

FAMILY APART:
THE AESTHETIC GENEALOGY OF KOREAN WAR MEMORIES

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

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August 2013

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Cornell University 2013

This dissertation examines the formation of national subjectivity in South Korea through an analysis of what I call “Korean War memory works.” Countering the selective remembering and forgetting of the unfinished war at the level of official discourse, these mnemonic texts have informed the political un/conscious of the divided nation. In tracing how such counter-memories contend and negotiate with the statist interpellation of Korean subjects, I direct attention to the trope of the broken family that persistently appears in Korean War narratives and images. While relating this “failed” family romance to a collective mourning process, I also reveal its generative power to produce the fantasy of an originary community. As I unpack the myth of the indivisible family-nation, I further criticize through a feminist psychoanalytic lens the patriarchal symbolic order that underlies the familial imagination employed by oppositional nationalism.

The postwar texts selected here for discussion are situated within the historical contexts in which each mode of representation, in association with a distinctive subject of narration, became a hegemonic way of grasping the unresolved past. Chapter One scrutinizes the intellectual subjectivity crystallized in Choi In-hoon’s “novels of ideas,” and reinterprets them as the unfulfilled *Bildungsroman* of the “4.19 generation.” Chapter Two probes the embodiment of the *minjung*, foregrounded in the

1980s' protests against domestic dictatorship and US imperialism, through a review of Jo Jung-rae's historical novel *Taebaeksanmaek*. Chapter Three addresses Park Wansuh's literary testimonies of the Korean War with an emphasis on the daughter-narrator's transformation through her confrontation and reconciliation with the (m)other, another witness in silent struggle. Chapter Four discusses the recent phenomenon of Korean War blockbusters, focusing on how such a spectacular memorialization in the "post-Cold War" era deals with the desires and anxieties of contemporary Koreans who in their everyday life encounter simultaneously the haunting legacies of Korea's partition and the new imperatives of global capitalism. By piecing together dispersed memories of the Korean War in these various aesthetic practices, this study seeks to rethink South Korean cultural identity in relation to its postcolonial history of "national division" and the familial structure of its remembrance.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

We Jung Yi was born in Jinhae, a port city on the southeast coast of the Korean peninsula. She received a BA in Korean Literature and English Literature, and a MA in Comparative Literature from Yonsei University, South Korea. She entered the PhD program in the field of Asian Literature, Religion, and Culture at Cornell University in August of 2006, and defended her dissertation in June of 2013.

To my parents, Kyung Han Lee and Hyun Joo Lee

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My odyssey in Ithaca has been full of adventure, challenge, and discovery. I would have been lost without the guidance, support, and wisdom of all those who have accompanied me on this road. Realizing that I will soon embark upon another journey once I complete this dissertation, I would like to take this moment to acknowledge the travel companions whose inspiration and perspiration have helped me to re-vision the world and myself.

First, I would like to express my gratitude to my committee members. Professor Brett de Bary has not only taught me to grapple with the unwritten while reading texts closely. She has always stood by me, providing me with the role model of an all-round scholar, just as Mentor encouraged and advised Telemachus throughout his development. It has been a blessing to have her as my chair and advisor. I am also indebted to Professor Michael Shin. His critical questions in and practical approaches to Korean Studies, combined with his astute comments on my project, have kept me reflecting upon my position and mission as a Koreanist. With his exemplary scholarship on translation theory and intellectual history in Asia, Professor Naoki Sakai has shown me how to situate a national subject within transnational contexts. I cannot appreciate enough the rigorous feedback on my research and unflagging enthusiasm for my work that Professor Petrus Liu has continually given me, in addition to his thought-provoking seminars in which this thesis originated. My thanks are extended as well to Dominick LaCapra at Cornell University, Bruce Cumings at the University of Chicago, Tae Gyun Park at Seoul National University, and Seung-Hee Jeon at the Korea Institute, Harvard University.

Generous financial support for my dissertation came from Cornell's Department of Asian Studies, East Asia Program, Mario Einaudi Center for

International Studies, Judith Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, Society for the Humanities, and Graduate School. I have also greatly benefitted from the School for Criticism and Theory and the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies.

To borrow from the protagonist Lee Myong-jun in *The Square*, my process of research and writing in a “secret room” could have been out of joint had it not been interlocked with many “squares” of coexistence. The abstract space of intellectual practice has become more perceivable and valuable thanks both to my peers here at Cornell and to my old friends across the ocean, who have willingly shared their expertise and experiences over the years: Bohee Han, Eunae Ko, Jison Kim, Ji Yun Jeong, Koonyong Kim, Seung-hwan Shin, Akiko Ishii, Christopher Ahn, Honghong Tinn, Jiwon Yun, Moonyoung Jeong, Moon-hee Lee, and Seongyeon Ko. The caring community of NPR church nourished me spiritually, emotionally, and physically, while the natural environment of Ithaca encouraged the growth of my imagination through exercise.

Last but not least, I am infinitely grateful to my parents, Kyung Han Lee and Hyun Joo Lee, for their love, faith, service, and endurance. Sometimes by surprising me with packages that contained homemade *kimchi* along with materials for my study, often by replacing my anxiety and skepticism with laughter and optimism through their comforting words or hilarious dances, and, most importantly, by praying for me all the time, they never let me forget that our family is always together, even when apart. I dedicate this dissertation to them with my eternal love and admiration.

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NOTE ON ROMANIZATION

This dissertation follows the Revised Romanization issued by South Korea's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 2000 for transliterating Korean words. The transliteration of personal names respects the wishes of individuals (e.g., Park Chung Hee instead of Bak Jeonghi). Korean names maintain their order of family name followed by given name, except when the author seems to prefer the Western style of placing the given name first. When texts in English translation are used, the Romanization of the translator is retained in the main body, in addition to direct quotations.

Introduction: Korean War Memories and South Korean Subjectivity

This dissertation explores the formation of national subjectivity in South Korea by tracing its traumatic origin as represented in Korean War fiction and film. Initiated as a localized conflict in a postcolonial nation, and leading to the inaugural hot war of the global Cold War, the Korean War (1950-1953) ended in a stalemate and the reconsolidation of the 38th parallel that had first been proposed by the United States at the time of Korea's "liberation" from Japan. Returned after three years of fighting to where they had begun, the two states on the Korean peninsula were left to rebuild their now-divided nation, devastated both materially and psychically. Because the top priorities were national security and survival, democratic freedoms were suspended in the present for democracy and freedom *in the future*. Along with military and economic competition under the auspices of the two Cold War superpowers, the opposing sides also contended for the historical legitimacy of Korean nationhood. In this continuing war over ideology, the trauma of division was not simply repressed, but rather strategically recalled to produce a disciplined, statist subject upon whom the unfulfilled task of Korea's modernization was imposed. Accordingly, access to and interpretations of the problematic past were controlled by authoritarian regimes, which rationalized all kinds of restrictions under the state of exception, namely, the unfinished war.

Despite the monopolization of knowledge production in the public sphere, South Korea's anticommunist state apparatus did not always achieve the upbringing of its desired subjects. Those memories that were excluded from the formal domain of politics came to furnish the raw materials for a counter-hegemonic space in which the violent origin and illegitimate constitution

of the existing regimes are ceaselessly conjured up to challenge the normative representation of the war.¹ The cultural realm to which the unauthorized histories of the division were transferred thus opened up a discursive arena in which the dominant narrative promulgated by the state could be questioned, and the dissenting voices suppressed in *Realpolitik* could be articulated. The enormous popularity of “division literature” (*bundan munhak*)² and its extensive repercussions in the South Korean cultural landscape need to be understood in this context; many postwar novels and popular films have served as loci where forms of subjectivity and collectivity that are alternatives to a national subject interpellated by the state can be found. This dissertation analyzes the political unconscious of those subjects who desired to narrate, from various perspectives and in various manners, such stories of Korea’s division.

In addressing the historical significance and political implications of Korean War memories shaped outside of institutionalized history, this study neither rests on the binary between official history and popular memory, nor presumes the stable or homogeneous nature of either of these entities. Such “imagined opposition between History and Memory,” as Lisa Yoneyama warns us, not only reproduces the hierarchical relationship of the categories, but also blinds us to the dynamic interplay and intimate complicity of the two.³ Therefore, instead of

¹ This idea of a “counter-hegemonic sphere,” deployed to conceptualize the South Korean political culture that challenged the state-managed public memory, is inspired by Namhee Lee’s book *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007). She formulates South Korea’s *minjung* movement that culminated in the 1980s as a “counterpublic sphere” in which “*minjung* practitioners articulated their identities, interests, and needs not only in opposition to the state but also an emancipatory program for the whole of a society” (10). As my analysis of Korean War memories covers a broader period, I would like to further expand and simultaneously delineate this discursive space; by employing the critical tool of gender, I will show how the two conflicting spheres of the official and the oppositional in fact intersect with each other.

² Regarding the translation of the word *bundan*, Chungmoo Choi notes that “although the Korean term *pundan* [*bundan*] does not differentiate between ‘partition’ and ‘division,’ an increasing number of South Koreans use the word in its passive meaning to indicate that Korea was not divided by the will of the people but partitioned by external forces.” See “The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea,” in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 481.

³ See Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley:

seeking to establish a more coherent, unified genealogy by incorporating new materials recovered from the margins, I look at the complex traffic between the state account and the oppositional narrative, as well as latent fissures and heterogeneous layers *within* the counter-hegemonic space.

1. After “Division Literature”: Toward a New Korean War Studies

Since the armistice of 1953, the Korean War has been a dominant theme in South Korean literature and cinema. To make sense of Korea’s division and to deal with its enduring ramifications, many Korean writers and filmmakers with dissimilar origins and from distinct generations have revisited the traumatic conditions of the two Koreas through different media. Breaking away from the statist framework of national history, their mnemonic practices have conveyed dissenting voices and multiple perspectives in diverse forms, from autobiographical narratives to feature films. Notwithstanding the rich cultural history of the Korean War, study of the war has often been divided according to academic disciplines: history, political science, literature, film studies, and so forth. More concerned with the causes and consequences of the Korean War, historians and political scientists have underlined the historical conditions and social formations upon which the division system was conceived, maintained, and transformed. Meanwhile, literary scholars and cultural critics have confirmed—occasionally contested—such macro-level epistemes by providing ancillary textual analyses of individual works.

University of California Press, 1999), 27.

Such hierarchical periodization and disciplinization, however, seem inadequate for explicating what I would like to call Korean War memory works,⁴ as revealed in the impasse that has been reached in the conventional paradigm of “division literature.” Despite its wide usage in the field of Korean literature, the scope and nature of *bundan munhak* remains ambiguous, if not controversial. For instance, by adopting historian Kang Man-gil’s periodization of the post-1945 period as an “age of division” in Korean history,⁵ Paik Nak-chung, a seminal theorist of Korea’s national literature, broadly defines *bundan munhak* by categorizing all postwar literature produced in Korea’s “division system”⁶ as “division literature.” By contrast, Kim Yun-shik, another distinguished literary critic, is inclined to confine *bundan munhak* to those literary works written by a certain generation of writers who were born in the 1940s and who, in the 1970s and 1980s, recounted their childhood memories during the war.⁷ Neither definition is satisfactory, however, because the latter is prone to overlooking the

⁴ While the term “memory work” frequently appears, often without a clear definition, in contemporary cultural studies, I would like to use it to underscore its social dimension as theorized by John R. Gillis: “‘memory work’ is, like any other kind of physical or mental labor, embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end.” See “Introduction: Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

⁵ See Kang’s classic *Hanguk hyeondaesa* [A History of Contemporary Korea], Part II. The entire book is composed of eight chapters, divided into two parts: Part I, entitled, “*Singmin jibae wa minjok haebang undong ui chujin*” [Colonial Rule and the National Liberation Movement], covers modern Korean history under colonial rule (1910-1945), and Part II, “*Minjok bundan gwa tongil undong ui jeongae*” [National Division and the Development of the Reunification Movement], deals with the post-liberation period. See *Hanguk hyeondaesa* (Seoul: Changbi, 1984).

⁶ Paik Nak-chung proposes the term “division system” (*bundan cheje*) to consider “the systematic nature of the reality of the divided peninsula” (“South Korea: Unification and the Democratic Challenge,” *New Left Review* 197 (1993): 5). Rather than fixating on Korea’s division as a mere byproduct of the ideological antagonism between the two states, he emphasizes its colonial origin and structural relationship with the world-economy (“Coloniality in Korea and a South Korean Project for Overcoming Modernity,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 73).

⁷ See Paik Nak-chung, “Bundan sidae munhak ui sasang” [The Ideology of the Literature in an Age of Division], in *Minjok munhak gwa segye munhak* [National Literature and World Literature], vol. 1 (Seoul: Changbi, 1978), 301-307, and “Tongil undong gwa munhak” [Reunification Movement and Literature], in *Minjok munhak gwa segye munhak*, vol. 2 (Seoul: Changbi, 1990), 97-130; Kim Yun-shik and Chong Ho-ung, *Hanguk soseolsa* [The History of Korean Novels] (Seoul: Munhakdongne, 1990), Chapter 10. *Bundan, isan soseol ui jeongae* [The

entangled connections between those first-hand experiential narratives and their constant transformations by subsequent generations, while the former tends to obfuscate the differences and discontinuities among postwar literary texts. More problematically, the conceptualization of “division literature” marginalizes *other divisions before and the after the territorial partition* that have been mutually constitutive of social life on the Korean peninsula. While *bundan munhak* theorists have concentrated on how economic, political, and social changes under the division system have affected Korea’s literary production and how literary producers and consumers can and should engage in overcoming the national division, they have less often asked how “division literature” has served to *unify* South Korean subjects across the boundaries of difference through the very process of constituting national identity as determined by the division.

The multifaceted and long-lasting effects of the Korean War on postwar society thus necessitate an innovative, interdisciplinary approach. This requires a broader conceptual spectrum that encompasses intellectual history, literary criticism, cultural studies, and theories of gender and sexuality, since national subjectivity and cultural identities that simultaneously constructed and were constructed by Korean War memory works have been enmeshed in the intricate power relations and social hierarchies around class, gender, and education. Because such multilayered and multidirectional subject formation cannot be easily subsumed under a single, unified methodology, I opt for particular interpretive strategies that each of the texts selected here elicits by itself. I perform this task by situating the texts in their specific sociohistorical contexts: Choi In-hoon’s experimental writings under Park Chung Hee’s developmental dictatorship; Jo Jung-rae’s historical novel serialized during the heyday of the

Development of Division Literature and Diaspora Literature], 469-497. For a more detailed, recent discussion of the category of *bundan munhak*, see Yoo Im-ha’s *Bundan hyeonsil gwa seosajeok sangsangryeok* [A Study on the Division Consciousness in Contemporary Korean Fictions] (Seoul: Taehaksa, 1998).

minjung movement in the 1980s; Park Wan-suh's autobiographical stories, which have been acclaimed by feminist critics since the cultural turn in democratized Korea; and contemporary Korean War blockbusters that appeared after the 1997 financial crisis in East Asia. In comparing these memory works, I focus on the distinctive subject of narration in each one, and I link these various subjects with one another through the trope of the broken family that is repeated in Korean War narratives and images. By visiting the traumatic site of the Korean War through an array of postwar texts that represent the *zeitgeist* at different conjunctures, this study intends to re-illuminate the primal scene of South Korea's national subjectivity.

2. The Gender of Korean War Memory and the Fantasy of Family Romance

As I track how continuous attempts to recall the nation's repressed past in the familiar setting of the family have de- or re-territorialized the dominant paradigm of Korean historiography, I attend to the power structure of the "domestic(ized)" realm through the lens of gender. Taking into consideration the historical development of Korea's family ideology, I note the irony or ambivalence of the "failed" family romance that has haunted South Korean cultural productions. On the one hand, the familial frame of such countermemories of war has provided an alternative space in which different trajectories for Korea's postcolonial history can be conceived. On the other hand, the popular imagination of "the family apart" that underlies postwar recollections of wartime has reproduced the fantasy of an originary community that had been primarily unitary and homogeneous before the break. While I unpack the myth of the undivided and indivisible family that is maintained in cultures of dissent, I further tackle the

patrilineal genealogy of an oppositional nationalism that has largely embraced the masculinist gender politics of the oppressive regimes that it strove to dismantle.

Gender, therefore, is applied here as more than a nexus for a diverse collection of postwar texts in various forms. Accepting Joan W. Scott's proposition for "gender as a useful category of historical analysis," I consider gender both "a constitutive element of social relationships" and "a primary way of signifying relationships of power."⁸ By bringing together and juxtaposing hitherto separated periods and genres through the prism of gender, this research aims to defamiliarize what has been taken for granted in existing Korean War studies: the nationalist patriarchal symbolic order. In investigating its multiple operations that traverse statist summonings and resistive movements, I demonstrate how gender affects not only the content of historical memory, i.e., what is included and what gets left out, but also the constitution of the interpreting agent, both individual and collective.⁹ Foregrounding gender as a determinant factor in reinscribing Korean War memories, I ultimately problematize the ways in which South Korea's "division literature" and its cinematic counterpart have conceived of the nation (*minjok*) through the male intellectual's reflexive narration of its "disrupted" history. By detecting certain ruptures in this dominant masculinist ideology, I also seek the possibility of different positions from which to narrativize traumatic experiences inflicted by Korea's division.

This project of remapping Korean War memory works is centered around the trope of the family, as I locate the contentious site of postwar South Korean cultural production at the intersection of the narration of national history and the configuration of gendered subjects.

⁸ "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Feminism and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 167.

⁹ In Rita Felski's words, "gender affects not just the factual content of historical knowledge—what is included and what gets left out—but also the philosophical assumptions underlying our interpretations of the nature and meaning of social processes." See *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1.

Whether to deplore its division or to imagine its reunification, the trauma of national division has frequently been recalled in Korean War narratives and images through association with the loss, separation, and displacement of family members. This does more than indicate that many participants, particularly ordinary people, experienced the war not so much as an ideological conflict but as the destruction of their family or the breakup of local kinship-based communities. It also calls for a critical inquiry about the symbolic power of the family in postwar Korea, including the prehistory of that power. Rooted in a Confucian legacy and solidified under Japanese colonial rule, the value of family was further reinforced first through the fratricidal war and then through compressed modernization under developmentalist regimes that were undergirded by the Cold War structure. On the partitioned Korean peninsula, the family has become the sacred core of individual lives and identities.¹⁰

Historically constructed and psychically affecting, South Korea's familism has exerted a pervasive influence on the formation of postwar subjects *in combination with other ideologies*. As the mandate of family survival was continually invoked by the state's interpellation of the anticommunist, developmentalist subject, the community-tied-by-blood served both as the only haven in the competitive capitalist world and as a buffer that reduced resistance to exploitation by the "free market" system.¹¹ However, the familial schema has not exclusively benefited the oppressive regimes that sought to manage the individual's behavior in everyday life by

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that familism is observed as one of the founding ideologies not only in the South, but also in the North, as Kim Dong-Choon discusses in *Bundan gwa hanguk sahoe* [Division and Korean Society] (Seoul: Yeoksabipyongsa, 1997), 114.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 113. This is because, as Jin-kyung Lee also points out, family was perceived as a "unit" for "social mobility." In this "collective" project of family's modernization, the gender division of labor is distinctive: "daughters' labor more often than not served the goal of financing the higher education of sons, whose success, in turn, would push the entire family into a higher economic stratum. The idea of a filial daughter's sexual sacrifice for the sake of her male siblings or her parents was a familiar and sacralized Confucian custom." See *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 26.

engineering the private sector as a disciplinary institution. Familial imagination has also been deployed in cultures of dissent to confront historical amnesia and selective remembrance in the public domain. Transposed to a domestic setting, the silenced memory of the war can be shared and its unacknowledged loss mourned. These counter-memories reserved in and transmitted through family relations have provided a communal ground on which the modern Korean subject, not only as a byproduct of the government's technology, but also as an agent of its liberal ideologies, can contemplate and challenge the official discourse prescribed by the state.

The family plot shaped in the oppositional culture is nonetheless deeply embedded in and intimately complicit with the established gender structure. In an attempt to recover the nation's historical continuity, which had been interrupted by the war and distorted by the Cold War division, the "alternative" path to the national past has reproduced a patrilineal genealogy of resistance by turning to the tradition of patriarchy, aligned with the authoritative account of the state. In the new family picture framed in the counter-hegemonic space, while the symbolic father, either despotic or incapacitated, is omitted, the unfulfilled ideal of the imaginary father is transmitted to his son thanks precisely to the devoted mother, who is hardly ever figured. Whereas noble fraternity is often highlighted to overcome the reality of division, the sufferings of the war are mostly materialized through women's bodies: for example, a mother's "illness," a wife's "betrayal," or a sister's "violation." This asymmetrical gender division of symbolic labor in Korean War representations will be the focal point of my critique of the masculinist-nationalist family romance in postwar Korean culture.

The Failed or Failing Family Romance

To critically engage with the familial imagination in Korean War literature and film, I utilize a psychoanalytic framework. Admittedly, the family narrative in the Korean cultural tradition exhibits an affinity with the family romance often found in modern European novels. In both cases, the son wishes to replace his father with a superior figure, or to become such an ideal father himself, as originally introduced by Freud.¹² In particular, I find Lacanian architecture useful to scrutinize how the subject encounters both the Imaginary (the realm of fantasies) and the Symbolic (“the name of the father”), and how the subjectification process accompanies a sexual identity formation. Here, in my examination of gendered subjectivities produced through the cultural practice of signifying a divided nation, the family romance is postulated as “a hybrid structure constituted through both memory and fantasy which coexist and feed one another to produce a narrative of subjectivity.”¹³ That is to say, I regard the familial space of Korean War texts as a site where war traumas are reenacted, mediated, and thereby processed at once realistically and fantastically. In exploring the verbal and visual reenactments of the confrontation between the two Koreas from the early 1960s to the present, I situate the figuration of the family at the critical juncture in a double sense: both between individual psyche and the

¹² See Marthe Robert, *Origins of the Novel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), and Christine Van Boheemen, *The Novel as Family Romance: Language, Gender and Authority from Fielding to Joyce* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). My approach to familial imagery in connection with social movements is inspired by Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), in which she reformulates the Freudian term “family romance” as a model of political culture that reflects the collective unconscious during the French Revolution. In fact, the ideas contained in the books listed here have informed many Korean critics: for example, see Kwon Myoung-a’s *Gajok iyagi neun eotteoke mandeuleojinenga* [How the Family Story Is Made] (Seoul: Chaeksasang, 2000).

¹³ Amal Treacher, “Children: Memories, Fantasies and Narratives: From Dilemma to Complexity,” in *Memory and Methodology*, ed. Susannah Radstone (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 144.

political unconscious, and between the traumatic memory of the past and a tragic vision of the future.

Although I bring psychoanalytic insights into Korean War studies, I do not assume that Korea's family structure and its patriarchal configurations are identical to those family structures in the West through which Freud, Lacan, and others have formulated their hypotheses. Since the material and discursive conditions under which family structures have been constructed are certainly heterogeneous, it would run the risk of fashioning another regime of truth simply to endorse the "universal" cipher in a local—Korean—context without considering that location's own historical concreteness. Rather than insert the Korean subject into the European model, I employ Western-originating theory as "a formal mechanism"¹⁴ that facilitates through the use of a common language the articulation of historically specific representations. By illustrating the family *tragedy* portrayed in Korean War fiction and film as a "failed" family romance, I claim that the norm of the bourgeois nuclear family derived from nineteenth-century Europe is a historical fantasy, not a transcendental code.

The "failed" family romance in Korean cultural history traces its roots back before the Korean War. To depict colonial reality, many Korean authors created characters, including absent(ed) parents, orphaned children, and separated siblings, whose families were disbanded and dislocated.¹⁵ Since imperial forces had already, in the name of modernization, emasculated the original father, the youth in the colony were not themselves given a chance to deny their feudalistic father or to constitute the imaginary father for the modern family-nation, as the hero

¹⁴ This follows Joan W. Scott's application of the psychoanalytic concept "fantasy" in her historical investigation of feminist history. See "Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (2001): 288.

¹⁵ Kim Yun-shik, for instance, emphasizes the "orphan consciousness" (*goa uisik*) of Yi Kwangsu, one of the pioneers in modern Korean literature, defining his epoch as a "time filled with the orphan consciousness." See *Yi Kwangsu wa geu ui sidae* [Yi Kwangsu and His Age], vol. 1 (Seoul: Sol, 1999), 21.

of the European novel in the revolutionary era did. Therefore, as many Korean critics have noted, the family romance could not but be “suspended,” “deferred,” or “transformed” in colonial Korea. On the one hand, the aura of the expelled, original father needed to be defended, while his incapability was denounced; on the other hand, the power of the hegemonic, foreign father could not be disregarded, but nonetheless needed to be disavowed.¹⁶ As neither father could be simply denied or entirely emulated, the colonized subject found himself split between the mimetic performance of the colonial/modern and the idealized vision of the indigenous/revolutionary, unable to recover the old family or to build a new one himself.

The “incomplete” or “delayed” family romance in modern Korean literature has been further complicated by the liberation that came “like a thief,” and then by the war that formalized the nation’s partition. The possibility of autonomous national building—or, the chance “to kill the father and eat him,” in the Freudian sense—was again frustrated; but the promise of national prosperity, including eventual reunification, was incessantly brought up by newly-emerged father figures in the divided nation-states: the North’s “dear father” Kim Il Sung and the South’s *gukbu* (the nation’s father) Park Chung Hee, who followed Rhee Syngman. While the paternal authorities exploited the familial imagination to mobilize their sons and daughters for the construction and maintenance of the familist state, the despotic father figures also, perhaps unwittingly, fostered rebellious children who imagined in the South Korean cultural field another family romance against the autocratic family-nation model.

Unlike Freud’s neurotics, whose fantasy is in effect a nostalgic gesture toward a happy childhood in which the father is considered a superhero, South Korea’s postwar “orphans” do not own such memories of being cherished. Many of their fathers were able to survive Japanese

¹⁶ Kim Myeong-inn, “Hanguk geunhyeondae soseol gwa gajok romangseu” [An Essay on the Family Romance in Korean Modern Novels], *Minjok munhaksa yeongu* 32 (December 2006): 332-52.

colonial rule and the consecutive comprador regimes only by collaborating with or succumbing to either foreign or native totalitarian powers; those who led, or participated in, revolutionary movements during or after the colonial period perished in battles, or went to the other side of the peninsula, so their records are not available. Thus, the family plot devised by the postwar generation in South Korea is distinct from the Freudian pattern in which the child sustains his original affection for his humble parents by exalting them in a fantasy.¹⁷ With the only reality being that of the model of a tyrant father, there are but two ways for a boy to become a man in his partitioned fatherland: one is to retrieve the disappeared, proud father by drawing a different genealogy; and the other is to form a new, independent family, breaking from the “unhappy” past. As I will discuss in Chapters One and Two, respectively, the latter route is taken by Choi In-hoon through his literary journey beginning with *The Square* (*Gwangjang*, 1960), in which the male protagonist bitterly criticizes both the South’s corrupt capitalism and the North’s hypocritical communism. The former case is exemplified by Jo Jung-rae’s historical novel *Taebaek Mountain Range* (*Taebaeksanmaek*, 1983~89), which resurrected the lost tradition of the people’s resistance beginning with the 1894 Donghak Peasant War.

While Choi In-hoon and Jo Jung-rae, through their contrasting yet canonical novels about Korea’s division, show historical variations of the primal fantasy hypothesized by Freud, their literary struggle against geopolitical contradictions on the Korean peninsula hardly reaches a satisfactory resolution, i.e., successful Oedipalization. Although both writers contest the legitimacy of the existing “bad” fathers who govern the reality of the split nation, neither of them presents what it is like to live on as a “good” father in a divided Korea. In Choi’s works, written

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, “Family Romances” (1909), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 9 (1906-1908), *Jensen’s ‘Gradiva’ and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), 235-242.

under Park Chung Hee's military dictatorship, most heroes do not create a "normal" family, let alone an alternative community, as they would rather flee into an unknown world, or retain their refugee status on the peninsula. The revolutionary fathers Jo rehabilitates in the wake of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising eventually meet a tragic end, leaving behind their sons to carry on the unending revolution. Nevertheless, the two novelists, despite their irreducible gaps in terms of generation, hometown, and political tendency, do not forsake the patriarchal family model. Even if their symbolic resolution can be achieved only in the form of a failed family romance, their male protagonists, mostly elites, are rarely described as losers, but rather as privileged subjects who are entitled to "revise" the wrong history of the nation. The ironic result of these enlightenment narratives is that they consolidate the disparity between the norm of the modern family—and, by extension, that of the modern nation-state—set by Western civilization and its variants on the periphery. By embracing such a normative modernization as a desirable and necessary step for individual and collective progress, Choi's and Jo's counternarratives uncannily mirror the state's developmentalist logic, which summons its subjects to climb up the very hierarchy of the modern world.

This is not to say that all Korean War tragedies have been monopolized by male intellectual authors. Though marginalized in the field of cultural production, as well as in political movements, women writers have sought to disrupt the androcentric discourse of national history. Among them, I pay close attention in Chapter Three to Park Wan-suh, not merely because she is South Korea's best-known female writer, but mainly because she looks awry at the family as the unchanging source of security and comfort *from within* the very domain assigned by the patriarchal partition. While her stories almost invariably revolve around the domestic sphere, her female characters are hardly alienated from public events. More profoundly,

in Park's Korean War novels, the family no longer serves as a secure refuge in which bare lives can find emotional solace; or as an imaginative power that can regenerate social cohesion, as in Choi In-hoon's or Jo Jung-rae's works; rather, Park's wartime memories shed new light on the family as an extended battlefield, penetrated by unconditional death threats. This familial front is distinguished from the male subject's solitary struggle in the failed family romance, in that it is operated by two female victim-survivors *in conflict*. While the tension between the mother and the daughter is triggered by the death of the family's only man, Park's elder brother, this does not lead Park to romanticize the pre-war family as a lost paradise. Faced with the fall of her brother, who used to embody the humanist ideas of modern enlightenment, she turns her critical eye to the fantasy of the modern family, and, by extension, the ideal of the modern-masculinist subject. In articulating the "private" experiences of women who *were not given a chance* to take flight or to meet a heroic death on the front line, Park exposes the underside of the fratricidal war: i.e., how ordinary Koreans have survived the war and have come to terms with its aftermath, coping with their shattered families. Hence, I interpret Park's mother-daughter narrative not as a deviation from the classic family romance, but rather as a historical transfiguration that undoes the Eurocentric, male-centered family model.

Nevertheless, the continuum of the broken family (aborted or divided), a failed subjectivity (individual or collective), and a flight attempt (exile or suicide) is ever prevalent in contemporary Korean War films. As I observe in Chapter Four, the "postmemory"¹⁸ of Korea's division projected on screen, especially after the democratic transition in the late 1980s, is culturally distinctive from the previous generation's remembrance of the inter/national conflict

¹⁸ The mnemonic landscape shaped by this new—digital—generation may be categorized as what Marianne Hirsch has termed "postmemory," as it is informed by the memories of the previous generation who actually lived through the war. See *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

between 1950 and 1953. While the traumatic event half a century ago is revisited from new perspectives, the regional issue particular to South Korea is reconfigured according to transnational aesthetic norms, i.e., the Hollywood blockbuster formula. Still, those recent films inherit many features from the preceding “division literature”; they retain the familial imagination in order to recall the violent past as the origin of the present contradiction, in reviewing the uncanny persistence of the division that South Koreans encounter in their daily life as an incomprehensible obstacle that cannot be surpassed by individual efforts. For instance, the couple torn apart in Kang Je-gyu’s *Shiri* (1999) is reminiscent of the abortive family in Choi In-hoon’s *The Square*. In both texts, the male protagonist, trapped in the state of (continuing) war between the two Koreas, fails to defend his lover—not to mention their unborn baby—from North Korea; and these failures betray the ongoing difficulty of such border-crossing relationships. The cinematic vision of North-South relations in the “post-ideological era” further twists the utopian aspirations of the earlier period, including a brotherly bond in place of paternal authority, as suggested in Jo Jung-rae’s historical novel. Rather than offering a new collective subjectivity underpinned by a shared belief, postmodern Korean War films tend to capture affective, contingent connections among fragmented and powerless *men* who are forced to confront one another against their own will. The private, precarious solidarity with the “enemy” that grows out of pathos instantly collapses, however, in front of the rigid public antagonism between the South and the North, as epitomized in Park Chan-wook’s *Joint Security Area* (2000). Even in the fantasy-comedy *Welcome to Dongmakgol* (Park Kwang-hyun, 2005), “the allied forces” comprised of soldiers from opposing sides eventually die through their united action. Indeed, the reunion of separated brothers is only made possible either by flight or after death, as in Kang Je-gyu’s *Taegeukgi: The Brotherhood of War* (2004).

These repeated failures to constitute family, (male) subjectivity, and (new) community can be related to the symptoms of identity crisis felt by contemporary South Koreans. Despite its economic “miracle” and successful democratization, South Korea’s condensed modernization process under the division system has brought about more disruptive effects. As Park Wan-suh’s literature testifies, far from allowing its subjects to work through painful war memories, the nation’s all-out drive for materialistic prosperity has intensified divisions within society. This sense of dislocation or dissociation was exacerbated as the myth of progress and development, which previously constrained social anxieties, began to crumble through the national breakdown and total reconstruction under neoliberal capitalism that followed the financial crisis in 1997. The disintegration of family resurfaced as one of the most pressing social problems, as earlier models of identity formation were called into question in the rapidly globalizing world. The Korean War blockbuster’s rise and its unflinching popularity at the turn of the millennium need to be understood within this context. Its hybrid nature—which has been generated through the appropriation of Hollywood’s aesthetic devices, on the one hand, and the reiteration of all-too-familiar traumatic images, on the other—displays the multilayered psychic landscape of Korean subjects as they stand at the crossroads.

3. Traumatic Memory and Na(rra)tional Subjectivity:

To Historicize Korean War Representations

Tracing the varied deployments of the family trope in Korean War texts from the 1960s, this dissertation delves into different types of subjectivities that emerged with each form of memory work. If subjectivity is constituted through dialogic interactions with others, those

subjectivities shaped by Korean War narratives and images are involved with more than each author's individual will to pursue the truth; these authors' attempts to recall and transmit their own memories have created a community of shared experiences—from violent events that caused collective wounds in the past to the ongoing difficulty of engaging in a reality founded upon those historical wrongs. For this reason, in my readings of a collection of literary and cinematic texts that have become central to the public discourse on Korea's division and reunification, I associate various methods of artistic expression used to recollect the pieces of the untold truth with specific groups that demanded social changes in postwar South Korea.

Choi In-hoon's ideational writings, Jo Jung-rae's historical novel, Park Wan-suh's autobiographical stories, and contemporary Korean War blockbusters not only have affinities in terms of theme (the trauma of the Korean War) and metaphor (the failure of the family romance). These heterogeneous forms of remembrance also manifest different sociocultural conditions in which a certain perspective on national history became an ideal *zeitgeist*, forging a new identity and solidarity. Whereas Choi's modernist experimentation and Jo's epic-scale historical novel are more closely related to elite carrier groups that strove to affect the center of political power from the periphery, Park's testimonial narratives and recent Korean War films depict the pain and anguish of ordinary people who have (not) survived the decades of turmoil and uncertainty during and after the war. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that each of them presents a distinctive figuration of the subject that reflects the present past, fashioning a hegemonic mode for remembering the violent history that resonates with the popular consciousness of the times. Reading Korean War memory works in the light of subject formation, I try to answer the key questions that Michel Foucault once put as follows: "under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear"; "what position does it occupy"; "what function does

it exhibit”?¹⁹ That is to say, why did Korean writers and directors need to develop new ways of narrativizing the history of division; how did those textual acts become fundamental parts of social, political, and cultural processes of the “national trauma”; and, as a result, what kind of subjects came into being?

Each chapter of this dissertation dwells on a specific vision of subjectivity embodied in the chosen texts within a larger and fuzzier context that is itself overdetermined by conflicting ideologies, socioeconomic changes, and shifting patterns of imagination during the period. If this approach tends to “periodize” or “classify” cultural artifacts, it does so not to fixate on different periods or genres, but rather to find a path for contemplating their differences, which are both textual and contextual. As indicated above, seemingly disparate forms of representation and apparently incompatible temporalities actually overlap with one another in a broader constellation, sharing certain motifs and elements of subjectivity, in addition to historical contradictions and cultural traditions inherited from their predecessors. Instead of making a new list of cultural canons, by charting multidirectional networks among diverse discourses, the following chapters aim to historicize a postwar Korean national identity that has been imagined as a unified entity.

Chapter One, “The Third Way in a Divided Korea?: Choi In-hoon and the ‘4.19 Generation,’” probes the intellectual subjectivity crystallized in works by Choi In-hoon that span the historical period the writer himself has called “the time out of joint”: *Gwangjang (The Square, 1960)*, *Hoesaegin (A Grey Man, 1963~64)*, and *Taepung (The Tempest, 1973)*. Hailed as the cultural icon of the April Revolution in 1960, Choi’s early works have been discussed by

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 137-38.

many scholars as “novels of ideas” (*gwannyeom soseol*). I reinterpret these works as the unfulfilled *Bildungsroman* of 4.19 intellectuals caught up in the bipolarized world of the Cold War era, and further scrutinize his oceanic vision as a means of traversing the partitioned land of Korea. To establish the ontological foundation of the writing self and the epistemic power of the critical intellectual both within and outside the aesthetic realm, Choi utilizes a romantic allegory as a diachronic channel through which the traumatic memory of the Korean War is conveyed, on the one hand, and as a synchronic path through which solitary individuals can make social interactions, on the other. I find this allegorization problematic, however, because of its gendered imagination in which female characters, while identified with incomprehensible excess that challenges the male protagonists’ intelligence, are always “embraced” as the very medium through which the intellectual subject can build an ideal community beyond the division of the private and the public, or of the South and the North. By interrogating the metaphor of woman, who stands in the way of the modern male subject’s self-development and socialization, I disclose the obscene origin of the liberal intellectual in 1960s’ South Korea.

Chapter Two, “*Han* Revived: Jo Jung-rae’s *Taebaek Mountain Range* and *Minjung* Historiography,” examines Jo Jung-rae’s ten-volume historical novel *Taebaeksanmaek* (1983~89; *TMR*) in relation to the *minjung* historiography that prevailed in the discourse of dissent in the 1980s. Jo’s serialized fiction, which gained huge popularity during the turbulent period of the democracy movement, stands in contrast to Choi In-hoon’s self-reflexive, contemplative novels. If Choi, drawing upon the power of *individual memory*, strives for aesthetic autonomy with which he can constitute the modern self against the deformed modernity of the external world, Jo seems more concerned with the production of historical knowledge that enlightens and motivates alienated individuals to become collective agents of political action. As

Jo himself stresses, his age could no longer afford literary practice divorced from social reality, especially in the wake of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising. While the defeat in Gwangju invoked intellectuals' self-reflection on the petty-bourgeois nature of the earlier political movement, the spontaneous solidarity of the Gwangju Commune demonstrated the power of the grassroots and heralded a new historical subject in the 1980s: *minjung* (the people). Accordingly, the nation's modern history was rewritten from a *minjung*-oriented perspective; in Jo's literary representations, the dispossessed no longer form an abstract historical background or are depicted in peripheral episodes, but emerge as the prime agent of social revolution. Through the unfolding of the social antagonism between tenant farmers and the landed class that arose out of the colonial system of production and paved the way to Korea's division, Jo's voluminous work vividly describes how the impoverished peasantry came to participate in rebellions against the exploiting oppressors. Jo's reconstruction of the legitimate protagonist of national history, however, involves more complex problems and various tensions because it not only re-memembers the powerless who are erased in the official site of memory, but also interpellates them as the unitary and voluntary subject of the nation, homogenizing different identities and conflicting interests. As a result, the minority discourse begets other minority groups within itself: most notably, the wives and children of the peasants, who are left behind after their patriarchs set off on a revolutionary journey, and remain at home only to suffer more through their "involvement" with the partisan struggle in *TMR*. Thus, my reading of *TMR* specifically tackles the issues of language and gender, or more appropriately, the gendered language narrating Jo's historical consciousness.

In Chapter Three, "Afterlives of the Traumatized: Park Wan-suh's Literary Testimony of the Korean War," I track repetition and difference in Park Wan-suh's autobiographical works,

questioning why and how her stories—seemingly almost the same but actually ever evolving—continue to touch the hearts of so many Koreans. Without doubt, her wartime memories expand the horizon of our understanding of that cataclysmic event, particularly by bringing women’s voices into the androcentric, nationalist narration of the Korean War. In contrast to Choi In-hoon’s philosophical protagonists and Jo Jung-rae’s revolutionary heroes, Park’s female narrators are indifferent to a master-signifier of the nation; yet, her ordinary but realistic characters are neither stereotyped as helpless victims as in *TMR*, nor reduced to the incomprehensible Other as in *The Square*. Instead of attempting to observe or to resolve the national division, Park chooses to portray the (after)lives of those who have suffered the traumatizing event, by centering upon human relationships that are stripped bare in precarious daily survival during and after the war. Her testimonial narratives, I argue, should not be limited to *women’s experiences that supplement men’s history*. While testifying to both the inevitability and the impossibility of witnessing, her tenacious wrestling with her traumatic memory gives rise to more fundamental questions about how to represent the unrepresentable, from whose perspective, and for what purpose. As Park herself states many times, her writing was initially motivated by her desire to speak out about what she had to bear witness to during “the time of the worm,” because she could no longer connive to the collective amnesia generated by mammonish developmentalism in postwar South Korean society. Her “belated” return to the haunting past, however, does not reach a closure in the present; in her first novel, *Namok* (*The Naked Tree*, 1970), she could recollect the pieces of her fractured memory only in a highly emotional and fragmented manner, as she confronted that from the beginning there is no such thing as an undivided subject (individual, familial, or national). Nonetheless, she persists in reinscribing the wounds inflicted by Korea’s division throughout her literary career, refusing any

easy resolution or prompt reparation. Through pertinacious inscription, which opens up a dialogic and transferential relationship between the self and the other, her individual mourning for the lost self eventually leads to attentive listening to the unvoiced cry of another victim-survivor who is beside her, i.e., her mother. Focusing on the mother-daughter conflict/connection in Park's re-visioning of Korean War experiences, the chapter first detects the different ways in which the two traumatized subjects cope with their repressed memory, through what Dominick LaCapra might call acting-out and working-through. Second, it unravels how such differences, the very cause of their confrontation, are gradually accommodated, through the daughter-narrator's transformation first from a vengeful victim-witness to an empathic mediator who perceives the silent struggle of the (m)other, and then to a responsible writer who transcribes the stories of those who are incapable of constructing a narrative.

Chapter Four, "A Screen Memory for a Globalizing Korea: Korean War Blockbusters 'After' the Cold War," deals with cinematic reflections on the violent history of Korea's partition within the context of globalization. Following the democratic transition in the late 1980s, popular culture emerged as a hot spot where previously marginalized memories were (re)discovered, and Korean War film became a major genre in this new mnemonic landscape of post-authoritarian South Korea. Its association with cultural memory is Janus-faced. On the one hand, the art of digitally reproduced memory offers a new collective route through which the contemporary audience can empathically relate to the people of the past by revisiting obliterated scenes within institutionalized memory. On the other hand, however, it may also obstruct our critical engagement with history by blurring historical catastrophes with spectacular images, thus fostering another form of amnesia. In this light, I place under careful scrutiny the unprecedented popularity of Korean War blockbusters that present the unique Korean content in a generic—

Hollywood—style. What is the social background of their emergence? How is this hybrid cultural product similar to and/or distinguished from prior memory works, as well as the Hollywood blockbuster format? To be more specific, how is the legacy of division literature, including its familial imagination and gender hierarchy, adapted and transfigured in the different media that flourish in new cultural conditions? Also, to what extent are the classic formulas of the Western genre, such as the male protagonist’s Oedipal trajectory and the final triumph of humanism, altered and refracted within the Korean context? In what ways does the national theme in a “universal” frame engage the empathy or apathy of globalizing audiences both within and outside the Korean peninsula? At a glance, this commercialized form of Korean War memories seems to simply echo the worldwide trend of nostalgia in the culture industry, while utilizing Korea’s “consumer nationalism”²⁰ in the era of transnational capitalism. The real picture remains more complicated, however. The historical pathos and aesthetic sensibility of those Korean blockbuster filmmakers, who belong to the “386 generation,”²¹ were cultivated under the unwavering US hegemony in South Korea; its military occupation and its dubious relationship with the dictatorial regimes were crucial factors in shaping the political consciousness of the generation. At the same time, American popular culture has largely influenced the South Korean mediascape, including its production system and consumption patterns, as the appearance of Korean-style blockbusters itself attests.²² Therefore, my investigation of contemporary Korean War cinema emphasizes the trans-Pacific dynamic that

²⁰ Laura C. Nelson, *Measured Excess: Status, Gender, and Consumer Nationalism in South Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

²¹ Coined in the 1990s, it refers to those who were in their thirties at the time, in college during the 1980s, and born in the 1960s. The use of the term is inclined to emphasize their shared experience of the political turmoil and cultural practices in the 1980s, under the hegemony of *minjung* discourse.

²² See Jinhee Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), and Christina Klein, “The AFKN Nexus: US Military Broadcasting and New Korean Cinema,” *Transnational Cinema* 3, no. 1 (May 2012): 19-39.

has been restructuring the national theatre of Korea's division, linking such a cultural phenomenon to the rising demand for new subjectivity in the age of globalization.

By piecing together dispersed memories of the Korean War in these various aesthetic practices, this dissertation seeks to rethink South Korean cultural identity in relation to its postcolonial history of "national division" and the familial structure of its remembrance. In manifesting what remains inarticulate in empirical studies of collective trauma, my literary approach to this historical topic further concerns itself with wider sets of theoretical questions that are not restricted to a national frame. As a still volatile complex of colonial divides and Cold War partitions, I believe that the stories of Korea's division can and should be read together with other cases of genocide and migration, including Holocaust testimonies and India's partition narratives. Such critical comparisons across the boundaries of regional blocs and the disciplinary protocols within the current paradigms of (post)colonial studies and Cold War literature will broaden the existing frame of historical references that shape our perceptions of and practices in reality, where we continue to witness a series of declarations, rather than terminations, of war.

I. The Third Way in a Divided Korea?: Choi In-hoon and the “4.19 Generation”

Choi In-hoon's *Gwangjang* (*The Square*, 1960) has been recognized as the first South Korean novel to squarely address the division system on the Korean peninsula, a taboo topic under Rhee Syngman's anticommunist, authoritarian regime (1948~1960). Whereas postwar novels in the 1950s, due to the immediacy of the war experience and the political constraints under Rhee's dictatorial rule, tended to highlight the victimization of innocent people by Kim Il Sung's sudden invasion, *The Square* showed an innovative way of representing the Korean War by introducing the perspective of the modern individual. Well-received as a milestone in division literature, *The Square* has had great resonance in South Korean society, and this is not simply because Choi, through his famous allegory of open squares and secret rooms, adeptly criticized both the socialist North and the capitalist South. Choi's critique of Cold War ideologies and his search for a third way beyond them have had a profound effect on the conceptualization of modernity in postwar Korea, precisely because his literary practices have been performed in the name of an individual (*gaein*), as opposed to a citizenry mobilized by the state. To use Choi's own metaphor, his engagement with the public square coincided with the discovery of an individual realm, at a time when neither that realm nor the public square was able to fully develop in the newly independent, but then divided country.

Choi In-hoon's progressive writing became possible, as the author himself acknowledged in his preface to *The Square*, within the political atmosphere after the 1960 April Revolution. By overthrowing Rhee Syngman, South Koreans finally achieved a “civilian revolution” (*simin*

hyeogmyeong) for the first time in their history.²³ However, the category “*simin*” in 1960 should be considered with caution because the term was closely allied to the emergence, during and after the uprising, of an urban male elite as the new political subject. Student leaders took center stage at the front of the anti-government protests, as denoted by the protests’ other name: the April *Student* Revolution. College students in South Korea, who had the most exposure to the theories of liberal democracy in the West, could not help but become enraged at the *Realpolitik* in their homeland. Their dissatisfaction with the corrupt, incapable government was aggravated by their economic distress since most of the highly educated found it difficult to pursue careers that matched their learning. The cultural heritage of Confucianism, furthermore, encouraged them, as modern intellectuals, to take social responsibility for the fraudulent, incompetent politicians.²⁴

Choi In-hoon’s literary works, which imagined a community of free individuals, were not only informed by, but in turn affected, the political terrain of post-1960s South Korea. Although

²³ Chang Chunha, a nationalist liberal intellectual, defined the April Revolution as a “*simin hyeogmyeong*” (civilian revolution), and also as a “*jiseongin ui hyeogmyeong*” (intellectuals’ revolution) in *Sasanggye*. While I follow Kim Hyung-A’s literal translation of “*simin hyeogmyeong*” as “civilian revolution,” I would also like to add Kim’s observation that, “no source suggests that Korean intellectuals at that time used Marxist terms such as ‘bourgeois revolution.’” See Kim Hyung-A, *Korea’s Development under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-1979* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 235.

²⁴ See Sunhyuk Kim, *The Politics of Democratization in Korea: The Role of Civil Society* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 43-44. It should not be forgotten, however, that student groups emerging in the 4.19 Movement were composed of multiple layers. Although university students in Seoul played a key role in the demonstration on April 19th, a series of anti-government protests were led by local high school students, as epitomized by the case of Kim Juyeol. By placing more emphasis on Kim’s case, Pak Tae-soon and Kim Dong-Choon criticize the existing interpretations of the April Revolution. According to them, the intellectual-centered perspective lacked a structural analysis of the April Revolution and was thus susceptible to the modernization theory of the military junta established by the 5.16 coup d’état. The junta claimed to carry on the national project left unfinished in the April Revolution. Pak and Kim are also critical of the 1960s’ nationalist and Third-Worldist interpretations of the 4.19 Movement for their lack of understanding of South Korea’s historical conditions, i.e., the division system, from the perspective of the 1980s’ *minjung* discourse. More recent approaches to the April Revolution therefore have striven to comprehend the student leadership of the 1960s in relation to the social structural contradictions of the time, instead of simply identifying them as the “representative” of the people, while acknowledging that the student-led social movement remains an unaccomplished revolution because its two goals—democratization and unification—have not been achieved. See *1960 nyeondae ui sahoe undong* [The Social Movements in the 1960s] (Seoul: Kkachi, 1991), 97-109.

the *simin*'s victory over power was eventually thwarted by Park Chung Hee's military coup d'état on May 16, 1961, South Korean authors, along with other dissident intellectuals, have hardly forsaken the vision of the April Revolution, and formed a counterforce to Park's developmental dictatorship (1961~1979). While creating an alternative space for the modern individual, Choi's texts further engaged in historical inquiry into the origins of South Korea's state-led modernization that, for the sake of national security and survival, "legally" deprived individuals of their liberty. Choi's literary journey since *The Square*, then, should be examined in relation to his unceasing efforts to maintain a sense of ego in the face of the denial of individuality during the intense process of nation-building. To probe the characteristics of this kind of self-conscious subjectivity, which Choi has claimed throughout his literature as being "an individual against the world," this chapter pays particular attention to his mnemonic strategies. In so doing, I propose reading Choi's nonconventional narratives, often called "novels of ideas" (*gwannyeom soseol*), as memory works that reflect upon the unfulfilled promises of modernity in postcolonial Korea.

Born in Hoeryeong City, North Hamgyeong Province, Choi In-hoon (1936~) spent his childhood and adolescence in the North until his family sought refuge in the South aboard a US Landing Ship Tank (LST), seven months after the Korean War broke out on June 25th, 1950. His memory of the war is thus divided into two parts. The first consists of his traumatic experiences under the North's communist regime, established in 1948, and the second is grounded on what he underwent as a refugee in the South afterwards. In 1952, he entered the School of Law at Seoul National University, but without completing his studies, he joined the army in 1957 to serve as an English interpreter and intelligence officer for the following seven years. While his experiences as a college student and as military officer in the South are by and large reflected in

his writings, the two most traumatic events that persistently return, with variations, to Choi's recollection of the past took place in the North: one was his forced self-criticism in a school class, where he was branded as a bourgeois, and the other was his sexual awakening in an air-raid shelter, in the midst of a bombing. Ironically enough, these two traumas inflicted in the initial stage of the war contribute to sustaining Choi's refugee sensibility, based on which he was able to criticize both Koreas. Choi's *individual* trauma of the Korean War is also linked with the oceanic imagination that he suggests can be used to transcend the division of the Korean peninsula. Just as the primal scene set in the bomb shelter simultaneously invoked the fear of death and the joy of life, the nauseating experience on the LST also provided the uprooted writer with critical distance, from which he could maintain the fantasy of a new world.

For Choi In-hoon, narrating his memory of the Korean War is not simply remembering the past he saw, experienced, and learned; through his recollections, he pursues mastering the situations that he had never been able to fully understand, although his own body had lived through them. This confrontation with the traumatic past is tied up with his ongoing struggle to make sense of the unintelligible world, where the painful history of division has been petrified as the absent cause of layered social problems. In this light, Choi's desire to build an autonomous realm of literature that bears the trace of the unending war can be read as a form of political practice; not only to access repressed memories, but also to constitute selfhood independent of the state's summoning. To unpack this aestheticized mechanism, my analysis of his memory works attends to the historical conditions in which Choi germinated his intellectual desire to account for the division of the peninsula, and in which his accounts came to construct a competing discourse of the Korean War, challenging the state's hegemonic claim over the national division. By inquiring into the canonization of Choi's literature within the context of the

failed April Revolution, this chapter ultimately delineates the literary formation of a new subject that resisted the metanarrative of the ruling power: an intellectual subjectivity that takes autonomy and reflexivity as its most fundamental faculties. As I intend to explore both the achievements and the limitations of the alternative politics in the 1960s, including its repercussions beyond the era, my discussion of Choi's literature stretches its scope to his later texts. I begin with his most recent work, *Hwadu (Topics, 1994)*,²⁵ because this final piece of his career epitomizes his idea of an individual as the transcendental subject of memory practices.

1. *Topics*: Writing Self, Living Memory

Recollection as the Origin of Power

Choi In-hoon's Korean War memory works call for careful attention to the way in which they place the narrating subject at the center of remembering. In Choi's literature, "individual" and "memory" are indivisible; working with memory offers the ontological foundation of the writing self, as well as an epistemological power through which the modern individual, as the reflective subject, can be constructed.²⁶ While the subject himself cannot find his place without identifying his memories, it is also true for Choi that the image of the past itself means nothing

²⁵ I use the Korean text *Hwadu* (Seoul: Moonji, 2008).

²⁶ My idea here is inspired by Woo Chan-je's "Hyeonsil ui yuhyeongin·insik ui segyein, geu gayeok baneung" [The Reversible Reaction between an Exile in Reality and a Citizen of the World], in *Sangcheo wa sangjing* [Wounds and Symbols] (Seoul: Minumsa, 1994): 249-68; and Yoo Heon-Sik's "Gieok gwa haengwi ui byeonjeungbeop" [The Dialectic of Memory and Action], *Cheolhak gwa hyeonsil* (Spring 1999): 207-32, among other preceding studies. Woo finds the "principal context [脈絡]" of "entangling *hwadu* (topics)" in "the phenomenology of memory," which is both the basis of [Choi In-hoon's] ontology and the narrative structure of *Hwadu*. Yoo focuses on Choi's historical consciousness, which is embedded in his memory writing, in terms of a dialectic of the interior and the exterior. Proceeding from their reviews, I will argue that memory, while establishing the ontological foundation of the writing self, provides the epistemological power of the modern subject as it is constituted *throughout* Choi's literary works.

until it is perceived and interpreted by the subject. Or, as Choi puts it, “primal memory” needs to go through a follow-up action of recollection (*Hwadu* 1:100), and only through this retrospective procedure can “I” become a master of my memory: “I will write down when I can be the master of myself. No, I should write in order to be a master. Only by finding the right context [脈絡] in the jungle of memory, and having it make the proper connection with [other] memories, can I become the master of myself. The context, it is ‘I.’ It is I who becomes a master” (*Hwadu* 2:586).

It is notable that this process of recollection aims to embody the Hegelian notion of “world-historical individuals,” whose purposes coincide with the will of the world spirit. For example, Choi In-hoon states that through a “rational approach” to the past (*Hwadu* 2:573), his reflective performance intends to (re)construct the world’s “organic unity,” and ultimately to affect and transform the fractured history of the divided nation.²⁷ For this reason, Choi regards his writing activity as a part of the universal movement of the modern historical consciousness, defining individual memory as “human phylogeny” (*Hwadu* 1:25). The “context of memory” he longs to structure is a text integrating personal memory (that which he has actually experienced in his life) and abstract epistemologies (that which is inherited from the evolution of mankind). The task of synthesizing his own individual memory and the collective memory of human beings, however, poses difficulties for Choi. In *Hwadu*, he ascribes this to the irreducible gap between

²⁷ Paying attention to the creative force of memory “affecting the object and transforming it” in the novel, Georg Lukács argues, “The duality of interiority and the outside world can be abolished for the subject if he (the subject) glimpses the organic unity of his whole life through the process by which his living present has grown from the stream of his past life dammed up within his memory.” This totality of the novel is not given, but rather “regulated only by regulative ideas,” and “that is why the unity of the personality and the world—a unity which is dimly sensed through memory, yet which once was part of our lived experience—that is why this unity in its subjectively constitutive, objectively reflexive essence is the most profound and authentic means of accomplishing the totality required by the novel form” (*Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 127-28).

What matters most in achieving the totality of the novel, then, is “the subject’s return home” because it allows him to “complete” and “turn” everything “into rounded action” in retrospect. But what if there is no home to return to? This is the point at which Choi In-hoon’s subject ceaselessly runs into internal contradictions and slippages, while he pursues the modern desire for totality, a desire to build an earthly home that corresponds to its ideal.

what he has witnessed on the Korean peninsula and what he has learned, as the product of a modern Korean education, about the Western history of civilization. As he wrote, the more “enlightened” he became, the more frustrated he became, because Korea’s post/colonial route is incongruent with the “world-historical” unfolding of the Enlightenment. Choi thus deplores, “a man, even if he could get citizenship in an ideational world, cannot obtain global citizenship in the real world in the same way” (*Hwadu* 1:140).

This tension between the ideal form of modernity in the West and the historical reality of postwar Korea leads Choi In-hoon to imagine a literary world in which he, as a self-determining subject, can analyze and articulate an external world that does not grant him any other means for social engagement. In order to resolve the problem of self-alienation in the external world, Choi In-hoon holds fast both epistemologically and aesthetically to a distinct subjectivity in the sovereign space of writing. While Choi’s (and also his characters’) exile to the world of the book is a passive mode for discovering the possibility of self-formation, Choi’s writing project is a constructive way of formulating the way of the world. His devotion to reading allows him to place himself above historical circumstances, while he expects that his desire to write will allow him to reinvent the symbolic structure of Korea’s reality, and thereby to establish his position as a critical intellectual both inside and outside the literary realm.

In Choi In-hoon’s literature, reading the world through books and writing about society through the medium of literature are not separable; rather, they are interacting movements between the actual and the potential. The world of the book provides an intellectual course through which a free individual is born by acquiring modern values in the form of ideas, and a critical perspective from which the constituted subject can perceive the absurd realities that South Koreans must cope with in their everyday lives under state-led modernization and a

developmentalist dictatorship. In the alternative space for counternarratives, the critical subject not only reveals but also reinscribes the deformed or incomplete modernity of Korea, while at the same time this subject compensates for his incapability in the real world. And this desire to (re)build the modern history of Korea in the aesthetic realm is none other than a postcolonial intellectual's symbolic act of historical consciousness, as narrated in *Hwadu*: "I wished to practice [my] historical consciousness to defend the 'national continuity' in the context of literary history, protesting against the discontinuity of our literature" (*Hwadu* 2:56).

In particular, Choi classifies himself as belonging to the same "intellectual generation" of colonial writers, such as Yi Sang, Park Taewon, and Jo Myeonghui, who cultivated a modern sensibility through reading Western literature in Japanese translation, and who also desired to achieve modernity through their practice of writing. Identifying himself as an heir of those colonial intellectuals, Choi claims that his psychological identification with them is the *individual* entity of the truth that he arrived at (*Hwadu* 2:226). In order "to live history as the master of history," writes Choi in another essay, we need "an attitude of sympathy toward the history of the nation as the destiny of the individual."²⁸ It is important to note here that the history of the nation, unlike the state's nationalist discourse, is postulated as the point of *departure for his journey in search for the universal truth in an individual form, not as the ultimate goal* to which all subjects of the nation should be subordinate. The relationship between individual and nation, in other words, is both the historical condition for and the epistemological object of Choi's literary research, rather than a fixed entity prescribed by the dominant ideology.

²⁸ "Yeoksa wa sangsangryeok" [History and Imagination], in *Yutopia ui kkum* [The Dream of Utopia] (Seoul: Moonji, 2010), 166, 165.

Against the authoritarian state's interpellation of the national subject, Choi In-hoon's postcolonial consciousness defends the idea of modern individualism as a desirable principle for a consensual community, which is also, ironically enough, envisioned in the image of the nation. In order to accomplish the project of modern enlightenment, the most urgent task for postwar intellectuals in South Korea was to devise an inner territory in which human rights and individual freedom could be secured under the anticommunist regime. It is in this context that Choi's literature could emerge as the cultural icon of his generation of the 1960s. Upon witnessing the collapse of the traditional form of understanding, his generation had to map out their interiority on their own, as Choi confessed in an interview with Han Gi.²⁹ Similar to the orphaned protagonists of Choi's novels, they had to figure out the right way to become men of the world without any role models in reality that they could emulate.

How the Youth in the Fatherless Nation Becomes a Man

The youth of the 1960s in South Korea were deprived of their chance to pass through the "classical" route of the family romance hypothesized by Freud since they had already lost their fathers in the Korean War, if not in the Pacific War. Lacking their own symbolic father with whom they were supposed to identify or compete, they instead faced the law of the foreign father, to use the Lacanian corpus. In this respect, it is sensible that Choi In-hoon traces the genealogy of postwar intellectuals in South Korea, as they wrestled with their orphanhood, to the colonial writers; that is, to those who rejected both the incapacitated traditional father and the tyrannical colonial father. Much like their predecessors during the colonial period, Korean writers of the

²⁹ "Ingan eun saenggakaneun jimseung" [Human Beings are Animals to Think], *Munyejungang* (Summer 1999): 24.

1960s, plunged into modernity without an initial moment of emancipation, were forced to develop a new schema to figure out the changing world that was deviant from what they had learned through their reading of modern classics. As a result, there were a number of initiation novels or *Bildungsroman* in postwar Korean literature, in which children without fathers wander in search of their social place. Among these novels, Choi's literature is exemplary of the "4.19 generation" who delved into a "symbolic form of Korean modernity."³⁰

Those who designated themselves as the 4.19 generation, commemorating the date of the April Revolution, of course, declared a break from the past by claiming to have a new sensibility and self-consciousness. Kim Hyun, a central figure in this group, asserted that the new generation of the 1960s developed a modern political consciousness based on the experience of the April Revolution, and discovered a new horizon of Korean as a literary language, without much burden or complex about the colonial experience or the division. Kim Byongik, another leading critic in the 4.19 group, also states that their generation began a new epoch with their autonomy and openness, precisely because "we were the ones who succeeded in bringing a revolution from below for the first time in our history."³¹ Precisely because the first revolution ended in failure, i.e., the advent of another dictatorship, however, the 4.19 intellectuals became all the more frustrated. Bewildered by the discrepancy between the ideal of modern progress and the geopolitical circumstances surrounding the Korean peninsula—both of which were

³⁰ The phrase "a symbolic form of Korean modernity" is derived from Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World*, in which he characterizes *Bildungsroman* as a preeminent "'symbolic form' of modernity." See *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 1987), 5.

³¹ Kim Hyun, "60 nyeondae munhak ui baegyeong gwa seonggwa" [The Background and the Achievement of Literature in the 1960s], in *Bunseok gwa haeseok/Boineun simyeon gwa an boineun yeoksa jeonmang* [Analysis and Interpretation/Visible Abyss and Invisible Vision of History] (Seoul: Moonji, 1993), 240; and Kim Byongik, "4.19 wa hangeul sedae ui munhwa" [4.19 and the Culture of the Generation], in *Yeollim gwa ilgum* [The Opening and the Cultivation] (Seoul: Moonji, 1991), 87-88. Although Choi In-hoon, who was born in 1936, and made his debut as a novelist at the end of the 1950s, may not be classified as one of the writers of the 1960s in the strict sense, he came into the spotlight of the 4.19 generation for his *Gwangjang* (*The Square*, 1960), the literary crystallization of the April Revolution.

appropriated to justify Park Chung Hee's developmental dictatorship—they could not help questioning the implications of development, both personal and national. It is no wonder then that Choi In-hoon's never-ending struggle with this historical impasse in the Korean path to modernization could draw ardent support from his contemporaries. The wandering of the young, intellectual protagonists of Choi's novels represented the painful growth of the youth in the 1960s.

Choi In-hoon's novels of formation remind us of the European model of *Bildungsroman* that is commensurate with the Oedipal theory featured in 19th-century bourgeois culture. Forced to flee their hometowns or choose permanent exile, Choi's orphaned heroes appear to take a route similar to that of the rebellious son, imbued with revolutionary aspirations, in the family romance written in the age of Enlightenment,³² or that of a young bourgeoisie infused with modern ideologies of independence or initiative, as in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.³³ Despite the very similar sense of alienation from the origin and the seemingly comparable journey to selfhood, Choi's personas, the literary incarnation of the 4.19 generation, were not placed in the same position as the protagonists in the European bourgeois genre. No matter how defiant those young challengers are in the Western novel, they do not entirely discard the concept of the good father in the traditional patriarchy, but rather transform it into a new concept that is suitable for a modern society made up of responsible and useful citizens. By contrast, the uprooted individuals depicted in Choi's novels are not allowed to return their original home or to build a bourgeois civil society. The "problematic formation" or the "failed initiation" of the youth in Choi's novels therefore demands both a theoretical analysis of the form and a contextual

³² Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, 175.

³³ Marthe Robert, *Origins of the Novel*, 89.

specificity of the genre. If the world of Choi's literature cannot be accounted for by the European format of *Bildungsroman* or the family romance, we should raise the question of how to articulate its historicity; rather than characterize it as a perversion—shaped under heterogeneous conditions—of the “standard.”

From this perspective, my analysis of Choi In-hoon's major works in the following pages foregrounds the historical context within which an individual (*gaein*) was conceived of as the ideal form of a modern subject that could counter the statist production of South Korean subjects. Admittedly, the individual subject in Choi's literature has been explored by many scholars. What is not often acknowledged or emphasized enough is that the spectrum of its meanings and values has also been extended and refracted by the social matrix in which Choi's texts were interpreted. In the 1970s, Choi's strong endorsement of individual freedom was highly appreciated by critics such as Oh Saeng Keun and Yu Jong-ho, who gave a great deal of credit to its historical significance in the dark days of dictatorship.³⁴ Later on, however, Choi's liberalist characters were criticized for their “abstract,” “simplistic,” or “biased” understanding of ideology,³⁵ or their negligence of the issue of social equality,³⁶ under the influence of the *minjung* movement in the 1980s.

In recent studies, the self, or the ego, of Choi In-hoon's intellectual protagonist has largely been discussed in terms of modern subjectivity.³⁷ Among these studies, it is noteworthy

³⁴ Oh Saeng Keun, “Mideum ui segye wa chang ui munhak” [The World of Belief and the Literature of Window], reprinted in *Choi In-hoon*, edited by Lee Tae-dong (Seoul: Seogang University Press, 1999), 123-30; and Yu Jong-ho, “Soseol gwa jeongchijeok hamchuk” [The Novel and Its Political Implications], *Ibid.*, 98-122.

³⁵ Ha Jeong-il, “Jucheseong ui bogwon gwa seongchal ui seosa” [The Restoration of the Subjectivity and a Narrative for Reflection], in *1960 nyeondae munhak yeongu* [A Study on Literature in the 1960s], ed. Ha Jeong-il (Seoul: Gipeun saem, 1998), 25.

³⁶ Yi Dong-ha, “Gwannyeom gwa sam” [Idea and Life], in *Jip eomneun sidae ui munhak* [Literature in the Age without Home] (Seoul: Jeongeumsa, 1985), 70.

³⁷ Notable works include Sung Ji-Yeon's PhD dissertation, “Cho In-hoon munhak eseoui ‘gaein’ e

that Sung Ji-Yeon considers the role of the individual in Choi's literature not only as a thematic matter, but also as a narrative strategy. For Choi, according to Sung, the individual is a methodology, as well as the beginning and the goal, of his literary journey. The individual's awareness of his own individuality is key to his perception of alienation from the system, but at the same time, it is also a subject in motion, constantly constructed through discourse. The ideational, essayistic characteristics of Choi's narratives, Sung concludes, are rooted in the modern subject's attempt, under the given historical condition, to fulfill the double task of achieving liberation from authority, on the one hand, and of imagining a different form of community, on the other.³⁸ While I acknowledge Sung's illumination of the modern individual as a theme and methodology in Choi's literature, I would like to complicate her gender-neutral approach, which assumes that there are no hierarchies in what she calls "a vision of integration" or "a narrative of solidarity" suggested in Choi's novels.

As I examine the political resonances of Choi In-hoon's individual subjectivity, I am more concerned with the way and place in which the individual locates *himself* within and/or beyond South Korean society: more specifically, the capacity of individual memory and the medium of the *female* Other, each of which is interconnected. Without exception, the individual in Choi's novels is portrayed as an intelligent *man* who can raise serious doubts about the legitimacy of the social order by using his own recollections of the past. At the same time, in opposition to the oppressive regime under the Cold War imperative, Choi imagines such a critical man as the basic unit of an alternative community, which, in turn, grants individual

gwanhan yeongu" [A Study on the 'Individual' in Choi In-hoon's Novels and Dramas] (Yonsei University, 2003); Yang Yoon Mo, *Jeongcheseong tamgu wa soseol ui hyeongsik* [A Study of Identity and the Form of the Novel] (Seoul: Bakijeong, 2003); Kim Young Chan, *Geundae ui bulan gwa modeonijeum* [The Anxiety of Modernity and Modernism] (Seoul: Somyeongchulpan, 2006); and Jeong Young Hoon, *Choi In-hoon soseol ui jucheseong gwa geulsseugi* [The Subjectivity and Writing in Choi In-hoon's Novels] (Paju: Taehaksa, 2008).

³⁸ Sung Ji-Yeon, *Ibid.*

freedom as the foundation of social solidarity. Since the youth under Park Chung Hee's military dictatorship were no longer permitted to gather in the political square, they could not avoid retreating to private rooms. The romantic relationship between the male protagonist and the beautiful women in Choi's memory works should be read, in this sense, as an allegory of a social desire for an ideal bond with the Others.

Love and War in Choi In-hoon's Memory Works

The narrative of love in Choi In-hoon's texts intersects with the traumatic memory of the Korean War, in either complementary or contradictory ways.³⁹ Certainly, love between a man and a woman offers the most concrete anchor through which rootless refugees like Choi could settle down in the unfamiliar land.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the love stories in Choi's works mostly end in tragedy because they constantly remind him of his first sexual experience with an unknown female in a bomb shelter in his adolescence, as I detail in a later section on *Hoesaegin (A Grey Man, 1963~64)*. Simply put, romance in Choi's novels functions not only as a synchronic medium through which solitary individuals can make social interactions, but also as a diachronic channel through which the traumatic past insistently returns. The failure of romance, in the final

³⁹ On the function of memory in the romantic narrative of Choi In-hoon's novels, it is worthwhile to look at Choi Ae Soon's PhD dissertation, "Choi In-hoon soseol e natanan yeonae wa gieok e gwanhan yeongu" [A Study on the Romantic Relationship and Memory in Choi In-hoon's Novels] (Korea University, 2005), although her work concentrates on rather different questions than mine. Whereas Choi Ae Soon, through Freud's concept of *unheimliche*, inquires into *the psychological effects of traumatic memory on the romantic relationship*—as the cause of the conflict between characters, and of the failure of their love in the end—I will pay more attention to *the gender politics of the romantic relationship* in Choi's constitution of intellectual subjectivity.

⁴⁰ In an interview with novelist Lee Chang-dong, Choi In-hoon says, "I thought that it was the most eternal and changeless for somebody to love somebody else; because it does not create a state of floating in the air or a fantasy, but assigns responsibility and leaves its result. In that sense, love, especially love between a man and a woman, seems to me to be the most realistic face [of life]." See Lee Chang-dong, "Choi In-hoon ui choigeun saenggakdeul" [Recent Thoughts of Choi In-hoon], *Jakgasegye* 4 (Spring 1990): 54.

analysis, reveals the deadlock in the formation (*Bildung*) of the modern subject. Because this (im)possibility of self-development and socialization is often related to the impenetrable Other, that is, woman, it is also necessary to scrutinize the gendered structure of Choi's literary world. In exploring the subject position of Choi's male intellectual protagonists, I will thus look closely at the notion of gender/sexuality, which is often missing in the existing understanding of the 4.19 literature.

Arguably, Choi In-hoon embraces the conventional role of woman as a mediator of men's desire, in conjunction with the masculinist myth of woman. In his novels, women serve as a route through which the male protagonist goes on a journey into the past, and as a savior who protects him from outside attack or carries a new life inside her. The woman's position in Choi's literature, however, turns out to be a more complex question since Choi's female characters simultaneously pose a threat to the male protagonist's self-fulfillment as an intellectual subject. The incomprehensible lover in the present tests his epistemological power and communication skills, stimulating associations with his sexual experience during the war. The image of woman as an absolute otherness therefore works as a screen memory that at once blurs and blocks the traumatic origin of the modern subject in postwar Korea.

To explicate the double failure of Choi In-hoon's male subject—failure in both *Bildung* and romance—I adapt psychoanalysis and trauma studies. While utilizing these theoretical paradigms as hermeneutic tools to analyze the “primal scene” of Choi's memory works, my interpretation also attends to the heterogeneous historical context in which a narcissistic ego comes into being in Choi's failed *Bildungsroman*. To use psychoanalytic terms, I grapple with the following questions: why is his libido withdrawn from the world of objects and invested into the world of letters? What kind of relationship is sought in this secondary, or pathological

narcissism? And how do these works counter the frustrating reality of Korea in the 1960s? In so doing, I focus on the principle of memory in Choi's narratives according to which the author and his characters, in their search for identity through their (literary) journey, explore the world around them. *The Square* begins with the protagonist's wartime reminiscences on his voyage to India; *Hoesaegin (A Grey Man, 1963~64)* portrays a youth who struggles with his refugee status in South Korea, disillusioned with the fantasy he had before he came to the South; *Taepung (The Tempest, 1973)* ends with the aging hero's flashback of the times when the colonial subject was reborn as a Third Worldist. In reading through these novels—three of Choi's five major works⁴¹—I will demonstrate how his trauma, which is rooted in Korea's division, ironically enough, provides a critical distance from postwar society for the exiled intellectual. By mastering his memory of the North, Choi was able to exceed the spatial and temporal boundaries imposed by the developmental dictatorship in the South, pursuing individual modernity in the aesthetic realm.

⁴¹ Looking back upon his career, Choi In-hoon says, "In the final analysis, I would like *Gwangjang (The Square)*, *Hoesaegin (A Grey Man)*, *Seoyugi (Journey to the West)*, *Soelga gubossi ui ilil (A Day of the Novelist, Mr. Gubo)*, and *Taepung (The Tempest)* to be read as a series." See "Wonsiin i deogi wihan munmyeonghan uisik" [Becoming a Primitive Man through Civilized Consciousness], in *Gil e gwanhan myeongsang [Contemplation on the Road]* (Seoul: Moonji, 2010), 29.

2. *The Square*: A Portrait of the 4.19 Intellectual

Despite the immense resonance of Choi In-hoon's *Gwangjang*, the evaluation of this epoch-making work remains controversial, whether it is viewed as an ideological critique of Korea's division or as a narrative of redemption through love. Whereas the former dwells on the protagonist's trenchant diagnosis of the opposing states on the Korean peninsula, the latter underlines the symbolic meaning of the protagonist's suicide at sea, namely, a desire for rebirth or reunion with loved ones that he has lost during the war. The sensationalistic descriptions of the love affairs between one man and two women in *The Square* have, of course, been criticized by feminist critics for their inclination towards male narcissism;⁴² while the protagonist's abstract analysis of ideologies has also been indicted as displaying the limitations of an idealist.⁴³ The previous reviews of *The Square*, however, have not fully taken into account what made Choi In-hoon one of the bestselling authors in modern Korean literature,⁴⁴ in spite of his esoteric writing style and problematic conceptions of gender/sexuality. Thus, I would like to ask: in what historical context did Choi's ideological critique become an important concern for all? What

⁴² See Lee Yeon Sook's *Choi In-hoon, huin geodot, geomeun soksal* [*Choi In-hoon, White Jacket, Black Skin*] (Paju: Hangukhaksuljeongbo, 2008), and Hong Sunae's "Choi In-hoon soseol ui seksyueolliti wa erotijeum yeongu" [A Study on Sexuality and Eroticism in Choi In-Hoon's Novel *Gwangjang*], *Hanminjok munhwa yeongu* 17 (December 2005): 159-83.

⁴³ Yom Mu-ung, "Sanghwang gwa ja-a," [The Situation and the Self], in *Hanguk hyeondae munhak jeonjip* [The Collected Works of Contemporary Korean Literature], vol. 16 (Seoul: Singumunhwasa, 1974), 70-83; Kim Yun-shik, "Gwannyeom ui hangye" [The Limit of Ideas], in *Hanguk hyeondae soseol bipan* [A Critique of Contemporary Korean Novels] (Seoul: Iljisa, 1981), 1-13; Song Sang Il, "Soseol ui hyeonsang" [The Phenomenon of the Novel], *Hyeondaemunhak* 319 (July 1981): 282-301; and Yi Dong-ha, "Choi In-hoon <Gwangjang> e daehan jaegochal" [A Reexamination of Choi In-hoon's *Gwangjang*], in *Hyeondae soseol ui jeongsinsajeok yeongu* [A Study of Contemporary Novels from the Perspective of Spiritual History] (Seoul: Iljisa, 1989), 191-211.

⁴⁴ Yi Imja's research into bestselling books in South Korea notes that from 1945 forward Choi In-hoon's *Gwangjang* was ranked by *Chosun Ilbo* in 1991 as one of the top eight steady sellers in Korean literature (*Hanguk chulpan gwa beseuteuselleo 1883~1996* [Publishing in Korea and Bestsellers 1883~1996] (Seoul: Gyeonginmunhwasa, 1998), 35). By 2008, its 159th printing had been published in South Korea, and it has now been translated into nine languages, including Russian and Hindi.

discursive effects did its canonization bring out in the formation of intellectual subjectivity in postwar Korea?

Notwithstanding the wide range of surveys, previous approaches to *The Square*, at least until the early 1990s, took for granted a series of dichotomies such as the North vs. the South, the public square vs. private rooms, equality vs. freedom, and ideology vs. love. These binary oppositions, however, are in effect ceaselessly deconstructed and reconstructed, if not continuously suspended, in *The Square*. As the author himself underscores in his 1961 preface, “The square is the secret room of the masses, and the secret room is the square of the individual” (*Gwangjang* 19).⁴⁵ In this dialectic movement of inside and outside, I argue, *yeonae* (romantic relationship) functions as the key vector that mediates the simultaneous process of the individualization and the socialization of Choi In-hoon’s male protagonist.

In *The Square*, intimate relationships with female characters serve as the critical motive for the action of the self-centered protagonist, whether such relationships force him to come out from his secret room to the public square to meet others, or to regress to his own place from the corrupt world to create an alternative space for coexistence. Again, political ideology and private romance in *The Square* are not incompatible with each other, but are instead complementary, in that modern politics and modern love are at once founded upon the value of the individual and performed through (mis)communication between individuals. After all, the male subject’s desire

⁴⁵ This preface is not included in the English translation, which is based on the 1973 edition published by Minum Publishing Company. As is well known, Choi In-hoon has rewritten *Gwangjang* seven times since he presented the first version in the literary journal *Saebyeok* in 1960; the first volume itself was printed by Jeonghayng Publishing in 1961; then it was made the 16th volume of *Hyeondae hanguk munhak jeonjip* [*The Collected Works of Contemporary Korean Literature*] published by Singumunhwasa in 1967. Another format was printed by Minum Publishing Company in 1973; it was also published as the first volume of *Choi In-hoon jeonjip* [The Complete Works of Choi In-hoon] by Munhak gwa jiseongsa (Moonji) in 1976, 1989, 1994, and 2008. The major change took place in the Moonji version in 1976, as I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter. Taking into account those differences, I will translate, when necessary, from the latest Moonji edition published in 2008 (*Gwangjang/Guunmong*), which is cited as *Gwangjang* here; otherwise, I use the English translation of *The Square* by Kevin O’Rourke (Barnstaple: Spindlewood, 1985), and follow its romanization of personal names.

to reformulate the social matrix that determines the boundary of the public square and the private space is not only conveyed by his soliloquy about, or contemplation on, the deplorable reality of a divided Korea, but also condensed in or displaced to his relationship with female others. What I would like to draw attention to here is that *The Square*'s hero Lee Myong-jun's desire for intellectual development, or *Bildung*, is intimately entwined with gender hierarchies and sex roles. My analysis of Lee as a portrait of the 4.19 generation will thus address the nature of the male protagonist's intellectual subjectivity (including its gender-specificity) in tracing his fatal journey from the South to the North, and to his suicide during his voyage to the third country.

Why Has Myong-jun Left the South for the North?

The apparent reason for Lee Myong-jun's decision to go to the North was his experience of torture when his father, who held an executive position in the North's Communist Party, appeared in a propaganda campaign aimed at the South. Another motivation for his crossing can be found in his disappointment with his girlfriend. As Choi In-hoon puts it, "At any rate it was at least certain that when Myong-jun took the decisive step of going north, the anger and sadness which her attitude had carried deep into his heart was momentarily the cause" (*Square* 104-5). The most fundamental cause for the young intellectual's defection to the North, however, lies in his desire to experience the transcendental totality of existence:

There was one memory which kept returning forcibly to his mind. He regarded it as an advent of God. (...) In that moment he felt the whole world grind to a clattering halt.

It was quiet.

Everything was in its proper place, so that further movement seemed pointless. It was as if the world in turning had locked firmly on its most trustworthy cog. (*Square* 14)

Notably, Lee Myong-jun's epistemological epiphany takes place *only within* his world of ideas. First, "the advent of God" is an exclusively personal experience between the subject and the object, which rejects verbal conceptualization, and presents its wholeness only to a pure spirit at a complete standstill. Second, this imaginary union between the subject and the object, or the subject's sublime recognition of the world without mediation confers a privileged, creative power upon the reflective individual. Third, the formation of the interiority of the subject and the representation of the totality of the world are mutually determined, for the form of totality is given by the subject who conceives the world through his experience.⁴⁶ From this perspective, Myong-jun's struggle to capture the moment of totality by signifying and thereby re-creating the world in the universe of pure ideas takes after what Lukács might call the "problematic individual's" inner journey towards "clear self-recognition" in modern novels.⁴⁷

The problem is that Lee Myong-jun cannot attain "conclusions about the world and living" in his daily life in Seoul (*Square* 13). Far from finding everything in its place, he only feels displaced in a contingent world that is completely out of joint. Most characters around him are interested only in having fun. Yong-mi, the only daughter of Myong-jun's patron, lives an extravagant life scheduled by a series of dance parties, drives, picnics, and movies. Her elder brother Tae-sik, a student of music, is an incorrigible flirt who plays the saxophone in a cabaret.

⁴⁶ If "totality," as Lukács argues, "can be systematized only in abstract terms" (*The Theory of the Novel*, 70), then the longstanding debate on the evaluation of Choi's ideational writing seems to be a side issue here because the fundamental question is not to what extent his conceptualization of the world is realistic, but rather what aspect of reality is comprised by his conceptualization, and what type of subject is produced by it. As Choi In-hoon states in his interview in 1992, he does not consider conceptual thinking and literary representation to be separated from each other: "Hegel perceives the world as a conceptual phenomenon, not unlike aesthetics. In this case, there would be no ultimate boundary or distinction between the conceptual phenomenon and the aesthetic phenomenon. My aesthetics is to see the world as the immanence of the hidden movement of the spiritual concept, while presenting it with defamiliarization" (Han Gi, "Gwangjang gwa milsil sai, ttoneun yesulga ui chosang" [In-between the Square and the Secrete Room, or a Portrait of an Artist], *Munhak jeongsin* (December 1992): 29). Regarding the criticisms of Choi's abstract ideality, see footnote No. 10.

⁴⁷ *The Theory of the Novel*, 80.

Even though they have a certain virtue—generosity—which is common among the offspring of bourgeois families, they do not welcome any sort of serious conversation with the young philosopher Myong-jun, who wants to “live every moment of time as if it was a thick drop of blood” (*Square* 13-14). Even his spiritual mentor, Mr. Chong, seems helpless; despite his expertise as an archaeologist, he remains silent when Myong-jun gives a long, bitter speech about the politics, economics, culture, and art in South Korea:

In the Korean political square, dung, urine, and garbage are heaped in piles. (...) The square of economics is overflowing with stolen goods. (...) You ask about the cultural square? The flower of idle words in bloom. (...) There is only the individual, no people. Only secret rooms abound, the square is dead. (...) A dead square. Isn't this South Korea? The square is empty.

Chong was listening quietly. (*Square* 33-35)

Becoming “aware at this time of Chong changing from being a teacher to a friend,” Myong-jun feels proud of himself, but at the same time, experiences the sad “emptiness that comes after smashing an idol” (*Square* 35). Nonetheless, this incommunicability between Myong-jun and the others leads him to confirm his intellectual superiority over his bourgeois peers and the incompetent old generation.

As Myong-jun loses any faith in the dead, empty square of South Korea, he withdraws into a room of his own in which he can find the final thing that is meaningful to him—the self: “self was what was left when all these things were taken away” (*Square* 39). In order to cultivate the room of self, he is absorbed in reading, feeling that philosophy is “everything to him”: “For a young man without parents, money or fame, philosophy was probably the only thing that guaranteed a pride which more than compensated for everything. Or philosophy was probably the last refuge of conscience in a society which couldn't even produce the daring necessary to realize ideals” (*Square* 65). Myong-jun's desire to build his own space is involved with the absence of his father, or in the Lacanian sense the problematic society without “the-name-of-the-

father.” If postwar South Korea was undergoing a major shift in the formulation of all authority relations, the protagonist’s—4.19—generation had to make their way in the new world of modernity without any help from tradition.

After overthrowing despotic paternal authority, however, the revolutionary son confronted another difficult task: to establish his own structure on his own terms. Myong-jun searches for his social place in South Korea by reading philosophy books when both his surrogate fathers—his financial sponsor, Mr. Pyon, and his spiritual mentor, Mr. Chong—fail to become appropriate role models: “Looking at the bookcase seemed to give him a sense of satisfaction and sensibility” (*Square* 22). Indeed, the world of ideas offers a mental route through which he can develop himself, following the road taken by his revolutionary father in the North. Here, the Freudian theory of the family romance in which a boy imagines replacing his humble parents with noble others is twisted, or at least differentiated. On the one hand, the protagonist is resentful at his father who has abandoned his family in the South to pursue his political ideals. On the other hand, the father can remain the figure of an honorable father, thanks precisely to his leaving. It is Myong-jun’s status as a foundling that guarantees an advantaged distance from which he can criticize South Korean society; and it is a privileged position from which he can, with his metaphysical nobility, construct new social values on a higher level.

When he is summoned by a detective, however, “the door of self which he had [has] believed so strong had [has] been opened discourteously without a knock.” Facing the absurdity of violent torture through which he is interrogated about a secret communication with his father, Myong-jun cannot help laughing, at first. The nauseating insult of the barbaric interrogator, permitted by the authoritarian government, only reconfirms the validity of Myong-jun’s criticism of South Korea, which puts the lives of its citizens “outside ‘the law’ that is supposed to protect

money, mind, and body” (*Gwangjang* 80). The more severe the assault becomes, therefore, the calmer he feels, because he finally grasps “the way revolutionaries suffer” (*Square* 42), or “the body’s way...the most visible way in life (*Gwangjang* 77). At this very moment, he physically experiences the presence of the absent father: “He realized that his father who had been far away was right at his side...My far-away father is making my nose bleed!” (*Square* 45) In addition, through this experience of bleeding, or this bodily perception, of the name-of-the-father, Myong-jun breaks away from an “imaginary identification” with his father via philosophy books.⁴⁸

Since the door of his self-consciousness is already broken, he is unable to confine himself in his old room of his own, and endures the need to “disperse” his loneliness. Now, his wish to live “a life of achievement,” spending his “full, mature hours,” cannot be suppressed any more. To melt away this terrifying temptation of dragging himself out of his “room for one man alone,” he longs for a woman who has “warm flesh” and “a pure heart.” It is not coincident that the image of Yun-ae suddenly rises before his eyes once he is acquitted after the interrogation. “For

⁴⁸ In the Lacanian formula, “imaginary identification” pertains to the ideal ego before the mirror stage, whereas symbolic identification pertains to the ego-ideal after the subject enters the symbolic order through the Oedipus complex. If, as Slavoj Žižek proposes, “imaginary identification is always identification *on behalf of a certain gaze in the Other*” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 106), Myong-jun’s ideal ego is constituted through his fantasy of the idolized father *through his own performance of the ideal father*. The problem of his imaginary identification, in the first place, is the gap between the ideal image of his father that represents “what he would like to be,” and the father’s negative reputation in South Korea, which is the product of a “false consciousness” from Myong-jun’s perspective. The true dilemma is not that Myong-jun imitates his father at the level of resemblance in his imaginary identification, while he strives to achieve an autonomous personality (this becomes clearer after he is disappointed in his father’s real life in the North). It is rather that he does not realize that “his-being-for-the-other” (not only his ideal ego, his father, but also the contemptible other, the “unawakened” South Korean detective) is in fact “his being-for-himself,” to use Žižek’s own phrase.

In reading *The Square*, however, we should *look awry* at Žižek’s argument on Žižek’s own terms, because Myong-jun’s imaginary identification is not a simple trap we are liable to fall into in the process of identification, mostly “in the lower level of the Graph of Desire,” as suggested by Žižek. Through his imaginary identification, Myong-jun is not only “already symbolically identified with the gaze for which he is playing his role” within the historical condition of South Korea, *but also, at the same time*, he is quilting his own “*point de capiton*,” the point at which he can go through the social fantasy of “liberal democracy” in Cold War South Korea at the upper level of the graph. Again, this desire to traverse South Korea’s not-so-fantastic-fantasy as a reflective modern individual constituted in the literary realm is no more than another (though more radical, progressive, and sophisticated) ideology of the liberal intellectual in postwar South Korea, as I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

the conceptual philosopher's egg, Lee Myong-jun," Yun-ae, "the-thing-in-itself" (*Gwangjang* 93), emerges as a substitute for philosophy, in which he used to find the truth of the world.

Far from satisfying Myong-jun's demands, however, Yun-ae challenges his masculinity by refusing his physical advances and his "teaching philosophy."⁴⁹ Myong-jun's sexual moves "to verify his own existence" are frustrated by the incomprehensible temptress; the "stubborn animal" confuses the male protagonist by turning him down in exactly the same place where she once assured him of her belonging to him. In the midst of caressing, she sends him into the depth of despair by making an irrelevant utterance: "Look at that seagull" (*Square* 62). Myong-jun begs Yun-ae to "believe," "transform," and "save" him, and yet Yun-ae asks in return, "What am I that I can save you?" Thus, he feels "alone in the square where clearly he thought he was standing alongside a woman" (82-83). As Myong-jun's desire for direct communication through the physicality of the body is thwarted by his female partner, who is simultaneously a human being and an animal or a "thing," Myong-jun returns to the initial state in which he was wandering in search for his place in-between the dead, empty square and the destroyed, isolated room.

While Myong-jun's failure in his relationship with Yun-ae signals that she also wants to have a room of her own, he refuses to acknowledge either her individual identity or his intellectual limitations, but simply blames her animality for his inability to understand her. Myong-jun's dilemma is that if he attempts to name the unnamable animal, or to discipline the superstitious body, it will destroy her womanness; he is not capable of communicating as a civilized man with her insofar as her place is reserved in the primitive world. The woman's body,

⁴⁹ In the sense that Myong-jun tries "love of teaching" in his relationship with Yun-ae (*Gwangjang* 93), it is not so much a relationship between a man and a woman equally in love, but one between a gentle, sensible teacher and an innocent, immature student. It should not be overlooked, however, that Myong-jun's love of teaching Yun-ae is not for her education, but for his satisfaction.

lying between an animal and a human being, materializes what his logical power cannot penetrate. What exists outside his epistemology then becomes false and superstitious. Disregarding “her roots in some dark valley where his logic could not reach,” therefore, he does not listen to her “lie.” When Myong-jun no longer (under-)stands the uncertainty of her identity, he makes up his mind to go to the North, hoping to find the world where the real is in accordance with the ideal.⁵⁰

What Has Myong-jun Seen in the North?

What was waiting for Myong-jun in the North was not a republic living “in the excitement of revolution,” but “the same old bourgeois society wearing a mask of revolution, and the people.” In the South, although its political, economic, and cultural squares were contaminated by avarice and betrayal, “there was freedom to become corrupt and freedom to be idle.” Here in the North, “there were always the same discussions and procedures at every gathering,” so he felt “the air more suffocating” than ever (*Square* 84, 86). Whereas South Korea was “a square of non-existent people,” the North was a “playground buried beneath a tedious mass game” (107). If South Korean youths were caught up in sex and jazz, North Korean comrades just repeated and followed, without thinking and feeling, what the party said.

Myong-jun’s pent-up rage finally bursts out towards his father, “What sort of People’s Republic is this?”; but his father, the person in charge of the National Unification Battlefront of

⁵⁰ On board a ship to North Korea, he dreams of a square in which people are in communion with Nature. It is interesting that he does not remember by name the woman he meets in this fantasy, saying, “Really, what’s in a name? The only thing that is certain is that she is my love” (*Square* 83-84). This unnamable, undivided community is none other than the imaginary realm in which the subject is presumed to experience the totality of the self and complete unity with the Other before he encounters the rupture between the signifier and the signified in the symbolic order.

Democracy, does not say a single word while his son spills out a barrage of criticisms. Just like Mr. Chong in the South, his father remains silent without any refutation. Myong-jun begins to cry, precisely because he feels “sad” to see that Lee Hyong-do is no better than any other fathers. In the South, his father was his idol who had fought for national liberation and the people’s revolution, but in the North, he is an ordinary man who tucks in his rebellious son at night, even after his son’s furious outcry. As a matter of fact, nothing could be less revolutionary than Lee Hyong-do’s life in the North. Myong-jun’s North Korean stepmother, for instance, is “a simple Daughter of Chosun” with a towel around her head, who washes his father’s socks. It is not only pitiful but unbearable to face this conventionality of his “family” in the North. Wasn’t it this “ordinariness” that made him flee from the South? He leaves home to “try again in a place where there was only action” without words (*Square* 90, 86). He still has some hope to find real people working on the front line, who are different from hypocritical bureaucrats, including his own father.

While Myong-jun is searching for vigorous, original people among the stiff, stone statues in the square of the North, he comes across Un-hye, who helps him feel certain of his own humanity. In contrast to Yun-ae in the South, who confused him with her “lies,” Un-hye is a lovable “animal quietly saying yes.” Whereas Yun-ae’s interstitial position between a human being and a thing, or her mind separated from her body, broke down Myong-jun’s desire for totality, Un-hye materializes his fantasy about the subject’s ideal symbiosis with the (M)Other, as he projects the image of the mother and the son into their relationship: “He saw a mother in her breasts and outstretched hand stroking his hair. Mother and son, a human formula since time immemorial.” Finally, Myong-jun discovers in Un-hye’s body the square of the truth that cannot

be ruined: “The only truth left to me is Un-hye’s body...[S]he is mine. Apart from that she is nothing” (*Square* 100-102).

Still, the position of the female other as a “thing,” which is meaningful only for the male subject, has not changed in Myong-jun’s relationship with Un-hye. Although Myong-jun contrasts the two women in the South and the North as if they were entirely opposite to each other, their position as the non-subject⁵¹ remains the same: to complete the lack of the male protagonist. Women’s subjectivity, if there is any, is determined by their sexuality, and it is always filtered through the primal fantasy of the male intellectual protagonist, whether it is presented in the form of incomprehensible denial (Yun-ae), or that of primordial instinct (Un-hye). Nevertheless, Myong-jun prefers to be with Un-hye, because “like most other women,” she is neither intelligent nor serious. She is lovable thanks precisely to her insensibility and indifference to thought or ideology: “Frequently she spoke recklessly as if she had forgotten that the map of the world is divided ideologically” (*Square* 107). Myong-jun wants to change with this ingenuous woman who lacks the habit of thinking; identifying himself as her child, when Un-hye tells him about the performance of her ballet troupe in Moscow, he begs her not to leave him: “I’m not a party member, nor a worker for the people. A fool acting like a child towards you, that’s what I am” (103).

This imaginary mother-son relationship, however, does not last long, not simply because Un-hye eventually leaves him, but rather because it lacks mutual belief. Myong-jun does not stop

⁵¹ For the idea of women’s non-subjectivity filling the epistemological lack of the male subject, I am indebted to Lim Gyung-Soon’s “Choi In-hoon ui <Gwangjang> yeongu” [A Study on Choi In-hoon’s *The Square*], *Bangyoeomunyeongu* 9 (1998): 355-74), which focuses on Lee Myong-jun’s journey as a process to internalize the epistemological power of 1960s’ intellectuals, when they are alienated from the political realm. Her argument, however, seems to need further corroboration in relation to Choi’s later works, considering South Korea’s drastic changes in the early 1960s, that is, the 4.19 Revolution in 1960 and the 5.16 military coup d’état in 1961. Thus, in order to discuss the formation of intellectual subjectivity in postwar South Korea, I will also analyze *A Grey Man* (1963), and *The Tempest* (1973), in comparison with *The Square*, which was originally written during the “interim” period that was filled with tremendous confusions as well as with utopian visions.

doubting her promises, as he counts only on his own intuition. But at the moment when he believes that he has grasped the only truth by taking up a woman's body, Un-hye forsakes him, as if she wanted to prove that he was wrong about (her) truthfulness. Losing "the two living pillars" that can protect him from the demolished square, Myong-jun throws himself into brutal reality—the Korean War.

The Korean War

When the communist army occupies Seoul, Myong-jun, now a North Korean intelligence officer, faces Tae-sik—his old friend, the son of his benefactor, and the current husband of Yun-ae. In the same place where he was tortured by a South Korean detective, Myong-jun tortures Tae-sik, longing for "the purest reaction one man could expect from another." But all he gains is "the sound of a landslide" in the middle of his own body. He tries again to be reborn as a sinner, as the "rotten" world demands, by violating Yun-ae. Yet he only realizes, "although he could take these breasts by force now...he couldn't own them" (*Square* 120, 124).

Thus, when by chance Myong-jun meets Un-hye on the battlefield, he retries to establish a room/square of their own, instead of blaming her betrayal. Feeling no resentment toward her, "he was grateful simply for the fact that they could meet again" (*Square* 125). With each meeting in a small cave, the "conceptual philosopher's egg" is transformed into "an animal," dreaming of the republic of love where "the man who does not love life is an enemy of the people, a capitalist dog, an imperialist spy" (128). Making a "small, primeval square where four arms and four legs were firmly intertwined" with Un-hye (130), Myong-jun seems to arrive at an open space where

there is no distinction between love and ideology, an imaginary community where the ideology is love.

Nevertheless, Myong-jun's awakening to the other's place within himself does not lead to further introspection, but only to another self-identification as "a man who loved this woman madly" (*Square* 130). Although he acknowledges the gap between Un-hye's truthful body and her deceitful words, he cannot see the fissure in his own narcissistic world that screens the desire of the Other. Throughout Myong-jun's journey on the Korean peninsula, female characters, at best, constitute the landscape against which his interiority can emerge. While their body language remain too ambiguous, if not too enigmatic, to be illuminated, the protagonist's subject position as the male intellectual, along with his sexual fantasies about the female body, rarely change, just as the dichotomous structure of Cold War ideology, far from being dismantled, is merely replaced by another social imagination of pre-ideological *jouissance*.

The Third Way?

The male intellectual's odyssey in search of a third space beyond the antithesis between the public square and the private space leads out to sea, after he decides to leave the Korean peninsula after losing his love during the war. On his voyage of hope for a new life in an unknown land, he nevertheless senses a certain emptiness inside himself along with an uncanny feeling that something has been chasing him from the beginning—a seagull. Because the haunting image of the sea bird does not allow him to rest, he grabs a hunting gun and aims it at two birds on the mast. At the very moment when he is about to pull the trigger, however, he

comes to perceive that those birds are the avatars of his family-to-be: Un-hye and their baby. Un-hye told him that she was pregnant when they met for the last time in the cave:

Myong-jun sat up and looked down at her belly. Her deep navel was filled with her sweat. He put his lips there. It tasted salty like seawater. Un-hye was a woman who had a full, fatty belly... Under the thick fat, there was the sea of this salty water, and a fish, she said, that would be called their daughter took root there. The woman... held the root of the man, and pushed it into her cave leading to the deep sea, hidden under the bush between her white, fatty pillars. (*Gwangjang* 211)

On retrospection, Myong-jun comes to recognize his root is connected with the Other's body. In Un-hye's body, the cave and the sea overlapped with each other, despite their contrasting connotations—condensation vs. proliferation. Symbolizing the woman's womb and associated with the image of the tomb, the cave is both where Un-hye conceives a baby, and where the memory of Un-hye is buried. Before her death, she *is* both the cave leading him to the sea and the sea itself he experiences, as implied in the citation above.

It is worth noting that Myong-jun's journey in search for an ideal place where the room of self harmonizes with the square for the people changes its direction from a horizontal to a vertical movement,⁵² as he finds the square where the seagulls fly to their hearts' content, just like the unborn fish in Un-hye's belly—the sea/cave. Since he cannot move upward like the sea birds, he chooses a downward movement into the sea to finally constitute his family in the “blue square,” a space that is not divided by political ideologies or economic status.⁵³ He jumps to his death from the ship, realizing “the courage of a woman that has given a birth in the tomb, a woman that has broken out of the tomb to soar into the sky embracing her new-born baby, and their love that has finally found him” (*Gwangjang* 216). By falling into the sea, for the first time

⁵² My idea of the spatial imagination in *The Square* here is inspired by Woo Chan-je's “<Gwangjang> ui gonggan susahak” [The Spatial Rhetoric of *The Square*], *Hanminjok eomunhak* 40 (2002): 363-90. Woo's formalist analysis of Choi In-hoon's text, however, does not concern the issue of gender.

⁵³ Woo, *Ibid*, 25.

in the novel, Myong-jun moves toward the position of Un-hye.⁵⁴ The cave that used to be “the last square which affirmed proof that they were alive” eventually leads them to the sea, where they are reunited in death (*Square* 130, 152). Does Myong-jun, then, finally come to terms with his narcissism under the sea, in the abyss of the Other?

The Death of Ideology, or the Rebirth of Love

Lee Myong-jun’s suicide in *The Square* has been criticized by national-realist critics as a petit-bourgeoisie’s futile effort to escape from politics,⁵⁵ or as the limit of an intellectual’s conceptual experiment with ideology.⁵⁶ By contrast, Kim Hyun reads his death as “an action to reaffirm love” by emphasizing the sea’s metaphor for “the womb of the universe.”⁵⁷ Confined within the dichotomy between ideology and love, however, both interpretations overlook that Myong-jun does not choose love instead of ideology, but rather sublimates love into ideology.

Admittedly, *The Square* trenchantly critiques the deformed realization of Cold War ideologies on the Korean peninsula through the dramatic ups and downs of a young philosopher’s life. Nevertheless, Choi In-hoon’s attempt to overcome ideology through love ultimately produces another social fantasy in which the individual is portrayed as if his position were exterior to the structure of power, while love is imagined as a universal human instinct

⁵⁴ This last scene is one of the major revisions Choi In-hoon makes in the latest edition. In earlier versions, the two birds signified Yun-ae and Un-hye, representing the South and the North, respectively; “Myong-jun has a hunch that he will not be able to become a completely new person in a third country because of the shadow of these women—the past he wants to forget; that night, he disappears” (*Square* 152-53).

⁵⁵ Paik, “Simin munhak ron” [On Bourgeois Literature], in *Minjok munhak gwa segye munhak*, vol. 1, 65.

⁵⁶ Kim and Chong, *Hanguk soseolsa*, 386.

⁵⁷ “Sarang ui jaehwagin” [The Reconfirmation of Love] (1976), reprinted in *Gwangjang/Guunmong*, 6th ed., 368, 369.

beyond ideological interpellation. The fundamental problem of this project to transcend state power through individual love does not lie in the simple fact that it fetishizes the female body; Myong-jun's wish, whether it is to escape from ideology, or to arrive at love, cannot but fail because he does not confront the gaze of the Other, which reveals the lack at the core of his desire, or the materiality of the Real. While the male protagonist struggles for the recognition of others, he hardly tries to recognize the desire of others who are themselves no more than other subjects with their own lack. For instance, Yun-ae would say, "No! I don't want to," but he would never ask her in return, "What do you want?" Un-hye begs him to forgive her, but he never tells her what she wishes to hear. Choi's symbolization of woman as the Other, furthermore, is problematic, not merely because his vision for the undivided, symbiotic space through the figuration of the holy mother fixes the patriarchal representation of woman, demanding her sacrifice in the final analysis; it is also problematic because his symbolic resolution, not unlike the state's narrative of the division, precludes conceiving any other form of "national unification" for Korea that is outside of the paternalistic paradigm—which more often than not is accompanied by the victimization of the "minor" members of the family, such as women and children, in order to highlight the tragic nature of war.⁵⁸

If the significance of Choi In-hoon's *The Square* cannot be discussed without considering the historical context of the 1960s that began with the 4.19 Movement, its limitations also need to be understood in relation to the modern(ist) sensibility pursued by the "revolution generation." Unquestionably, the young intellectuals of the era succeeded in constructing a new political subjectivity founded upon the principle of democracy by subverting Rhee Syngman's dictatorial regime that denied the civil rights of the people under the rubric of the exceptional state of the

⁵⁸ This familial imagination, along with the idolatry of woman as a sacrificial victim, keeps alive in the popular imagination of the Korean War, as I will detail in Chapter Four.

division. Proclaiming a radical break from the old generation—either the corrupt ruling class or the incompetent conformist masses—the youth of the 1960s claimed to be a new agent for the suspended modernity in South Korea, and prepared the ground for the later social movement for democratization and unification. The student leaders of the revolution, however, were not able to form a strong solidarity with the public body that was about to sprout up in urban areas; hence, they failed to institutionalize their sovereign power in *Realpolitik*. Just as their ideational grasp of modernity could not resolve the ideological cleavages and social contradictions that were carried over from the colonial period and then intensified by the Korean War, the newly constituted civilian government was unable to perform the task of establishing a stable order, and was finally thwarted by Park Chung Hee’s military coup d’état after only nine months.

Nevertheless, the 4.19 generation did not simply disappear from the public sphere after the reactionary transition, but rather opened up a cultural space as an alternative field in which they could achieve the modern ideal of the self-reflective, autonomous individual. What is at stake in this politically charged terrain of literature is not the event of the April Revolution itself, but the question of its “truth-process” that “induces” a certain type of subject as the “bearer of the event,” as Lee Kwang-ho puts it using Badiou’s term.⁵⁹ The young generation conceived through the April Revolution, despite their alienation from the “official” realm of politics, emerged as the vanguard of the critical movement in South Korea, gaining social recognition of

⁵⁹ In his article on the relationship between the 4.19 Movement and 4.19 literature, Lee Kwang-ho argues that the bearer of the event cannot be reduced to the authors in the 1960s, but rather should be located in the composition of the texts (“4.19 ui ‘mirae’ wa tto dareun hyeondaeseong” [The Future of 4.19 and Another Modernity], *Munhak gwa sahoe* (Winter 2009): 333). Although Badiou’s theorization of the irreducible singularities of historical events is full of suggestions for the study of the subject formation of 1960s’ literature in South Korea, the intellectual subject emerging in the April Revolution in 1960’s South Korea, I maintain, should be carefully distinguished from Badiou’s political subject conceived in the context of May 1968 in France; because, as Badiou clarifies, what he calls the “subject” “does not overlap with the psychological subject, nor even with the reflexive subject (in Descartes’s sense) or the transcendental subject (in Kant’s sense),” whereas the 4.19 generation precisely sought to construct a reflexive, transcendental modern subject in the cultural field. See *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2001), 43.

their intellectual and moral leadership. Thanks mainly to their discursive hegemony, the event of April of 1960 has been successfully commemorated as an immanent break from the state-version of Korean history. It is in this context that *The Square* has obtained its canonical status.

While the young intellectuals of the 1960s, mostly represented by male college students, enjoyed a brief moment of euphoria, they also had to figure out why their revolution went against their expectations. In this light, Choi In-hoon's later works in the 1960s can be read as a series of introspective reports on their aborted revolution, and among them, *A Grey Man* deserves more attention for its relation to *The Square*. As Kwon Bodurae notes, while *The Square* is a literary expression of the 4.19 spirit, *A Grey Man* is a literary diagnosis of 4.19 in retrospect.⁶⁰ Whereas the inexorable ideological critique in *The Square* was made possible by the momentary freedom brought by the 4.19 Movement, the skeptical vision of *A Grey Man* is bound up with the defeat of the April Revolution. The theme of "ideology" and "love" in *The Square* is thus converted into "revolution" and "love and time," as Seo Eun-ju succinctly summarizes.⁶¹

Ironically, it is precisely the failure of the revolution in reality that led Choi In-hoon to rethink the universal origin of the modern self. In other words, as the belief in the progress of history based on critical reason was frustrated, he came to contemplate the historical conditions that changed the direction of Korea's modernization away from the European model. As a result, Choi had Tokko Jun, the protagonist of *A Grey Man*,⁶² take another long journey backwards

⁶⁰ "Choi In-hoon ui <Hoesaegin> yeongu" [A Study on Choi In-hoon's *A Grey Man*], *Minjok munhaksa yeongu* 10 (1997): 226.

⁶¹ "Choi In-hoon soseol yeongu: Insik taedo wa seosul bangsik ui sanggwanseong eul jungsim euro" [A Study on Choi In-hoon's Novels: The Relationship between the Attitude of Recognition and the Narrative Method] (PhD diss., Yonsei University, 2000), 44.

⁶² I use the latest edition of *Hoesaegin* (Seoul: Moonji, 2008).

through time—to discover what hindered the “normal” development of the nation-state, which is fundamental to individual *Bildung* in European culture. Lee Myong-jun’s spatial migration to search for a true square in *Gwangjang* is inherited by Tokko Jun’s time travel in *Hoesaegin*, in which the protagonist struggles to work through his memory of childhood in North Korea, on the one hand, and to settle his life as a refugee in South Korea, on the other.⁶³

3. *A Grey Man*: A Refugee Intellectual’s Tragic *Bildungsroman*

Compared with Lee Myong-jun in *The Square*, who has a discordance between his superfluous consciousness and his political extremism, Tokko Jun in *A Grey Man* seems more cautious and skeptical of the chance to flee from the binarized structure of reality. Unlike *The Square*, Choi In-hoon’s radical vision of revolution unfolds, in fact, through supporting characters in *A Grey Man*. Kim Hak, a college student of political science, is the character who inherits Myong-jun’s aspirations toward the square, in contradistinction to his best friend, Tokko Jun, who prefers to stay in his room by himself. As a Korean literature major and a would-be novelist, Jun turns to “love and time,” disagreeing with Hak’s thesis of “revolution.” “In the circumstances of South Korea, there is no possibility of revolution,” says Jun bitterly, for instance, when in the beginning of the novel Hak proposes that Jun join his circle, “Imprisoned generation.” Hak counterargues, “In no era in history was revolution possible. And that is why

⁶³ On retrospection of his literary career, Choi compares *The Square* and *A Grey Man* as follows: “*The Square* was an ‘exemplar of the rite of passage in the 1960s that I privately made’ in happy empathy with both the meanings of the society I lived in and the meanings of the individual within it, without self-alienation. When I was writing this text, I remember, I had a vision that my literary life from then on would go along in the milieu that guarantees open intellectual discussion. *A Grey Man* was a record of seeking for another rite of passage since such a vision unfolded in a different way, so I had to explain again to myself where I was and what kind of society I lived in. In the critical adjective ‘grey,’ I conveyed the feeling of dilemma of not saying what is uncertain even to myself, while feeling that I should still strive to analyze the situation.” See “Wonsiin i doigi wihan munmyeonghan uisik,” 22-23.

revolutions occurred” (*Hoesaegin* 20-21), but both seem to acknowledge that they still lived in a “grey” era even after their “attack on the Bastille” in April of 1960. Within this historical context after the breakdown of the first democratic movement in South Korea, they continued to wrestle with the predicament of their predecessor in Choi’s earlier work: that is, how to retain the revolutionary moment in both individual life and political history, and how to connect the two.

Is There Any Possibility of Modern Revolution in South Korea?

The distinct personalities of the two main characters in *A Grey Man* are in fact closely related to their social positions in South Korea. Whereas Tokko Jun is a North Korean refugee without any family members in the South, Kim Hak is proud of his family history rooted in Gyeongju, the old capital of the Silla Kingdom, although his family’s fortune has gone on the wane. In contrast to Tokko Jun, the Kim brothers remain steadfast in the ideal of Korea’s traditional community, as visualized in the image of Bulguksa (佛國寺: The Temple of the Buddha Land) in their hometown, the cultural icon of the Unified Silla. Although Officer Kim, Hak’s old brother, admits the pitfall of nationalism, he still longs for the nation as the object of love:

Since we were under the bondage of others in the period [of enlightenment], we lost the chance to cultivate nationalism. In our age, nationalism has simply negative nuances in terms of resentment against Japan, without any positive aspect. It is because there was no nation-state. We had the other to rebel against but no other to love. That was the difference between Western nationalism and ours. (*Hoesaegin* 159)

Kim’s community of love here can be juxtaposed with the “republic of love” that Lee Myong-jun dreamed of in the middle of the battlefield. Choi In-hoon’s imagination of an ideal state for the nation in *A Grey Man*, however, develops further the abstract idealization of the “primeval

square” in the previous work. To find a way that would lead to a lovable community, or, more precisely, to identify the obstacle that has prevented Korea from undertaking a modern revolution, the writer returns to the colonial period, the primary cause of the nation’s deformed modernization.

In his long speech on modern Korean history in comparison with the European Enlightenment, Mr. Hwang, Kim’s mentor, deplores Korea’s lack of an ideological tradition by which the individual could learn and embody the universal spirit of modernity in a particular—national—form. Whereas the West nationalized, but preserved the Christian concept of God in their fight for democracy, through the modernization process imposed from without Koreans have lost their indigenous form of spiritual life. What Hwang calls tradition, however, is not limited to something old, but “a structure of spirit passed down from the past that lives on in the present.” Thus he stresses the act of remembering in order to reconstruct the broken-down mental structure of Korea. Only by restoring “our own schema,” argues Hwang, can we exterminate the historical problems foisted upon Korea by the West (*Hoeseagin* 221-22). The method he finally finds to frame Korea’s own problems is the Buddhist tradition, which has “two thousand years of roots in Korea.”

At first sight, Hwang’s postcolonial project to stand with Korean Buddhism against Western Christianity appears vulnerable to criticism, in that it is still confined within the hierarchical opposition between the West and the East. Choi In-hoon’s historical epistemology, however, requires more investigation than the simple accusation of (reverse) Orientalism, because the main purpose of his comparison between Korean politics and Western democracy does not lie so much in slavishly imitating the European way, or conversely, glamorizing “Asian values” to survive the “clash of civilizations.” Rather, Choi takes more care to expose the hidden

side of European modernity, i.e., colonial domination in the name of enlightenment, as Tokko Jun cynically states in the beginning of the novel.⁶⁴ The real crux of Hwang's alternative is not that he under-(or, over-)estimates the heterogeneous conditions of Korean history, but rather that he has difficulty finding the proper agent to resolve the social contradiction he sees through in South Korea. For people have not been given sufficient time to love even their egos, not to mention others; society faces the absence of a new vanguard that can lead an internal revolution in postwar South Korea. The breakdown of the 4.19 Movement provided the momentum for its young leaders to look back over their "unfinished revolution," and to question why it did not succeed. Choi's own answer, coming from his now seasoned character, is the underdevelopment of new powers that "can take over politics after removing those formerly in power." If "a revolution is a trio, an ensemble of three elements: ideology, leaders, and the people," as Hwang affirms, there is no chance of democracy in contemporary Korea because "the ruling class is rotten," and "the people lack both the knowledge and the power" (*Hoesaegin* 208-10). But this is also the very reason why he calls the youth "the seedlings" of new lumber to replace the "rotten timbers" of the nation:

Though you've had no chance to choose democracy through revolution...you at least have been taught as you grew up, learning that democracy is something natural, like air, and this will go on in the future. This is what matters. When your generation leads the country...it will be the time when Korea makes a great leap. Until then, time is needed. Right now you lack the ability to bring about a revolution, don't you? That's why it can't happen now. You must wait until the time is ripe. (*Heosaegin* 210-11)

It is noteworthy that the young generation Hwang dubs as the hope for Korea is distinct not only from the compromised, if not corrupt, old generation, but also from the populace that has never grasped the meaning of democracy. The new subject that Choi In-hoon wishes to interpellate in

⁶⁴ "Where on God's earth could we possibly seize a colony to use as fertilizer for the growth of democracy? Democracy without a colony imposes a huge risk" (*Hoesagin* 11).

the name of the 4.19 generation, in the final analysis, is the awakened young leaders, mostly portrayed as male college students in Choi's novels, like Kim Hak and Tokko Jun.

Despite Hwang's expectations, those "promising" intellectuals in *A Grey Man* simply lead the life of wanderers in the "prison" of the era. Thrown into a grey area between the disabled traditional values and the disparate foreign modern ideas, they could neither adjust themselves to, nor revolt against, the deformed capitalist society in the South. After May of 1961, it was also no longer possible to mention the North, a totalitarian society, in the name of socialism, not even as a referent for critique, as Myong-jun could do in *The Square*. Discussions about reunification, which, after the 4.19 Movement, reemerged as the key issue for the social revolution of Korea, were suppressed again under the Park Chung Hee regime.⁶⁵ Thus, Tokko Jun's journey in search for the self in *A Grey Man* seems less dynamic yet more introspective than Myong-jun's adventure in *The Square*, although there is a strong resemblance between them. After all, both are orphaned youths seeking the ideal of the good father, while living off a bourgeois patron, whom they look down on at heart.

⁶⁵ After Rhee Syngman's dictatorship was put to an end, the 4.19 Movement developed into a movement for national reunification, as the division system was recognized as the material and ideological foundation of the conservative forces in South Korea. The national reunification movement, sparked by the April Revolution, however, was completely repressed by the military government, "which had declared 'anti-Communism to be its basic state policy.'" After issuing a decree that "'persons organizing anti-state associations, joining such associations, or urging others to join such associations shall be severely punished'...the military government dissolved all political parties and social organizations on 22 May [in 1961], announced its law to establish a Central Intelligence Agency on 10 June, and a new anti-Communist law on 4 September. It also arrested the students and progressive forces such as the 'Central Association' who had led the reunification movement after 19 April and turned them over to military courts, thereby totally suppressing talk of reunification." See Kang Man-gil, *History of Contemporary Korea*, trans. John Duncun (Folkstone: Global Oriental, 2005), 244.

Loss of North Korean Origin: Exile to the World of the Book

Just as the protagonist in *The Square* is shocked to see the ordinariness of his “revolutionary” father in the North, Tokko Jun is disappointed in his father in the South. Although his father had to flee first because he was branded as reactionary bourgeoisie by his “comrades,” and thus left the other members of his family in the North, he was remembered there only as “a dignified yet quiet man with a good appearance.” The father with whom Jun is reunited in the South, however, looks no better than a weak and lonely loser, falling behind in the rapidly changing society. In their refugee life, they share nothing but “the shame of guilt” about running away, abandoning other family members to the peril of death (*Hoesaegin* 76-77). Nonetheless, after the powerless father dies in the spring of Jun’s sophomore year, Jun feels “an icy despair” at becoming an adult. Now that he has become “a young refugee with nobody to depend upon, forced to stand on his own feet and raise himself from the bottom of life,” he “needs warm light and a windshield until his independent ego puts down new roots” (*Heosaegin* 79). In order to nourish his isolated ego, he reads whatever comes to him, while taking refuge in nostalgia for his hometown whenever he needs to protect his soul in exile.

Jun’s nostalgia for his lost origin in North Korea and his withdrawal into the world of books are intertwined with each other. Unlike the present in which he suffers from forced isolation and unavoidable separation from his ego, he can maintain his superior identity in his exile in the fictional world he has enjoyed since his childhood in the North. The image of his hometown can be crystallized “in a gilt-framed” picture precisely because at that time he was able to keep alive his imagined longing for “a free nation, a democratic state...[of] utopia.” He

could even dream of a happy family reunion when his family in the North had secretly listened to South Korean radio: “That was father’s voice, the voice of one’s beloved” (*Heosaegin* 26-27).

As Jun recollects, “the voice coming from where his father lives made us a family of spiritual exiles,” and Jun, more than anyone else, tasted the melancholic ennui and the angst of exile at an early age (*Heosaegin* 28). After undergoing a series of “self-criticisms” in front of his entire class for his reactionary view of history, he became more and more introverted, shutting himself up among books. The world of stories looked more real to him, while the real world more bizarre. When the war broke out, the little protagonist even wished that the permanent vacation would last for a long time so that he would never have to return to school. Just as he learned from books, he wished to become like the righteous and courageous boys in Hector Malot’s *Sans Famille* and Nikolai Ostrovski’s *How the Steel Was Tempered*. It is noteworthy that his “imaginary identification” with Western heroes depends on (wishful) resemblance between the self and the ideal other. As Slavoj Žižek points out, this constitutive alienation of the ego in the imaginary world is supported by the illusion of the self as an autonomous subject, while veiling its fundamental reliance on the Symbolic.⁶⁶ Ironically enough, his “failure” to enter the absurd symbolic order renders him in the position of a powerful subject. As a voluntary exile, he chooses to refuse the real world that goes beyond all reason, to become the master of the fictional kingdom.

In the ideal world of literature, Jun discovers “the self, which is prior to membership in the nation, the state, and the family,” and becomes enraptured by the desire to cultivate the self

⁶⁶ According to Žižek, “symbolic identification” means “identification with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love,” in contrast to imaginary identification “with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing ‘what we would like to be’” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 104-105). For a more detailed Žižekian analysis of the protagonist in *A Grey Man*, see Koo Jae-jin’s “Choi In-hoon ui <Hoesaegin> yeongu” [A Study of Choi In-hoon’s *Hoesaegin*], *Hanguk munhwa* 27 (2001): 85-107.

by reading more books. Nevertheless, this “make-up for his soul” is not an entirely narcissistic act since “he read so frenetically...due to loneliness,” as he confesses (*Heosaegin* 41). Although he keeps critical distance from false reality, thinking of himself as an eternal refugee in a divided Korea, he still needs to be recognized by his neighbors, other egos as lonely as himself. In this sense, Choi In-hoon’s “narcissistic” character holds open the possibility of solidarity among individuals, but only insofar as they can feel the universal loneliness of the solitary subject. The modern self that is sought in Choi’s literature, then, is more than a self-exiled individual disillusioned with depraved society; as an enlightened monad, to use Lukács’s term, he struggles to extend his sense of “transcendental homelessness” as the basis for solidarity: “His eyes wander to his neighbor. He sees another man as lonely as himself...Tokko Jun’s ego extends the hand of solidarity to his neighbor” (*Heosaegin* 80-81). Jun’s desire to build a new structure, in other words, grows out of his longing for belonging. In spite of his declaration, “I have no family, therefore I am free,” the free monad still needs to get a fix on the coordinates of his ego in a total system (139).

The loophole in Tokko Jun’s “modern manifesto” is that while modern Koreans have lost their traditional identification system, including a lineage based on kinship, they have not established a new order in which they can configure their own positions. As a result, the word family still exercises a certain influence in the conventional way, while the term state remains awkward because it does not accord with the ideal of self-fulfillment in the current situation. As an alternative, or as an intermediate unit between the family and the state, Jun considers the concept of the nation, yet he concludes that Korean nationalism went to waste in the battle between Democracy and Communism before setting up a reasonable system that could gain the

sympathy of the people. Unlike the West, moreover, the youth in the East did not have their own myth to destroy, since it had been already ruined by colonial rule (*Heosaegin* 18).

It is in this context that Tokko Jun's obsession with ideological schema, or his "exile into the world of books," should be understood. In order to perform the double task his generation faces, that is, to restore their spiritual root only to transform it into a particular vessel to hold universal modernity, he has to create the outside world anew on the model of ideals.⁶⁷ If subjectivity is "none other than an idea forged into a sense of reality through that very subjectivity," as Choi In-hoon puts it in one of his essays,⁶⁸ his characters become a "person of the idea, a person possessed by...an idea-force," to borrow Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation in his reading of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel.⁶⁹ Like the uprooted intelligentsia in Dostoevsky's novel, Choi's characters wander in the world of ideas to trace their lost origin, instead of finding a way to settle in a reality that disapproves of their ideals. Put otherwise, they choose to defend their subjectivity by exercising their discursive power in the literary realm, waiting for the right time for an internal revolution of the nation. And this is why Choi In-hoon and his protagonists continue their textual practice; in the world of literature, they struggle for the synthesis of the

⁶⁷ From this perspective, Tokko Jun might seem to be the contemplative protagonist of the nineteenth-century romantic novel of disillusionment, as observed by Lukács. It should not be overlooked, however, that Lukács's framework, which relies on linear historiography to explicate the development of the novel in the West, cannot adequately account for the simultaneous appearance of non-simultaneous genres in modern Korean literature, e.g., the coexistence of the features of Abstract Idealism, Romanticism of Disillusionment, and *Bildungsroman* in Choi In-hoon's novels. As Choi states in his interview with Han Gi, his original intention was to synthesize a wide range of genres, such as the ideological novel and *Bildungsroman*, in a single work ("Han mangmyeong yesulga ui hwadu, 20 segi illyusa ui hwadu: Choi In-hoon ui <Hwadu>") [The Topics of an Artist in Exile, The Topics of 20th-century History: Choi In-hoon's *Topics*], in *Hamnijuui ui munteok eseo* [At the Threshold of Raionalism] (Seoul: Kang, 1997), 290). Although this remark was made about *Hwadu*, it could be applied to Choi's literature in general since, according to Choi, the development of Korean society itself has been discontinuous.

⁶⁸ "Sinmunhak ui gijo" [The Basis of New Literature], in *Munhak gwa ideollogi* [Literature and Ideology] (Seoul: Moonji, 2009), 183.

⁶⁹ *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 22. This comparison between Choi In-hoon and Dostoevsky was originally suggested by Lee In-sook in her PhD dissertation, "Choi In-hoon soseol ui damron teukseong yeongu" [A Study on the Discursive Characteristics of Choi In-hoon's Novels] (Korea University, 1998), 43-44.

“language of manners” they have learned in books and the “language on-the-spot” they use in their everyday life, in the belief that there should be “an intersection of the Western form of thoughts and the Eastern form of thoughts.”⁷⁰

The Social Position of a Refugee Intellectual

Similar to Lee Myong-jun’s orphan consciousness, Tokko Jun’s refugee sensibility inscribes a double vision in the cultural space of South Korea. On the one hand, it provides the young intellectual with critical distance from which he can observe contradictions immanent in the existing social structure. On the other hand, the critical edge serves as a screen behind which the constituted subject can evade confronting his “hopeless” surroundings. This double consciousness of a postcolonial intellectual in South Korea dwells on the ambivalent sentiment of nostalgia for his hometown in the North. In Tokko Jun’s recollection, its utopian image emerges as what Herbert Marcuse might call a prehistoric paradise that “preserve[s] promises and potentialities which are betrayed and even outlawed” by the reality principle, “but which had once been fulfilled in his dim past and which are never entirely forgotten.”⁷¹ One may not miss that the exiled writer utilizes nostalgia as a critical strategy with which he deconstructs his own recollections of the past as well: “Going back home. A basic gestalt of life...But would I be indeed happy if only I could go there? (...) Home was already dead in his soul” (*Heosaegin* 278-79). Choi In-hoon’s nostalgia for the lost home in the North, then, is not so much restorative as

⁷⁰ Interview with Lee O Young, “Soseol eun hyeonjanggeomjeungida” [The Novel Is an On-site Inspection], *Sedae* (September 1965): 188.

⁷¹ *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 18-19.

reflective.⁷² Unlike many “imagined communities” proposed in recent national and religious representations, Jun’s remembrance of his hometown is intended neither to restore an ideal past in the present, nor to return to the original place—neither option is available, anyway—but to reveal the inexplicable cause of the loss. Jun’s nostalgic representation of his childhood does not remain within a private realm, but rather extends to historical reflection on the deformed modernization of Korea, that is, the imposition of foreign ideologies without the resolution of social contradictions accumulated since the colonial period.

However, Tokko Jun’s refugee consciousness in combination with nostalgic sentiment does not go beyond the prescriptive form of politics imported from the West in the end. Although he attempts to transcend both the constraints of colonial remains and Cold War imperialism through the dialectics of the European idea of the self and the Asian concept of karma, he casts no doubt on the universality of modernity deriving from the West, not to mention that his dialectics is constricted by the binaries of tradition and modernity, Asia and Europe, and the North and the South. The self-subalternization of the refugee intellectual, furthermore, may become dangerous, if its discursive power serves as his hegemony, while masking his own political interest, as Rey Chow warns us.⁷³ While Choi In-hoon engages in a power struggle against the state’s official history of the division by writing the individual memory of the war, he hardly looks at the fragmentary nature of his own recollections, or his subject position that also marginalizes the experiences of others. After all, the deconstructive power of Tokko Jun’s

⁷² According to Svetlana Boym, there are two kinds of nostalgia: the restorative and reflective. Whereas restorative nostalgia underlines *nostos* (return home) and endeavors to reconstruct the lost home in a transhistorical image, reflective nostalgia, involved with *algia* (longing) itself, dwells on the ambivalences of human (be)longing, deferring the homecoming. Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as the absolute truth and eternal tradition, while reflective nostalgia raises doubts about itself. See *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xviii.

⁷³ *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 13.

nostalgia is mobilized only to defend the grey zone where his ego remains in the rhetoric of “love and time.”

Ideal Love or Traumatic Memory?

The idea of love in *A Grey Man* is self-referential, unless it is another abstract ideology. Not unlike Lee Myong-jun in *The Square*, Tokko Jun oscillates between two women: Kim Sun-im and Lee Yu-jeong. While Sun-im, reminiscent of Yun-ae in *The Square*, carries a large superego as a female evangelist, Yu-jeong has the free spirit of a liberal artist, close to Un-hye. In contrast with *The Square*, however, there is no real romantic event among characters in *A Grey Man* because Tokko Jun is instead captured by his trauma with an unknown woman in the North, who led him not only to a shelter to escape an air raid, but in the midst of the bombing also to his first sexual experience: “Since then, he had been in the habit of comparing every woman he saw with the woman on that summer day. For him, she was an archetype” (*Heosaegin* 196).

This primal scene of the mysterious goddess that recurs in Tokko Jun’s flashbacks⁷⁴ demands careful scrutiny since it crystallizes the moment when he experiences the split of his ego and the symbiosis with the Other *at the same time*. It is not until this summer day that he encounters both the violence of the war, which used to be heard only as a rumor or a fairy tale, and the ecstasy of sexual contact, which he had *learned* through books like Emil Zola’s *Nana*. The compulsive repetition of his first encounter with the real world is more traumatic due not

⁷⁴ This “air-raid shelter” episode constitutes a crucial motif in Choi In-hoon’s remembrance of the Korean War throughout his work. The cave scene in *The Square*, for instance, is another variation of this primal scene in which the male protagonist affirms his existence through the sexual other against the backdrop of the violent war.

merely to its sexual characteristics, but to its contradictory nature: in an extremely dangerous situation, somewhere between life and death, he explores both realms of Eros and Thanatos simultaneously. The more the fear of death sweeps over the boy, the more the pleasure of life pressures his body: “No doubt it was fear. But... it was not fear of tearing metal but fear of soft flesh.” Tokko Jun’s “traumatic awakening”⁷⁵ to life and death is therefore accompanied by a sense of guilt that he had his eyes opened to sexuality during the imposition of death. He was able to survive thanks precisely to the Other’s sacrifice: “The woman who held him tight could have been dead. I might have survived thanks to her” (*Heosaegin* 67).

Jun’s recollection of “that summer day” has been analyzed through the grid of trauma theory; Koo Jae-jin, for instance, interprets Choi In-hoon’s repetitive return to this primal scene as a symptom of trauma, which can be encapsulated into its “belatedness” and “incomprehensibility.”⁷⁶ To elaborate on this, I would like to pay particular attention to the way in which the epistemological impasse replaces the ethical question in (post)traumatic writing. If, as Cathy Caruth claims, the belatedness and incomprehensibility of the traumatic memory is involved with “not so much an epistemological, but rather what can be defined as an *ethical* relation to the real,”⁷⁷ Choi’s protagonist fails to work through trauma precisely because he engages in his flashback only to the extent that it constitutes his desire, or sustains his sexual fantasy: “Jun’s first experience suited his temperament...[It] satisfied his vanity” (*Heosaegin*

⁷⁵ In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth argues, “[T]rauma consists not only in having confronted death but in *having survived, precisely, without knowing it*. What one returns to in the flashback is not the incomprehensibility of one’s near death, but the very incomprehensibility of one’s own survival. Repetition, in other words, is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt to claim one’s own survival. If history is to be understood as the history of a trauma, it is a history that is experienced as the endless attempt to assume one’s survival as one’s own.” But precisely because one cannot claim one’s own survival as one’s own, the issue of trauma “engages a larger question of responsibility.” See *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 64, 101.

⁷⁶ “Choi In-hoon ui <Hoesaegin> yeongu,” 97-98.

⁷⁷ *Unclaimed Experience*, 92.

196-97). Jun suffers from the wound inflicted upon his ego, its split between its private desire as a sexual being and its societal guilt as a political being, but he eventually makes it up to himself, rather than seeing something that can create a communion of suffering. Consequentially, there is no room for the unrecovered—or real—victims of trauma who could not reconstitute their subjectivity in Choi’s imagination of “ideal love.”

What complicates the air-raid shelter scene further is that it also works as a retrospectively shaped “screen memory,” in Freudian terms,⁷⁸ to displace the previous trauma of self-criticism, another leitmotif throughout Choi In-hoon’s works.⁷⁹ When Tokko Jun was summoned to the school in North Korea, before coming to the South, he had decided to respond to the call for reconstruction and medical duties in the bombarded area because he wanted to regain his pride, which had been injured by his earlier self-denunciation. Thus, against the wishes of his family, he leaves on the trip to pursue his desire for social recognition, or, more specifically, to please the Boys Corps supervisor—the symbol of authority. At first, young Jun had had a peculiar feeling for the new handsome supervisor, who was also the teacher of his favorite subject, Korean literature; yet the instructor only found “symptoms of a reactionary bourgeois family” in Jun’s compositions. In order to disprove this judgment, Jun had to go to school. As he arrives at the empty ruins of the school, he is not given a chance to demonstrate his

⁷⁸ For more detailed discussions of Tokko Jun’s remembrance of the primal experience as a type of “screen memory,” see Choi Ae Soon’s PhD dissertation (119), and Seol Hye Kyung’s article, “Choi In-hoon soseol eseoui gieok ui munje: <Seoyugi> wa <Heosaegin>” [A Study on the Problem of Memory in Choi In-hoon’s Novels, *Seoyugi* and *Heosagin*], *Hanguk eoneo munhwa* 32 (December 2008): 139-162, particularly 153.

⁷⁹ Lee Myong-jun in *The Square* is also criticized by the Communist Party for the outmoded petit-bourgeois sentiment found in his report, which is supposed to grasp the heroic struggle of his brothers, located in the Korean Kolkhoz in Northeast China, to increase production (*The Square* 96-98). His autobiographical novel, *Hwadu*, also highlights his experience of self-criticism in North Korea as an indelible trace in his childhood, as he narrates that after “his ‘ego’ was negated by an instructor,” he has since felt throughout his entire life as if he were standing at an infinitely pending trial (*Hwadu* 2:84).

loyalty, so he begins to mock the supervisor's hypocrisy through mimicry of the supervisor's teaching.

The "betrayal" of the party member contributes to the young boy's disbelief in, or total denial of, the existing system of ideology. Instead of gaining the social recognition of adults by entering the deceptive symbolic realm, Jun came to have a desire to construct a new structure in which his ego would never get hurt. However, Tokko Jun's (and Choi In-hoon's) continuous reenactment of the traumatic experience during the war implies that the wrong beginning to his development has never been rectified. In other words, the repetition of the traumatic memory implicates its enduring impact on subject formation, and, at the same time, the subject's desire to master the traumatic memory.

Love and Time

Tokko Jun's refugee sensibility loses its critical edge as he becomes incorporated into South Korean society by moving into the house of Hyon Ho-seong, the ex-husband of Jun's sister in the North. Although Jun rationalizes his threat of exposing Hyon's labor party membership card as being in service of Dostoyevskian justice, his "settlement" with Hyon, the incarnation of the corrupt capitalist system of the South, compromises Jun's position as an intellectual in exile. Jun gains a "pseudo-family" in the South at the expense of his ideal ego. Since he accepts the existing symbolic order, he can no longer pursue his desire for "the ecstatic confluence of the ego and the universal." Not surprisingly, his original plan to become a novelist while living off his despicable patron begins to fall apart. Even the thought of Kim Sun-im, who

used to be the alternate for the mysterious woman in his memory of the North, only gives him nausea, especially after Sun-im discourages his sexual desire.

Although Tokko Jun's fantasy about the archetypal woman in his nostalgic memories of the idyllic past finally disintegrates, this does not necessarily indicate that he has learned to traverse the social fantasy of love he once had. On the contrary, the breakdown of his imaginary realm only escalates his disillusionment with the reality that swallows up his "innocent" ego. His disgust at the pure image of Sun-im, in truth, is a mere projection of self-loathing, yet he only supplants his old fantasy with a new one about another woman, Lee Yu-jeong. Jun's "realistic" choice of "love and time" remains problematic because his masculinist gaze looks away from the needs of the women about whom he fantasizes. In his tragic monologue, the female Other appears only to prove his intellectual supremacy, while his self-reflection never crosses the boundary of the self. Consequently, the intellectual subjectivity shaped in *A Grey Man* is, in the final analysis, confined within a self-made prison-house in which he can fulfill the impossible goal of becoming God, but with no companion: "To become God myself. That's the only way. (...) Do it...in one's own name...the name of Tokko Jun" (*Hoesaegin* 382).

Tokko Jun's only act after this self-proclamation, however, is to enter the door of Lee Yu-jeong's room. In the room of the Other, then, could he get out of the closed circuit of the self? In the sequel, *Seoyugi*, Tokko Jun continues the exploration of modern subjectivity in Korean history: in this journey to his unconscious, the male protagonist continuously runs into notable figures in Korea's national history, such as General Lee Sunsin and author Yi Kwangsu.⁸⁰ Through the voices of those characters, Choi In-hoon attempts to shed new light on

⁸⁰ *Gunmong* (*The Nine Cloud Dream*, 1962) is another novel in which the male protagonist goes on a fantastic journey that begins as a private matter—chasing after his first love in the North—but ends with the historical question of Korea's division. It is interesting to see the way in which Choi In-hoon's personal trauma serves to trigger the collective memory of the Korean War. His never-ending attempt to work through the

the “devastated and chaotic nature...[of the] Korean fossil” by using a distinctive methodology, which he terms the “archaeology of consciousness.” Choi’s reworking of national history from an individual perspective becomes broader in *Taepung* (*The Tempest*, 1973),⁸¹ where he writes back to the history of empire by imagining an alternative history in East Asia. In my analysis of Choi’s last novel before his hiatus until *Hwadu* (1994), therefore, I will illustrate how the “failed” *Bildungsroman* of the youth in 1960s’ South Korea is transformed into a *multinational* family romance set in (post)colonial South East Asia. In so doing, I will focus on the intertwinement of Choi’s desire for a historical intervention into Korean modernity with the (trans)national imagination of Third Worldism, beyond the bipolar confrontation that exists under the Cold War imperative.

unspeakable trauma, captured only in repetitive flashbacks, will lead to a more fruitful discussion when we attend to its “historicity and temporality,” particularly its “various modes of repetition with change,” as Dominick LaCapra proposes:

Processes may be complex and involve various modalities of repetition. Acting out is compulsively repetitive. Working through involves repetition with significant difference—difference that may be desirable when compared with compulsive repetition. In any event, working through is not a linear, teleological, or straightforward developmental (or stereotypically dialectical) process either for the individual or for the collectivity. It requires going back to problems, working them over, and perhaps transforming the understanding of them. Even when they are worked through, this does not mean that they may not recur and require renewed and perhaps changed ways of working through them again. In this sense, working through is itself a process that may never entirely transcend acting out and that, even in the best of circumstances, is never achieved at once and for all. (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 148-49)

From this perspective, I suggest reading Choi In-hoon’s writing as an on-going *process* that engages the complex problem of modern Korean history, in which he seeks to trace or secure the position of the individual through his struggle for memory.

⁸¹ I use the Korean text *Taepung* (Seoul: Moonji, 2009).

4. *The Tempest*: The Third World's Mimicry of the Empire's Family Romance

Whereas Choi In-hoon's earlier works in the 1960s foreground the interior landscape of the postwar intellectual imprisoned in South Korea, his novels since the late 1960s have been more concerned with a range of (post)colonial questions, including the issue of the "division system" on the Korean peninsula, as in, for example, *Seoyugi (Journey to the West)*, 1966) and the *Chongdok ui sori* series (*The Voice of Governor General*, 1968~1976). Choi's literary experiment for transcending national borders culminates in *The Tempest*, an alternative-history novel in which his oceanic view of the inter/national conflict on the Korean peninsula is further extended through the parody form of the European classic.

In contrast with the huge repercussions of *The Square*, there has not been much attention paid to *The Tempest*, which could be called the story of Lee Myong-jun's afterlife. If Choi In-hoon's literary exploration of the modern self in postwar Korea begins with Lee's dramatic journey on the Korean peninsula and ends with his jump into the South China Sea, then Lee's unfulfilled dream of being reborn as an anonymous yet autonomous individual in a third country continues in *The Tempest* through Otomenak's adventure in South East Asian archipelagoes. Similar to other protagonists in most of Choi's works, the main character is a young, handsome, intellectual man who loves the ideal world of letters and enjoys romantic relationships with beautiful women. The conventional roles of women as both the object of male sexual desire and as the life-giver/caretaker of men also remain unchanged in *The Tempest*. Overall, *The Square* and *The Tempest* share more in common than do other of Choi's works, in that they have more

explicit narrative arcs and plot structures, as has been observed by a few critics.⁸² The fundamental difference between them is that the latter presents a “happy ending” in which the male protagonist finally succeeds in establishing a modern—nuclear bourgeois—family. Does this, then, signal the end of the failed *Bildungsroman* in 1970s’ South Korea?

The Crisis of the Novel?

In truth, Choi In-hoon’s literary imagination has reached a deadlock after *The Tempest*. As he states in one of his essays, he came to see the “dangers of the novel,” such as “the constant confusion between the consciousness of daily life and that of the imaginary world,” and “the subjective interpretations” resulting from the individual nature of reading and writing. “Converting” to playwriting, he confided that he had to rely on the norms of another genre that was “dominated by a clearer form and a more codified tradition.”⁸³ If, as Choi states, “to write a

⁸² Among the so-called five representative novels of Choi In-hoon, Jung Kwari argues that there is a “direct connection” between *The Square* and *The Tempest*, when compared to other works: *A Grey Man*, *Journey to the West*, and *A Day of the Novelist, Mr. Gubo*. See “Moreugi, moreuryeo hagi, moreunche hagi: <Gwangjang> eseo <Taepung> euro, hogeun jaboljeok muji ui saengjonsul” [Not to Know, Intend Not to Know, or Pretend Not to Know: From *The Square* to *The Tempest*, or The Survival Skill through Voluntary Ignorance], *Sihak gwa eoneohak* 1 (2001): 111-43.

⁸³ “Soseol gwa huigok” [The Novel and the Drama], in *Munhak gwa ideollogi*, 500-15. Although Choi In-hoon turned his literary energy to another genre, i.e., drama, in which he covered the more “instinctive roots” of the Korean people with themes of myths, folktales, and oral history, his playwriting should be thought of as a different approach to the same problematics. As he recalls in one of his interviews:

For me, the motivation to write novels was the question of what the origin of the Korean mentality was... a study of Korean intellectual history in the form of the novel... In the West... the authors had but to plant technical seeds such as story, romance, and conflicts on the fertile soil that had been already cultivated, and to await their development. However, how is it possible for an author [in Korea] to produce even the soil of the story? (...) By turning to the drama genre, I take up as my theme the legends, folktales, and myths, which had already been accumulated through the process of cultural evolution... [in writing drama] I can get for free the ground that the novel does not own. (...) Writing a novel was a kind of tragic work that hardly bore fruits... after sowing on a wasteland. By deciding [to move to] the genre of drama and [to use] Korea’s traditional stories as my subject matter, I could therefore overcome the difficulty or contradiction I used to have. (“Haneul ui tteut gwa ingan ui tteut” [The Will of Heaven and the Will of the Human], in *Munhak gwa ideollogi*, 475-76)

novel” was “to have a specific laboratory” in which he could figure out the way of the world while shaping his ego,⁸⁴ his inability to write a novel during the 1970s under the *yusin* (Revitalizing Reform) system⁸⁵ alludes to the fact that he has lost the “sense of direction” that used to support his fictional laboratory. Choi’s postcolonial and transnational imagination in *Taepung*, then, should be read in parallel with the social conditions under which a realistic

Choi In-hoon’s expedition to another genre is also related to the transfiguration of Choi’s notion of the individual. While his novels focus on the internal conflicts of the modern individual who experiences an identity crisis, his dramas highlight the relationship between characters thanks precisely to the convention of the genre, as he states in another interview with Kim Hyun, “Byeondonghaneun sidae ui yesulga ui tamgu” [A Study of an Artist in the Era of Change], reprinted in *Choi In-hoon*: “I have always thought that the genre of the novel is dangerous since it can be used as an individualistic instrument, but in the case of drama, the form itself... has a certain power to control my ideas that are otherwise likely to expand endlessly like monsters” (38). In other words, Choi’s internal journey towards the universality of the modern individual in the novel is transposed into a search for solidarity between alienated individuals in the ritual space of drama. Regarding the comparison of the meaning of the individual in Choi’s novels and dramas, see Sung Ji-Yeon’s dissertation, Chapter 4, in particular.

⁸⁴ “21 segi ui dokja ege” [To the Readers in the 21th-Century], in *Hwadu* 1, 9.

⁸⁵ Park Chung Hee’s developmental dictatorship reached its climax with the promulgation of *yusin* after he declared martial law and dissolved the National Assembly on October 17, 1972. Inspired by the Japanese Meiji Restoration, Park’s *yusin* system sought to achieve all-out socioeconomic reform, mobilizing the masses for the state’s heavy industrialization program. Under the banner of “*minjok jungheung* (national restoration)” — Park’s vision to “restore” the prestige and strength of the Korean nation through modernization — South Korea was restructured as a “quasi-wartime state,” as Kim Hyung-A describes. See *Korea’s Development under Park Chung Hee*, 139-40.

Although it is hard to deny that Park Chung Hee’s governing ideology was influenced by what he learned and experienced as an officer of the Imperial Japanese Army during the colonial period, his developmental dictatorship during his reign should be understood through the social conditions of postwar Korea, as many scholars have emphasized recently. Among them, Lee Byeong-cheon criticizes the “colonial origin of the developmental state” argument, saying that it fails to take into account other factors in South Korea’s socioeconomic development after its liberation from Japan, such as the Korean War, the April Revolution in conjunction with the nationalist movement in the Third World, and US hegemonic leadership over East Asia in the Cold War structure. Regarding the question of the way in which Park Chung Hee gained such strong power, Lee explains as follows: “what conditions were needed for the junta to earn legitimacy for its developmental dictatorship... it seems that the Korean people had suffered too much from the many decades of colonialism and the Korean War. In other words, for the great mass of the population, the matters of pressing concern were liberation from poverty and nationalist imperatives, for which Park’s ‘national modernization’ slogan struck a chord.” See “Gaebal dokjae ui jeongchi gyeongjehak gwa hanguk ui gyeongheom” [The Political Economy of Developmental Dictatorship and the Experience of South Korea], in *Gaebal dokjae wa Park Chung Hee sidae: Uri sidae ui jeongchi gyeongjejeok giwon* [Developmental Dictatorship and the Age of Park Chung Hee] (Paju: Changbi, 2003), 20-21.

In a similar vein, Lee Chong-suk also draws attention to the division structure as the foundational condition through which the Park Chung Hee administration was able to validate its authority and mobilize the population. The irony is that Park used “the notion of preparation for reunification to an excessive degree” in the formulation of *yusin*: “Although within the division structure of the Cold War era, [Park’s] discussions about both anticommunism and reunification appear mutually exclusive, they were, in fact, mutually reinforcing” (“Yusin cheje ui hyeongseong gwa bundan gujo” [The Formation of the *Yusin* System and the Division Structure], *Ibid*, 241, 218). Put otherwise, the *yusin* system was established by generating terror about invasion from the North, and simultaneously sustained by appropriating the collective desire for Korea’s national reunification.

critique, within a national paradigm, was no longer permitted. Taking into consideration this context of Choi's "return" to the colonial period in the form of alternative-history fiction, my close reading of *The Tempest* in the following sections attends to its vision for transnational and transracial solidarity in order to discuss the political implications of Choi's last novel under Park Chung Hee's *yusin* regime (1972~79).

The Oceanic Imagination of National History

In an essay, Choi In-hoon clarifies his intentions in writing *The Tempest*: "I wrote the novel to make the best use of the term fiction...this is a novel that could be the story of any nation, because it does not refer to any specific country; a novel that could be the story of any man, because it does not feature any historical figure."⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the alternative history conceived in *The Tempest* instantly brings to mind the actual history of Asia. The unfamiliar places depicted in it are easily converted to specific referents in reality: Aerok to Korea, Napaju to Japan, Anich to China, Aisenodin to Indonesia, Nibrita to Britain, and Akirema to America. Most readers, moreover, will be reminded of Sukarno (1901~1970)—Indonesia's national founder and one of the leaders of the Non-Aligned movement in the Third World during the Cold War era—by the story of Karnos, who is portrayed in the novel as an ideal mentor to the youth who are suffering under colonialism. The trickiest anagram is the protagonist's name, Otomenak, derived from Kanemoto [金本], a Japanese variation of the Korean family name "Kim", and used by a number of Koreans during Japanese occupation.⁸⁷ In this way, the fictional world of

⁸⁶ "Wonsiin i doigi wihan munmyeonghan uisik," 30.

⁸⁷ Song Hyo Jeong, "Choi In-hoon ui <Taepung> e natanan pasijeum ui nollli: Geundae chogeungnon gwa dongasiajeok gajokjuui reul jungsim euro" [The Logic of Fascism in Choi In-hoon's *The Tempest*: "Overcoming

The Tempest adeptly grapples with colonial history in a simplified manner, without losing its historical connections with the “here and now.”⁸⁸

Unlike the protagonists in most of Choi In-hoon’s other works, Otomenak has a definite career position, as an intelligence officer of the Imperial Napajunian Army.⁸⁹ While serving as a supervisor of a POW camp in Aisenodin, he is selected to undertake a special mission: to watch Karnos, who is under house arrest, and who has led Aisenodin’s independence movement against Nibrita before Napaju “liberated” the country from the Western imperialists. Otomenak is later asked to transfer Karnos under tightest secrecy, along with Nibritan female prisoners, to the eastern coast of the country. The special nature of this mission can be found in the fact that Otomenak is from Aerok, a colony of Napaju. Moved by the decision of the high command, he cannot help wondering, “How can I be charged with such an important mission.” At this moment, Otomenak betrays the unconscious of the colonized, who are split between what Homi Bhabha would call “colonial mimicry,” and the slippage, rupture, and difference that are continually produced by that very mimicking performance. In other words, the young, enlightened colonial

Modernity” and the Asianic Familism], *Bigyo hangukhak* 14, no. 1 (2006): 102.

⁸⁸ Undeniably, there are irreducible differences between Choi In-hoon’s depiction of Aisenodin and Indonesia’s real history. Indonesia was occupied by Dutch forces, not the British, and Sukarno’s real life was more complicated and turbulent than Karnos’s glorious biography in *Taepung*. In addition, against the author’s wish, Korea’s division system remains unchanged. Choi’s appropriation of the colonial history in East Asia, however, needs to be understood as a literary device by which he, with less difficulty, touches upon complex historical issues—such as Japan’s “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” and the discourse of “Overcoming Modernity” against the threat of Western imperialism—which may be better exemplified by Great Britain than the Netherlands, while seeking a new way in Third Worldism to overcome both the colonial legacy and the confrontational logic of the Cold War.

⁸⁹ The protagonist can also be read as an allegorical figure of the military dictator, Park Chung Hee, who was trained in the military schools of Manchuria during the colonial period and voluntarily Japanized his name to *Takaki Masao*. As one of the four top-honored students of the Military Academy, he was admitted to the Japanese Military Academy in Tokyo in October 1942, and became absorbed in the fascist coup of young Japanese military officers on 26 February, 1936. “The influence of the February 26 Uprising, especially on Park’s reformist thought,” argues Kim Hyung-A, “seems to have been far greater than some have asserted”: “According to Park’s close associates, his mission-focused approach to sociopolitical and economic reform in his latter years was largely the product of self-taught lessons he had drawn from this incident, even though he publicly referred to the Japanese Meiji Revolution as his model” (*Korea’s Development under Park Chung Hee*, 20).

subject could not entirely “dispel” the “anxiety at the back of his mind.” This is despite the fact that he has incessantly identified himself as Napajunian—as being even more authentic than the natives—not simply because he is the heir of an influential pro-Napajunian collaborator, but mainly because he has “inhaled the excellence of the Napajunian mind” through his extensive study of Napaju’s classical literature (*Teapung* 35, 14). It is notable here that Choi describes Otomenak’s acquisition of colonial power as a voluntary process of *Bildung*, through which the colonized seeks to constitute a modern subjectivity in negotiation with antagonistic historical conditions. The protagonist’s internalization of imperial discourse is thus not entirely attributed to the coercive imposition of colonial ideology, since it is actually grounded in the subject’s consent to ideological hegemony. Napaju’s idea of overcoming modernity and building an East Asian community against the white man’s invasion might have seemed more realistic—if not more fascinating than the goal of national liberation or autonomous modernization—to colonial intellectuals in the 1930s, during a time in which “they could not encounter any form of resistant movement other than rumors” (19).

Otomenak’s dual identity as a colonized subject vis-à-vis Napajunians, and as a colonizer vis-à-vis Aisenodinians, not only engages with Korea’s colonial past, during which a host of intellectuals advocated the imperial discourse of the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” and “Japan and Korea as one body.” The colonial intellectual’s intermediary position between empire and colonies, as well as between old and new empires, also indicates the present geopolitical and socioeconomic circumstances: namely, the neocolonial condition of the Cold War era, in which South Korea began to emerge as one of the junior partners in the US’s military and economic dominance over the Asian region. Admittedly, the “miraculous” modernization under Park Chung Hee’s developmental dictatorship was a product of the transnational

realignment of postcolonial Asia, most notably, through the Vietnam War. In this light, Choi In-hoon's *Taepung*, conceived after his visit to the Korean forces in Vietnam, can be read as an allegorical text that portrays the interior landscape of 1970s' dissident intellectuals; who, in spite of their critical stance toward deformed democracy under military dictatorship, hardly raised a voice against the transnational Anticommunism Crusade that was promoted by the state's nationalist narrative.

The (Post)Colonial Subject's "Emancipatory" Project of Pan-Asianism

By exploring the empire's intellectual legacy through its classic literature, and exercising its political power assigned to his military status, Otomenak constantly performs his subjectivity in order to appropriately respond to the interpellation of empire. Colonial subjects are not allowed to doubt the colonial regime of truth, since their subject position—however degraded it may be, it is presumed to be the only way to become a modern man—will be taken away once they distrust the colonial discourse. Therefore, it is imperative for Otomenak to believe in Napaju's pan-Asianism, which postulates, at least in theory, “what matters is not race, a biological factor, but spiritual faith” (*Taepung* 15). However, the more the protagonist desires to become a universal subject of the empire, the more he recognizes the irreconcilable gap between the colonizer and the colonized, precisely because his “colonial mimicry” that is “almost the same, but not quite” depends on an indeterminacy which continually produces its slippage.⁹⁰ Still, he never grasps that his disavowal of racial difference and his endeavor to replace his blood with imperial power are the discursive effects of colonial enunciation that employs a twofold

⁹⁰ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 122.

system of representation.⁹¹ It promises the vision of enlightenment only insofar as the colonial subject embraces the discriminatory structure under colonial rule as the primary condition of subjectification. Therefore, Otomenak cannot attain self-transcendent subjectivity, however hard he tries, since his value can be determined not by himself, but by the Other.⁹² Nevertheless, the colonized intellectual is unable, or unwilling, to see the hidden structure embedded in the “emancipatory” project of pan-Asianism, which just switches the position of master and slave in European colonialism. For instance, he never realizes the “inner contradiction” of his contempt for subservient Aisenodinians, who dare to consider collaborating with Nibritans, who are not only their former colonizer, but also the public enemy of all Asians (*Taepung* 35).⁹³

⁹¹ Otomenak’s dilemma demonstrates what Etienne Balibar calls the “inverted fashion” in which racism operates: “the racial-cultural identity of ‘true nationals’ remains invisible, but it can be inferred (and is ensured) *a contrario* by the alleged, quasi-hallucinatory visibility of the ‘false nationals’... In other words, it remains constantly in doubt and in danger; the fact that the ‘false’ is too visible will never guarantee that the ‘true’ is visible enough.” See “Racism and Nationalism,” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 60.

⁹² On the colonized’s subjectivity formed within the colonizer’s discourse, Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* provides an insightful interpretation: “When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place. If his psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The black man stops behaving as an *actional* person. The goal of his behavior will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth.” The colonial subject’s desire to be the Other, however, should be distinguished from the white bourgeois subject’s unconscious desire, because, according to Fanon, “the racial drama is played out in the open, [so] the black man has no time to ‘make it unconscious.’” See *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967), 154, 150.

Disagreeing with Fanon’s assertion that “The Negro’s inferiority or superiority complex or his feeling of equality is *conscious*,” however, Bhabha stresses the political unconscious of the white-masked black man: “from such ambivalent identification,” he argues, “it is possible... to redeem the pathos of cultural confusion into a strategy of political subversion. (...) In occupying two places at once—or three in Fanon’s case—the depersonalized, dislocated colonial subject can become an incalculable object, quite literally difficult to place” (*The Location of Culture*, 88-89).

Bhabha’s emphasis on the “*non-dialectical* moment of Manichaeism” in his remembering Fanon nevertheless remains somewhat obscure about how the unconscious of the oppressed is transformed into a positive means of struggle. Although he refers to another essay by Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” to offer a concrete example, his reading of the veiled Algerian woman, at best, reveals the complexity of the colonial question, failing to offer the historical context of the Algerian War of Independence or to address the issue of gender entwined with both colonial domination and anticolonial movement. From this perspective, Choi In-hoon’s *Taepung* offers an interesting case for postcolonial studies since Otomenak’s metamorphosis from a colonial to a postcolonial subject covers a wide range of issues from the colonial subject’s conscious effort to gain self-recognition by assimilation and its frustration to the postcolonial intellectual’s eternal dilemma in his pursuit of new identity that is neither imperialist, nor nationalist.

⁹³ Choi In-hoon’s postcolonial reflection here should not be simply regarded as a retrospective gesture to correct the wrongdoings of pro-Japanese intellectuals during the colonial period. His criticism also penetrates the

Postcolonial Awakening

Otomenak's unyielding faith in Napajunian imperialism starts to falter, not because he becomes aware of the contradiction in his pursuit of colonial desire, but because he learns that Napaju is about to lose the war. When Mayaka, a good friend of his father, tells him that an Aerokian needs not lay down his life for Napaju, Otomenak is terrified to acknowledge that his subjectivity constituted in the colonizer's ideology was actually grounded upon self-deception. Instead of confronting his false consciousness or traversing the fantasy of imperial discourse, he chooses to shift the blame to others. In order to protect his ego, his "ignorant" strategy⁹⁴ leads him to deny his own responsibility by passing it to the old generation in the colony. The colonial order he has lived in is shattered by one of its original builders, yet he is still reluctant to give up the shards of its broken ideology.

As he begins his duty to keep a close watch on the national leader of Aisenodin, Otomenak nevertheless feels uncomfortable with him since "it was the first time for Otomenak to see a person who did not fit within the dichotomous framework that was divided into friend or foe" (*Taepung* 62). According to the Manichean logic of empire, it is impossible to take a third

violent politics founded on the binary opposition that still subsisted even after South Korea's political independence and economic development. Just as Otomenak, the symbolic figure of the colonial intellectual, could hardly imagine a possible way to go beyond the Manichean world of empire, Choi's contemporaries of the *yusin* period confronted almost the same dilemma under the authoritarian regime: to comply with the state's exclusive nationalism or to become the enemy of the nation, namely, communists. In other words, there were only two options for liberal individuals such as Otomenak and Choi In-hoon: either to forget about the modern ideal of self-fulfillment in order to gain a deceptive form of social recognition approved by the dominant power, or to flee the oppressive nation-state, turning away from the social demand for revolution. In the end, the author decided to take a temporary leave from South Korea, accepting the offer of the International Writing Program hosted by the University of Iowa, while his protagonist in *The Tempest* determines to become a "superior" subject in the given reality.

⁹⁴ Jung Kwari calls Otomenak's (mis)recognition of colonial reality a survival strategy based on "voluntary ignorance" ("Moreugi, moreuryeo hagi, moreunche hagi," 140).

way beyond the binary between the colonizer and the colonized. After Mayaka's visit, however, Karnos appears "more distinguished than ever." In contrast to the hypocritical, irresponsible Aerokian collaborator, the captive looks to be an admirable, steadfast leader, even when he is taken prisoner (*Taepung* 90-91). Unlike Otomenak's shameful father, the hero of Aisenodin embodies an exemplary leader for all small countries: even under colonial rule, he never renounces his vision of independence or loses a sense of reality. As Kwon Bodurae aptly observes, in Karnos's persona, "a miracle takes place by integrating qualities that have never been combined in Choi In-hoon's novels."⁹⁵ In a word, Karnos personifies an ideal father figure for young intellectuals in weak countries as he makes his way through the colonial condition with "love and time," transcending the hierarchy of the existing world order.

When Otomenak stumbles upon a hidden repositiorium in which he finds confidential documents drawn up by the imperial Nibritan army, he can no longer avoid acknowledging that Napaju is no different from its rival, Nibrita, just as Aerok's circumstances are not better than Aisenodin's. As he reads over Nibrita's reports on Aisenodin's independence movement, evaluations of their secret agents in anticolonial organizations, conversion statements of Aisenodinian elites, and even the evidence of collusion between the colonial government and well-known national leaders, he, at first, trembles to see how elaborate and manipulative Nibrita's colonial system is. The "frightening education" of the documents, furthermore, awakens the colonial intellectual to "another history that is totally different" from what he has believed in: "What if documents such as these are stored in an archive in the Napajunian government general of Aerok, in this kind of place where only authorized persons have access? Yes, it must be" (*Taepung* 124).

⁹⁵ "Choi In-hoon-Yangmyeon: Jayu wa dokjae" [Choi In-hoon—the Two Sides: Freedom and Dictatorship], in *Jayu raneun hwadu* [The Topic of Freedom], ed. Kim Dong-Choon (Seoul: Samin, 1999), 194.

Otomenak's postcolonial awakening requires a thorough evaluation. Undeniably, the alternative history created by Choi In-hoon sheds new light on Korea's colonial past in relation to its postcolonial situation placed between the First World and the Third World. His criticism of intellectual collaborators during the colonial period involves more than the repetition of colonial history, however. Choi also poses the question of what literature can or should do when history calls for action, and this critical consciousness must be understood with reference to the sociopolitical environments that made him doubt the literary world that he had never given up on. In this regard, Otomenak's self-deprecating statement about his devotion to classic Napajunian literature is affiliated with Choi's own agony over "the shabby literary imagination" that has failed not only to realize the ideal of the "blue square" he envisaged a decade ago, but also to represent "the core of life, life covered with blood," in the uncanny postcolonial condition under which a former officer of the Imperial Japanese Army can become a national leader.

Postcolonial Appropriation of Colonial Discourse

It is ironic that Otomenak's postcolonial reflections take place within the circuit marked out by an authoritative account of Western imperialism. Triggered by a fortuitous discovery of confidential reports made by Nibritan colonizers, Otomenak is shocked to learn that, for the Aerokian people, Napaju is an imperial power just like Nibrita. But his traumatic awakening does not lead him to recognize himself as a surrogate imperialist. He does not (want to) face the fact that, for the Aisenodinian people, Napaju/Aerok is nothing more than another Nibrita. As a result, Otomenak's representation of Aisenodinian rarely diverges from a colonial discourse that is based on the teleological notion of historical evolutionism. This is implied, for example, in his

description of the newly conquered colony: it seemed “much more natural...something like a big, lively child” (*Taepung* 33).

This hierarchical dichotomy of nature and culture that is reproduced by the in-between colonial subject becomes more complicated as it is materialized into a racialized and gendered body. The innocent or naïve image of Aisenodinian nature is often likened to “a maid with primitive power that cannot be found in White or Yellow races” (*Taepung* 42). This orientalist fantasy of the male colonizer is crystallized in the depiction of Amanda, the heroine of *The Tempest*. Embodying native women as sexual objects, Amanda is reified as a silent image as she smells tropical fruit under the protagonist’s masculinist gaze (55). Otomenak’s position as both an observer and an emancipator of the Aisenodin hardly changes in their romantic relationship. Turning away from the multilateral and multilevel structure of colonial power, Otomenak’s immediate, manifest denial of Napajunian imperialism becomes assimilated into a “new” paradigm of Asian community that covers over violence and/or discrimination against the colonized (and feminized) Other within an intimate family frame. Believing that there is “a way in which all nations in Asia could live as one family” (303), Otomenak dreams of a marriage with Amanda as a concrete path toward such an ideal of Asiatic community. In transposing the colonial relationship into the private realm, Otomenak’s “familistic settlement” also reconfigures modern patriarchy. While integrating racial and cultural others as constitutive members, Choi In-hoon’s transnational family model unfailingly reinforces manhood as the key virtue in realizing the renewed form of pan-Asianism: “It is masculinity that shoulders the responsibility of [putting into action the idea of Asian community]” (303).

Beyond Intellectual Postcolonialism

As *The Tempest*'s male protagonist is different from the image of a self-determined modern individual marked in Choi In-hoon's novels in the 1960s, its heroine is also distinguished from Choi's other female characters. In contrast to Otomenak, who becomes confused about his position, and insecure about his intelligence, Amanda always keeps her composure, successfully veiling her identity—Karnos's secret agent and mistress. Even when she is considered to be an innocent native woman under Otomenak's colonialist gaze, she rarely remains a silent sexual object. In spite of her status, a maid of the colonizer, she does not hesitate to make a "daring [sexual] move," though this is simply reckoned as a foreign feature. She never says yes to Otomenak's requests. For instance, when the male colonizer proposes marriage, she simply answers back, "Aren't we married?" Whereas Otomenak is caught in the symbolic order of colonial discourse—however critical he may be of it, he still feels it necessary for his love to be approved by the very colonial institution—Amanda does not seem to be bothered about the "legitimacy" of their relationship, and disregards the conventional meaning of marriage. Precisely because she locates herself beyond the normative structure, Otomenak is afraid of telling her the inside story from the frontline: "[H]e was afraid. He could not foresee how Amanda would reply. That is the real problem. He was afraid of telling the truth" (*Taepung* 338).

The truth is, to Otomenak's surprise, that Amanda, who is *not* supposed to know, already knows what the male protagonist—the subject who is supposed to know better than the Other—tries to conceal. Perhaps the colonial intellectual was right to fear the colonized other; the real

dilemma he does not recognize is that she is not an innocent victim awaiting a savior, as Otomenak imagines, but an active agent with a technique of camouflage, disturbing the colonial system of representation that requires a fixed identity. If Choi In-hoon's *Taepung* can offer any possibility of new subjectivity beyond what might be called intellectual postcolonialism, it should be found in this marginalized character, rather than in the male protagonist.

This alternative vision that the author wittingly or unwittingly suggests in *The Tempest* is left for readers to figure out, without concrete pictures. Arguably, Amanda is granted greater autonomy than Choi In-hoon's other heroines. Even after Karnos's death, for instance, Amanda does not "return" to Otomenak. Nonetheless, Amanda plays only a minor role in *Taepung*: except for Otomenak's description of her appearance, a few episodic conversations with the male protagonist, and the author's summary of her whereabouts in the epilogue, no other clue is provided for understanding her character. Considering her lack of interiority, Amanda's "relative autonomy" is no more than an aura the mysterious Other is supposed to have.

The End of Colonial Mimicry?

Otomenak's private desire for inter-Asian solidarity is shattered as his voyage for the repatriation of Karnos and the Nibritan women is confronted with the mutiny of the captives, and the ship is overtaken by a typhoon at sea and washes ashore on a desert island. Otomenak barely saves his own life, along with several subordinates and rebellious detainees, only to fall into despair upon hearing the news on the radio that Napaju is about to be defeated in the war. Again, however, he pretends not to know the truth, thinking that he would rather die on the unknown island than return to an Asian continent conquered by the Western savages: "Otomenak

visualized an Asia that had become a playground for Nibrita or Akirema. (...) Is this the way history repeats itself?" (*Taepung* 450-51)

Otomenak's "resistance" to the new empire in holding fast to the old power is self-deceptive, as well as anachronistic. Confined within the same Manichean schema established by colonial power, his parody of imperialist drama in the desert island in no way undermines, but merely modifies, the existing social and political relations. In the new land, Otomenak retains, if not extends, the colonial order through his performance of imperialist and patriarchal power; by conniving with the Napajunian soldiers to violate the Nibritan female captives, he reasserts his identity as an anti-Nibritanist (*Taepung* 473). The Napajunian model of the Asiatic sphere, in the final analysis, deploys the very politics of Western imperialism. Both exercise gendered forms of racial and class power through a set of exploitive sexual and service relations; the sole difference is whether it is between white men and colored women or between Asian men and European women.

The Logic of Rebirth: After 30 years...

In order to break out of the closed circuit of the colonial regime, Choi In-hoon makes a dramatic reversal in the epilogue by applying what he calls "the logic of rebirth." Choi's principle of rebirth is the completely secular "wisdom of humans" through which "we are able to work out our salvation through our own efforts in our cruel age where we cannot see a resurrection in the future or eternal life in heaven."⁹⁶ In *The Tempest*, not surprisingly, this belief in human wisdom through which "an individual can be reborn through self-criticism...even

⁹⁶ "Wonsiin i doigi wihan munmyeonghan uisik," 29.

several hundred times”⁹⁷ echoes through the voice of Karnos. As Otomenak contemplates committing suicide to avoid being killed as a Napajunian soldier, or of being returned to Aerok as a national traitor, Karnos suggests a third way—to live as an Aisenodinian:

Even after the Napajunian army surrenders, the Aisenodinian people will have to fight against Nibrita. Then, your weaponry, organization, and technology will be useful. If you cooperate with us by turning over the intelligence and the supplies of the Napajunian army, and perhaps its superb military force, you will become the savior of the Aisenodin. No, you will become an Aisenodinian who makes a great contribution to our independence. You can be reborn. Why do you want to die? (*Taepung* 492)

Accepting Karnos’s offer, the colonized-colonizer chooses a new name and a new beginning as a universal subject in a third country; just as his predecessor, Lee Myong-jun, chose neither the South, nor the North, but India, where he could live anonymously as an autonomous individual. Aerokian Otomenak’s metamorphosis into Aisenodinian Banyakim is somewhat different from his earlier efforts, as an imperial subject, to embrace the “inferior” race. Now he seeks an alternative future for small countries that are caught between great powers, while negating the permanent distinction between the powerful and the powerless.

Otomenak’s “afterlife” in an imaginary land further unravels Choi In-hoon’s utopian vision of his divided country. In its hopeful conclusion, Aeroke’s reunification is briefly mentioned as an exemplary case that shows the solidarity of small and weak nations, a solidarity that was initially demonstrated in Aisenodin’s decolonization process (*Taepung* 476). The “faith in humanity” of Karnos, the Third World leader, has been inherited by his former oppressor, who has become a crucial contributor to the prosperity of his homeland by conceding to an Aerokian enterprise the drilling rights for an enormous amount of oil (that he discovered where he had been shipwrecked). Choi’s idealized scenario of the Non-Aligned Movement beyond the Cold War bipolarization remains problematic, however. Its transnational imagination, while

⁹⁷ Ibid.

appropriating a pan-Asianism that used to be monopolized by imperialists, is still caught in a developmentalist narrative, which normalizes the linear history of capitalist modernity. The dramatic reconciliation between Karnos and Otomenak not only proposes a reciprocal relationship between the powerless; it implicitly acknowledges a practical alliance between the former colonizer, who possesses technology, and the national leader, who possesses integrity. After his rebirth, Otomenak's past as a voluntary collaborator is virtually erased, or written over with the noble image of Banyakim as a successful immigrant, or as a civilian ambassador in a foreign country. Not coincidentally, the reborn character in the novel feels sympathy for Eichmann's claim that he was a mere "cog in the machine" of the fascist regime (*Taepung* 477), although it is left rather obscure whether Choi's "universal logic of rebirth" signals redemption of those "banal victims" of bureaucratic totalitarianism.

A closer look reveals that Banyakim's integrative leadership is in fact secured by a patrilineal and elitist genealogy—from Karnos, a native foundation father, to Banyakim, a diasporic national hero—while the Aisenodinian masses are left faceless and voiceless in the story of their own "emancipation." The norm of the patriarchal bourgeois nuclear family is also kept intact in the transnational subject's alternative family consisting of an Asian father, a white mother, and their adopted indigenous daughter.⁹⁸ By reinscribing diasporic patriotism, which at once facilitates and is mediated through the flows of global capital, Choi In-hoon's blueprint for universal progress implicitly echoes the dominant 1970s discourse endorsed by the national security state, which gave top priority to economic development. The greatest irony of all these uncanny repetitions in South Korean history is then perhaps not that a "patriotic" dictator with a

⁹⁸ Banyakim adopted Amanda, the daughter of Karnos and Amanda, when her father died and her mother remarried. To everybody's surprise, Banyakim's mysterious wife, Marina, was one of the Nibritan captives Otomenak was supposed to transport to her own country thirty years ago.

shameful past of pro-Japanese collaboration “effectively” utilized the colonial wartime mobilization system for national reconstruction in the Cold War context, but rather that such a developmentalist nationalism was practiced through the very rhetoric provided by the liberal intellectuals of the 1960s.⁹⁹

In the totalitarian society of 1970s’ South Korea, of course, Choi In-hoon’s tenacious exploration of the modern individual is not insignificant. He has never forsaken the responsibility of intellectuals as he pursued the unfulfilled promise of modern enlightenment through his literary experiment, while deliberating about the (post)colonial questions concerning how to overcome pathological modernity in postwar Korea. Nevertheless, his critical consciousness and literary engagement seemed no longer viable under the *yusin* system that deprived its subjects of individual autonomy, as implicated in Choi’s twenty-year hiatus after *The Tempest*. His “universal logic of rebirth,” after all, tolerates the reenactment of violent history by overlooking that the cycle of individual birth, death, and rebirth does not automatically terminate the modes of exploitation or the production of its victims. Survivors of oppression may also become agents of violence, just as most people in South Korea, while groaning under tyranny, “participated,” willingly or unwillingly, in the state’s crimes against another country: in the Vietnam War.

Another loophole in *Taepung*’s postcolonial project can be found in Choi In-hoon’s silence about the issue of language, despite his undiminished concern with linguistic techniques.¹⁰⁰ The issue of translation, though it is fundamental to the notion of universality,¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ “Park [Chung Hee] justified the coup on the same grounds that the liberal intellectuals had provided, the need for national reconstruction, while also pursuing his own reform agenda right to the brink on the same grounds, in both rhetoric and action.” See Kim Hyung-A, *Korea’s Development under Park Chung Hee*, 64.

¹⁰⁰ For instance, in “Munhak gwa ideollogi” [Literature and Ideology], Choi defines literature as art that makes full use of language (in *Munhak gwa ideollogi*, 392-417). In “Munhak gwa hyeonsil” [Literature and Reality], he states, “Writing a literary work is doing criticism of the society in which the author lives through the form of the fight between the author’s consciousness and language” (Ibid, 37).

does not appear to be a problem of great importance in his transnational project; for instance, there is no clue to how Otomenak and Karnos, the colonizer and the colonized, communicate with each other, or how Otomenak and Amanda, and Banyakim and Marina, those foreign lovers, express their emotions in ways other than through their physical contact. Shouldn't this lacuna in the postcolonial intellectual's transnational vision, then, be rethought as an ambivalent point at which such a modern project of emancipation could impose another totalizing narrative, complicit in muting the heterogeneous voices of those who are not eligible for either national or global citizenship?

5. World Citizen: A Man of Intellect

Choi In-hoon's literary travels through Korean history have been fueled by his dream of utopia, which was momentarily seized upon in the April Revolution. To redeem the lost history *in his own name*, Choi invested his imagination in representing a (self-)portrait of the 4.19 generation who lived through heterogeneous temporalities simultaneously. While they were liberated from the colonial legacy, and also survived the Korean War, the specter of colonialism and the trauma of the war never ceased to haunt them, but instead repeated themselves in the national model of modernization under the Cold War imperative. The brief moment of freedom

¹⁰¹ As Judith Butler points out, the theorization of universality that transcends national borders and heterogeneous cultures cannot be forged without thinking of cultural translation: "no notion of universality can rest easily within the notion of a single 'culture,' since the very concept of universality compels an understanding of culture as relation of exchange and a task of translation." From this perspective, Butler suggests "the notion of culture in terms of a defining problem of translation, one which is significantly related to the problem of cross-cultural translation that the concept of universality has become"; she also warns us, "without translation, the only way the assertion of universality can cross a border is through a colonial and expansionist logic" (*Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), 20, 24-25, 35). Choi In-hoon's pursuit of universality through the introduction of a "transnational family" but without any concern for the work of translation exposes this limit.

achieved by the 4.19 Movement, in which they could actually experience what they used to learn from books, aggravated their sense of alienation from reality after their efforts ended up meeting another dictatorship. The non-contemporaneity Choi's contemporaries underwent, ironically enough, forged their critical consciousness even further; in the literary realm, they sought to preserve the memory of the failed revolution, thanks precisely to their plight of displacement. As they were institutionally divorced from political power in reality, they were devoted to the cultural field that allowed rootless individuals to criticize the prevailing ideology, on the one hand, and to create an alternative community, on the other.

In Choi In-hoon's case, such a desire for an alternative space comes out more incisively in conjunction with his refugee sensibility. From the perspective of the self-exiled intellectual, the existing orders of the two Koreas are no more than deviations from universal modernity. The very ground of this universality is the monumental event of the 4.19 Revolution. From that day forth, Choi declares in the essay "Segyein" (World Citizen), "the youth of the April [Revolution]... became the masters of history for the first time... blasting the black wall of an inferiority complex" through "their 'attack on the Bastille.'"¹⁰²

The significance of 4.19 is that it was the symbol that expressed our belief in and spirit of rebirth... From the youth who ran to Gyeongmudae [President Rhee Syngman's residence] that day, I see the metamorphosis of the people who ran to the Bastille in the summer of 1789. (...) When it comes to the April [Revolution], it is meaningless to speak of an empty theory.¹⁰³ It was a myth. (...) The April [Revolution] became the home of Koreans who wanted to become human beings. (...) The youth of the April [Revolution] were the first Koreans who wanted to live a life. Along with them, a new era began. Human beings who determined to become "the self." Only those who overcome alienation from politics through action deserve to live, and have the power to become *segyein* [a citizen of the world] with the great Westerners. ("Segyein" 100)

¹⁰² *Yutopia ui kkum*, 91-104.

¹⁰³ Or, "to speak of a theory of public interests." In the original Korean text, Choi In-hoon uses the word "gongniron," which could mean either a theory of public interests or an empty theory.

Choi's idea of a "world citizen" is not as universal as it alleges to be, however. Those whom Choi would like to interpellate in the name of "segyein" are men "of intellect...who acquired concrete power by keenly grasping the destiny of society, expressing it, and directing communal actions"; or, more accurately, "the intellectual elite who choose...explore, and fight for human freedom with modesty and pertinacity" ("Segyein" 103). Thus, Choi's design for April's eutopia leaves out others who do not have either the epistemological ability to discover their own ego, or the revolutionary spirit to deal with the destiny of society. Put differently, those "nonintellectual" people, who are not only unable to reflect upon the self in the private room, but are also unwilling to struggle for another history in the public square, are marginalized, if not suppressed, in Choi In-hoon's literature. It is at once problematic and paradoxical that those doubly displaced—from both Choi's manifesto of Korean universality and the official narrative of Korean history—are more often than not represented by female characters. Throughout Choi's novels, women are viewed as an incomprehensible excess that challenges his male protagonists' perceptive capabilities, but at the same time, are fantasized as the very medium through which the intellectual subject can build an ideal community beyond the division of the private and the public, the South and the North, and the West and the East.

Arguably, Choi In-hoon's literary journey in search of a universal self with a critical consciousness is incomprehensible without reference to the historical conditions of the 1960s, in which the 4.19 intellectual had to find a way to retain the memory of the failed revolution in order to resist the dictatorial rule of Park Chung Hee. As demonstrated in this chapter, Choi's textual practice served to construct the intellectual subjectivity of the 4.19 generation in the literary realm, and this enabled him to critique contemporary society as a reflective individual, enlightened by the world of letters itself. Choi's continued research on Korean history, I suggest,

has been conducted through creative methods devised by the postcolonial intellectual's unremitting efforts to become the master of history; while his "logic of rebirth" is linked with his desire to conceive of a modern community based on the free will of sovereign individuals, as opposed to the state's model of modernization, that is, parochial, exclusive nationalism.

Nevertheless, Choi In-hoon's alternative imagination misses the internal contradictions embedded in the Enlightenment narrative, whose teleological process uncannily resembles the developmentalist ideology of the state. Complicit with the dominant power, Choi's intellectual discourse results in excluding an array of people who cannot be articulated under the "universal" category of the modern individual. To borrow Gayatri Spivak's remarks, "it is impossible" for Choi "to imagine the power and desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other." Ultimately, Choi's male elite subject is constituted through his difference from a limitless set of other identities, including women, Aboriginals, the illiterate, and the proletariat, while representing himself as transparent.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, as long as the "citizen of the world" envisioned in Choi's postcolonial writings contributes to the reproduction of the Other in the "civilized world," Choi's blueprint of the transnational family, and his proposal for "the republic of love," will remain exposed to the risk of being abused by neocolonial global capitalism, as we have already witnessed in the past.

¹⁰⁴ *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 265.

II. *Han* Revived:

Jo Jung-rae's *Taebaek Mountain Range* and *Minjung* Historiography

1. The Korean War as the Prehistory of the Gwangju Massacre

Taebaeksanmaek (*Taebaek Mountain Range*, 1983~89; *TMR*)¹⁰⁵ by Jo Jung-rae (1943~) is considered the first historical novel to recognize the partisan struggle in the divided spaces of post-colonial Korea. Jo's serialized fiction, which gained huge popularity during the turbulent period of the democracy movement, is distinguished from previous "division literature," in that it presents a new type of historical consciousness that imagines, in an epic form, the oppressed masses of the periphery as the subject of national identity. As the novel locates the origin of Korea's division in the social antagonism between tenant farmers and the landed class that arose out of the colonial system of production, it powerfully conveys how the impoverished peasantry came to participate in rebellions against their exploiting oppressors. In Jo's literary representation of the dispossessed, they no longer remain faceless, innocent victims in historical transformations, but are rather constructed as the prime agent of social revolution. *TMR*, in a word, made the history of the Korean War a mass experience for the first time.

Jo Jung-rae's rediscovery of the leftist movement in the southern part of the peninsula and the fervent response from his contemporary readers cannot be understood without taking into consideration the *minjung* historiography and sensibilities that prevailed in the 1980s, during which South Koreans were confronted with another traumatic event in Gwangju. Park Chung

¹⁰⁵ For *Taebaeksanmaek*, I use the fourth edition in Korean published by Hainaim in 2007.

Hee's *yusin* system started to falter in the late 1970s, and finally shattered when he was assassinated by the chief of the Korean CIA on October 26, 1979. On December 12, 1979, however, South Koreans watched another military figure, Chun Doo-hwan, seize power from the interim government through a coup d'état. Yet the new military power was in a much weaker position than its predecessor in defending its legitimacy through the rhetoric of the need for safeguarding national security and interest. Throughout the spring of 1980, the people's long-repressed yearning for democratization was clearly expressed in a series of protests, culminating in a mass demonstration at Seoul Station on May 15, which brought out an estimated 150,000 students and citizens. To their plea for immediate democratic reform, General Chun responded by issuing a declaration of martial law on May 17, closing down all universities across the country and arresting thousands of political dissidents and student activists, including Kim Dae-jung.¹⁰⁶

Collective action against such illegitimate power did not vanish in a single night. On the morning of May 18, a clash took place between students and martial law troops at the gate of Chonnam National University in Gwangju, the capital city of South Jeolla. This "spontaneous and unorganized" protest escalated into armed resistance from the local civilian population,¹⁰⁷ but the ten-day struggle was eventually suppressed through brutal violence, exerted by the newly established military regime, that caused an estimated 2,000 casualties. Nevertheless, the Gwangju Uprising enlarged the scope of South Korea's democratization movement, while

¹⁰⁶ Gi-Wook Shin suggests that the arrest of Kim deserves special attention in understanding the Gwangju Uprising since he was the most popular political figure in the southwestern region, including Gwangju. According to Shin, many in the area believed that Kim's presidency had been taken away by fraud in the 1971 election. "They were enraged when they learned that Kim was arrested by the new military regime." See "Introduction," in *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), xiv.

¹⁰⁷ As for the dialectical development of a spontaneous protest into an organized struggle, see Na Kahn-chae's "Collective Action and Organization in the Gwangju Uprising," *New Political Science* 25, no. 2 (June 2003): 177-92.

disclosing the nature of America's foreign policy in East Asia.¹⁰⁸ Oppositional leaders now came to have their eyes opened to the historical/geopolitical condition of Korea's division system within the larger context of the Cold War. Because questions were raised over US complicity in the Gwangju Massacre, the image of the United States as the guardian of justice began to crumble, along with the American model of liberal democracy. Just as the "(neo)colonial" and "petty-bourgeois" nature of the earlier social movement was criticized, the intricate relations between the people's democratization and national self-determination were brought to the center of the 1980s' wave of discussions, which included the debate on social formation (*saguche nonjaeng*) and on modern and contemporary Korea (*geunhyeondaesa nonjaeng*).¹⁰⁹

The legacy of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising came to play a crucial role in shaping the collective subjectivity of the 1980s, which did not merely affect the mode of cultural production at that time, but eventually led to the political change of 1987. The spontaneous solidarity of the Gwangju Commune demonstrated the power of the grassroots, and heralded a new historical subject in the 1980s in the post-Gwangju era: *minjung* (民衆; the multitude of the people). The common people, many of whom had remained at the margins in the culture of dissent, emerged as the major protagonists of the *minjung* movement,¹¹⁰ and invoked a moment of self-reflection,

¹⁰⁸ Keun-sik Jung, "Has Kwangju Been Realized?" in *Contentious Kwangju*, 46-47.

¹⁰⁹ Undeniably, reunification "came to the forefront of political discourse" toward the end of the 1980s in conjunction with "the end of the Cold War" and "the impact of German reunification," but the emergence of reunification as a central issue was made possible by "the specific historical events" in South Korea; that is, "the Kwangju [Gwangju] uprising in 1980 and the June 1987 uprising, followed by massive workers' struggles." See Jang Jip Choi, "Political Cleavages in South Korea," in *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*, ed. Hagen Koo (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 40, 41.

¹¹⁰ Jae-eui Lee's *Kwangju Diary*, a significant eyewitness account of the days from 18 through 27 May 1980, notes that, "May 19 was the day the torch of the uprising was passed from the students to the ordinary working people of Kwangju." See *Kwangju Diary: Beyond Death, Beyond the Darkness of the Age* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 1999), 56. As for the ramifications of the Gwangju Uprising in the democratization of South Korea, see Jo Jung-kwan's "5.18 hangjaeng i hanguk minjuhwa e michin yeonghyang"

as well as a sense of guilt, among intellectuals who had led prior social movements. After all, it was largely the working class who fought to the end in Gwangju. The intelligentsia, far from preventing the tragedy in Gwangju, not only urged working class protesters to turn in their arms to the authorities during the struggle, but also failed to expose the truth of the “incident,” which the military regime presented as a riot instigated by communists. “The [post-Gwangju period] was an era in which the deaths of hundreds and the suffering and crises of tens of thousands were simply ignored and rationalized too easily in the name of groundless rumor,” states Im Chul-woo, who survived the Gwangju Massacre and has written ever since about the traumatic event he witnessed.¹¹¹

Forcefully displaced from the legitimate arena of social discourse, the experience of the Gwangju Uprising nevertheless reconfigured the topography of political activism and social movements afterwards. Since the defeat in Gwangju, the nation’s modern history has been rewritten from a *minjung*-oriented perspective to counter the official historical knowledge promulgated by the authoritarian state. Now the masses, previously alienated from both *Realpolitik* and discursive power, were resituated as the true subject of the nation’s historical development. Through the theoretical elaborations and cultural practices of *minjung* thinkers and activists, the *minjung*’s history of suffering was reinscribed as a tradition of protest, tracing back to the 1894 Donghak Peasant War, the 1929 Anti-Japanese Student Movement, and the 1948 Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion—all of which started from South Jeolla.

Jo Jung-rae’s massive writing project, which covers the series of events originating in the southwestern region, was able to achieve record-breaking sales precisely because it fulfilled the

[The Influence of 5.18 upon South Korea’s Democratization], in *5.18 geurigo yeoksa*, ed. Choi Yeongtae (Seoul: Gil, 2008), 135-65.

¹¹¹ Quoted in *The Making of Minjung*, 48.

role of a must-read alternative history textbook of the era. Meeting the popular demand to learn from the *minjung*, it attracted a broad public readership, selling more than 5.5 million copies in the decade that followed the publication in 1986 of the first part of the ten-volume set. *TMR* was first serialized beginning in 1983 in the monthly literary journal, *Hyundae Munhak*. It was not only chosen by writers and critics in 1990 as “the best novel in Korea” (*Sisa Journal*), but also voted by university students throughout the country in 1991 as “the most impressive book” (*JoongAng Daily*), and by Korean readers in 1996 as “the most unforgettable book” (*DangA Daily*).¹¹² For those who were unable to grasp historical reality through the official channel of national education, to read *TMR* was regarded as “the rite of initiation.”¹¹³

The historical consciousness of the 1980s not only contributed the social basis for the popular reception of Jo Jung-rae’s ten-volume epic. It was also the driving force for the author to continue writing about the *minjung*’s history. As he states in an interview, what he “intended and defended” throughout the writing of the thirty-two volumes of his historical novel trilogy¹¹⁴ was “the vital energy of the *minjung*,” who “have played a key part in making history, though remaining nameless in history books.”¹¹⁵ His will to narrate the unwritten or expurgated stories of the *minjung*’s struggle was informed by his visit to Gwangju, where he had spent his adolescence, right after the massacre in May of 1980. The burden of Gwangju motivated him to

¹¹² “Taebaeksanmaek” [TMR], last modified January 30, 2007, http://www.jojungrae.com/portfolio/worklist_read.htm?No=12.

¹¹³ Song Hyo Jeong, “Daeha soseol ilkki ui sahoejeok etoseu” [The Social Ethos of Reading Historical Novels], in *Daejung seosa janreu ui modeun geot*, ed. Daejung seosa jangreu yeonguhoe (Seoul: Iron gwa silcheon, 2009), 265.

¹¹⁴ After *TMR*, Jo Jung-rae published two other historical novels: *Arirang* (1990–95; twelve vols.), which covers the colonial period, and *Hangang* (1998–2002; ten vols.), which deals with South Korea’s economic development and democratic movement after the Korean War.

¹¹⁵ Lim Hong-Bin, “Bundan munhak ui gobaekjeok jinsil” [The Confessional Truth of Division Literature], *Munhaksasang* (April 2002): 180.

search for the root cause of the terrifying situation that was occurring in the 1980s. As he said in another interview:

The “bloody repression” in Gwangju gave me a shock. What was the justification of the repression? It was none other than anticommunist ideology and the situation of division. I thought the problem would not be solved until its fundamental root and maladies were clarified and recognized by the public. It was within this context that I determined to write *Taebaeksanmaek*. My 1980s was dedicated to the writing of *Taebaeksanmaek* as a “work to unearth the root of the present contradictions and ordeals.”¹¹⁶

Put otherwise, the brutal suppression of the Gwangju Uprising became an occasion through which Korea’s division was clearly recognized and experienced as the “necessary prehistory of the present,” to use the words provided in Georg Lukács’s classic work on Walter Scott, *The Historical Novel*.¹¹⁷

By attributing contemporary social injustices to the failed resolution of historical contradictions, Jo Jung-rae’s literary imagination brings the faded past to life as the substantial precondition of the present. In rewriting major historical events in modern Korea, he does not simply highlight the unidirectional impacts that the violent upheavals had on the majority of Korean people. In revealing the other side of historical development, he foregrounds popular life amidst the national turmoil. The dispossessed no longer form an abstract background or peripheral episodes inserted into the main plot, but construct the backbone of social revolution. As he delves into the material basis of their historical consciousness, Jo vividly reenacts what Lukács might call “the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events”:¹¹⁸ more

¹¹⁶ Sim San, “Tongil ro ganeun munhak yesul ui jangdaehan sanmaek” [A Grand Range in Literary Art towards Reunification], *Sahoe wa sasang* (November 1989): 200.

¹¹⁷ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 61.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

specifically, the way in which the uprooted tenant peasants turn into heroic partisan warriors through their collective confrontation with the landowning class.

By rediscovering the forgotten legacy of grassroots struggle throughout modern Korean history, *TMR* offered a new sense of history for its contemporary readers. The memory of the partisans, which had been repressed under the state's anticommunist ideology, resurged as the lost tradition of the people's resistance in the 1980s against the normative discourse of the state. Jo Jung-rae's reconstruction of the legitimate protagonist of national history, however, involves more complex problems and various tensions because it not only re-members the powerless who are erased from the official site of memory, but also interpellates them as the unitary, organic, and autonomous subject of the nation, thereby homogenizing different identities and conflicting interests. For this reason, as the wave of postmodernism swept 1990s' South Korea in the wake of the fall of existing socialism, the intellectual imagination of the *minjung* as exemplified in *TMR* has been criticized.

Admittedly, the category of *minjung* is susceptible to becoming a totalizing conception that homogenizes diverse subjects and subsumes unequal positions, precisely because it has been theorized by oppositional *elites*. "Much the same as the notion of the 'subaltern' in subaltern studies," as Namhee Lee sharply observes, the *minjung* discourse comprises a series of disjunctions: among hybrid members of the subaltern, between the *minjung* represented and the intellectual representer, and even among intellectual authors themselves, who desire "to actively insert themselves into the process of constructing the *minjung*'s revolutionary subjectivity, and...to efface this active presence at the same time in order to maintain *minjung* agency and autonomy."¹¹⁹ After all, both the epistemic privilege and the ontological limitation of *minjung*-

¹¹⁹ *The Making of Minjung*, 12.

oriented intellectuals entail a historical responsibility, as well as an ethical dilemma, to arouse the latent potential of the masses without othering the underprivileged class in the representation of the *minjung* created by those intellectuals.¹²⁰ It is this double-bind vision of the *minjung* movement that I would like to engage in through my reading of Jo Jung-rae's *TMR* in this chapter.

In this chapter, I will examine the *minjung* subjectivity constituted in Jo Jung-rae's literary representation of modern Korean history, focusing on the lineage of *han* (恨): unresolved resentment born of the experience of oppression and struggle. Widely characterized as the essence of Koreanness in the *minjung* discourse, *han* shapes the core sensibility of the peasantry's perception of reality and, at the same time, fuels the pivotal energy for the partisans' revolutionary practice in *TMR*. Although "the symbolic contours of *han*" are so "wide-ranging" that "any definition will be simplistic,"¹²¹ Jo tellingly describes how the complex of the suppressed feelings and thoughts has been formed and inherited through the closest human relationships, such as those between parents and children, lover and beloved, siblings and friends, on the one hand, and exploded through a chain of tenant-landlord conflicts since the late 19th century, on the other. By articulating the split of the nation through the trope of the broken family, *TMR* presents a concrete picture, on an epic scale, of Korea's national *han* as caused by its colonization and division.

¹²⁰ As for the problem of representation in South Korea's *minjung* movement, see Chungmoo Choi, "The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory," 461-84.

¹²¹ Roy R. Grinker, *Korea and Its Futures* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 79. Among the many approaches to this complex concept, I would like to utilize Grinker's psychoanalytic interpretation of *han* as a collective mourning process involved with South Koreans' experience of national division: "this complex term expresses both personal and collective losses, violations, and consequent resentment—the tragedies of individuals and collectives of different sizes and inclusiveness can all be represented with the term *han*—and also provides the victims with a means of representing and eventually resolving the resentment" (74).

However, Jo Jung-rae's attempt to replace Korea's modern tragedy with a genealogy of the peasants' resistance is beset with complications and compromise. Not unlike many other emancipatory projects in postcolonial history, the *minjung* imagination of new forms of political collectivity carries the burden of representation, precisely because "the dominated, by virtue of their very powerlessness, have no means of recording their knowledge within those instituted processes," as Partha Chatterjee points out in his criticism of subaltern studies.¹²² In *TMR*, for instance, peasant consciousness is elevated by the guidance of intellectual leaders, while the peasantry is conceived of as a coherent unity. As a result, this minority discourse begets other minority groups within itself: most notably, the wives and children of the peasants, who are left behind after their patriarchs set off on a revolutionary journey, and who survive only to undergo further suffering because of their "involvement" with the partisan struggle. Thus, my analysis of *TMR* specifically tackles the issues of language and gender; or more appropriately, the gendered language in which Jo builds a patrilineal genealogy of the people, on the one hand, and fraternal solidarity between *minjung* intellectuals and the masses, on the other.

My examination of Jo Jung-rae's historical imagination in the following pages begins with a discussion of the spatial allegory of Beolgyo, the center stage of *TMR*. Though far from the main ridge of Taebaek Mountain Range, this small town on the southwest coast of the Korean peninsula is postulated as a microcosm that captures the national movements of historical time that determine individual lives under specific conditions. My concern here is less with the factual accuracy of Jo's alternative narrative, which begins with the 1948 Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion, and retrospectively tracks Korea's internal disintegration back to the Donghak Peasant Revolution at the end of the 19th century. Rather, my concern has more to do with the narrative's

¹²² Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 161.

discursive effect; in other words, how effectively *TMR*'s "chronotope,"¹²³ derived from Jo's desire to create a concrete totality of Korea's division process, challenges the conventional paradigm of the Korean War up until the early 1980s, namely, Kim Il Sung's "sudden invasion" of the South on June 25, 1950.

Next, by addressing the question of class and gender implicated in the patrilineal genealogy of the people, I investigate to what extent Jo Jung-rae's "radical" account of the Korean War counters and, *at the same time*, is confined within the dominant nationalist narrative. Undeniably, many *minjung*-oriented writers, including Jo, were more sensitive to the class structure existing within an oppositional culture than their predecessors who, in the end, failed in the first civilian revolution they led due to a lack of popular support. Nonetheless, the hierarchical relationship between the elite leaders and the uneducated masses subsists in Jo's historical novel of the 1980s. Furthermore, the fraternal solidarity between *minjung* intellectuals and peasant partisans is gender-coded, as well as class-specific. Jo's recovery of the memory of the partisan fathers does not merely rehabilitate the symbolically dead Korean father, whose authority was denied in 4.19-generation writer Choi In-hoon's *Bildungsroman* in the 1960s. By revitalizing the repressed tradition of struggle, it ultimately redeems the politically orphaned children of the 1980s, who sought to make their way in the present. This reinscription of the lost brotherhood/fatherhood, I argue, reinforces both paternal authority and brotherly solidarity at the cost of overshadowing other family members who are unwilling or unable to assist their patriarchs.

¹²³ I find this term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin useful because it reminds us of "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature." See "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press), 84-258. The citation is from p. 84.

2. The *Chronotope* of *Taebaeksanmaek*: A Genealogy of the Peasants' Revolt

In *TMR*, two temporalities and spatialities are intertwined with each other. One is the *chronotope* (time-space) of the main story: Beolgyo, from the 1946 Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion, a ten-day leftist takeover of the region, to a night in September 1953, two months after Korea's division was formalized by the armistice signed by the UN, North Korea, and China. The other is an extended continuum: the entire Korean peninsula since the anti-feudal and anti-foreign movement, called Donghak, in 1894. As the novel's main characters encounter the nation's major events in Beolgyo, their personal memories and family histories extend back to the pre-colonial period, and their areas of activity in the novel stretch along the Taebaek Mountain Range, the backbone of the Korean peninsula. Why did Jo Jung-rae select Beolgyo, which lies on the *edge* of the "national backbone," more than 400 km away from the 38th parallel, as the central setting of his historical novel? How is the locale, its past of oppression, transcribed into a historical site of any promise for the future in *TMR*?

Beolgyo, in a word, was a town constructed and developed by the Japanese. Before then, it was no more than a poor village in a wetland area...then the Japanese developed it to exploit South Jeolla further inland...As a transportation center...it became distinctively Japanized...Landlords were not satisfied with making money through land; they were also businessmen investing in fail-safe businesses connected with the Japanese. Therefore, while they asserted their [distinguished] genealogies and status, they were more sensitive to looking out for their own interests, almost having lost what might be called the virtues of *yangban* [landed literati in the Joseon Dynasty], such as dignity and magnanimity, through the wrong modernization process. And other villagers, even if they did not engage in business, but in farming, are more wide-awake and have sharper tongues than farmers in other regions. (*TMR*, vol.1:156-57)

As described above, Beolgyo is a product of colonial modernity in Korea. It was not merely developed as a transport center, by Japanese colonial policy, to promote efficient

shipping of agricultural products from the Honam region, the breadbasket of the Korean peninsula. The Japanese also implemented a large-scale land reclamation project in the area, which induced a great influx of rural population who hoped that they could lease a part of the reclaimed land. The colonial project of modernizing the seaside village, however, only intensified class conflicts, even more than before, because it converted the feudal ruling class into a landed capitalist class under the auspices of colonial authorities, while accelerating competition among tenant farmers. In this regard, the 1946 Beolgyo setting in *TMR* effectively epitomizes the tumultuous “liberation space” (*haebang gonggan*) of the immediate postcolonial period (1945-1950), during which the Korean peasantry’s *han*, inherited from the colonial period, developed into an ideological stance.

By drawing particular attention to the Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion¹²⁴ as the proximate trigger of the Korean War, Jo Jung-rae thus underscores the historical basis of the “leftist insurgency,” led by two regiments of the ROK army in Yeosu, which swept nearby towns in South Jeolla. “It is impossible,” he states in an interview with Yim Hun Young, “that, in just

¹²⁴ In *The Origins of the Korean War*, Bruce Cumings gives an outline of the insurgency as follows:

The proximate cause of the uprising was the refusal on October 19 of elements of the 14th and 6th Regiments of the ROK army to embark for a counterinsurgency mission on Cheju [4.3. Jeju Uprising], which in turn reflected the deeper problem that the Army, based on the Constabulary, had within it disparate political tendencies. (...) A week before the rebellion began, the regimental commander and one of his battalion chiefs had been arrested for alleged “subversive activities,” which may have set the events in motion.

On the evening of October 19, a Sargeant-Major [*sic*] named Chi Chang-su, with six confederates, began haranguing other elements in the 14th Regiment to take the unit over, arguing that it should not be used to suppress Korean brethren on Cheju. They won over some forty soldiers, who then seized an ammunition warehouse and began distributing weaponry to the rapidly swelling insurgents. By dawn on October 20, the group (numbered then at two thousand) seized control of Yösu [Yeosu]; they overwhelmed the town police station and seized its weapons. Some elements then entrained for the nearby town of Sunch’ön [Suncheon] and took it over by the early afternoon. Soon rebels had spread out to Kwangyang [Gwangyang], Ku-rye [Gurye], Posöng [Boseong] and Namwön [Namwon].

See *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 2, *The Roaring of the Cataract 1947-1950* (Seoul: Yuksabipyungsa, 2002), 259-61.

three days, the insurgent army was able to stretch out to Goheung, Boseong, Hwasun, and so on, by depending solely on underground organizations or socialist ideology”:

What they [the peasantry] believed... was no more than that “they chose a way to gain their own land where they would be able to live like human beings.” Thus, it was a phenomenon caused by their desire for existence, their will to live. From this perspective, they did not blindly follow [the communist leaders]... at that time the peasant group existed like a pile of parched firewood, and the so-called ideology lighted a fire. It was an example of the most spontaneous ignition, I think.¹²⁵

Jo’s carefully thought-out *chronotope* of Beolgyo in 1946 turns out to be effective in illustrating how the Korean peasantry’s *han*, their collective experience of long-lasting social injustices, erupted into the ideological clash that led to Korea’s division. In rewriting the military incident as a grassroots struggle, Jo further concretizes the historical contradiction of land ownership, which was the weightiest matter for the newly independent, labor-intensive farming country around that time. In the 1940s, 80 percent of the population in Boseong, the county Beolgyo belonged to, engaged in agriculture, and more than two-thirds of the inhabitants were tenant farmers.¹²⁶ Even after Korea’s liberation from Japan, the situation did not improve, because the colonial legacy—including human resources from the former pro-Japanese landowning class—far from being rooted out, was reinforced under US military occupation. Considering that “the most pressing national issues during the eight years of the postliberation period, from 1945 to 1953, were to establish an autonomous unified nation-state, to punish anti-national pro-Japanese collaborators, and to rectify the colonial socioeconomic structure through land reform,”¹²⁷ it

¹²⁵ Yim Hun Young, “<Taebaeksanmaek> eul malhanda” [Speaking of *Taebaeksanmaek*], *Oneul ui chaek* (Winter 1986), 147.

¹²⁶ “This tenancy proportion was even the highest in the entire Honam area,” as Huh Sang-Moon points out in “<Taebaeksanmaek> gwa yeoksajeok sangsangryeok” [*TMR* and the Historical Imagination], in *Munhak gwa byeonjeungbeopjeok sangsangryeok* [Literature and the Dialectic Imagination] (Seoul: Munchangsa, 1994), 254.

¹²⁷ Park Myung-Lim, “<Taebaeksanmaek>, 80 nyeonda, geurigo munhak gwa yeoksa” [*TMR*, the 1980s, Literature, and History], in *Munhak gwa yeoksa wa ingan: <Taebaeksanmaek> ui soseoljeok seonggwa wa tongil munhak ui jeonmang* [Literature, History, and Humanity: The Fruit of *TMR* as a Novel and the Prospect of Reunification], ed. Yim Hun-Young (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1991), 85.

may be difficult to find a more adequate locale than Beolgyo to show how all those problems were entangled with one other.

Beolgyo in *TMR* does not simply work as a spatial symbol of the oppressed under Korea's colonial and neocolonial condition. More importantly, it allegorizes the untold history of their struggle that traces back to the 1894 Donghak Peasant Revolution. This tradition of resistance from the previous century is naturally revitalized in *TMR* through what I call "the genealogy of *han*." Inheriting both the accumulated resentment against the ruling class and the unfulfilled ideal of equality, the descendants of the rebellious forces instinctively foster their political unconscious, and then courageously rise up against the continuing socioeconomic exploitation. The archetype is the peasant hero Ha Daechi. He is embodied as a "purely revolutionary warrior" in *TMR* (4:183), not solely because he is the grandson of a Donghak participant who was brutally murdered by his landlord, but mainly because he perfectly transforms hereditary suffering into a historical struggle for social revolution.

Nevertheless, Jo Jung-rae's *minjung*-oriented narrative fails to elucidate how the suppressed energy of *han*, resigned suffering, could be converted into a flame of social struggle, other than by highlighting the Donghak spirit as incipient class consciousness. Except for the tragedy of Daechi's grandfather, there are no further details about the process by which the boy, born to an impoverished peasant family, develops into a dauntless partisan. The only clue to his awakening is that Daechi *went to school*, unlike other peasant offspring. Going against his father's hope that his only son would climb up the social ladder through modern education, Daechi decides to break up the social order, though he is aware that this is like throwing an egg at a wall. Just like his own grandfather who, despite his low social status, had learned letters, only to bring calamity upon himself and his family, Daechi caught an "illness from learning," in

the view of his illiterate father. Still, what Daechi learned from school and how it is related to his resolution to confront the ruling power remains obscure in this colossal text.

Ha Daechi's figuration of the *minjung's* healthiness, focused on his physical strength, is distinct from the description of his superior: the intellectual partisan leader Yeom Sangjin, who graduated from an education college, but gave up a teaching position in the imperial system to become a farmer. Not unlike Daechi, Sangjin is a man of humble origin, and yet he is portrayed as a levelheaded socialist because of his higher education. Throughout the entire novel, Yeom Sangjin's charismatic leadership hardly falters. His loftiness, however, seems to serve as a stopgap for the disjunction between the abstract ideology of communism and the amorphous power of the masses. In other words, the idealization of Yeom Sangjin's character covers up the narrative lack of how so many peasants came to follow his leadership, and more essentially, to what extent they believed in the vision of the Labor Party during the struggle. In reflecting upon their midnight flight after the ten-day takeover, for instance, Yeom Sangjin simply dispels any skepticism about North Korea. Running counter to his thoroughness, he simply reiterates the inviolable authority of the party.¹²⁸ As Shin Seung-Yeob pertinently observes, "while he [Yeom Sangjin] clamors for a socialist revolution, he never considers how this is connected with the thesis of the bourgeois revolution for democracy that was taken up by Namrodang [South Joseon

¹²⁸ In this regard, Im Gyu Chan criticizes Yeom Sangjin's lack of an objective perception of the postliberation period in its totality, not merely that of the Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion. See "Yeoksa ui taebaeksanmaek, munhak ui taebaeksanmaek" [TMR as History, TMR as Literature], in *Watteon gil ganeun gil sai eseo* [At the Intersection between the Road Taken and the Road to Take] (Seoul: Changbi, 1997), 284. Relates failures such as Yeom Sangjin's to the limitations of the current perspective on the postliberation period, Seo Kyeong-seok says, "We cannot shift this onto the partisans [in the past]. Rather, this is the problem of the writer, or the problem of the society, to which he belongs." See "<Taebaeksanmaek> ron: Bigeukjeok yeoksa ui jeonhwan eul wihayeo" [On TMR: To Change the Tragic History], *Changjak gwa bipyeong* (Summer 1990): 242-43.

Labor Party] at that time...how [Namrodang's] doctrine of land reform...leads to the peasantry's socialist organization."¹²⁹

It should not be overlooked here that the contrasting formulations of Yeom Sangjin and Ha Daechi are transposed to their hierarchical relationship. In the partisan group, allegedly a classless society, they show an intimate master-pupil relation, rather than a sense of comradeship:

Nothing could give more delight and pride to Ha Daechi than the fact that he had a close connection with someone like Yeom Sangjin. The place that Ha Daechi had reached today was all due to Yeom Sangjin's influence. (...) Yeom Sangjin, a college graduate, transplanted many seedlings into Ha Daechi's head, which had a large space to be filled. Ha Daechi, who had thick blood temperamentally, many dislikes environmentally, and masochistic tendencies inherently, might have been the most fertile land in which those trees could grow up. Ha Daechi was a piece of rice paper of good quality, and Yeom Sangjin was a superb artist. As the artist drew lines in an elegant style and painted with splendid colors, the paper sucked in the paints. (1:45)

This "artistic" relationship between the excellent "painter" and the pure "paper" reflects the intellectual author's desire for an organic fusion with the unenlightened masses, which, in turn, reproduces the reified image of the simple-hearted peasantry bearing a tough spirit. This fixed identification of the oppressed, however, is precisely what Lukács warns writers of when they describe popular life:

What must be stressed...is the falsely objective, to a certain extent sociographic manner of describing popular life to which important writers fall victim. The individual representatives of the oppressed and exploited appear as exemplars of sociographically fixed species rather than as independent figures; their outer and inner lives seem to be deduced from general sociological principles: i.e., how would such an exemplar think, feel, etc., in such circumstances? But in a genuine prehistory of a popular movement it is the complex, contradictory and very individual way in which the oppressed *really* think about their situation which is important. To portray the revolutionary awakening of buried popular energies with artistic and historical truth, this must first of all be shown.

The real historical greatness of a subject depends upon the inner greatness of the popular movement it portrays.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ "<Taebaeksanmaek> gwa jangpyeon soseol ui sae jipyeong" [*TMR and the New Horizon of a Feature-Length Novel*], in *Minjok munhak eul neomeoseo* [Beyond the National Literature] (Seoul: Somyong, 1999), 192.

In *TMR*, unfortunately, the revolutionary awakening of the *minjung* is definitely guided by the civilized leader, and the inner greatness of the exploited, what Jo Jung-rae calls the peasants' "flame of *han*," is barely fired by the intellectual's intervention. Whenever the educated leftists in the novel use their commanding presence to make the best decision, the majority of the uneducated partisan members simply obey their superiors without expressing any doubt.

In preceding studies on *TMR*, Ha Daechi and Yeom Sangjin are often co(n)figured as complementary features of the *minjung*. Kim Yun-shik, for instance, interprets Ha Daechi as Yeom Sangjin's alter ego, supporting the latter's abstract ideology with his indomitable vitality.¹³¹ Yi Dong-ha also holds that Yeom Sangjin demonstrates a successful case of the *minjung*'s conscientization, whereas Ha Daechi represents the instinctive energy inherent in their deeper unconscious.¹³² In a similar vein, Yu Im-ha argues that Yeom Sangjin and Ha Daechi together comprise one historical self that allegorizes the *minjung*'s theoretical practice and their vital power, respectively.¹³³ This binary conceptualization of the *minjung* is problematic, however, because of the asymmetrical poles postulated in the alternative community, as portrayed in the unequal terms between Yeom Sangjin and Ha Daechi. Ha Daechi's process of enlightenment by Yeom Sangjin, moreover, uncannily resembles the teleological trajectory of the state-led modernization, which also utilized the *han* of the lower-class to mobilize them as competitive workers.

¹³⁰ *The Historical Novel*, 299-300.

¹³¹ "Beolgyo ui sasang gwa naega boaon <taebaeksanmaek>" [The Imagination of Beolgyo and *TMR* from My Perspective], in *Munhak gwa yeoksa wa ingan*, 129.

¹³² "Bigeukjeok jeongjo eso seojeongjeok hwanghol kkaji" [From a Tragic Sentiment to a Narrative Ecstasy], in *Ibid.*, 171.

¹³³ *Bundan hyeonsil gwa seosajeok sangsangryeok* (Seoul: Taehaksa, 1998), 236.

In depicting the partisan group's communal life as a unidirectional training course, given by rational intellectual leaders, for the spontaneous, violent masses, Jo Jung-rae's novel consequentially misses the internal dynamics of peasant consciousness, including what they learn from their experiences of subordination, and how they develop ideas of emancipation through their participation in the resistance movement.¹³⁴ This splitting of the oppositional force between core and periphery, or between theory and practice, after all, indicates the rupture implicit in the *minjung* discourse—the rupture between the ontological privilege of the peasantry as the protagonist of the revolution and the intellectual writer's uncritical reproduction of their passive awakening by intellectual, as well as paternal, power. Thus, we need to address the issue of who, in the “progressive” narrative of the 1980s, is the subject of the *minjung*'s enlightenment. The following section therefore explores *TMR*'s structure of enlightenment, inquiring into the ways in which what Jo calls the “bio-language,” or “physical language,”¹³⁵ of those who are deprived of any means of recording is articulated and translated by their intellectual sympathizers.

¹³⁴ In his critique of both colonialist and nationalist historiographies that bring in the peasantry as the subject of history, Partha Chatterjee calls our attention to the movement of peasant consciousness: “If our objective is to write the history of peasant struggle in the form of a history of peasants as active conscious agents, then their consciousness must also have a history. Their experience of varying forms of subordination, and of resistance, their attempts to cope with changing forms of material and ideological life both in their everyday existence and in those flashes of open rebellion, must leave their imprint on consciousness as a process of learning and development.” See *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 171.

¹³⁵ Jo Jung-rae conceptualizes *minjung*'s *han* as “bio-language,” or “physical language” that transcends theorization. This will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

3. The Structure of Enlightenment

It is ironic that the story of why the peasantry had no choice but to become partisans unfolds in *TMR* as a story told neither by the peasants themselves, nor by their leftist leader, but by “middle-of-the-road” *intellectuals*. While the partisan forces are isolated from the popular life of Beolgyo—and by extension, that of the nation—because they retreat to a mountain at the beginning of the novel, the historical signification of their struggle is explicated by well-rounded intellectuals, who also take care of a series of social conflicts among the non-partisan majority in the village. Such an asymmetrical relationship between the elite and the masses in both the village and the area under rebel control is not only structured within the text. It is replayed between the author of *TMR* and *TMR*'s readers outside the text, as the former teaches the latter the true history of the nation.¹³⁶

Among the leading intellectual characters in the novel, Kim Beomu rises above the others. Though he had engaged under colonial rule in the leftist movement with his senior Yeom Sangjin, he changed his political direction after he experienced his share of grief as a stateless person. Drafted as a Japanese student soldier, he was about to return as a POW after the liberation, but became a foreign OSS agent after surrendering to the Allied Forces. Believing that the nation is prior to any ideologies, Kim strives to mediate the leftist guerillas and anticommunist landlords in Beolgyo. Always standing at the side of the *minjung*, within the text he also throws himself into fixing their problems; while, outside the text, he helps the reader to

¹³⁶ For the idea of the “twofold enlightenment structure” in *TMR*, I am indebted to Chong Ho-ung’s article, “Han, bulseong, gyemongseong” [Han, Buddhism, and Enlightenment], in *Hanguk daeha soseol yeongu* [A Study of Korean Historical Novels], ed. Yi Nam-ho (Seoul: Jipmoondang, 1997), 187-204. His criticism, however, does not seem to relate this structure to the 1980s’ *minjung* discourse, which is an important point that I would like to stress.

understand the historical context of the novel. In this light, Kim Beomu is more than a “guide [who informs us of] *Taebaeksanmaek*.”¹³⁷ He is an excellent model for “the conscientious nationalist force” in which the writer anchors his hope:

Our modern history has never allowed a middle way. But I see those who took it [the middle way] as the very force that is able to embrace the wide-range of the *minjung*, although they are denounced as grey opportunists by both the leftist and the rightist. As long as politics, economy, and ideology are bipolarized into socialism and capitalism, they might be the force for whom we could have some expectations for the time being. (...) To me, they don't seem to have been a politicized group; rather, we should recognize their role as moderator of the bipolarized political confrontation. As far as I can see, they were unfortunate political leaders who had to disappear from the stage of political history before their role or work was properly examined.¹³⁸

Jo Jung-rae's endeavor to seek the “middle way,” however, ultimately romanticizes the universal intellectual who stands “in the middle,” rather than questioning why those “middle-of-the-road heroes” could not exert social power in postwar South Korea. In *TMR*, Kim Beomu claims that what he pursues in the name of the nation is “not an abstract concept, but a group that defends and supports the communal life [of the people]” (1:169). In effect, the popular life of Beolgyo is not defended or supported by the *minjung* themselves, but is barely sustained by prominent conscientious figures, including Kim Beomu himself. In other words, in Jo's imagined community, who defends the nation and who needs their support is always already determined. Kim Beomu, masterfully balancing between the two opposing parties, almost never fails to bring dramatic reconciliations between them, but such solutions are by and large the byproducts of his heroic and solitary actions.

As a matter of fact, Jo Jung-rae's mystification of the intellectual mediator in *TMR* has been criticized for its lack of reality. Literary critic Han Gi, for instance, points out that *TMR*'s

¹³⁷ Seo Kyeong-seok, “<Taebaeksanmaek> ron,” 245.

¹³⁸ Yim Hun Young, “<Taebaeksanmaek> eul malhanda,” 149-50.

conscientious intellectual characters heavily rely on their ethical and intellectual superiority precisely because they do not have any material basis in the bifurcated social structure.¹³⁹ Kim Beomu’s historical insight overcomes the economic condition of his own class—he is a descendant of a landed aristocrat—yet this very extraordinariness contradicts his own vision for the mass’s autonomous subjectivity. As Park Myung-Lim observes, Kim’s noble family successfully “reigns over” the *minjung* both materially and spiritually during the social upheaval because Kim Sayong, Beomu’s father, in contrast to the other vicious landlords in the novel, dispensed his land to his tenants, displaying a virtue that was rare among the *yangban*. The desirable relationship between the landowning class and their tenants is held together by a “moral economy”; that is, “as long as their sponsors are ethical and guarantee that their right to live is maintained, the peasantry will not rise up against their landlords or the state.”¹⁴⁰

In this respect, it is not a coincidence that Kim’s tenant farmers are no less loyal to their master than the partisan members are to their leader, Yeom Sangjin. In spite of their different origins, both Yeom Sangjin and Kim Beomu are respected for their moral authority by the uneducated masses; they are good young men of culture who actually understand the suffering of their subordinates. It is for this reason that *TMR*’s imagined community does *not look anti-revolutionary*. Yeom Sangjin’s and Kim Beomu’s righteousness and responsibility are the primary, not the secondary, condition for influencing the masses. What I want to draw attention to here is the twofold structure of enlightenment; certainly, there is a disjuncture between the intellectual leader and the rest of the *minjung*, but awakening is not a unidirectional process transmitted from the former to the latter. Intellectuals also need to *learn* from the *minjung*; their

¹³⁹ “<Taebaeksanmaek> ui seongchui wa geu mosun” [The Achievements of *TMR* and Its Contradictions], in *Jeonhwangi ui sahoe wa munhak* [Society and Literature at a Turning Point] (Seoul: Moonji, 1991), 263-64.

¹⁴⁰ Park Myung-Lim, “<Taebaeksanmaek>, 80 nyeondae, geurigo munhak gwa yeoksa,” 73-74.

dilemma is that *the masses will not, or cannot, teach how to become the minjung*. Therefore, intellectuals are required to “discover” the way to make themselves members of the *minjung*, *without losing their hegemony* in the community of dissidents, since the *minjung* need the guidance of their leaders. This is an ethical demand that encompasses the entire enlightenment structure, filling up the intrinsic gap in South Korea’s *minjung* movement in the 1980s.

Despite the rupture between the inborn nobility of its heroes and the anti-democratic hero-cult in *TMR*, its historical lesson, resonating with a moral imperative for intellectuals, produced a striking effect outside the text. Through the “unofficial” education offered by Jo Jung-rae’s novel, his readers of the 1980s came to have an imaginative empathy for the people who had participated in the collective struggle for national autonomy that had occurred before the readers were even born. For the young generation who did not experience the Korean War, but still lived in the divided country, *TMR* provided an imaginary space where they could witness the suffering of their forebears, on the one hand, and learn the traditions of revolution in *their* past, on the other. As a writer who wished to enlighten his readers, Jo’s task was not simply to dictate the repressed memory of the leftist movement in Korea for the next generation. By inspiring his readers to learn from a legacy of resistance, Jo wanted to correct past wrongs through a revolt against present injustices. In narrating the history of the peasants’ uprising as the *legitimate* prehistory of the present struggle, Jo taught the youth of the division era that the spirit of revolutionary democracy was not imported from the outside, but cultivated from the tenancy disputes in Korea. Such lectures about modern Korean history, presented through the intellectual characters of *TMR* were, in effect, aimed at the reader. The teacher-pupil relation within the text overlaps with the author-reader relationship outside the text.

The most exemplary case of such a history education can be found in the conversation between Seo Minyeong, a seasoned Christian social activist, and Sim Jaemo, a young martial law commander from Seoul. In the face of the first dispute between a landlord and his tenants, right after his appointment to Beolgyo, Sim Jaemo realizes that he needs to understand the agrarian problem in general, and Kim Beomu introduces his own mentor, Seo Minyeong, a graduate of Tokyo Imperial University, who taught not only Kim Beomu, but also Yeom Sangjin at the Gwangju College of education. Not unlike his pupils, Seo Minyeong is described in *TMR* as one of the most conscientious, patriotic intellectuals of the time; though his rural enlightenment campaign was frustrated by colonial policy, he resumed his campaign after the liberation by devoting his private property to building a collective farm and a night school. As Seo Minyeong put into practice his vision for a village without class as well as his philosophy of open education, his remarkable personality became more venerated by the ignorant tenant farmers, not to mention his own disciples in town. If Kim Sayong, Kim Beomu's father, upholds traditional authority with the vanishing virtue of the *yangban* class, Seo Minyeong sets a role model for intellectual activists in a modernizing society. In this sense, his lecture to Sim Jaemo is intended for none other than the fledging intelligentsia who were expected to lead the opposition movement in 1980s' South Korea.

Prefacing his talk by defining the peasantry issue as the national issue, Seo Minyeong goes on to narrate the historical significance of the Donghak Peasant Movement, taking up two whole pages. Undoubtedly, Seo Minyeong's wordy yet fascinating explanation of the peasantry's Eastern Learning (Donghak) is closely tied up with Jo Jung-rae's effort to reconstitute the history of struggle that is not available in the official discourse of the state. In order to grasp the historical problems in the agricultural community, according to Seo Minyeong, one must address

the vestiges of Japanese colonialism—particularly its land management policies, under which “eighty percent of Korean farmers, eighty percent of the entire population, became tenant farmers, and eighty percent of them food-short farmers.” Seo Minyeong’s emphasis on the understanding of this colonial landlord system is obvious: to recognize the peasantry as the subject of the nation-wide liberation struggles under colonial rule. From his perspective, the 1919 March 1st Movement, for instance, could not have happened so extensively and violently if it had not been for the power of the peasants. “They must have taken courage,” he explains, “from the spirit of the Donghak Uprising,” when their pent-up frustration finally exploded for the first time. Though the March 1st Movement was eventually suppressed, the peasantry was “awakened to the nation,” in which they were bound to each other, so they continued their struggle. “A series of tenancy disputes from that point forward until the liberation comprised their struggle for the right to live, and at the same time, their own way of participating in the anti-Japanese movement” (3:166-77).

In this way, Seo Minyeong’s peasant-centered national history traces the origin of Korea’s class antagonism back to the late Joseon period, while seeking to rediscover such a subjective position of the peasantry in the nation’s present revolution. His historical analysis of the internal division of Korea and the peasants’ endeavors to overcome it does not end in pointing out the lasting impact of Japanese imperialism. He also pays attention to a wide range of protests against US occupation after liberation as the next phase of the “*minjung* uprising.” Rectifying the incorrect term “riot,” Seo Minyeong asserts that it was a “reenactment of the Donghak Revolution” because it was a kind of war against the American military government, which made an ally of the former collaborators, and disregarded the Korean *minjung*’s longing for decolonization. The US government not only dismissed the major political issue of punishing

pro-Japanese Koreans, but also failed in economic reconstruction by procrastinating about land reform in the South, as opposed to the North. Most of the “leftist rioters” in the liberation space, he concludes, in fact consisted of “people who had a desperate desire for existence, as well as pure patriotism” (3: 178-82).

Admittedly, the writer’s intellectual characters do not have a monopoly on *minjung*-oriented narration in *TMR*. The tradition of revolution is also well known to the peasantry themselves. Though they could not join the partisan movement, most tenant farmers in Beolgyo secretly share their empathy and support for the leftist vision of social revolution. Keeping tabs on the movement of the “mountain people,” they thus talk in whispers about the fight, in parallel with their grandfathers’ stories of the Donghak Uprising, whenever they have a chance to get together. The problem is that their political unconscious hardly leads to a heightened class consciousness, but rather easily ends in the idle chat of a drinking party, or the habitual lamentation of their misfortune. The memories of a Donghak Uprising participant, Han Jangsu, are of course comparable with Seo Minyeong’s “intensive seminar” on modern Korean history, yet they are merely received as an “interesting story” narrated by a “gifted storyteller.” Afraid of being charged as a political offender, the old Han stops recounting his experience during the 1894 Peasant War (4:53-62). The compelling testimony of the Donghak War survivor, at best, serves *to complement* the other intellectual character’s “dry lecture.”

In his preface to *TMR*, Jo Jung-rae states, “History is not to be ‘the record of the powerful,” and “when such false [history] is subverted, when history is ‘possessed by the awakened *minjung*,’ I believe, unification will come true” (4: “Preface”). The *minjung* he desires to awaken with his novel, however, does not seem to include all the powerless, as his hope for the *minjung*’s awakening had more to do with the self-enlightenment of the nation’s future

leaders, as epitomized in the heroic actions of the “middle-of-the-road” intellectuals in *TMR*. His goal of teaching a historical lesson and instilling social responsibility in the emerging intelligentsia was achieved to a large extent, considering that the historical novel greatly appealed to middle-class college students in the 1980s. Their concept of the *minjung*-centered nation, however, remains split, if not contradictory, just as the talented “mediatory characters” in *TMR* cannot help oscillating between a vision of socialist revolution and the nation’s reality of division. While they *can understand and sympathize with* the peasantry’s resentment against the corrupt ruling class, neither their understanding of the *minjung*’s history nor their sympathy for the peasants’ suffering offers a real solution to the fundamental divide between them, not simply because their class is more closely affiliated with the capitalist group,¹⁴¹ but mainly because they persist in their position as the emancipator of their subordinates. In taking charge of the *minjung*’s awakening, they hardly think of the internal divisions of the *minjung*—by age, gender, political consciousness, and so forth—but rather readily embrace the dual structure of enlightenment.

Due to this double bind, there is almost no dialogue *between* the intellectual heroes and the illiterate masses in *TMR*, except when the former try to instruct the latter. For instance, Kim Beomu makes an effort to explain the socialist revolution to his loyal tenant Mun, but Kim’s “simplified” account is rather twisted by the “poor and illiterate” listener. Mun’s “blunt” interpretation of the people’s drastic turn to the left leaves the intellectual character unable to speak.

¹⁴¹ Han Gi notes that the equivocal position of *TMR*’s intellectual characters results from the “insecure historical basis of the middle class,” and more precisely, from their “subordination to the capitalist.” Their “effort to be objective and moderate,” argues Han, “therefore cannot but be abstract...for instance, the thesis of ‘the discovery of the nation’ only mystifies the abstract concept, ‘nation.’” See “<Taebaeksanmaek> ui seongchwi wa geu mosun,” 266-68.

“Do you know why people become commies? The state keeps putting off land reform only to pay lip service, and landlords do their own things, so the poor and illiterate have nothing to trust and turn on. And now they say, if the partisan comes into power, they would chop away all landlords and distribute their lands to everybody. Who is not gonna become a commie? To put it bluntly, the state makes the Communist Party, while landlords make commies.”

(...)

Kim Beomu has no words in reply. (1:161)

In contrast to Seo Minyeong’s history lecture to the elite officer, who immediately demonstrates “the effect of education,” Kim Beomu’s conversation with the peasant only confirms the gap between them. “Disconcerted,” Kim Beomu decides to wrap up their “dialogue” at that point. Jo Jung-rae’s enlightenment project, though it may work for both the sensible characters in the novel and the intelligent reader outside the text, permits little communicability between the *minjung*-oriented intellectual and those who they supposedly represent, thanks precisely to this dualistic structure. The “narrative power”¹⁴² of the intellectual, in effect, albeit unwittingly, marginalizes the *minjung* by granting them the role of the “native informant” in their very own discourse.

One of the cruel ironies in *TMR* is that whereas many progressive characters strain to learn the bare language of the *minjung*, vicious rightists have little difficulty conveying in the vernacular language of their tenants their blatant intent to “protect” their own interests. The Jeolla-style threats of *yangban* landlords in the region thus impress Sim Jaemo: “What struck him, setting aside [the content of] their threats, was the manner in which they poured out coarse language without reserve... They have a nasty way of talking” (3:276). Paradoxically enough, the use of Jeolla dialect, by which Jo Jung-rae intends to express the healthy, untainted nature of the

¹⁴² Im Hwan Mo, *Hanguk hyeondae soseol ui seosaseong gwa geundaeseong* [The Narrativity and the Modernity of Contemporary Korean Novels] (Seoul: Taehaksa, 2008), 67.

minjung more effectively,¹⁴³ also arouses a sense of crudeness and obscenity. In terms of linguistic vulgarity, the extravagant gathering of the Left Eradication Commission in Beolgyo, consisting of conservative landlords of the region, is marked by the same level of refinement as the depressing drinking party held by their impoverished tenant farmers; both the affluent landlords and the lowly peasantry voice their class consciousness in candid language, together with indecent jokes. Here, it can hardly be missed that the rough dialect is often charged with masculine sexuality. As asserted by Yeom Sanggu, “it is the language of Men,” which is “weighty, trustworthy, and strong,” as opposed to the “crafty, frivolous, and unserious” Seoul language (2:196). In this sense, Jeolla language in *TMR* is linked not only with the aboriginality of the peasantry and the local residents’ pride against the capital, but also with the masculinist ideology embedded in Jo’s *minjung*-oriented nationalism.

Undeniably, the “non-standard” discourse in Jeolla dialect makes Jo Jung-rae’s depiction of popular life in Korea’s periphery more enriching and engaging. Whereas the analytical speeches of *TMR*’s intellectual characters tend to sound stiff and sterile, the lively talk of the *minjung* fleshes out the national history in terms of its day-to-day happenings. Nevertheless, the hegemony of standard Korean, the language of enlightenment, is hardly weakened in the novel, as illustrated by Ha Daechi, the archetype of the robust *minjung*. He feels “his mouth frozen” in front of intellectual leaders such as Yeom Sangjin and Ahn Changmin, no matter how much he practices socialist jargon like “passion of revolution” or “ideological struggle” (6:328).¹⁴⁴ Of course, the *minjung*-oriented writer is considerate enough to attend to even the unarticulated,

¹⁴³ “Sangcheobadeun sidae geu han gwa bulkkot ui munhak” [An Wounded Age, the Literature of *Han* and Its Flames], in *Munhak gwa yeoksa wa ingan*, 28.

¹⁴⁴ Son Seungho can be regarded as an exceptional intellectual who uses Jeolla-style cursing. But his “mimicry” of the *minjung*’s language elicits only laughter from his highbrow listener. Even his dearest friend, Kim Beomu, says, “That cursing doesn’t do anything for you” (7:70).

voiceless language of the *minjung*. “Instead of embellishing with letters or theories,” argues Jo through the mouth of an intellectual character, “they [the peasantry] physically confront, physically perceive, and physically speak.” Criticizing the intelligentsia’s vanity and misconceptions, he notes, “The peasantry makes social commentary, expresses the truth of life, and participates in history through *saengche eoneo* (bio-language)” (5:26-27). Jo’s proposition raises more fundamental questions about the “physical language” of the *minjung*: does every *minjung* form one body that feels and perceives social reality in the same way? If not, what kinds of bodies do they have? Can they claim the ownership of their own body language?

Jo Jung-rae’s endeavor to formulate, through the materiality of the *minjung*’s language, what is not captured in intellectual discourse results in the gender division of the peasantry’s struggle/suffering. Simply put, the *minjung* in *TMR* bifurcates into a rebellious, masculine body of struggle and a submissive, feminine body of suffering. This masculine/feminine binary is not a minor fissure in Jo’s emancipatory vision; rather, I argue, it constitutes the central axis in *TMR*’s paternalistic enlightenment, along with the elite/masses binary. The distinction by sex and/or gender needs to be differentiated from the intellectual/peasantry division, however, in that the latter is to be resolved, at least in theory, through social revolution, whereas the former is reinforced even after the conscientization of the *minjung*. Women in *TMR* are thus always already subordinate to their “patriarch,” whether they are old or young, educated or illiterate, traditional or revolutionary. For the sake of their children, most partisans’ wives passively endure suffering, hardly bearing a grudge against their husbands who have left home for the great cause. The few female partisans who come to be involved with the armed struggle through their familial or romantic ties with leftist men tend to follow, without objections or doubts, the

directions of their male comrades. In the next section, therefore, I will explore the gendered division of *han* in the allegedly progressive narrative of *TMR*.

4. Men Fight, Women Endure: Gendered Materialization of *Han*

Contrasting with the wide and varied spectrum of male characters and the vast arena of their performance during the war, little diversity or movement can be found among female characters in *TMR*. As Korea's national strife takes a critical turn after the entry of US troops on the peninsula, followed by the Chinese intervention, both leftist leaders and "middle-of-the-way" heroes, as well as impoverished peasants and wealthy landlords in Beolgyo, begin a long journey across the country, whether they become involved with one or the other side, or they attempt to escape from the chaos. Once they were under the DPRK's control in the early stages of the war, i.e., right after the 1948 Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion, nobody could remain "neutral" afterwards. They have already seen how the military and the police of the South carried out the "preventive detention" of those who were accused as leftist civilians and communist sympathizers. As a result, after the US Forces that landed in Incheon push into the south, most peasants decide to become partisan guerillas when the People's army makes its retreat into the mountains. Undoubtedly, this is the very moment at which *TMR*'s focus turns from its intellectual characters to the *minjung* majority; but their determination process is briefly described, as compared with Kim Beomu's or Son Seungho's choice of the North, made after much deliberation. What should not be missed here is the gendered way of obtaining—or being excluded from—partisan membership. Whereas male peasants need only to make up their minds, their wives have to seek the permission of their husbands.

Jo Jung-rae's terse presentation of five scenes in which *TMR*'s non-intellectual characters leave their hometown behind thus demands careful observation. In the first and the fourth scene, male tenants reach an agreement to become manly men by joining the partisan struggle: "It makes little difference whether we helplessly wait for a death, or we put up a good fight before we die. Which is better for a man with a cock?" In the second scene, Namyangdaek¹⁴⁵ begs her husband to take her to the mountain, but he gives her a simple refusal and a severe scolding. Namyangdaek cannot help lamenting, "You should never have let me work for the Women's Federation. Since you did, you should let me tag along, at least. Even if I could flee to my parents' home with our children, how could they greet us when they too barely make a living? I envy the wife of your dead brother (Oeseodaek), for she can do whatever she wants." In contrast, Shaman Sohwa and Deulmoldaek, Ha Daechi's wife, resolve their dilemma without meeting any opposition in the third and fifth scene, respectively. However, this can hardly be seen as a political action made by enlightened subjects. Sohwa rather chooses to "help" Jeong Haseop with his work in the mountain because "she cannot die before she is reunited with him." Deulmoldaek cannot find any safe place to hide, so her husband complies with her request to go with him as the last resort (7:202-4).

Ultimately, women's participation in the partisan struggle needs to be (dis)approved by their patriarchs. Even though they make their own resolutions, such resolutions are motivated by an absent lover (in Sohwa's case) or a lost husband (in Oeseodaek's case). It is also to be noted

¹⁴⁵ All married women in Beolgyo are called by their *taekho*, the second given name after their marriage. In most cases, *taekho* refers to their native homeland—for example, Namyang in Namyangdaek—followed by the suffix "daek," an honorific for residence. This naming is problematic from a feminist perspective because it takes for granted the exchange of women between men, from their fathers to their husbands through marriage. In this light, Ahn Sook-Won points out that *TMR*'s female characters have no chance to reveal their own identity since they are never called by their maiden names ("<Taebaeksanmaek> e natanan minjokjuui yeoseongsang" [The Figures of the Nationalist Woman in *TMR*], *Yeoseong munhak yeongu* 9 (2003): 44). Their *taekho* allegorizes, in the end, the place married women are to *be returned*, with their children, when they do not have the heads of their households.

here that the direction of *TMR*'s female characters is often decided in the domestic space, while men gather to discuss their communal path in public places such as a tavern or the center of the village. In other words, women's enlightenment is pursued in a private realm through personal channels or emotional connections with male members of the Communist Party, whereas men's awakenings take place in the alternative yet legitimate domain of politics. Whether they enter or stand aside in men's battles, partisans' wives and mothers suffer from and struggle against gender oppression, in addition to taking care of their homes without the heads of their households. This presents a striking contrast to their patriarchs who are entitled to focus on the public causes, including national liberation and proletarian revolution, since such men have already "arranged for their personal issues" by leaving their homes, forsaking their family members.

In terms of gender politics, Jo Jung-rae's *minjung*-oriented imagination simply follows the sexist patriarchal ideology that existed in reality, and this becomes clear when we compare the cases of Ha Daechi's extramarital relationship with Jangteodaek, and Oeseodaek's multiple rapes by Yeom Sanggu. Ha Daechi approaches the widowed tavern owner on purpose to "get some help" for the army and his "expediency" is even tolerated by his idol, Yeom Sangjin. While taking advantage of Jangteodaek's "promiscuity," Ha Daechi inwardly disdains her hypersexuality: "What a nasty woman, I see how you ended up becoming a widow" (3:119). In this way, Ha Daechi's exploitation of Jangteodaek is displaced onto the matter of her excessive sexual desire, which is inherently negative, unlike Ha Daechi's "healthy" masculinity. Later on, even when Ha Daechi reflects on his lie to her, who unwittingly helped his task of revolution, he is bent solely upon the integrity of the partisan struggle: "He wants to be a genuine warrior

without qualms by wrapping up his relationship with her, taking away her longing for him” (4:270).

Oeseodaek’s transfiguration from a violated woman into a violent guerilla needs more scrutiny. In the first half of the novel, Oeseodaek appears to be the most victimized character in the village; her husband went away after the Yeosu-Suncheon Rebellion, but she escaped from torture by the rightist forces only to be sexually assaulted. Her sexy look involuntarily appeals to Yeom Sanggu—a former hoodlum who becomes the head of Beolgyo’s Korean [Rightist] Youth Association because of his *han* against his elder brother, Sangjin—and she undergoes repeated rapes by him, until she attempts to drown herself after she realizes she is pregnant. Even though she, at first, wishes to kill him and then commit suicide, her body gradually accepts, and even enjoys, having sex with him: “Why is it that with each sexual relation her heart feels less and less creepy about the dirty, crawly, hateful man? Why does she feel her heart beating fast...in spite of herself?” (3:97) This unfolding of Oeseodaek’s sexuality echoes with the perverse logic of masculinism that passes the shame of, and the blame for, the rape to the female victim, by saying, “It is her sexual allure that provokes sexual assaults,” “As long as she remains in or returns to the relationship, it is consensual activity,” and so forth.¹⁴⁶ Even if the male author, as a progressive intellectual, aims at a dramatic effect by depicting the *minjung*’s *han* and its explosion through Oeseodaek’s story, her melodramatic metamorphosis endorses, rather than dismantles, the existing patriarchal order. Above all, Oeseodaek’s decision to participate in the armed struggle is rooted in her sense of guilt. Her husband was shot dead when he came back to kill Yeom Sanggu on hearing that Yeom Sanggu had violated his wife. Oeseodaek’s guilt about the “extramarital relationship” is distinct from Ha Daechi’s, however. The male partisan’s compunction comes

¹⁴⁶ Yeom Sanggu, for instance, shifts his responsibility to Oeseodaek, saying, “It is not my fault, but her allure” (6:118).

from the fact that his “strategy” breached the vision of the people’s liberation, and his moral scruples are later restored simply by his saying good-bye to his mistress. In contrast, the partisan’s wife is not sure whether “her sin could be forgiven” even after volunteering for the leftist army. She eventually bore a son with Yeom Sanggu, and by doing so, “the burden of guilt toward her husband would never be lifted off her shoulders” (7:118-19). A woman’s body, once it is “damaged,” cannot itself be “recovered.”¹⁴⁷

As if it is the only way to “purify her tainted past,” Oeseodaek becomes an audacious fighter in the guerilla struggle. Yet the imagery of her as a female partisan is no less problematic than the previous visualization of her as a partisan’s vulnerable wife. Whereas her earlier suffering was largely concerned with her utmost femininity, her bold moves later are often associated with her asexuality, as when she declares:

¹⁴⁷ Patriarchal nationalism is repeated throughout this extensive work. For instance, looking back upon his traumatic experience with a comfort woman when he was drafted into the Japanese Imperial Army, Sim Jaemo concludes that the women were “victimized because [Korean] men were so powerless that they were deprived of their country” (4:23). Although Jo Jung-rae does not overlook the fact that Korea’s patriarchal social practices contributed to silencing the comfort women issue, his sympathy for them only reinforces the masculinist gaze at the female body as national property, i.e., the Korean woman’s body damaged under Japan’s military sexual slavery system. This representation, in effect, homogenizes Korean women’s experiences under colonial rule in terms of sexual degradation, while the patriarchal body politics remains untouched in the postcolonial, nationalist reconstruction of the memory of imperialist oppression.

Jo Jung-rae’s “nativist solution” for the rape victims during the Korean War is not dissimilar. In order to appease two departed spirits, whose bodies were soiled by American soldiers, a *gut* (Korean shamanistic ritual) is set up in a village. Saying, “we, men, should take full responsibility for this misfortune because the war essentially belongs to a man’s world,” the village leader, the only man in the ritual, urges the remaining rape victims “to wash their bodies of sin.” During the entire exorcism, these survivors, veiled with white cloth, never speak, but only follow the shaman’s order to gain new bodies (7:269-75).

Undoubtedly, Jo Jung-rae’s attention to the taboo subject of Korea’s “worn-out women during the wars” takes a step forward from the national disavowal of its “shameful history” in earlier times. Still, his effort to “rescue” the violated nationhood by “remedying” their deformed femininity is confined within the same symbolic order. In this “symbolic economics,” as Chungmoo Choi notes, “the victims continue to be kept in the position of passive recipients of honor,” while “the key to restoring the women’s honor” is out of their hands, or more precisely, in the hands of the native men in Jo’s imagination (Chungmoo Choi, “The Politics of War Memories toward Healing,” in *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, ed. Takashi Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 404). In this Manichean structure of defilement or sanctification, there are only two choices left for the “violated” women: to exist as invisible specters or to appear as silent images, as shown in the scene of “bathing *gut*” above.

“Please don’t see me as a woman. I am no longer an immature girl who used to laugh and talk over coloring fingernails with balsam...By learning why my husband participated in the leftist movement, I have become a different person. I want to be a grand warrior, so don’t you dare see me as a woman.” (8:242)

Her—or, more precisely the male author’s—argument that “There is no gender inequality among partisans” (9:125) seems to be an oxymoron. How can there be any sex/gender discrimination when there are only dauntless *men*?

While Oeseodaek’s “acquired manhood,” including her filthy mouth, overwhelms even her male comrades, her political consciousness as a leftist is hardly captured in *TMR*. She is seldom found in the scenes of ideological debates, but often appears as a sentimental narrator who appreciates the natural landscape during the struggle, and is at times secretly steeped in nostalgia for her late husband. As shown in her response to her promotion to company commander—“It is good to save my husband’s reputation” (10:208)—her “pseudo-masculinity,”¹⁴⁸ far from pointing to a new subjectivity of women partisans, ultimately reinscribes the patriarchal ideology. Though Jo Jung-rae’s historical novel illuminates how the deeply rooted antagonism between the landed class and tenant farmers developed into a class struggle during the Korean War, he casts little light on how Korea’s colonial modernization, in combination with unrelenting feudalistic conventions, has intensified gender oppression. This complicated issue of gender/sex hierarchy remains neglected in the counternarrative, and therefore stands at the limit of the people’s liberation envisioned in the *minjung* discourse during the 1980s.

In comparison with Oeseodaek’s radical rebirth, induced by a tragic affair, Sohwa’s engagement with the leftists seems to be more voluntary. Her passionate romance with Jeong

¹⁴⁸ Feminist critic Ahn Sook-Won finds that the speech and action of *TMR*’s female partisans are “pseudo-masculine.” See “<Taebaeksanmaek> e natanan minjokjuui yeoseongsang,” 74.

Haseop, a promising communist, is a known factor contributing to *TMR*'s popularity, since Jo Jung-rae deploys a suggestive depiction of their relationship at the beginning of the novel. "The contradictory relationship" between the young communist and the attractive shaman, however, does not simply aim to arouse popular interest, according to the author. Through "their unusual connection," Jo states, "I intended to show how the ideological distance between different classes and dissimilar positions could be overcome and reconciled through love," and "how even a woman of shaman status could have her consciousness raised and engage in society as a member of the *minjung* during the upheaval of social conflict and historical revolution."¹⁴⁹

At first, Sohwa appears to be the most traditional type of woman, who is grateful just to run some errands for the man to whom she "gives her virginity." Later on, nevertheless, she inches her way forward, not only toward her lover, but also toward his ideology, challenging social discrimination against the lowest cast. After she is released from prison—she had been charged with delivery of some communist funds from Jeong Haseop's mother to her son—she thus articulates in front of her beloved, without any shyness, "it is better than anything else to make a world where everybody is fairly treated without contempt; and I'd like to do that, too." Although Jeong Haseop, the party officer, thinks that her statement is "not a conscious awakening to social revolution," but rather "a fruit of romantic sentiment," he concludes that it is a transformation in "the most Sohwa-like" way (4:214-15).

As a matter of fact, her own method of practicing her political consciousness proves compelling thanks precisely to her ambivalent position as a shaman, who is believed to possess supernatural powers by the "pre-modern" village people. When she performs a *gut* for cleansing the soul of Jeong Haseop's father, who was killed by one of his tenant farmers after his scheme

¹⁴⁹ "Sangcheobadeun sidae geu han gwa bulkkot ui munhak," 18.

to siphon off his farmland before an agrarian reform was disclosed, she dexterously rescues the rest of the tenants, who are complicit with the murder, by conveying the dead Jeong's "will" to his widow: "Do not sell the farmland, but distribute it to the tenants. By expiating my sin in this way, I will be able to go to paradise." Certainly, Sohwa's "resolution" to the tragedy was originally planned by Yi Jisuk, an intelligent leader of the Women's Federation. Although she is too educated not to analyze in scientific terms Sohwa's "tricks" during her performance, Yi immediately feels contemptuous of her own highbrowism, and reflects on her "blasphemy." Appreciating the shaman's passion for revolution, Yi Jisuk then embraces Sohwa as a "comrade": "What you did brought about an amazing result. It is greater than what I have achieved in more than seven years. (...) Since you agreed to my suggestion without hesitation, and put it into practice, you're already our comrade. (...) Jeong Haseop, too, will be very pleased to learn of your subjective action" (6:137-39, 144).

Even if Sohwa's action was initially driven by her affection for the "young master" and guided by a female intellectual, it is quite notable how smoothly she traverses between the traditional and the modern, as well as between the left and the right, drawing admiration from both sides. One might juxtapose her intermediary role with that of the middle-of-the-road hero Kim Beomu, yet there is a huge difference between them. Whereas the enlightenment discourse of the male intellectual is barely communicated to others, neither to his loyal subordinates nor to his learned companions, the performative language of the female shaman naturally forms a community of sympathy regardless of age, gender, social class, and political belief. As shown above, her ritual for the late greedy landlord in effect sets the stage for reconciliation among the living. Here, it should not be overlooked that Sohwa's non-linguistic aura is also corporeal, by and large overlapping with her sexuality. Her mysterious look simultaneously fascinates and

terrorizes men. Even her lover, Jeong Haseop, feels sexually aroused in *seeing* her indecipherable face, while trembling with fear when she leads him to the God's room (1:89-100). Yeom Sanggu, the right wing scoundrel, also restrains his sexual drive, recalling, "If you mess with a possessed woman, you will meet a sudden death" (1:204). Men's horror of the transgressive woman is maximized in the scene in which Sohwa has a miscarriage, caused by Yeom Sanggu's torture; her blood, covering the cell, panics even the inhuman villain (3:288).

Ironically enough, Sohwa's dangerous boundary crossing comes to an end as she is fully incorporated into the leftist world. During her second pregnancy, she stays away from the front and devotes herself to needlework, and when she turns her hand to manual labor for front-line troops, her supernatural powers are converted into maternal instinct. In the last analysis, the woman's enigma is solved by, or sublimated into, the sacred myth of the mother, which domesticates her frightening power by turning it into strong motherhood. After she gives birth in prison to a baby boy, she names him Minseung (民承; inheriting the people) in order to fulfill his father's will. Her request to his nanny, another female shaman—not to expose him to any *gut*-related stuff, so that Minseung can live up to his name (9:148-50)—intimates that "the people" her son should inherit, in fact, excludes certain categories, including the one to which she used to belong. In this way, Sohwa fulfills her duty as a good wife by carrying on Jeong Haseop's revolutionary spirit through his son, and also as a wise mother by preventing her "shady" past from interrupting her son's future. Doesn't this ending, however, serve the dominant male fantasy that men desire to conquer a femme fatal, but at the same time, to tame her sexuality only for reproductive capability?

In the national community of Jo Jung-rae's historical novel, the patriarchal law transcends class conflicts. Regardless of social status and educational background, all female

characters are depicted as either dutiful wives or sacrificial mothers, or in most cases, both. Even in the radical partisan group, it is difficult to find an independent, intelligent woman leader comparable to Yeom Sangjin. For instance, Yi Jisuk, the most educated leftist woman in Beolgyo, never uses her capacities and courage to challenge the male-centered social order. Even though she is well respected in the village as a teacher of the impoverished children and a leader of the unlearned women, she always acts according to the male superior's wishes. Repeating the enlightenment discourse of the leftist men, she wants to *assist* their revolution:

The ignorant masses are like grains of sand without cohesion. In order to change the sandy field into a fertile soil, it is necessary to irrigate them ceaselessly. Teaching and awakening should be the way through which [their own] water could flow. (...) Although it flows silently under the surface, Yi Jisuk believes in its righteousness and truthfulness. While Ahn Changmin, with Yeom Sangjin, is building a water route from which it sprouts, she is certain that she is replenishing the engine with oil so that the current of water can flow more strongly. (4:103-4)

Not unlike Oeseodaek or Sohwa, the basis of Yi Jisuk's communist ideology was established under the influence and the guidance of men around her. The death of her elder brother, who was involved with an underground resistance movement during the colonial period, led her to take the same road, and then her anti-capitalist ideas were pushed further by her ideological father, Seo Sangchoel.

In this light, it is no wonder that the female intellectual's political consciousness shines the brightest when it is combined with her intimate feelings for her male comrade, Ahn Changmin. While she waits and watches his operation for a bullet wound in his leg, she discovers in herself "another bead, different from ideology," and makes a promise to herself that "she will be united with him *in his body*," by transfusing her blood into him (2:247, 249; emphasis added). When captured and tortured on the charge of harboring and assisting a communist to escape, she claims, "Women can do such work for the sake of love!" and it does

not sound like a mere excuse at all (3:96). Frightened by women's endurance, Yeom Sanggu thus concludes, "The teacher bitch talks about love, and this shaman bitch also talks about love. Why the hell on earth do all the chicks throw themselves into love?" (3:280) Indeed, Yi Jisuk's passion for Ahn Changmin is quite a contrast to her fiancée's "tacit" attitude. When they are finally married during the Korean War, with blessings from other partisans, the wife confesses, "To be honest, I am so happy. I have dreamed of marrying [you] every single day." The husband, however, simply takes the wedding as a moment "to think about his qualities as a man" (10:230). Whereas women put *sarang* (love) first, *sasang* (ideology) comes first to men. Put otherwise, masculinity is secured by men's political consciousness, while femininity obscures, if not obstructs, collective struggle. Not surprisingly, therefore, Ahn Changmin defines "history as hemp cloth interwoven by numerous lives, whose anchoring points are achieved by a sensible and courageous band of *strong men*." After all, this "trustworthy" and even "beautiful" relationship among partisan warriors is conferred only upon men (5:59; emphasis added). Women's true beauty, however, resides in a different place—their motherhood. Kim Miseon gives a concrete example of what the male author expects from women during the war. Though introduced as a reporter for *Haebang Ilbo* (a newspaper published by the North during the Korean War), except for a brief introduction—"Graduated from Ehwa Women's College, she is a mother of two children, and a member of the Communist Party"—the reader cannot find any clue to her political awareness or activities as an important left-wing journalist (7:190). Instead, she mainly plays the role of the listener, who needs to be *further* enlightened by her male comrade, Yi Haksong. Reminiscent of the master-pupil relation between Seo Minyeong and Sim Jaemo, Yi Haksong gives her a lecture on the notion of *han*:

What is *han*? As you said just before, it is none other than the accumulation of anger, bitterness, and resentment. It is the very history of suffering, as well as the condensation

of spirit into which the experiences of the oppressed and exploited are reduced. In other words, it is the ideology of the subordinate. It is only different from [other] political ideologies in that it has not been equipped with theoretical analysis and the logic of practice; hence, it is a mass of experiential ideology. For what reason do we call the people the subject of the revolution, particularly putting stress on the lowest class? Isn't it because if we apply theoretical analysis and the logic of practice to the mass of experiential ideology, they will become the most passionate and committed force of revolution? That is the explosive power of condensed *han*. Therefore, *han* is the driving force for a historical change. (7:253)

Undeniably, this theory of *han* epitomizes Jo Jung-rae's *minjung*-oriented historiography, which he wants to disseminate in the form of fiction. What catches my attention here is not the hierarchical relationship between the author and the reader, as already discussed above, but the gender hierarchy implicit in the way in which Jo carries out his enlightenment agenda through a seemingly romantic, yet surely male-dominated relationship between the two intellectual communists. On hearing Yi Haksong's elucidation of *han*, the submissive listener barely responds, "Oh, how great! I have never heard of that kind of story. Perhaps I am a bungling member of the Party. I cannot be that logical, and when I listen to such logic, I am inclined to believe in it without finding any rebuttal of it" (7:253-54).

In this way, the male intellectual receives full recognition by the "non-logical" female communist. Although Kim Miseon, the formal member of the Communist Party, is supposed to provide theoretical instruction and the logic of praxis for her male partner who does not have party membership, the relationship between Kim Miseon and Yi Haksong is completely inverted, based on their genders. Yi Haksong as a rational thinker and a humanistic journalist, moreover, solves Kim Miseon's dilemma of identity, that is, her political stance in the public realm vs. her maternal instinct in the private realm. By distinguishing motherhood, as instinctive feelings, from a rational political ideology, Yi Haksong warns her of dogmatism, saying, "After all, motherhood and children could encourage and intensify your political creed all the more." Thus,

Kim Miseon's maternal instinct is corroborated by the male comrade who "always rescues" her, whereas Yi Haksong's own agony of fatherhood is hardly seen, let alone raised as an issue (8:34, 35). His effort to "save her" nevertheless comes to nothing later. After sentenced to death in the South, Kim Miseon decides to renounce her political ideology to spare her life: "The Party, which has gone already, does not concern her. What is going to happen to the two little children if I disappear in this world...?" (10:69)

All mothers in *TMR* are devoted to their children, whether they are politically active or not.¹⁵⁰ While male partisans put their political beliefs before their "personal business," their wives and mothers neither blame their husbands or sons, nor turn away from their own obligation to provide for the descendants of partisans, without exploding their own *han*. A good example of such a dedicated, sacrificing mother is Deulmoldaek, Ha Daechi's wife. After her father-in-law is lynched to death by a right-wing youth group, she pledges to raise her two sons by herself, even engaging in a job that is lowlier than digging up cockles in the freezing mud flat. When she is sentenced to five years of imprisonment for her leftist activity, however, she regrets that she tagged along with her husband:

If she had known that it was such a difficult task to make a new world, she would have borne any kind of hardship to hold onto her two kids. Whereas the husband is above the heaven, as its character, 夫, signifies, children are another heaven below that. While in her husband's arms, all anxiety and fatigue are solved...when embracing her children, indomitable power develops...(8:342)

To begin with, Deulmoldaek is not considered to be a member of the partisan group. As Yi Jisuk recognizes, Deulmoldaek has been faithful to her role on the second front, dreaming of a day when revolution is achieved, a day when she can be reunited with the father of her children. For

¹⁵⁰ Even Mrs. Yun, a promiscuous upper class lady, "sacrifices" her sexual desire for the future of her daughter; when she finds out her boy friend raped her daughter, she agrees to portion her asset to him on the condition that he will take responsibility for her daughter by marrying her (7:318-23).

partisans' wives, the joy of revolution or emancipation is completely *privatized*, but Jo Jung-rae treats Deulmoldaek's "naive" and "pure" sentiments towards her husband as a genuine expression of humanitarianism, as the essence of social revolution (5:295). This gendered division of wartime labor reveals the sexist binary in *TMR*: the emotional foundation of women's struggle vs. national *history* made by men's battles. In contrast with his wife, Ha Daechi is a model of the manly partisan, never thinking of making an appearance at his home while he is on duty; he does not even see his wife or children in his dreams, but only his idol, Yeom Sangjin (6:198, 166). Whereas women's political consciousness is often overwhelmed by their maternal instincts, men's fatherhood rarely obstructs their greater cause. In this regard, the gap between the first front, where men fight against the anti-national force, and the second front, where women endure with their children, is not to be underestimated.

Of course, not all partisans' wives are obedient to or cooperative with their patriarch. An exemplary character is Juksandaek, Yeom Sangjin's wife. When Yi Jisuk suggests that she join the Women's Federation, Juksandaek flatly rejects this, precisely because of Yeom Sangjin's high-ranking post in the People's army:

My husband, crazy about left-wing politics, is not a mere low man, but a high man on the totem pole, and is running wild. If I go crazy with him, what's gonna happen to this Yeom family? Cops and the Youth Corps call me 'Jindo Dog.' If I had not been so dogged, how could I have survived with my two children so far? Even if I was born to be a woman of liberal outline without a pretty face, I am still a woman who knows shame and coyness. But for what have I turned nasty, biting and attacking men? Wasn't it my struggle to live on with my two kids? Who knows my aching, broken heart? (7:102-103)

Though Juksandaek appears at first glance to be a proto-feminist, the confession of "mother courage" above betrays that her tough spirit and wild actions are actually derived from her "thoroughgoing motherhood." The survival struggle that forced her to keep her balance during the unforeseeable war is, in the end, ascribed to an unfavorable condition, i.e., the absence of her

husband; to use Juksandaek's own words, "her sin was to have married the wrong man" (2:226). Here, Jo Jung-rae's conception of women as "innocent sinners" is implicitly repeated. If fragile women, including Oeseodaek, are prone to be "violated" by other men, unyielding mothers, such as Juksandaek, are bound to live *a dog's life* for the sake of their children. When Boseongaek shows up to complain about her son, however, Juksandaek does not, or cannot, display her strong personality because Boseongaek's husband was killed by the leftist army. In front of her, Juksandaek is no better than a culprit.

If Juksandaek serves the role of a sinner, on behalf of her husband in the external world, Hosandaek, her mother-in-law, feels like a sinner even under her own roof, because of her two sons, who are each other's enemy. Every time she thinks about Juksandaek, Hosandaek cannot help feeling sorry for her daughter-in-law, whose life has been a living hell ever since her son became engaged in the leftist movement. Nevertheless, she cannot long for the new world that her eldest son strives for because, then, her younger son would be hunted under the leftist regime instead. Not surprisingly, she is oppressed, evening by evening, by a nightmare in which her younger son is shot to death by her eldest son, or vice versa. In this regard, she is the epitome of the suffering mother who has to carry the weight of the fratricidal war on her own shoulders. Her sorrow as an involuntary survivor, who cannot take any political side, is nevertheless transformed into a will to survive, since she must take care of the descendants of both sides. "Because she was alive, she could supply her grandchildren with some rice, taken from her younger son. After she dies, he will never care for his nieces" (3:337-38). She also looks after her illegitimate grandchild, the child of Yeom Sanggu and Oeseodaek, even thanking God that it is a boy. In the final analysis, women's *han* in *TMR* is always tied up with their position in the family, either as a wife or as a mother (or both), and ironically, passed from mother-in-laws to

daughter-in-laws, both through and for their patriarchs. Are women's *han*, then, going to be resolved by their fatherless children, whom they have raised under undeserved hardships?

5. The Descendants of the Partisans

TMR's dramatic closure preserves the will of the nameless men, who lost their lives during the partisan struggle, in their afterlife through the family line. On hearing the news about a cease-fire agreement, Yeom and his comrades come to the resolution that they will meet a glorious death as partisans, struggling till the last. "Believing that their lives dedicated to the truth of the people's liberation would certainly be revived in history," they do not show the slightest regret about their own choice or bear a grudge for the party's decision (10:339). When Yeom Sangjin realizes there is no way out of the siege, therefore, he takes the pin off a hand grenade without hesitation. On the threshold of death, Yeom Sangjin nevertheless recalls the face of his son, as if his cheerful voice were heard, "Father, I want to grow up as fast as possible so that I can become a great man just like you!" As he closes his eyes, "the face of his mother, the face of his wife, and the face of his daughter overlap" (10:339). This juxtaposition—the utterance of Yeom Sangjin's son and the *overlapping* image of the female others—corresponds to the masculinist ideology that pervades Jo Jung-rae's imagined community: men as the subject of narration and women as a vessel of reproduction, each of whose roles are divided, according to their sex, in transmitting the agnatic heritage of the nation's unfulfilled revolution.

In spite of the ordeal imposed by Yeom Sangjin's political activities, his son, Yeom Gwangjo, has no hard feelings towards his father, but rather holds him in the highest respect. In the same vein, Ha Daechi's sons, Gilnam and Jongnam, not only support their father, but also

practice his ideology, consciously or unconsciously. When they go by a sweet potato plot, the hungry brothers cannot help asking the owner if she would give them one sweet potato *in return for their labor*—digging out potatoes of one furrow. Though the owner says that it is okay to take some for free, they insist they should work because their father taught them, “Those who hope for free stuff are no better than thieves” (7:326). Although the partisan fathers were able to spend hardly any time with their sons, let alone give historical lessons or instill moral values, their descendants *naturally* pledge themselves to inheriting the will of their fathers. While this spontaneous generation of the *minjung* spirit along the bloodline may appear sentimental, it cannot be simply denounced as a nativist proposition if we relate *TMR*’s recurrent imagery of familial rebirth to Jo Jung-rae’s conceptualization of history as a living organism:

For those who are not awakened, history does not exist; for those who avoid awakening, history is no more than past; for those who are awakened, history is recognized as a living organism...History is not limited to time, events, or records. It is a living organism...that is composed of the numerous lives of the people who wanted to stand on the right side. Therefore, history is not an abstract idea, or bygone days, for it is definitely substantial. Thus, history does not flow, but grows. (10:294)

The children of the partisans in *TMR* show that the family, even when it is dismembered, is the last bastion that continues the “history of life” through the cycles of birth and death. In the domestic setting, the memory of the absent father is constantly recalled through privatized social rituals such as ancestor worship, and the spirit of the dead is continually revived through the living. The relationship between the dissident father and the fatherless son is at once retrospective and reciprocal. While the father, whose trace has been eliminated in the state’s legitimate knowledge, ultimately (re)gains recognition through the voluntary learning and active remembering of his inheritor; the son, who has wandered in search of his true identity, finally discovers his proud origin. In this way, the tragic ending of the revolutionary father is redeemed

by future generations, who are now granted a new historical mission to accomplish the aborted revolution of their fathers.

The lost memory of the unknown warriors in Korea's national history is rehabilitated not only through the father-son relationship, but also through a brotherly reconciliation beyond ideology, as implied in the last scene of *TMR*: the dead leftist leader is finally embraced by his younger brother—the very enemy/oppressor of the guerilla movement. When Yeom Sangjin's decapitated head is exposed in the station square, it is Yeom Sanggu who removes it, asserting the supremacy of the law of kinship over the law of mortality: “[He was] a commie when alive, not anymore in death!” (10:344) This final resolution demands careful attention, not simply because it suggests Jo Jung-rae's view of the divided Korea's future, as many critics have noted, but rather because it captures a moment in which a new patriarch emerges from among the survivors. Whereas both the imploring appeal of Yeom Sangjin's old mother and the violent protest of his tough wife are easily frustrated by governmental authorities, his callous brother, against all odds, succeeds in laying claim to the dead body *on behalf of* the family. Thanks to this abrupt action at the last moment, Yeom Sanggu dramatically becomes a humane character, blurring out his evil past. In the meantime, the mother and the wife of the late partisan remain as passive beneficiaries of the new patriarch's power, losing their last chance to express their suppressed *han* against the unjust positive law.

In Jo Jung-rae's “radical” narrative of the nation's unactualized possibilities, patriarchy is not completely ruined by the death of the father, but rather repaired with fraternal solidarity, which immortalizes paternal authority. In these “new” power relations, women's roles are invariably limited to the traditional and biological ones within the family, such as the maternal and reproductive functions. A striking example is the “seed-receiving” episode during the war: in

order to comply with the last wish of a partisan member's father to perpetuate the family line, his wife enters the area under the control of leftist force through cooperation between Yeom Sangjin and Sim Jaemo, both of whom agree that "human nature" comes before any political ideology. In the dramatic consent of the two male parties, however, the voice of "the seed-receiver" is never heard, for she exists only as an invisible medium for the continuation of life-history. "All women in this work," as Jo states in an interview, "serve as the womb or the earth that preserves the men's bloodlines."¹⁵¹

Along *TMR*'s agnatic genealogy of the *minjung*'s struggle, gender hierarchy is renewed through the most intimate relationships, if not reproduced by the "emancipatory" project itself. In this respect, it is significant to note the "chivalric order" among the descendants of leftist guerrillas: Ha Daechi's son, after he rescues Yeom Sangjin's daughter from the school bully, the offspring of a rightist, is gratified to hear her saying, "I had no idea you were such a brave guy. You must take after your father" (10:344). Their spontaneous empathy, grounded in the repressed memory of their righteous fathers, and conditioned by their marginalized position in postwar anticommunist society, is thus concluded with a *romantic* vision, i.e., the partisan's son publicly succeeds to the healthy *minjung* spirit of his father by defending the fatherless girl *outside of the domestic space*. In this "transgenerational revitalization"¹⁵² of masculinist nationalism, however, the leftist leader's daughter is no more than a character foil to highlight the birth of the new man in charge of the revolution in the present.

Within the patriarchal symbolic system that has contained both the official and the oppositional discourses in postwar South Korea, it is difficult to detect women's voices. Have the

¹⁵¹ Interview with Jo Hyeonyeong, "<Taebaeksanmaek> eun heori itgiya" [*TMR* is to Link the [Broken] Back], *Geumho munhwa* (January 1990): 127.

¹⁵² Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Narratives of Nation-building in Korea: A Genealogy of Patriotism* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 105.

victimized “mothers” or surviving “daughters” had a chance to tell their stories from the same historical moment? If so, to what extent have their experiences been interpolated into the rewritten history of the divided nation, from whose perspective, and for what purpose? Or, are they still waiting to be heard, excluded from the male-led project of *minjung* historiography in the 1980s? To read Jo Jung-rae’s historical novel in the post-*minjung* era, then, is not to return to the myth of a united people, but rather to reflect on the failure of this past attempt to unify them. Only by acknowledging that the *minjung* always consist of multiple and shifting subjects might there be a chance for another “story-telling of the people to come,”¹⁵³ to use the words provided by Gilles Deleuze, a people who will come into play as part of a change of reality, not in the form of a unified front, but through the process of an infinite becoming.

¹⁵³ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema*, vol. 2, *The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 223.

III. Afterlives of the Traumatized:

Park Wan-suh's Literary Testimony of the Korean War

1. Women's Memory of the National Trauma

In previous chapters, I demonstrated how the national trauma of the Korean War is bound up with the formation of modern subjectivity in postwar Korean literature. This subject in the counter-hegemonic sphere, I argue, is not always oppositional to the ruling power. From the perspective of gender, it is hard to make a clear distinction between the alternative space and the dominant culture, in that both contribute to reproducing the patriarchal symbolic order of the nation. As shown in Choi In-hoon's and Jo Jung-rae's narrativizations of the war, postwar Korean writers have sought in the aesthetic realm to correct the wrongs of the past, challenging the state's master narrative chronicling the nation's modernization. The imagined community led by these male authors, nonetheless, adopts the masculinist symbolic power of the oppressor, which is habitually translated into familial terms. In seeking different paths to modernity in their divided nation, the orphaned male protagonists recover the status of being legitimate sons as a means of renewing their family-nation, while female characters are hardly ever figured. Weren't women also exposed to, and traumatized by, the national catastrophe, even if they did not play a central role during the fratricidal war?

As an attempt to listen to women's own voices in such patrilineal Korean War memories, this chapter addresses Park Wan-suh's autobiographical novels. While keeping in mind the multiple levels linked through the medium of narration itself, I attend to the constant yet

changing methods of her narration; i.e., the ways in which the raw experience of the female author has been shaped in her effort to find a voice, as it develops through time and in negotiation with others. While I acknowledge that her narration, like any other kind of symbolic labor, is always already mediated, I also raise a series of questions: what made this woman writer determined to testify about her traumatic memory of the Korean War? Why did her stories of Korea's forgotten past receive widespread support from both critics and readers? What does this support have to do with her social status as a woman (writer)? In answering these questions, my analysis of Park's Korean War narratives focuses on the issue of gender, since I recognize it as a constitutive element in her memory works.

What distinguishes Park Wan-suh's literary testimony of the Korean War from other memory works is her doubly marginalized position as a speaking subject. Whereas male intellectuals, in their struggle for signification, construct the writing self as the unquestionable foundation of interpretation, Park, though an educated woman, finds herself fragmented and powerless in the world of meaning that is structured by the patriarchal order. While the heroes of male novelists (re)gain their modern subjectivity through their symbolic practice, either in the form of individual consciousness (in the case of Choi In-hoon) or of collective agency (in the case of Jo Jung-rae), Park Wan-suh's narrator-character remains split, oscillating between compulsive acting-out and incomplete working-through. Far from privatizing Korea's division history, however, Park's personal memory reveals the hidden forces in the constitution of the masculine subjectivity that has dominated the public memory of the Korean War. By incorporating her experience of objectification into her narratives, Park calls into question a series of binary oppositions: public vs. private, external vs. internal, domination vs.

subordination, and resistance vs. compliance, the dichotomies that have been taken for granted by many male authors.

Throughout her various writings, Park Wan-suh (1931~2011), arguably South Korea's most popular female writer, neither describes female subjects as helpless victims stereotyped under the male gaze, nor narrates her experience as a rational observer, as male intellectual writers strive to do. She rather perceives women's resilience, as well as their vulnerability, in their daily survival during and after the national catastrophe. Precisely because she begins with the subject position of the other in the patriarchal symbolic order, Park's literature sheds light on the underside of Korea's division process beyond the bloody battle scenes that are so central to both the official and the oppositional narratives of the inter/national conflict between 1950 and 1953. Put differently, her autobiographical novels uncover the way in which the war trauma is embedded in the everyday as a nonintegrated part of life beyond the immediate moment. In Park's recollections, family thus crystalizes how collective violence transforms the individual and the social, as well as the material and the psychical, as they intersect with one another at the domestic(ized) site of trauma.

The familial space shaped by Park Wan-suh's narrative, however, does not provide a secure refuge that is expected to regenerate social cohesion, as in Choi In-hoon's and Jo Jung-rae's novels. Simply put, most male protagonists in Choi's and Jo's works find emotional solace in the private sector after their political struggles in the public realm fail, and as a result, the spatial binary between public and private is solidified. In contrast, Park's narrating subject blurs the boundary between the personal and the political by interweaving familial adversity with national history, since, for her, family means an extended battlefield, penetrated by unconditional death threats and unveiled death instincts. This familial front is distinct from the one occupied by

the male subject's individual or collective struggle, in that it is operated by two female victim-survivors *in conflict*, though the death of Park's elder brother during the war triggers and intensifies the tension between them.

War trauma, family structure, and female subjectivity have been placed in the foreground of Park Wan-suh's portrayals of Korean people, ever since she made her debut as a novelist in 1970 and went on to become one of the most prolific writers in contemporary South Korea. While each of these themes stands out in a particular subgenre—division literature, novels of manners, and feminist texts, as they have been categorized by many scholars—all these tendencies are not separated from, but are instead intertwined with, one another. As Pak Hye Gyeong notes, Park's works on Korea's division deal with the historical event through the microscope of Park's middle-class family, the basis on which her feminist critique of postwar Korean society develops as well.¹⁵⁴ If the traumatic memory of the Korean War repeatedly intrudes into her "recovered" family life, this recurrent intrusion of the unmastered past is always checked by her sense of reality, that is, her sensibility as an educated, middle-class woman. Thus, family does not merely provide the main setting for Park's writings, but rather works as a mediating space in which the war trauma is repressed for survival, but nonetheless returns to its survivors. In Park's work, this haunting of the restless past is finally recorded by a female witness.

In order to unpack the dynamics of the traumatic memory/family relations/feminist writing in Park Wan-suh's literary world, this chapter draws attention to her belated, yet never-ending, writings of her war experience. Why did it take her so long to speak of her traumatic wound, inflicted more than two decades earlier? Why could she not stop speaking about it, once

¹⁵⁴ Park Hye Gyeong, *Park Wan-suh ui <Eomma ui malttuk> eul ingneunda* [Reading Park Wan-suh's "Momma's Stake" Series] (Seoul: Yeollimwon, 2003), 14.

it came pouring out? How are her later works different from, as well as similar to, her earlier works? Were her “almost the same, but not quite” wartime stories consistently well received, or have they only recently been re-illuminated in accordance with the emergence of feminist criticism in post-democratization, post-authoritarian South Korea? What is the significance of reading Park’s literary testimony of the Korean War here and now—in the divided Korean peninsula in the “post-Cold War” era?

To examine Park Wan-suh’s life-long engagement with the shattered self and fractured memory, I first probe the complex nature of the author’s own war trauma: the death of her brother that led Park to a dual struggle. As Park has described, her brother’s death meant that in the inner world of the self, she had to come to terms with her own loss of an ideal, since she was no longer supplied with a caring brother who had embodied modern enlightenment for her. In the outer world of reality, she also had to take care of her mother, who was shattered by the death of her son, and lost her will to live.¹⁵⁵ The brother’s death fueled Park with thoughts of revenge, but, at the same time, it also imposed a responsibility to support the family members left behind. If the desire for vengeance, rooted in this loss during the war, eventually produced her vocation for writing, the abruptly conferred duty of family support invested her with a practical eye. As the urgent demand for a stable life transformed the embittered young woman into a mature, critical mother, her retaliatory spirit developed into a sense of responsibility as a writer. One senses that, throughout Park’s life, her “‘realistic’ capacity to survive the tempests of social conflict,”¹⁵⁶ attained through her very traumatic experience, counteracts her obsessive fixations on the unresolved past. As I approach this dual structure of Park’s literature, what Michael

¹⁵⁵ In this sense, Park Wan-suh’s coming-of-age cannot afford the luxury of self-exile, as Choi In-hoon’s does.

¹⁵⁶ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World*, viii.

Rothberg might call “traumatic realism,”¹⁵⁷ I observe how the tension between trauma and reality grows stronger as she confronts gender inequalities, even within her own family, when she becomes the breadwinner—or, more precisely, the rice-stealer—of the household *in place of her brother*.

The double movement of Park Wan-suh’s trauma narratives, at once driven by the desire for revenge and checked by communal responsibility, corresponds to what Dominick LaCapra theorizes in terms of “acting-out” and “working-through.” Elaborating Freud’s notion of melancholy and mourning, he accentuates the therapeutic effect of the repetitive actions of Holocaust survivors. While he acknowledges that “Acting-out may well be necessary and unavoidable in the wake of extreme trauma,” he also notes that “Working through trauma brings the possibility of counteracting compulsive ‘acting-out’ through a controlled, explicit, critically controlled process of repetition that significantly changes a life by making possible the selective retrieval and modified enactment of unactualized past possibilities.”¹⁵⁸ This positive power of traumatic repetition leads us to consider what Park wants to retrieve from the past through her insistent return to the past, and what is in effect enacted by this return. To state the conclusion first, what is revived in Park’s writings is not only the memory of the dead, who had to be “buried too quickly and too deeply”¹⁵⁹ without the normal process of mourning, but also the subjectivity of the survivor who must bear witness to the death, and survive to tell the story of the loss. The performance of literary testimony enables her to reinscribe subjectivity into the

¹⁵⁷ See *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). As Michael Rothberg notes, his work is inspired by Hal Foster’s *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

¹⁵⁸ *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 194, 174.

¹⁵⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 15.

traumatic experience, the very situation in which her existence was degraded into that of a “worm,” as she narrates in her autobiographical novel *Geu Manteon singa neun nuga da meogeosseulkka?* (*Who Ate Up All the Shinga?* 1992).¹⁶⁰

Surely there was meaning in my being the sole witness to it all. (...) If I were the sole witness, I had the responsibility to record it. That would compensate for this series of freak occurrences. I would testify not only to this vast emptiness, but to all the hours I’d suffered as a worm. Only then would I escape being a worm.

From all this came a vision that I would write someday, and this premonition dispelled my fear. (*Shinga?* 248)

The witnessing subject constituted in Park Wan-suh’s continuous writings of the Korean War is not fixed, but rather evolving. Though little changes in terms of the object that is repeated, much changes in the repeating subject. This difference in repetition, Gilles Deleuze explains, is drawn from the imagination, by which “[t]he past is then no longer the immediate past of retention but the reflexive past of representation, of reflected and reproduced particularity.” This reflective representation mediated by imagination inevitably conserves two temporal spaces simultaneously, because, according to Deleuze, the “reproduction of the former present” coincides with the “reflection of the present present.”¹⁶¹ Deleuze’s insight into the role of imagination in correlating the reproduction of the forgotten past and the reflection of the remembering present helps us to understand the way in which Park’s active recollection of painful history enacts unactualized past possibilities. For Park, literary imagination does more than serve to undo the trauma of the war by arranging a proper burial for the dead, however belated and imaginary it may be. Her repetitive writings also substantiate her desire for self-realization through remastering the haunting memory of the dead ideal.

¹⁶⁰ I use the English translation unless mentioned otherwise: *Who Ate Up All the Shinga?: An Autobiographical Novel*, trans. Young-nan Yu and Stephen Epstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁶¹ *Difference and Repetition*, 70-71, 81.

In tracing differences in Park Wan-suh's repeated narration of the Korean War, this chapter aims to demonstrate that subjectivity is not unchangeably given, but historically unfolding. More specifically, I pay attention to the dialogic and transference relations between the past and the present, between the dead and the living, and between the loss and its remains in her witnessing subjectivity, which itself testifies to both the inevitability and the impossibility of witnessing. While her incessant reenactments of the unforgivable past refuse any easy resolution or prompt reparation, they also signal that working through trauma requires "the infinite task of encountering it."¹⁶² This infinite turning toward the past, as indicated above, is inseparable from the writing present that must be articulated in association with the previous present. Focusing on her desire to recollect the fragmented self, I thus discuss how Park's compulsive repetition of wartime memory is involved with her critical recognition of postwar society, in which the debris of the past is covered by the myth of progress. Park's literary imagination for recovering the historical truth, I claim, is closely linked with her reaction to everyday reality as a woman who is both a daughter and a mother. To this end, I place at the center of my inquiry of Park's Korean War narratives the mother-daughter plot, in which each generation wrestles in its own way with the scars of the unfinished war.

To Understand the (M)Other

Admittedly, the complex mother-daughter relationship in Park Wan-suh's literature has already been highlighted, particularly since feminist criticism has gained more of a voice since the 1990s. Earlier criticisms of Park's novels, mostly written by male authors, commended her

¹⁶² Shoshana Felman, "The Return of the Voice," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (New York: Routledge, 1992), 268.

involvement with the issue of national division,¹⁶³ but were often indifferent to or even skeptical of the “feminine” quality of her writing, i.e., a narrow perspective that lacks totality and a middle-aged woman’s not-so-artistic style akin to chatting.¹⁶⁴ These “shortcomings” however have been reevaluated by later feminist critics. For instance, Cho Hae-joang has given Park’s literature high marks for her “methodology of the life-world” through which the author explores the “history of women.”¹⁶⁵ Feminist approaches to Park’s works have been elaborated more recently in combination with psychoanalytic theory. Most notably, Choi Kyeong-hee and Im Ok-Hee, respectively, have scrutinized Park’s mother-daughter plot as a counternarrative that resists the masculine symbolic order, tracking the construction of Korea’s New Woman, as well as women’s language of the body.¹⁶⁶ The irony is that although she is one of the few women writers in modern Korea to offer a penetrating look into the lives of women, Park has often said,

¹⁶³ Renowned male critics such as Paik Nak-chung and Yu Jong-ho gave positive reviews of Park Wan-suh’s literature from the perspective of national-*minjung* literature in the late 1970s, focusing on her “consciousness of crisis” in everyday life that penetrates the fantasy of modernization, based on the “self-examination of a petty bourgeois” (Yu Jong-ho et al., “Nae ga sangakaneun minjokjuui munhak” [What I Think of as National Literature], *Changjak gwa bipyeong* (Fall 1978): 41; Paik Nak-chung, “Sahoe bipyeong isangui geot” [More than a Social Comment], *Changjak gwa bipyeong* (Spring 1979): 351). Kim Yun-shik’s analysis is more multilateral: defining the “feminine mode” of Park’s literature as the “archetype of matrilineal literature,” he relates it to the popularity of her “flawless” memory work, which is grounded in “reality itself” (“Cheonuimubong gwa daejungseong ui geungeo: Park Wan-suh ron” [Park Wan-suh: Foundation of Flawless Style and Popularity], *Munhaksasang* (January 1988): 154.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Yi Dong-ha, “Hanguk daejung soseol ui sujun” [The Level of Korean Popular Novel] (1984), reprinted in *Jip eomneun sidae ui munhak* [Literature in the Age without Home] (Seoul: Jeongeumsa, 1985), 133-52.

¹⁶⁵ “Jakpumron: Park Wan-suh munhak e isseoseo bipyeong iran mueosinga,” *Jakgasegye* 8 (1991): 97-144.

¹⁶⁶ Choi Kyeong-hee, “Neither Colonial nor National: The Making of the ‘New Woman’ in Pak Wansö’s ‘Mother’s Stake I,’” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 221-247, and “Eomeoni ui beop gwa ireum euro: <Eomma ui malttuk 1> ui sangjing gujo” [Under the Law and the Name of the Mother: The Symbolic Structure of “Mother’s Stake I”], *Park Wan-suh munhak gilchatgi: Park Wan-suh munhak 30 nyeon ginyeom bipyeongjip* [Finding a Path to the Park Wan-suh Literature: A Collection of Critical Essays in Commemoration of Park Wan-suh’s Thirty-year-long Writing Career], ed. Yi Kyeongho and Kwon Myoung-a (Seoul: Segyesa, 2000), 166-20; Im Ok-Hee, “Iyagikkun Park Wan-suh ui salm ui jipyeong neolpigi” [Storyteller Park Wan-suh’s Extending the Horizon of Life], in *Park Wan-suh munhak gilchatgi*, 129-45, and “Manggak e jeohanghaneun bulkkonoli” [Fireworks Resisting Amnesia], *Silcheon munhak* (Spring 1996): 402-10.

and also responded as follows when asked, “I have never intended to do feminist literature. Even if it is not intended, however, isn’t it something naturally produced during the process of making great literature?”¹⁶⁷

These interstices between the writer and the critic, as well as the discordances between earlier reviews by male critics and recent feminist analyses, attest to differences produced through repetitions, not only by the writer, but also by the reader, and call for reading the context, along with the text. Both Park Wan-suh’s writing of the past and its reading in the present require contextualizing and historicizing the identities formed by the very process. To delineate such differences embedded in, and also surrounding, Park’s autobiographical novels, my analysis dwells on the dynamic progression of the familial structure; in other words, how it is transformed through Park’s ceaseless attempt to narrativize her war experience. The confrontation between mother and daughter in Park’s literature is thus not to be taken for granted, but rather interrogated as the manifestation of more layered conflicts within, between, and around the two women.

Further complicating the current understanding of Park Wan-suh, I shall take a closer look at the subject position of the author-narrator-protagonist, stressing its polyvalent and shifting nature. Though not a few scholars have dealt with the tension between the old and the young female characters in her novels, it has been less acknowledged that the narrator unveils her stories not only as a daughter, but also as a mother. This is not simply because Park was already a mother when she began to write about her war trauma in her belated debut at the age of forty with *Namok* (*The Naked Tree*, 1970). It has more to do with the dual structure of Park’s memory work that sustains two temporalities. As described above, her recollection of traumatic

¹⁶⁷ “Peminiseum munhak gwa yeoseong undong” [Feminist Literature and Women’s Movement] (1987), reprinted in *Tto hana ui munhwa* 3 (1995): 22.

history is shaped in a constant dialogue with the present reality within which both the mother and the daughter are in the process of coming to terms with the indelible past. This process is neither linear, nor dialectical, since it involves acting-out and re-living in daily life the past traumatic moment, while the mother-daughter relationship becomes more entangled and even inverted.

This contrapuntal composition, moreover, hardly complies with the “female family romance,” in which, as Marianne Hirsch suggests, mothers appear as “the primary negative models for the daughter.” In contrast to the Western feminist canon, Park Wan-suh’s disengagement from her mother does not head toward a “refusal of conventional heterosexual romance and marriage plots” and “disidentification from conventional constructions of femininity.”¹⁶⁸ Instead, the daughter moves in the opposite direction, i.e., toward becoming a very ordinary mother, frustrating the mother’s wish for her to become a “New Woman.” Her transformation from a special daughter to an average mother, supposedly a gesture of defiance, however, eventually leads to a deeper understanding of the mother as another woman in pain, especially after Park is also bereaved of her own son—her last child and the only son to whom she gave birth.

In this sense, Park Wan-suh’s continual reflection upon the Korean War can be read as “the story of the way in which one’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound,” as Cathy Caruth proposes in her seminal study of traumatic experience.¹⁶⁹ By revisiting the site of trauma over and over again, she comes not only to discover the damaged self, but also to reencounter the (m)other, who also had to bear witness

¹⁶⁸ *The Mother/daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 10-11.

¹⁶⁹ *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 8.

to the horrors of war and then had to cope with it in a different way. As a result, Park's speech act, to become a subject of her own, has the effect of recovering a sense of connection. This community created by Park's witnessing neither reverts to the intimate familial bond, as in Jo Jung-rae's historical novel, nor calls for the solidarity of awakened individuals, as in Choi In-hoon's intellectual writings. Rather, Park's traumatic recall aspires to listening and responding to the other, based on dialogic and transferential relations. In lending her voice to the other, therefore, the differences of those traumatized are embraced, rather than exorcized, testifying to distinctive ways in which to live on despite enduring scars.

From this perspective, my reading of Park Wan-suh's wartime memories traces her journey from individual mourning to a new way of constituting the self *in relation to* the other. Since her writing about the dead is also about those who remain alive with the remembrance of—or by repression of—the traumatic memory, my reading also engages in different ways of counteracting the unhealed wound. I perform this task by focusing on the mother-daughter relationship that faces constant negotiations with the void resonating from the death of the family's only man. After the extinction of the law of the son/brother, which had formerly anchored the family structure, each female survivor's "afterlife" takes a different route in resistance to, and recognition of, their loss. As his absent presence, or his present absence, is continually recalled, but nonetheless repressed in postwar society, each woman reminds the other of the excess and the lack of life. For the mother, their afterlife is considered to be what exceeds life, but for the daughter, it refers to what is lacking in life. Whereas the mother remains alive, like a member of the living-dead, after passing through the extreme threshold between life and death,¹⁷⁰ the daughter clings to life, more than ever, precisely because she cannot find socially

¹⁷⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 47-48.

acceptable spaces for her desire: desire to enjoy youth, to pursue pleasure, and to become herself. This intertwining of the family tragedy (rather than the family romance) and the coming of (dam)age (rather than a *Bildungsroman*) of the female protagonist will be key to my analysis of Park's trauma writing: from her debut fiction *Namok* (*The Naked Tree*, 1970) and short story "Bucheonim Geuncheo" ("Near Buddha," 1973) in the early phase of her literary career to her later memory works, including the novella series *Eomma ui malttuk* ("Momma's Stake I, II, III"; 1980, 1981, and 1992), *Geu Manteon singa neun nuga da meogeosseulkka?* (*Who Ate Up All the Shinga?* 1992), and *Geu san i jeongmal geogi isseosseulkka* (*Was There Really a Mountain?* 1995). My exploration of Park's multivocal texts ultimately aims to excavate, through the lens of gender, the aftermath of the unfinished war as the very "stake" plunged into the heart of postwar Korean society.

2. *The Naked Tree*: The Stripped Self and the Bare Truth

Beginning with Park Wan-suh's earliest text, the Korean War has functioned as the defining setting in which her female protagonists go through a thwarted dis/identification with the established ideal of womanness. The absence of men in the wake of the war forced Korean women out of the domestic sphere to make an everyday living, even before they could mourn their losses. As women's access to the outside surged because of inevitable economic necessities, their status in both the interior and exterior of the household changed as well,¹⁷¹ but it did not

¹⁷¹ Feminist social historian Lee Im-ha's research examines thoroughly and closely the sociocultural ramifications of the integration of women's labor into the public sphere of postwar South Korea. Feminist critic Park Jeong-ae also points out, "While the extreme violence of war brought women hardship, it also provided them with opportunities for self-discovery and development beyond the patriarchal family system. In the latter sense, the war means a 'ritual space' women had to pass through to grow up as independent individuals, struggling through their sufferings and ordeals." See Lee Im-ha, *Hanguk jeonjaeng gwa jendeo: Yeoseong, jeonjaeng eul neonmeo ileoseoda* [The Korean War and Gender: Women, Rise to Their Feet over the War] (Seoul: Seohaemunjip, 2004); and Park

automatically lead them to emancipation from the existing gender ideology. Women's advance into the workforce also brought about social unrest, making their patriarchs anxious. Such male anxiety created by women's "dislocation" grew more complex as an increasing number of Korean women became engaged in businesses related to the American army base. Their involvement with the racial Other was threatening enough to exacerbate the emasculation of Korean men, whose survival was dependent upon foreign intervention into the fratricidal war. This sociohistorical subtext should not be disregarded in the examination of the hysterical female protagonist of Park's first novel, which is grounded in her working experience as a salesgirl at the US army PX during the Korean War.¹⁷²

After winning a competition organized by the women's magazine *DongA Woman* in 1970, Park Wan-suh's debut novel *The Naked Tree* was endowed with the typical features of women's melodrama. Not unlike Hollywood's classical domestic film, Park's work touches upon "the pathos of misplaced love," "generational friction" and "the difficulties of female independence in the face of...patriarchal stricture," "centering around a sympathetic heroine."¹⁷³ A historical analysis requires, however, deciphering the hysterical language and psychic energies that are repressed in the "melodramatic" text, and also repeated in Park's later works. The emotional turmoil of the female protagonist, above all, is neither caused by a truly evil villain, nor

Jeong-ae, "Yeoseong jakga ui jeonjaeng cheheom jangpyeon soseol e natanan 'monyeo guangye' wa 'ttal ui seongjang' yeongu: Park Kyung-ni ui <Sijang gwa jeonjang> gwa Park Wan-suh ui <Namok> eul jungsim euro" [A Study on the Aspects of "Mother-daughter Relationship" and "Growth of Daughter" in Park Kyung-ni's *Fair and Battlefield* and Park Wan-suh's *The Naked Tree*], *Yeoseong munhak yeongu* 13 (2005): 328.

¹⁷² Relying upon Bruce Cumings's point about the black markets formed around the US military camp towns in *Korea's Place in the Sun*, feminist critic Choe Sung Sil pays close attention to the symbolic meaning of space in her analysis of the female protagonist's experience as an educated Korean salesgirl at the US PX. See "Jeonjaeng soseol e natanan singminjuche ui ijungseong: Park Wan-suh ui <Namok> eul jungsim euro" [Reading Park Wan-suh's *The Naked Tree*: Beyond the Constructionism], *Yeoseong munhak yeongu* 10 (2003): 120.

¹⁷³ Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 38.

repressed by dominant patriarchy, as in the classic melodrama, but rather involves the historical situation that constrains the desires of the 21-year-old woman, both sexual and social. Can't we read, then, the "extreme pathos, domestic duress, and romantic distress"¹⁷⁴ that resonate with *The Naked Tree* as a narrative strategy for the author to reclaim her stolen youth during the war through recollection of the traumatic memory?

Ann Kaplan's proposition that we should view melodrama as an aesthetic form that emerged "to accommodate fears and fantasies related to suppressed historical events"¹⁷⁵ is useful in my reading of the melodramatic narrative of Park Wan-suh's first memory work. The two traumatic events enclosed in it—one familial and the other a war trauma—are inextricably tied up with her subject position as a young, educated woman thrown into war-torn Seoul; and her fears and fantasies interpolated in the forms of flashbacks, hallucinations, and phobias in the novel are to be approached from a gender perspective. The female subject portrayed in *The Naked Tree* does not form a singular, unified, and coherent entity, but remains a split, unstable, and inconsistent character. The textual analysis of the traumatized heroine needs to be complemented by the contextual articulation of the remembering author, because the past "I" reconstituted in a fictionalized image accompanies the present desire of the narrating self. The first question to be asked, then, is what led to this desire to reenact the traumatic memory through writing? Put differently, how has the trauma been unlocked, and why has it not been restrained again, once it has been set in motion?

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 73.

Entering the Witness Box: Unlocking Memory, Seeking the Truth, Recovering the Self

“That was because it was more urgent to suture my family, which collapsed during the war.” This is Park Wan-suh’s own answer to the question above, in her essay “Writing in the Postcolonial Context.”¹⁷⁶ However, even after she created her own family, through which she expected her wound to be healed, the lingering past never ceased to haunt the stabilized present of the middle-aged, middle-class housewife. Her wish for the memory of the war to fade away was unfulfilled, since far from allowing any distance from which she could see the full truth, it clung even more tightly to her “like a leech”: “I couldn’t stand it anymore, so I wrote in order to exorcise the dark, horrible memory. Now, I have depicted only one tree, not the woods. Though it may sound like an excuse, I could not grasp the totality of what I experienced during the war, because my personal war experience has never become distant, however much time passes.”¹⁷⁷ Although she waited expectantly for relief while focusing on the pressing need to repair her family, which was racked with pain in the aftermath of the war, she was never relieved of her traumatic memory, which had already become an appendage to her life. Just like a leech on the skin, the trauma resisted being detached, dwelling in the self as a non-integral, disparate fragment.

While Park Wan-suh’s writing is about the family trauma inflicted by political terror, it is also about the festering wound that is intimately related to the desire to regain the self within and

¹⁷⁶ Park Wan-suh, “Poseuteu singminjeok sanghwang eseoui geulsseugi” [Writing in the Postcolonial Situation], in *Gyeonggye reul neomeo geulsseugi: Damunhwa segye sok eseoui munhak* [Writing across Boundaries: Literature in the Multicultural World], ed. Kim Woo-chang and Pierre Bourdieu (Seoul: Minumsa, 2000), 658.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

beyond the family. In coming to terms with the “sticky” presence of the past, she sought to become a subject who could recall and signify the traumatizing event.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, Park’s attempt to reconstitute selfhood is not entirely subsumed in the personal, or domestic sphere, but is intricately combined with the political and social matrix. In revisiting the traumatic site, she also restores what has been repressed or marginalized in the dominant narrative of the Korean War. Whereas both the official and oppositional histories of the war, with their focus on the frontline, have highlighted how the *nation* was devastated by the ideological conflict, Park’s concern is with how most of the people—who were deceived, exploited, and eventually abandoned by the both states—barely survived, only to then remain silent. Park’s memory work, narrated in the form of autobiographical fiction, should thus be seen as literary testimony based on first-hand witnessing that illuminates the untold fragments of Korea’s modern history; rather than as an inaccurate second-class historical account.¹⁷⁹

To read Park Wan-suh’s trauma stories as literary testimonies is not to emphasize their literariness and testimonial power separately, but rather to consider the productive tension between the two. The private and the public dimensions, already overlapping in her testimony, become more complicated because the testimony takes place through an “imaginative medium” in the name of literature. The “fictional” representation of the war, however, is not incompatible with Park’s vision of historical truth. As Seung-Hee Jeon has pertinently observed, “finding out the truth,” a “clear goal” in Park’s autobiographical writings, “has more to do with the active

¹⁷⁸ In this sense, her Korean War narratives have much to do with what Susan Brison explicates as “a speech act” of the trauma survivor. In *Aftermath*, Brison states, “Narrative memory is not passively endured; rather, it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self.” See *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 71.

¹⁷⁹ I use the term “literary testimony” to stress its two dimensions, the private and the political, as Judith Herman notes: “Testimony has both a private dimension, which is confessional and spiritual, and a public aspect, which is political and judicial. The use of the word *testimony* links both meanings, giving a new and larger dimension to the patient’s individual experience.” See *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 181.

process of making sense of historical facts through discerning interpretations than with passively representing them” (emphasis added).¹⁸⁰ Such a truth-seeking process, more importantly, does not aim to produce a single, linear, authoritative truth claim. Through repeated revisions, Park rather presents an open-ended and evolving writing process, while excavating forgotten history, which includes how historical events were perceived by the people who lived through them, and how their perception has affected their afterlives ever since. By linking historical facts with the historically determined subject’s interpretation and empathy, Park’s imaginative reconstruction of the historical truth makes itself even more powerful.

In deconstructing a simple dichotomization of history and literature, her performance of literary testimony does more than challenge the authorized form of historical discourse. While recollecting the discarded parts of national history, she also strives to engage in the collective amnesia widespread in postwar Korea, in which the mass was not simply forced to forget, but in effect reluctant to recall the unsettled past. As the writer has said many times, what pushed her creative thirst into an uncontrollable desire to write was deeply embedded in the absurd reality that promoted social forgetting. Though her painful memories of the past had been always ready intruding into the tranquil(ized) present, the solidified ground of her quotidian life did not open its fissures until she faced the abuse of such forgetting. When she came across the posthumous show of Park Soo-keun, who had gained an international reputation after his death for his unique genre paintings, she could not help feeling a sense of vocation “to testify to how he lived.”

During the Korean War, he had struggled to make a living by selling cheap paintings at a US

¹⁸⁰ Quoting Park Wan-suh’s own remark, “I...could not forget the injustice and stupid deceptions done to me. It seems to me that my obsessive and troublesome temperament to *find out the truth* by any means became the backbone of my literary spirit,” Seung-Hee Jeon also takes note of the function of literary imagination in Park’s search for truth through writings (“War Trauma, Memories, and Truths: Representations of the Korean War in Pak Wan-So’s Writings and in ‘Still Present Pasts,’” *Critical Asian Studies* 42, no. 4 (2010): 632). While appreciating Jeon’s reading of Park’s literature and its emphasis on the concept of historical truthfulness, my analysis focuses more on the desire implied in the process of her truth-seeking and the discursive effect of such literary practice.

Army PX store where she had been hired to persuade US soldiers into having their portraits made. Because she “saw it,” she “ought to give testimony as a witness.”¹⁸¹

Park Wan-suh’s attempt to testify to what actually happened, however, ended up in the transformation of Park Soo-keun’s biography into a novel, because her intense desire to “project [her]self” led the writer, the witness, to insert what she felt into the process of reconstructing the bleak reality of wartime Seoul. She said, paradoxically enough, “Once my imagination was no longer checked, I could create a person with greater resemblance to *the truth* of him as I understood it...and I could represent more vividly the times when he and I breathed together.”¹⁸² Like a Möbius strip, the survivor-witness’s social responsibility is tightly interlocked with her personal desire for self-representation. In light of this, the literary imagination in Park’s testimonial writing performs a dual task: while engaging with historical truth, it also helps to recover a sense of subjectivity by providing a space in which she could repair the damaged self. Through an imaginative act, the suffering subject is transformed into a speaking subject, even though this does not necessarily guarantee relief from or reduction in suffering.

To capture such a transformational process of the suffering/speaking subject of trauma, the following section focuses on the psychic formation of Kyong-a, the protagonist of *The Naked Tree*.¹⁸³ Her explosive emotions and mood swings, as well as moral mysophobia and sexual repressions—one might call this her melodramatic state of being—are to be considered as both trauma symptoms and a defense mechanism through which she copes with extreme conditions. I

¹⁸¹ Park, “Sigol jip eseo” [In a Country House], in *Eoreun noreut, saram noreut* [Role of Adults, Role of Human Beings] (Seoul: Jalgajeongsin, 1998), 105.

¹⁸² Park Wan-suh, Kwon Young-min, and Ho Won-suk, *Park Wan-suh munhak aelbeom* [Park Wan-suh’s Literature Album] (Seoul: Woongjin Publishing), 138-39.

¹⁸³ I use the English translation by Young-nan Yu (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Program, 1995), unless stated otherwise, and follow Yu’s romanization for personal names.

argue that while the full acting-out of the most hysterical character in Park Wan-suh's literature betrays the difficulty of articulating the vexed situation, it also conveys her desperate desire to break through the impasse of communication.

Suffering/Speaking Subject

Locating *The Naked Tree* as the starting point of Park Wan-suh's literature, many literary scholars have read Park's "maiden work" as a coming-of-age novel that deals with the young heroine's maturation and marriage.¹⁸⁴ As Seunghei Clara Hong points out, however, what *The Naked Tree* brings about is not so much "overcoming" the tragic past but "unsettling" traumatic memories, for "resolution is forever deferred."¹⁸⁵ What draws my attention here is Park's particular way of problematizing the public amnesia of the Korean War through the use of her intimate memories, that is, through what I have called trauma realism above. Not simply as a trauma victim, but also as a faithful witness to the age, Park portrays the desolate landscape of wartime Seoul, into which she wedges her traumatic memory in the form of hysterics, flashbacks, or dreams, thus exhibiting an affinity with melodrama.

While the originary moment of Kyong-a's trauma is deferred in the novel, the reader first encounters a vivid picture of Seoul during the war, and wonders what makes this "lucky" girl so miserable. Isn't she, relatively speaking, "blessed" to survive the devastating event? She is even capable of supporting her family by working at the PX. Though her job to entice American

¹⁸⁴ For instance, see Kim Kyeongsu, "Yeoseong seongjang soseol ui jeuijeok cheungmyeon" [Women's Novel of Formation as a Ritual], in *Peminiseum gwa munhak bipyeong* [Feminism and Literary Criticism] (Seoul: Koryowon, 1994), 229-49.

¹⁸⁵ Seunghei Clara Hong, "Re-Collecting Fragments: Towards a Politics of Memory in Partition Literature" (PhD diss., The University of Michigan, 2009), 25.

soldiers into purchasing a coarse portrait scarf may be tedious and humiliating, isn't her situation better than that of the fake artists or "princesses"¹⁸⁶ working with, or around her, not to mention others outside the PX? Dexterously foreshadowing a powerful climax, the hysterical narrator's grumbles about her daily life provide a thick description of the interior of the PX, the gaudy heart of those dark times. And this is made possible by her in-between position; between the lowly and sly Korean workers and the arrogant but ignorant American servicemen at the PX, and between the phantasmagoric, colorful world of foreign objects inside and the stifling, gray landscape of Seoul outside.

Much like the Manichean world of melodrama, the spatial framework of *The Naked Tree* is divided into two parallel spaces, corresponding to the inner turmoil of the protagonist. Straddling the bifurcated world, the young heroine struggles with her "colorful ambitions," her "intention of finding the joy of life" (*Tree* 85), on the one hand, and with the decaying, but "stubborn," "grey" reality she has to live with, i.e., her mother, who merely hangs around the destroyed house, looking back at the good old days before her sons were killed in the bombings.

I hated her mousy greyness. Her hair, streaked with white, looked grey, and her clothes were an exhausted grey, the color of a dirty dish towel.

But most of all, I couldn't stand her grey stubbornness. She never stopped thinking that she was alive only because she couldn't kill herself.

My colorful ambitions, my desire to make life fun, swirled inside me but then withered when confronted by her obstinacy. (*Tree* 5)

I was severely torn between the longing for a brighter life and the resignation that I might never escape from my situation... Looking up in fright, as the war raged on, at the dark roof with one side shattered, hating my mother, eating *kimchi* soup; I might never be free from any of it. (*Tree* 83)

¹⁸⁶ *Yanggongju*, which literally means "western princess," was a derogatory term that referred to Korean sex workers for US military personnel in the camp town. For a detailed discussion of the figure of *yanggongju*, see Grace M. Cho's *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

Like a “shadow” of the old house, the mother’s life no longer accepts any change, as if it still stood in the past. Losing her hold on life, she neither cares about her looks, nor looks after the only child left alive, her daughter. Resisting any sign of being alive, the mother does not even bother to wear her dentures. Her mouth, without teeth, signifies more than that she has lost her appetite; it also implies that she has shut herself off from all outside contact, refusing any attempt to communicate. She has become, in a word, “a being without a thought. Complete hollowness,” as Kyong-a puts it (*Tree* 104).

Stubborn silence, unfocused gaze, shadowy movements...the mother’s “vegetative existence,” like a “walking corpse,” reminds us of the limit-figure that Giorgio Agamben denominates as *Muselmann*, the “complete witness” to Auschwitz.¹⁸⁷ Not unlike the “husk-men” Primo Levi speaks of, or what Aldo Capri calls the “living dead,” Kyong-a’s mother inhabits “the extreme threshold between life and death, the human and the inhuman,” as if to *embody* the impossibility of witnessing an extreme situation. Just as the *Muselmann* was the “great fear of prisoners” in the concentration camps, Kyong-a not only abhors the dehumanized mother, but also feels horrified to see her ceasing to be human, afraid that her life will become like her mother’s.

She [mother] moved slowly and noiselessly, chewing in her strange way, because she didn’t have her false teeth in.

I lost my appetite before I had my fill, thinking that the act of eating was a cursed obligation. As I watched my mother chew, I placed my spoon on the tray and tried to swallow the waves of hatred that periodically welled up inside me. I didn’t like my mother; in fact, I hated her. (*Tree* 5)

Perhaps [it was] because of my mother’s complete emptiness that I hated her, at the same time fearing her might. (*Tree* 104)

¹⁸⁷ *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 41-86.

Nevertheless, the daughter persistently grapples with the issue of the mother, exhausting all possibilities of bringing the mother to herself. In contrast to the concentration camp prisoners Agamben describes, who avoid at any cost encountering those who have “touched the bottom” of humanity, Kyong-a keeps striving to speak with the one that refutes ordinary life principles in her extreme situation, including communication with others. To prove that they are still alive, for instance, Kyong-a pleads with her mother to make some dumplings for New Year’s, and also attempts to sever the ties to the past by smashing a guitar left by her deceased brothers. However, their desperate fight over the guitar ends with the “victory” of the mother, who momentarily changes into a “healthy, passionate woman with a strong throbbing pulse”; and the dismal menu, cold *kimchi* soup, is unfailingly delivered on their dull New Year’s Day.

The mother-daughter conflict in *The Naked Tree* presents two different ways of bearing witness to the unbearable. Whereas the mother insists on remaining in the past by giving up her voice and identity, the daughter holds on to the possibility of moving on while searching for an appropriate word through which to articulate her agony. Unlike the silent mother, who is subject *to* suffering, the daughter seeks to become *the subject of suffering*; isn’t this, at least, the only thing to which she can stake out a claim?: “Only the things that were mine, without any pretention, were left. Feelings of fright and coldness. They were the only feelings I had, incredibly vivid and strong” (*Tree* 104). Despite her yearning to express, she does not know how to enunciate her thoughts and feelings without mimicking or borrowing somebody else’s language. Since she used to see the world through her brothers’ eyes, without them, she could not find “what was worthy of love, worthy of passion” (12). The war deprived her not only of the lives of her beloved, but also of the perceptual, emotional, and intellectual ground on which she

could discover the particularities of an object. What had been lost was not an entity that existed separately from her; it was rather something constitutive of the self.

In this regard, the ruptured mother-daughter relationship functions as a screen upon which the loss is tenaciously reenacted, and simultaneously, the primal scene of the trauma is effectively concealed. While the death of the family members penetrates their surviving life, it ironically works to inhibit them from another split: “Living in this vast old house, just the two of us, we were not bound by any affection or obligation. We must have been caught by the spirit of the old house. I couldn’t leave it, but it wasn’t because of anyone else” (*Tree* 37). Tied up with the presence of absence, the survivors defer facing the traumatic experience. As Kyong-a narrates, “I was afraid of looking at them [the chains bound me]. I hadn’t forgotten about them. I was just avoiding as deftly as possible” (84). Instead of mourning a shared traumatic event, the mother and daughter project their internalized guilt and accumulated resentment onto each other. Kyong-a’s hatred/fear of her mother goes much deeper than the level of interpersonal strife, as it overlaps with her intrapsychical process of incorporating the loss into her consciousness. When her endeavor to acknowledge the loss through a gesture of connection with the other survivor in the family fails, her anxiety to (re)discover her place in the world cannot find any outlet other than her hysterical symptoms, such as cynical remarks and chronic depression.

In this situation, it is no wonder that Kyong-a comes up with “the idea of falling in love with Ock Hui-do” on the very day the new painter arrives. Catching “a glimpse of a wasted landscape,” she wishes him to be different from the others who belong to the PX, impregnated with the smell of dollars (*Tree* 9). Indeed, he turns out to have been a “real artist” before the war disintegrated the order of things. Though he has been degraded to a “mere painter” working at a place in which coarse imitations are bargained for as if they were genuine pieces, he struggles to

preserve his own realm. Still, he cannot entirely hide his solitude and despair, as he stares at the ragged grey curtain hanging in the portrait booth. In his gaze toward the other sphere beyond the world of survival, Kyong-a perceives his loneliness, precisely because she also suffers from loneliness but cannot share it with anybody else. Neither the painter nor the salesgirl is integrated into the capitalist jungle of the PX, not to mention that both are alienated from living like human beings. To survive the war, and to support their family members, they are compelled to suspend their dreams. As they go back and forth between the garish scenery of the PX store and the grim landscape of wartime Seoul, they feel as if they have become like “the chimpanzee” at the toy stall, with a sad face that seems to say he hates himself, but still “has to do his silly routine whenever someone winds him up.” Just like his “endless, boring repetition,” Mr. Ock spits out, “every time we smell dollars, you speak halting English with a sad face and I draw the same damned mongrel faces over and over again” (*Tree* 108). As a gesture to identify himself as a human being,¹⁸⁸ he reaches out to his companion, but their desperate kiss brings about a silent sorrow instead of assurance or satisfaction. Trembling with his unfulfilled desire, the painter finally opens his lips, “It’s been so long that I wonder if I’m still an artist. I’m more afraid than that I’m not a person. Let me be an artist for a few days,” and then parts from her (109). While they feel sympathy for each other, their sense of comradeship at the crossroads of humanity, after all, hardly relieves their pain, or replaces their desire.

It is notable here that the narrator leaves it equivocal whether this scene is real or imagined: “Once alone, I felt the breathless scene near the cathedral was no longer real...It could have been a fantasy I imagined in the middle of a night. Like the poor match girl’s dream, her

¹⁸⁸ Embracing Kyong-a, in the original text Mr. Ock cries out, “I want to be a human being. I want to identify myself as a human being.” But for some reason, this line is omitted in the English translation. See *Namok* (Paju: Segyesa, 1995), 172.

hungry fantasy about a turkey and a warm stove, her lonely fantasy about a warm-hearted grandmother. I must have been imagining what I craved” (*Tree* 109-110). In other words, the remembering subject is not certain if what she experienced was reality or illusion. Also remarkable is the way in which she interprets her fantasy. Likening herself to the orphaned girl in the fairy tale, she makes a distant allusion to her own yearning for her mother’s affection. As if she intended to deny the phantasmatic experience, furthermore, she flings and crushes the toy dishes that Mr. Ock bought for her before they kissed. Though she felt like shouting that she wasn’t a child who would like a toy, she could not speak out; instead, she suggested that she should buy something for him too, but his response, “For me? A toy?” made her find him “detestable” for the first time (*Tree* 107). By smashing the toy dishes, she seems to vent her frustrated desire to be treated as a mature counterpart by the other sex. Her desire *as* a grown woman who, supposedly, can fill in the Other’s lack, however, is intricately entwined with her own lack; that is, the lack of recognition by her mother, as hinted at in her identification with the little match girl. As her dual attempts—to break the void in the mother-daughter relationship, and to tear open the curtain that screens her off from Mr. Ock’s world of art—come to a deadlock, Kyong-a turns her attention to somebody else, one who can appreciate her existence, whose wants she can satisfy.

“Don’t Break Me!”: To Unveil the Trauma

During Mr. Ock’s absence, Kyong-a is tempted to engage in a “shallow and sensual” relationship with a green-eyed GI. The soldier’s hunger, at least, is something she could alleviate. Her fantasy of being able to satisfy the racial other’s desire, at first, seems to correspond to “the

double structure” of fantasy, which “simultaneously enacts the individual’s transgressive wish, and punishes the wisher,” as in Freud’s classic essay, “A Child is Being Beaten.”¹⁸⁹ By serving the carnal appetite of the American GI, she also wants to fulfill her self-destructive desire, i.e., to become a “fallen woman,” the kind of woman whom she used to look down upon. This “abrupt” change in her attitude should be understood within the larger narrative structure, because her fantasy of self-injury aims not simply at exploring the “mysterious power of the opposite sex,” but rather at exteriorizing her suffering, which cannot be expressed otherwise (*Tree* 95).

It wouldn’t be my responsibility if I were broken apart. It was not important that I was the one who might be broken apart. To me, the fact that I was not responsible was important. *I wanted to shout it, so everyone could hear.*

What really mattered to me was having an excuse, to be able to say it was all because of Ock Hui-do, that nothing like this would have happened if only he had been with me. (*Tree* 127; emphasis added)

In this sense, her self-mutilation attempt can be read as a radical gesture to break through a failed communication. Rendering her own body a site for the wound that cannot be inscribed in the Symbolic, she makes a plea for recognition in a melodramatic way. Venting her anger and frustration, she also demands that her agony be shared by those who refuse to step out of their own world: Mr. Ock, who has returned to the path of art beyond the grey curtain, and her mother, who has become reified as a part of the grey, collapsing house.

Confronted with the wall that she cannot pierce on her own, Kyong-a decides to tear it down with a foreign hand. By giving her body to the sexual desire of the green-eyed GI, she dreams of revenge upon the unsympathetic, unresponsive others. That is why she chooses Joe over Tae-su, a Korean electrician at the PX. The sweet-hearted young man is too conventional to

¹⁸⁹ Following Joan W. Scott, I consider fantasy as a “formal mechanism for the articulation of scenarios that are at once historically specific in their representation and detail and transcendent of historical specificity.” See “Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (2001): 288.

make a good partner for her transgressive move. Mr. Ock even “blesses” Kyong-a and Tae-su, saying, “you two looked good together” (*Tree* 102). Additionally, she finds Tae-su’s earnest courtship rather burdensome because she feels incapable of meeting his fervent wishes, “You should be different from other women.” Their first date on Christmas Eve therefore ends with a meaningless conversation after an awkward embrace, as Kyong-a narrates, “All I experienced from my first kiss was that it was cold” (43-44).

In contrast to Tae-su, Joe seeks to elicit her repressed desire. Trying to “penetrate” “a thick taboo” behind which the women that cannot be bought are hidden, he teases her about being a prude. His candid wooing actually works to awaken “the embarrassing consciousness” within her, as Kyong-a feels that she is “being transformed into a female animal” under his gaze. Allured by his whisper, “I want to love this country through you,” she thus wonders, “Did I need to be the victim in his love affair? I could be a co-conspirator. I could conspire in a fantastic love affair with him.” Her private imagination is halted, however, when she comes to think of her mother: “I couldn’t imagine knocking on the gate of my house and introducing this man to my grey mother.” She is not brave enough to go out with an American soldier into a public space, precisely because she is “from a good family” (*Tree* 117-18).

Again, it does not take a long time for Kyong-a to realize that her mother, the sole family member left aside from her, is no longer willing to maintain any family values. After the sudden deaths of her sons, hasn’t she lived on only because she could not kill herself? Nevertheless, Kyong-a makes one last attempt to perk her up. As her friend Misuk buys some mung-bean pancakes for her sick mother, Kyong-a, too, makes an impulsive purchase, hoping that the hot, fresh dish will provide warmth for their cold table. Even though the mother has stopped performing her role in the house, the daughter still retains a lingering memory from the past,

when the mother enjoyed cooking for her family. Kyong-a's final attempt, however, fails to bring life to her mother's dull eyes. For the mother does not react even a tiny bit to the pancakes that Kyong-a even put under her clothes to keep warm. Kyong-a flies into a fury and plots a scenario to galvanize her mother:

I should have brought that Yankee home. (...) If I knocked on our gate with my arm hooked in his, my mother's eyes couldn't remain expressionless. (...) I had to invite him here behind these high walls. (...) She couldn't help but be shocked. I'd ignore her reaction and walk with him around the house. (...) I would let him sit down on my father's overstuffed chair, let him touch my brothers' things. (...) I would whisper to him in front of my mother. Then she wouldn't be able to gaze at her daughter with those lifeless eyes. (*Tree* 121)

In this light, we can say that the primary cause of Kyong-a's breakaway from the taboo of "dongbang yeui jiguk"¹⁹⁰ is not the foreign man's seduction, but her mother's inertia. Due to her apathy, the "maiden from a good family" can take a turn as a "Yankee slut," no longer minding the gaze of others. Or, more precisely, she intends to breach the decorum of the nation by opening the eyes of others with alarm, particularly her mother's inanimate eyes.

While Kyong-a is seeking out a chance to trespass social norms, she confronts another woman: Mr. Ock's wife, towards whom Kyong-a feels ambivalent sentiments. Apparently, the wife is her romantic rival, and yet Kyong-a is unable to dislike her. In spite of their life of distress, Mr. Ock's wife admirably performs her roles as a supportive wife and a good mother without losing her dignity or vitality as a woman, *presenting a striking contrast to Kyong-a's mother*. If Mr. Ock is a male character to whom Kyong-a projects her nostalgia for the lost father and her longing for the dead brothers, his wife is the idealized mother figure¹⁹¹ who has

¹⁹⁰ "Tong bang [dongbang] yeui jiguk" can be translated into "Nation of Decorum in the East." In the novel, Joe uses the term "to refer to women who can't be bought" (*Tree* 118).

¹⁹¹ Kim Eun-ha, "Aejeung sok ui gongsaeng, uuljeungjeok monyeo gwangye: Park Wan-suh ui <Namok> ron" [Symbiosis within Love-Hate, Melancholic Mother-Daughter Relationship: Park Wan-suh's *The Naked*], *Yeoseong gwa sahoe* 15 (May 2004): 112-30.

vanished from Kyong-a's old house, along with the male members of the family. With his own family, Mr. Ock thus does not seem to be the same painter at the PX, who Kyong-a imagined was commiserating with her.

She is baffled, even more, to see the painting that Mr. Ock has made to recover his identity as an artist. The "dead tree killed by a cruel dry spell on his canvas" does not show any of the "joy of life" in bright colors and vibrant rhythms that she envisions in art, beyond the grey curtain of reality. All she can see in his work is "poverty and desperation," which hardly differs from the gloomy landscape she is faced with in her mundane life. Perplexed and dismayed, Kyong-a takes it out on Mr. Ock's wife, crying to her, "I'd rather take off my clothes and let him paint me, instead of watching him paint dead wood and things like that" (*Tree* 124-25). However, when the woman asks back, "Who on earth are you?" Kyong-a can barely answer, "I'll tell you by and by." Kyong-a does not know, either, who she is, and what she wants, just as she "had to make her [Mr. Ock's wife] angry...for no reason" (125-26).

To discover her true self, and to explore her repressed desire, Kyong-a finally makes use of the American GI's orientalist curiosity:

Through him I wanted to step out of all those superfluous layers of myself. I wanted to throw off those selves, the ones that sometimes tore me to pieces, that hid behind myself and transformed with such dizzying speed without ever consulting me.

With Joe's help, I believed I could. He certainly would show up the real me. I wanted to see my body and soul in all its nakedness. (*Tree* 131)

Even holding a rough map Joe has drawn for her, however, she still hesitates, and heads in another direction instead; she is led to the toy vendor only to find that the chimpanzee is no longer there, let alone Mr. Ock, who would sympathize with her. She then takes a turn into the alleys of taverns, diffused with the smell of mung-bean pancakes, as if to fantasize about restoring the warped relationship with her mother. A woman she actually runs into at that

moment, surprisingly enough, is Diana Kim, who is having a merry time with her sons in a Western cake shop. Struck by her “metamorphosis,” Kyong-a feels a sense of betrayal; how can this “perfect mother” be the same woman who “clung desperately to money, slept with niggers...and insulted Ock Hui-do” (*Tree* 130)? Encountering mother Diana outside the PX, Kyong-a is thrown into chaos, again. Not unlike Mr. Ock’s wife, she does her best to maintain her family by any means necessary. Nonetheless, her “affectionate and almost elegant” image stirs up animosities, rather than admiration. Concluding that Diana simply takes on multiple false appearances, Kyong-a thus makes up her mind not to be misled by her masquerade: “[S]he was a fake through and through, and if you peeled off the mother, the whore, and the miser, she would be a hollow cave, *completely empty like my mother*” (130; emphasis added). Kyong-a’s antagonism towards Diana, after all, is displaced from the love-hate relationship with her mother.

Her mixed feelings turn not only outwards to the mother(s), but inward upon herself as well. Or, more accurately, her ambivalent emotions toward the (m)other are intimately entwined with her unidentifiable desires. As much as she wants to peel off the masks of the other to see her naked face, Kyong-a yearns to take off her “fake” selves to face the hidden kernel of her being, ultimately to be reunited with her mother: “And most of all, I would have liked to have been able to face my mother without hating her” (*Tree* 131). In this regard, Kyong-a’s desire to gain her real self in all its nakedness is at once constructed and mediated by the (m)other within the self; that is, the Other already inhabits the intimate space of the subject. It is noteworthy here that she conceives of “self-realization” *with the hand of a stranger*. To be rid of “the tatters” of her soul, she would dismember her body. By *letting* the racial other break her, she wants to cast off the “cocoon” that binds her “wings.” The foreign man, in other words, is used to facilitate her transformation, not to be imagined as a supplement to her lack. It is at this point that Park’s

sexual fantasy with the racial other is distinguished from Choi In-hoon's "primal scene," which sustains the male intellectual's desire for a complete unity with the Other, or from the scene of bathing *gut* in Jo Jung-rae's *Taebaek Mountain Range*, which rests on the *minjung* writer's masculinist gaze at the "violated" women during the war.

If "fantasy," as Laplanche and Pontalis maintain, "is not the object of desire, but its setting,"¹⁹² we need to look at what is installed in the setting to better understand Kyong-a's psychic space. The hotel's *tatami* room with a Western bed covered with a pink spread looks like a kitsch or a pastiche, at which she feels "apprehensive" and "tacky." The incongruous juxtaposition of the Eastern and the Western corresponds to the incompatible match of the "dongbang yeui jiguk" and the Yankee. It is important not to miss that the hegemony of the American GI, who comes to the foreign battlefield to save the nation of the Korean woman, remains intact in the private sphere; though Kyong-a walks into the hotel of her own free will, she cannot shake the feeling that she is the "guest at the feast." For instance, Joe simply disregards her interest in the book he has been reading, and then acts as "the host" of the event (*Tree* 132-33). Upon entering Joe's room, her own fantasy does not work for her subjectification, but rather for her reification by the sexual, racial other. At the moment the master strips off the last shell she is wearing, instead of obtaining a new set of wings to fly into the future, Kyong-a encounters the repressed memory that she has been "avoiding so skillfully":

The switch clicked on. The Crimson bulb came to life under the crimson shade. Before looking into Joe's face, I saw the bedspread dyed in a deep blood-red. The blood-red sheet...the blood-red sheet. Ah, the blood-red sheet!

(...)

The ghastly blood stains on the bright white sheet that my mother had so carefully beaten to a stiff smoothness with her ironing bats, the young bodies so mercilessly ripped. Those gruesome bodies that showed in full horror how tender young bodies could be mangled

¹⁹² Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 49, no.1 (1968): 17.

before their souls departed, the crimson blood, still warm, which had flowed from those horrible bodies. I had seen them.

(...)

I couldn't express the horror I felt. I felt as if my body would be mangled by Joe at that very moment. Like my brothers Hyok and Wook, I thought I would be hacked to pieces, drenching the bed with my blood.

I had to flee. I had to. (...) I wanted to get away from the squirting blood, the butchering, the ugliness, and the pain. (*Tree* 134)

"Please, please don't break me," pleading in her broken English, Kyong-a thus storms out of the hotel room, leaving the "hairy" man, looking like "a huge gorilla," puzzled (*Tree* 134). He no longer holds hegemony in their romantic relationship, since its screen function is over. The hotel scene, after all, serves as a backdrop against which the traumatic moment of subjectification is at once covered and discovered.

This sexual fantasy suggests the *complicated* origin of the subject *situated at a particular historical moment*. As in the "typical" fantasy theorized by psychoanalysts, it coincides with "the discovery of sexual difference."¹⁹³ Such "discovery" nonetheless contains in itself the social structure where the subject, the "organizer"¹⁹⁴ of her own fantasy, is placed. As analyzed above, Kyong-a's sexual experience with the racial other cannot be separated from the power relationship between, and the popular notion of, native girls and foreign troops during the Korean War, while it is intimately linked to her desire for the recognition of the mother, whose condition has to be understood in relation to the historical event as well.

¹⁹³ Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 2-13, 10.

¹⁹⁴ "If 'the same fantasies with the same content are created on every occasion'...if, beneath the diversity of individual fables we can recover some 'typical' fantasies, it is because the historical life of the subject is not the prime mover, but rather something antecedent, which is capable of operating as an organizer" (Jean Laplanche and Jean Bertrand Pontalis, *Ibid.*, 9).

Naked Tree and Narrating Subject

Tearing out of the hotel with “tears of relief,” Kyong-a finally encounters the trauma that has been repressed. “Strangely,” as she puts it, the return of the repressed memory does not emerge in a melancholic tone, although it begins with her father’s death. The death of her father is not recalled as a traumatic event, not merely because it occurred before the war. Her father’s death was less shocking than her failure to enter college, precisely because she could share the grief with the other members of the family. She even states that they felt “lighthearted” on their way back home from the Forty-ninth Day Rite (*Tree* 137-38). By a proper burial and communal mourning,¹⁹⁵ the death of the old patriarch was not merely overcome by the family. The memorial service for the dead also worked as a rite of passage for the family’s young patriarchs, heralding a new era. Consoled by their support, the mother recovered herself soon, while the daughter felt somewhat alienated from the now-closer mother-son relationship.

Her sense of alienation, accompanied by envy, finally explodes in the form of *guilt*. When their uncle and cousins come to seek shelter at their house, it is Kyong-a who suggests that her brothers move from the attic in which they used to hide to keep from being drafted to the closet in the servants’ quarters, persuading the mother that it would be “safer.” “Up to this point,” Kyong-a narrates, “there was no ‘me’ in my memory; there was only ‘us.’ Because I used to think through ‘our family’ that did not particularly recognize an individual I, our joy and sorrow were at once my joy and sorrow” (*Namok* 220). Her idea of protecting “the undividable family” by bumping the central members of the family to the shelter implicates more than their

¹⁹⁵ A community for mourning plays a crucial role in Park Wan-suh’s attempt to master her trauma through writing, as expressed more explicitly in “Near Buddha.”

temporary separation; the new heads of the household were transferred to the old, shabby place that was originally built for servants, i.e., non-family members who were supposed to serve the family. In this sense, her brother's "joke" is not to be overlooked: "It's cozy, but it looks like the inside of a coffin" (*Tree* 143). Isn't this because the family man felt as if he were castrated by being displaced by the family's youngest female member?

The precarious mask of the family's symbiotic unity finally disintegrates with the collapse of the supposedly "safer" refuge. On the very night that the "pillars" of the house were transposed to the ancillary building, their home was bombed. Upon seeing "the fresh youth" "brutally hacked up," Kyong-a lost consciousness, as if her body were also caught by the blood-stained sheet, barely covering shattered flesh (*Namok* 225). Nevertheless, she recovered quickly, particularly because she felt herself "indispensable" to her mother: after all, she was the only one left with her poor mother. Nursing her devotedly, Kyong-a is eager to comfort her: "Poor Mother! Why did you have to see it! I never dreamed you'd have to see something like that. But Mom, you have to live for a long, long time, even if it is only for me. You have me, your daughter. I'll make you happy. I'll make up my brothers' shares." Her mother, however, turns away from her, sighing, "The gods are so cruel. Why did they take all my sons, leaving only the girl behind?" (*Tree* 147-48)

Having survived *in place of* her brothers, the girl's "survivor guilt" becomes more convoluted. The sudden loss of the "ideal ego" during the war not only engenders a traumatic awakening that there was no such thing as inseparable "us"; the demolition of the old house also exposes the hidden structure of "us" underneath daily life, particularly its gender hierarchy. Facing the bare truth about the (non-)position of "I" within the family, the daughter undergoes another set of shocks, which may be distinct from what male subjects would go through on the

frontline or in their shell shock.¹⁹⁶ Her trauma is not simply derived from the break-up of her family during the war. It is also imbricated in the sociocultural context, i.e., the patriarch-centered family system, in which the traumatic event was perceived by others, as well as by the self. Kyong-a's personal wound inflicted by a historical event is deeply affected by the social conditions for, and "cultural process"¹⁹⁷ of, trauma. Going through the trauma of the (m)other, the daughter meets with another demand: to survive survival.

Kyong-a's resentment towards her mother, and towards the world, reveals the complex symptoms of such an ongoing process of survival. Her hysterical reactions to the daily routine actually serve as a screen that displaces her guilt about the death she may have unwittingly contributed to, while disguising a sense of relief to be alive. No less than her grief and rage over the dead, the young survivor harbors a desire for life, which cannot be pursued overtly. Vacillating between contradictory emotions, the ambivalent subject projects her repressed desires and inward anguish onto the ginkgo trees standing in the backyard. Though they, too, have witnessed and survived the horrible night, their leaves are still "dazzling" and "splendid," as if they could not give up their golden age because of the tragedy. Envious of their unreserved enjoyment of the moment, she tries to relieve herself of "survivor guilt"; under the trees, she

¹⁹⁶ For instance, Park Wan-suh's representation of the bombed-out old house at the moment of her brothers' death presents a striking contrast to Choi In-hoon's "primal scene" at the air-raid shelter, in which the male protagonist constructs his subjectivity in the middle of destruction through the unknown, sexual other. For a detailed comparison between the "self-development" narrative of male writers and the "self-loss" experience in Park's literature, see Lee Sun-Mi, *Park Wan-suh soseol yeongu: Bundan ui sidae gyeongheom gwa soseol ui hyeongsik* [A Study on Park Wan-Suh's Novels: The Temporal Experience of Division, and the Form of the Novel] (Seoul: Gipeun saem, 2004).

¹⁹⁷ Jeffrey C. Alexander suggests the term "trauma process" to conceive "the gap between [traumatic] event and [its] representation," arguing as follows: "It is the meanings that provide the sense of shock and fear, not the events in themselves. (...) Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity. Collective actors 'decide' to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are, where they came from, and where they want to go." See *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 10.

finally finds vent for her unspeakable desire/resentment towards the other survivor—her nonempathic mother:

Lying on the thick yellow carpet...I didn't have to feel sorry that I was the one who was alive. (...) There, I was cultivating a hatred for my mother without knowing it. (...) I'll make her a poor woman without any children, not even a daughter.

I wanted to die. But the gingko trees were so splendid, the sky so blue, the air in the backyard so refreshing and clear that I wanted to live. I wanted to die. I wanted to live. I wanted to die. (*Tree* 148-49)

With the gingko leaves fallen, Kyong-a wishes the image of the bloody night and her mother's heartless remark to fade away as well. She even declares, "I had already forgotten about the crimson sheets along with my mother's lament about leaving only the girl behind." Underneath her assertion of the mastery of the trauma, however, her inner world remains ripped up by "the contradiction without its roots" (*Tree* 150). The harder she tries to run away from the haunting past, the more she suffers from the repressed memory, just like a bare tree that has to stand against the cold winter with every fiber of its body, stripped of a chance to boast of its exuberant youth.

Now we can see why she was plunged into despair when she earlier took a glance at Mr. Ock's painting. She had looked for a ray in her dark life through her "special" relationship with the artist, but her fantasy of art was totally shattered in the face of his canvas, on which "[n]either the sky nor the earth were visible, and the old tree floated like a monster in the grey confusion" (*Tree* 123). Struck by the misty image, she questions herself why she must see such an image; or, more precisely, why she had to confront her interior landscape in his painting. The desolate tree, which is neither rooted in the shallow ground, nor entirely uprooted from the cursed land, is no different from the state of the female subject. Oscillating between the mirage-like PX and the haunted house, she is torn by her own desire and guilt, on the one hand, and by fear and hate towards her mother, on the other.

When the protagonist-narrator reencounters the painting in Mr. Ock's posthumous show, Kyong-a, who has become Tae-su's wife and given birth to two children, discovers what she could not view ten years ago: the unshakable belief in spring of the winter tree, which now provides a background for two women in the picture. They had not been in the earlier version that had disappointed Kyong-a so deeply, but now they were bent upon surviving—just like Kyong-a during the war—as the old tree stood firmly, its leafless branches trembling in the wind. Although it was stark naked at that time, it had not withered away, in the long run. Perhaps it lasted to testify to the “thirsty season,” just like the writer, who has lived through the days when she was treated as a worm, swearing revenge by recording what she witnessed. The naked tree's unyielding perseverance that the writing subject ultimately perceives in her belated epiphany, then, can be read as the strong determination of the author herself. Though the narrator of the novel identifies the naked tree with the late artist, and herself with one of the women passing by the tree, we could juxtapose the two—the naked tree and the narrating subject, as well as the young survivor and the matured writer.

Reinscribing the Wounds of War

The Naked Tree is Park Wan-suh's declaration of another “war” against Korean society's collective amnesia in the “era of peace,” and its rather abrupt ending implies that her struggle to mourn the unmourned, including her own youth, would not easily reach a closure. As Park states herself, for her to write about the war is not to recover, but rather to reveal the wound, which is still bleeding beneath the vague scar, though most people have gone numb with the sense of pain:

The division of our people is now acknowledged as a fact. It has stopped bleeding long ago, and become a hard scab. (...) The people for whom reunification is their true dream [however] cannot help picking at the wound of division, so that it bleeds painfully.¹⁹⁸

[A]s long as there is blood flowing out from my wound, I must write something with the blood. Even if I have to pick at it, over and over, to prevent it from being healed, I will keep *fresh* blood flowing, so that I will be able to write something with it.¹⁹⁹

This *new* blood from the old scar opens up another layer of writing about trauma as an incomplete process. That is, the nearly identical stories she has narrated are in fact shaped in different temporal frameworks, and accordingly contain evolving perceptions of the unresolved past. Whereas her first memory work, in revisiting the traumatic scene, is preoccupied with the symptoms of the repressed, her later texts are more involved with her unremitting efforts to seek a proper space where the fragmented past is recollected for herself, shared by other survivors, and imagined with the postwar generation as well. The young narrator of *The Naked Tree*, who cries out, “Why *me?*” now begins to wonder, “How about *others?*” Transmitting her witnessing beyond the realm of the individual, Park is led to more challenging questions in the following works: in what ways can her subjective writing address others’ suffering and struggle, in what languages can their discrete experiences be delivered, and what kind of community can be created through her act of testimony? Now, Park’s speaking subject comes to perform multiple tasks: not only as a survivor-witness, but also as a mediator-translator, she speaks for other trauma victims that have silenced their voices, as well as for their descendants, without war memories, who still live in the divided country. In unraveling how those multidirectional and

¹⁹⁸ “Micheo chamanaeji motan tonggok” [A Wail That Could Not Be Swallowed]; Acceptance Speech of the Fifth Yi Sang Literary Award in 1981, *Munhaksasang* (November 1981): 161-62.

¹⁹⁹ *Park Wan-suh munhak aelbeom*, 140; emphasis added. Park Wan-suh’s stubborn refusal of complete recovery seems similar to and reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s defense of “allegorical melancholy” against “symbolic mourning,” to use the words provided by Martin Jay. Just as a Benjaminian allegorist would keep the wound open to resist any premature healing, Park would accept the pain, rather than put it under anaesthetic amnesia, through infinite repetition of writing, even if it demands fresh blood. See Martin Jay, “Against Consolation: Walter Benjamin and the Refusal to Mourn,” in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 221-239.

overdetermining tasks are (mis-)performed, my investigation of Park's revision process places an emphasis on the changes in the mother-daughter relationship, i.e., how the rebellious daughter becomes the translator-sympathizer of the mother's alien way of struggle.

3. Writing for Survival, Writing as Re-vision

As discussed above, *The Naked Tree* can be read as a record of the young heroine's painful growth, that is, how Kyong-a finally moves out of the constricted stance of the sufferer by putting into words the bloody imagery and bodily sensations she witnessed during the war. The performance of speech acts is not sufficient to work through trauma, however, as Park Wan-suh's never-ending returns to the traumatic memory suggest. This is because the narrative of traumatized individuals cannot be complete until it finds or forms a responsive community of listeners; as noted by a group of scholars, the speaking subject of trauma needs to be reconnected with others in order to recover, overcoming isolation and helplessness.²⁰⁰ The problem is that Park was not the only one wounded by the violent event—isn't she even "fortunate" to have survived the war?—so there was no such community of "generous" supporters. Frustrated by the indifference of others, the narrator of her short story "Bucheonim Geuncheo" ("Near Buddha") thus laments, saying, "What's the meaning of a wail when no one hears? Can the chief mourner play the role without condolers?"²⁰¹ Her secret, disclosed almost two decades later, seems to be of interest to nobody, which makes her more miserable.

²⁰⁰ Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Atheneum, 1994), 188. Also see Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, Chapter 10. *Reconnection*.

²⁰¹ *Bukkeureoum eul gareuchimnida* [Teaching Shame], 111; *Park Wan-suh danpyeon soseol jeonjip* [The Complete Series of Park Wan-suh's Short Stories], vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Paju: Munhakdongne, 2011), 89-120; I use this Korean text for my analysis of "Near Buddha."

Not Only as a Speaker, But Also as a Listener: "Near Buddha" (1973)

It is at this impasse, however, that she takes the further step from being a courageous speaker towards being a sensitive listener by perceiving “a silent cry, an inarticulate struggle” of the other next to her: the mother. Offering an earnest Buddhist prayer to have the departed souls guided to paradise, the mother, for her part, was doing all she could do, while the daughter was striving to “spill—or, more precisely, spell—out” through writing what she had to “swallow down” during the war.²⁰² The narrator, more educated or civilized than her aged mother, has a difficult time wrestling with failed communication precisely because of her belief in the power of language. To draw more attention from apathetic people, she embellishes her story of the undeserved deaths during the war, and yet she only feels that she has become a “liar” when she reads her fiction in print. The failure was, as the narrator confesses, partly due to her “insufficient ability” and to her “hyper-consciousness to suit my potential listeners and the times”; but the main reason was that the deaths were so closely attached to her that she could not secure a perspective for grasping the entire picture (“Bucheonim” 113-14).

The difficulty of addressing that which has fixated upon the self and of soliciting empathic responses, ironically enough, directs the lonely speaker’s attention to her silent “partner in crime.” For her own survival, the mother, too, “devoured” the “disgraceful” deaths of her son and her husband.

How was it that our family, and I, were forced to witness the gruesome, horrifying, brutal death [of my brother] and then to clean up? Our heartless family did not even scream.

²⁰² In “Near Buddha,” the main character experiences two deaths during the Korean War: her elder brother and her father, the latter of whom might be associated with Park Wan-suh’s uncle in reality. He was regarded as a surrogate father after her own father had died, but was also killed during the Korean War, branded as a “commie.”

(...) Like wild animals gobbling up the afterbirth of their newborns and lapping up the bloody mess, *we* swallowed his death, as if it had never happened. (“Bucheonim” 106; emphasis added)

Here, the mother is re-membered as an accomplice, and this is significantly different from Park Wan-suh’s first novel. In *The Naked Tree*, the mother remains the incomprehensible and unspeakable Other, who even exacerbates the daughter’s trauma, and is left dead in the tumbledown old house. In “Near Buddha,” however, the mother is re-viewed as another guilt-ridden survivor, the only one who can share the burden of a survival. Thus, she is chosen as “the final outlet” for the narrator’s “hysteria.”

The daughter’s return to the (m)other, which arises out of a rather ulterior motive, opens a new phase in their relationship of complicity. At first, the narrator intentionally breaks their implicit agreement because she is not entirely happy that the mother, despite their shameful legacy, seems to maintain a healthy life, living off her daughter and son-in-law. Once the daughter gives utterance to her nightmare of the dead, however, the mother starts to pour out her own thoughts, as if she had been waiting for the right moment. The daughter realizes, “The specters have not interfered with me only, but with Mother as well, though in a completely different manner” (“Bucheonim” 114).

Such differences are not easily resolved, even after each finds out that neither has been released from the undying specters imprisoned within them. Though they identify with the other’s pain, their ways of coming to terms with it still run parallel. Mother, no longer a silent listener, even seeks out a shaman to perform *jinogui gut*, the rite for the restless dead, but her daughter, more materialistic and realistic, rather feels “pity” and even “disdain” for her mother’s supernatural and indiscriminate ways of mourning. Despite the daughter’s cynical, repulsed attitude towards her mother’s amalgam of religion and shamanism, she complies with the

mother's request to join the seemingly nonsensical ceremony, just as the mother reciprocates by listening to the daughter's storytelling without disputing its truthfulness.

Through the process of negotiation, the two are led to learn how to take in the other's wound. This reconnection is not solely made by the daughter's narrativization, or by the mother's ritualization; it is rather formed in their response to, and participation in, the other's struggle. As the partners in crime become companions for healing, moreover, the shattered mother-daughter relationship is also reconstituted in a reversed way. On their way back home from the "ridiculous" ceremony at the temple, the daughter feels like "the mother of her mother"²⁰³ when she holds her mother, who is sleeping like an innocent baby on her chest. This transferential relationship between mother and daughter in "Near Buddha" is noteworthy, not only because it initiates an intersubjective movement that challenges the conventional dichotomization of women, i.e., maternal vs. rebellious, but also because it ultimately goes beyond fixed identifications and linear temporalities. In this alternative space, the survivors, in embracing the differences between the living, also find a clue to reconciliation with the dead. In the end, the daughter narrates, "For the first time, I could think of a person's death without an ounce of loathing. (...) In Mother's death in peace...I would be able to be free from what had bound me so long" ("Bucheonim" 120).

²⁰³ Kwon Myoung-a also notes the multiple, shifting relationship between mother and daughter, as she traces the forgotten experiences of women in modern Korean history throughout her comprehensive study of Park Wan-suh's literature, from Kwon's debut as a literary critic with "Park Wan-suh munhak yeongu: Eokcheok moseong ui ijungseong gwa ttal ui segye ui uimi reul jungsim euro" [A Study on Park Wan-suh's Literature: The Duality of Relentless Motherhood and the Significance of the Daughter's World], *Jakgasegye* 23 (1994): 332-350. See also Kwon's recent memorial writing on Park Wan-suh "Park Wan-suh, geunyeo ga namgin geot" [Park Wan-Suh, What She Left], *Jakgasegye* 88 (2011): 94-102. While Kwon and others tend to focus on the mother-daughter narrative in Park's post-*Namok* texts, I would like to underline that it is actually foreshadowed in her debut work: Kyong-a in *The Naked Tree* already performs the role of mother in caring for her mother, though remaining unsatisfied with such an inversion.

It is interesting that the space of inversion the daughter finally reaches takes after the heterogeneous world the mother clings to; as in *jinogui gut*, Park Wan-suh's writing offers a stage in which the dead are recalled in the present, while the living re-live the past. Not unlike the shaman who mediates the two worlds in performing the role of the other, the daughter-narrator undertakes to receive and to transmit the stories of those, including her own mother, who are incapable of constructing a narrative.²⁰⁴ This changed way of relating the self to the (m)other in "Near Buddha" attests to the different unfolding of the all-too-similar memory works of Park. Her writing, which was initially motivated by wanting to speak out about what she witnessed during the war, mainly to recover the still damaged self, has been reframed to include the stories of the others through continual revisions.

Because of her subject position, from the beginning, of being the othered—as an incomplete substitute for the dead brother—Park Wan-suh's incessant rewriting is not a unidirectional movement from the privileged subject toward the unrepresentable Other, as in Choi In-hoon's literary journey. Remembering the past in a dialogue with others, nevertheless, she gradually recognizes the (m)other as another survivor who has gone through the same violent event, but who has chosen different ways of coming to terms with it. This re-visioning of the formerly silenced (m)other, furthermore, leads to the revival of the restless dead in her creative looking back.²⁰⁵ In this regard, Park's revision practice seems reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's

²⁰⁴ In *Who Ate Up All the Shinga?* the author in fact states that she has had an "affinity" with and "awe" towards shamans since she was young: "What I witnessed was not a shaman's rite, but the sole mystical experience of my life. Just that once, I glimpsed a divine realm that can't be explained rationally" (70-71). Such a realm that "can't be explained rationally," though she "witnessed" and "experienced" it, is none other than what she has tried to capture throughout her Korean War memory works.

²⁰⁵ Park Wan-suh's continuous rewritings of Korean War memories accord closely with Adrienne Rich's definition of writing as re-vision: "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in our cultural history: it is an act of survival." See *Adrienne Rich's Poetry*, ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 90-98; Quoted in Marianne Hirsch's *The Mother/daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, 126.

concept of translation, which fosters the continued life, or “afterlife,” of the vanished through perpetual renderings.

Bella Brodzki’s co-figuration of survival and translation helps us to comprehend the multifaceted nature of Park Wan-suh’s revisionary movement. In *Can These Bones Live?* Brodzki states, “‘survival’ as a cultural practice and symbolic action...is *to be translated, to be in translation.*” If survival is “a process that extends life, but one that also prolongs the meaning traces of death-in-life, life after death, and life after life...[t]ranslation is the mode through which what is dead, disappeared, forgotten, buried, or suppressed overcomes its determined fate by being borne (and thus born anew) to other contexts across time and space.”²⁰⁶ From this perspective, Park can be called not only a survivor, but also a translator who at once crosses and connects life and death, and death and afterlife, like the shaman in “Near Buddha.” If the task of the translator is to transplant the original, rooted in a foreign land, into a more palpable realm,²⁰⁷ Park adds the quality of desperation to her role as translator, precisely because she is one of the survivors being translated and being in translation. In the final analysis, the survivorship of her text does not solely belong to the translator, but also depends upon the reader.

Here lies the crux of Park Wan-suh’s literary testimony: the simultaneous translation of the self and the other. As a survivor-writer, she strives to reclaim the dissociation of the self and the breakup of her family, but this is only part of the picture. Even after being reconnected with the mother, the daughter could not stop writing about trauma, because Park, as a witness-translator, also wants to build a channel through which the experiences that her contemporaries

²⁰⁶ *Can These Bones Live?: Translation, Survival, and Cultural Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 5-6.

²⁰⁷ Benjamin says, “Thus translation, ironically, transplants the original into a more definitive linguistic realm.” See “The Task of the Translator,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 75.

have lived through can be empathically and ethically shared by their descendants, so that the translation of the past can continue to live and be renewed in the present. In this way, Park's evolving writings extend the testimonial space to a new dialogue with the postwar generation, rather than confine it to internal monologues or personal conversations among the immediate victims. This "expansion to the public" seems more demanding than the "private" reconciliation between the mother and the daughter, however, as illustrated in her later works.

Translating and Transmitting the Struggle of the Other: "Momma's Stake II" (1981) and Afterwards

As widely acknowledged, the "Momma's Stake" series²⁰⁸ is the mother's history recovered through the daughter's narration.²⁰⁹ What remains under-explored in the existing scholarship is that the mother-daughter narrative is always in transition, or in translation, as the familial relationship is overlapping, intersected, and in conflict with other configurations of the modern world. For instance, "Momma's Stake I" (1980), which thematizes both the daughter's struggle against and complicity in the mother's "New Woman" project, suggests that their intimate bond is often complicated by new relations formed through the very modernization process: that is, colonial education. Between the fantasy of New Woman projected by her mother and the hypocrisy of New Woman personified by her teacher, the young narrator gradually adjusts to translating and being translated to the modern, just as she absorbs the spatial division

²⁰⁸ I use the English translations of the "Momma's Stake" series in *A Sketch of the Fading Sun*, translated by Hyunjae Yee Sallee (Buffalo: White Pine Press, 1999).

²⁰⁹ Park Hye Gyeong, *Ibid.*, 77.

of the urban setting, while missing the borderless paradise in the countryside she has left. Having survived her childhood, she looks back upon those days as follows:

Discord between the far too old-fashioned appearance upon which Momma based her model for a modern woman and her own ridiculously high ideology, the contradiction between noble roots and worldly vanity, eternal awareness of being outside the gate—all these were still part of my consciousness. Come to think of it, my consciousness still has that stake. Even if I feel I'm far away from it, it may be that I'm still attached to a length of rope that has just been loosened from the stake. ("Stake I" 137)

Precisely because her consciousness is *loosely tied* to the mother's stake, however, the grown-up daughter is faced with a double bind. When she arrives at the same age as when her mother put down her stake in Seoul, she learns that their "meaningful monument" has been "finally pulled out" ("Stake I" 137): their first home of their own in Seoul has been bulldozed out under the onslaught of industrialization. In the meantime, her mother has become a burden to her offspring, turning into an ordinary, weak, old woman. As portrayed in *The Naked Tree*, she still lives in the past, and her obsession with the old days is hardly understood by the younger generation. This abject figure of the mother, located in a more complex familial setting beyond the bilateral relationship between mother and daughter, comes on in "Momma's Stake II" (1981) as the one that embodies the uncanny persistence of Korea's division in the 1980s. Here, the mother's lonely struggle against the "monster of division" is understood only by her daughter-translator.

In the novella, written a decade after Park Wan-suh's first novel, it is not the daughter-narrator that is afflicted with the trauma returning in a flashback. Instead, the narrator witnesses the almost forgotten violence of the war in encountering her mother's hallucination: she is reenacting the traumatic moment when her son was shot by a North Korean soldier in their refuge, the very place she had "planted the first stake" after moving to Seoul. Grasping what her mother is going through after the operation on the mother's leg, the daughter is terrified, too.

Confronting the mother's profanity and rancor hidden underneath her benevolent and graceful Buddha-like figure, the daughter cannot help fighting with her own horror: "I wasn't fighting with Mother but with my own self-induced fear" ("Stake I" 136). But as the illusion of the complete recovery of trauma is broken, the daughter finally bursts into a wail, which has been suppressed for a long time. Now that another lonely mourner is found, she can tell the story about the root of her daily symptoms that include indigestion and neuralgia.

This unlocking of repressed memory needs to be distinguished from Park Wan-suh's first work, in which the fierce match between mother and daughter ends in the former's "victory," only to confirm the unsurpassable gap between them. After the failure in talking through the family trauma with its only other survivor, Kyong-a breaks away from the site of contention to construct her own world. The twenty-year-old protagonist eventually has access to the blocked memory of the war, but this takes place in the phantasmatic setting for her subjectification, after which she is preoccupied with recollecting *her* fragmented memory. After all, the recalling "I" of *The Naked Tree* traces back to the painful past *for the sake of the speaking subject*.

In "Momma's Stake II," Park revisits the traumatic scene of the family tragedy, but the center of this remembrance is not the daughter's feelings or sufferings. Here, she seems not so much an innocent victim as a secondary witness to, or a receptive analyst of, the (m)other. Instead of becoming the subject supposed to know, the narrating "I" unravels "our" story in a more distanced manner, though *without concealing uncertainty*:

It had been a riddle to me why Mother regarded our house on top of Hyunjo-dong as a refuge during the Korean War... Her trust and attachment in Hyunjo-dong might be related to the particular nature of our hardship [that we had undergone in order to escape from the tight grip of poverty before the war].

The Korean War was raging. Our problem was as insignificant as a particle of dust when the entire country was bleeding heavily from a national tragedy. It was bound up in the respectable, middle-class neighborhood where we saw the true color of people—their treacherous and two-faced humanness. It was a classic case—my brother's

joining the voluntary army. After Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule, he participated at one time in the left-wing movement and converted to it. Because of that, my brother couldn't flee South. He was forced to stay behind in Seoul, and he was extremely fearful for his safety. ("Stake II" 171)

In this passage, the narrator does not pretend to know the (m)other inside out; she does not particularize the experience of her family, either. It was a rather "classic" case during the war, as she puts it. This juxtaposition of the familial adversity with national history, however, works more effectively to unveil the deeper implications of the historical event, as they mutually illuminate each other. While encompassing the multivalent features of the individual experience "as insignificant as a particle of a dust," it also challenges the dominant discourse of the war by questioning its authority and legitimacy: "The government, supposedly for the people and in which he [Brother] believed, had apparently taken to deceiving the helpless people and had then left them under the control of the enemy as they fled to protect themselves" ("Stake II" 172).

The Decline of the Brother's Regime

In this interweaving of private wound and public memory, it is notable that the brother's death is considerably resignified within the larger sociopolitical context of the tumultuous years from the end of the colonial period to Korea's liberation and division. As frequently depicted in Park Wan-suh's autobiographical narratives, particularly in *Who Ate Up All the Shinga?* (1992), her brother was not merely the "religion" of the mother, and the "pillar" of the whole family; for his younger sister, he was the ideal(ized) model of the modern under the colonial condition. As the family's only man, he respectably carried out the traditional duties of a filial son and of a household head on behalf of the late father. At the same time, he successfully set the example of the colonial intellectual; against the Japanese policy of *changssi gyemyeong* (requiring Koreans

to adopt Japanese ones), he defended their family name in spite of the opposition of Mother and Uncles. With “an odd sense of pride,” his sister thinks, “I had the illusion that I was unexpectedly glimpsing a soul that towered over a world awash with philistines” (*Shinga?* 119). In the eyes of the younger sister, who had her eyes opened to the colonial reality, including its disjunction from Western modernity, by reading books in his study, the brother was seen as the one who put into practice what (s)he learned from books.

The brother’s influence on the sister’s enlightenment is tremendous. Without his intervention and support, the country girl could not have maintained a balance between the mother’s arbitrary interpretation of New Woman and its contradictory manifestation by her teacher. His mediatory role was not confined within the family; in the domain of the outside, too, he endeavored to bridge the gap between the ideal standards of modernity and the limiting situation of colony. Of course, his idealist nature caused anxiety for his mother, and sometimes attracted criticism even from his sister: for instance, when he resigned from the ironworks, a secure position during the Greater East Asia War, after his effort to extricate an old lathe operator with many mouths to feed from forced labor faltered, the narrator considers this action to have come out of his idealism, rather than out of a sense of justice. Still, she longs to emulate her “idol,” believing, “only I could fathom the loftiness of Brother’s thoughts” (*Shinga?* 180). Her sympathy with the left also originates from her desire to imitate him. Her mimicry nevertheless remains ambivalent; while she yearns for the lofty world of her brother (and his comrades), she does not or cannot disregard the down-to-earth issues of living that her mother represents. “[C]aught in the middle and unavoidably torn,” she therefore laments, “I supported and cheered Brother, but pitied Mother” (*Shinga?* 184).

It is this in-between subject position that makes the narrator a great translator. Just as Kyong-a in *The Naked Tree* could vividly describe the two contrasting women-worlds, i.e., the mother in the old house, and the “western princess” at the PX, the young girl who searched for *shinga* in Seoul, while missing the city on her visit to hometown, has now grown up to become a skilled negotiator. Between the mother’s materialistic world view grounded in her experiential intuition and the brother’s lofty ideology maintained by his delicate sensibilities, the daughter seems to have discovered how to come to grips with reality. She is even able to turn a critical eye on her own family members, eventually facing up to the “double face” of the mother,²¹⁰ and also

²¹⁰ Park’s autobiographical narratives in the 1990s, *Who Ate Up all the Shinga?* and *Was There Really a Mountain?*, are distinct from her earlier works in that the daughter-narrator not only points out the mother’s contradictions, as in her former texts, but also acknowledges their resemblance or complicity, which is rarely found in “Momma’s Stake” series, though they cover the same period. For instance, the narrator of “Momma’s Stake I” describes the mother’s double standard, as if the daughter were a mere scapegoat for the mother’s duplicity:

When Momma came to take me to Seoul, she appeared to be a perfect Seoul person, but this was a sham. She was living “outside the gate” and was stricken with an inferiority complex and nervousness because she wasn’t yet a complete citizen of Seoul. Momma’s only consolation for living “outside the gate” and at the mercy of this “unassociable breed” of neighbors was rooted in her deep dislike of the countryside and her sense of despair whenever she thought of us being reared there. It was truly a strange correlation. Instead of escaping from the tight grip of this contradictory relationship, Momma was sinking ever deeper and deeper into the mocking mire of contradiction. (“Stake I” 120)

As she had demanded that I worship and keep the best characteristics of Bakjuk Valley as our foundation when we lived at Hyunjo-dong, Momma tried to fabricate an air of the city about me when I was ready to visit Bakjuk Valley.

I was unsure whether or not I liked the dress that Momma had made for me. She assured me that the dress would be a masterpiece, and it was nothing compared to a ramie topcoat she had made picture perfect with her exquisite skill. Consequently, I had to abandon my criticism. (“Stake I” 132)

Later in *Who Ate Up All the Shinga?*, however, the daughter refreshes her memory by including her own contradiction and collusion with the mother.

When she [Mother] puffed herself up with pride over our country roots, her face had the same expression as when she bragged about her urban sophistication on visits home. This double face of my mother—arrogance because of Seoul in Pakchök [Bakjuk] Hamlet and vice versa—confused me, but only I saw through this weak point of hers. (...) I was already mimicking my mother’s smugness, though, and found the taunt [by the children in Seoul] ridiculous, considering the contrast between what I’d left behind in Pakchök Hamlet and the circumstances they lived in. (...) I had to develop a thick skin, if for no other reason than to defend the honor of the countryside. (*Shinga?* 50-52)

What most appealed to me was the idea of going home with skates slung proudly over my shoulder, when the other kids had never laid eyes on such a thing. Mother and daughter understood each other perfectly in this without having to exchange so much as a word. Although we were struggling to get by in a hovel beyond the gates of Seoul, we were determined to impress those back home. The way we strove to realize

the underside of the romanticist brother. His conversion after the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948 disillusioned her fantasy, disclosing what underlay the image of her idol: “An innocent sense of justice might have spawned his leftist sympathies, but he was too weak and fond of comfort to put his beliefs to the test. While the people of Hyŏnjŏ-dong [Hyunjo-dong] were making gruel out of bean dregs, not having enough to eat their fill, he’d invited me out for a Western meal to celebrate getting into school” (*Shinga?* 202).

As many commentators have pointed out, the brother’s death constitutes the central motif in Park Wan-suh’s Korean War narratives. The traumatic experience, which was revealed only partially and spasmodically in her first novel, has been gradually (but unevenly) reconstructed, and given a fuller picture in her later texts, as she has woven her personal memory into the social fabric of postcolonial Korea. In this more comprehensive mapping, Park’s brother has been reread as an archetype of those who were abused, abandoned, killed, and then forgotten by both sides of Korea.²¹¹ What is not to be dismissed here is that her brother was dying *gradually*, not in a single night, as Park writes several times with emphasis. After escaping from the People’s army, “like a nightmare rather than a miracle,” he was transformed into “something hideous,” and his family, too, could not avoid secondary trauma in witnessing his post-traumatic stress disorder. Completely devastated, he can no longer afford to care for other people, as he used to; he is now solely bent upon his own survival and even abuses his mother and sister, as epitomized in his shameless statement, “Hey, you, why don’t you lure some big fish to cough up the bribe

our dreams of coming home in style, with a Western dress and ice skates, strikes me now as something out of a comedy movie. (*Shinga?* 88)

I will further discuss these differences later in this section.

²¹¹ Lee Kyung-Jae, “Park Wan-suh soseol ui oppa pyosang yeongu” [A Study on the Representation of the Brother in Park Wan-suh’s Novels], *Uri munhak yeongu* 32 (February 2011): 368.

for an ID card and save your own brother? What's the use of having a sister if she's not being useful, huh?" ("Stake II" 174-75)

The fall of the brother produces more than a set of shocks; it betrays the trust and love that has bounded the family, destroying all the values and beliefs that they once held. The madness of war annihilated both the brother's ideal of modern enlightenment and the mother's pride in her noble lineage, not to mention the daughter's position on the borderline. On the ideological front, which did not allow any neutral zone, they were already degraded to "worms" not merely by external forces, but also by their own instinct for survival. They could stay alive in the "time of the beast" only by breaking into evacuated houses to steal food: "[N]o matter what circumstances...our stomachs come first, so we had no compunctions about what we were doing" (*Shinga?* 247). As the entire family had to give up fleeing after the brother was shot in the leg, the sister confesses, "It was really hard not to wish the bullet had penetrated his heart."²¹² Their humiliating survival at the expense of human dignity reaches a climax when they "rushed to eat red bean porridge," right after they "threw out" the dead body. They did not spend even one single day in mourning after their beloved family member had breathed his last breath, because they were more concerned about its decomposition (*Geu san* 164). This improper burial of the brother, carried out in horror, and then "gobbled up" in hunger, has haunted Park Wansuh's memory ever since, along with the undesirable wish about his wound. As a guilt-ridden survivor, she could not help but compulsively return to the traumatic scene: sometimes more melodramatically, in a manner similar to Kyong-a's gory hallucination in *The Naked Tree*; other times rather symptomatically in her daily life, in the same manner as the narrator of "Near Buddha."

²¹² *Was There Really a Mountain?* Here I use the Korean text *Geu san i jeongmal geogi isseosseulkka* (Paju: Segyesa, 2008); citation comes from page 9.

From Revenge for the Self to Re-Visioning the Self through the Other

In “Momma’s Stake II,” the remaining members of the family conduct a belated funeral for the dead after the South Korean government returns to the capital in Seoul. Though the wife of the late brother wants to have a grave for her two fatherless sons, the mother insists on having him cremated:

My brother’s flesh was transformed into streaks of smoke and his bones into a fistful of powder. (...) Facing in the direction of the town, which was seen but could not be reached, Mother let a fistful of powder scatter in the wind. I did not see Mother as a weak woman, hiding her resentment in her heart and remaining stoic as she yielded to her fate. Rather, I saw her as a brave soldier, girding herself for the challenge of the battlefield.

Mother attempted to confront a battle of enormous consequences with a mere fistful of dust and a puff of wind. To her, a fistful of dust and a puff of wind were not insignificant by any means. They were the only tools by which Mother could express her total disbelief in the existence of that abominable monster that had taken everything away from her after trampling her down: the separation between two Koreas, North and South. (“Stake II” 182)

By asking the daughter to do the same thing with her own body, furthermore, the mother urges her “accomplice” to participate in, or, more appropriately, to succeed her in lonely struggle.

While the daughter feels sympathy for the mother’s “pathos,” and finds in it historical meaning, she also raises a question, “Although more than thirty years had passed since then, was that really the only way to nullify the existence of the monster?” (“Stake II” 183) The daughter hesitates to proceed according to the mother’s will and her way of confronting the division.

Though the daughter cannot forget that she has been the dying survivor-witness’s only partner in the past, she also feels the need to supplement it in the present, or to reconcile it with the living, as a mother of a future generation. This dilemma as an intergenerational translator is thus placed at the heart of “Momma’s Stake III” (1991).

While the narrator is fully conscious that she is “the only witness to” the mother’s silent battle, she cannot deny that the mother’s descendants, including herself, have become weary of the mother’s “piteous” preoccupation with the past, and even want to free themselves from it. When her nephew, who is the eldest son of the dead brother and is in charge of the funeral arrangements, dismisses his grandmother’s “gibberish,” and determines to have a “normal” mourning service for her, the narrator feels not only intimidated, but also relieved:

“Are you telling me I ought to cremate Grandmother and scatter her ashes over the sea that washes ashore at my home town as she did for Father? Aunt, please don’t even think about making this fuss again. What I don’t like is that you and Grandmother are planning to repeat a ritual expressing indescribable rancor and a deep grudge which is inappropriate in this day and age. In Father’s time, I suppose it was the only way and I concede that it must have been rather tragic. But if we carry out Grandmother’s wish now, it will be nothing but a show. I also want to give her a normal funeral service as others do. I have to think about my social standing.”

(...)

Although I whined and carried on, even shedding a few tears, deep inside I felt light and cheery as if an aching tooth had been extracted. (“Stake III” 192)

Nevertheless, the aunt has a premonition in which she cannot cast off a sense of obligation to carry out the wish of the dead, and finds “detestable” the “thoroughly practical” perspective of the nephew for his resistance to participating in resolving the mother’s *han*. The daughter, who had to keep her balance between the mother’s empiricism and the brother’s idealism, and then between their incapacitation process and survival instinct, now needs to mediate the lived experience of war survivors and the living imperative to move into a new era.

Passed on as another task of transgenerational translation, Park Wan-suh’s later works contain what surpasses her previous desire for self-discovery or self-recovery from trauma. Bearing an ethical duty to the forgotten dead, on the one hand, and historical responsibility for the living, on the other, Park’s revision practice no longer aims for cathartic wailing or belated revenge, as she recollects in her recent speech “My Faith in the Power of Writing”:

In retrospect, it seems to me that what I really thirsted for back then was not literature, but vengeance. The flame that burned inside me was not the will to write, but red-hot hatred. It's only now, at this late age, that I'm starting to realize that vengefulness and hatred must not be rashly put into words, but only soothed by the balm of time. For imagination is love, not hate. I could not truly write until the horrifying experiences of the past receded into the far distance, turning my hatred into compassion and my desire for vengeance into tolerance and understanding.²¹³

In the end, Park's faith in literature turns to its power of love, which embraces the differences existing among other trauma victims, alive or dead, while, at the same time, forging a new connection between survivors and their posterity. Her "tolerance and understanding," however, neither means simply forgetting the dead or forgiving the perpetrators, nor is intent to completely go along with the current demand for "settling the past." What she seeks through recognizing the otherness within ourselves is not to erase the traces of the irrevocably lost, but rather to illuminate the ineluctable underside of today's "progression."

In this sense, Park Wan-suh's literary subject that performs the transposition of the lost memory of an individual into the public domain of national history resembles the critical practice of those whom Walter Benjamin calls the historical materialist. Just as the historical materialist cannot turn away his face from the pile of debris left out in the document of progress, while never forgetting "the present in which he is writing history," Park cannot dismiss her "unique experience with the past"²¹⁴ because she believes that it forms the "basis of the present world [in which everybody seems to be] doing well," as she states in the preface to *Was There Really a Mountain?*: "The power of forgetting is more frightening than that of a bulldozer... 'This is how we have lived.' I anxiously strove to remember this in this age of peace and prosperity."²¹⁵ She

²¹³ Paper presented at the First Incheon Asia Africa Latin America Literature Forum, Incheon, South Korea, April 23-25, 2010.

²¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, 262.

²¹⁵ This preface is contained in the first edition of *Was There Really a Mountain?* (Seoul: Ungjin Chulpan, 1995), 6-7.

even says in another interview, “In my novels like *Who Ate Up All the Shinga?* and *Was There Really a Mountain?*, I wanted to show the original form of experience without any distortion...Even if they lose their value as novels, I hope that they will remain valuable later as [historical] material.”²¹⁶ At this point, the realist writer’s image precisely overlaps with the Benjaminian historical materialist, who “wishes to retain that image of the past” because he is aware that “every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.”²¹⁷

What Storyteller Park Wan-suh Has Left Us

As explored throughout this chapter, Park Wan-suh’s unceasing endeavor to narrativize Korean War experiences from multiple perspectives has produced different subjects and differentiated subject positions: from a hysterical victim to a vengeful witness during the initial phase of her literary career, and then from an empathic translator to a historical materialist in her later years. Through repetitive revision, her writing in search of the self has led to the discovery of the formerly silenced (m)other; and in reinscribing the mother’s stories, and thus bringing to light previously unheard or unknown struggles in modern Korean history, Park has also acquired and fulfilled an ethical responsibility as an intergenerational translator to connect past and present, and individual and community. In this memory practice, I find the image of the melancholic allegorist, who would rather re-live, than relieve, the pain in order to resist deceitful

²¹⁶ *Park Wan-suh munhak gilchatgi*, 33

²¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 255.

closure; and the vision of the historical materialist, who is willing to engage in the very social structure designed to obliterate the history of violence.

Difference drawn from Park Wan-suh's repetition not merely reflects the writer's evolving perceptions of the past; it is also involved with the nation's political and social changes, including its miraculous economic growth and the democratization process, both of which cannot be divorced from the international context of the Cold War and its détente in the late 1980s. The unprecedented political freedom and the improved standards of living, unfortunately, have not automatically brought about historical awakening to the oppressed past. As captured in "Near Buddha" and "Momma's Stake III," most people at the present time are more inclined to "move on," even in the name of collective forgiving after the "victory" of South Korea at the end of the Cold War.²¹⁸ Nonetheless, Park has neither forsaken her original pledge to testify to the "time of the worm," nor ceased attempting to translate it, to remind us of the unchanged structure of injustice—the division system on the Korean peninsula in the so-called post-Cold War Era.

Park Wan-suh's death in 2011 has left us to carry on her struggle to remember the unending war by renewing it here and now. Even before her death, we have in fact witnessed a "memory boom," particularly in today's culture industry. In this outpouring of popular forms of memorialization, then, is the original witnessing of the traumatic event complemented by its existence as an afterlife, or dissolved in a totalizing frame of the past? To answer this question, the following chapter examines through an analysis of contemporary Korean War blockbusters the historical implications of Korean War memories as revived in popular culture.

²¹⁸ Regarding the transition from the Cold War narrative to the "collective forgiveness" discourse in the public domain, see Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Jiyul Kim's "The Korean War after the Cold War," in *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, ed. Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 233-65.

**IV. A Screen Memory for a Globalizing Korea:
Korean War Blockbusters “After” the Cold War**

1. Producing Pleasure and Consuming Resistance:
Korean Blockbusters in the Age of Global Capitalism

In the 1990s, reading literature seems no longer to be the hegemonic mode of remembering the Korean War now that the Korean film industry, swiftly growing under neoliberal globalization, has reformulated the mnemonic landscape in South Korea at fin de siècle. Yet the cinema’s takeover of Korean War memories in the “post-Cold War” era needs to be situated in a larger and more complex context. The global flows of capital and media technology were conflated and synthesized with the political and social shifts in South Korea, which were brought about by the democratic uprisings of 1987 and the economic crisis of 1997. While these two conjunctures paved the way for the substantial transformations in the film sector and the cultural sphere at large, the neoliberal market reforms of civilian democratic regimes have always been associated with two “outside” factors: the threat of North Korea and the hegemony of the US, both of which are rooted in the unfinished Korean War.

Marching in step with both the government’s globalization policies and the changes in consumer culture in postindustrial South Korea, Korean War blockbusters have functioned as “the big screen,” on which new types of desires and anxieties are projected, and by means of which the double stakes for global capitalism and national security are fulfilled *at the same time*. To represent and resolve the continuing but changing contradictions, recent Korean War films,

with their advanced methods of production and distribution, not only appropriate the global trend of the blockbuster, but also inherit traditional forms and values. Most notably, postmodern memory works created through digital reproduction condense and displace the trauma of the Korean War onto the private sphere of the family, in a way similar to “division literature.” In inviting contemporary South Koreans to consume the national past from a safe distance, however, the newly rising mode of remembering, unlike its predecessor, cooperates rather than challenges the state imperatives in an age of reconciliation. The all-too-familiar motifs in literary texts about Korea’s division are now realigned in spectacle-driven imaginings of inter/national clashes between 1950 and 1953 and afterwards, in line with the democratic governments’ endeavors to revise the national history and to refashion the national consciousness so that they are suitable for the global market system.

From this perspective, this chapter offers both a historical analysis and a close reading of Korean War blockbusters by tracing how the legacies of division literature, such as the trope of the broken family and the fantasy of flight or reunion, are transposed and refracted in this emerging technique of representation. Since the filmic reenactment of the Korean War is invariably presented with references to Hollywood’s aesthetic norms, from its deployment of special effects to its narrative conventions, I also pay close attention to the ways in which the failed family romance in the tradition of Korean War memory works intersects with the Oedipal trajectory of archetypal Hollywood action heroes, who, in the end, restore the nationalist patriarchal symbolic order. Noting the absence of the ideal father in parallel with the vague image of the nation in Korean War blockbusters, I thus link those cinematic visions with a South Korean demand for new identities in the globalizing world, against the backdrop of the continued but unsteady US hegemony in the region. The political, ideological, economic, and military

power of the American empire, which once contributed to the death of the revolutionary father by sponsoring the despotic father who guided Korea's modernization, now returns as part of the cultural cast of the "national" theatre; where the witnesses of traumatic history are summoned by their descendants to grasp the uncanny persistence of the division.

In disentangling the transnational and transgenerational memory practices embodied in recent Korean War films, I take note of the dying or vanishing subjects who play the role of mediators between those who have already died and those who have been left to survive; mediators who also try to transcend the spatial binaries of the private/public and the South/North. Through my review, I will seek answers to questions such as: what is uncovered by their border-crossing activities? Why do those who desire to connect separate worlds always meet a tragic end? What makes them take the risk of losing their lives? What does their annihilation signify? What effects does their (failed) mediation produce? As is often observed, the performance of those mediators is gender-inflected:²¹⁹ male protagonists take actions to kill (even themselves), whereas female characters are eliminated by men. I elaborate this line of discussion on gender asymmetry in the following way: while women perish in order to carry out their mediatory role, men live on (or choose to die) because their attempt to mediate has miscarried. This gendered system of mediation within the narrative is further intertwined with the relationship between the text and its audience, who, for their part, come to experience in the imaginary realm the Others beyond the given temporal and spatial boundaries in reality. As I delve into such multidirectional contacts, I detect two specters that haunt Korean War blockbusters—North Korea and the US—as flexible, if not amorphous, components of contemporary Korean nationalism, and demonstrate

²¹⁹ See, for instance, Kyung Hyun Kim, "'Each Man Kills the Thing He Loves': Transgressive Agents, National Security, and Blockbuster Aesthetics in *Shiri* and *Joint Security Area*," in *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 259-76.

how these ghostly figures, antagonistic to each other, serve as “absent causes” for the death of South Korean subjects who encounter the apparitional Others “too early” or “too late.” This melodramatic imagination that resonates with a sense of belatedness, I argue, reveals the historical pathos of contemporary South Koreans at a moment when both the statist Cold War propaganda and the *minjung* movement for national reunification appear out of time in a post-Cold War, post-*minjung*, and post-modern moment.

The Specter of Minjung?: Relocating the People in a Nation-State-Market Nexus

Democratic progress in the 1990s brought South Koreans more than a political shift from a militarized society, more than freedom of thought and behavior in both the public sphere and everyday life. It was also the time when the country sought to reconfigure its cultural identity beyond the metanarratives of the Cold War era. For this new project of rebuilding the nation in the age of globalization, the earlier opposition of the state and civil society became a cooperative relationship for the reconstruction of national memory. While the former opened up space for multiple voices and different perspectives on contentious historical issues, the latter helped the emergent democratic polity to derive its legitimacy from the consent of the governed by providing varied interpretations of a common past, thereby fulfilling the ideal of a pluralist society.²²⁰

²²⁰ Regarding the introduction of minority perspectives into national historiography in democratized South Korea, see Koen De Ceuster, “When History Is Made: History, Memory and the Politics of Remembrance in Contemporary Korea,” *Korean Histories* 2, no. 1 (2010): 13-33. Prasenjit Duara also addresses how nationalisms in contemporary East Asia have been globalized in conjunction with the liberalization process in both political and economic domains. See “Historical Narratives and Trans-Nationalism in East Asia,” in *Contested Views of a Common Past: Revisions of History in Contemporary East Asia*, ed. Steffi Richter (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2008), 99-117.

The task of rewriting modern Korean history in the post-authoritarian era thus involved a twofold process. On the one hand, it was necessary to revise the official account of the state, as previously excluded memories were incorporated into formally acknowledged history. On the other hand, those recovered memories were inevitably sanitized, though no longer officially censored, so as not to impair national security, precisely because the Korean War has not ended despite the collapse of socialism and the triumph of Western capitalism. The worldwide decline in ideological confrontation has complicated rather than eased North-South Korea relations. Their diplomatic and economic interactions rapidly increased after the end of the military dictatorship in the South, as politicians from both sides began to engage in high-level talks in 1990, and as South Korean companies started making direct investments in North Korea. In 1998, the founder of the Hyundai conglomerate became the first civilian to cross the DMZ, as he herded 1001 head of cattle across the line. In June of 2000, North Korean leader Kim Jong Il and South Korean president Kim Dae-jung met in Pyongyang, and during this first inter-Korean summit both parties declared that they agreed upon forging mutual trust for peaceful reunification. Nonetheless, military conflicts between the two have not ceased; a series of naval clashes near the Northern Limit Line and exchanges of fire across the border continued around the very time of the summit conference, followed by North Korea's nuclear and missile development. This in-between situation—the Cold War is over, but not quite, on the Korean peninsula—demanded a renewed nationalist strategy. As a replacement for the old anticommunist rhetoric, this new national discourse needed to reconsolidate the South's historical and political legitimacy, as well as its economic and cultural superiority, as the very ground for Korea's reunification.²²¹

²²¹ In their analysis of the Korean War monument built in the 1990s, Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Jiyul Kim characterize this “narrative of South Korean ‘victory’ over the North” in the era of reconciliation as follows: “The

Within this context, it is not coincidental that South Korea's fledging liberal-democratic governments, in taking drastic measures "to settle the past," concentrated on creating a master narrative that stressed the nation's cultural distinctiveness; or, more accurately, how Korean traditional values and unique culture could be utilized to gain a competitive edge in the global market place. Thus, South Korea's state-led globalization movement known as *seghyehwa*, initially endorsed under the Kim Young Sam administration (1993-1998), did not jettison but rather fostered the nationalist agenda, as many Korean scholars have noted.²²² Such a nationalist drive for world competitiveness was accelerated even further after the 1997 IMF intervention. In the face of "the country's biggest crisis since its foundation," the first and foremost mandate was the nation-state's survival under transnational capitalism. This regenerated nationalist discourse did not merely comply with liberal market principles, but also called for innovative capacities that would help South Korea to achieve a position as a global leader. Accordingly, numerous programs to promote the information technology industry and the culture industry were implemented during the Kim Dae-jung regime (1998-2003) because these would become the "most fundamental industries" in the twentieth-first century, "an era of information, knowledge, and culture."²²³

reunification message was predicated upon South Korea's 'forgiveness' of the North—and was premised on the idea that the two Kroeas would reunite under the South which was the authentic and legitimate Korea whose prosperity presented a clear contrast to the poverty-stricken, isolated, and totalitarian North Korean state." See "The Korean War after the Cold War," 248.

²²² Among them, sociologist Gi-wook Shin draws a parallel between Park Chung Hee's modernization project and Kim Young Sam's globalization policy by attending to their "emphasis on Korea's native culture and national identity as integral to their respective national development projects." See *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 215.

²²³ Kim Dae-jung stated, "Culture is no longer a medium that simply enriches the quality of life of a nation and its people. The culture industry is spreading throughout the world as one of the most fundamental industries. The culture industry, which encompasses movies, databases and computer games, has a huge market which now dominates the globe." See "Era of 'Universal Globalism' Dawning," *Korea Times*, November 4, 1998, accessed March 20, 2013. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2013/02/116_50286.html.

During the Kim Dae-jung administration, the "Korean film industry environment was visibly improved"; film censorship was abolished "under the principle of 'giving support without interference,'" and the Korean Film

It is within this dual process of Koreanization and globalization in the post-Cold War era that the hybrid form called “Korean-style blockbusters” emerged in the South Korean cultural sphere, joining the ranks of the vanguard in the Korean Wave (*hallyu*). Appropriating the Hollywood model, the indigenized genre contains more than a simple mixture of the “global” formulas of spectacular big-picture and “national” materials familiar to the local audience. Its translation of the “original” format is placed within an intricate web of intertextuality. While evoking the nationalist desire to compete with American conventions, thereby challenging US dominance in the region, such postcolonial mimicry²²⁴ in popular forms of entertainment also signals that the prior mode of resistance to foreign imperialism and developmentalist dictatorship—the two major goals of the *minjung* movement in the 1980s—has turned out to be neither valid nor appealing since the ascension of neoliberal global capitalism. In this

Council (KOFIC) was organized in 1999. See Kim Hyae-joon, “The WTO System and the Reorganization of Film Promotion Policy,” in *Korean Cinema: From Origins to Renaissance*, ed. Kim Mee Hyun (Seoul: CommunicationBooks, 2006), 365.

²²⁴ The ambivalence of South Korean blockbusters entailed by their appropriation of foreign conventions to represent specifically Korean subjects has been discussed by a number of film scholars in both Korean and English. Drawing upon Chris Berry’s argument of the blockbuster’s “de-Westernization” in East Asia, Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer, while vigilant about creating a clear hierarchical divide between Hollywood blockbusters and their local counterparts, state that “the concept of the blockbuster has been indigenized, or injected with local concerns and local subject matter.” See “Storming the Big Screen: The *Shiri* Syndrome,” in *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*, ed. Frances K Gateward (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 59, and Chris Berry, “What’s Big About The Big Film?: ‘De-Westernizing’ the Blockbuster in Korea and China,” in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003), 217-29.

By taking into account the social, economic, and cultural transformations under the IMF system, many Korean film critics scrutinize multilayered nationalist sentiments evoked by the “Koreanness” of Korean blockbusters. Kim Soyoung, for example, analyzes the hybrid nature of the Korean blockbuster as follows: 1) the foregrounding of the locality of Korea, 2) the imitation of transnational Hollywood cinema, and 3) an attempt to become a new leader in Asian cultural productions, following Hong Kong and Japan. She then points out that this complex desire for the local, the Asian, and the transnational is produced within a field of power dominated by America. See “Sarajineun namhan yeoseongdeul: Hangukhyeong beullokkeoseuteo yeonghwa ui muusikjeok gwanghak” [Disappearing South Korean Women: Unconscious Optics of the Korean Blockbuster], in *Ateulantiseu hogeun amerika* [Atlantis or America: The Korean Blockbuster], ed. Kim Soyoung (Seoul: Hyeonsilmunhwayeongu, 2001), 33. See also Kim Byeong Cheol, *Hangukhyeong beullokkeoseuteo ui bit gwa geuneul: Hangukhyeong beullokkeoseuteo ui bopyeonseong gwa teukseuseong* [The Light and Shadow of Korean-Style Blockbusters: The Universality and Particularity of Korean-Style Blockbusters] (Paju: Hangukhaksuljeongbo, 2005); Kim Kyoung Wook, *Beullokkeoseuteo ui hwansang, hanguk yeonghwa ui nareusisijeum* [The Illusion of the Blockbuster, the Narcissism of Korean Cinema] (Seoul: Chaekseasang, 2002); Kim Sunah, *Hanguk yeonghwa raneun natseon gyeonggye: Korian nyu weibeu wa hangukhyeong beullokkeoseuteo sidae ui gukga, seksueolliti, beonyeok, yeonghwa* [The Unfamiliar Boundary of Korean Cinema: The State, Sexuality, Translation, and Cinema in Korean New Wave and Korean-Style Blockbusters] (Seoul: Communication Books, 2006).

reconstituted public sphere, the people, too, no longer appear to (care to) be the collective subject of history. More important are issues related to personal identity and wellbeing, and to private concerns and anxieties, which had previously been suspended under, if not suppressed by, the heavy weight of social imperatives for the sake of economic development and political advances. Such changing needs of contemporary South Koreans eventually led to the success of well-made commercial films, breaking from the 1980s' Korean New Wave of social realism.²²⁵ As the literary circle and intellectual community at large underwent internal strife under the tide of postmodernism and became alienated from popular life, the film industry promptly engaged itself in visualizing the hitherto marginalized desires of the masses (*daejung*) and enabled them to enjoy a different type of subjectivity as consumers.²²⁶ This newfound tendency in post-*minjung* society ushered in the rise of the next generation of cultural practitioners. The transnationalized tastes of viewers were met by the blockbuster trend, which was introduced by a new group of directors. Their technologically intensive high-budget filmmaking was further promoted by the government's support and the influx of financial capital as their works targeted both domestic and overseas markets.

Since the cinematic has superseded the literary on the central stage in the public realm, South Koreans nowadays are keener to watch spectacular Korean War movies than to read a massive historical novel like *Taebaek Mountain Range*.²²⁷ Whereas the people in *minjung*

²²⁵ Kim Byeong Cheol, *Ibid.*, 116-17.

²²⁶ In this "pursuit of and respect for 'the popular'" in South Korean films since the mid-1990s, Jinhee Choi finds traces of the *minjung* movement: "[T]he Korean film renaissance may be viewed as a reorientation and/or an expansion of the cultural movement of the 1980s, with its focus changing from *minjung* to *daejung* (the mass). There is a continuity between these two cultural eras in that the reimagining of the national divide persists in contemporary South Korean cinema, although in a weakened and commercialized form" See *The South Korean Film Renaissance*, 27-28.

²²⁷ Korean cultural critic Baek Moonim sees Jo Jung-rae's *Taebaek Mountain Range* as the last literary text that dominated the public sphere by fulfilling "the role of literature as alternative history textbooks." See "Yeonghwa ui geundae wa munhak ui talgeundae—gonggong yeongyeok euroseoui hanguk yeonghwa wa munhak" [The

literature remain the objects of enlightenment in their own stories, *daejung* consumers in the newly emergent mediascape actively pursue their pleasure, rejecting the preconceived notion of the oppressed under state authoritarianism. The past of the nation that is projected on the screen is now something recollected in the private realm, revolving around desires, fantasies, and anxieties in everyday life. Combined with marketing strategy and nationalist sentiments, moreover, the phenomenon of the Korean War blockbuster makes it more difficult to map out the relationships among the nation, the state, and capital. In this light, contemporary Korean War films seem much less likely to play the role that their predecessor, “division literature,” played; namely, as a vehicle for political or social critique that depicts a history of struggle or traces the origins of current contradictions.

There is no doubt that the spectacularization, as well as commodification, of Korean War memories in the mass media is intermingled with the consumer culture that is so pervasive in post-IMF South Korea. But that is only part of the picture. Certainly, the sensational reenactment of the traumatic event in new-fangled war movies brings cathartic relief, which may work as a “screen memory” that blocks critical reflection. Nevertheless, it would leave too much out to conclude that the syndrome of Korean War blockbusters merely generates the nation’s historical amnesia. Their visceral appeal to a wider audience is also related to a symptomatic acting-out of the trauma inflicted by the unending war when the preexisting way of processing such trauma—e.g., narratives from the *minjung* period—is barely functional. At the heart of those entertainment memories, furthermore, lies the unfulfilled wish for working-through the unresolved past. In this sense, today’s media culture sets out a new form of public sphere in which the desire for (re)mastery over memories of violence can be pursued collectively, however

Modernity of Cinema and the Postmodernity of Literature: Korean Literature and Cinema as the Public Sphere], *Para 21* (Summer 2004): 359-61.

fleeting and fragmentary it may be. What is at stake, then, is how the blockbuster has become the dominant form of remembering the Korean War, what it adopts and transforms from aesthetic devices and memory practices, both “foreign” and “indigenous,” and in what ways it is changing our perception of national history, the present state of inter-Korean relations, and the future of the Korean peninsula.

2. Dying Together, Living Alone:

Melodramatic Imagination and Historical Pathos in Korean War Blockbusters

Belated Temporality, Intersecting Spatiality in Shiri

In terms of production costs, Korean War blockbusters cannot compare with their “rivals” from Hollywood, which are equipped with overwhelming special effects.²²⁸ Nevertheless, these “low-budget” spectacles have worked no less compellingly than their Hollywood counterparts. Global media marketing strategies barely touched South Korean consumers, who were well aware of the national crisis under the IMF system, as illustrated in the “*Shiri* syndrome.” The first Korean War blockbuster *Shiri* (Kang Je-gyu, 1999) “sank” the *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) by overtaking the latter’s box-office record, and this was made possible through a nationalist mechanism through which watching an indigenous movie was

²²⁸ According to Jinhee Choi, “The biggest budgets [in the Korean film industry] reach over \$12 million, but they still represent a fraction of the budgets of Hollywood blockbusters, which often cost well over \$100 million.” See *The South Korean Film Renaissance*, 31.

regarded as a patriotic action, in parallel with a citizens' gold-collecting campaign to help their country out of its plight.²²⁹

Shiri captivated South Korean audiences not so much with its technological achievements as with its *unprecedented* ways of presenting issues of both continuing and immediate concern for the nation. Admittedly, this popular film reflects the altering geopolitical condition of the post-Cold War Korean peninsula; it portrays North Koreans as “human beings with inner dimensions,” and separates them from the demonic imagery found in the Cold War narrative. This humanistic depiction of the communist North in *Shiri* did not appear “for the first time”²³⁰ in the cultural sphere of postwar South Korea, if we take into account the sympathetic characterization of partisans in *Taebaek Mountain Range*—an alternative history textbook for the 386 generation that included many of the filmmakers of Korean blockbusters. The newness of *Shiri*, in fact, lay in its mode of the image-nation within the Hollywood frame, by bracketing the conventional notions of temporality and spatiality through its spectacular rearrangements of time-space. Thus, what is at stake in the spectacle-making of Korean War blockbusters is not how to create realistic war scenes through computer-generated special effects, but rather how to bring back the fading memory of national division within the context of contemporary living conditions that prompt the forgetting of the traumatic past. The humanization of North

²²⁹ Kim Kyoung Wook notes, “When *Shiri* broke the record of *Seopyeonje* (Im Kwon-taek, 1993), the production company of *Shiri* held an event to celebrate setting the new record...the female lead further lent her voice in support of pushing *Shiri* to surpass the record of *Titanic*, as well as to set the highest record in the history of Korean national cinema. The Korean media then began to carry a series of articles about whether or not *Shiri* might smash the record of the *Titanic*, and spread a formula that equated watching *Shiri* with acts of patriotism. This gained enormous empathy from the people, who were willing to overcome the IMF economic crisis through a ‘gold-collecting campaign.’ A nationalist mechanism worked.” See *Beullokbeoseuteo ui hwansang, hanguk yeonghwa ui nareusisijeum*, 7.

²³⁰ Suk-Young Kim, “Crossing the Border to the ‘Other’ Side: Dynamics of Interaction between North and South Koreans in *Spy Li Cheol-jin* and *Joint Security Area*,” in *Seoul Searching*, 225. Also see Michael Robinson, “Contemporary Cultural Production in South Korea: Vanishing Meta-Narratives of Nation,” in *New Korean Cinema*, ed. Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 27-28.

Koreans—even an attractiveness based on their moral virtues and disciplined bodies—in *Shiri*, then, is not a mere reflection of the thawing relations between the two Koreas after the Cold War. It is also a narrative strategy that maximizes the dramatic effect of the blockbuster, as it deploys the “North Korean threat” *at the level of daily life*. Those who look like ordinary citizens whom you may pass by on your way to work, sit next to in a soccer stadium, or fall in love with at first sight may turn out to be North Korean terrorists at any time!

Undeniably, this fear of “invisible others”²³¹ from the North is reminiscent of anticommunist hostilities of the earlier period. At the same time, however, it is associated with growing anxiety over social *costs* incurred by the increasing exchange between the two Koreas:²³² from skepticism about the South’s conciliatory policy toward the North (the “sunshine policy”) to concern with social conflicts surrounding the influx of North Korean defectors. This sense of foreboding about the unsettled boundaries of the nation is also entwined with a budding curiosity about the hitherto taboo territory beyond the 38th parallel. As Baek Moonim aptly perceives, in *Shiri* bugging devices planted in a fish and a liquid explosive (called CTX) can be read as interesting allegories for South Koreans’ ambivalent attitudes toward the North. On the one hand, the untainted image of the North Koreans reminds South Koreans of the North’s primitive resources that can be developed by the South, as exemplified in the case of the Mt. Kumgang Tour. On the other hand, their colorless and odorless features aggravate an unidentified horror of their destructive potential.²³³

²³¹ David Scott Diffrient, “*Shiri*,” *Film Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (2001): 43.

²³² As Chungmoo Choi succinctly puts it, “once the dizzying frenzy of propaganda subsided and the demonic image of the Northern brothers faded, the question that haunted South Koreans was whether their Northern relatives were starving.” See “The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea,” 464.

²³³ Baek Moonim, “‘Talinyeom’ ui jeongchihak—<Shiri>, <Gancheop richeoljin>, <Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA>” [The Politics of ‘Post-ideology’: *Shiri*, *Spy Li Cheol-jin* and *Joint Security Area*], in *Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA*, ed. Yonsei Institute of Media Arts (Seoul: Samin, 2002), 114.

The North has already become a part of the South's everyday life, just as the packaged fish tanks are mixed in the high-tech office of the male protagonist Ryu Jung-won, a South Korean intelligence agent. The technologically advanced yet eco-friendly environment of the South Korean Intelligence Agency, in effect, visualizes the "natural" way in which the North can and should be observed by or absorbed into the South. Arguably, the former provides something that the latter has lost through its condensed modernization: its innocent past. The coordination of Northern raw materials within the postindustrial landscape of the South, however, is always already determined by the interests of global capital. While this suggests the indisputable hegemony of the South in inter-Korean relations, it also displays the comfort zone in which the "reintegrated" Other can be accepted and appreciated. Not unlike the luxurious aquarium that, at best, serves as a refreshing accessory to the cutting-edge area in metropolitan Seoul, the North can be replaced or disposed of on any occasion—especially when it is inclined to threaten the wellbeing of the people in the South.

Furthermore, the undetectable identity of the liquid bomb can be linked with the amorphous, as well as volatile, nature of the North. What is not to be overlooked here is that CTX, initially developed as an alternative energy source by the South Korean government, is transformed in the movie into a weapon of mass destruction by North Korean terrorists. Such a plot obviously hinges upon the postcolonial-neocolonialist binary between the North and the South: that is, indomitable North Korean warriors, whose only concern is the welfare of the nation, as opposed to individualistic South Koreans, who are simply occupied with "butter and coke" dispensed by the American empire.²³⁴ Less explicit is the spreading apprehension that

²³⁴ The dichotomy of the North-nature-past and the South-culture-future has been discussed with reference to the South's ambivalent desire for the North that is at once postcolonial and neocolonialist. More often than not, North Koreans are considered to carry more aspects of "authentic Koreanness" than South Koreans, since they are "less international" and "less materialistic," as Grinker notes in *Korea and Its Futures* (61). This spiritual/material

South Korean capital and technology, barely recovered from the 1997 crisis, could be usurped by the North if the chance arose. Hence, South Korean “investment” in the North, either material or psychological, needs to be continually monitored and regulated within a safety zone. Agent Ryu’s fatal error is then to lose such a critical distance; above all, between the public and the personal, since he is the one who brings the fish bowls from his fiancée Lee Myeong-hyeon, who later turns out to be Lee Bang-hui, the North Korean sniper he has been tracking down.

It is, of course, Lee Bang-hui/Myeong-hyeon who disturbs the established (b)order most saliently. Playing the role of both a political opponent and a private lover, her double identity functions as a quilting point that interweaves the film’s dual plot structure. What is appalling about her transgression is not simply that she has crossed over the territorial border between the North and the South, but rather that she breaks down the cognitive boundaries of South Koreans, who have rarely imagined North Korean spies outside the public domain. The formidable assassin from the North perfectly internalizes the value system of the South, from her musical tastes to her drinking habits (if the former was the motive for their romance, the fruit of their romance is her abstinence from drink). The most traumatic moment for the male protagonist is thus when he encounters his fiancée as the public enemy; and his trauma is heightened by the fact that the confrontation occurs at the very center of intimacy, that is, in their own home. To use a term coined by Lacan, she embodies “extimacy,” the liminal space in which the divide

distinction in the South Korean imagination of the North complicates Chatterjee’s observation of anticolonial nationalism in twentieth-century Asia and Africa, because the South’s acknowledgement of the North’s spiritual superiority not only reconfirms the South’s material power, but also justifies the South’s “colonization” of the North through the “postcolonial” movement to overcome the legacy of the colonial period, i.e., national division. In this regard, Kwon Eun-sun’s review is noteworthy: “The combination of the South’s high-level technology, embodied in CTX, and the North’s uncontaminated spirituality, personified by Park Mu-yeong [the leader of North Korean terrorists], is imagined as the most proper way to respond to the West’s (cultural) imperialism in the age of neoliberal globalization.” See “‘Hangukhyeong beullokkeoseuteo’ eseoui minjokjuui wa jendeo—<Shiri> wa <Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA> reul jungsim euro” [Nationalism and Gender in “Korean-style Blockbusters”: *Shiri* and *JSA*], *Yeo/seong iron* 4 (June 2001): 110. I will further elaborate on this postcolonial-neocolonialist unconscious of contemporary South Koreans in the following analysis of *JSA*.

between exteriority and interiority is blurred. At the moment in which the South Korean subject faces the rupture in the symbolic system—the Real in the Lacanian sense—he is at a loss for words.

Nevertheless, Lee's deterritorialized Korean identity, i.e., at once the Northern and the Southern, hardly transcends the ascribed social conditions. Though she does not seem to be bounded by the borderline between the two states—almost like *shiri*, indigenous Korean fish that freely flow along water streams—her exceptional “mobility” is, ironically enough, a byproduct of the division of the peninsula. In other words, her “freedom” is permitted only under the given conditions, no better than a fish in a tank. More problematically, her action is determined by her object status, subordinate to her North Korean superior, on the one hand, and her South Korean husband-to-be, on the other. Her inner conflict between professional duty and personal desire, or between the North's communist ideology and the South's bourgeois capitalism, is easily displaced into a woman's confusion between the two male characters who stand on opposing sides.²³⁵ In this way, the heroine of the film, who could have been one of the most subversive female characters in Korean cultural history, is readily transformed into a hapless victim.²³⁶ The interstice that the split or double subject *embodies* is, after all, used for the narrative employment to stimulate melodramatic sentiment.²³⁷ Bizarrely well matched with her physical strength and

²³⁵ This is the uncanny inverse of the “love triangle” centering around the male protagonist in Choi In-hoon's *The Square*.

²³⁶ Lee Bang-hui/Myeong-hyeon in *Shiri* reminds us of the female character who magically mediates the two opposing sides in *Taebaek Mountain Range*. Much like Sohwa, Lee becomes infected with the ideology of her lover. While the direction of her “conversion” is completely overturned in the Korean War blockbuster made two decades later, the gender asymmetry in the national imagination does not seem to have changed. In spite of the political and cultural shift in the 1990s—whether it is about the dominant subject (from *minjung* to *daejung*) or about the hegemonic form (from the literary to the cinematic)—the position of women remains the same: placed between the two masculine superpowers.

²³⁷ This “melodramatic sentiment” cannot be simply referred to as “traditional Korean storytelling,” as Diffrient asserts in “*Shiri*”: “Perhaps the film's singularity and huge success can be attributed to the way it fuses the special-effect-driven spectacles of Hollywood blockbusters and the melodramatic sentiment of traditional Korean

spiritual innocence, her feminine agony amplifies the effect of the voyeuristic gaze of the audience. Much like tropical fish in an aquarium, her exotic, primitive, and fragile beauty, commensurate with the Orientalist fantasy of native (Korean) women, enhances the viewers' sentimental reactions to her catastrophe.

The female protagonist from the North remains a foreign, sexual object under the gaze of South Korean spectators, who most likely watch her extermination from the perspective of Agent Ryu. No less than his female "partner," he is pictured as a victim of unfortunate historical circumstances rooted in Korea's division. At the end of the film, the two lovers face each other as enemies, and Lee is killed by Ryu. Though he survives, and even succeeds in preventing another calamity for the nation, the hero is left devastated. Suggestive of the common destiny of kissing gourami—a species of fish that cannot live apart from their partner—he declares, "Agent Ryu is dead." Despite his symbolic "death," his position as the subject of interpretation is never relinquished. While identifying Lee with "a hydra created by the division of the Korean peninsula," he mourns his lost love, Lee Myeong-hyeon, who he himself has killed in her guise as Lee Bang-hui.

In contrast to Ryu's self-initiated withdrawal from the symbolic order, the expulsion of Lee from South Korean society is enforced or suspended by the male subjects. When Park Mu-yeong, the leader of North Korean terrorists, chides her betrayal, she tries to take her own life,

storytelling" (42). As Jinhee Choi points out, such a melodramatic element is "not unique to Korean storytelling" since it is often found in Hong Kong Noir, as well as in Hollywood blockbusters such as Michael Bay's *Armageddon*. While I appreciate Choi's criticism of Diffrient's binarization of the spectacles of Hollywood blockbusters and the Korean tradition of melodrama, I do not entirely agree with her conclusion that: "A better way to characterize the difference would be that Korean blockbusters are more character-driven and attempt to expand 'narrative depth,' which is often lacking in contemporary Hollywood blockbusters" (See *The South Korean Film Renaissance*, 49). I would rather dispute Diffrient's interpretation by relating the melodramatic structure of Korean War blockbusters to a popular mode of representation that has played a vital role in how Koreans have made *sense* of modernity since the colonial period. I discuss in more detail the historicity of Korea's melodramatic "tradition" later in this chapter, building upon Peter Brooks's theorization of melodrama as "the modern imagination" (*The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1995).

admitting that she has failed to change her interiority. Her suicide attempt, however, is thwarted by Park. The voice message she has left for Ryu is not delivered on time, so her last wish to avoid confronting her fiancée as a foe is not realized as well. The most melodramatic scene of the movie unfolds when Ryu revisits Lee's place, the intimate site in ruin, belatedly listening to Lee's request and confession: "The times I had with you are all of my life. With you, I was neither Lee Myeong-hyeon nor Lee Bang-hui, but just me. I won't ask you to understand me. I miss you." By disavowing both her past as a North Korean spy (Bang-hui) and her fake identity in South Korea (Myeong-hyeon),²³⁸ the hydra-like persona is, in the final instance, remembered as *just a woman* who loved a man.²³⁹

The melodramatic mode in *Shiri* is involved with a certain aporia engendered by the unnamable, vanishing Other. Surely, the privatization of Lee's death obliterates the history of the nation and the division system in the present. As Yi Hyo-in points out, romantic elements in *Shiri* serve to alleviate South Koreans' compulsive neurosis related to the war.²⁴⁰ However, the "commercial use" of "Korean reality" does not necessarily reflect an "apolitical" attitude.²⁴¹ Rather, the popular form of cultural production swiftly captures, and instantly dissolves, the haunting anxieties over the unpredictable situation on the Korean peninsula. The eradication of the North Korean woman is inevitable since her assimilation into South Korean society is likely to be a threat. To put it the other way round, it is too early for South Korean subjects to embrace

²³⁸ After receiving plastic surgery in Japan, Lee Bang-hui steals the identity of Lee Myeong-hyeon, who is taking a cure in a sanatorium located in Jeju Island.

²³⁹ It is notable that throughout the film the female protagonist never speaks as Lee Bang-hui. When she performs the role of a North Korean special agent, she looks like a war-machine without a voice.

²⁴⁰ *Yeonghwa ro igneun hanguk sahoe munhwasa* [Reading Sociocultural History of Korea through Films] (Seoul: Gaemagowon, 2003), 211.

²⁴¹ Yi Hyo-in, "Tongil eul hyanghan wiheomhan sigak: <Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA>, <Gancheop richeoljin>, <Shiri>" [A Dangerous Perspective towards Unification], *Tongilsiron* 9 (January 2001): 191.

the foreign other, however alluring she is, let alone the baby produced by *her* transgression. Ryu's delayed agnition, that is, mourning Lee's death in a private space after killing her in a public area, should be seen within this context. By giving her a personal burial, Ryu not only dissociates his perished love from her public identity, but also comes to terms with his own wounds. The melodramatic imagination of the Korean War blockbuster, then, can be better understood as an aesthetic practice through which traumatic history is approached more safely, as well as more sensationally. It has not yet come to more adequately represent the trauma of national division.

Interlocked with such unrepresentability, Ryu's acknowledgement of powerlessness is conveyed by his tears in the last scene of the film. Looking out on the sea, he is listening to Lee's favorite song, "When I Dream." Indeed, the union between the South Korean man and the North Korean woman is not possible on the divided land, unless in fantasy. This reality check provided in the tragic finale constructs a powerful after-image, as it is combined with Hollywood-style editing. By intersecting multiple spatialities and temporalities, the spectacle of *Shiri* intensifies its melodramatic structure that exteriorizes the psychic process of acting-out and working-through. Perhaps this technologically mediated, collective sensing of Korea's division is where the newness of Korean War blockbusters can be found.

Melodrama and Trauma: What Returns in Flashback?

The melodramatic imagination of Korean War blockbusters illustrates the pervasiveness of melodrama as a mode of representation that may not be located exclusively in a theatrical tradition or a film genre because the aesthetic, emotional, and cognitive fields it offers break

boundaries of genre, style, and ideology.²⁴² If, as Linda Williams proposes, melodrama should be perceived as a popular mode that “seeks dramatic revelation of moral and emotional truths through a dialectic of pathos and action,”²⁴³ its rich presence, I argue, cannot be constrained within the cultural history of the West, i.e., from the Victorian stage to Hollywood cinema and TV series. As much as it has been adapted for diverse media, it has also been translated across geographic boundaries, since “the drama of excess” is profoundly aligned with modern experiences, as Peter Brooks insightfully discerns: “It [melodrama] comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern.”²⁴⁴ In light of this, melodramatic features of Korean War films can be associated with contemporary South Koreans’ bewilderment caused by the disparity between the world’s celebration of the end of the Cold War and South Korea’s spectral anticommunist ideology, including the National Security Law. Moreover, the prior patterns of moral order, e.g., the *minjung* movement, no longer offer suitable social glue.

The melodramatic imagining of the Korean War becomes more effective as it is compounded with the spectacular medium of the cinema. If traumatic memory is something that

²⁴² Regarding melodrama as “a pervasive aesthetic mode,” see Christine Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation,” in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: BFI Publishing, 1987), 5-39.

²⁴³ “Melodrama Revised,” in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Brown (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 42. I agree with Williams that “supposedly realist cinematic effects—whether of setting, action, acting or narrative motivation—most often operate in the service of melodramatic affect,” and yet I disagree with her idea that “melodrama is a particularly democratic and American form” (42). Even though melodrama has its origin in the West, as Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto points out, “any generic category is neither more nor less than a theoretical construct” and therefore “the ultimate purpose of generic criticism is to deconstruct the illusion of the completeness of a genre and to analyze the layers of sedimented ideologemes constructed into a seemingly distinct genre.” See “Melodrama, Postmodernism, and Japanese Cinema,” in *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*, ed. Wimal Dissanayake (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 106.

²⁴⁴ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 15.

breaks out of narrativity due to its sensory aspects or fragmented nature,²⁴⁵ the film has an edge in reenacting traumatic events. In addition to its visuality and aurality, cinematic techniques—particularly flashbacks—fittingly manifest the abrupt and fragmentary return of trauma, on the one hand, and the stranded relationship between the past and the present, on the other.²⁴⁶ It is thus sensible that Ann Kaplan matches traumatic symptoms with cinematic mechanisms, “through which a culture can unconsciously address its traumatic hauntings.”²⁴⁷ In re-illuminating melodrama from the perspective of trauma theory, she places the generic formation of melodrama “at certain historical moments [in which] aesthetic forms...emerge to accommodate fears and fantasies related to suppressed historical events.” Her remark that “Hollywood’s melodramas are arguably impelled to repeat the rent in the dominant fiction occasioned by historical trauma while at the same time seeking unconsciously to repair and reveal that rent,”²⁴⁸ is useful in considering Korean War movies, for their “screen memory” also serves a similar sort of protective function. The textual displacement of war trauma into the familiar—mostly familial—one is inexorable because, according to Kaplan, it is “too dangerous” for the culture to recall the traumatic experience “*for political or social reasons*” (emphasis added).²⁴⁹ The melodramatic representation of the Korean War, then, needs to be thought together with an attempt to defuse such political or social dangers in divided Korea. Park Chan-

²⁴⁵ In his rigorous study of war trauma, Jonathan Shay states, “Traumatic memory is not narrative. Rather, it is experience that reoccurs, either as fully sensory replay of traumatic events in dreams or flashbacks, with all things seen, heard, smelled, and felt intact, or as disconnected fragments.” See *Achilles in Vietnam*, 172.

²⁴⁶ See Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York: Routledge, 1989), and Susannah Radstone ed., *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

²⁴⁷ *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 69.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

wook's *Joint Security Area* (2000), which smashed *Shiri*'s box-office record, is an exemplary instance of the dramatic defusing of the continuing war on the Korean peninsula by way of displacement, or virtual experiment of border-crossing, as it fully employs the flashback trope of trauma that evokes at once spectacular astonishment and historical pathos.

In the non-linear narrative of *JSA*, flashbacks are not just inserted and left hanging in the main plot, but rather set out to reconstitute a traumatic event: a shooting incident in the Joint Security Area. Beginning with the crime scene that shows only a bullet hole in the wall, the camera follows the movements of Swiss Major Sophie Jean, an investigator on the (inter)national case. Though she plays multiple roles as a mediator—both spatially between the North and the South and temporally between the past and the present within the film, as well as between the fictional world and the spectator beyond the screen—her “neutral/superior” position, which allows her exceptional traversals, ironically leaves her out of the core of the story. Interrogating the victims-suspects-witnesses of the gunfight, she seems to remain a supporting character in the unlocking of their memories, from which she is herself alienated. This marginalization of the authority figure from the outside is further complicated by her gender: the commanding woman in masculine society ultimately drives the male subjects to suicide.²⁵⁰ Though, as the director intended, “the conflict between individuals and the system” in *JSA* “show[s] that the Joint Security of Panmunjom is not a mere byproduct of the Cold War, but also a contradictory space

²⁵⁰ It is notable that the original novel, Park Sang-yeon's *DMZ*, unfolds the story of Swiss Major Sig Versami, centering on the interiority of the *male* protagonist-narrator. This gender switch affects the entire power dynamic in the film. As discussed in detail in the main text of this chapter, the authority of Sophie as a member of NNSC (the Neutral Nation Supervisory Commission) is to a large extent offset by the fact that she is “the first female staff in Panmunjom.” What is not to be overlooked is that the film adaptation also marginalizes the issue of language, which is a crucial part of both the suspenseful narrative and the identity crisis of the protagonist in Park's novel: the process of learning Korean is entangled with Sig's own trauma inflicted by his Korean father, while his fluent use of Korean often surprises Korean characters from both sides since his personal background remains unknown until he himself discloses it. In contrast, Sophie's half-Koreanness is rather abused, in combination with her gender minority. Korean characters in the film not only take for granted communication in Korean, but also express their superiority as native speakers. When she requests the extradition of the perpetrator-victim, a South Korean minister gives her “advice,” using the familiar form of Korean.

that is too small to avoid a dialogue with the other,²⁵¹ the individuals who can participate in the dialogue are gender-specific. While Sophie fulfills her duty as a medium for the unfinished dialogue between men, she is in fact excluded from the process of communication. In the end, she gives up speaking of the truth, upon witnessing the destructive result of her desire to know. Overlapping with her racial heterogeneity, Sophie's gender difference contributes to her isolation from the homosocial community, as not a few critics have pointed out.²⁵²

What is not often noticed or emphasized enough is that the foreign, sexual other *stands in for histories* that have no place, neither in the past, nor in the present, and are therefore continually reenacted in the form of flashbacks. In gathering bits and pieces of the traumatic event in the Joint Security Area through counter-examinations of conflicting statements, Sophie also undergoes her own status change from the neutral investigator to an involuntary perpetrator (her in(ter)ference triggers suicide attempts by the two South Korean soldiers under interrogation), an under-acknowledged victim (she is strangled by one of the South Korean suspects, upon seeing the fall of his subordinate), and eventually to an empathic witness to the tragedy of Korea's division. Her transformation is further entwined with her ambivalent feelings towards her father, one of the North Korean POWs who chose a third country after the ceasefire in 1953. Her in-between subjectivity that grants her the ability to recover Korea's traumatic past, both the recent and the remote, inversely suggests the inability of the insiders to gain access to the history of the Korean War. In this sense, she is not simply mobilized to bridge the

²⁵¹ Interview in *Film 2.0* (a weekly movie magazine of South Korea), reprinted in *Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA*, 162. This somewhat reflects or refracts one of the most important features of Panmunjom portrayed in the original novel: a place in which language is suspended.

²⁵² See, for example, Yomota Inuhiko's "Bundan ui bunjeol" [The Articulation of the Division], trans. Song Tae-uk, in *Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA*, 32-59, and Kim Soyoung, "Hangukhyeong beullokbeseuteo eseoui dongseongsahoejeok pantaji" [Homosocial Fantasies in Korean-style Blockbusters], *Yeo/seong iron* 6 (July 2002): 151-178.

incompatible spaces of the North and the South, the past and the present, or the personal and the public. Since the registration of the traumatic event in flashback is connected with the (un)conscious effort to “escape” it,²⁵³ Sophie’s borderline position tactfully provides a safe way to manage the terror and loss that might be caused by touching on this volatile issue. Just as flashbacks maintain the “strange connection—between the *elision* of memory and the *precision* of recall,”²⁵⁴ the stranger can establish legitimate connections by virtue of her otherness. Accordingly, those who are not equipped with such a “protection device” cannot escape the punishment for their private connection with the enemy of the state, as exemplified by the deaths of the two South Korean border guards who crossed “the bridge of no return.”

Precarious Solidarity in Joint Security Area

As director Park Chan-wook proudly mentions in his interview in *Film 2.0*, the setting of *JSA* was a daring challenge to this forbidden topic in the modern history of Korea.²⁵⁵ Whereas its predecessor, *Shiri*, abstracts the border between the North and the South, *JSA*, by making the best use of its exceptional setting, succeeds in visualizing the multiple, i.e., the geopolitical and socio-psychological, boundaries dividing the Korean peninsula.²⁵⁶ Simply put, *JSA* depicts the

²⁵³ In “Recapturing the Past,” Cathy Caruth argues, “The ability to recover the past is thus closely and paradoxically tied up, in trauma, with the inability to have access to it. And this suggests that what returns in the flashback is not simply an overwhelming experience that has been obstructed by a later repression or amnesia, but an event that is itself constituted, in part, by its lack of integration into consciousness. Indeed, the literal registration of an event—the capacity to continually, in the flashback, reproduce it in exact detail—appears to be connected, in traumatic experience, precisely with the way it *escapes* full consciousness as it occurs.” See “Recapturing the Past,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 152-53.

²⁵⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA*, 165.

²⁵⁶ Kwon Eun-sun, “‘Hangukhyeong beullokbeoseuteo’ <Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA> eseoui minjokjuui” [Nationalism in ‘Korean-style Blockbuster’ *JSA*], in *Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA*, 64. Borrowing

cross-border friendship between North and South Koreans who have not experienced the Korean War, but have lived under the division system. For these young generations, the fratricidal war between 1950 and 1953 may belong to the space of what Marianne Hirsch has called “postmemory.”²⁵⁷ Distinguished from the first-hand memory of people who lived through the wartime, the second-generation memory recalls the un-experienced yet still haunting past through the (re-)creation of inherited discourses. In this postmemory landscape, there is no clear opposition between knowledge taught in public education and alternative revisionist histories, the opposition sustained in the counter-memory shaped by the previous generation. Rather, both are presented as contested and in flux. In this respect, Park Chan-wook’s own comment on the comparison of *JSA* to Choi In-hoon’s *The Square* is instructive: “Our generation is a generation fascinated with Choi In-hoon’s *The Square*. I wanted to carry on such a beautiful tradition. [But] this film has nothing to do with the anguish of intellectuals. I just felt sympathy with individuals who are unable to choose either side.”²⁵⁸

Homi Bhabha’s concepts of “the liminality of the nation” and “the barred Nation It/Self,” Kwon proposes to use South/North Korea in order to indicate political, ideological, cultural differences between the two Koreas and their people, problematizing the “natural” cohesion of South-North Korea.

²⁵⁷ Hirsch writes: “Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. (...) Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. I have developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but I believe it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences.” See *Family Frames*, 22.

This postmemory also illustrates the way in which a “learned history” is transformed to a “living memory,” as Paul Ricœur elaborates “a curve” outlined in Maurice Halbwachs’ conceptualization of the collective memory: “On the one hand, the history taught in school, made up of memorized dates and facts, is animated by currents of thought and experience, becoming what the same sociologist had earlier considered to be the ‘social frameworks of memory.’ On the other, personal as well as collective memory is enriched by the historical past that progressively becomes our own. Taking over from listening to the words of the ‘old people,’ reading gives a dimension to the notion of the traces of the past that is at once public and private.” See *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 394-97.

²⁵⁸ *Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA*, 166.

Admittedly, the individuals framed by the 386 generation director do not resemble the main characters either in Choi In-hoon's intellectual novels or in Jo Jung-rae's *minjung* narratives. The young South Korean soldiers in *JSA* traverse the demarcation line not because they want to become the vanguard of national history, but because they find in their transgressive act an outlet for their military life. The protagonist Sergeant Lee Soo-hyeok suggests "introducing some friends" to Private Nam Seong-sik when the rookie worries about his future on the base after Lee is discharged. Later Lee leads Nam to the North's guard post, but Nam hesitates in front of the very borderline on the bridge of no return. Then Lee mimics, in a parodic way, what he heard before from the North Korean guard Jeong Woo-jin on Lee's first visit to the North's post: "After half a century of division, . . . um . . . overcoming our history of agony and disgrace, we're gonna open the dam to reunification, okay?" Nam's horrified response, "Could we maybe open it later?" is finely counterposed with the comical finish of Jeong's "welcome address" with "I am sorry."²⁵⁹ In this way, the political imperative of national reunification is laughed away in the film made in 2000, and this "decontextualization strategy," as Baek Moonim puts it, is successful in "relieving the tension and anxiety of the South Korean audience and gaining their sympathy."²⁶⁰ Lee and Nam, the ordinary *men* of contemporary South Korea, thus replace the central position of modern/postcolonial intellectuals in the earlier metanarratives of nation.

The more they cross the physical border, the last line of defense, the less the psychological barrier within themselves matters. Beyond the official state ideology, which now

²⁵⁹ When Lee Soo-hyeok first visited the North's post, taking at face value Jeong Woo-jin's "invitation letter," Jeong ardently welcomed the "South Korean defector" by praising his initiative to "open the dam to reunification." Upon seeing Lee's puzzlement, however, Jeong hurriedly finished his welcome address with "I am sorry." Regarding this comic twist as "a marked quality of this film," Baek Moonim notes that "[the film] dismisses such an 'ideological' remark . . . to evoke laughter." See "'Talinyeom' ui jeongchihak," 123.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

seems anachronistic as well as contradictory, they encounter the human face of the enemy and thereafter foster dangerous—but thanks precisely to the risk, more thrilling—fraternal ties. They even enjoy their secret pleasure, as if they were making a mockery of the arbitrary line separating them; they hardly suppress their laughter, spitting on the other side, while they are on sentry duty, confronting each other. Here the camera, instead of shooting the North from a southern perspective, looks down on both sides from the air, conveying an illusion of neutrality and transcendence of history. The skillful disposition of the sequence makes the spectators share their playful gaze, creating the impulse to cross the line.

This “voyeuristic phantasy” that draws the viewers deeply into the pleasure obtained through identifying with the transgressive characters on the screen is, ironically enough, promoted by the separations between the spectator and the screen, on the one hand, and among the spectators. As Laura Mulvey astutely notices, “conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world...the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire on to the performer.” Park Chan-wook’s art of directing utilizes further these extra-diegetic tendencies founded on “the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen.”²⁶¹ *JSA*’s intersection of the repressed desire in the dark, private room and the reclaimed ideology in the bright, public domain exquisitely corresponds to the psychic landscape of contemporary South Koreans, confounded by the lasting Cold War order on their border, as opposed to the “détente” in the Cold War metropole.

²⁶¹ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 836.

First of all, the South/North Korean soldiers' nonmilitary rendezvous begins at night when North Korean officer Oh Kyeong-pil rescues Lee Soo-hyeok, who, falling behind the line, has stepped on a mine laid in the DMZ. Their brotherly bonding through cross-bordering deepens only in the dark, splitting them into two different selves: one that leads a public/conscious life during the day and another that maintains a private/unconscious desire at night. While their public relationship during daylight is filled with lies, hypocrisies, and threats, their private meetings in a basement bunker enable them to share a candid, intimate, and even "regressive" atmosphere; they sit smoking together, and play marbles and cockfighting, listening to South Korean pop songs from the 1980s.²⁶² To use Choi In-hoon's spatial allegory, their double life as enemies by day and friends by night corresponds to a public role in "the square" and private affairs in "the secret room," respectively. Just as Lee Myong-jun was so distressed because neither "the square as the secret room of the masses," nor "the secret room as the square of the individual" was possible on the divided Korean peninsula, his descendants, even a few decades later, are still frustrated by the same dilemma: their relationship in the private room cannot and must not be exposed to the *sunshine* world in which the military confrontation between the two Koreas continues while the South offers economic and humanitarian aid to the North under a conciliatory approach known as the "sunshine" policy.²⁶³

In contrast to the hierarchy of the public realm, these youths banding together underground develop fraternity based on equality, averting the omnipresent gaze of the political fathers of each side. For instance, when Nam Seong-sik takes a picture of the other three in their private reconciliation in the secret room, he makes an effort to frame them without the wall upon

²⁶² This "regressive fantasy" of *JSA* has been addressed by several film critics in South Korea, including Kim Kyoung Wook. See *Beullokbeoseuteo ui hwansang, hanguk yeonghwa ui nareusisijeum*, 67-71.

²⁶³ This idea to connect the day/night contrast with "sunshine policy" is indebted to Petrus Liu's valuable comment on my original draft written for his seminar, "Cold War Aesthetics" in 2007.

which hang portraits of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. Furthermore, Jeong Woo-jin says, “Move your [ROK] army. Then we can go head to head with those damned Yankees,” picking out the South’s dependency on the American power, on the “neocolonial father.” It is worth underscoring that such a denial of the father’s shadow constitutes a condition for the alliance of the North-South brothers in the movie. Put otherwise, the newly found brotherhood emerges as a desirable social power in an imaginary world without fathers, without either the dictatorial (in the North) or the impotent (the South) father. This fraternal connection across the border(s) is differentiated from the comradeship within the same system, as implied in Oh Kyeong-pil’s response to Lee Soo-hyeok’s thank you letter, in which the latter asks, “Can I call you brother? I’ve always wanted a brother.” Oh responds, “After hearing ‘comrade’ all the time, it’s nice to be called brother.”²⁶⁴ Like a big brother, Oh strives to save his younger brothers from the South, even after an “accidental” gunfight in which he loses his comrade, Jeong Woo-jin, the youngest member of their alternative family. The private bond between the South and North Korean soldiers eventually trumps the North Korean camaraderie enforced by socialist ideology.

While this equalized and horizontal solidarity of the South/North postwar generation is formed against the backdrop of the “fading” ideological antagonism, what bridges their material and psychological gap is none other than the male-dominated military culture. In the murky bunker, the four soldiers engage in a wordy, playful battle over *choco-pie*, the most popular snack among South Korean soldiers, as they listen to the South Korean soldiers’ favorite folk song “A Letter from a Private.”²⁶⁵ While the South Korean brothers satisfy, if not relieve, the

²⁶⁴ Certainly, their correspondence bears a resemblance to that between a pair of lovers. When Nam catches Lee writing a letter and asks him whether it is to Lee’s girlfriend (and Nam’s younger sister), Su-jeong, Lee gives an evasive, but not negative answer. See Kim Soyoung, “Hangukhyeong beullokbeseoteo eseoui dongseongsahoejeok pantaji,” 73.

²⁶⁵ Baek Moonim, “‘Talinyeom’ ui jeongchihak,” 125.

material or “cultural” hunger of the North by providing an American lighter and a porno magazine, the North Korean brothers repay their kindness in nonmaterial or traditional ways: Oh Kyeong-pil’s wisdom derived from actual fighting and Jeong Woo-jin’s authentic painting. Here we can see another dualization of the material and the spiritual, in addition to the chiaroscuro between day and night. The reconciliation narrative that twists the contradiction of the division system on the Korean peninsula is not fundamentally unhinged from the binary opposition in the age-old nationalist discourse that divides the world into two domains: the material realm, constructed by the “help” of the outside, and the inner spiritual realm we should preserve.²⁶⁶ In this dichotomous structure, the North Korean characters are portrayed as representing traditional values, whereas South Korean figures embody modern individuals nostalgic for the older days.

By setting such a time lag between the two Koreas, the Manichean universe of *JSA* reconfirms the economic and technological superiority of the South. The notion of the South’s supremacy is nevertheless conflated with a sense of powerlessness. The more humane and virtuous the North Koreans appear, the more burdened and anxious the South Koreans feel about their *forced* initiative at reunification. Bringing out the melodrama’s prominent features—the personalized world, the all-innocent victims, the nostalgic structure, and its musical

²⁶⁶ Partha Chatterjee, defining the dualistic formula of the material and the spiritual as “a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa,” argues that nationalist discourse in former colonies “declares the domain of the spiritual its sovereign territory and refuses to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain” (See *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 6). The neo-colonial relationship between the South and the North, which mirrors that between the US and the ROK, requires refining Chatterjee’s analysis. Undoubtedly, *JSA*’s North Korean characters seem more desirable model brothers than the South Korean pair in the sense that they retain authentic national and masculine values. Oh Kyeong-pil’s subjectivity, however, is not fixed but fluid, as Kwon Eun-sun observes in “‘Hangukhyeong beullokkeoseuteo’ <Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA> eseoui minjokjuui” (82-85). On the one hand, he cannot resist the capitalist temptations, including a Yankee cigarette lighter. On the other hand, he embodies the anti-American, anti-imperial nationalism of South Korea. “If the Yankee bastards play their war games, we’ll be obliterated. Three minutes into the war, both countries would be destroyed. A total wasteland. Don’t you get it?” What should be noted here is that in this scene the camera does not capture all the members of the conversation in a full shot, but zooms in on Oh’s figure, as if he asks the last question of the audience.

expressivity²⁶⁷—the affective fantasy of the film thus operates as a defense mechanism that prolongs the possibility of the wish-fulfillment: when their secret relationship is about to be disclosed, the South Korean soldiers elect to commit suicide, rather than to expose their dark fantasy of personal reconciliation to the public sphere in broad daylight. The tragic ending opted for by the South Korean soldiers, however, neither abandons nor disavows their desire for reunion with the other, but rather transfers their wish to the third party by shifting their authoritative interrogator to a legitimate witness (and, by extension, to the viewer behind the screen). Lee Soo-hyeok does not pull the trigger on himself until Sophie (the spectator’s “screen surrogate,”²⁶⁸ to use Mulvey’s expression) makes it to the scene.

Gendered Strife: Deferred or Incomplete Awakening to the Forgotten Father

The responsibility of the last witness, or the unintentional “accessory” to the deaths, is *given to*, not taken by, Sophie. Undeniably, Major Jean, with Swiss citizenship and a J.D. degree, stands in a much higher position than those powerless and emotional victims. In contrast to the South Korean soldiers’ illegal border-crossing, her lawful cross-border investigation endows her with the physical freedom and legal authority to enter the borderland in broad daylight. Nonetheless, her exceptional position that dismisses any affinity with either the South or the North hinders her from surpassing the invisible mental barrier constituted by the brotherhood between the South and the North. As mentioned above, Sophie’s (inter)national isolation is intertwined with her gender identity; *she* can never understand the mysterious solidarity among

²⁶⁷ Gledhill, *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 838.

brethren, however hard she strives to fit into the male world, e.g., by cigarette smoking and physical training.²⁶⁹

Again, the bar that blocked Sophie's engagement is lifted by the male subject, just as her duties as the investigator-witness are assigned, or thwarted, by masculine dominance. Lee Soohyeok's last and most truthful confession is made after he hears about her father. Learning that she is the daughter of a former North Korean officer, he feels a sense of friendliness. Here, it deserves attention that she neither resolutely denies, nor openly embraces, but rather suspends the signification of her father (in her family picture, the part with her father is folded down, but not torn away); perhaps she wanted to know her fatherland through this first visit of her life.²⁷⁰ What is waiting for Sophie in her father's land, however, is her doubly negative identity. Her agency as an investigator, which is already marginalized by her gender, is further questioned because of her troubling origin. In this light, Sophie's father, who appears only in a portion of a picture—not unlike Kim Il Sung's portrait on the wall of the dark bunker—can be seen as a specter that haunts the national history of Korea.²⁷¹ Since he chose neither side of the Korean peninsula but went to live in a third country, as Lee Myong-jun did in *The Square*, there is no

²⁶⁹ As for this double-alienation of Sophie, feminist film critic Kim Soyoung deliberates as follows: "Her [Sophie] investigator's 'look' is constantly denied agency, presumably because the murder and its concealment is provoked, sustained and empowered by a brotherhood based on ethnic nationalism that transcends the different ideologies along the lines of the cold war. Sophie, in desperation, tries to connect to this situation via her deceased father who had served in the Korean War but had defected to Switzerland after being detained in the war prisoners' camp. Her father's photograph now alludes to the complexities of modern history ravaged by the cold war, division and migration. But it does not really enable her to look at the cover up of the murders among North and South Korean soldiers. Neither does her expertise in international law (Zurich law school graduate) help, nor her half 'ethnicity' as Korean." See "The Birth of the Local Feminist Sphere in the Global Era: 'Trans-Cinema' and *Yosongjang*," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4, no. 1 (2003): 17-18.

²⁷⁰ This contrasts with Park Sang-yeon's original novel, in which the (belated) reconciliation between the male protagonist and his father constructs one of the dual plots. Not coincidentally, this reconciliation between the past and the present in the original is also mediated by his wife—a woman from the Third World.

²⁷¹ This juxtaposition of the two spectral fathers in *JSA* rests on the interpretation of Moon Jae Cheol. Arguing, "In this film, history exists in the form of pictures," Moon relates the "abrupt appearance" of the "disposed father" to the process of mourning "the specter of history," which cannot but end in failure. See "Saeroun bangsik euro bundan eul sangsanghagi" [A New Way of Imagining the Division], in *Gongdonggyeongbiguyeok JSA*, 12-31.

proper burial site left for him in his divided homeland. Precisely because he cannot be buried, however, he keeps coming back, and this apparition wandering from place to place, or connecting disjointed *chronotopes* “can often be more powerful than the living,” as Jacques Derrida highlights in his famous “hauntology.”²⁷² For he cannot be symbolized into language, but merely re-presented in images; he is nothing but the “traumatic core,” or “real kernel” of the division system, to use Žižek’s words.²⁷³

It should not be missed that the power of the (dead, treacherous) father is exerted only on the female character in *JSA*. While the male soldiers, thanks to their lack of fathers, are tied together by a horizontal brotherhood, “overcoming the history of agony and disgrace,” the heroine cannot escape her father’s shadow. Whereas the fatherless brothers are projected as self-made men, who are entitled to build (the nation’s) future, she is bound by the (nation’s) past as her status is, in the last instance, determined by her biological kinship. The indigenous male subjects therefore do not welcome, and eventually denounce the “modernity” introduced by Sophie—scientific knowledge, technological devices, and international law, i.e., the modernity imported from the outside. This is not only because her inquisition threatens the claim that “the peace is preserved by hiding the truth” in Panmunjom, as explicitly stated in the cinematic text. It is also because her mediation between the separate spaces as well as between the different histories disturbs the postcolonial order of things in South Korea that is preserved by repressing the past. Her intervention into the imagination of reconciliation between the brothers is thus dangerous in multiple ways.²⁷⁴ She brings in the law of the “foreign” father, the reality principle

²⁷² *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), 60.

²⁷³ *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 132; Moon, “Saeroun bangsik euro bundan eul sangsanghagi.”

²⁷⁴ In the critique by Kim Soyoung and Kwon Eun-sun, among others, Sophie is presented as a dangerous woman who thwarts the secret dream of reunification in alignment with a brother-centered family narrative, in

that permits her to cross the physical border, on the one hand, and the specter of the “forgotten” father, the returned past that helps her to transcend the psychological barrier. The daughter of the two fathers, however, is ultimately barred from the rebellion of the orphaned sons, once again, by the name of the father, who is consciously placed out of the frame of fraternity. After all, she is interpellated as a *mute witness* to the replayed tragedy of national division, not a participatory subject in the male-centered fantasy of a reunited nation. There is no spot left for her in the fraternal imagination of the seemingly new—and yet all-too-familiar—community, as insinuated in the last scene: the young patriarchs of the divided nation are reconvened in the very historical site of the division as if in order to revive their solidarity, which is at once broken and sustained by death.

The Family Before the Nation in Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War

Whereas *JSA* offers a close-up of the present geopolitical and sociohistorical tensions on the still divided Korean peninsula in the post-Cold War world through an exploration of the psychic landscape of younger soldiers enlisted half a century after the Korean War, *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* (Kang Je-gyu, 2004) takes a trip back to the very moment the Korean War broke out, following the memory lane of an earlier generation. While the former manifests a

which only two types of women exist: a second-rate family member like Su-jeong (Nam’s sister and Lee’s girl-friend) or the object of a male’s sexual fantasies, e.g., Song-sik’s picture of South Korea’s top actress (See Kim, “Hangukhyeong beullokbeoseoteo eseoui dongseongsahoejeok pantaji,” 172-73; Kwon, “Hangukhyeong beullokbeoseuteo’ eseoui minjokjuui wa jendeo,” 115-17). If the absence of the father is the first condition of their companionship, their brotherhood is consolidated through the exchange of pictures of women. What is often rarely discussed is Sophie’s performative power *as a speaking subject* who cannot, or does not even want to, be incorporated into the patriarchal symbolic order. By refusing the woman’s role in the transactions between men, she challenges the authority of the emergent patriarchs of the nation. In punishment for her defiance, she is thus left as a mute witness, losing her voice. Her presence is eventually denied in the last still-cut of the film, which captures only the fraternal alliance among the four male soldiers from both Koreas.

desire to create a new brother-bonding *beyond* the ideological conflicts between the two Koreas, the latter appeals to the timeless value of brotherhood *before* state ideology or political antagonism. In depicting its anti-hero brothers as innocent victims of the war, *Taegukgi* finally restores the bloodline of the separated family, which is even stronger than the irresistible force of history. The “genuine” brotherhood in Kang’s second Korean War blockbuster, nevertheless, uncannily reminds us of the “alternative” brotherhood suggested in Park Chan-wook’s *JSA*. In both films, the “Northern” elder brother, who is reliable but simple-hearted—in other words, an ideal figure of the old patriarch—is willing to sacrifice himself for the preservation or prosperity of the Southern younger brother, who is more sophisticated and therefore suitable to become a modern subject.

The belated reunion of the separated brothers in *Taegukgi*, furthermore, relieves the guilt of the heir in the South since he has not only survived, but has also fulfilled the request of the dead. The successful modernization of the younger brother, the last hope of the refugee family, compensates for a sense of powerlessness rooted in the traumatic fratricidal past. But at the same time, the flood of tears in its finale betrays an acknowledgement of the sacrifice of the others, without which there would have been no survival or success. The recovery of the lost brother, who is already presumed to have died in battle, by the surviving brother, who is also aged and waiting for his own death, is in effect all the more necessary for the postwar audience. In vicariously experiencing the history of loss, they participate in the rite of mourning *from a distance*. As they watch the melodramatic resolution between the dead and the dying, the new generation can move on, while simultaneously appreciating the benefits grounded upon the sufferings of their forbears.

This generational division of symbolic labor in *Taegukgi* illustrates the popular way of coming to terms with the legacies of the past in today's South Korea. Admittedly, such distancing of time and space in the mediascape aggravates the selective remembering and forgetting of the history of violence. Those who lament the current lack of historical consciousness in the current public sphere and ascribe this waning of collective struggle to the manipulation of the media, however, are right only to the extent that there is a valid and consensual conception of what the politics of (counter)memory should do. The more critical issue at this point is to penetrate how the "memory industry" manages to reshape the site of memory, and thereby what social effects are produced. The melodramatic relief offered by *Taegukgi* is significant in that its commercial breakthrough can be accounted for through its deft appropriation of existing memories,²⁷⁵ i.e., the family trope prevalent in both the official and the oppositional narratives of national strife. The motif of fratricide and the scene of reconciliation in death give a feeling of déjà vu since these have been repeated in the tradition of division literature, including Jo Jung-rae's *Taebaek Mountain Range*. Such a "repetition" in a different medium nonetheless contains the new anxieties of twentieth-first-century South Korea; whereas the *minjung* imaginary of the 1980s rehabilitates the nameless warriors during the partisan struggle by delineating a patrilineal genealogy of resistance that records the "politically proud fathers," the Korean War blockbuster made in the post-*minjung*, post-IMF era retrieves the

²⁷⁵ By demonstrating how *Taegukgi* "liberally" interweaves the official and the *minjung* versions of the national past, sociologist Roh Myung Woo acutely grasps a new method of managing public memory that is led by the culture industry and is "free" of the necessity of a political choice between the official and *minjung* versions of the past (See "Saeroun gieok gwanri bangsik: Gieok saneop ui jinghu" [A New Method of Memory Management: A Symptom of the Memory Industry], *Munhwagwahak* 40: 151-69). This hybrid constitution is more clearly shown in the special feature accompanying the DVD release of *Taegukgi* (Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005). The first menu, "6.25 and US," begins with an interview of Paik Sun Yup, who served as Commanding General during the Korean War, but the dominant discourse of the state, spoken by the retired general, is soon overturned by the recollections of ordinary war veterans, who speak more about how difficult, frightening, and painful it was to fight a war. Kang Je-gyu sharply "synthesizes" the conflicting narratives by inserting a commentary by Park Myung-Lim, a leading Korean War historian who can be categorized as a member of the 386 generation, just like the director himself.

remains of the “politically innocent (grand)father” in order to remember his sacrifice for the wellbeing of the family. In registering this “past” trauma in the form of popular entertainment, contemporary Korean viewers might also have processed the harsh realities of neoliberal capitalism that caused mass unemployment under the IMF system; realities that were more often than not emblemized by the phenomenon of the “jobless father’s suicide.” From this perspective, I would like to rethink the privatization of the national trauma in recent Korean War films as a new form that circulates and counteracts the unarticulated fears of the masses when no collective form of solidarity seems available. These fears, of course, are intimately wedded to enjoyment and pleasure as intensified by the domestically produced spectacle of *Taegukgi*.²⁷⁶

The Melodrama of Spectacle, or the Spectacle of Melodrama

Resonating with the emotions of “ordinary people” who have been made to forget wartime memories in their daily struggle to survive the competition of capitalist society, *Taegukgi*’s melodramatic imagination of the Korean War is imbued with an empathy and pathos that can be shared as a source of communality in given historical moments. Put otherwise, South Koreans’ affective yearning for a lost community and longing for continuity and wholeness in the fragmented and disjointed national space under the conditions of globalization are conveyed more powerfully by a spectacularized form of memorialization, which, at the same time, privatizes the historical trauma by focusing on the never-ending tragedy of a refugee family.

²⁷⁶ Building upon Guy Debord’s observation of the society of the spectacle, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri note, “Although the spectacle seems to function through desire and pleasure (desire for commodities and pleasure of consumption), it really works through the communication of fear—or rather, the spectacle creates forms of desire and pleasure that are intimately wedded to fear.” See *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 323.

Kang Je-gyu's "Korean War epic" not only "attracted 11.7 million moviegoers nationwide, a record for the Korean movie industry," but also wrote "the next chapter in the development of Korean cinema."²⁷⁷ By landing on Japanese and American shores, the director of *Shiri* and *Taegukgi* achieved his goal "to fly the Korean flag over other parts of the world in the form of movies," as the Korean title of the film—*Fluttering Taegukgi* [the national flag of South Korea]—indicates.²⁷⁸ The waves created by the Korean War blockbuster, however, were more national(istic) than international. Despite its casting of *hallyu* stars, *Taegukgi* drew an audience of less than one million in Japan, a number below the record of its predecessors: *Shiri* (1.3 million) and *JSA* (1 million).²⁷⁹ In the US, its gross income (\$ 1.11 million) fell short of Kim Ki-duk's *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring* (\$ 2.38 million); even though *Taegukgi*, unlike Kim's art cinema, received the full support of Koreans in America.²⁸⁰ Yet it is unsatisfactory to simply blame this "failure" of *Taegukgi* in the global market on the filmmaker's excessive desire to "show the potential of Korean movies to Asia and the rest of the World"²⁸¹ by representing a unique Korean theme and its national territory in the universal grammar of the Hollywood action movie. It is also futile to deplore—or, on the contrary, to console by emphasizing—the unbridgeable gap between the original and its mimicry. It is more fruitful and

²⁷⁷ Kim Jin, "A Tale of Two Brothers Taegukgi," *The Korea Herald*, January 13, 2005, accessed May 8, 2007, http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/SITE/data/html_dir/2005/01/13/200501130037.asp.

²⁷⁸ Kim Jin, "Blockbusters Fly Higher with Taegukgi," *The Korea Herald*, February 5, 2004, accessed April 24, 2013, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>.

²⁷⁹ "Ol yeoreum ilbon gaebong hanguk yeonghwa ui heunghang seongjeokpyo" [The Transcript of Korean Films Released in Japan This Summer], *Cine 21*, August 25, 2004, accessed April 24, 2013, http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/25794/p/1.

²⁸⁰ "<Taegukgi hwinallimyeo> miguk gwangaek daebubun i hangukgye" [The Most of the American Audience of *Taegukgi* Are Korean Americans], *Hangeyore*, April 15, 2005, accessed April 24, 2013, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/culture/culture_general/26538.html.

²⁸¹ "Local Blockbuster 'Taegukgi' Creates Waves," *Chosun Ilbo*, February 11, 2004, accessed May 8, 2007, <http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200402/200402110007.html>.

meaningful to unpack the way in which Kang's cultural translation exploited what South Koreans (want to) recollect from the past, a subtext that turned out not to be recognized by a wider regional and global audience. To state the conclusion first, Kang's Korean version of *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998)²⁸² fashions a hybrid mixture in terms of both form and theme. As the Hollywood-style action spectacle is interwoven with its melodramatic structure, Spielberg's humanitarian universalism is transcoded into nostalgia for the prelapsarian past, in which family life during the pre-war period is imagined as a peaceful utopia. These nostalgic aspirations to turn national history into personal mythology and to revisit the idyllic time before the war are also interlocked with South Koreans' dissatisfactions with the present state of their country. Evoking a sentiment of displacement, the cinematic memory of the Korean War ultimately reinscribes the primal fantasy of the South Korean subject, i.e., *his* traumatic origin that involved the irrecoverable loss of the other who used to be considered one and the same. In this regressive time-travel movie in our postmodern era, women invariably exist as the silent Others over and through whom the male subjects conflict and reconcile with one another.

In *Taegukgi*, what catches the audience's eyes first is its scale, but the main energy that stirs the audience to tears comes from the melodramatic mode dominating the entire narrative. As the director himself announces, the movie has less to do with ideological factors or the political aspects of the Korean War than the unchanging values beyond ages and ideologies.²⁸³

²⁸² When *Taegukgi* was released, it won high praise, especially regarding its spectacular visual effects, even with a budget that was approximately one-fifth the size of the budget for *Saving Private Ryan*. According to one of the reviews, "The [*Taegukgi*'s] ensuing battle scenes are bigger and better than anything ever before seen in Korean cinema. To a backdrop of ear-splitting explosions and thick artillery smoke, flesh goes flying and blood is splattered so vividly and graphically that the film almost takes us there. The sight of an American bomber crashing or the panorama of the Chinese army charging over a mountain is remarkable by any standards... Like the World War II epic *Saving Private Ryan*, *Taegukgi* delivers an unflinching depiction of the horrors of war from the perspective of the lowest soldier. The shroud over the Forgotten War is lifted to reveal its brutal violence in a way that is certain to make the film a milestone in Korean cinema." See Kim Jin, "Blockbusters Fly Higher with *Taegukgi*."

²⁸³ See his interview contained in the supplemental DVD.

In tracking the tragic fate of the two brothers thrown into fratricidal war despite their will, *Taegukgi* refuses both to reiterate the banal rhetoric of anticommunism and to cause discomfort by unveiling the perilous desire for an intimate reunion with the North; instead it takes a risk-free route: the reminiscences of an elderly man. Though his story, too, is told in flashback within a frame structure, this is not to give rise to a sense of thrills and suspense by creating an uncertain or indeterminable boundary between reality and fantasy, as in *JSA*, but rather to set the spectators at ease by maintaining a stable distinction between the past and the present. Because of this *illusion in distance*, the characters in *Taegukgi* look familiar. They are like “our” family, without drawing the awkwardness that a national hero would arouse, and their wretched memory feels like our own fathers’ life stories, rather than the fossilized knowledge of a history textbook. By inviting viewers to become fellow mourners for those who lived through the war, this identification-in-separation facilitates closing the collective wound inflicted by the historical trauma.

*“All of Us Are Victims of Unfortunate Historical Circumstances.”*²⁸⁴

In the melodramatic plot of *Taegukgi*, there is no “real” villain, as Kang Je-gyu said in an interview with Brad Balfour: “I don’t think there is any noticeable villain in the film. If there is any, the war itself is the one creating all the tension in the film.”²⁸⁵ In contrast to the classical Western melodrama, in which “good and evil are highly personalized...[Therefore] Good and

²⁸⁴ In his analysis of the melodramatic sentimentality of postwar Japanese cinema, Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto observes the political unconscious that involves “the wish fulfillment that all of us are victims of unfortunate historical circumstances” in *Kinoshita’s Broken Drum*. See “Melodrama, Postmodernism, and Japanese Cinema,” 110.

²⁸⁵ “G21 Interviews: Je-gyu Kang,” *New York State of Mind*, November 8, 2004, accessed April 24, 2013, <http://www.generator21.net/g21archive/nystate30.htm>.

evil can be named as persons are named,²⁸⁶ in *Taegukgi*'s melodramatic world the main conflict results from a good, innocent family vs. harsh, inescapable realities. Here, family does not function merely as a background for the individuals in the film, but as a fundamental unit "that generates the most interest," closer to other Asian melodramas that focus on "the familial self" than to "the individual self" explored in relation to the family in Western melodramas.²⁸⁷

What turns the elder brother, Jin-tae, who used to be a young man of simplicity with a warm heart, into a relentless warrior on the battlefield is his unchanging love toward his younger brother, Jin-seok. In order to protect his weak yet promising brother from any harm, and, by doing so, to fulfill the dream of their deceased father, Jin-tae, who seems too innocent to be accused as a guilty perpetrator, does not hesitate to volunteer for every single risky mission. Believing that his younger brother with asthma will be sent back home once he obtains a medal, Jin-tae desperately says to him, "I want both of us to survive. But if only one of us can, I want it to be you." To Jin-seok's humanist eyes, however, Jin-tae appears "like a stranger." Combined with, or contaminated by, the madness of war, Jin-tae's blind love is transformed into the insane actions of a merciless killing-machine. Their seemingly unbreakable brotherhood finally comes to a crisis at the very moment that Young-shin, Jin-tae's fiancée, is killed in front of them, branded as a "communist whore."

It should not be forgotten that *Taegukgi*'s female characters are mobilized to *embody* the brutality of the war, as nothing more than silent images in "the brotherhood of war." Whether the melodramatic relationship between the two brothers is intensified by their disabled mother, or endangered by Young-shin's death, the camera never approaches those female personas without

²⁸⁶ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 16-17.

²⁸⁷ Wimal Dissanayake, "Introduction," in *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*, 4.

filtering them through the male gaze. Thus, the female voices in *Taegukgi* always need men's sanction so that they can be endorsed in the symbolic order; the mother, who has stopped talking after her husband's death, can be represented only through her sons' translation; Young-shin's claim on her virtue is denied by other men and doubted by her fiancée (Jin-tae certainly vacillates and misses his slight chance to run away with her when Jin-seok takes one member of the Anticommunist Federation hostage). Until her last moment of breath, Young-shin struggles to verify her chastity, saying, "I didn't do anything shameful. Believe me." It is at this point that Jin-seok no longer calls Jin-tae an elder brother, but a "murderer": "You're responsible. You killed her." It is noteworthy that Young-shin's death, even before it is fully mourned, is quickly shifted to the issue of the man's responsibility to defend his woman. The sick mother and the devoted fiancée are symbolized as metaphors for the brothers' unforgettable home, the very reason that they have to survive; these women seem too vulnerable to guard their family that has been left by men.²⁸⁸

Despite his oath that he does not even care if Jin-tae dies, in the end, Jin-seok runs into the enemy line to save his "insane" brother. He does this once he realizes, reading Jin-tae's returned letter, that Jin-tae is still and forever "an innocent shoeshine boy who loves his family, especially his brother." Only through a piece of paper does Jin-seok come to recollect his older brother, who never regretted giving up school and shining shoes for his little brother. For Jin-seok, Jin-tae is not an ordinary brother, but "the sole brother" *in place of their father*. Now it is

²⁸⁸ This counters the notion of melodrama as "a woman's genre." In her study of 1950s' Hollywood melodrama, Laura Mulvey states, "Roughly, there are two different initial standpoints for melodrama. One is colored by a female protagonist's dominating point of view which acts as a source of identification. The other examines tensions in the family, and between sex and generations; here, although women play a central part, their point of view is not analyzed and does not initiate the drama" ("Notes on Sirk and Melodrama," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, 76). By contrast, *Taegukgi* proves that melodrama is not necessarily a women's genre because its melodramatic representation is not only dominated by the male characters, but also continuously limits, if not excludes, women's existence both physically and psychologically.

time for the delicate younger brother to save, at the risk of his own life, his ingenuous elder brother, who “knows nothing about communism or democracy,” but who simply “loved him so much.” When Jin-seok finally finds Jin-tae—who, believing his younger brother was killed by a South Korean commander, became a North Korean sergeant full of vengeance—Jin-seok strives to galvanize his big brother, reminding him of his duty as a family-head, and adding the devastating images of the female members of their family: “Think of mom. You have to take care of Young-shin’s grave. You promised me so much. You have to live to see me go to college.” This sentimental line, not surprisingly, makes Jin-tae dramatically return to himself, just as his letter did the same for Jin-seok. As soon as Jin-tae recovers his senses, he urges his younger brother to escape the battlefield first. Again, the big brother is willing to sacrifice his own life for his little brother, and their melodramatic brotherhood reaches its climax when the elder brother is fighting to the death, while the younger brother is barely walking, with faltering steps, away from the raining shells, as his older brother insists. This momentary reunion of the separated brothers is compellingly tragic not simply because it takes place “too late” at the end of the film, according to the melodramatic convention.²⁸⁹ It is also, or rather, because the ending betrays the paradoxical temporal structure of traumatic experience: belatedness and repetitiveness.

The belated encounter with the lost other actually occurs twice in *Taegukgi*: the first time in the line of fire, and then over the remains of the past, almost a half-century after the war. This twofold structure serves to maximize the sensational effects of the film, and further to promote the imaginary healing of the division trauma. While this melodramatic treatment pacifies the

²⁸⁹ Linda Williams notes, “[M]elodramatic weepie is the genre that seems to endlessly repeat our melancholic sense of the loss of origin, the impossible hope of returning to an earlier state... In contrast to pornography’s meeting ‘on time!’ and horror’s unexpected meeting ‘too early!’, we can identify melodrama’s pathos of the ‘too late!’ (...) Origins are already lost, the encounters always take place too late, on death beds or over coffins.” See “Film Bodies,” 10-11.

collective desire to mourn the loss of unity, this well-made blockbuster gives the restless past a “private” burial *too soon*. This “non-political” reconstruction of the Korean War is thus not only symptomatic of contemporary culture’s imbrication with the unresolved trauma, but also problematic insofar as such “glorification of victimhood”²⁹⁰ blinds us to questions of why and how the war began and has not ended, particularly when it silences those who have not been able to speak for themselves.

The Fantasy of Flight and Reunion in Death: Welcome to Dongmakgol

Whereas Kang Je-gyu’s two Korean War blockbusters and Park Chan-wook’s mystery thriller film create realistic impressions by foregrounding the historic setting of Panmunjom (*JSA*), the spectacular reproduction of all-too-familiar Korean War memories (*Taegukgi*), or latent fears of North Korean infiltration into postmodern urban life in Seoul (*Shiri*), Park Kwang-hyun’s *Welcome to Dongmakgol* (2005) presents a fantasy space through the active exercise of imagination. While the soldiers in the earlier Korean War movies are placed at the center of tragic history, the main characters in *Dongmakgol* happen to gather on the periphery, far from the front: US navy Captain Smith is “dropped” from the sky, two South Korean soldiers desert from their barracks, and three North Korean comrades are cut off from their main force. These maladjusted individuals from the combat zone are reborn in a rural village that keeps itself away from the rest of the world. As its name means to “live carefree, like children,” *Dongmakgol* is depicted as a primordial community *before modern civilization arrived in Korea*.

²⁹⁰ This expression comes from Chungmoo Choi’s critique of popular memory in postcolonial South Korea. See “The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea,” 463.

This fairytale-like work of cinema, the fourth biggest hit film in South Korea as of 2005, definitely inculcates what Arjun Appadurai calls “imagined nostalgia,” which “teaches consumers to miss things they have never lost.”²⁹¹ Reminiscent of Tao Yuanming’s “peach blossom spring story,” the world of *Dongmakgol* enchantingly brings back a perfect sense of unity that could or might have continued to exist without contamination from the outside. Mesmerizing contemporary South Koreans with what has been lost through modernization, namely, the humanistic virtues of benevolence and compassion in harmony with nature, the nostalgia film provides an aesthetic experience of a “missing past.”²⁹² What is aestheticized in this postmodern pastiche is the authenticity of such a homogeneous social organism—or, an “a priori category of the nation/*minjung*,” as Cho Hyung-rae puts it. The imagined past recalled in *Dongmakgol* excludes the symbolic order of modernity. According to Cho, the assimilation process of the alien visitors is none other than retrogression to the phase of infancy in which the bodily matters of eating and excreting come first and foremost. They live a second life as the “living dead” because they have already died once, as soon as they entered the “Imaginary Realm.”²⁹³

Their “redemption” is neither free, nor harmless, however, precisely because it is the strangers who put the heavenly place in jeopardy. As its natural corollary, the outsiders leave the utopia—where time has happily stopped—to meet death, which has been temporally suspended.

²⁹¹ Pointing out that “nostalgia is a central feature of modern merchandising,” Appadurai writes, “these forms of mass advertising...create experiences of duration, passage, and loss that rewrite the lived histories of individuals, families, ethnic groups, and classes. In thus creating experiences of losses that never took place, these advertisements create what might be called ‘imagined nostalgia,’ nostalgia for things that never were.” See *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 76-77)

²⁹² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 19.

²⁹³ “Meokgo baeseolhaneun sinche ro hoegwihara: <Welkeom tu Dongmakgol> saeropge ilkki” [Return to the Body That Eats and Excretes: A New Reading of *Welcome to Dongmakgol*], *Cineforum* 8: 205-23.

Their cinematic itinerary from a supplementary life in the Imaginary to a physical death in the Symbolic seems to reverse the normal order of what Žižek says about the two deaths. Like Sophocles's *Antigone*, in *Dongmakgol* they live between the two deaths as they are already dead in the symbolic community.²⁹⁴ By coming out of the fantastic world and not returning to where they come from, however, they choose to die with honor rather than live with shame. In this way, their second death in the Real ultimately transmits—not traverses—*the fantasy of the nation/people before the intrusion of ideology*. In forming an allied force against the evils of modernity, epitomized by the US military in the film, the rag-tag group of losers from (if not traitors of) each side become national heroes who prevent civilian casualties during the war.

This imagined fulfillment of the wish for national autonomy expresses popular resentment against American imperialists who *ordered* civilian massacres during the Korean War. Without doubt, such a public airing of the US-related mass killings was made possible by democratic advances in the 2000s, during which official recognition and institutionalized settlements of past wrongdoings were initiated by South Korea's new government body: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2005-2010).²⁹⁵ The wish fulfillment of *Dongmakgol* involves more than a retroactive resentment at the foreign power because it also releases South Koreans from the burden of guilt about their own complicity in the massacres. The metamorphosis of Lieutenant Pyo, a runaway from the ROK army, encapsulates such a working through process. The "conscientious objector," who disobeyed the order to blow up the Han River Bridge that was filled with refugees fleeing to the South, has continued to suffer his post-traumatic stress disorder ever since, even in the utopian life at *Dongmakgol*. His trauma is not

²⁹⁴ *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 131-49.

²⁹⁵ Regarding the achievements and limitations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, See Kim Dong-Choon, "The Long Road toward Truth and Reconciliation," *Critical Asian Studies* 42, no. 4: 525-52.

overcome until he gains the prerogative of the supreme command²⁹⁶ in the operation of the “united force of the nation.” In directing the mission to save the Edenic village, the rebellious but powerless postcolonial subject is now promoted to a humanistic and genuine leader of the united nation.

The irony of this imaginary solution of *Dongmakgol* lies in its modernized way of rescuing the pre-modern form of their nation. The primitive community consisting of innocent people cannot decide their fate for themselves, and their survival all rests in the hands of their “naturalized” members, who initially belong to the world of enlightenment. The power asymmetry between the traditional and the modern determines the relationship among the outsiders themselves. The Northerners, though they outnumber the Southerners, *voluntarily* follow the direction of the South Korean lieutenant, whereas their weapons and technology are supplied by the only member from the West, who resembles the benevolent missionaries who are assisting the modernization of the backward country(side). Not surprisingly, the performance of their deadly mission entails a tear-jerking melodrama about the North-South brothers who have solidified their intimacy and affection. Their brotherhood across the territorial division is also interwoven with an implicit romance, across the temporal difference, between Tak-ki, a teenage North Korean soldier, and Yeo-il, an incarnate of the pristine village. In the end, the death of Yeo-il, shot by American paratroopers, gives decisive momentum to the forging of a new alliance among the modern men. While the male characters prove their masculinity through a military operation for national sovereignty that takes place *outside the fantasy world of tradition*, the female subject, who, in fact, used to transgress all kinds of boundaries more freely than

²⁹⁶ The prerogative of the Supreme Command over the South Korean army belongs to the US.

anybody else in the film, is eternally confined within the imaginary and traditional domain after her death.

Innocence Must Be Defended

Arguably, the disarmament of the soldiers in *Dongmakgol* implicates the death of the modern subject, and their dream life—or, a life in dream guided by butterflies—reaches a magical resolution of Cold War confrontations, even transcending racial and linguistic barriers. While this dramatic settlement hardly deviates from the dominant narrative of the Korean War in the South, i.e., the “sudden invasion of the North,” it equally echoes the *minjung* imagination by dissociating the people from the state ideology. When South Korean Private Moon blames the North for having ruined his ambition to become a club manager, Tak-ki, the youngest North Korean soldier, is stunned into silence in seeing his superior, High Comrade Lee, admit this. But Tak-ki soon responds, “I just went to the South because they [the ruling power] told me to do so.” In such a comical and satirical manner, the film also describes the absurdity and unjustness of the war through the mouths of the ignorant villagers. Upon hearing about the outbreak of a war, they conjecture it must be an aggression of the “Japs” or “Chinks.” By raising a question of whether it is fair for the North to fight against both the South and the US, this time it is the villagers who put Private Moon at a loss for words.

The coerced animosity between the South and the North that cannot be articulated is smoothed over in non-verbal ways in *Dongmakgol*, and such a pre-symbolic reconciliation is often heightened by the film’s “Disneyesque”²⁹⁷ *mise-en-scène* and Japanimation-style music.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Kim Kyu Hyun, “*Welcome to Dongmakgol*,” October 8, 2006, accessed May 7, 2007, <http://www.koreanfilm.org/kfilm05.html#dongmakgol>.

The first “military” clash between soldiers from the North and the South ends in a spellbinding sequence: after a grenade is accidentally dropped and eventually rolls into the town barn, a stockpile of corn stored inside is blown up, and falls down from the sky like popcorn. Despite the fact that the explosion despoiled all the provisions for winter, far from being thrown out of the village, the troublemakers are treated to a plain meal. After “sleeping with the enemy” in the same room, the former fighters gradually become accustomed to the natural life in Dongmakgol, where people do not “even blink,” when shouted at by someone with a gun. The soldiers finally find a common ground upon which “to be comfortable and friendly” by beating a wild boar that has been ravaging the crops that the farmers worked so hard to grow. The boar hunt scene—which could be seen as a parody of, or an homage to, Miyazaki Hayao’s *Mononoke Hime*—not only delivers a lively thrill-ride, but also alludes to an “ideal” way of solving the longstanding problem for Dongmakgol’s agrarian society. When the youngest (North Korean) soldier, who had the pluck to fling a stone at the gigantic beast, is chased by the boar, the altruistic (South Korean) officer pushes him out of the way, facing a crisis of his own life. It is High Comrade Lee who knocks off the “public enemy,” by thrusting into it the “improvised spear,” namely, a crutch that is passed to him by Captain Smith. To be sure, the united front composed of the refugees from the modern world fixes the old headache of the country folk. But it is also the civilized men who reap the most benefit from the big game; they enjoy a secret barbeque party at night, and wonder why the village people *do not know* this taste.

Now the outsiders, shedding their military uniforms, are “adopted” as family members of the kinship community, or as honorary citizens who, for their part, make great efforts to modernize the traditional society without harming the virtues of simple life. Captain Smith, of all

²⁹⁸ The soundtrack was composed by Hisaishi Joe, who is well known for his collaboration with Miyazaki Hayao, including *Mononoke Hime*.

men, now looks less like a member of the US navy than a sympathetic “anthropologist,” as he teaches the indigenous people American football and takes a motion picture of their festival. His affective connection with Dongmakgol natives is distinctive from the curious gaze of the foreign tourists who take photographs of Panmunjom in *JSA*, for instance. Carrying the oldest woman of the village sleeping on his back, just as a grandson would do for his own grandmother, he says to himself, “That’s life.” Again, their communication does not require any linguistic intelligence. The wise “grandmother” simply applies soybean paste on the bee sting of the “grandson” who dropped from the sky. Similarly, the harmony among the Koreans, both between the South and the North, and between the old-fashioned and the new-fangled is achieved through the natural rhythms of their bodies, as crystallized in the festival scene: Private Moon sings a “boogie-woogie” song, which he might have picked up in a nightclub for Americans, to a percussion accompaniment played by the villagers. In blending seemingly incompatible elements in a marvelous way—or in a postmodern pastiche—*Dongmakgol* conveys more than an obvious antiwar message. Inheriting *minjung* sensibilities, it also visualizes an alternative trajectory for Korea’s post/colonial history: what if *we Koreans* were able to modernize ourselves without a foreign yoke?

Of course, the history lesson offered by this hilarious movie is not as didactic or serious as the one by *Taebaek Mountain Range*.²⁹⁹ Using wit and humor, this film made in 2005 provides its social commentary more lightly and comically. For example, when High Comrade Lee asks, “How is it that...you have such a hold on the villagers without ever raising your voice? What’s the secret to your great leadership?” the village chief responds, “You just gotta feed them a lot.” This unsophisticated yet pithy answer perplexes the young man from North Korea, the

²⁹⁹ Nonetheless, *TMR*’s “double structure of enlightenment” among the characters within the text and between the text and the reader remains almost the same.

country suffering from mass hunger in spite of, or because of, their “great leader.” The profound truth beyond the literal words thus touches upon the issue of the North Korean famine and food shortage more subtly than *Shiri* (e.g., the North Korean terrorist leader’s criticism of South Korean society for its addiction to “butter and coke”) or *JSA* (e.g., the North Korean officer’s “dream...that one day, our republic makes the best damn sweets [like *choco-pie*] on this peninsula”). Not unlike the other Korean War blockbusters, nevertheless, *Dongmakgol* reproduces, in its own subtle manner, the stereotypical image of impoverished North Koreans as nonresistant victims of a dynastic dictatorship. In contrast to their partners from the other side, the North Korean soldiers do not have traumatic flashbacks, or secular desires; they are so naïve that they just follow the orders of the state, and are so lucky to have survived thus far. Lacking interiority and historicity, North Korean characters in contemporary South Korean films almost always stay in the past. Their trauma, which is perhaps located at the very core of the “submissive” subjectivity of North Koreans, has yet to be acted out, let alone be worked through.

The Indispensable Other in the Formation of Our Family

In contradistinction to North Koreans, who belong to a lost past, the American forces come from a future that will direct our lives and cultures in South Korea, for good or ill. In *Dongmakgol*, the US army represents modernity, mostly its detrimental side: from materialistic commercialism to rationalistic militarism. Aiming solely at a war victory, they promptly decide to allow indiscriminate bombings, even within civilian areas and without further deliberation. They do not hesitate to abuse innocent people either, including children, women, and the elderly. The greatest irony of the massacre in the Korean Shangri-La is that the sudden attack of the UN

paratroopers “helps” the heterogeneous members of the village become formally registered in the kinship community. The interpellation of power—or, more exactly, interrogation by torture—facilitates the construction of an undividable (pseudo-)family. Tak-ki, speaking in a different dialect, is declared to be the son of a North Korean (Sergeant Jang) and a female native of the town. Comrade Lee, marked with a scar on his cheek, is identified as the father of a boy, who is actually raised by a single mother in the village.

This newly formed genealogy in *Dongmakgol* inherits the alternative history conceived by the dissident intellectuals who led the *minjung* for South Korea’s democratization in the 1980s. Because the respectable father in traditional society (and in the imaginary realm) is killed by a foreign force, his sons—but not his daughters—must face up to the national crisis. This patrilineal association of struggle, however, does not give a position to the existing father in reality, as hinted at in Private Moon’s insistence on referring to Sergeant Jang, who is almost one generation above him, as his elder brother. This “horizontal” fraternity between the North Korean elder brother, with his spiritual and physical superiority, and the South Korean younger brother, with a modern (capitalist) sensibility, is now almost too familiar to South Korean audiences since it has been repeated from *Taebaek Mountain Range* to *JSA* and *Taegukgi*. Evoking melodramatic sentiments, the banal but still powerful fantasy of brotherhood ultimately transforms the most cowardly and individualistic character into one of the selfless martyrs for their divided nation. Though he protested against the idea of becoming a decoy to divert the bomb attack of the US from *Dongmakgol*, saying, “We’re third parties. Even if it were my family, I couldn’t do that,” Private Moon, in the end, meets a glorious, *manly* death on the battlefield, falling beside his elder brother from the North.

The brotherly bond that unites all Koreans in *Dongmakgol* is racially “purified” by returning Captain Smith to the US base, because the preservation of the utopian world depends in the last instance on the word of the outsider. In a Žižekian sense, the foreigner plays the role of the Other under whose gaze the Korean characters identify themselves as the unified national subject. What should not be discounted is that Smith is not only the survivor of the devastating war, but also the witness to the sacrifice of the nameless warriors. When Smith sees in a distance an air raid in the joint operation area, as the sole mourner of their death he wipes away the tears rolling down his face. In the meantime, the allied Korean forces smile as they stand up to the dropping bombs, as if they were watching spectacular fireworks over the sky, just like Dongmakgol children—or, as if they knew their death would not receive any signification from the nation, even though they put their lives at stake for its existence.

Before its closing credits, the film reverts to the moment when the Korean soldiers “concluded a peace treaty” by falling asleep in the same room after enacting a wonderful bombing scene in the village. Needless to say, this final version of an ideal family-nation picture does not include any non-Korean subjects. This dreamy space for Korean men only then receives an angel-like visitor: Yeo-il. As she tucks a flower that she had in her hair behind the ear of Tak-ki, he smiles while sleeping. Does this ending with a *mise-en-abyme* effect suggest that the united front of the deserters was but a dream? If so, was it the fictional characters on the screen that had the dream, or the eighty million South Korean viewers in theatres? The “revived” characters in the closing credits seem to ask the question by turning back the gaze of the spectators over the camera, as the hegemony of reality over fantasy, which has been inverted throughout the film, returns.

3. Screening Trauma, Screened Memory:

The Korean War Blockbuster as a Work of Mourning in Transition/Translation

The trauma of the Korean War remains an unspeakable memory in South Korean culture, even in its post-authoritarian, post-Cold War, and post-modern juncture. Standing somewhere between mourning and melancholia,³⁰⁰ contemporary Korean War films at times imagine the laughter of the dead, but at most times demand tears of grief for those who were unable to be buried in the past, and therefore have been haunting the present. In screening those ghosts, without proper names, wandering in the liminal space of the divided nation, Korean War blockbusters project a desire to recover historical continuity, while veiling its lack. This screened memory of the apparitional subjects, furthermore, both transmits and transforms the verbal tradition of Korean War memory works through its spectacular visualization that benchmarks the Hollywood model. On the one hand, the cultural translation stages a “transitional space”³⁰¹ in which the incurred but not recorded losses are transferred to the next generation that has not experienced the inter/national war but still lives under the division system on the Korean peninsula. By means of identification with the main (male) characters, through sharing their sense of powerlessness, the spectators come to indirectly mourn those who have been left unregistered in the existing symbolic order. On the other hand, such a transnational and transgenerational reproduction of the violent past interlaces old fears with new anxieties, as well

³⁰⁰ In his explication of South Korean culture during the early Cold War period, Theodore Hughes locates the “formation of the North/South politics of the visual as standing somewhere between mourning...and melancholia, in LaCapra’s words,” and I find it still effective in our post-Cold War era. See *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom’s Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 9.

³⁰¹ Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 20.

as shifting desires, in the age of globalization, when the previous matrices of national identification are in transition. Enmeshed with the impossibility of representing the national trauma, the failure of subjectification is more often than not organized around the affective techniques and conventions—which create a synergy in combination with technology-intensive spectacles—that are employed in melodrama.

To elucidate this phenomenon, I attended to the dying subjects in Korean War blockbusters in relation to their aborted attempts to constitute a unified family-nation-community. Such virtual deaths of the national subject, I demonstrated, operate within the sexual economy of symbolizing the war. Male subjects are *dying* to avoid the loss of meaning, while female characters are *killed* to accomplish men's labor of signification.³⁰² Masculine bodies produce spectacles in their extreme moment, whereas feminine bodies are fetishized as the symbolic means of (re)production. Men sustain their self-consciousness by risking their lives—thereby becoming the master of truth in a Hegelian dialectics—*only after* women perish to remind them of the incomplete “law of the son.” In the (former) colony, the traditional patriarch was already beheaded by modern power, but *his* descendent is still caught between the nationalist past (fleshed out by North Korean elder brothers) and the postmodern future (networking with US-led global capitalism). With this historical pathos, the conjunction or the disjuncture between the “foreign” form of the blockbuster and the “local” theme of the Korean War generates a melodramatic spectacle in which South Koreans encounter the lost members of their family as their split self, *only too late or from a safe distance*.

³⁰² This reminds us of Laura Mulvey's acute summary of psychoanalytic readings of narrative cinema: “Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her places as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.” See “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 834.

According to Benjamin, “translation, ironically, transplants the original into a more definitive linguistic realm since it can no longer be displaced by a secondary rendering. The original can only be raised there anew and at other points of time.”³⁰³ The jarring hybrid of Korean War blockbusters certainly makes the original superfluous, but, at the same time, such a “postcolonial” desire to dislocate the center of metropolitan culture is continually learned through the undying spirit of nationalism, which is itself constituted under the gaze of the Big Other, i.e., global capitalism. If contemporary Korean cinema is to rewrite the modern history of barbarism in the tradition of the oppressed, this will be only when its transcultural “dissemination figures that which cannot be the father’s,”³⁰⁴ or the brother’s, but which instead belongs to the community—a community that is yet unnamable.

³⁰³ “The Task of the Translator,” 75.

³⁰⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 86.

Afterword: To Mourn the Unnamable

Even sixty years after the ceasefire on the Korean peninsula, there is no consensus among Koreans on how to name the inter/national clash that occurred on their land between 1950 and 1953. Usually referred to as “the Korean War” in the English-speaking world, its official term in North Korea is “the Fatherland Liberation War” (*joguk haebang jeonjaeng*), and South Koreans are more accustomed to “6.25” (*yuk-i-o*), the starting date of the war. As sociologist Kim Dong-Choon notes, this naming that overemphasizes the sudden invasion of the North encapsulates the way in which the South Korean state has regulated the knowledge of the past to produce docile, disciplined anticommunist subjects suitable for its modernization project. Dissident voices have been stifled in a permanent state of war, which rationalizes military rule for the sake of national security and economic development.³⁰⁵

Nevertheless, repressed memories of this traumatic event have not only persisted outside the sanctioned realm of knowledge production, but have also provided foundational sources in oppositional movements for imagining alternative forms of subjectivity. The aesthetic genealogy of Korean War memories probed in this dissertation is the trace of such continuous attempts to restore “the expunged” as a means of subverting the imposed structure of power. By creating new narratives of the nation, those counter-discourses have opened up a cultural space in which the present contradictions rooted in the unresolved past can be reflected upon, and a different future thereby envisioned. Choi In-hoon’s experimental writings after the abortive revolution in April of 1960 and Jo Jung-rae’s historical novel in the wake of the 1980 Gwangju Massacre are

³⁰⁵ *Jeonjaeng gwa sahoe*, 2nd ed. (Paju: Dolbegae, 2008), 65-91.

illustrative of how acts of remembering in the counter-hegemonic sphere have informed the political un/conscious of Korean subjects, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, respectively.

The political un/conscious of the anti-statist culture in South Korea is itself fraught with complexities because it unconsciously reproduces the fantasy of the modern nation through its conscious confrontation with state-led nation-building. Neither the modern individual (*gaein*) portrayed in Choi In-hoon's literature, nor the collective agent (*minjung*) embodied in Jo Jung-rae's *Taebaek Mountain Range*, truly calls into question the community called the nation or the idea of modern progress. By taking for granted a linear path toward enlightenment, the national history rewritten in the culture of dissent accordingly encounters a deadlock, as implicated in the failed family romance that has haunted South Korean division literature. While the "lost" familial bond is paradoxically deployed as both a goal and a ground for struggle in the formation of major sociocultural movements, such alternative practices uncannily resemble their contending other. The lineage of resistance unearthed by *minjung* intellectuals, including Jo Jung-rae, in effect echoes the masculinist-nationalist ideology of the state. From the perspective of gender, both the official and oppositional discourses are set within, and reinforce, a patriarchal system of meaning. Locating the familial site of Korean War memories at the intersection of the countering yet mirroring imaginaries of the nation, "Family Apart" thus delves into how the politics of memory unfolds in the domestic arena where the trauma of national division is acted out and worked through by a gendered division of symbolic labor.

To rethink the familial schema that has shaped postwar recollections of wartime in the South Korean cultural field, this dissertation utilizes critical concepts in feminism, psychoanalysis, and postcolonial studies. My employment of these frameworks facilitates a comparative approach to the mechanism of subject formation and its entanglements with social

memorialization (or lack thereof), and it does so in such a way that Korean War texts can be read together with other accounts of genocide and migration. In articulating historically specific representations of the Korean case, I have further sought to examine the applicability and translatability of Western-originating theories. As elucidated in Chapter Three, the mother-daughter plot that overarches Park Wan-suh's autobiographical stories complicates the Freudian family romance, derived from nineteenth-century Europe, as well as its revisions by First-World feminists. Moreover, Park's literary testimonies to the violent *history* of (post)colonial Korea suggest different ways of coming to terms with the wounds inflicted in the past when their settlement is still pending, i.e., when the "normal" processing of trauma hypothesized in Holocaust studies is not valid. The hybrid entity known as the Korean War blockbuster, investigated in Chapter Four, also attests to evolving and multidirectional modes for recalling the unfinished war, as the "end" of the Cold War demands a more comprehensive mapping of the national theatre within the globalizing mediascape.

In juxtaposing and scrutinizing a collection of Korean War memory works across media, genres, and contexts, "Family Apart" grapples with the connection between the individual psyche and the collective imagination, on the one hand, and the relationship between the aesthetic and the political in postwar South Korea, on the other. Throughout this study, I have vividly witnessed the explosion of memory as it has traveled from politics to industry to academia, both within and outside the Korean peninsula. Does this then signal that contemporary Koreans, along with other postmemory generations in the world, have finally overcome the aftermath of war? Or, does it indicate another phase of acting-out, perhaps even of generating amnesia-through-commemoration? In post-authoritarian South Korea it may now be less dangerous to conjure up the calamitous war of six decades ago, but it seems more difficult to

work through its lasting affects, despite our “obsession” with the restless past. It is for this reason, however, that we must review the preceding failures in order not to repeat them.

The memories of the Korean War explored in this dissertation do not present a more “complete” picture or offer more “authentic” documents of the war. Rather, their fragmentary nature compels us to grasp what is absent in the present and, at the same time, to reconsider what remains with us, how and under what conditions. To this end, each chapter of “Family Apart” inquires into diverse subjects who not only transmitted the oppressed past but also shaped the form of its presence (or absence) in South Korean cultural history. This mnemonic practice, I hope, will contribute to our unceasing efforts to re-vision the experiences of those who, for the sake of the present’s wellbeing, were “buried too quickly and too deeply.”³⁰⁶ Only when we learn from the specters, only when we take responsibility for the others who are not here and now, can we live better—more justly.³⁰⁷ This is why the mourning of the unnamable, however impossible, cannot and should not come to closure.

³⁰⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 15.

³⁰⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, xvii-xviii.

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