.<sup>37</sup> For him, the people were his neighbors, friends, family, relatives, and anyone he met in his daily life. The activist Hwang Gwangwu expressed a similar sentiment:

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<sup>31</sup> Oh Yun, “Misuljeok sangsangryeok gwa segye ui hwakdae” [“Artistic Imagination and Expansion of the World”], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongne saram* [Oh Yun: People of the World, People of the Village], vol. 1 (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Oh Yun, “Misuljeok sangsangryeok gwa segye ui hwakdae” [“Art’s Imagination and Expansion of the Reality”], *Oh Yun: han eul saengmyeong ui chum euro* [Oh Yun: Han as Dance of Life] (Seoul: minjuhwa undong gi’nyeom saeophoe, 1985), 215–26.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 487.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 481.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 488.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Maybe for some seniors, the farmers were *minjung* who were difficult to approach. For me, they were my uncles and aunts. If the torn shirts of the farmers represented their poverty, for me it was part of familiar daily life in a farming village. The upper class students taught us that we should not see the *minjung* as objects but live with the *minjung*, and such an attitude is a road to true intellectuals. However, my own uncle and aunt did not know the word “*minjung*.” They called themselves “people without money and power.” The intellectuals who used the term *minjung* objectified the people from the beginning.<sup>38</sup>

Han Yunsu, another friend of Oh, recalled that, for the artist, the people were both his friends and the subject matter of his art. For instance, Oh Yun rented studio space in Gaori, a slum area. He used to hang out and drink with his neighbors and friends. They shared their life stories, which were often connected with the Korean War and even the Donghak Peasant Uprising through their family lineage. He observed how they worked, took rest, ate, and drank.<sup>39</sup> Many of his figural works were about the neighbors he encountered and with whom he chatted on the street, in stores, and on other casual occasions [Figure G.4 and Figure G.5]. He had great compassion for them because he could see the human dignity in common people more than in the rich and powerful.<sup>40</sup> Thus, when their anger, resistance, and pain are expressed in his work, he captures the deprivation of and conflict with their human dignity and life force.<sup>41</sup> Oh viewed their ordinary lives as illuminating the core of life in integrating the ordinary and the spiritual in the language of humanism.

Oh Yun’s idea of people and life is well articulated in one of his black-and-white woodblock-print series, *Land V* (1983) [Figure G.6]. He made several sketches for the print *Land V* during the years 1970 through 1983. His rough drafts were

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<sup>38</sup> Hwang Gwangwu, *Jeolmeumyiyeo ohrae geogi namah itgeora* [*The Youth, Stay There for Long*] (Seoul: Changbi, 2007), 44–45.

<sup>39</sup> Han Yunsu, “Gaori eseo chaek pyoji reul sijakhada” [“Beginning Book Illustrations at Gaori”], in *Oh Yun; sesang saram, dongnae saram*, 207.

<sup>40</sup> Yi Seokwu, “Saengmyeong ui him gwa maek eul hyeongsang euro tteonaen seonguja” [“Pioneer Who Articulated Life Force and Breathing”], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongnae saram*, 78.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



executed in brushwork, pencil, coal, and pen. If the earlier drafts feature sculptural figures with sharp, metallic lines yet affectionate ties between mother and child [Figure G.7 and Figure G.8], the 1980s drafts employ much rounder forms and more organic lines, and show the mother's determination to protect her child [Figure G.9]. Interestingly, in his more than decade-long studies for the *Land* series, the principle subject matter and its representation did not change. This indicates his perseverance in grasping his subject matter as thoroughly as possible. At the same time, one could say that he condensed and chiseled many ways of describing people's lives into an archetypal, if somewhat static, form.<sup>42</sup> Or one could also say that, as a result, he was able to capture the "essence" of myriad individual realities in his work.

*Land V* represents a mother's determination to protect her child against a destructive force moving toward them. She holds the child on her lap, guarding him tightly while holding a rifle with her right hand. As the art critic Seong Wan'gyeong states, Oh described them with powerful lines that exude firm, heavy, taut feelings.<sup>43</sup> As he carefully laid down all the visual elements, Oh expressed the mother's staunch resolution and love within a metaphorical structure: the eye of a typhoon. The center of the print is a fragile child on whom the mother's large-boned hand lies. As the viewer's eyes linger on mother and child at the tactile surface of the woodcut plate, they connect with them as the mother assures the child with her protective touch. This central image exudes the tenderness of motherly love, yet it is also "the eye" of her fierce force in the battle. The mother's shielding arms and erect legs, which resemble the huge bricks of a stronghold, wrap around the child, one upon the other, in

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<sup>42</sup> Seong Wan'gyeong, "Oh Yun ui but gwa kal" ["Oh Yun's Brush and Knife"], in *Minjung Misul eul hyanghayeo: hyeonsil gwa baleon 10nyeon ui baljachwi* [Toward Minjung Misul: Traces of 10 Years of The Reality and Utterance], edited by Hyeonsil gwa baleon Publication Committee (Seoul: Gwahak gwa sasang, 1990), 225.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 224.

concentric circles. As her force unfolds and projects further outward, her energy appears to be magnified by thrusting itself into the space with great intensity.

Oh Yun does not necessarily mention the realities of the mother and the child in a prosaically descriptive manner. Rather, he pays attention to the moment when the mother's determination to fight for a better life is well manifested. Hence, the land—the symbolic and tangible space entrenched with the people's past, present, and future—becomes a battleground for humanism. As the land is the foundation of the people, so is the mother the foundation of the child's growth and well-being. Her fight is not merely about a militaristic victory over oppression. It is ultimately about returning to the human values of life. Oh thus brings art to life and life to art, and this approach to art is born out of his desire to seek “a value system centered on life” in and of art.<sup>44</sup>

### **You, I, and We in Suffering and Liberation**

In the *Land* series by Oh Yun, the mother's tenacity to persevere and yearn for a humane life seizes upon the Korean concept of *han*, long-repressed sorrow, bitterness, and grudges. Just as Ham Seokheon called Korean history a “history of hardship,” so is *han* premised by the reality that pre-modern and modern Koreans have suffered throughout history, through famine, feudalism, foreign invasions, national division, modernization, and dictatorships. Although people in other nation-states have historically suffered as well, South Korean intellectuals and artists perceive *han* as unique to the emotional and cultural expressions of Koreans.<sup>45</sup> The poet Go Eun says that *han* is indispensable and predominant among Korean *minjung* emotions.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The Catholic Farmers' Association Charter of 1987.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>46</sup> Go Eun, “Han ui geukbok eul wihayeo” [“Overcoming *Han*”], in *Han ui yiyagi* [*Stories of Han*], edited by Seo Gwangseon (Bori, 1988), 29. Quoted in *ibid.*, 59.

As Koreans were forced to suffer through inhumane conditions, Kim Jiha saw that their hearts were filled with an accumulated feeling of grief and bitterness that had no outlet. Kim defined *han* in “Satire and Suicide”:

Sorrow is coagulated in the hearts of poets by torture and stigma from the violence of materialism. And it condenses in the depth of one’s heart. When this situation is continued, sorrow is deepened. . . . When such sorrow accumulates, it is called *han*. *Han* is a particular emotional condition that emerges when a rightful course of the life force is obstructed, and when this [unfulfilled] process is repeated.<sup>47</sup>

Kim Jiha also illumines that *han* is a state of rage and bitterness against unjustifiable oppression.<sup>48</sup> It is more than just a feeling of resignation. The journalist, educator, cultural critic, and government minister Yi Eoryeong asserts that *han* cannot exist without a desire to attain something and that it can be resolved only by attaining what one truly wants.<sup>49</sup>

*Minjung* theology, which is closely related to the practices of Korean shamanism and Donghak, imagines such a desire to overcome as *dan* (“a cutting off”), a sublimation of the negative forces of *han*.<sup>50</sup> In the dialectic of *han* and *dan*, *minjung* theology conceptualizes the *minjung* as performing the messianic role of unifying God

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<sup>47</sup> Kim Jiha, “Pungja’nya jasalyi’nya” [“Satire and Suicide”], in *Minjok ui norae, minjung ui norae* [*Song of the Nation, Song of the People*] (Seoul: Donggwang chulpansa, 1984), 173.

<sup>48</sup> Mun Donghwan, “Han-sesalm ui gijeom” [“*Han*-New Point for New Life”], in *Han ui yiyagai* [*Stories of Han*], 346; quoted in *ibid.*, 60.

<sup>49</sup> Yi Eoryeong, “Puneun munhwa, sinbaram ui munhwa” [“Culture of Relief and Excitement”], *JoongAng Ilbo*, September 23, 1982. Quoted in Yi Gyeongsuk, Park Jaesun, and Cha Oksung, *Han’guk saengmyeong sasang ui ppuri* [*Origin of Korea’s Life Philosophy*] (Seoul: Ehwa Women’s University Press, 2001), 58.

<sup>50</sup> The theologian Ahn Byeongmu distinguishes between “*han*” and “sin.” He views “sin” as a label ascribed to the *minjung* by the ruling class, so he looks at social conditions that cause one to sin rather than at the sin itself. According to him, “*han*” is the people’s expression of their enduring sorrow, born of the accumulated experience of oppression. If *han* is a dominant feeling of defeat and resignation, it is also a tenacity and will to live in the oppressed, on both psychological and social levels. Only through total transformation of the unjust society can *han* be resolved and salvation for the *minjung* be achieved. Hence, *minjung* theology is characterized as a messianic movement; it is positioned in the long tradition of the *minjung*’s general messianism. Please see Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 1993); David Kwang-sun Shu, “A Biblical Sketch of Asian Theological Consultation,” *Minjung Theology: The People as the Subjects of History* (New York: Orbis Book, 1983), 25.

and revolution. Its emphasis on the people's suffering and liberation finds affinity with the liberation theology that had a global impact in Asia, Africa, and particularly in Latin America in the 1960s. Liberation theology is also grounded in the historical realities of the pueblo under colonialism, sociopolitical oppressions, and economic exploitations. Unlike the *minjung*, a symbolic, cultural, ideological concept, the pueblo is concretely derived from the Marxist analogy and category.<sup>51</sup> Similar to practitioners of *minjung* theology, the liberation theologians perceived salvation to be the restoration of human rights through struggle against the current oppressive system. As a result, working toward the transformation of the world is itself a process of humanization and of building a humane society/liberation.<sup>52</sup>

Oh Yun and cultural activists translated *dan*, or the people's struggle for liberation, into an aesthetic term, *shinmyeong*. *Han* and *shinmyeong* are thereby thought to be part of one circular movement, constantly renewing and reconfiguring one another. Like *han*, *shinmyeong* is not only an aesthetic form and sensibility, but also a set of dialogical points through which to interact with the people's lives along a continuum. These activists shifted a conventional judgment of artistic beauty and made it possible to radically rethink art and overcome the alienation of life.<sup>53</sup>

Kim Bongjun describes the abstract term *shinmyeong* by giving an example of farmers' responses to his friends' performance. Even though his *pungmul* group was not proficient at recreating tradition, Kim recalled that when they performed, their audiences exclaimed freely and danced with excitement.<sup>54</sup> Kim sensed that their *pungmul* must have triggered something inside the audience. When *shinmyeong* in a

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<sup>51</sup> Kim Ilmok, "A Critical Analysis of the Relationship between Salvation and Social Justice in *Minjung* Theology," Ph.D. dissertation, Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2008, 109.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>53</sup> Kim Jiha et al., "*Minjung* mihak simpojjum" ["Symposium of *Minjung* Aesthetics"], in *Gongdongche Munhwa* [*Communal Culture*], 1986, 29.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 27.

person triggers such a state to be shared by other members, Chae Hwiwan, a *madanggeuk* creator, observed, a sense of collective reality soon spreads with an explosive force, with important implications for possible social transformation.<sup>55</sup> Kim views such emotional and spiritual states as *chung'il* (exuberance, overflow, and abundance), which unifies people with irrepressible joy.<sup>56</sup> It gathers all the conflicting elements of reality into one place and disentangles *han* and pain, as in shamanistic rituals.<sup>57</sup>

The feeling of *han* and *shinmyeong* is well conveyed in Yi Cheongjun's novel *Seopyeonje* (1976) and in the movie by the same title (1993). *Seopyeonje* refers to *pansori* (a one-person traditional drama performance), centered in the western Jeolla province. *Seopyeonje* has a long sorrowful sound, as if it captures the regional oppression of the Jeolla people. In the story, Yubong, once the best pupil of a mastersinger, wanders around with the orphan girl Songhwa and the orphaned boy of the widow Dongho. He teaches them *pansori*, but Dongho is not happy with their meager life. To "prohibit" Songhwa from running away and to deepen her voice with *han*, Yubong blinds her with medicine. Although she understands why she has been blinded, Songhwa focuses more sharply on her singing and is able to find her "voice" for *pansori*. After years of separation, when Songhwa and Dongho meet again, they unbind their *han* through all-night *pansori*. Without introducing themselves to each other by name or asking about each other's whereabouts, they recognize each other in the *han*-filled songs.

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<sup>55</sup> Yim Jintaek, "Madanggeuk eseo madanggut euro" ["From Madanggeuk to Madanggut"], in *Minjung yeonhui ui changjo: Yim Jintaek pyeongronjip* [Creation of Minjung's Entertainment: Yim Jintaek's Selection of Critiques] (Seoul: Changhak gwa bipyeong, 1990), 86.

<sup>56</sup> Kim Jiha et al., 29.

<sup>57</sup> Yim Jintaek, "Madanggeuk eseo madanggut euro," 86.

Although *han* is a feeling of sorrow and grudges, it is not one of revenge and hatred but is rather a collective desire to overcome suffering and to live humanely.<sup>58</sup> Oh Yun represents the *han* of the people in the incomplete scroll painting *Won'guido* ("Vindictive Spirits," oil on canvas) in 1985 [Figure G.10]. He depicts the people's stories and their spirits from the Donghak Peasant Uprising to the Gwangju Uprising. *Won'guido* is a painting of the spirit of grudges and grievances in which the living and the dead coexist. It visually traces Oh Yun's heart-wrenching dialogue with the past historical memories of Koreans.

Oh Yun had particular affection for the Jiri Mountains because of their significance to the people's history: the Donghak peasant uprising of the late Joseon dynasty, the Righteous Army during the Japanese colonial era, and the *partisan* armies during the Korean War. When Oh visited the Jiri Mountains, he felt that many vindictive spirits wandered in every valley. He promised these ghosts that he would represent their unjustified deaths so that his works could comfort these spirits without grudges and sorrow.<sup>59</sup>

The work depicts the causes of Korean suffering and hardship through multiple narratives. It opens with a group of armed skeleton soldiers marching with colorful banners, as the clouds of war hang heavy over the sky. Behind them, disabled veterans represent the tragic human losses of the Korean War. People who would be considered political offenders during the Rhee and Park dictatorships are seen walking in prison uniforms. In the air, spirits float in a space surrounded by barbed wire, like that which one can witness along the highly fortified border with North Korea. Several women are marching. They appear to have lost their minds from the excessive shock and pain of the Gwangju experience.

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<sup>58</sup> Yi Gyeongsuk, Park Jaesun, and Cha Oksung, *Han'guk saengmyeong sasang ui ppuri* [Origin of Korea's Life Philosophy] (Seoul: Ehwa Women's University Press, 2001), 61.

<sup>59</sup> Kim Minju, 61.

In this visual “epic novel” of post-colonial Korean history, the people’s past and present are woven together as in a tapestry. One can engage in their continuing experience of *han* and their wishes to transcend it in both present and futuristic terms. Although his work also depicts the ghosts of *han*, in his reading of *Won’guido*, Kim Jiha says that their *han* is transformed into *shinmyeong* and joy in its horizontal format.<sup>60</sup> Although Oh Yun might not have liked to hear it, Kim Jiha said that Oh grasped the “true internal life of the *minjung*’s life.”<sup>61</sup> Oh’s emphasis of the scroll format suggests that he saw it as a visual metaphor for *han*. As his painting is spread open, the figures’ stories are shared with the viewer. At the same time, as they are rolled back up, their suffering and healing are entwined. The departure scene of the Righteous Army in the novel *Arirang* (1993–2003), written by the prominent yet also highly controversial writer Cho Jeongrae, clearly captures this idea.<sup>62</sup>

After several years of guerrilla warfare during the colonial period, the generals of the Righteous Army decided to disperse their soldiers because it was so reckless to fight against a Japanese army that aimed to exterminate them. Before leaving their base, the soldiers decided to sing the (folk) song “Arirang” together, standing arm-in-arm in a circle. Although they kept the original melody, each person sang his personal version of “Arirang,” with new lyrics, in high spirits. They criticized and satirized the colonial situation, while demonstrating their determination to fight until the end. They

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<sup>60</sup> Kim Jiha, “Jungryeokjeok chowol yiraneun saengmyeong gwa geumajeo beoseonan keun pyeonghwa: Oh Yun gwa na” [“Life which Overcomes Its Existential Gravity and Larger Peace beyond Life: Oh Yun and I”], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongnae saram*, 117. This writing was originally published in *Oh Yun: natdokkaebi shinmyeong madang* [*Shinmyeon Madang of Bogy*] (Seoul: Keolcheo buks, 2006). Here, he used the term “heung” to express excitement, joy, and ecstasy. It was interchangeably used with “shinmyeong” in the text. Earlier than these two articles, in his article on Oh Yun (and the other members of Reality and Utterance) in 1991, “Teukbyeol gigo: saengmyeong ui misulro” [“Special Contribution: for Art of Life”], Kim Jiha used the term “shinmyeong” to describe Oh Yun’s works. In particular, in discussing *Wonguido*, he appropriated *pansori*’s rhythm to explain its art form and content.

<sup>61</sup> Kim Jiha, “Jungryeokjeok chowol yiraneun saengmyeong gwa geumajeo beoseonan keun pyeonghwa: Oh Yun gwa na,” 118.

<sup>62</sup> Cho Jeongrae, *Arirang*, 12 vols. (Seoul: Haenaem, 2002).

resolved their *han* through *shinmyeong*: they renewed their community as seeds germinating their own liberation.

For Oh Yun, *shinmyeong* and *han* were critical because they were thought to underlie the emotional, physical, and spiritual spheres of everyday people, conversing with their time continuum. He considered them to be not merely traditional aesthetics and expressions of the *minjung*'s suffering, but rather the living embodiment of the people beyond spatio-temporal divisions. Instead of the vernacular images of *daedong* or *haewon*, Oh finds utopia in the emotional and spiritual state of *shinmyeong*, in which people express their humanism in the most liberating sense.

### **History as Ideology: Questioning the *Minjung* Historiography**

As *han* is conceptualized in Koreans' historical experiences, the reinterpretation of modern Korean history is a way to reclaim *minjung* sovereignty from the state discourse. The dissident intellectuals believed the national history to be a collective repository that they could deploy to inspire and mobilize Koreans to assert their subjectivities. They believed that historical facts should serve the Korean nation and propose a correct vision for its historical progress, rather than merely recording a chronological progression or too readily reflecting the state version of events.

According to Jacqueline Pak, the revisionist *minjung* historians, especially of the post-Gwangju 1980s, were in search of "a political correctness of ideological purity, or self-righteousness,"<sup>63</sup> and sometimes re-read or misread the historical facts in order to "genealogize" the anti-state *minjung* movement in line with the non-mainstream nationalist or communist movement. She notes that these so-called *minjung* or revisionist historians often adopted the logic of dichotomy between *mun*

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<sup>63</sup> Jacqueline Pak, "Cradle of the Covenant," in *Christianity in Korea*, edited by Robert E. Buswell and Timothy S. Lee (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 123.



(culture) and *mu* (military).<sup>64</sup> She further delineates that in such historiography, the nationalist movement was crudely demarcated into “Confucian-left-patriot-militarist-righteous army vs. Christian-right-collaborators-cultural nationalist-patriotic enlightenment.”<sup>65</sup> She perceives that in employing such a binary logic the dissidents too reductively championed the left-militarist as legitimate and reconceived their pro-democracy movement in its representational and discursive politics. After the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, this binary logic became greatly polemicized and rigidified in the context of the Cold War and the conflict between the dictatorship and civil society.

Based on this dichotomy, for instance, the *minjung* historiography postulates that the Donghak peasant movement and other Righteous Army movements were anti-feudal and revolutionary in comparison with the bourgeois, Christian cultural pacifists. (Jacqueline Pak and other Christian scholars would problematize and disagree with such a description of Christian nationalists in and of itself.) However, a growing body of work acknowledges the Donghak’s conservative and un-revolutionary character. In addition, some Christian leaders worked with the Righteous Army to wage war against the Japanese colonialists. Both Confucian and Christian reformers worked conscientiously to nurture and imprint a national spirit and culture in the people by imagining the nation in terms of their shared language, history, and tradition. On the other hand, Christian leaders emphasized a new sovereign democracy and education. An example of this can be seen in Ahn Changho’s case, for not only did Ahn work with various movements (e.g., the Righteous Army, anarchists, and communists) in an eclectic manner, but he also incorporated and experimented with the idea of constitutional democracy in his re-envisioning of the modern Korean nation.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>66</sup> Please see Jacqueline Pak, *An Ch’angho and the Nationalist Origins of Korean Democracy*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1999.

In the *minjung* historiography, only certain memories are constituted or re-constituted in a political and ideological manner. Or only some histories are selectively gathered, imagined, and reinterpreted to compose the lineage or legacy of the *minjung* movements. Among historical events, the 1894 Donghak Peasant Uprising, for example, is one of the most popular in the dissident discourse. It has been widely viewed as a historical turning point as the moment of the birth of *minjung*-consciousness in the late Joseon dynasty. This event was actively appropriated and repurposed in the national literature and among the *minjung misul*. The dissident community cherished it for embodying a tradition of resistance as well as a set of fighting tactics along with a culture and philosophy that could realize a horizontal community and liberate the *minjung* from all oppressive powers.<sup>67</sup>

*Minjung* historians emphasized the Donghak socioeconomic reform or revolution—as the peasant uprising and the class war in a feudal Joseon society. Kim Jiha, who has a Donghak family background, opposed such a reading, which he thought was too straightforward an interpretation of historical records and materials.<sup>68</sup> He stressed that because the people's record had been voluntarily and officially oppressed, in order to reach truth one should use historical imagination and living realities.<sup>69</sup> Here, Kim's critique of the revisionist writing presumed that these historians used reliable historical sources and interpreted them without distorting obvious historical facts.

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<sup>67</sup> Nancy Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 23–24.

<sup>68</sup> Kim Jiha, *Sasang gihaeng: sin yillryureul kkumkkumyeo 2* [*Journey of Philosophy: Imagining New Humanity 2*] (Seoul: Silcheon munhaksa, 1999), 141. His *Sasang gihaeng* was published in 1999, five years later than his *Donghak yiyagi* [Donghak Story]. *Donghak Iyagi*, which many people refer to for Kim's writing on Donghak, was published in 1994 for the centennial anniversary of the Donghak Uprising. However, he and his friends had already begun their book project *sasang gihaeng* in 1985 by taking a trip to important historical sites. This book consists of their travelogue, interviews, and Kim Jiha's writings.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

Based on such a conjecture, Kim Jiha criticized the revisionist *minjung* historians for tending to focus solely on the political aspect of Donghak by defining it as an anti-imperial national uprising and as a class war.<sup>70</sup> He perceived that their myopic reading of Donghak resulted from their accentuating of the division of Donghak: Donghak consists of the north and south branches based on the geographical locations of the movement leaders.<sup>71</sup> That is, Choe Sihyeong was the north-branch leader in Chungcheong province, and Jeon Bongjun was the south-branch leader in Jeolla province. The historians read the north branch as a mystic and religious faction for the Later Heaven. They perceived the south branch, centered in Jeolla province, to be driven toward social reform by the peasants, especially in terms of Donghak as a war strategy and tactical benchmark.<sup>72</sup> This division was crucial in bringing the *undonggwon* to champion Donghak, favoring the anti-feudal and anti-imperial nature of the peasant uprising over its religious and spiritual aspects.<sup>73</sup> Kim believed that such a binary was prevalent among contemporary activists.<sup>74</sup> It induced them to perceive spiritual, holistic, and religious reform/revolution as irrelevant to and even in conflict with political reform.<sup>75</sup>

According to Kim Jiha, the fleeing of the founder of Donghak, Choe Jewu or Suwun (his penname), to Eunjeokam in 1861 is critical to an understanding of both the political and the spiritual dimensions of the movement.<sup>76</sup> Choe was a fugitive because his radical philosophy made him an enemy of the Confucian order, which was the backbone ideology of the Joseon dynasty. Several of Kim's writings follow Choe's footprints in the Eunjeokam period. As a response to feudalism as well as foreign

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>72</sup> Kim Jiha, 139.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 141–50.

military and spiritual invasions, Kim perceived that, by teaching sovereignty and equality, Choe's way offered a new revolution of humanity in terms of life and the spiritual world, culture, religions, and values.

Kim Jiha points out that Choe Jewu wrote his sword-dance poem while he was staying in Eunjeokam. The poem expresses his will to eliminate social evils and encourages the people to rise up against a corrupt regime and the imperial powers that threatened Koreans. It also expresses Choe's belief that such a rare historical opportunity comes along only once in fifty thousand years.<sup>77</sup> In the beginning, Kim writes that the song-poem and the sword dance were Choe's personal performance media.<sup>78</sup> Later, they became essential rituals in mobilizing the people's solidarity during the Donghak peasants' battles against the oppressive regime and foreign invaders.<sup>79</sup>

### ***The Song of the Sword, the Song of the People***

Oh Yun's *The Song of the Sword* [Figure G.11] is a visual rewriting of Choe Jewu's sword dance in Kim Jiha's (and his own) philosophical and spiritual exploration of Donghak. Although one could imagine a solitary, dynamic sword dance under the moonlight, Oh carved the figure against a red background without any description. Perhaps he was not much interested in limning historical "facts" through his art. On a preliminary reading, his print invites the viewer to engage in the continuing process of re-reading and re-writing Choe's political and spiritual acts for a new world. Through the act of re-reading the image, the viewer is encouraged to participate with Donghak in the process of envisioning their community.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

In Oh Yun's print, spiritual or other forms of cleansing are visually expressed by the sliced Chinese characters encircling Choe Jewu's dancing figure. The rendering of the Chinese characters (the official Korean written language during the Joseon dynasty) in thick black lines against a bloody red color dramatizes the image.<sup>80</sup> His figure is rendered in rhythmic gestures that signify the slicing and slashing of all things evil or corrupt in human beings and society: greed, anger, wickedness, destruction, indulgence, fear, filth, malice, and stupidity. In other words, the sword dance is a performative gesture that signifies the cleansing and purifying of all human vices in preparation for *gaebyeok*, which refers to the new beginning of the world in Donghak's teachings.

All of the societal vices are expressed in Chinese characters carved into the woodblock as textual marks. Their rendering in a circular movement suggests the continual and infinite nature of social vices. If people are to resist these vices, they must involve themselves in a continual process of reworking and renewing their community. *The Song of the Sword* references Korean shamanistic rituals designed to assuage grief and trauma, while also projecting a transformative gesture as the source of creation of a new world from the beginning.

Such reworking of contemporary social realities through Donghak can be referenced by Jean-François Lyotard's theorization of *working through* in his essay "Rewriting Modernity."<sup>81</sup> He states that the "now" is often perceived as a periodic term in chronological succession, but the "now" is always entailed and contained in both the past and the future. Drawing from Freud's theory, Lyotard defines rewriting in terms of repetition, remembering, and working through. He notes that "working through," which involves a "double gesture of forwards and backwards," does not

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<sup>80</sup> There was no written Korean language until King Sejong created *Han'geul* in 1443.

<sup>81</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, "Rewriting Modernity," in *The Inhuman* (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 1991), 24–35.

mean “passively and repetitively enduring the same ancient and actual passion.”<sup>82</sup>

Rather, it is actively renewing and “applying its own possibility.”<sup>83</sup>

Oh Yun’s print also refers to the people’s empowerment in his rendering and emulation of the *Donghak* amulets. Suwun’s dancing figure follows the shape of the Chinese letter *gung* or a *taegeuk*.<sup>84</sup> The *gung* character is similar to an “S” or rotating dragon shape. The *taegeuk* or yin-and-yang fan is a circle shape with an undulating line dividing it into two spaces, one symbolizing heaven, the other, earth. The letter *gung* was used in the nineteenth-century *Donghak* amulet. The *taegeuk* shape of the figure and broken black lines that encircle Suwun’s figure resemble the *ba gua*: the eight trigrams of the Daoist cosmology. The interrelationships among the trigrams create two orders: *seoncheon* (“Earlier Heaven”) and *hucheon* (“Later Heaven”). From Taoism, which inspired *Donghak*, *seoncheon* is defined as the brutal history of humanity up to the present. *Hucheon* (or *hucheon gaebyeok*) elucidates the beginning of a new world. The amulet symbolizes the idea of *hucheon gaebyeok*, conceiving an endlessly transforming entity capable of overcoming all obstacles.

### **Unfolding *The Song of the Sword***

Challenging the revisionist historians as well as Kim Jiha and Oh Yun, the historian Yu Yeongik (or Young-ik Lew), in his work *Donghak Peasant Uprising and Gabo Reform*,<sup>85</sup> contends that *Donghak* was essentially an armed reform movement informed by traditional conservative values at the end of the tumultuous Joseon dynasty. Until his work appeared in 1998, the *Donghak Peasant Uprising* had been

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>84</sup> Kim Jiha and Sim Gwanghyeon, “Oh Yun jakpum ui hyeonjaejeok uiui” [“Contemporary Meaning of Oh Yun’s Works”], in *Oh Yun, Sesang saram dongne saram* (Seoul: Hakkoje, 1995), 166–86.

<sup>85</sup> Lew Young-ik, *Donghak nongmin bonggi wa gabo gyeongjang* [*Donghak Peasant Uprising and Gabo Reform*] (Seoul: Iljogak, 1998).

interpreted broadly as 1) a revolutionary insurrection characterized by its anti-imperial, national, and egalitarian character—modern nation-building by nature; or 2) a class war in the transition of power from feudal overlords to the bourgeoisie class.<sup>86</sup> These positions emerged from the problematic primary “historical” source, to which the *minjung* historians consistently referred: a “historical novel” written by Cheondogyo’s (a religion of the heavenly way; the religion developed from Donghak) amateur historian Oh Jiyeong (1869–1950), *Donghak History*. Without the support of substantial historical sources, the revisionist, or *minjung*, historians, especially of the politically driven 1980s, speculated that the Donghak Uprising was “revolutionary,” “modern” and/or “progressive.” Yu Yeongik writes that the revisionists intentionally ignored primary and secondary sources that revealed the counterrevolutionary character of the Uprising.

Yu Yeongik demonstrates that the first peasant uprising of Donghak, in 1894, the armed reform movement, was based on the Confucian teaching of “loyalty to king, loving people,” aiming at the restoration of the very conservative and isolationist regent Daewongun, the father of King Gojong, who had earlier ordered the massacre of over 20,000 Korean Catholics. The second uprising in 1894 was the first anti-Japanese war waged by the Righteous Army, which was of a different nature than Donghak, though the two overlapped. Although accounts of the second uprising indicate its anti-imperial nature, he argues that the Donghak Peasant Uprising was far from a modern citizens’ uprising or social revolution with explicit revolutionary goals, agendas, and methods for Joseon polity.

In this regard, Oh Yun and other *minjung* artists espoused the Donghak and other mileposts in *minjung* history as the foundations of their aesthetic and activist

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<sup>86</sup> Lew Young-ik, “Gapbo nongmin bonggi ui bosujeok seonggyeok” [“Conservative Nature of Kapbo Peasant Uprising”], in *ibid.*, 353.

endeavors. They thereby supported and propagated the revisionist views without scrutinizing the associated agendas or “desires,” thereby reinforcing each other. Nonetheless, I do not propose that Oh Yun and the other artists should have depicted historical truth in their work. These artists repurposed and recreated the historical “facts” as powerful images, but their close alliances with the discourse indicates that there was not much room to reformulate the artists’ visions according to other models of the world. With the repeated production of ideological images and rhetoric, the artists also made it possible for a certain discourse within the movement to claim legitimacy.

In its appearance, Oh Yun’s print operates in the same way: he appropriates and represents the dissident discourse of Donghak. At the same time, it distinguishes itself by its lack of formulaic narratives depicting the *minjung*’s struggle or of the vernacular images of utopia that, for instance, one sees in Kim Bongjun’s *Let’s Pick the Stars*. Precisely in the absence of such a narrative in capturing a quintessential moment in Choe Jewu’s sword dance, this work renounces being read as a mere description of the dissident discourse. Instead, Oh Yun conceived of the utopia found in the emotional and spiritual state of *shinmyeong* or the transcendence of *han* into *shinmyeong*, not in the image of the people’s grand union per se.

I argue this point in two ways. First, although in *The Song of the Sword* the letters, or the Chinese characters, as well as the legible form in the *gung*-shaped body are crucial, what Oh pays attention to most is the figure’s dancing movement. He equates the *shinmyeong* arising out of dance with the most basic living expressions of everyday people beyond the limits of spatio-temporality. Second, unlike the preconceived notion of Oh’s affection for tradition, it is rather the case that he was skeptical of so-called tradition as an effective mode of dialogue, or *sotong*. In addition, he problematized the emphasis on the collectivity of the people at the expense of



individuality. His stances appear to be contradictory to his artwork, in light of his interests in national art, tradition, and communalism. Such apparent contradiction indicates that while Oh manipulated familiar forms and concepts of the tradition, he was eager to grasp the worlds behind them as the foundation for imagining a new society that would exist somewhere between everyday reality and the ideals of dissident nationalism.

### **Utopia, Life, and *Shinmyeong* in Flows of Dance**

With Oh Yun's emphasis on dance, *The Song of the Sword* developed out of the artist's careful studies of Suwun's dance movements. Although there are sketches of the same dance move for the finished work, Oh Yun made other versions as well [Figure G.12 and Figure G.13]: the man holding a sword high while placing his foot on the ground (or already on the ground); the man jumping in the air in a burst of energy, suggested by his wide-open arms and flexed upper body. These preliminary sketches capture different moments of his sword dance or of the flow of his energy. Despite their dissimilarities, his dance moves appear to "gravitate" in the direction of the dance move in the final work.

The situation is no different when one compares Suwun's dance with dancing figures in Oh Yun's other prints. From his image of *A Female Shaman* [Figure G.14] to the collective dance image of *There is No Benevolence in Spring and There is No Righteousness in Fall* [Figure G.15], it turns out that dancing figures are variants of Suwun or the other way around. Further, similar to the expansive energy in *The Song of the Sword*, for instance, the figure *Sorikkun II* (a performer of *Pansori*) [Figure G.16] pulses with excitement and ecstasy, as his finger pushes through the frame of the work. Or, one can see that the sound of the drum in *Drum Dance* [Figure G.17] and its vibrations are literally expressed in his work. In their resemblances to the

bodily movement and emotional and spiritual state of *shinmyeong*, it is apparent that Oh had a profound interest in traditional Korean dance. He valued Korean dance not for its sake and its traditionalism, but rather its power to transcend *han* to reach *shinmyeong*, or the state of articulating true humanism.

Oh Yun was fascinated with Korean dance. According to the dancer Yi Aeju, who was a model for his numerous prints [Figure G.18], Oh Yun danced with others in the studio and quickly acquired dance moves.<sup>87</sup> She remembered that through Oh Yun's work, she learned that dance exudes such strong energy, and not the other way around. In addition, Oh Yun's maternal family in Dongrae, Gyeongsang province, in the southern part of Korea, was famous for the "Crane Dance." Due to the efforts of his father, Oh Yeongsu, the dance also came to be registered as human cultural assets—the intangible cultural traditions that are taught and handed down by masters—in Korea.<sup>88</sup> His maternal cousin, whose name was not identified, was apparently so skilled at the dance that when she performed it as a young girl, its elder masters danced with her. Interestingly, she recalled that she learned the crane dance from Oh Yun and kept a sketch-manuscript of the dance drawn by him [Figure G.19].<sup>89</sup>

Oh Yun believed that Korean dance is different from Western dance in that its movement carries and detangles the emotions of *han*.<sup>90</sup> In articulating people's lives, their *han* and joy, he saw life energy as *shinmyeong* and expressed it mainly in the

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<sup>87</sup> Yi Aeju, "Dokkebi gateun saram" ["A Person like Dokkebi"], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongne saram*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2010), 262.

<sup>88</sup> The year is not identified.

<sup>89</sup> Ju Jaehwan, Son Jangseop, Park Hyeonsu, Kim Yongtae, and Kim Jeongheon, "Jwadam: 'Jakga Oh Yun' e daehan chueok" ["Memories of the Artist Oh Yun"], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongne saram*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2010), 97. Although Oh Yun's cousin claimed that it was drawn by Oh himself, a few of his friends said that the handwriting on the manuscript was not his.

<sup>90</sup> Yi Seokwu, "Saengmyeong ui him gwa maek eul hyeongsang euro tteonaen seonguja" ["Pioneer Creating Life's *Han* and Rhythm"], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongne saram*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2010), 79.

form of dance.<sup>91</sup> His emphasis on dance, as both a bodily and a spiritually liberating force, can be found throughout his other works. He recreated it as an archetypal “form” and “content” that demonstrated utopia, in the emotional and spiritual state of *shinmyeong* into which the viewer could assimilate [Figure G.20].

He thus tried to depict people’s dancing as accurately as possible and was quite successful in doing so. Chae Hwiwan remarked that he could tell that the collective dance of the villagers portrayed in Oh’s works *There is No Benevolence in Spring* and *There is No Righteousness in Fall* is a regional dance of southeastern Gyeongsang province, the *gutgeori deotbogi* dance.<sup>92</sup> Kim Bongjun, too, mentioned that when Oh Yun was making drawings, he asked Kim to review drawings of a *pungmul* leader and other performers, and only a few corrections were needed.<sup>93</sup>

If the emotional and spiritual core of Korean dance is what Oh Yun imagined as an alternative to the contemporary world, then how do we read his numerous depictions of the people’s community and traditional culture, reminiscent of a farming community? It appears that he tried to seek human wisdom and a future in the Koreans’ communal past, given his numerous prints and drawings of and deep interest in the folk tradition. Nevertheless, unlike the conventional view of Oh Yun, he was quite skeptical of the dissidents’ veneration of collectivity over the individual and of tradition over modern urban culture.

In a table discussion of “What *gut* (the shamanistic ritual) means today,” Oh Yun confronted the focus of other participants on the communalism of *gut* and the agrarian tradition, questioning how effective the tradition would be in contemporary

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>92</sup> Yi Hongjae, Kim Ikgu, and Chae Hwiwan, “Jwadam: Gohyang chin’gu, Oh Yun” [“Round Table Discussion: Hometown Friend Oh Yun”], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongne saram*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2010), 177.

<sup>93</sup> Yoo Hyejong and Kim Yungi, “Na geurigo neo ahneseo chatneun sinseonghan him” [Sacred Power in I and You], in *Misul gwa saenggak* [Art and Idea] (Seoul: Gak, 2008), 90.

reality.<sup>94</sup> He asked why they did not take account of stories of the individual and their collectives. Often, when the dissidents discussed how Koreans evolved as individuals or as a nation, he stated that they mainly talked in relation to the nationalist and dissident movements but rarely in terms of family, friends, or daily problems.<sup>95</sup> Oh disagreed with viewing *gut* and other traditional culture in a totalistic and universal manner, erasing the regional culture; he perceived *gut* and the “trivial” problems of one’s life as interrelated.<sup>96</sup>

In the aforementioned writing “Artistic Imagination and Expansion of the World” (1984), Oh Yun observed that with the science-centered perception of the world, studies of tradition became more concerned with formalistic preservation than with grasping the worlds behind it.<sup>97</sup> Here, one might ask how different the dissidents’ notion of the Korean predicament was from his idea of the people and their *han* and *shinmyeong*. The key might lie in their different definitions of the people in their ideological, personal, or daily interactions with them, but the distinctions in reality are blurry. For instance, Kim Bongjun and Oh Yun similarly identify the people and their everyday interactions as quintessential. Yet, Kim Bongjun’s everydayness is already configured in a utopian vision of the agrarian village and premises the individual in the community/nation. Oh Yun, however, would regard this as an overly intellectualistic approach to the people. Although Oh would greatly appreciate Kim’s “humane” art and community activities, he would advise Kim to investigate the urban life and its aesthetic sensitivities more.<sup>98</sup> Despite their initial difference, Oh Yun

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<sup>94</sup> Oh Yun, Yi Aeju, Chae Hwiwan, Choe Taehyeon, and Ha Jongoh, “Ohneul ui uriege gut eun mueot inga” [Roundtable Discussion, “What Gut Is for Today: Gut as Essence of Life and Original Source of Imagination”], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongne saram*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2010), 504.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 505.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 513.

<sup>97</sup> Oh Yun, “Misuljeok sangsangryeok gwa segye ui hwakdae” [“Artistic Imagination and Expansion of the World”], in *Oh Yun: Sesang saram, dongne saram*, vol. 1 (Seoul: Hyeonsil munhwa, 2010), 481.

<sup>98</sup> Yoo Hyejong and Kim Yungi, “Na geurigo neo ahneseo chatneun sinseonghan him” [“Sacred Power in I and You”], in *Misul gwa saenggak [Art and Idea]* (Seoul: Gak, 2008), 89–90.

grasped (the) people in their organic environment through their “essence,” similar to Kim Bongjun’s archotyping of the *minjung*.

### **Summary**

This chapter explored the life and artwork of the *minjung* artist Oh Yun in his most productive years, 1984–85. Against the current development of socially conscious art and the democratization movement, his work reveals an intricate engagement with the emotional and spiritual worlds of the common people that marks a gap between the people’s living realities and dissident nationalism. Oh Yun, a member of both Reality Group and the later Reality and Utterance, re-envisioned art as “vessels” engaging with people’s everyday lives as well as with their collective predicament through individual expression. He refused to allow art to become merely an instrument of protest or a representation of sectarian ideological stances. In conceptualizing the people as life / the life force, he perceived them neither as the oppressed (in terms of the national culture movement) nor as the proletariat (in terms of historical materialism). He instead saw them as his neighbors, with whom he met and engaged in everyday conversation. Despite the appearance of his work, he explored tradition, history, and the vernacular utopian world not as existing in a certain time-space, but as the people’s expressions of and aspirations for humanism. He perceived their emotional and spiritual core, the undercurrent in *han* and *sinmyeong*, as the possible realization of human dignity and liberation.

**CHAPTER SEVEN:**  
**HWANG JAEHYEONG:**  
**FROM THE TAEBAEK MOUNTAINS TO THE EAST SEA<sup>1</sup>**

Beginning in the mid-1980s, university students, progressive church ministers, and labor activists moved to the eastern mountainous region of Taebaek, in the Gangwon province, creating a laborer–church–activist alliance. If Seoul and its surrounding areas had been the epicenter of the dissident political actions, Taebaek, where the largest mining industry was located, was naturally rich ground for the labor movement. Especially during the June 10, 1987, Democratization Movement and the July–September Great Workers’ Struggle in 1987, the society’s fervor for democratization swept the Taebaek mining towns with militant strikes.

Since the opening of the mining industry during the colonial era, the Taebaek mines have been a source of industrial development as well as a site of oppression and frequent labor strikes. When the Korean mine industry opened in the late nineteenth century, the right to use the mines was usurped by foreign powers. In addition, for Japan’s war efforts, some 660,000 to 670,000 Koreans were drafted to work in mines in Korea, Japan, and Russia, and to serve in the wars, and those who went to the mines created towns. After liberation, President Rhee Syngman implemented an official policy to increase coal productivity, and to increase and privatize mine development. Coal production was prioritized in President Park Chung Hee’s first five-year development plan in 1962, as well. The coal industry sustained enough production to heat Korean homes as it also contributed to “the miracle of the Han River.” With the

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<sup>1</sup> The title is same as that of his oil painting *From the Taebaek Mountains to the East Sea* (1991).

high rate of productivity maintained in the coal industry, South Korea did not suffer from the first and second oil crises in 1973 and 1978.<sup>2</sup>

In the course of modernization driven by successive military dictatorships, Korean miners, referred as the “industrial fighters,” particularly suffered from danger, hardship, and poverty. People flocked to the mines, or “a blind end in a mine gallery” (*makjang*), for work. However, the daily lives of miners and their families consisted of the rigors of intense physical work, frequent safety incidents, physical and verbal abuse, and a lack of cultural and educational institutions. Their wretched living conditions foreshadowed the tragic Sabuk incident in 1980. They arose with yearning for democracy during the brief period known as “Seoul’s Spring.” It was a prelude to the brutal oppression of the Gwangju citizens by the Chun military authority in 1980.<sup>3</sup> The Sabuk incident did not resolve the fundamental structural problems of mining work. Several years would pass before a series of explosive strikes occurred again, in the late 1980s, when the democratization movement to amend the Korean Constitution reached its peak nationwide.

In the exhilarating yet confusing pro-democracy movement in the Gangwon mines, the *minjung* artist Hwang Jaehyeong fully participated in and lived through the

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<sup>2</sup> Please see Samcheok sirip bakmulgwan, *Gangwondo samcheoksi dogyeeup tan'gwangchon saramdeul ui salm gwa munhwa* [People's Life and Culture in Gangwondo Samcheoksi Dogyeeup Tan'gwangchon] (Seoul: Minsogweon, 2005); Sabuk cheongnyeon hoeuiso, *Tan'gwangchon ui salm gwa aehwan: Sabuk, gohan yeoksa yeongu* [Life, Joy and Sorrow of Mine Towns: Historical Studies of Sabuk and Gohan] (Seoul: Sonin, 2001); *Gangwon tan'gwang jiyeok ui oeje wa ohneul: Gangwon tan'gwang jiyeok byeoncheonsa* [Yesterday and Today of Gangwon Mine Regions: History of Transformation in the Gangwon Mines], edited by Gangwon baljeon yeon'guwon, vol. 1, 2 (Chuncheon: Gangwondo tan'gwang jiyeok gaebalgwa, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> The origins of the Sabuk incident were laid in the secret agreement between the labor union committee of Yi Jaegi and the Dongwon Mine Company on April 15, 1980, to raise wages by a mere 20%, ignoring the 42.7% pay increase previously settled on in the branch manager discussions of the Mine Labor Union Association. Hence, Yi Won'gap and 25 other miners demanded the resignation of the chair of the labor union committee, Yi Jaegi, and a raise in pay. In the miners' protests, five miners were run over by a police car. Angry miners began street protests, violently clashing with the police and military forces, and gained total control of the town of Sabuk, Gangwondo. Nonetheless, under the now-expanded martial law, 110 people were arrested and tortured, and 31 people altogether were sentenced to 150 years in prison.

struggle for democracy with other mine workers and their families. Hwang has lived with his family in the Taebaek mining town since 1983. Despite his less than two years of mining experience (the winter of 1980, 1981; 1982–84), he is referred to as the “miner artist” because of his deep involvement in a community of miners. This chapter explores how Hwang has made his art, life, and neighbors communicate among each other in his artistic and community work. His endeavors have centered on the miners’ everyday lives, remaking the “rootless” mining towns into their “hometowns” while supporting the democratization movement.

The notion of community was easily equated with the idea of national community in the 1980s, but Hwang instead attempted to imagine a community by engaging in the miners’ and their families’ realities through the art of *sotong*. Hwang was not involved in the debates among the state, *minjung misul*, and the modernists, which took place in Seoul. He nevertheless had to negotiate his position in the complex landscape of Taebaek *hyeonjang* by navigating the fine line between art and activism.

Although his artistic and activist endeavors are archetypical of the *minjung* artist, he did not want to discuss them in detail, expressing discomfort with the possibility that his comments might bring out still-unresolved issues with other activists. In addition, under the conservative Lee Myungbak government (2007–12) and in light of the national security laws, he did not feel safe opening up about the related activism of others.<sup>4</sup> In exploring his engagement with the pressing issues of the day, I found that the lack of primary and secondary sources about his activist works and his hesitancy to discuss details of his community work created certain limitations for my discussion. As a preliminary study of Hwang Jaehyeong, in this

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Hwang Jaehyeong and his wife, Mo Jinmyeong, on February 12, 2010.



chapter I aim to trace the development of Hwang's artworks and his *hyeonjang* activity in his exploration of *sotong*/community/humanism.

### **Life as the Language of Art**

Hwang Jaehyeong was born in 1952 in Boseong, the southern part of Jeolla Province, and in 1958, his family moved to Seoul. In 1964, he was first exposed to art through the practice of *dessin*. Although he enjoyed learning art, he had difficulty adjusting to school life and continued to transfer. When he was in the third year of elementary school, his schoolteacher visited his father, a high civil official, and complimented him on Hwang's artistic talent. The teacher's comment greatly upset his father, since artists were not respected in Korean society.<sup>5</sup>

However, Hwang began to study art soon after his father passed away, in 1961. Although his art was good enough to secure his acceptance into high school with an art scholarship, he soon dropped out of school. When he criticized a teacher's open contempt for another student's shabby clothing, he was severely slapped by the teacher. After this abusive experience, he saw no reason to stay in school. A few years later, he earned a high school diploma through a high school qualification examination. He entered the Art College at JoongAng University, but he was soon conscripted into the army. After three leaves of absence, he finally graduated, in 1982.<sup>6</sup>

Hwang and his college friends Song Chang, Lee Jonggu, and Park Heungsun created the art collective Imsulnyeon 98,912 eso (Imsulnyeon; a name that combines the lunar calendar year, 1982, with the figure representing the total area of South

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<sup>5</sup> Yun Cheolho, "Jwilheuk gwa nwilheuk eul chaja taebaek eul neomneun jakka Hwang Jaehyeong" ["The Artist Searching for jwil heuk and nwil heuk in Taebaek, Walking across the Taebaek Mountains"], *Wolgan sahoe pyeongron gil*, October 1993, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Korea), which existed during the years 1982–88.<sup>7</sup> If Reality and Utterance was more interested in exploring the issue of art as an institution and an ideology, the Imsulnyeon members aimed at honestly representing the multi-layered realities of contemporary life.<sup>8</sup> Imsulnyeon often used a photorealistic style to describe its sociopolitical realities.

He twice received an award from the JoongAng Art Contest for his hyperrealist work, the *Hwangji* [also the name of a mining town] series, in 1982 and 1983. One of his prize-winning works, *Hwangji 330* (1982),<sup>9</sup> shows a miner's overalls on a huge canvas, an image that foretells Hwang's lifelong artistic and activist endeavors. Long before Hwang completed *Hwangji 330* (1982), he visited the Hwangji mine country often, and both painted its landscapes and portrayed the miners' lives. In 1980 and 1981, he began to work as an apprentice miner in Hambaek, Gangreung, and Cheongdong in Gangwon province, and became an actual miner in the spring of 1982. He liked to talk to and befriend other miners, but they were suspicious of him and treated him like a spy. One day, several miners dragged him off and beat him up very badly, thinking he was a police spy. Despite such obstacles and challenges, however, in 1983 he finally decided to live in a mining town with his family and to work as a miner.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike Yim Oksang, who was at the center of the public discourse about art, Hwang was far removed from the Seoul art scene. This distance enabled him to concentrate on the miners' everyday lives rather than reflecting the prevailing institutional critique. He attempted to close discrepancies between art and the miners'

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<sup>7</sup> Although Hwang was well known as a member of Imsulnyeon, with three other artists he had already created "the Development of the Third Painting" in 1981.

<sup>8</sup> Their first exhibition was held in Seoul from October 29 through November 13, 1982, at the Deoksu Palace Art Museum.

<sup>9</sup> I could not find its reproduction.

<sup>10</sup> The author interviewed the artist on March 12, 2008.

lives, and between art and political discourse/ideology. If he mostly concentrated on the miners' lives as a way to exercise art's imagining of humanism and *sotong*, some young artists deliberated over the re-creation of art with a vision of a new Korean nation-state, which the state's authority found to be disquieting and to easily justify their intervention, as was the case with the "1985, Korean Art, the 20s' 'Power'" exhibition in 1985.

### **Beauty in the Presence of Life**

Hwang's year and a half of work experience as a miner was crucial in providing him with a firsthand glimpse of the miners' lives. He articulated his mining experience in the oil painting *Lunch Break* (1985) [Figure H.1]. He recalls that in the beginning he felt awkward and alienated, eating in the midst of flying coal dust. As he grew used to the mine environment, he felt more at ease eating and resting next to other miners. He notes, "squatting down, putting our heads together, inside of this tunnel I felt somewhat like I was inside of my mother."<sup>11</sup> The life-threatening space can become a site where communal feelings are nurtured and shared through companionship with others.

In the painting, Hwang represents the miners having their humble meals in circular congregations in the darkness. They are sitting in a narrow, confining tunnel, and the suffocating air, with its heat waves and coal powder, is visually expressed in the claustrophobic composition. Interestingly, in the cluster of workers there is little direct contact, not even eye contact. The disconnectedness frustrates communication, or rather makes the miners resemble masses with no personality. However, one's eyes adjust to the darkness; one can see the strong torchlight of one miner's safety hat illuminating the lunchbox of another miner. The lights are their "eyes" in the darkness,

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<sup>11</sup> Yun Cheolho, 39.

identifying one another's presence, ensuring one another's safety, and connecting the miners as one community.

Just as Hwang connected himself to other miners, in his painting he grasped the internal landscape of these people refracted by their hardships. Yet, their rough and ravaged life is depicted with sympathy and compassion for other human beings—another expression of beauty. Hwang's *Sunset at Tancheon* (1990) [Figure H.2] depicts a striking view of a sunset on a riverbank with shabby houses. The riverbank, which is polluted by coal, is invested with blazing golden colors by the mineral's sheen and the soft sunrays. He says that this river is called *ttongmul* ("excremental water"), in which the corpses of illegitimate babies float with other miscellaneous junk.<sup>12</sup> As the riverbank is a microscopic landscape of people's lives in Taebaek, their misery and despair is smeared all over the picture plane in its arresting view.

Pastor Won Gijun commented on *Sunset at Tancheon* in an interview (2008) with Hwang, with whom he worked in the labor movement: "Perhaps because I felt that way. In his works, I feel some sadness. Although it is not a beautiful scenic view, the *minjung*'s sadness and suffering were warmly represented. Rather, from something ugly and depressing, [you] seem to pull out beauty. There doesn't seem to be much meaning in the distinction between ugliness and beauty."<sup>13</sup> Hwang articulates his notion of beauty: "The beauty I try to find is not beauty as in nirvana but as in life, beauty as our presence is merged into it."<sup>14</sup> His philosophy of art is summed up in the phrase "*jwilheuk gwa nwilttang*," which is also the title of two of his exhibitions (1983, 1985) in the 1980s. *Jwilheuk*, "the earth one holds," indicates his awareness of fellow workers and their travails, while *nwilttang*, "the land where one lies,"

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<sup>12</sup> The author's interview with Hwang Jaehyeong on March 12, 2008. Hwang Jaehyeong, Kim Yun'gi, Yoo Hyejong, et al., "Jonjae ha'neun geosi huimang yida" ["What Is Living Is Hope"], *Misul gwa saenggak*, 1 (2008): 47.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

represents a firm base for their struggles and hopes. His emphasis on earth or land indicates that the history of the mining industry overlaps with the modern Korean history that is carved into the Taebaek region. Hwang breathed in and embraced the past and present of the people in Taebaek in the most intimate sense by becoming a member of their community.

### **A Mining Town as Hometown**

Hwang Jaehyeong has lived in the mining town of Taebaek for almost 30 years. However, because of an eye condition, conjunctivitis, he could not work in the mines for long; consequently, he expressed uneasiness about being known as the miner artist. Because he could not work directly in the labor *hyeonjang*, he focused instead on committing himself to community work, and plumbed the depths of art's organic relationship to the miner's life, an orientation that has informed his work since the early years of his artistic career.

The miners' life is often perceived to be *makjang*, although their mining was praised in the name of (the fatherland's) modernization. Such nationalistic rhetoric covered the exploitative practices of coal companies in the name of productivity and high profits. For instance, the outdated methods for calculating wages, paid based on the amount of coal production or the working distance of the mine gallery, forced the miners to overwork and were easily maneuvered by managers on a whim, so mine work was called a "slavery system."<sup>15</sup> Also, the relationship between miners and office workers/managers was hierarchical and discriminatory, and exposed the miners and even their family members to constant verbal and physical abuse.<sup>16</sup> Above all, the

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<sup>15</sup> Samcheok sirip bakmulgwan, *Gangwondo samcheoksi dogyeeup tan'gwangchon saramdeul ui salm gwa munhwa* [People's Life and Culture in Gangwondo Samcheoksi Dogyeeup Tan'gwangchon] (Seoul: Minsogweon, 2005), 126.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 133.

mine companies' irresponsible attitudes toward safety, and their unplanned and pre-modern mining practices, resulted in high rates of death and occupational disease, rendering mining "the battlefield of life."<sup>17</sup>

Added to this already desolate living environment was a serious lack of culture, education, and medical treatment.<sup>18</sup> In the vacuum left by the absence of educational and cultural institutions, the adult entertainment industries (i.e., pubs, pool, and gambling) functioned as the main outlet for the miners' leisure.<sup>19</sup> Also, the basic lack of institutions contributed to students' low academic achievement and dropping out and their easy deviations to adult entertainment, despite the miners' strong desire for their children's education. The hardships of these people's everyday lives were articulated in many of Hwang's works with a strong emotional empathy, from the viewpoint of someone who has worked and lived with them, suffering also from the grim realities of his own life.

As a way to supplement what the Taebaek community lacked and to earn a living, Hwang Jaehyeong and his wife, Mo Jinmyeong, opened an atelier. He taught art (i.e., prints and paintings) and became part of Taebaek's small cultural scene. His studio and house became the mining town's *sarangbang* (salon for casual meetings), cultivating communalism among "rootless" people (not only did the miners leave their hometowns to work, but they also rarely felt able to put down roots in the dejected mining towns). Mo's recollection of their *sarangbang* shows how their meetings evolved into a daily community where people shared meals and ideas:

Although he [Hwang] did not work at the front, our home was always crowded with 20 to 30 community residents. [ . . . ] Despite the fact that there was not much to offer [reflecting his family's poverty], I welcomed them with teas . . .

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 233, 236.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 119–20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 299.

Later, the people who often came realized that we did not have rice, so the guests began to bring food to eat in our meetings.<sup>20</sup>

As time went by, the residents began to discuss social and community problems at their casual meetings. In these discussions, Hwang and the other cultural practitioners conceived of the progressive cultural organization Taebaek Madang in March 1986, and Hwang was its representative. Taebaek Madang began as a simple cultural group. It interlaced the cultural and labor movements and became an independent cultural propaganda group in the early 1990s, at which point Hwang made a clean break from it. Instead, he decided to concentrate on art education for the miners and their children. It is plausible that he did not agree with the group's ideological direction for art and culture in relation to activism. They supported the general strikes through *samul nori* and other performances, such as the theater play "Campfire and Morning Dew."<sup>21</sup>

Taebaek Madang had been organically related to other activities at Taebaek, such as labor strikes and political protests. Hence, the organization would have been an excellent subject for a case study on how a cultural collective can be community-based and participate in community-building. Nonetheless, Hwang did not want to discuss it in detail, expressing discomfort because it might provoke criticism of his old colleagues (particularly their attitudes toward the use of art in political movements) and the activists' approach to the labor movement. In addition, Hwang indicated that, under the government of the conservative Lee Myungbak (2007–12), he did not feel safe opening up about his and others' activism.<sup>22</sup> Above all, talking about his community activities painfully touches upon his lifelong struggles and unfulfilled vision in desolate conditions: to make mining towns into "hometowns" for the miners.

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Hwang Jaehyeong and Mo Jinmyeong on February 12, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Written interview with Won Gijun on January 14, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Hwang and Mo, February 12, 2010.

In its discussion of the miner's strikes, this chapter therefore traces the history of the activist atmosphere by reference to the community activities of Hwang's close friend and colleague, the pastor Won Gijun.

### **Translating the Democratization Movement in a Local Context**

When Won Gijun was a seminary student in the early 1980s, he participated in the Yeongdeungpo urban mission in Seoul and became interested in *hyeonjang* activity. After his summer work in a mining town, he opened his eyes to the harsh realities miners confronted. The pastor Yi Jeonggyu, who contemplated the social welfare mission, proposed that Won work with him at Hwangji church in Taebaek, beginning in late 1985. Won decided to settle in Taebaek and met many progressive cultural practitioners as well as activists (i.e., Gangwon University students) in the town. Won soon got to know Hwang Jaehyeong, and despite their different approaches to the labor movement, Hwang became Won's long-time mentor and supporter. Hwang helped the struggles of Won and other dissidents by producing prints and banner paintings that were disseminated widely in the miners' newspapers and other media.

Won's efforts to create *hyeonjang*-related church activity were not easily realized, however, because of the miners' three-shift work schedule, high accident rate, indigenous beliefs, and low church-attendance rate. Moreover, the elders and deacons of the Taebaek church opposed involvement in labor *hyeonjang*. Reflecting the conservative atmosphere, as the first organizer of the Hwangji church, Won concentrated more on introducing the residents to human rights than on teaching labor laws and directly organizing the mine workers. Won and the young church members also discussed the miners' problems in the workplace, such as unfair dismissals, overdue wages, and industrial accidents. They expanded the existing community



programs by including local issues pertaining to daily life, such as environmental pollution, and by creating schools for housewives and the elders.<sup>23</sup>

In January 1985, the Taebaek Seonlin church (whose pastor was Shin Seongsik), affiliated with the progressive Korean Presbyterian Church, was founded and aspired to be a *minjung* church. Although the church “building” was a tent, many young laborers participated in the church services and programs. In 1986, Won Gijun, who worked as an administrator for welfare at the Hwangji church, tried to reach out to the labor *hyeonjang*. Nevertheless, because of his progressive inclinations, Won and ten young workers were abducted by military security forces in November 1986, charged as spies, and tortured for a week.<sup>24</sup> The pastor Shin Seongsik and other ministers at the Taebaek Seonlin Church campaigned for their release in 1987.<sup>25</sup> Won and those involved in his release created the KNCC (The National Council of Churches in Korea) Taebaek Ecumenical Youth Council.<sup>26</sup> These campaign participants later founded the Taebaek Human Rights Mission Committee, in May 1987, which grafted other human rights issues and democratization onto the labor movement.

Taebaek priests, dissident activists, and locals were involved in the democratization movement, in collaboration with other pro-democracy forces. On May 25, 1987, seventeen pastors at Cheolam Presbyterian church in Jeongseon initiated a three-day fast in a prayer meeting to protest the government’s protection of the Constitution.<sup>27</sup> On June 21, around seventy laborers and religious figures in Taebaek protested in favor of overthrowing the dictatorship and amending the

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<sup>23</sup> Written interview with Won Kijun on January 14, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Won Gijun, Kim Changwan, and Jeong Unhwa, “Minjuhwa yeonpyo,” 2005, unpagued.

Constitution.<sup>28</sup> On June 26, people in Taebaek participated in the nationwide Big March for Democratization in support of a democratic constitution and to inaugurate the “Headquarters of the Taebaek Branch for Securing the Democratic Constitution.”<sup>29</sup>

On June 29, the day presidential candidate Roh Tae Woo delivered the 6.29 declaration, at Sabuk cathedral in Sabuk there was an inaugural assembly for the “Jeongseon Branch of the Gangwon Resident Movement for the Democratic Constitution,” while around a thousand miners and residents congregated downtown.<sup>30</sup> Ushered in by the July–September Great Workers’ Struggle, a string of strikes took place in the coal industries in Gangwon province beginning on August 8, 1987, that included the companies Samcheok, Hwangji, Hanbo, Jangwon, Hyogyong, and Gangwon.<sup>31</sup> The unfulfilled 1987 miners’ strikes continued in 1988 through labor strikes and the establishment of branches of the Promotion Committee for the Improvement of Labor Conditions.

### **Art Beyond a Political Instrument**

Labor activists and students, often from Gangwon University, began to move into Taebaek in 1985. If they relied primarily on political and ideological stances, the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> See Won Gijun, Kim Changwan, and Jeong Unhwa, “Jiyeok minjuhwa undongsa pyeonchan eul wihan gicho josa saeop” [“Basic Report for Publication of History of the Taebaek Region’s Democratization Movement”], 2005. In the first strike of Samcheok miners from August 8 to 12, 1987, the miners took over the Gohan train station, and they carried militant struggles on the street by, for instance, fighting with stone missiles against the police force. Although the enthusiasm of the laborers was unprecedented, the strike leadership could not effectively accommodate their demands. What they could achieve was only to force the official labor union executives to resign, and their labor strikes ended in four days. The consecutive labor strikes arose in the process of constructing the Promotion Committee for Improvement of Labor Conditions (*nodong jogeon gaeseon chujin wiwonhoe*). The company, ex-official labor union executives, mine labor association, and the like constantly interrupted the miners’ efforts to build a democratic union. The second strike was led by a disguised activist-miner who worked as a member at the Committee of Settlement from August 21 to September 3. However, because of his hard-line position, their violent protests instead gave the government authorities an excuse to intervene in the situation, and incurred public blame. Thirteen union members were arrested and punished for “the crime.”

church organizations adopted a community-based approach that linked workers' rights to welfare issues while supporting the miners' strikes. Although these people aligned themselves behind a common agenda, it would not be difficult to speculate that the university students, labor activists, and the community activists did not always agree on strategies and tactics. Won mentioned briefly that Hwang tried to talk to and advise the students and activists on working with the community, but Won did not explain specifically on what matters. One might catch a glimpse of the situation through the *hyeonjang* activity of Hwang Gwangwu, the activist and younger brother of the dissident poet Hwang Jiwu.

After Hwang Gwangwu failed in his first *hyeonjang* activity, he and his friends decided to obtain skills first and then to seek employment in a factory. He underwent six months of training to learn how to operate a lathe in 1983. Predictably, on the first day in Guro, his incompetency was exposed, so he ended up being a waged worker.<sup>32</sup> He confessed that the road to becoming a factory worker was so challenging that he envied factory workers for their ability to do their jobs properly.<sup>33</sup> In 1985, he met Yang Seungjo, a laborer activist and the only surviving member of Jeon Taeil's club, *baboheo*, or "the dumb society." When they discussed the labor movement, Hwang Gwangwu stressed the urgent need for political struggle. Yang criticized the hastiness of the student activists, warning that they would soon leave the labor *hyeonjang*.<sup>34</sup>

Likewise, skeptical of some activists' organizational and ideological approaches, Hwang collaborated with people he knew based on trust and daily interaction.<sup>35</sup> Such preferences are well reflected in artwork and art projects that conscientiously evoke the emotional reverberations of the residents. For instance, his

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<sup>32</sup> Hwang Gwangwu, *Jeolmeumyiyeo ohrae geogi nama ipgeora* [Youth, Stay There Long] (Seoul: Changbi, 2007), 110–11.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 130–31.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

*Clock* [Figure H.3] is created from an old clock on which he depicts two men of skin and bones. Their skin colors are grayish yellow, as if they are decaying slowly under the strain of their endless, inhumane workload. The two men depend on each other—each one using the other as “the fulcrum” of the other’s working movement. If the clock’s hands tick in a light mechanical motion, the men move more like Sisyphus, carrying a huge rock with their four hands. The struggling limbs of the men are located between the markers for each hour, so that the numbers are half-hidden or partly omitted. The workers’ “un-artful” movements interfere with reading the clock. So, checking the time—a mundane and almost unconscious action—becomes a conscious moment in the suffering of others.

In addition, Hwang Jaehyeong and the cultural practitioners felt that it was crucial to lay “the organic foundation” of art, which in turn became part of their vision for new mining towns. He executed several mural paintings at local churches, such as the Gohan Church’s *Wall of Life*,<sup>36</sup> depicting the past, present, and future of the region, and the Hwangju Catholic Cathedral’s mural, making them part of the local landscape.<sup>37</sup> Also, in order to implant regional pride among the rootless Taebaek people, Hwang and his friends transplanted as well as created traditional Gangwondo *neowajip* dwellings (houses made of red pine trees). Many residents gave them positive feedback on the dwellings, saying they felt as if they were back in their old family homes.

Although one might criticize the subjective and emotional aspect of his art and community activity, Hwang argues his position through his view of propaganda art:

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<sup>36</sup> I could not obtain an image of this mural.

<sup>37</sup> Gohan Cathedral’s *Wall of Life*, in which Hwang depicted the past, present, and future of Taebaek, was destroyed to make way for a road-widening project for “Gangwon Land” (a ski, casino, and resort development) in the mid-1990s. When he received compensation, he gave it to the local residents for the improvement of their town. His other murals are at the Taebaek Chilpyo Farm, the Hwangji Cathedral, and a rest area of Hwangjicheon Diocese Cathedral in Gohan (the title of the mural is *Tomorrow* and is in the lounge of the cathedral).

I don't know how clearly one can grasp [social reality] even if one discusses it in logical terms and acknowledges that subjective things can be objectified. And [I doubt] if art can go in such an analytical direction . . . . In fact, when I see the socialist countries' propaganda art, I don't think [their ideas] are well articulated. Even the propaganda of the North Korean leader is at an elementary level like some movie poster, and it can't play the role of true propaganda art as it fails to move [the viewer's heart].<sup>38</sup>

His alternative conception of propaganda art might be most closely captured in his protest art. However, not only were these works not recorded or preserved in catalogues, they were also produced with no signatures. Hence, I will instead explore his oil painting, *History of the Struggle by Seong Wanhui* [Figure H.4].

After leading the 1988 strikes of the Gangwon Coal Industry, the mine worker Seong Wanhui was dismissed but fought to be reinstated. As a result, he was allowed to return, but his colleague Yi Gimman was fired instead for his support of Seong Wanhui. Seong struggled for his friend's reinstatement, and in the end his friend received a ruling of reinstatement by the Ministry of Labor and the regional Labor Committee. However, the company refused to reinstate Yi Gimman, so Seong and other friends began hunger strikes. On the eighth day of their fast, he and five others carried gasoline and kerosene to the labor union office to show their determination. When the company's security guards broke in with iron pipes and wooden sticks, Seong poured gasoline over himself and burned himself alive.

Hwang Jaehyeong created this painting immediately after learning that the miner Seong was fatally hurt in his attempted immolation. Hwang later became a member of the Seong Wanhui Commemoration Committee. On the day he painted it, on a broken wooden panel, his house was wiretapped and surrounded by police detectives. When one looks at his work in this context, what seems unusual is that the work does not represent Seong's lethal wounds or the miners' militant uprising

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<sup>38</sup> The author's interview on February 12, 2010.

juxtaposed with the wishes for national liberation and proletariat democracy that one might see in propaganda art. If Hwang produced this work to express his intense anger and sorrow for the human cause, whom did he presume to be his viewer?

Hwang depicted his neighbors in a volatile atmosphere. Yet his careful depiction of each individual in light, pastel colors exudes a sense of calmness. The figures consist of men, women, children, and a mother and child, represented in a montage. They are alert, as if watching or brewing over something unfair and unjust, and seem ready to act against the Gangwon Mine Company that fired Seong for his support of his friend's reinstatement. In contrast, a man in the corner, presumably Seong, projects a solemn and contemplative mood in the midst of the situation. Juxtaposing the turbulence of the situation with this reflective atmosphere, the painting seems to be suspended in intense personal and collective heartbreak.

At the same time, one might wonder where the urgency to produce this work came from, and what this meant for Hwang and the other residents, especially when it was so difficult to access under the watchful eyes of the police. Or does this question already presume that his work had taken on a political nature or would be appropriate as propaganda art, even though it had a different form and content? Does this inquiry greatly limit the diverse ways of being political through aesthetic expression? The ambiguities of *History of the Struggle by Seong Wanhui* indirectly and directly touch upon many crucial issues arising out of art's negotiations of its position in the turbulent political atmosphere of the 1980s and 1990s. The questions of art versus politics or of the representation of politics in art were very much addressed in the aforementioned debates between the older and younger generation of the *minjung* artists in the late 1980s, discussed in chapter three.

Hwang's emphasis on art touching upon the viewer's life and its community-making developed into his art education for underprivileged people and a teacher-

training program beginning in the early 1990s. He has been involved in providing children with disabilities protection and education by working with other teachers, after agonizing over which direction to follow personally between the labor movement and art education. He opened the education center Sarang ui Bang (The Community of Love) for them, getting aid from humanitarian organizations in Germany. In his teaching of children, he learned that the conventional art pedagogy, according to which one learns art with logic, did not work. Thus, he began to contemplate how art could be taught by focusing on art for human beings. Approaching this problem in a more structural way, he began to lead 10-day teachers' trainings, and currently, he is reconstructing an abandoned school building to serve as a training center.

### **Summary**

Hwang Jaehyeong has committed himself to the betterment of miners' lives, and such artistic and *hyeonjang* activities have continued to inspire many *minjung* artists. With a desire to be among the people and to capture their lives as honestly as possible, Hwang has lived and worked with the miners. He has imagined his art, neighbors, and their community as one by collaborating with people to recreate the mining town as their hometown. His endeavors have centered on the miners' everyday lives, nurturing communalism while supporting democratization in art's humanistic way. His activism intersects with a great increase of *hyeonjang* activities, the June 10 Democratization Movement, and the July–September Great Workers' Struggle in 1987. In the labor movement in Taebaek, he cooperated with several branches of activists, but did not align with the hardliners, and opposed their subordination of art to politics. Instead, he contemplated how art and cultural organization could be rooted in the people's lives so that they became a dialogical process of reimagining humanism, as in the case of his art education.

**CONCLUSION:**  
**A NEW DIALOGICAL ART IN THE 21ST CENTURY:**  
***MINJUNG MISUL* AT A CROSSROADS**

This study delineated *minjung misul*'s multifaceted *sotong* with Korea's modernity in its reimagining of the Korean modernism and nation-state during the 1980s' democratization movement. I explored the aesthetic, discursive, and activist engagements of five *minjung* artists in *minjung misul*'s entwined relationship with the dissident movement beginning in the 1960s. The artists' eclectic dialogues with the sociopolitical, economic, cultural-intellectual, and spiritual realms articulated their underlying operational logic and aspirations—the creation of a legitimate Korean modernism and modernity—shared by other dissidents in the form of dissident nationalism.

*Minjung misul*'s nationalism is genealogically connected to the national movement during the colonial era in terms of the two movements' shared desire for a sovereign nation-state based on democratic principles. The *minjung* artists radically reexamined and reconceptualized a constellation of concepts—*minjung*, nation/alism, *sotong* (dialogue), *gongdongche* (community), humanism/democracy, tradition, modernity and modernism—in their political and aesthetic-ethical contemplations of democracy. In their perception of the discrepancy between the reality of Koreans' lives and ideals, or in their efforts to close the gap between the “form” and “content” of the Republic of Korea, the artists tried to envision the legitimate Korean modernism and everyday/national community with which the people's struggles and aspirations became a harmonious one. In their indigenous reinterpretation of democracy, humanism, the artists created a competing model of modernism and modernity that had moral legitimacy over the Western and existing Korean modernisms and



modernities. By interrogating the *minjung* artists' core values, humanism/democracy, my study showed that their imagining of the people's nation-state sows the seeds for a new vision of the transnational.

In this dissertation I explored *minjung misul* in the context of dissident nationalism and the 1980s' democratization movement. Along these lines, my conclusion evaluates and examines the fissures in *minjung misul* in the full-fledged transnational era after the 1987 democratization movement. Nonetheless, it is not my intention to trace either the development or the "decline" of *minjung misul* in the 1990s and 2000s. Rather, I will address some critical issues surrounding the "institutionalization" of *minjung misul*, based on my observations of and discussions with *minjung* artists in casual and formal meetings. I will articulate the current contentions on *minjung misul* in relation to its autonomy as an aesthetic expression, its perceived incongruity in terms of its representation of and dialogue with the people, and its reluctance or indifference to engaging with other contemporary art forms. The question of *minjung misul*'s institutionalization touches upon a central question of its evolution and autonomy in 21st-century South Korea.

The large-scale "Minjung Misul 15 Years, 1980–1994" exhibition in 1994 has been thought to mark the first moment of *minjung misul*'s acceptance into the art institution by many *minjung* artists and critics, as well as other art critics. This exhibition was held by the government-sponsored Contemporary Korean Art Museum under the first civilian government, led by Kim Young Sam (1992–97) [Figure I.1]. Nonetheless, it was negatively reviewed by both the *minjung misul* camp and the press for its undemocratic preparation and decision-making process, its failure to provide a critical evaluation of *minjung misul* and its perspective, and so forth. In addition, the exhibition was perceived to signal *minjung misul*'s institutionalization, and even its end, by some critics and reviewers.

Beginning with the “Minjung Misul 15 Years” exhibition, throughout the 1990s there was an increase in the number of alternative art spaces, programs, and commercial galleries, all of which intervened in conventional art institutions by allowing new artistic and curatorial experimentation. The flourishing of non-mainstream art spaces and expressions also allowed *minjung misul* to be introduced in commercial gallery exhibitions. Some of the older generation of *minjung* artists, if they had been under harsh scrutiny for their supposed culturalism by the younger generation, were now invited into and sponsored by the galleries. In a way, these artists, who felt divided between the logics of rigid activism and art in the 1980s, could better concentrate on the production of art beginning in the mid-1990s. At the same time, it was a period of frustration and confusion for the younger activist *minjung* artists, because they could not replicate the earlier artistic strategies and tactics. Their ideological approaches to art and the politics—and not all, but some, activist artists’ rough expressions—prevented them from entering into the museum and gallery spaces during the transitional period.

Further, with the establishment of the Gwangju Biennale in 1995, multiple global art platforms have been provided to Korean artists, including *minjung* artists such as Yim Oksang and Kim Jeongheon. These exhibitions gave Korean artists opportunities to engage in more-horizontal dialogues than those taking place during the earlier internationalism. Partly because of the altered situation in the art world, the artists or art collectives Park Yiso, “Jang Younghye Heavy Industry,” Kim Beom, Jeong Seoyeong, Kang Honggu, and others were able to explore a marginal space that had been ignored in the hegemonic struggles between *minjung misul* and modernism. In the 2000s, many young artists or collectives such as Jo Seup [Figure I.2], Yangachi, and Rice Mix, who are grouped under the pseudo-journalistic term *post-minjung*, have navigated diverse social and culture milieus in their artistic experimentation. They

have paid particular attention to the ingenious integration of various mediums into their social critiques. They freely work with issues related to their own lives, breaking the boundaries between art/culture and life, popular culture and high art, and the like.

In the confluences of art and culture, some *minjung* artists have tried to renew their visual languages and subject matter. They have actively held numerous exhibitions and have used social media to expand the basis of their *sotong*, recovering from more than a decade of stagnation. In addition, under the progressive governments of Kim Dae Jung (1997–2002) and Roh Mu Hyun (2002–7), the visibility and position of *minjung* artists and critics seemed to be solid in the institution. However, under the current Yi Myungbak government, a few *minjung* artists and critics, such as Kim Yunsu, who held the position of director of the Contemporary Korean Art Museum, and Kim Jeongheon, the chair of Arts Council Korea, were laid off.

Although *minjung misul*'s presence is still felt in exhibitions and other institutions, interestingly, except for well-known individual *minjung* artists, *minjung misul* has been examined in the past tense, and some even question, with skepticism, whether it still exists. Those who doubt *minjung misul*'s feasibility perceive it as lacking the aesthetic autonomy necessary to sustain itself as a “real” art movement.<sup>1</sup> According to these commentators, the particular circumstances of the 1980s that formed the very identity of *minjung misul* have disappeared. Further, many young artists (especially “post-*minjung*” artists) express social critique through the use of various media and aesthetic forms in their art. Under such circumstances, these critics see little reason why the current *minjung misul* should be given particular autonomy, distinguished from other contemporary art forms.

If these commentators see *minjung misul* as the historical avant-garde that emerged from the political activism of the 1980s', the *minjung* artists pay attention to

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<sup>1</sup> Seo Dongjin, “Minjung Art and Beyond: A New World of Visual Life and the Politics of Art,” *Journal Bol* 8080, 10 (2008): 84.

its critical spirit. It is thought to be carried on in the contemporary *minjung misul*, in the artists' alliances with civic movements and campaigns. In their conjecture, these *minjung* artists already presume that the current *minjung misul* articulates innovative artistic forms and subjects. Such assessments of *minjung misul* leave room for further debate among various stances. In addition, the *minjung* artists perceive their art and activism as viable and urgently demanded, given that “undemocratic” forces (i.e., the conservative government and neo-liberalism) continue to exist in more complicated and powerful forms. They insist that the notion of the *minjung* is still crucial to any exploration of social inequality and injustice.

However, if the people, who would be referred to as the *minjung*, do not identify themselves (or do not want to be identified) with the ideological *minjung*, in what way do the artists create an aesthetic and discursive ground for *sotong*, the very foundation of their art?<sup>2</sup> Although many people would share the *minjung* artists' assessments of Korean society, few would agree with the principal premises of *minjung misul*, particularly in terms of its representation of the *minjung* and the progressive politics ingrained in 1980s' political ideology. In fact, the different cultural and political sensibilities of the public and the artists might result in the *minjung* artists' paradoxical situation—the institutionalization and official visibility yet indiscernible presence of *minjung misul* to the public (even in art education). The people who now call themselves “citizens” do not welcome, and feel alienated by, the 1980s' ideological “styles” of protest and representational politics.

The 2008 Candlelight Vigil protests succinctly demonstrated this point [Figure I.3]. During three months of protests, the Candlelight protesters tried to remake the Korean nation-state into a democratic civil society outside the frame of existing progressive or conservative politics. They exercised their democratic citizenship

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

through direct representation in cultural and political dissent as well as through the use of social media.<sup>3</sup> At the protest sites, many participants showed discomfort with the earlier militant protest styles and rhetoric, and thus, it was not surprising that earlier *minjung misul* did not or could not appear. Even if *minjung misul* did, it would little appeal to the aesthetics of the Candlelight protesters, an aesthetics formed by the powerful contemporary South Korean popular culture (“the Korean Wave” or *hallyu*) and the online networks and other social media.

Under such circumstances, the existing discrepancies between *minjung misul* and the people would not be narrowed by merely following “popular taste.” Also, it does not seem to be enough for the *minjung* artists to say that there are numerous exhibitions demonstrating the great changes in their art; new premises and conditions for *minjung misul* need to be conceived and reconceptualized if its artistic and political potential is to be fully realized in the 21st century. However, the artists’ reassessments will not be thorough unless they reexamine their alliances with other progressive movements in the 1990s and 2000s in terms of their common discourse and agendas, as in the case of the 1980s’ *minjung misul*.

After the 1987 democratization, many activists and social organizations, who were now called the progressives, learned that they could not insist on the earlier mass mobilizations because there were no common targets for opposition.<sup>4</sup> As a result, new civil associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to work with the emerging civil society. These civil-society groups addressed a wide range of new social issues, and their members included ordinary citizens, journalists, professors, social workers, artists, and farmers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hyejong Yoo, “The Candlelight Girls’ Playground: The 2008 Candlelight Vigil Protests in South Korea,” peer-reviewed online journal *Invisible Culture*, 15 (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Sunhyuk Kim, “Civil Society and Democratization in South Korea,” in *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy and the State*, edited by Charles K. Armstrong, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007), 59.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

The transformations of the progressive movements have greatly influenced *minjung misul*, and vice versa. Nonetheless, as in the case of the 1980s' *minjung misul*, art's collaborations with the progressive movement also imply that the artists might not have much space to contemplate various issues through art's unique imagination and its interactions with other contemporary art. In the 1980s, because *minjung misul* emerged in opposition to the modernists' art practices, it did not communicate much with other constituencies in the art world. It is peculiar to witness that in the 2000s the *minjung* artists still do not actively converse and work with other contemporary artists. Or, other artists prefer not to be seen as aligned with the *minjung* artists either because of the ideologically polemicized atmosphere of South Korea or because of *minjung misul*'s connection to a political ideology. As a result, one can often see *minjung misul* works displayed by themselves instead of with other contemporary art.

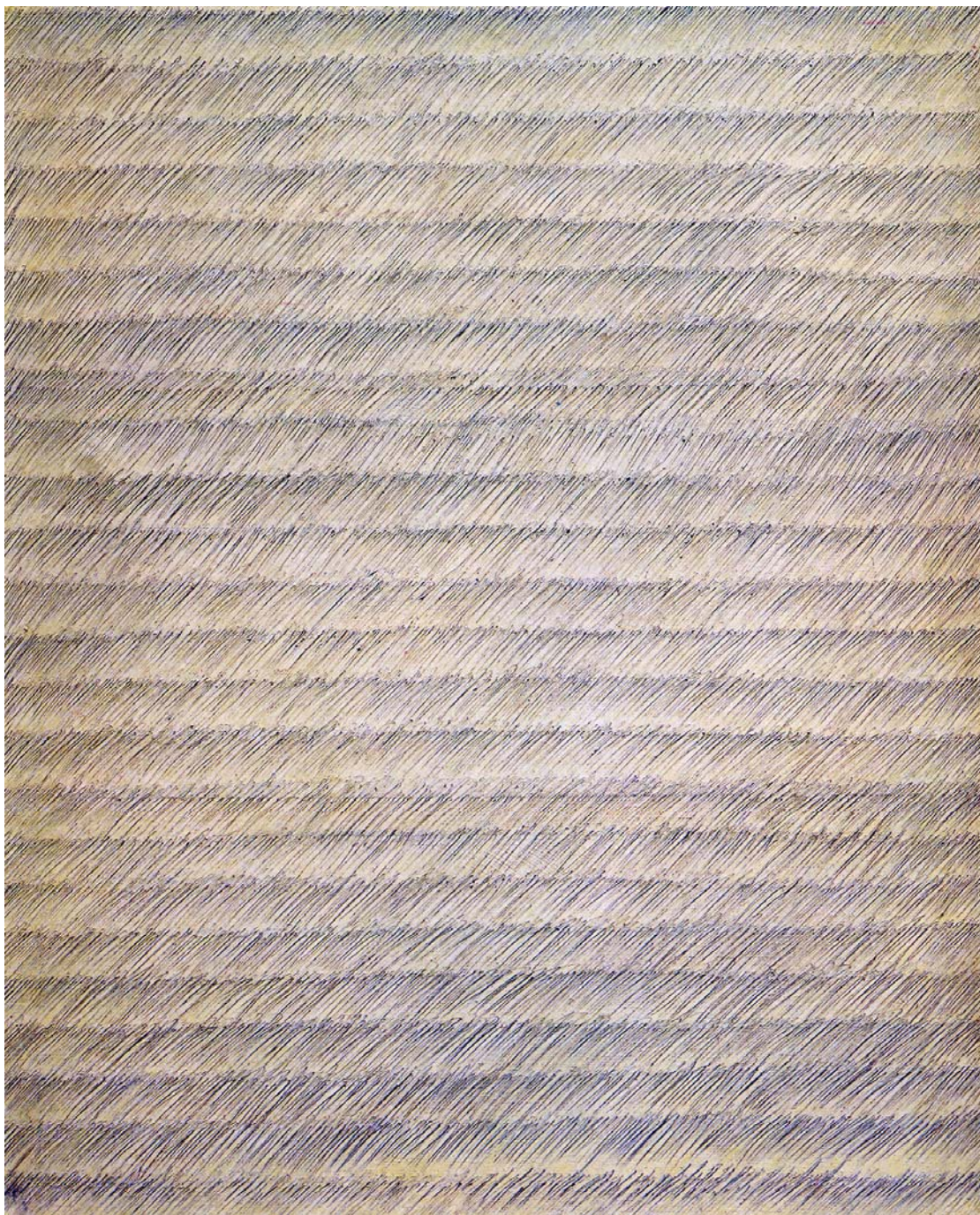
The interlaced relationship among *minjung misul*, progressive politics, and the art world recalls the earlier questions of conceiving a new dialogical aesthetics through the reassessment of the art institution/ideology and the Korean nation-state. Shifting from the *minjung* artists' outward interrogation in the 1980s, the challenges these artists now face are inward questioning and reflection on their art's very existence and operation in aesthetic terms. Three decades—and divergent priorities—separate the *minjung artists* of the 1980s and the 2000s. Nevertheless, their contemplations complement each other in their new visions for art and for the nation-state, in the continuing search for a Korean trans/national community based on democratic ideals.

## APPENDIX A: INTRODUCTION FIGURES



Figure A.1. Ganeunpe, *Laborer*, 1987, Cotton Cloth and Paint, size unrecorded. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Minjung Misul 15 Years 1980–1994*.





**Figure A.2.** Park Seobo, *Ecriture No 60-73*, 1973, Pencil, Oil on Canvas, 24.4 x 51.2 inches. Collection: Kim Daljin yeon'guso.





**Figure A.3.** Yun Hyeonggeun, *Umber-Blue* 1978, 1978, Oil on Linen, 102 x 59.1 inches. Collection: Kim Daljin yeon'guso.

## 한국 미술의 일제 식민잔재를 청산하는 길

金潤洙·文明大·朴容淑·安輝潁·李慶成·李龜烈·林鍾國·鄭良謨·崔淳雨

## 설문

우리와 문화, 그리고 경제 문제라는 것, 이는 일제 식민지 전개는 해방후 40년에 이르러서도 여전히 현실적 의전을 구상해야 해로운 특징이냐, 40년이라고, 혹은 공물문화의 전개되는 사에도 미치지 못하여, 이 한 점에서도 자기들과 상반된다. 그러나 그것이 우리 미국의 발전에 걸림이요 부장적인 요인으로써 작용하고 있다는 사실을 감안할 때, 우리 스스로 문화의 혁신에 걸림하여 열한 지척을 하고 반성의 이는 실로 긴요한 것이라 하지도 수 없음이다. 현역 작가의 의욕을 거론하여 이는 여를, 앞에서도 논한바와 같이 할 수 할, 모든 작가가 없을 수 없는 사이이므로 이를 줄로 압니다. 그러나 솔직한 지적해 주시는 것이 우리 문화의 한 발전을 위한 제언이라 하도 생경입니다. 이 특집은 9명의 우리 작가로 구성되었습니다. 9명의 작가 이름만 두도 밝혀 두는 것과 글자지는 명칭하지 않겠습니다. 이 문제가 없는 눈이 있는 것이라 생각합니다. 다음 4가지 주제로 압축해 주실 것을 부탁드립니다.

- I. 우리 미술에서 일제 식민잔재가 문제시 돼야 하는 이유는?
  - II. 청산해야 할 잔재의 범위를 유평·개인활동 등 구체적으로 지적하면?
  - III. 일본화풍의 영향을 크게 받은 작가는?
  - IV. 식민잔재를 청산하는 길은?
- (배열은 원고도착순)

(배열은 원고도학순)



聲明書

不信과不和를助長하는底意를 묻는다.

『계간미술』(25호)의 특별기획  
「한국미술의 일제 식민잔재를  
청산하는 길」. 9명의 평론가와  
미술가가 무기명으로 기고한 이  
기사는 작가들의 성토회와 성명서  
발표로 격론이 일어났다. 아래는  
36개 미술단체 명으로 낸 성명서.  
(동아일보 1983. 4. 21)

**Figure B.1. Reproduction of the Article “The Road to Eradicate the Colonial Legacies in Korean Art” in *Quarterly Art*, Spring 1983; A Public Statement of Thirty Six Art Organizations against the Nine Critics of the Former Article at *DongA Daily*, April 21, 1983. Published in *Sigak gwa eon’eo*, 2 (1985).**



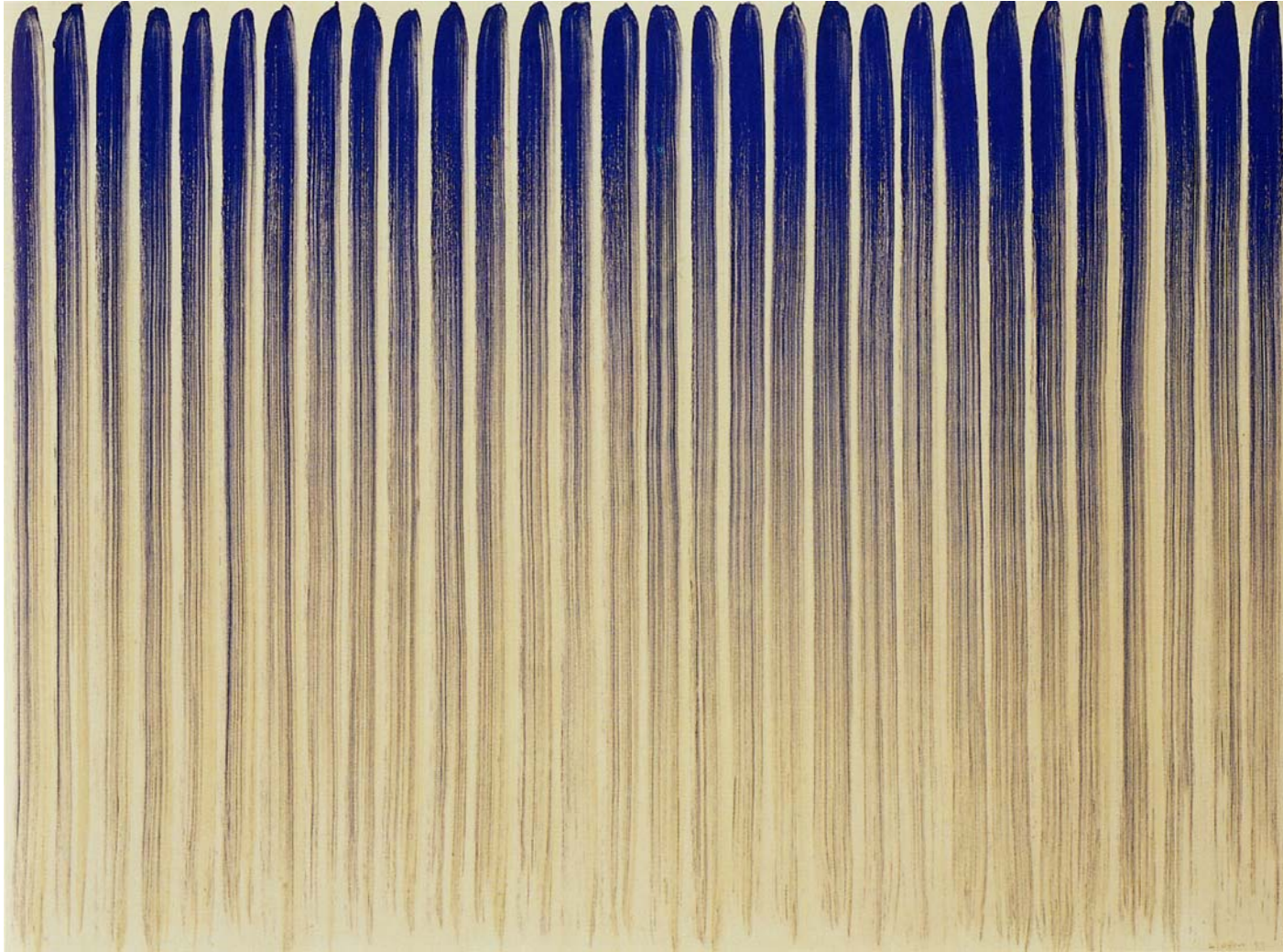


Figure B.2. Lee Ufan, *From Line*, 1979, Oil on Canvas, 76.4 x 102.4 inches. Collection: Kim Daljin yeon'guso.



**Figure B.3.** Shin Hakcheol, *Modern Korean History*, 1983, Oil on Canvas, 153.5 x 51.2 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Minjung Misul 15 Years 1980–1994*.



APPENDIX C: CHAPTER TWO FIGURES

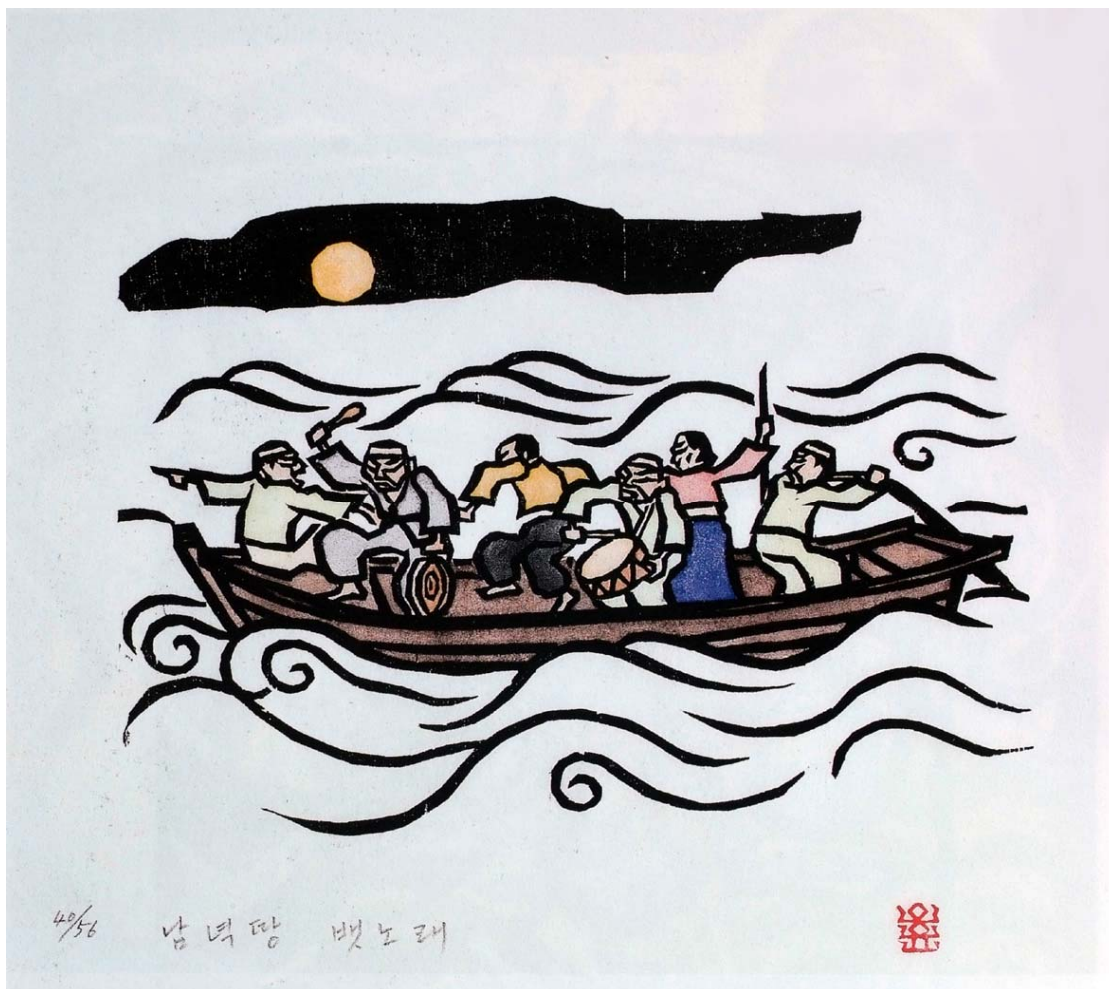


Figure C.1. Oh Yun, *The Song of the Sailor in the Southern Land*, 1985, Woodblock, Paper, Color, 7.7 x 10.1 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.





Figure C.2. Oh Yun, *The Yellow Earth*, 1985, Woodblock, Cotton Cloth, 8.4 x 6.5 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.

## **APPENDIX D: CHAPTER THREE FIGURES**



**Figure D.1.** Choe Byeongsu, *Bring Hanyeol Back to Life*, 1987, Cotton Cloth, Paint, and Binder, 393.7 x 295.3 inches. The image also shows *You Are Still Awake*, the banner painting created by Choe Minhwa and several university students, displayed at the funeral of the martyr Yi Hanyeol, July 9, 1987. Collection: the Korean Democracy Foundation.



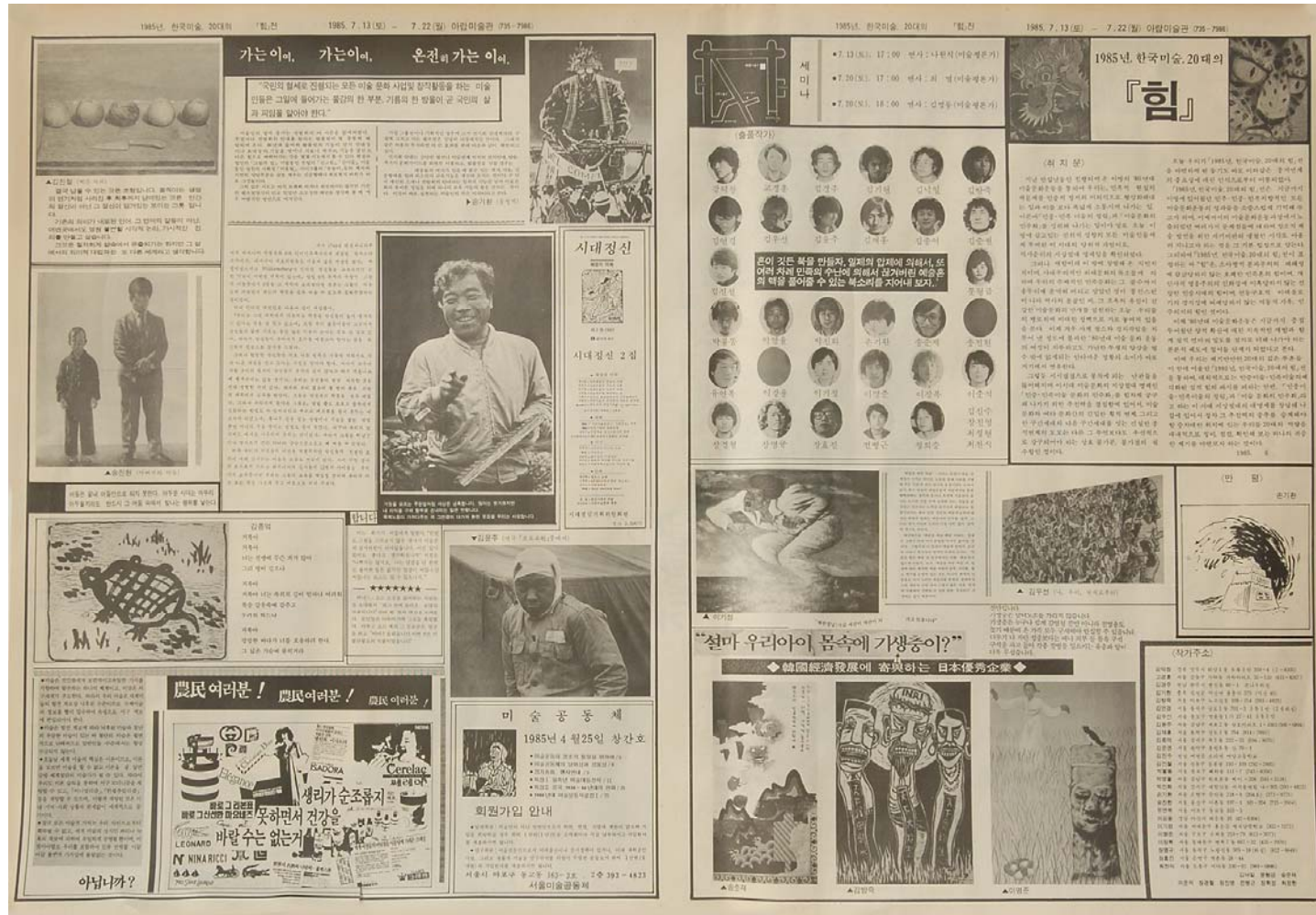


Figure D.2. Pamphlet of the “1985, Korean Art, the 20s’ ‘Power’” Exhibition, 1985. Collection of the artist Park Jinhwa.



Figure D.3. Park Gibok, Song Jinwon, Kim Yeongmi, Nam Gyuseon, and Gang Hwasuk, *The Unification and Working People*, 1986, on a Building Wall at Sinchon, size unrecorded. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Minjung Misul 15 Years 1980-1994*.





Figure D.4. Ryu Yeonbok, Kim Jinhwa, Hong Hwanggi, Kim Yongman, and Choe Byeongsu, *A Painting of Living Together*, 1986, Ryu Yeonbok's House Wall in Jeongreung, 7.9 x 31 inches. Minjung Misul Collection of Cheon Gwanjae.



**Figure D.5. Funeral Portrait of the Martyr Yi Hanyeol, July 9, 1987. Collection: The Korean Democracy Foundation.**



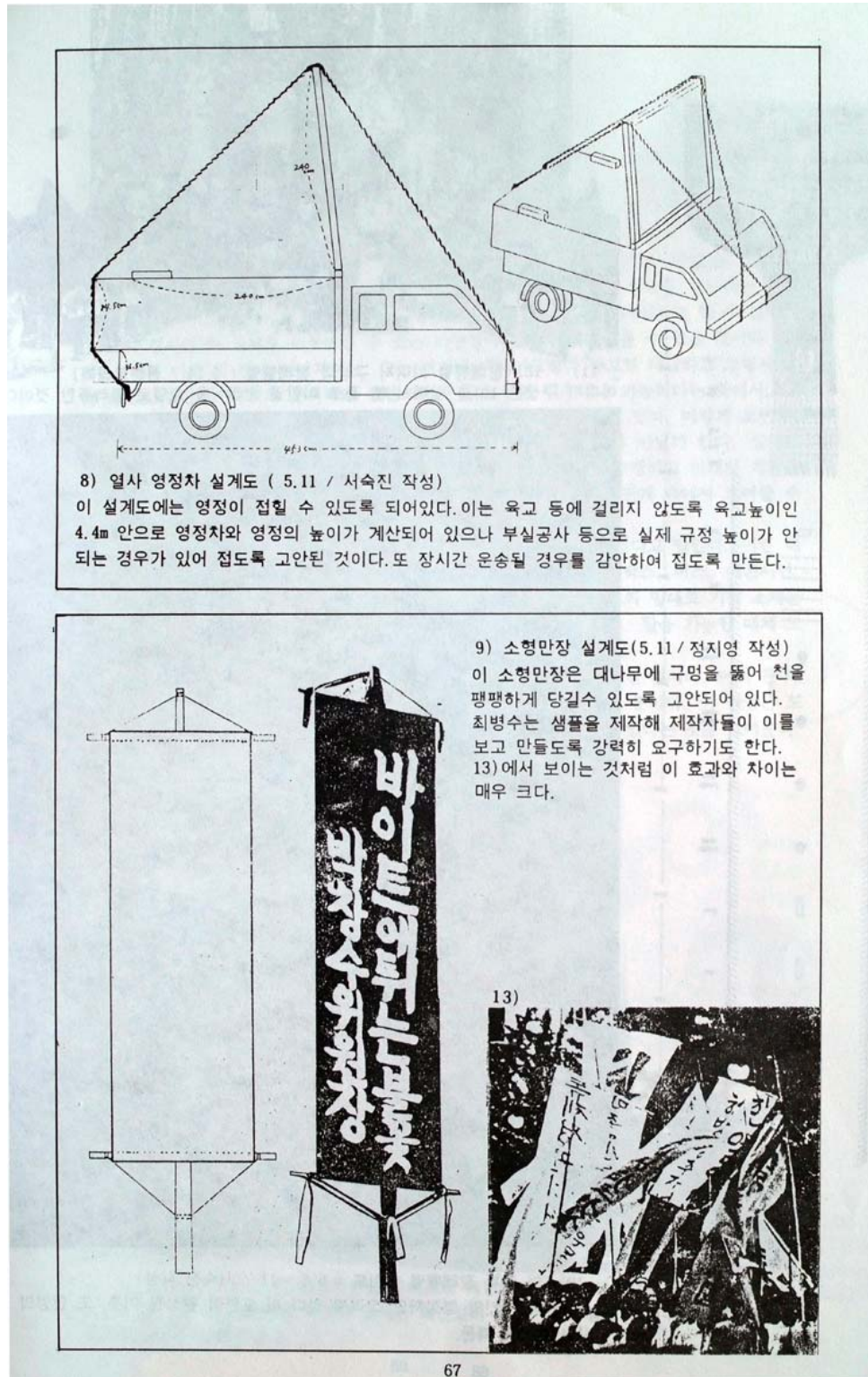


Figure D.6. An Example of a Blueprint for a Funeral Car and Elegy Banner. Published in *Minjok misul*, 11 (1991).





**Figure D.7. Yi Hanyeol's Funeral Procession to City Hall in Seoul. Collection: The Korean Democracy Foundation.**





**Figure D.8.** Jeon Jeongho and Yi Sangho, *Under the Foot of the Baikdu Mountains and the Dawn of the Unification*, 1987, size unknown. Published in *Minjok Misul*, 7 (1989).



# APPENDIX E: CHAPTER FOUR FIGURES



Figure E.1. Yim Oksang, *Newspaper, 1980, Newspaper and Painting*. Published in the catalogue of the founding exhibition of Reality and Utterance, October 17–23, 1980.





**Figure E.2. Kim Jeongheon, *Walking with Tomboys*, 1980, Oil Painting with Collage, size unrecorded. Published in the catalogue of the founding exhibition of Reality and Utterance, October 17–23, 1980.**



Figure E.3. Kim Jeongheon, *For Affluent Life . . . Lucky Monoryum*, 1980, Oil Painting with Collage, 26x35 inches. Published in the catalogue of the founding exhibition of Reality and Utterance, October 17–23, 1980.



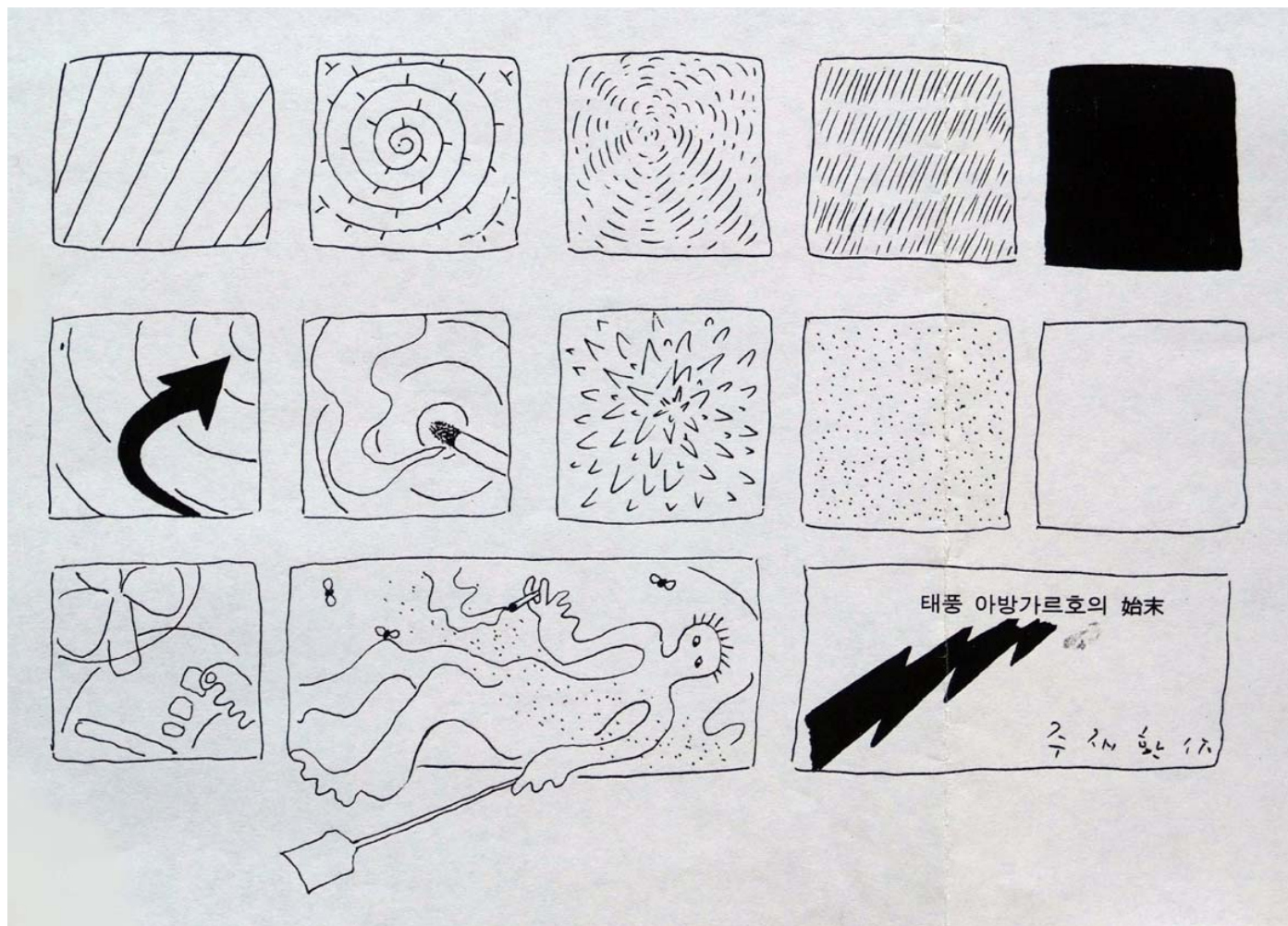


Figure E.4. Ju Jaehwan, *The Beginning and End of Ship Typhoon Avant-Garde*, 1980, Comic Strip, 36 x 55 inches. Published in the catalogue of the founding exhibition of Reality and Utterance, October 17–23, 1980.



Figure E.5. Oh Yun, *Safety Hat*, 1979, Woodblock and Paper, 10.4 x 9.8 inches. Published in the catalogue of the founding exhibition of Reality and Utterance, October 17–23, 1980.



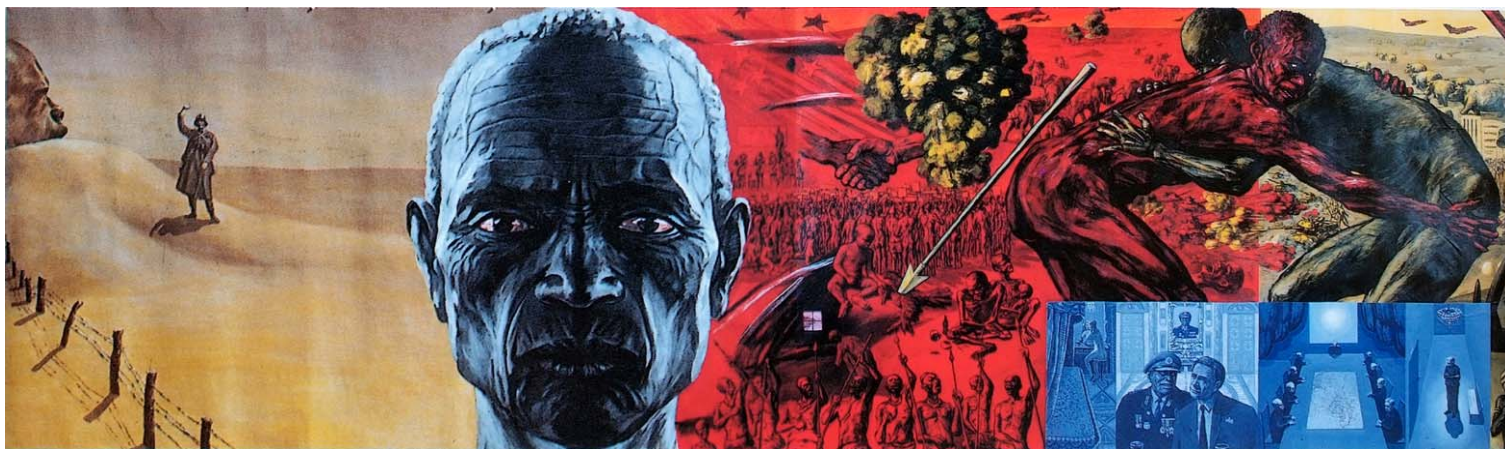
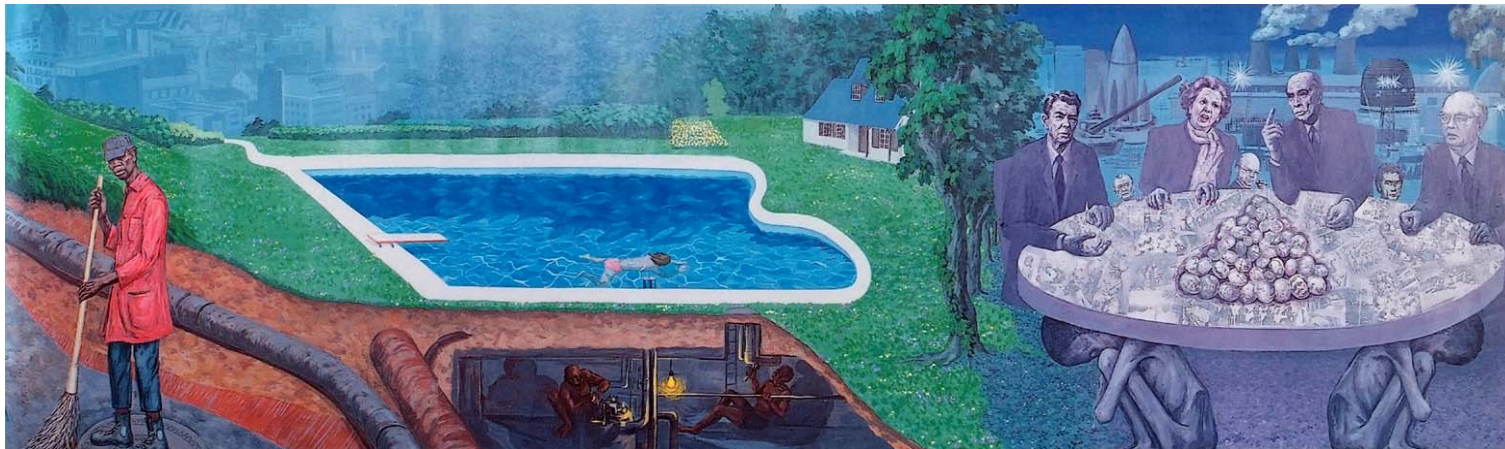


Figure E.6. Yim Oksang, *Modern History of Africa*, 1984–85, Acrylic on Paper, 59.1 x 414.2 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Ok-sang Lim: In the Spirit of Resistance*, Alternative Museum, New York, in 1997.





**Figure E.7.** Yim Oksang, *Newspaper*, 1980, Paper Collage, Oil on Canvas, 118.1 x 54.3 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Ok-sang Lim: In the Spirit of Resistance*, Alternative Museum, New York, in 1997.



Figure E.8. Kim Gangyong, *Reality+Field*, 1979, Oil on Canvas, 58.3 x 46.5 inches. Collection: Kim Daljin yeon'guso.





Figure E.9. Ji Yongsu, *Tire 81*, 1981, Oil on Canvas, 109.1 x 109.1 inches. Collection: Kim Daljin yeon'guso.





**Figure E.10.** Kim Hyeongguen, *Target*, 1970, Oil on Canvas, 63.8 x 51.2 inches.  
Collection: Kim Daljin yeon'guso.



Figure E.11. Yim Oksang, *The Earth IV*, 1980, Oil on Canvas, 40.6 x 72 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Ok-sang Lim: In the Spirit of Resistance*, Alternative Museum, New York, in 1997.





**Figure E.12.** Yim Oksang, *The Earth II*, 1981, Ink, Acrylic, and Oil on Canvas, 54.7 x 126 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Ok-sang Lim: In the Spirit of Resistance*, Alternative Museum, New York, in 1997.

APPENDIX F: CHAPTER FIVE FIGURES



Figure F.1. Kim Bongjun, *Mom, I Came Back Home*, 1981, Woodblock, Paper, Color, 7.5 x 8.3 inches. Published in *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae*, 2001.





**Figure F.2.** Kim Bongjun, *Ancestor in the Wooden Pillory*, 1981, Wood Block, Paper, Color, 8.7 x 13.8 inches. Published in *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae*, 2001.



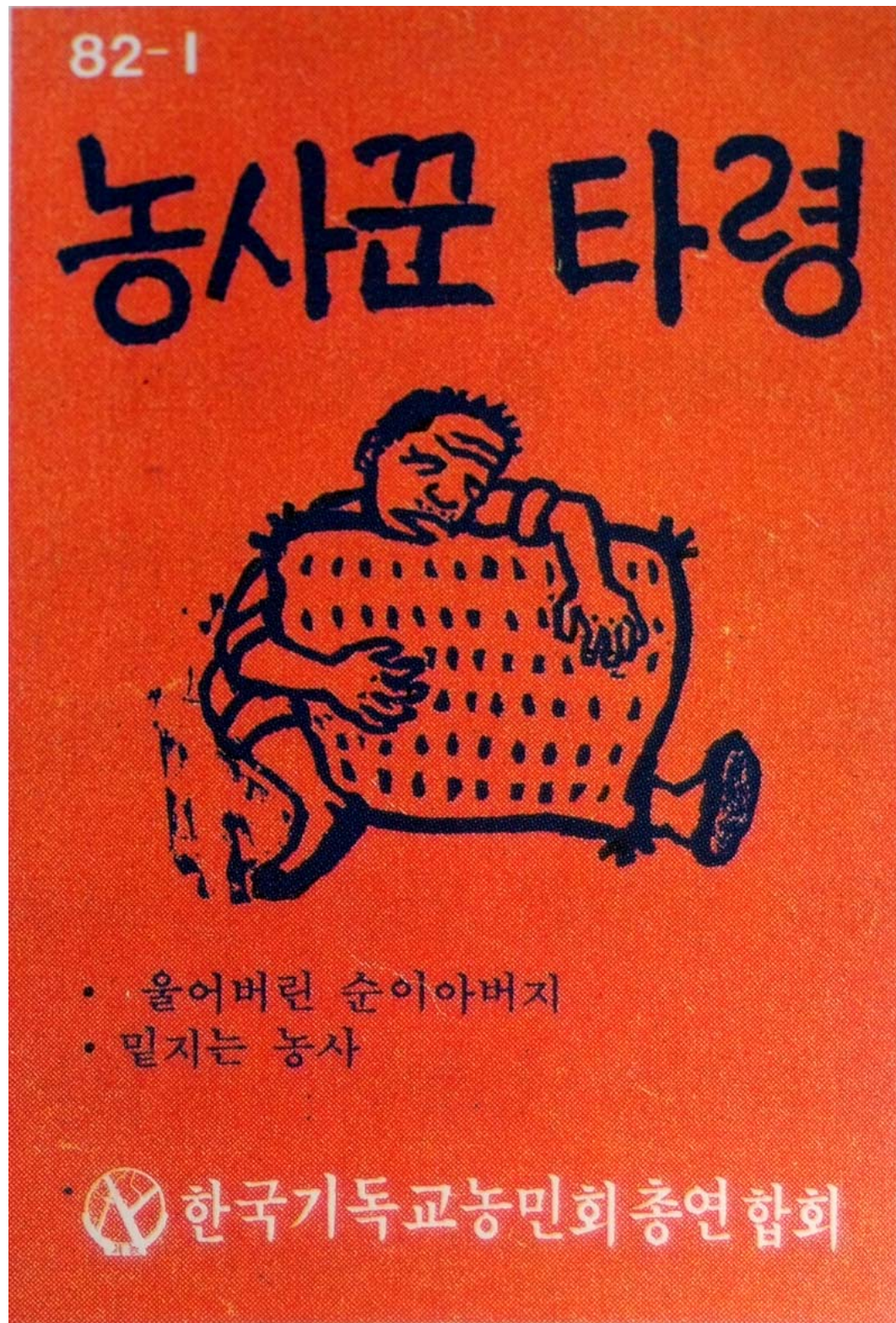


Figure F.3. Kim Bongjun, Cover of the Comic Book *The Farmers' Ballad*, 1982. Published in *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae*, 2001.





Figure F.4. Kim Bongjun, A Performance at Aege Cultural Center. Published in *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae*, 2001.





Figure F.5. Kim Bongjun, *Dureong*, 1983, Woodblock, Paper, Color, 10.2 x 14.2 inches. Published in *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae*, 2001.





**Figure F.6.** Scene from the Gwangju Citizens' Art School, around 1983. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Minjung Misul 15 Years 1980–1994*.



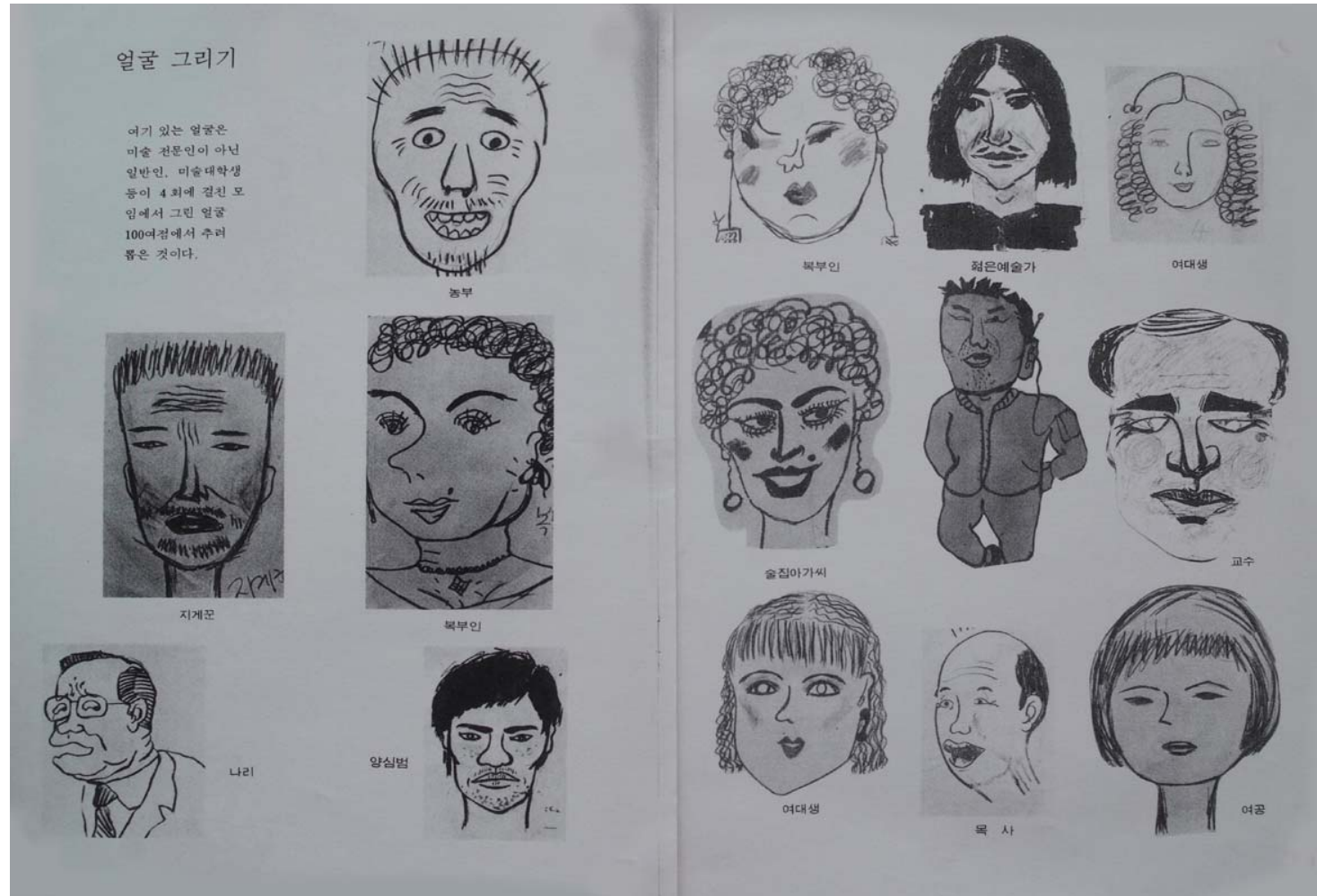


▲ 탄생



▲ 가난한 자에게 복이 있나니

**Figure F.7. Examples of the Collective Work of Participants at the Aege Citizens' Art School, around 1984. Published in *San guerim*, 1 (1983).**



**Figure F.8. Drawings of People's Faces by Participants at the Aege Citizens' Art School, around 1983. Published in *San guerim*, 1 (1983).**



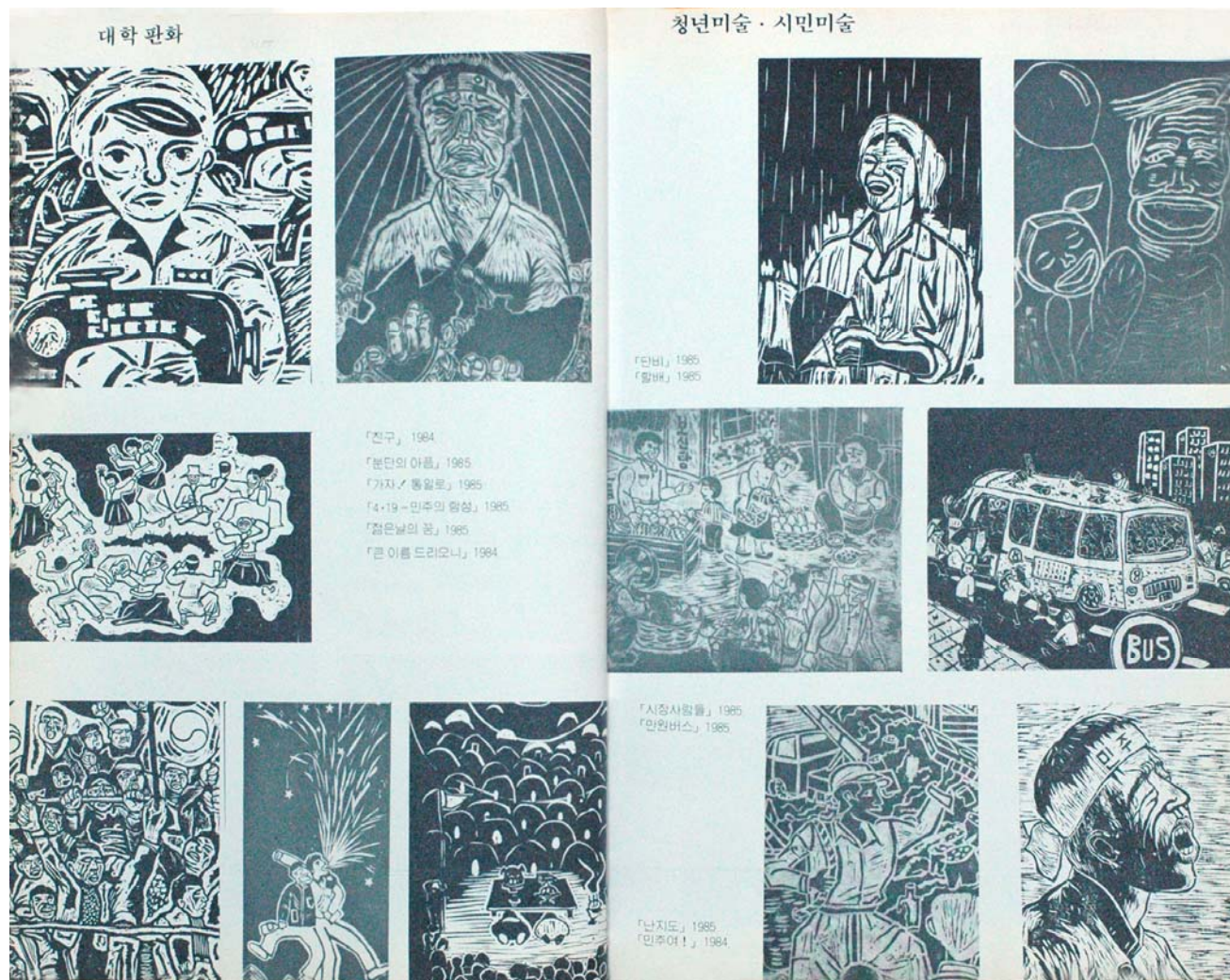


Figure F.9. The collection of “The Citizens’ Prints.” Published in *Minjung Misul*, 1985.





Figure F.10. Kim Bongjun, *Let's Pick the Stars*, around 1984. Acrylic on Canvas, 118.1 x 196.9 inches. Published in *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae*, 2001.





Figure F.11 Kim Bongjun, *Monaegi* ("Rice Planting"), 1984, Woodblock, Paper, Color, 15.7 x 11.8 inches. Published in *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae*, 2001.





Figure F.12. Kim Bongjun, *Nanjang* ("Festival"), 1983, Woodblock, Paper, Color, 13.4 x 10.2 inches. Published in *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae*, 2001.





Figure F.13. Dureong, *The Cross of Liberation*, around 1984, Acrylic on Canvas, Banner Painting, 118.1 x 196.9 inches. Published in *Supeseo chajeun ohraedoen mirae*, 2001.

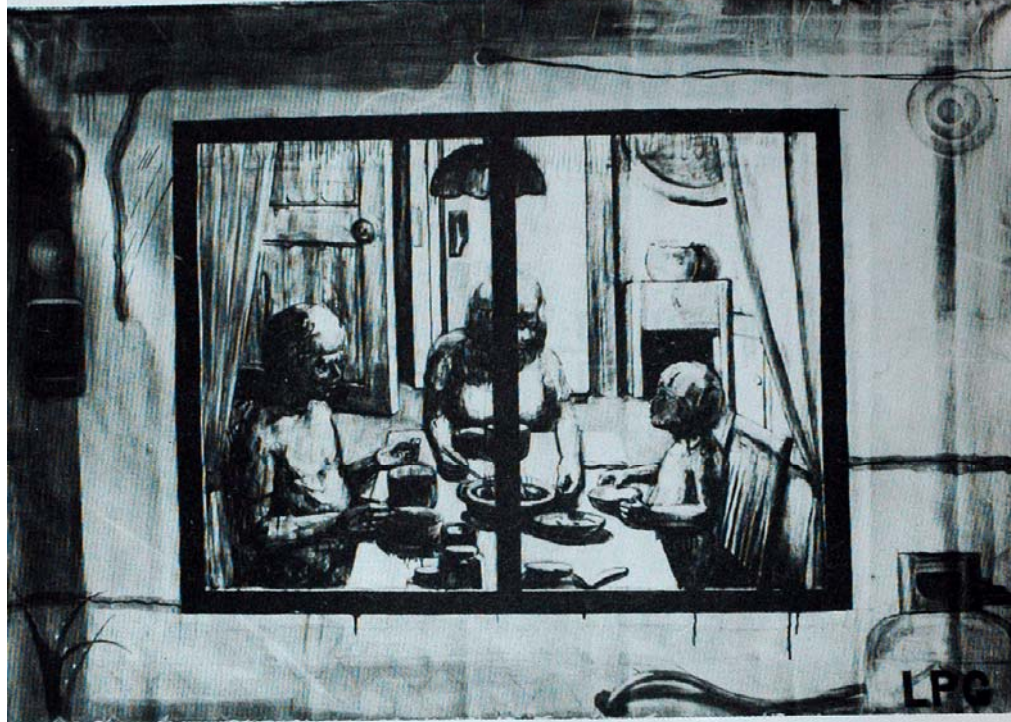


## **APPENDIX G: CHAPTER SIX FIGURES**



Figure G.1. Oh Yun, *1960 Ga*, in the Manifesto of Reality Group, 1969.





金正憲

'46년 평양생, 서울대 미대 회화과 및 동 대학원 졸업, 신체제전, 오늘의 작가전, '81년 새구상화가 11인전, 개인전('77), '81년 문제작가·작품전(서울미술관 기획), 현재 공주사범대학교수로 재직하고 있다.  
주소 / 서울 강남구 서초동 273-10  
T. 593-5705

행복에 관한 스로건을 스스로 걸머지기 위하여 우리는 불행하다. 행복이란 그 자체로 벌써 허구의 논리 위에 존재할 뿐 만 아니라 행복을 감지할 수 있는 우리의 감각은 선천적으로 마비상태에 있을지도 모르기 때문이다. 더군다나 그것을 시각예술의 매체로 형상화 한다는 작업 자체가 의문이 아닐 수 없다.

그러나 그것은 행복에 대한 형상화의 의미보다 오히려 행복에 대한 진지한 물음 자체가 가지는 신선함과 건강함을 위하여 또는 우리가 가지는 삶 그 자체에 대한 근본적인 물음으로서의 의미가 크다 하겠으며 또한 우리를 둘러싸고 있는 그러면서도 가장 평범하고 일상적인 느낌(내용)을 이미 첨예화하고 신경발작적인 시각형식과 마찰시킴으로써 빚어지는 예측할 수 없는 결과에 대한 설렘도 있는 것이다.

어쨌든 우리는 「시각적 행복론」을 펼쳐야 할 의무가 있다. 그것은 개념과 관념으로만 존재하는 우리를 비롯한 수많은 위장인생의 겉 껍질을 벗기고 삶의 알맹이에 닥아서야 한다는 도덕적 내지 윤리적 인생관의 문제에서 만이 아니고 미술이 가지는 허구적이고 감각적인 행복의 관행을 깨뜨려야 하기 때문인지도 모른

Figure G.2. A Writing and Painting by Kim Jeongheon, in the catalogue *Painting and Speech*, as part of the “Shapes of Happiness” exhibition, 1982.



#### 閔晶基

'49년 서울생, 서울대 미대 졸업 및  
학원 재학, 12월전('80-'82), 제3구  
('78-'81), 3인전('77), 오늘의 작가  
-'81), 새구상화11인전('81), 현실과  
회원이며, 현재 전주대학교에 출강중  
주소 / 서울 용산구 한강로1가 287  
T. 793-7266

일상의 우리 주변에서는 행복한 모습들을 많이 찾아볼 수 있다. 바캉스를 떠나는 행복한 가족, 여가를 즐기며 자기 아이들이 뛰어노는 모습을 사진기에 담은 아버지의 모습, 슈퍼마켓에 무수히 쌓인 상품들 속에서 만족할 만한 물건을 사기 위해 이것 저것 찾아보는 사람들의 모습, 자신만만하고 쾌기에 차 있는 회사원들, 고급 승용차를 운전하는 젊고 아름다운 부인의 모습, 그리고 건강하고 정력적인 남성과 젊고 싱싱한 그리고 아름다운 여성들의 행복에 찬 모습들을 담은 수많은 상품선전의 사진, 광고, 포스터, 선전 방송들.

이 여러가지 행복한 모습들을 받쳐주고 있는 것은 현대사회를 움직이는 거대한 과학기술, 기술관료정치, 방대한 경제적 순환을 위한 고도로 발달된 대량생산체제와 그에 따른 대량소비체제이다.

이러한 상황에서 개인은 오로지 성공적으로 적응하기 위한 하나의 기능인으로서만 이 사회에 직접적인 연관을 갖게 된다. 예전부터 내려오던 고유하고 토속적인 삶의 방식과는 등을 돌리게 되고, 개인과 사회의 관계에 있어서 전통적인 의미, 기준, 가치, 동기 등은 설 자리를 잃는다.

이것들은 현대사회의 허공에서 뿌리없이 떠돌아 다닐 뿐이다. 이에 대한 끝없는 비판과 토론도 만족할 만한 해답을 제시해주는 것 같지는 않다. 즉 그것들의 유효성에 대한 비판의 기준은 더이상 전통적인 삶에 뿌리를 둔 것이 아니라 개인적인 정서의 만족을 추구하는 주관적인 태도로 전환되었다고 말할 수 있다.

우리가 일상생활에서 보아왔던 행복의 모습들은 이와같이 사회에 적응하기 위해서 개인의 의식의 기능이라고 하는 얇은 주형(鑄型)으로서만 존재함으로써 얻어지는 것이다.

그렇다면 기능인으로서 개인의 역할을 다하고 나서 그가 즐기고 소비하는 대중예술은 어떠한가?

**Figure G.3. A Writing and Painting by Min Jeonggi, in the catalogue *Painting and Speech*, as part of the “Shapes of Happiness” exhibition, 1982.**





Figure G.4. Oh Yun, *Labor in the Dawn*, 1984, Woodblock and Paper, 10.8 x 7 inches. Illustration for the poetry collection *Labor in the Dawn*, by Park Nohae, 1984. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.



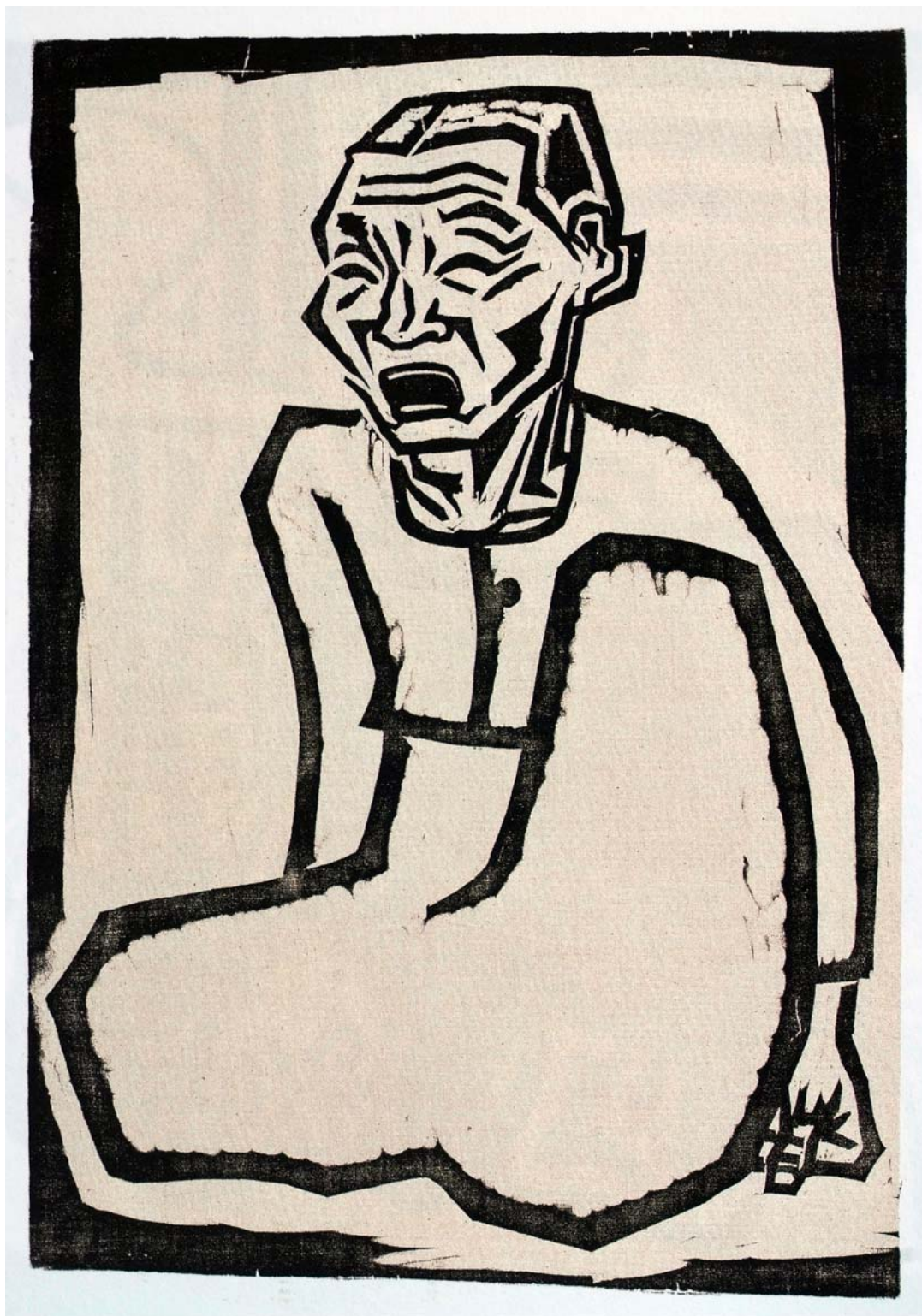


Figure G.5. Oh Yun, *Grandma II*, 1983, Woodblock and Cotton Cloth, 20.1 x 14 inches. Published in *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.





Figure G.6. Oh Yun, *Land V*, 1983, Woodblock, Paper, 16.3 x 14 inches.  
Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*,  
2006.





**Figure G.7.** Oh Yun, Drawing for *Land V*, 1971–75. Published in *Oh Yun: 3115 Nalgeot geudaero ui Oh Yun*, vol. 3, 2010.





**Figure G.8.** Oh Yun, Drawing for *Land V*, 1976–80. Published in *Oh Yun: 3115 Nalgeot geudaero ui Oh Yun*, vol. 3, 2010.





Figure G.9. Oh Yun, Drawing for *Land V*, 1980–83.. Published in *Oh Yun: 3115 Nalgeot geudaero ui Oh Yun*, vol. 3, 2010.



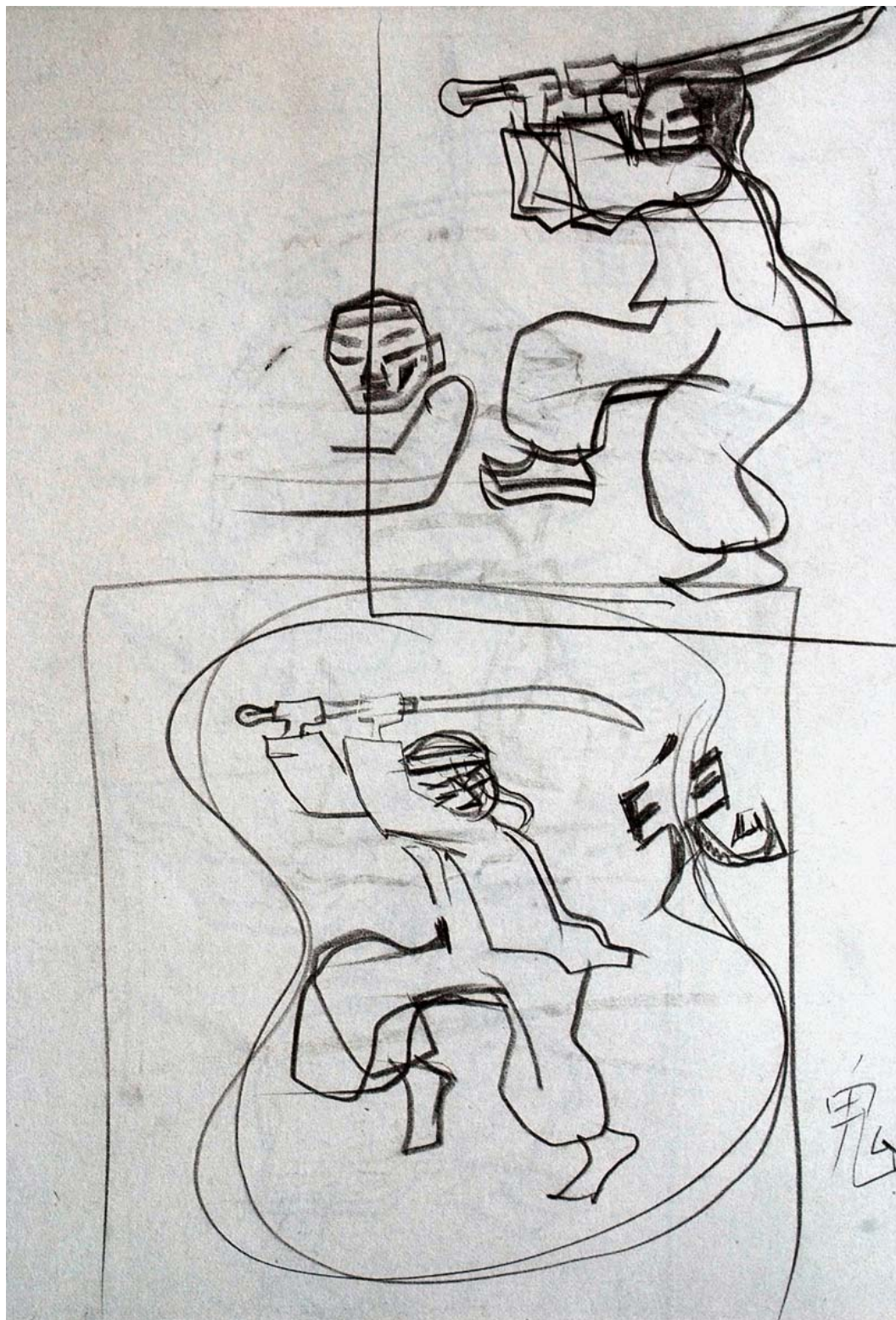
Figure G.10. Oh Yun, *Vindictive Spirits*, 1984, Oil on Canvas, 27.2 x 181.9 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.





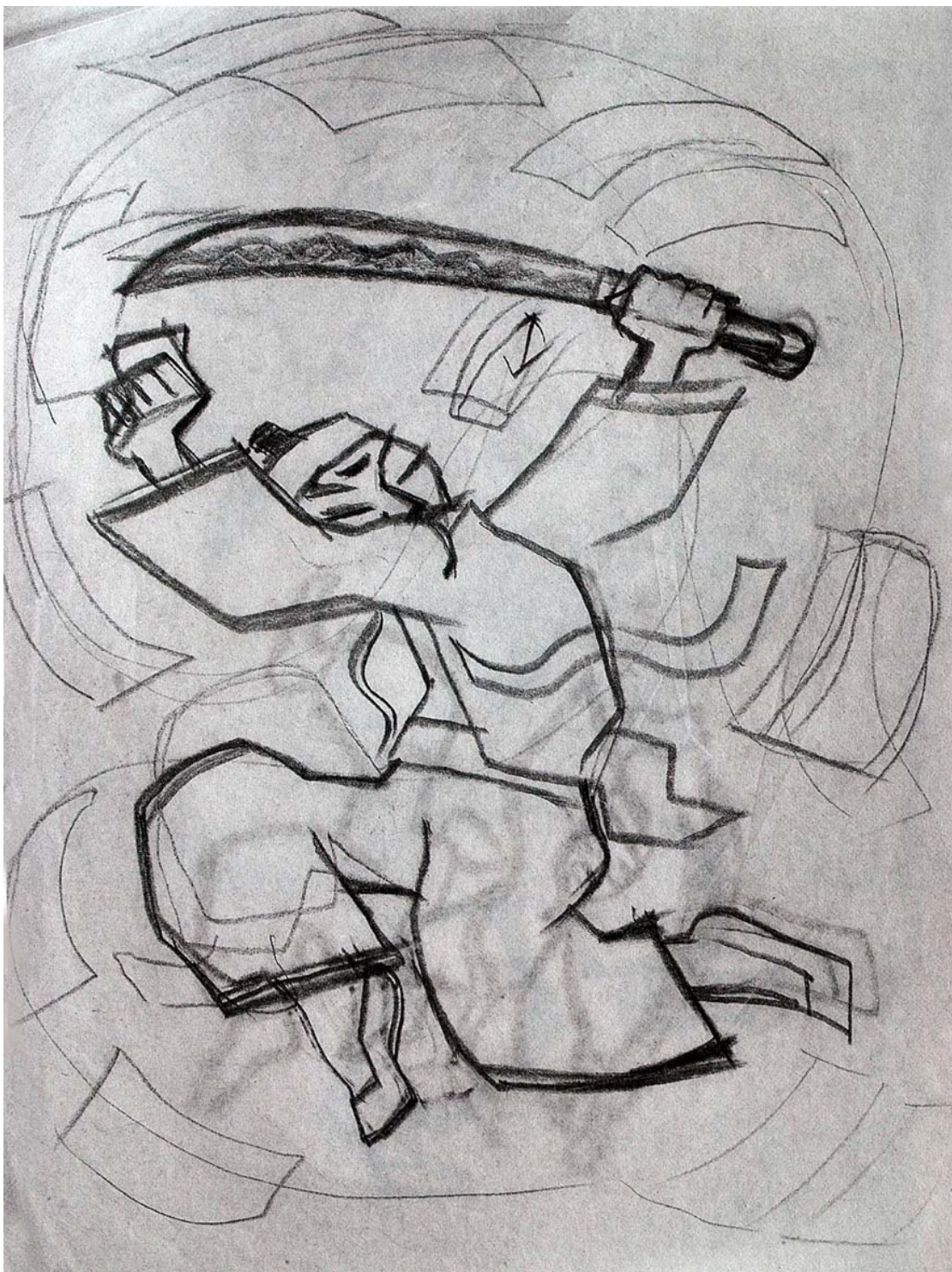
Figure G.11. Oh Yun, *The Song of the Sword*, 1985, Woodblock, Cotton Cloth, Color, 12.7 x 10 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.





**Figure G.12.** Oh Yun, Drawing for *The Song of the Sword*, 1984–86. Published in *Oh Yun: 3115 Nalgeot geudaero ui Oh Yun*, vol. 3, 2010.





**Figure G.13.** Oh Yun, Drawing for *The Song of the Sword*, 1984–86. Published in *Oh Yun: 3115 Nalgeot geudaero ui Oh Yun*, vol. 3, 2010.





Figure G.14. Oh Yun, *A Female Shaman*, 1985, Woodblock and Paper, 8.14 x 7.1 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.





**Figure G.15.** Oh Yun, *There is No Benevolence in Spring and There is No Righteousness in Fall*, 1985, Rubber Board, Cotton Cloth, Color, 25 x 18.7 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.





Figure G.16. Oh Yun, *Sorrikkun II* ("Singer of Pansori"), 1985, Woodblock, Cotton Cloth, Color, 11 x 9.8 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.





Figure G.17. Oh Yun, *Drum Dance*, 1985, Woodblock and Paper, 12.4 x 10 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.

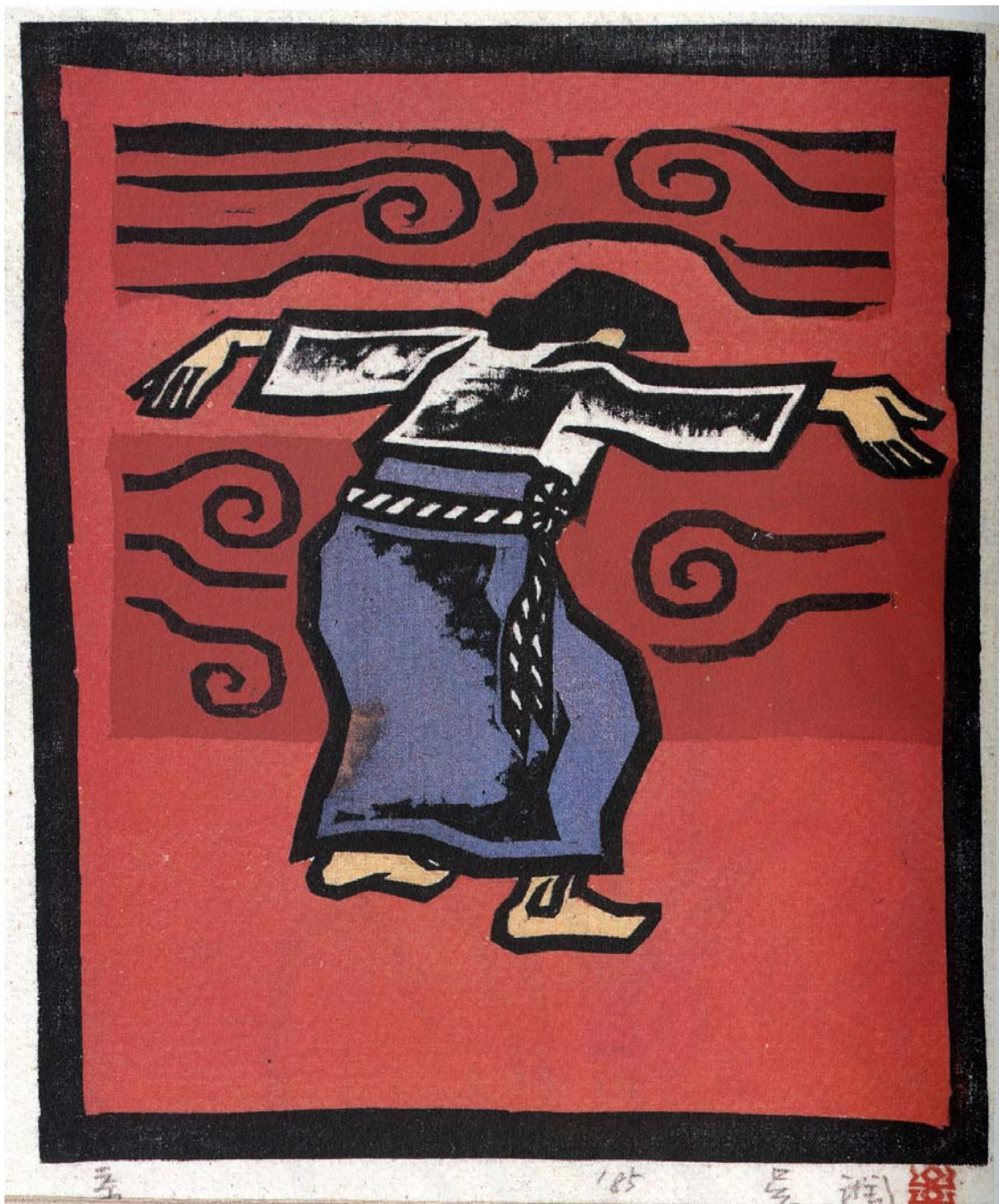


Figure G.18. Oh Yun, *Dance III*, 1985, Woodblock, Cotton Cloth, and Color, 11.2 x 9.4 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.



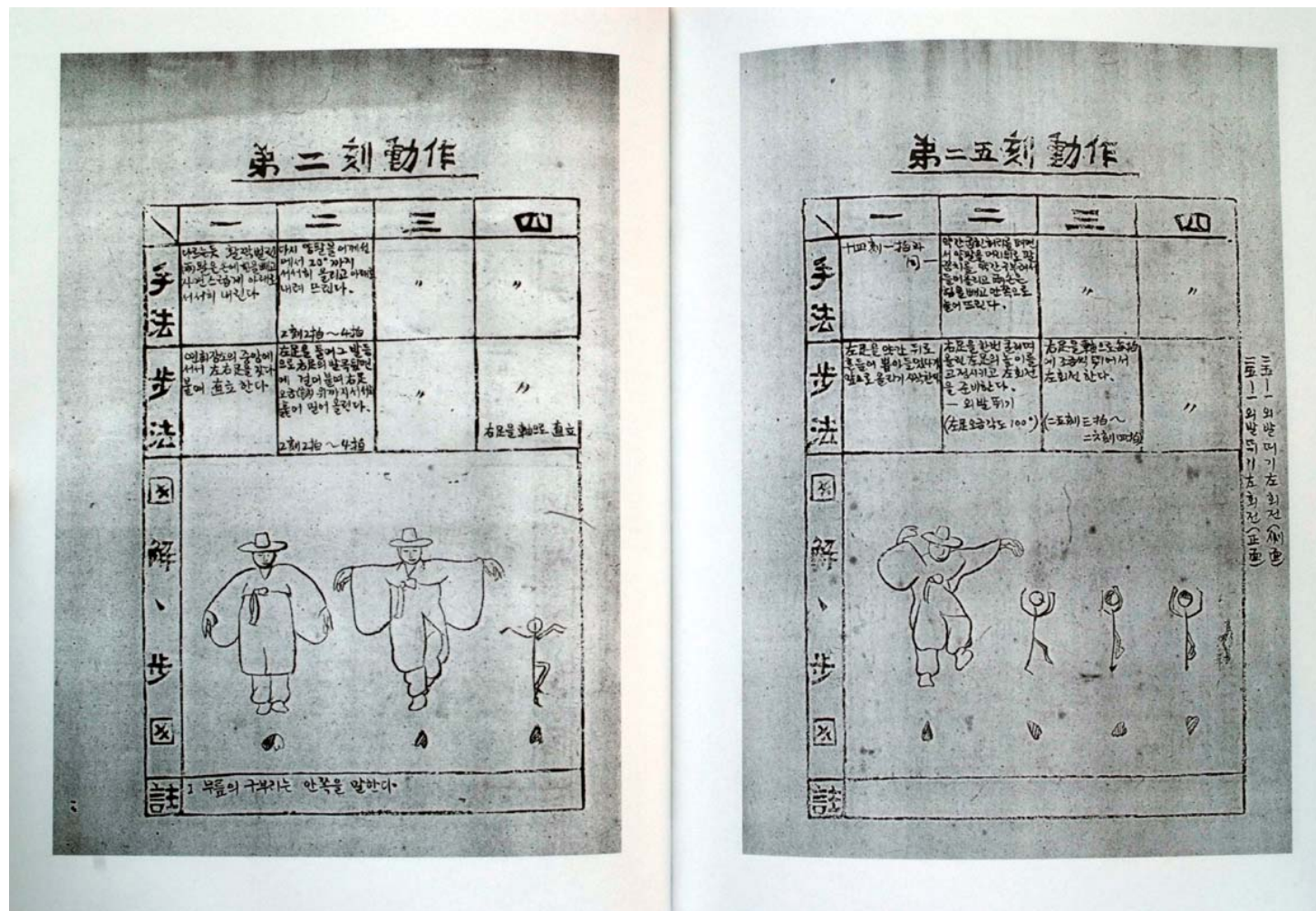


Figure G.19. Oh Yun, Illustration for "Crane Dance." Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Kal eul jwin dokkebi*, vol. 2, 2010.



Figure G.20. Oh Yun, *The Great Desires for the Unification*, 1985, Oil on Canvas, 155.1 x 54.3 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Oh Yun: Natdokkebi shinmyeong madang*, 2006.

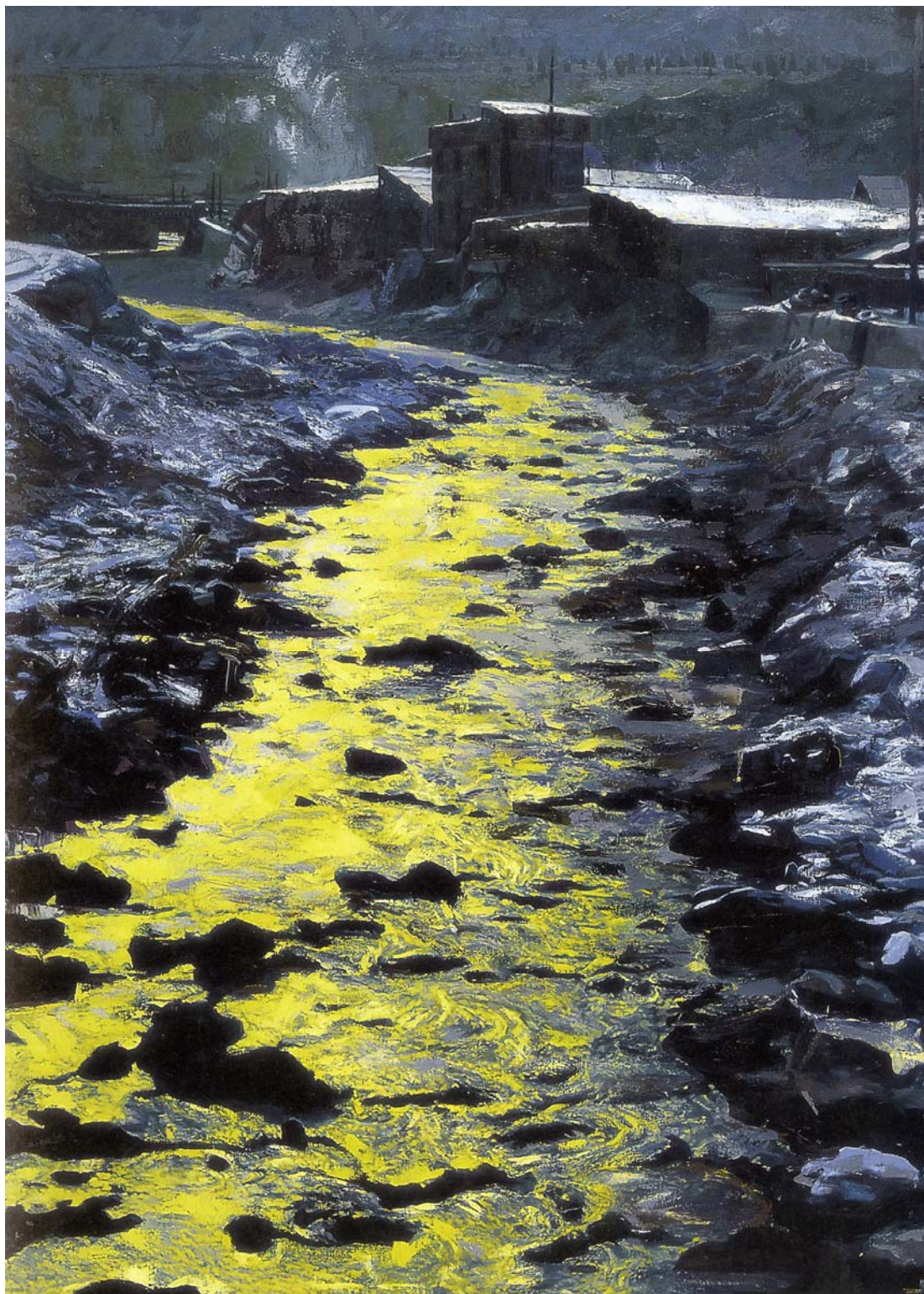
## **APPENDIX H: CHAPTER SEVEN FIGURES**





**Figure H.1.** Hwang Jaehyeong, *Lunch Break*, 1985, Oil on Canvas 35.8 x 46.1 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Jwil heuk gwa nwil heuk*, 2008.





**Figure H.2.** Hwang Jaehyeong, *Sunset at Tancheon*, 1990, Oil on Canvas, 89.4 x 63.8 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Jwil heuk gwa nwil heuk*, 2008.





**Figure H.3.** Hwang Jaehyeong, *Clock*, 1985, Mixed Medium, 22.8 x 22.8 inches. Minjung Misul Collection of Cheon Gwanjae.



Figure H.4. Hwang Jaehyeong, *History of the Struggle by Seong Wanhui*, 1989, Canvas on Board, 35.4 x 70.9 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Jwil heuk gwa nwil heuk*, 2008.

## **APPENDIX I: CONCLUSION FIGURES**





Figure I.1. “The Minjung Misul 15 Years, 1980–1994” Exhibition, 1994. Collection of Minjok misulin hyeopuihoe.





**Figure I.2.** Jo Seup, *Bring Seup Back to Life*, 2002, Digital Photography, 51.2 x 47.2 inches. Published in the exhibition catalogue *Art toward Society: Realism in Korean Art 1945–2005*.



Figure I.3. Candlelight Vigil Protests at Cheongaecheon Plaza, May 17, 2008. Collection of Kim Yun'gi.



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