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ISSUING THE FIRST VOLUME OF KOREAN HISTORIES

The reasoning behind the creation of this new, biannual peer-reviewed journal, *Korean Histories*, has proceeded from a simple idea: that the creation of history in the sense of representations of the past is a social activity that involves many more individuals and groups than the community (or rather communities) of professional historians and, of course, long predates the nineteenth-century appearance of historiography as an academic specialism in the context of the rise of modern nation-states. The involvement of other actors becomes even more obvious if one considers the many ways history actually functions in human societies. Because representations of the past in some form or another are judged to be socially relevant, historical representations are not the exclusive preserve of professional historians; in fact, historical representations are also produced by novelists, film makers, painters, sculptors, journalists, politicians and members of the general public, and are part and parcel of the discourse of many social and political debates. It is probably as difficult to imagine a society that does not in some way represent its past(s) as it is to imagine a society without any form of religion, even if one may doubt the reality of what is represented or of the objects of worship.[1] Historical representation, in whatever form, is a social fact that cannot be ignored, and certainly not in Korea, present or past. *Korean Histories* does not *a priori* take sides in the debate over the degree to which the representation of history can be an adequate reflection of the past, leaving judgement in this regard to its contributors, but rather invites articles that introduce new perspectives by striving to make sense of the Korean past with a sensitivity to the richness and variety of both sources and interpretations, conscious of the social embeddedness of historiography.[2] Approaches may be either historical or anthropological. Although 'Korea' (in itself a historically and socially constituted concept) is the focus, *Korean Histories* also welcomes contributions about regional and transnational issues that have a bearing on Korea, as well as papers that suggest methodological alternatives or critically question the general approach of the journal. Apart from regular articles, research notes will be published, as well as reviews of books that are relevant to the aims of the journal. The format of the e-journal will also allow *Korean Histories* to make sources available that are in the public domain, but not easily accessible otherwise. The intention is to publish these sources with brief introductions that suggest their possible significance.

1 The plea of Keith Jenkins for a world without historiography ("…in the best of all possible worlds, I think that we can and we ought to live our finite lives in time but 'outside of histories'." Keith Jenkins, *At the Limits of History: Essays on Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 16) appears rather utopian and ironically has its best chances of realization in limited academic circles rather than in society at large.

2 This approach has gradually developed from research done in Leiden since the 1980s, but is very similar to that proposed by Michel-Rolph Trouillot in his *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

BOUDEWIJN WALRAVEN

Cheju Island 1901

RECORDS, MEMORIES AND CURRENT CONCERNS

Great disturbance among the people of Chejudo. The French have propagated their faith on Cheju and the exile Yi Yongho 李容鎬*, a former Fifth Counselor (kyori* 敎理*) [of the Office of Special Counselors], converted to it. Several tens of thousands of the people on the island followed him in this. Aiding him they instigated [all kinds of] outrages and therefore the whole island was in an uproar. The people joined in a revolt and attacked the Catholics of whom they killed more than 250. When the matter became known [at court], Hwang Kiyŏn* 黃耆淵 *was made Investigative Military Commander (ch'allisa* 察理使*) and with 100 soldiers from Kanghwa, 200 soldiers each from Suwŏn and Chŏnju, and 100 soldiers from Kwangju, he went ahead to pacify [the islanders]. In the Fifth Lunar Month he returned [to the capital]. The exiles were relocated to other islands.*[1]

This is the way Hwang Hyŏn 黃玹(1855-1910) in *Maech'ŏn yarok* 梅泉野錄 (Maech'ŏn's Unofficial Chronicles) described the 1901 Cheju Island rebellion, which these days is best known as the Disturbance of Yi Chaesu (李在守의 亂*Yi Chaesu-ŭi nan*). *Maech'ŏn's Unofficial Chronicles* is in several ways a remarkable text (apart from the fact that the numbers are highly inaccurate: the number of Catholic converts and catechumens on the island did not exceed a thousand, while the victims were much more numerous than Hwang reported). Although Hwang lived the life of a retired scholar in Kurye in South Chŏlla Province which was closer, as the crow flies, to Cheju Island than to the capital, his rendering of the events is very much written from a centralistic, bureaucratic perspective. Judging by the relevant entries in the dynastic history of the period,[2] one of the main concerns of the government was the question how to deal with the exiles, who were members of their own status group. Most curiously, those who were most directly concerned are hardly mentioned. Yi Yongho, who hardly figures in other accounts of the revolt, is mentioned by name, while those considered to be the leaders of the rebellion and who died for the rebellion, are not mentioned at all. As the cause of the revolt Hwang Hyŏn only mentions the behavior of native Catholic converts, leaving out another factor that is often mentioned: the levying of excessive taxes. His succinct account is but one of the many retellings of the events and each of these narratives applies the perspective of certain persons or groups and is shaped by the conventions of the genre to which it belongs. I cannot pretend in this paper to consider all the sources, nor to weigh the validity of those sources establishing an objective truth. However, I will attempt to trace what kind of historical representations have been created over the years and by whom. I will moreover survey how these representations have interacted in turn with new events and with each

1 Hwang Hyŏn, *Maechŏn yarok*, *kwŏn* 3, p. 140 in the original text (from the 1955 Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe edition) that is a supplement to the modern Korean translation by Kim Chun (Seoul: Kyomunsa, 1996).

2 *Kojong t'aehwangje shillok, kwŏn* 41, 31 May, 2 June, 5 June, 7 June, 15 June, 12 July, 9 October 1901.

other, probing their significance in the larger framework of social interaction.

Limited in scope though this exercise may be, it is complicated by the number of groups that were and are, directly or indirectly, involved. At the time of the rebellion alone we can distinguish the central government (represented by the governor, *moksa* 牧使, of Cheju, and three prefects, *kunsu* 郡守, the tax collector and later the officials who were sent to suppress and investigate the rebellion); exiled members of the metropolitan elite; the local gentry; the common people of the island, among whom were the Catholic converts; the approximately 400 Japanese who made a living on or near the island; the Japanese press and government; the French Catholic priests proselytizing on Cheju, and, because of their presence on the island, the French legation in the capital. In addition, the American William Franklin Sands, who acted as an adviser to the Korean king, headed the first detachment of soldiers that entered Cheju City, leaving behind his own narrative of what he condescendingly called "my little comic-opera war."[3] It would not be difficult to sub-divide some of these groups again, singling out, for instance, the women or the shamans among the common people of the island. Not all of these groups, however, have left narratives that allow us to hear their voices. Regrettable as this may be, this simplifies matters somewhat. On the other hand, in the century that has passed since the rebellion took place different groups and individuals of later generations have formulated their own take on the events: professional historians of various political and religious persuasions, relatives of the protagonists, local historians and story-tellers, political activists, writers and filmmakers, and employees in the tourist industry. The different perspectives on the events are reflected in the variety of phrases used to refer to them: the "troubles of the year shinch'uk" (辛丑年亂離*shinch'ungnyŏn nalli*), the "religious disturbances of the year *shinch'uk*" (辛丑敎難*shinch'uk kyonan*), the "holy teachings disturbance" (聖敎亂*sŏnggyonan*), the "Cheju peasants'revolt of 1901" (1901年 濟州農民蜂起 *1901nyŏn Cheju nongmin ponggi*), the "Cheju['s people's] resistance of 1901 (1901年 濟州抗爭*1901nyŏn Cheju hangjaeng*), and the "people's revolt of the year *shinch'uk*" (辛丑民亂 *shinch'uk millan*), are but some of the expressions, in addition to the already mentioned "disturbance of Yi Chaesu."[4]

Cheju island

Hwang Hyŏn's account is insufficient to grasp even the basic issues at stake in the revolt. In order to contextualize the different ways in which the events of 1901 on Cheju Island have been viewed, an outline of the most fundamental facts regarding these events is needed. First, however, I should make clear that by "facts" I do not mean a comprehensive collection of objective data from the past; rather, the term refers to pieces of more or less reliable evidence, documenting a socially determined selection from the data of the past, which are almost infinite in number and can never be assembled in their fullness to reconstitute "wie es eigentlich gewesen." We can, and should, enrich the store of this evidence by looking at unconventional sources that have not yet been explored, but the "facts" we retrieve will never escape from this process of selection, which can take on many forms.[5] Records may

3 It should be granted to Sands that in many ways he had the interests of the Korean people at heart, and was not as insensitive to the suffering of the people as his qualification of the campaign he conducted might suggest. His attitude, however, unabashedly reflected Western feelings of superiority. William Franklin Sands. *Undiplomatic Memories: The Far East 1896-1904* (London: John Hamilton, 1904), p. 178.

4 Yi Yŏnggwŏn, *Saero ssŭnŭn Cheju-sa* (Seoul: Hyumŏnisŭtŭ, 2005), p. 274; Sahoe kwahagwŏn ryŏksa yŏn'guso. *Chosŏn chŏnsa* 14 (Pyongyang: Kwahak paekkwasajŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1980), p. 80.

5 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), p. 49.

intentionally suppress certain aspects, carelessly ignore them, or inadvertently be blind to them (as we will see in the case of William Sands), while material remains, which are in fact less transparent in meaning than one might assume, depend just like records for their survival on the vagaries of history itself. It is with this caveat in mind that I will first present an outline of the basic evidence.[6] This will allow us to see how subsequently over the years certain pieces of evidence have been highlighted or silenced, or have been given a different slant.

In the Chosŏn period, Cheju Island was considered to be at the border of the civilized world; it was the most remote place of exile (although because of its size and relatively large population not the most inhospitable). Its most prized product was abalone, which was sent to the court as local tribute along with citrus fruits and other local specialties,[7] but on the whole Cheju Island was so poor that it could hardly contribute to the national treasury. It is reported that by the end of the nineteenth century no taxes had been sent to the central government for a long time; whatever taxes the island could produce were used by local officials (who generally were by no means loath to exact as much as they could). This changed when the government started to modernize in the 1890s. Measures were taken to fill the coffers of the state by imposing new taxes and sending especially appointed tax collectors to the provinces. Previously local officials had been responsible for tax collection, in cooperation with the local gentry. This is one of the factors that fomented the 1901 rebellion. Already before the trouble on Cheju started in earnest, the newspaper *Hwangsŏng shinmun* of 16 April 1901 devoted an editorial to the increased burden on the people the new system brought with it. It also increased the likelihood of a clash between the tax collector and the general population, as the tax collector, sent with the explicit mission to collect taxes, would be less inclined to make concessions to the common people than a local magistrate, whose responsibility it was to generally maintain peace and order in his district. This was never an easy matter when people were constantly struggling for survival. In 1862, a rebellion on Cheju had foiled attempts to enforce a land tax on the slash-and-burn fields poor people had developed on the slopes of Mt. Halla, and in 1898 a new rebellion had erupted to protest against similar taxation attempts. Consequently, the islanders had the reputation of being "difficult." Their problems were compounded when the new tax collector also started to meddle with their property rights, for instance assigning ownership of land they had customarily used to the state or to other individuals. The new system also caused friction with the local dignitaries, who up until then had profited from taxes imposed on the people.[8]

Subsistence was made even more difficult for the people on the island by the end of the nineteenth century, when increasing numbers of Japanese fishermen, having superior boats and equipment, threatened to rob the local population of one of the main sources of their livelihood.[9] They were in the vanguard of Japanese economic encroachment[10] and although it would be wrong to describe them as agents of their government (in fact, the first of them most likely already came to Cheju secretly before 1876), their presence on the island guaranteed Japanese government interest in what happened there. Foreign interest in the island was also a result of the presence from 1899 onwards of a few French Catholic missionaries, who by 1901 had made about a thousand converts or catechumens.[11] The missionaries fell under the jurisdiction and protection of the French legation and they had the tendency to extend this special status to their flocks, to such an extent that it has been said that they

6 For matters about which there is general agreement I will not provide references.

7 Pak Ch'anshik, "19segi Cheju chiyŏk chinsang-ŭi shilt'ae," *T'amna munhwa* 16 (1996), pp. 255-272.

8 Sands argued that taxation was the real cause for the revolt and showed some sympathy for the people: "It had also come out that the Christian massacre was accidental to the real revolt, and not a primary factor. Taxes in Quelpaert [the name Dutch sailors had given Cheju] were sporadic. They were always unpopular and rarely collected. Some years before my time there had been a tax revolt and the collectors had been driven off the island. An imperial proclamation then had relieved the "loyal islanders" of all back taxation, and none had been collected since. Early in this year one of that infernal tribe of go-getters, which is not confined to the United States, had offered to the emperor to produce a much-needed sum for the privy purse by collecting all back taxes in Quelpaert, including those remitted before."

9 Kim Okhŭi, "Cheju-do sinch'ungnyŏn (1901) kyonan-ŭi wŏnin," *Pusan yŏdae nonmunjip* 9 (1980 pp. 194-201.

10 Gregory Henderson has drawn attention to the significant role such lower-class Japanese who went overseas independently before Korea was annexed could play in the larger processes of colonization and modernization: "Japan's Chōsen: Immigrants, Ruthlessness and Developmental Shock," in Andrew Nahm (ed.) *Korea Under Japanese Colonial Rule* (n.p.: Center for Korean Studies, Western Michigan University, 1973), pp. 263-266.

11 The *Compte Rendu des Travaux de 1901* of the Societé des Missions-Étrangères, p. 62, mentions 242 people baptized and 600-700 catechumens, all "souls snatched from the claws of Satan." The latter was said to be the master ruling an island inhabited by superstitious half-savages. I thank Hyun-Young Choe for procuring this source and material kept in the archives of the Missionnaires de Paris for me.

formed a state within the state.[12] Their activities also created tension, because their campaigning against superstition directly affected the local cults for the guardian deities that flourished in every community.[13] The situation recorded by ethnographers and folklorists in the second half of the twentieth century shows that Cheju had preserved its own traditions of popular religion to a much greater degree than communities on the mainland, where such conflicts also arose. The potential for conflict dramatically increased when some converts went to work for the tax collector, who did not have his own local staff. Catholics were moreover accused of abusing the authority the priests derived from a letter from the king requesting everyone to treat them as they would the monarch himself, and the looming military might of their home country, which – we should remember – had just taught mighty China a lesson during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 together with the other great powers. To which extent these accusations (which included allegations of beatings, rape, robbery and murder) were justified, is a matter of debate; there is no doubt though that such accusations created an explosive atmosphere. Even Catholics acknowledge that among the followers of the missionaries there were some who used the authority of foreigners to settle old scores and pursue their own interests.[14] There is, moreover, substantial evidence from other regions in Korea as well that new converts to Catholicism assumed they had a kind of extra-territorial status, which some abused to extort money, beat up those who refused to pay, and so on. An unconventional source to confirm this is James Gale's novel *The Vanguard*, where such an incident is recounted in detail.[15] Although nominally fictional, the novel is so close to reality that it contains photographs of some of the protagonists. In Gale's account, a Catholic priest is complicit in the violence inflicted on Protestant believers.

Violence first erupted in Taejŏng, one of the three towns where a district magistrate resided. Again there is debate as to which side started, the Catholics or the others. However, a private organization of the local gentry founded by the district magistrate Ch'ae Kusŏk 蔡龜錫 (who originated from the island itself) is said to have played a crucial role in the way events escalated. Ch'ae had used this organization, the Sangmusa 商務社 (Association for Commercial Affairs[16]), to initiate local projects to improve the livelihood of the people, to protest against the multitude of taxes that were put on almost everything imaginable, and to stop the abuses committed by Catholics. The death of a local man, who was either killed by the Catholics or committed suicide because he had been humiliated by them, was the catalyst that made the Sangmusa members decide to take matters to a higher authority – the governor in Cheju City – to protest against unjust taxation. Because they circulated an appeal to other communities to join in the protest, something resembling a people's army was formed and marched toward the city. This greatly worried the Catholics, including the priests, who feared for their lives. They armed themselves and decided to undertake an early-morning raid on the camp of their opponents who – it is generally held – until that moment only wanted to protest peacefully and offer a petition to the governor. Amidst the frantic firing of guns some of the leaders of the Sangmusa were taken prisoner, and subsequently the Catholics strengthened themselves by looting the armory of Taejŏng. The protesters were routed, but soon assembled again, with renewed anger. It was at this juncture that Yi Chaesu became one of the most important leaders of the protest. This was surprising, for although he had been a leading member of the Sangmusa (執事*chipsa*), he was of poor and lower-class (slave) origin and worked as a runner for the local magistrate. Born in 1877, he was quite young as well. When

12 Kim Yangshik, "1901nyŏn Cheju millan-ŭi chaegŏmt'o," *Cheju-do yŏn'gu* 6 (1989), pp. 133-134; Ryu Dae Young, "Treaties, Extraterritorial Rights, and American Protestant Missions in Late Joseon Korea," *Korea Journal* vol. 43, 1 (2003), pp. 189-190.

13 Cf. the list detailing 178 alleged Catholic misdemeanors in the district of Chŏngŭi alone in Pak Ch'anshik, "Hanmal Cheju chiyŏg-ŭi ch'ŏnjugyohoe-wa 'Cheju kyoan'," *Han'guk kŭnhyŏndaesa yŏn'gu* 4 (1996), pp. 101-106. This list includes thirty-one instances of setting fire to shrines, cutting sacred trees, and stopping of shamanic rituals.

14 Cheolbae Son, a researcher who is critical of scholarship that emphasizes the "progressive" aspects of the rebellion, concludes that the Christians were inclined to take advantage of their conversion as a chance to improve their living conditions at the expense of non-Christian villagers. Son, "The Ordinary Reaction by Koreans against the Foreign Penetration, 1876 to 1910," unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Washington 2006, p. 228. I thank Dr. Son for making his dissertation available to me.

15 James Scarth Gale, *The Vanguard: A Tale of Korea* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1904), pp. 291-294. The full text is available at http://www.archive.org/details/vanguardtaleofko00galeuoft; accessed 10 October 2009.

16 Originally this was the name for the guild of the peddlers (褓負商 *pobusang*), which at the end of the nineteenth century was often used by the government to provide muscle against opponents; Pak Ch'anshik, "Pang Sŏngch'il nan-gwa Yi Chaesu nan-ŭi chudo seryŏg-e taehan saeroun charyo," *T'amna munhwa* 16, pp. 311-312 and the same author's "Hanmal Cheju chiyŏg-ŭi ch'ŏnju kyohoe-wa 'Cheju kyoan'," pp. 81-84. In Taejŏng, the association seems to have the protection of local interests as its aim.

another Catholic sortie resulted in several casualties and at least one person killed, the protesters looked for revenge and were prepared to use violence themselves. Attempts to negotiate with the Catholics who had sought safety behind the walls of Cheju City failed, because the rebels demanded that those they held responsible for the Catholic attacks would be handed over to be severely punished. Even the release of their leader O Taehyŏn 吳大鉉 did not mollify them. Laying siege to the city, they started killing the Catholics they captured outside the walls. For days they were unable to overcome the defenses of the city, but then the gates were opened by the starving citizens themselves. Women took a leading role in this. A relentless massacre of Catholics then ensued and hundreds of them, irrespective of individual conduct, age or gender, were killed.

In the meantime, one of the catholic converts among the exiles had crossed the sea to Mokp'o on the mainland, from where he sent a telegram to the French legation in Seoul. There the assistance was invoked of French men-of-war that happened to be nearby. The Korean government also sent troops together with the American adviser William Sands. The French arrived first and made the rebels retreat from the city. Shortly afterwards Sands set foot on shore with his "hundred tatterdemalions," as he mockingly described the soldiers from the Kanghwa garrison he had been given to quell the rebellion. The government troops occupied the city, soon assisted by more troops from the mainland, while outside of the city walls rebels continued to fire at them. Slowly, however, the protest lost force, and spurred by threats of severe retaliation the rebels finally surrendered. Sands describes the "final grand tableau of my little comic-opera war" as follows:

> *Thousands of rebels came in; I could only estimate them in their huddled masses. They were armed with prehistoric weapons. Some wore armour made of iron plates fastened to a cumbersome leather tunic or to a quilted or wadded cloak. Some were dressed in leather cloaks with hairy dog-skin hats, like the coon-skin caps of American pioneer riflemen, the tail of the dog dangling over their shoulders. Some had bows and iron-tipped arrows; others had the usual Korean matchlock guns. Many had spears and flails, made of a short cudgel studded with iron points fastened by two interlocking rings to a long staff.* [17]

17 Sands, *Undiplomatic Memories*, pp.178-179.

They also had an assortment of small cannon ("a museum collection"), some more modern Japanese shotguns and "a Murata rifle, of the latest model," which confirmed Sands's suspicion that the Japanese supported the revolt.

The leaders of the rebellion were transported to Seoul to be tried. The three main culprits, O Taehyŏn, Kang Ubaek 姜遇伯 and Yi Chaesu, were executed by strangulation. Sands speaks about the trial (the first western-style trial conducted in Korea, although the sentences still referred to the Ming Legal Code, which had been the foundation of Korean penal law since the beginning of the Chosŏn period) but, tellingly, not of its outcome. This court case incidentally represented the first western-style trial conducted in Korea, although the sentences still referred to the Ming Legal Code, which had been the foundation of Korean penal law since the beginning of the Chosŏn period. The magistrate of Taehyŏn was also prosecuted, not in the last place because of the insistence of the missionaries and the French legation, but in the end acquitted. For the population in general, though, the consequences were less serious. All along the government had aimed to use minimal force to suppress the rebellion and the rank and file were not punished. Unfortunately, however, the people had to pay a huge indemnity claimed by the French government to make up for the losses suffered by the Catholic Church.

DIVERGING PERSPECTIVES, WRITTEN AND ORAL

Above I have provided a summary, in itself a narrative, fashioned out of basic sources of evidence, attempting to skirt round the most controversial issues. Out of the available material all kinds of different narratives can be distilled – each account with its own significance – by adding or deleting details, by contextualizing what happened in different ways, by reinterpreting "facts," by questioning interpretations, and by filling in the obscure parts of the picture with creative imagination. Of course, it is also possible to find new, hitherto neglected evidence. It is not possible here to supply a comprehensive survey of all the options: not just for reasons of space, but also because the possibilities are endless. A selection of varying interpretations of the events of Cheju 1901 will have to suffice to demonstrate the different emphases that may be given to similar pieces of evidence, to what we are tempted to call the "facts."

For Sands, in the final analysis it is a tale of his own personal adventures, written to entertain Western readers with a taste for the exotic. He does not even bother to inform us of the fate of the main protagonists of the rebellion, who remain completely nameless and faceless in his account, although he took part in their trial. Nor does he say anything about the final outcome of the protest for the population. Sands's attitude was that of a tourist; briefly looking around in a place he was certainly interested in, he did not really engage with it. The voice of the Cheju population is completely silenced. This is not to say that what he wrote about the rebellion is of no historical interest; on the contrary, he sometimes presents fascinating details. Sands for instance writes about the way armed Japanese men procured access to the trial, confirming if not complicity in the revolt then at least Japanese interest in it. He also reveals how elements of traditional Korean law were mixed with western legal procedures. Not the least of his contributions is that by translating the events in his own terms, he offers a clue as to how the revolt looked in Western eyes. Together with two items in the *Korea Review* his account informs us how contemporary Westerners saw the events of 1901. For the subsequent development in Korea of the "story of Cheju 1901," however, the account by Sands is of little significance.

Echoes of other Western perspectives that were offered in 1901 by articles in a English-language publication called the *Korea Review*, however, can be found in the works of later Korean writers (some of whom will be discussed below) who have shown an interest in exonerating Catholicism. On 19 June 1901, the *Korea Review* published a rendering of the report by the magistrate of Cheju, Yi Chaeho 李在護, introducing it as follows: "It is straightforward and bears all the outward marks of veracity, but we cannot vouch for it." In its final analysis, the *Korea Review* concludes disapprovingly that the report was "an open attempt to place on the adherents to Christianity part of the blame for the troubles in Quelpart."[18] William Sands sent a letter to the Editor (published in the August edition) in reaction to the report of the governor, stating that the governor was not impartial and "not the best of witnesses." He also remarked that the Catholic Mission rather than adding to the tax burden of the population put limits on the exactions officials and yamen-runners imposed on those who had become Catholics: "The priests stood between them and oppression."[19] The *Korea Review* also documented French pressure on the Korean Foreign Office, which apparently was passed on directly from the Foreign Office to the Law Department.[20] In December of 1901, the *Korea Review*, moreover, published an article by E. Martel, a teacher at the French School in Seoul, originally published in French in *Revue de l'Extrême Orient* in Shanghai.[21] This article countered reports in the Japanese press to the effect that the Catholics had been responsible for the disturbance on Quelpaert. The point of view is strongly pro-Catholic and concentrates on the positive effects of missionary activities among an "ignorant and backward" population unfamiliar with "the benefits of Christianity." The "rapidly increasing numbers [of Catholic adherents]," it says, "formed a permanent obstacle to official extortion." The focus of attention of the article is clear from its closing words: "…let us express the hope that Korean justice will do its utmost to maintain its reputation by fully repairing the injury done to the Mission on the island of Quelpaert." [22] Again there is no trace of the voice of the islanders, not even of the Catholics, who are merely innocent victims of an enraged and ignorant mob.

The most influential source for later historiography is the diary known as *Sok Ŭmch'ŏngsa* (History of Clear and Cloudy Days, Continued) by Kim Yunshik 金允植 (1835-1922), a reformist politician and former minister of foreign affairs, who had been living on Cheju as an exile since 1897. This record contains a very detailed day-by-day account of the revolt, which includes both Kim's own observations and hear-say from other locations on

18 *Korea Review* June 1901, p. 265.

19 Sands tackles the suggestion that the Catholics might have done anything wrong with surprising levity: "It is possible that many people joined the Mission who had not its best interests at heart, because of the protection they received. This, however, is so common an occurrence in every mission throughout the East, and is so well known to you gentlemen in your mission work that no comment is necessary." *Korea Review* August 1901, pp. 353-354. Another item in the *Korea Review* (September issue, p. 409) confirms that priests might interfere with the work of the tax -collectors. This item also documents that priests would act as if they were secular authorities, mentioning "a native priest named Kim Wŭn-yŭng [Kim Wŏnyŏng 金元永] who imprisoned one of the tax collectors." This was also reported in the *Hwangsŏng shinmun*; cf. Yu Hongnyŏl, *Kojong ch'iha sŏhak sunan-ŭi yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ŭryu munhwasa, 1962), pp. 387-389, which also gives attention to the Catholic point of view.

20 *Korea Review* August 1901, p. 363 and September 1901 p. 409.

21 Emile Martel had been in Korea since 1895.

22 *Korea Review* December 1901, p. 539.

the island.[23] As a long-time resident of the island, Kim Yunshik knew many people and was well informed. His perspective on the revolt was ambiguous. While feeling pity for the islanders who suddenly were taxed for everything imaginable, from fish grounds and fields to trees and out-houses, as a true member of the elite he also deplored their ignorance, gullibility and rude manners. He sympathized with the people because of the abuses of the Catholic converts, but abhorred the indiscriminate slaughter of the latter. This is part of his description of the final phase of the siege of the city, when the population decided to open the gates to the rebels.

> *28 May: Clear. In the morning the women of the city gathered, shouting loudly; they went from house to house and chased people out. Our Ŭip'anyŏ* 義波女 *and Wŏra's mother* 月娥之母 *from the neighboring house were also chased out. They appeared with white scarves wrapped around their heads and sticks in their hands. The "women's column" counted more than a thousand, the "men's column" an equal number. Everything was initiated by the women. Even Kim Namhak* 金南鶴 *[also Namhyŏk* 南赫*, the so-called commander of the sympathizers of the rebels within the city walls, BW] followed the commands of the women. When they went up on the ramparts, removed the cannon and threw them down outside the walls, the crowds cheered. Then they went after the Catholics.*[24]

Kim Yunshik relates that when the protesters surrounded the city, the eldest of the two French priests, Marcel Lacrouts (1871-1929),[25] proposed that some of the worst offenders among the Catholics be arrested and an apology tendered to the people. According to Kim, he deeply regretted that he had been unable to reign in his followers. Because this was fiercely opposed by Ch'oe Hyŏngsun 崔亨順, an exile who had converted and who was one of the most hated figures among the Catholics, nothing was done to calm down the people.[26] There is little reason to doubt this account, which goes against attempts to minimize the culpability of Catholic believers.

One of the reasons why the events on Cheju in 1901 are of interest for the purposes of this paper is that from the point of view of the late twentieth century, when interest in the revolt increased, they took place on the edge of living memory and recorded history, allowing us to probe the relationship between the two (Yi Chaesu's sister, born in 1897, died in 1982!). In this regard the oral tradition of Cheju is important. At the time when the tales about the 1901 rebellion were recorded some people who had witnessed the events would still be alive, although they were very old. One of the informants used the phrase "when you listen to what people who were watching say" and apparently had known persons who had seen the routing of the protesters by the Catholics. There is no guarantee, however, that the tellers of the tales, even when they were born well before the rebellion happened, actually witnessed the events, nor can we trust the veracity of their tales. Apart from the fact that, as we all know, memory is not always reliable, there is in all oral traditions a tendency for tales to conform to the "einfache Formen" of basic tale types. Stories, moreover, tend to be told in such a way that they keep the attention of the listeners, who influence the narrator in a much more direct way than the implied reader inspires the man or woman who in solitude confides a story to paper. Yet, the oral tradition offers the possibility of access to the feelings and voices of groups that otherwise could not be heard and indicates how events are recalled in the collective memory.

Strikingly, all three stories recorded in the comprehensive collection of oral tales from all over Korea, *Han'guk kubi munhak taegye* (Survey of Korean Oral Literature),[27] paint the conflict as an event caused completely by the evil-doing of native Catholics, who acted as if they were no longer under the authority of the officials of the central government. There is no mention of extravagant taxation at all. Of the non-Catholic majority among the inhabitants of Cheju City it is said that they were very happy when the people's army entered: "Now we will no longer be oppressed by those bastards (*i nom-dŭl*) and can live in peace." A gruesome detail that comes up in each story is that during the great massacre many Catholics were

23 The diary can be found in its entirety in the *Korean History-on-line* database: http://db.history.go.kr/url.jsp?ID=sa_011 accessed 20 October 2009. Here I will refer to the version of the parts relevant to the 1901 revolt rendered in Yu Hongnyŏl, *Sŏhak sunan-ŭi yŏn'gu*.

24 Cf. the account in the *Korea Review*, p. 541: "The most revolting particular in regard to [the massacre] is that women, horrible shrews, were the leaders in the riot."

25 http://mepasie2.anakrys.biz/?q=fr/lacrouts accessed 16 December 2009.

26 Yu Hongnyŏl, *Sŏhak sunan-ŭi yŏn'gu*, 410.

27 Han'guk chŏngshin munhwawŏn ŏmunhak yŏn'guwŏn, *Han'guk kubi munhak taegye* vol. 9:3 (Sŏngnam: Han'guk chŏngshin munhwawŏn, 1981), pp. 361-375, 421-424 and 612-614.

deliberately trampled to death by the people. These are tales of pent-up grievances and bloody revenge, typical of the oppressed and powerless. Yi Chaesu plays a role in all three stories, but this I will discuss in a separate section devoted to his posthumous reputation. Another oral tale, recorded by the local scholar Chin Sŏnggi秦聖麒, concentrates on the evil acts of the Catholic converts, who are accused of stealing cows and pigs, the futile attempts by the people to seek redress with the authorities, and the powerlessness of local officials, who are compared to "servants in their own house."[28] In this story the comeuppance of the Catholics is not narrated in detail. Whatever the historical accuracy of these tales may be, they constitute strong evidence that in the collective memory of the islanders the disturbance of 1901 lived on uninterruptedly until the second half of the twentieth century as a revolt against Catholic abuses.

Chin Sŏnggi in 1957 also collected a shaman song in which the origin of a deity, Ko Toch'aebi, is set against the background of the 1901 revolt.[29] The informant was a man who at the time was fifty-nine years old and therefore a small child when the rebellion took place. The word *toch'aebi* is related to *tokkaebi* ('goblin') in standard Korean, but here it is used to denote an ancestral tutelary deity.[30] Ko was a great hunter, who could run so fast that he could catch deer by hand. He was a superb marksman as well: "At the time of the *shinch'uk* troubles Ko Toch'aebi joined [the insurgents] and laid low the Holy Teaching Gang (*sŏnggyop'ae* 聖敎牌)." During the siege of Cheju, the song says, he saw a priest with a Western gun on the ramparts and with a primitive, self-made fire arm shot his hat from his head. The defenders were thrown into disarray and the gates opened, but at that time the country was weak and listened to the Holy Teaching Gang, and the blame for the revolt was put entirely on the people. The Three Righteous Ones [this was how O Taehyŏn, Kang Ubaek, and Yi Chaesu came to be known on Cheju in later years, BW] and the vanguard of the three districts [of Cheju] were all caught, and when they went to the king they were interrogated in the Royal Presence.

The king had heard of Ko's marksmanship and asked for a demonstration. Ko then took his bow and arrow and hit a dragonfly, having only seen its reflection in water. Filled with admiration the king presented him with a western gun and sent him back to Cheju, where, so the story ends, he would never lend this cherished royal gift to other people. In this tale, elements of historical reality are mixed with some of the timeless motives of folk tales worldwide. In view of the fact that this story begins with events that are usually regarded as a revolt, it is noteworthy that it does not question royal authority in any way. In general revolts were protests against specific policies and the officials who promoted those policies.

The popular imagining of the rebellion as a protest against Catholic oppression is criticized in some academic studies that seek a more balanced picture of the events, attempting in particular to add nuance to the representation of the role of Catholicism. Here I will mention just two of these analyses. Yu Hongnyŏl's book (in Korean) with the English title *Studies on Catholic Persecutions During King Kojong's Reign (1863-1907)* is one of the most detailed studies of the rebellion and quite fair-minded at that.[31] Kim Okhŭi, another author inclined to exonerate the Catholics, introduces French material: letters and documents from French missionary archives.[32] Both authors subscribe to the somewhat naïve opinion that it is unlikely that Catholics did all they were accused of because that would run counter to the Ten Commandments.[33] More importantly, they both highlight Japanese support for the rebels, arguing that in fact the revolt can be seen as one step in the whole process of Korea's colonization by Japan. There is indeed some evidence (for instance in Kim Yunshik's diary) that Japanese traders on the island furnished weapons to the insurgents, and certainly the Japanese government was keenly interested in what happened on Cheju. To present the events of 1901 as being part of the colonization of Korea seems somewhat exaggerated, but of course in the social climate that has prevailed after 1945 an accusation of this kind amounts to a fierce attack against those who claim a positive role

28 Chin Sŏnggi, *Cheju mindam* (Seoul: Hyŏngsŏl ch'ulp'ansa, 1977), pp. 314-315.

29 Chin Sŏnggi, *Cheju-do muga ponp' uri sajŏn* (Seoul: Minsogwŏn, 1991), p. 692. The story is also included in Chin's collection of Cheju folktales. See *Cheju mindam*, pp. 315-318.

30 Cf. Chin, *Cheju-do muga ponp' uri sajŏn,* pp. 713-714, where it is said that he is a *kunung*, literally a military hero; on Cheju the term *kunung* is used to refer to ancestral spirits that protect families.

31 Yu Hongnyŏl, *Kojong ch'iha sŏhak sunan-ŭi yŏn'gu*.

32 Kim Okhŭi, "Cheju-do sinch'ungnyŏn (1901) kyonan-ŭi wŏnin," *Pusan yŏdae nonmunjip* 9 (19) p. 186. Unfortunately, her transcriptions and translations of the French documents are not always accurate.

33 For some evidence of abuses by Catholics who made use of their quasi-extraterritorial status, see Kim Yangshik, "1901nyŏn Cheju millan," p. 134.

The Tonga ilbo page with a short biography of Yi Chaesu

in Korean history for the rebels.

In North Korea, by contrast, the revolt is seen as a form of peasant resistance against foreign encroachment and feudal oppression.[34] Good and bad are clearly distinguished; those who are on the wrong side of history, such as the corrupt governor of the island, the tax collector or the French missionaries and envoy, all get the derogatory suffix *nom*. Even if their declared aim was to protest peacefully, the protesters are from the outset described as the "army of the insurgents" (*ponggigun* 蜂起軍). Unmoved by threats of violence and attempts to reason with them, "the peasants were not taken in by the schemes of those bastards (*nom-dŭl*) and stubbornly fought the government army and the French invaders."[35] According to this interpretation of the events the revolt failed in the end because of the armed oppression of the reactionary forces. More generally, it concluded that the series of revolts around this time failed because the lack of leadership ability prevented the development of (class) consciousness and organizational structures. It is not surprising that seen from such a perspective the leaders of the 1901 revolt are not named at all. Still, the final judgment is moderately positive: the revolts significantly weakened feudal domination and stimulated class awareness and national consciousness, as well as the readiness to engage in struggle. Consequently, the Cheju rebellion of 1901 seems to be quite well known in North Korea, as a tour group from the island that went to Pyongyang in 2002 observed.[36]

Views similar to the North Korean perspective are also encountered among South Korean historians, particularly in more recent decades. An example is Kang Man'gil's *Koch'ŏ ssŭn Han'guk kŭndaesa* (Rewriting the History of Modern Korea). This work provides a brief overview of the period, characterizing the 1901 rebellion in no more than a single sentence as directed against feudalism in its resistance against taxation, and against foreign encroachment in the form of Catholic proselytizing.[37] The insurgence receives much more attention in a comparable book of roughly the same size by Kang Chaeŏn; *Han'guk kŭndaesa* (History of Modern Korea) devotes three and a half pages to it.[38] Kang Chaeŏn's account is rather descriptive, including several lively quotes from the diary of Kim Yunshik. The author does not state explicitly why the rebellion merits so much space, but we may confidently assume that his personal perspective as a native of Cheju has something to do with this.[39] Kang Chaeŏn has not theorized his choice for attention to local history, but Yi Yŏnggwŏn, a young historian from Cheju who earns a living as a high school teacher of history, argues that only by paying attention to regional history can one return history to its rightful "owners": the people who have actually experienced concrete historical events.[40] Nevertheless, his evaluation of the events of 1901 is not significantly different from that of Kang Man'gil in its general conclusions. Yi Yŏnggwŏn admits that from the viewpoint of the Catholics the events were a tragic ordeal, but he privileges the perspective of the *minjung* 民衆, the masses of the ordinary people, who stood up against the iniquities of feudal exploitation. Yi Yŏnggwŏn also speaks approvingly of Yi Chaesu's resistance against the perceived foreign intrusion.[41]

Again another perspective is put forward in the doctoral dissertation of Cheolbae Son, "The Ordinary Reaction by Koreans against the Foreign Penetration." Son counters the inclination to see progressive tendencies in the revolt, instead defining it as a very traditional, "apolitical and customary reaction to outside intrusion" and intolerable living conditions.[42] It is perhaps not accidental that this dissertation, which rejects the most fashionable interpretation, was written outside of Korea, at some distance from the heat of academic and public debates going on there.

While numerous narratives provide us with a multitude of perspectives on the events of Cheju 1901, one angle is somewhat neglected, namely, a comparison between the events in Cheju and developments in China that were happening around the same time. The behavior of the

34 Sahoe kwahagwŏn ryŏksa yŏn'guso, *Chosŏn chŏnsa* 14 (Pyongyang: Kwahak paekkwasajŏn ch'ulp'ansa, 1980), pp. 80-81.
35 In fact, as soon as the French gunboats troops arrived the insurgents withdrew from the city and in spite of continuous sporadic shooting, there never was a pitched battle until the rebels surrendered.
36 http://minjog21.com/news/articlePrint.html?idxno=1085; accessed 26 August 2009.
37 Kang Man'gil, *Koch'ŏ ssŭn Han'guk kŭndaesa* (Seoul: Ch'angjak-kwa pip'yŏngsa, 1996), p. 228.
38 Kang Chaeŏn, *Han'guk kŭndaesa* (Seoul: Hanul, 1990), pp. 113-117.
39 Kim, Keong-il (ed.). *Pioneers of Korean Studies* (Seongnam: Academy of Korean Studies, 2004), p. 407.
40 Yi Yŏnggwŏn, *Saero ssŭnŭn Cheju-sa,* pp. 5-9.
41 Ibid., pp. 282-283.
42 Cheolbae Son, "The Ordinary Reaction by Koreans against Foreign Penetration," p. 266.

French missionaries on Cheju cannot be seen in isolation from French policies in China and East Asia as a whole. Ernest Young has called attention to the protection regularly extended to the missionaries in China by the French authorities (the so-called Religious Protectorate), which it based on the treaties concluded with the Qing government.[43] This protection also covered Chinese Christians and prompted the missionaries to frequently intervene in Chinese affairs. Apparently this involvement of the missionaries with Chinese matters sometimes went beyond what the secular authorities had in mind. The French minister in Beijing reported that the missionaries considered their flock to be outside the jurisdiction of the Chinese authorities. He deplored this: "Under the influence of this tendency, the missionaries intervene too often with the authorities on matters strictly Chinese, in which they have no right whatsoever to involve themselves."[44] The killing of Christians on a considerable scale during the Boxer Uprising also makes it easier to understand why Father Lacrouts consented to a pre-emptive (and, in hindsight, fatal) raid on the camp of the protesters, when they marched in their thousands (until then peacefully) toward Cheju City. Knowing what had happened in China, he must have feared for his life and that of his converts. On the other hand, Ch'ae Kusŏk's insistence that the missionaries should not be harmed can also be judged in view of the Boxer Uprising. That revolt had resulted in foreign troops being sent to China, where they conquered Beijing, while the foreign powers forced the Chinese to pay a huge indemnity.

YI CHAESU

There is no doubt that nowadays many people locate the significance of the 1901 revolt in the person of Yi Chaesu, seeing his spirit of resistance against the exploitation of the common people and his defiance of foreign oppression as its most crucial elements. Nevertheless, there are also diverging perspectives here and it is debatable what exactly he contributed; highly contrasting readings of the available evidence are possible. Without Yi Chaesu, the protest would quite likely have fizzled out after the first set-back, when those marching to Cheju City were attacked by the Catholics. It is equally likely that without him the massacre and destruction of church property that took place after his men had entered the city would have been less violent and indiscriminate, and that afterwards the population would not have been burdened with the large indemnity demanded by the French government. After the fall of the city disputes arose between the radical Yi Chaesu, the commander of the "Western Column" and the more moderate leaders of the "Eastern Column" (Kang Ubaek and O Taehyŏn) about the treatment of the Catholics and Catholic property, almost resulting in a violent split. Be that as it may, this little man of less than five feet tall somehow had the quality, perhaps already during his lifetime, but certainly posthumously, to act as a spur to the imagination. In the good hundred years that have passed since the revolt, he has tended to catch the limelight and become the main protagonist in almost all retellings of the story of the rebellion. In other words, he had the qualities, or was ascribed the qualities, to be a good subject for narration. Such figures deserve particular attention if we want to investigate the "social life" of certain events in historiography and collective memory, and for that reason I will trace some of the representations of Yi Chaesu over time.[45]

Yi Chaesu seems to have seen himself as a "righteous soldier" fighting a just campaign against the enemies of the nation, a claim he persisted in until his death. When he was put to trial, he was unrepentant and was quoted as saying that the Catholics, because they "read the book of another country," did no longer obey the Korean officials and committed all kinds of crimes that went unpunished. When the people of Cheju went to protest against the new taxes, the Catholics took possession of weapons stored by the government. They then went on to occupy Cheju City, firing guns at the people. This made them, he concluded, nothing but rebels (*yŏkchŏk* 逆賊). He and his men had executed rebels deserving death; they had not killed innocent people (*yangmin* 良民).[46] In short, the

43 Ernest P. Young, "The Politics of Evangelism at the End of the Qing: Nanchang, 1906," in Daniel H. Bays (ed.), *Christianity in China from the 18th Century to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 93-113. Also see Ryu Dae Young, "Treaties, Extraterritorial Rights, and American Protestant Missions in Late Joseon Korea."

44 Ernest P. Young, "The Politics of Evangelism at the End of the Qing: Nanchang, 1906," p. 110.

45 A similar case is provided by Yi Chun 李儁, the secret emissary of King Kojong who died in The Hague in 1907, reputedly because he committed suicide (which afterwards was proven to be a false rumor). His companions Yi Sangsŏl 李相卨and Yi Wijong 李瑋鍾played an equal or more important role, but it is Yi Chun whose name always comes up first when the International Peace Conference in The Hague is remembered.

rebels were on the other side; he himself was a loyal subject. This was also how he was represented in later years by the people around him, who battled to have his honor restored. Yi Chaesu's younger sister Yi Sunok in particular was active in this campaign. In 1928 she petitioned the colonial government for this purpose, asking for a commemorative monument, and in 1932 she co-wrote a book about her brother, which was published in Osaka.[47] But it was not until 1961, exactly one cycle of sixty years after the events in another *shinch'uk* year, that she persuaded Cheju citizens to erect a memorial stele for O Taehyŏn, Kang Ubaek and Yi Chaesu – the Three Righteous Ones (*Samŭisa* 三義士) – in Yi's native district of Taejŏng.[48] This is of interest because it was a public monument perpetuating historical memories that was erected by private persons, not a monument, like the statue of admiral Yi Sunshin in the centre of Seoul, intended to promote a view of history propagated by the government. There are indications, however, that already much earlier the public perception of Yi Chaesu was positive, and not only on Cheju Island. Yi Chaesu figured in a series of short portraits of important historical figures published in the *Tonga ilbo*, in the installment of 3 November 1921, where he is described as someone who, together with O Taehyŏn and Kang Ubaek, appealed to the people to "form a righteous army to defend the nation" (the Sino-Korean phrase used is *ch'angŭi*倡義 , the slogan that in the film about Yi Chaesu is prominently displayed on a banner carried by the protesters).[49] Consequently, he surrendered voluntarily after the enemies of the nation had been dealt with. Right after he had been taken into custody he justified the massacre by claiming that from time immemorial everyone had had the right to kill traitors. The article describes him as being of low birth and very small in stature, but with the heart of a true, loyal hero (*yŏryŏrhan taejangbu* 烈烈한 大丈夫).

Yi Chaesu's sister's account, which was written down by someone else, should also be regarded as based on oral tradition: she was only four years old when the revolt took place and must have heard her brother's story from third parties. In addition to this there are other oral traditions about Yi Chaesu, which present quite different aspects of his life or legend. One of these stories was told by a man who was ninety-two years old in 1958, and hence as old as Yi Chaesu or one year older than him; this man also came from Taejŏng.[50] Although we cannot be sure of this, he may very well have been an eyewitness. According to this informant, in the beginning O Taehyŏn and Kang Ubaek were the leaders. After O Taehyŏn had been captured by the Catholics, an enraged Yi Chaesu appealed to the people to continue their resistance. Our informant claims, quite plausibly, that at first hardly anyone listened to Yi Chaesu because of his low status. It was only when an old man expressed his support for Yi Chaesu, saying that while he might be of low descent, his intention was magnificent, that people responded to Yi Chaesu and made him a commander. This account has the appearance of a story that reflects the voice of someone who personally experienced the revolt; it does not accept Yi Chaesu's status as a leader without question, as later narratives about him tend to do.

In the three tales collected in the comprehensive collection of Korean oral literature *Han'guk kubi munhak taegye*, one fixed motif is Yi Chaesu's prominent role in the mass killings. All stories emphasize his ferocity. With the sword he carried he finished off one Catholic after another, if they had not yet been trampled to death. In every tale, a gruesome detail is added. While Yi Chaesu was busy killing Catholics, alcohol and pig meat were offered to him. He then used the same bloody sword with which he had killed people to cut off pieces of the meat, "[a]s if he was eating human flesh" (*saram kogi mŏktaship'i*), according to one version.[51] It would be naïve to assume that such statements express disapproval of Yi Chaesu. Rather, such details transform him into a legendary figure. They also show the rage of the oppressed

46 Pak Ch'anshik, "Pang Sŏngch'il nan-gwa Yi Chaesu nan-ŭi chudo seryŏg-e taehan saeroun charyo," *T'amna munhwa* 16," p. 331. An internet discussion shows that Yi Chaesu still has supporters who regard the Catholics as traitors who sold their country and deserved death; see http://www.seoprise.com/board/view.php?uid=1569&table=forum1&start=1430; accessed 12 November 2009.

47 Cho Mubin, *Yagetsu no Kandasan: Ri Zaisu jikki* (Osaka: publ. unknown, 1932). Cho Mubin came from Cheju and had been imprisoned by the Japanese as an independence fighter.

48 A journalist of the *Cheju shinmun* mentions a descendant (*huson*) of Yi Chaesu as having had a hand in the erection of the stele; O Sŏngch'an, "Sŏnggyonan-ŭi chudongja Yi Chaesu," *Narasarang* vol. 79 (1991), p. 27.

49 Other figures featured in this series in the same issue were the reformer Kim Hongjip 金弘集and Chŏn Pongjun 全琫準, the leader of the Tonghak 東學armies.

50 Chin, *Cheju mindam*, pp. 312-314.

51 Han'guk chŏngshin munhwayŏn'guwŏn, *Han´guk kubi munhak taegye*, 9:3, pp. 361-375. Yi Yŏnggwŏn relates that his grandmother told him, perhaps from her own observation, how Yi Chaesu every time he had beheaded someone would wipe his sword on his straw shoes; Yi Yŏnggwŏn, *Cheju yŏksa kihaeng* (Seoul: Han'gyŏrye shinmunsa, 2008), p. 229.

as expressed by "primitive rebels" like Yi Chaesu, in their legends as much as in their lives.[52] Alternatively, or simultaneously, the emphasis on Yi Chaesu's eating and drinking manners during the slaughter could also be explained by pointing at the narrative need for telling, memorable detail.

Yi Chaesu's sword itself is a recurring motif in narratives about him. The sword is given to him by a Japanese fish merchant, Arakawa (written with characters that are pronounced Hwangch'ŏn in Korean), who according to Kim Yunshik supported the rebels by supplying weapons. The sword is called his "Hwangch'ŏn sword" 荒川劍. This name is reminiscent of the name of a legendary sword from Chinese tradition, Yongch'ŏn 龍泉 (Dragon Well), linking Yi Chaesu to the great heroes of the past. In one of the oral tales, Yi slashes at a camellia tree alongside the road and when the leaves fall down in great numbers cries: "Victory will be ours and the heads of the Catholics will fall like these leaves."[53]

Coming from Japanese hands, the sword is of course a potential source of embarrassment, particularly after the colonial period. The pro-Catholic researcher Kim Okhŭi uses it to paint a damning picture of a retainer (Yi Chaesu) who is knighted by his feudal master (the fish merchant).[54] In the film *Yi Chaesu-ŭi nan*, however, the problem is solved by having Yi explain why it is acceptable to receive the sword: if the rumour spreads that the Japanese are involved, the French will not dare to attack the rebels.[55] Ironically, the historical authenticity of the gift of the sword is doubtful. Kim Yunshik only mentions that the Japanese fish merchant donated guns and swords to the rebels. The sword episode seems to be based on oral tradition only. That does not make it necessarily untrue, but in origin it may be just a narrative embellishment.

Shaman songs present another form of oral tradition about Yi Chaesu. His name comes up in a list of soldiers and fighters. This list not only enumerates the soldiers of the time "long long ago" (*yennal yetchŏk*, a formula also used in folk tales), when the rebellion of Yi Chaesu arose, it also salutes those who fought during the Japanese invasions of the late sixteenth century. The inventory continues by mentioning those soldiers who served in the thirteenth century, when the Three Special Brigades continued to resist the Mongols; in the rebellion of Pang Sŏngch'il房星七 (1898); in the Great East Asian War (Second World War); in 1948, when government troops bloodily suppressed a rebellion on the island; and during the Korean War. Distant episodes of history are conflated and all soldiers are invited to eat and drink; they are also asked to see to it that evil spirits cannot harm the island.[56] In a similar list, the ways the soldiers have died is specified: by the sword or by iron and bamboo spears. It becomes clear that this inventory revolves around the potentially dangerous spirits of those who have died an unnatural death before their time.[57] Listed together with martial figures from completely different epochs, in such texts the figure of Yi Chaesu is to a certain extent de-historicized. Shorn of his historic context, his role as defender of the island against foreign aggression is nonetheless the same as that ascribed to him by some historians. In any case, shaman songs have served to keep Yi Chaesu's name alive and as such are part of the genealogy of Yi's memory.

Another shaman song mentions Yi Chaesu, but directs attention to the merits of a village deity rather than those of Yi. It praises the powers of the guardian deity of the village of Shinp'yŏng in Taejŏng-ŭp: "In the time of Yi Chaesu, when the Catholics wanted to take away the land rights from us in Shinp'yŏng, and Yi Chaesu started a rebellion and the Catholics came to Shinp'yŏng to catch Yi Chaesu, the spirit of this shrine averted misfortune for Shinp'yŏng."[58] Here Yi Chaesu is represented as the leader of the revolt from the outset, but mentioned only casually as part of the context of a story devoted to the

52 It might be interesting to compare these acts of extreme violence, which are abhorrent to the elite, with similar cases in European history that have been analyzed by historians like F. Lestringant, Le Roy Ladurie and Alain Corbin. Gruesome incidents of "gratuitous violence" and "ritual cannibalism," they suggest, may be seen as political acts with their own logic and rationality.

53 Han'guk chŏngshin munhwa yŏn'guwŏn, *Han´guk kubi munhak taegye*, 9:3, pp. 421-424.

54 Kim Okhŭi, "Cheju-do shinch'ungnyŏn (1901)," p. 213.

55 Pak Kwangsu *et al.*, *Yi Chaesu-ŭi nan* (Seoul: K'ŏmyunik'esyŏn puksŭ, 2005), pp. 65-66.

56 Hyŏn Yongjun, *Cheju-do musok charyo sajŏn* (Seoul: Shin'gu munhwasa, 1980), pp. 296-297. Very similar lists, detailing soldiers who died in all kinds of wars and incidents, appear in other shaman songs; see for instance Mun Mubyŏng & Yi Myŏngjin, *Cheju Ch'ilmŏridang Yŏngdŭng kut* (Taejŏn: Kungnip munhwajae yŏn'guso, 2007), pp. 185, 195.

57 Hyŏn Yongjun, *Cheju-do musok charyo sajŏn,* p. 576.

58 Chin Sŏnggi, *Cheju-do muga ponpúri sajŏn*, p. 548. Chin suggests the translation "all rights" for *chŏn'gwŏn*, but in view of the fact that Catholics were involved in taking away originally communal land that poor people had used for a long time as if it were their own, the phrase "land rights" (田權) is perhaps more appropriate in this context.

deity. Another role is ascribed to Yi Chaesu in a shaman song from Posŏng Village, also in Taejŏng-ŭp:

At the time of the rebellion of the year shinch' uk, when Yi Chaesu acted as a leader, at the age of twenty-four, when the Catholics destroyed this shrine, General Yi Chaesu resurrected it, this year sixty-three years ago.[59]

This song was sung by a female shaman who at the time of recording was seventy years old and thus had been a child when the revolt took place. It foregrounds Catholic attempts to suppress "superstition," which quite likely caused as much resentment among the local population as the expropriation of the land that the poor farmers worked and considered their own, and the imposition of taxes on anything imaginable that might be taxable. The local shrines were part and parcel of village life until far in the twentieth century. In this song Yi Chaesu is the defender of time-honored indigenous custom.

The connection between Yi Chaesu and shamanic ritual is at the core of "When I die, bury me under the mulberry tree…" (*Nallang chukkŏn takpat'e mudŏng…*), an epic poem by Mun Mubyŏng, a Cheju writer and cultural activist. In the poem, published in 1987, Mun draws liberally on oral traditions as well as on written history, in order to construct an interpretation of the rebellion that is typical of the *minjung* movement. The poem presents a left-wing, but nevertheless nationalistic narrative of history from the viewpoint of the masses of the people (the *minjung*).[60] Choi Chungmoo's characterization of the *minjung* take on history perfectly fits the epic about Yi Chaesu: "In the history thus reread, hitherto marginalized people enter the central arena or become agents of history."[61]

After an introduction in which he highlights the hunger and poverty of the people of Cheju, Mun Mubyŏng moves on to the story of Yi Chaesu: "This is not just a story of a dazzlingly glorious death/it is the story of a hero." Mun describes Yi Chaesu's childhood as follows:

Though he never had a proper spoonful of rice,
Chewed on the roots of trees,
He was a child who knew what was right,
A child who knew the blaze of resentment (han)

As a child, Yi Chaesu attends shamanic rituals (*kutp'an*), where he proves himself to be a good dancer and singer (setting the hearts of the diving women of his village aflutter). A pious worshipper of the native deities, he almost becomes a shaman (*shimbang*) himself. Mun Mubyŏng then broadens his focus and tells of the political problems that beset late nineteenth- century Korea, focusing on the corruption of the officials, who made life for the masses so hard that they were driven to resistance. In conformity with historical sources, he relates how survivors of the Tonghak revolt of 1894 sought refuge on Cheju, where in 1898 they rose up in rebellion once again under the leadership of Pang Sŏngch'il. This rebellion was unusual in that it did not just call for the redressing of specific limited complaints, but also seemed to aim at political independence for the island. After the suppression of this rebellion Catholicism came to Cheju, with a missionary "carrying the bible in one hand, and a gun in the other" invading the "sacred space" of the shamanic rituals that gave the people the force to endure their tribulations. Opportunistic ruffians among the islanders seek the protection of the church, and Cheju becomes "French territory." Facing this threat, Yi Chaesu worships the native spirits even more zealously and one day while dancing at a *kut*, he is possessed by the spirit of the executed Pang Sŏngch'il. In this way a genealogy of resistance is created, which, as we shall see below, can be extended to later ages. The oppression by the Catholics is compounded by the new tax collector, who is assisted by Catholic henchmen. The narrative now generally develops according to the commonly accepted pattern, but the inspiration of the shamanic rituals is stressed, and the whole revolt treated as a ritual to resolve the resentment (*han* 恨) of the people of the island. Local deities urge the islanders to defend themselves: "Listen, I will give you the force to bring down 10,000 soldiers with one arrow, don't be afraid, crush your

59 Hyŏn Yongjun, *Cheju-do musok charyo sajŏn,* p. 545.

60 Mun, Mubyŏng. "Nallang chukkŏn takpat-e mudŏng……," in Minjok kuthoe (comp.), *Minjok-kwa kut* (Seoul: Hangminsa, 1987), pp. 270-307.. This book was compiled by the National Kut Association and its introduction was written by Paek Kiwan, the director of the National Unification Research Institute, a dissident organization. Paek had political ambitions and was a presidential candidate in 1987; see Choi Hyun-moo, "Contemporary Korean Literature: From Victimization to Minjung Nationalism," in Kenneth M. Wells (ed.) *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), pp. 167-168.

61 Choi Chungmoo, The Minjung Movement and the Construction of Popular Culture," in Kenneth M. Wells (ed.) *South Korea's Minjung Movement*, p.117.

mortal enemies!" When the Catholics have made their pre-emptive attack on the protesters and their leader O Taehyŏn is taken captive, the narrative turns to Yi Chaesu, whose takeover of the leadership effected a change in the character of the protest with regard to social class: "they were not scholars with white foreheads, they were peasants, government slaves, slash-and-burn farmers." At this juncture Yi Chaesu, inspired by the gods, turns into a kind of revolutionary Jeanne d'Arc, who calls for a society without classes, and asks the deities to make him "a shield for the people of Cheju." Later he is called "a son of the god[s]" (*shin-ŭi adŭl* 神의 아들) who offers his life to the "Grandmother" (the guardian deity), to chase away the foreign spirits polluting the island.

Mun Mubyŏng also deals with two problematic issues. The first is the sword Yi Chaesu receives from the Japanese fish merchant Arakawa. There is no hint here that Yi Chaesu may have been manipulated by the Japanese. The sword is Koreanized, and thus sanitized, by describing it in terms that refer to Korean folk customs: "This sword is the sword used by famous generals under heaven, this sword is the sword used by famous generals under the earth." The second issue is the massacre of the native Catholics, through whose veins ran the same (Korean) blood. Yet, Catholics and non-Catholics are now divided: "people who in tears press their heads against the breast of the dead, people who sing triumphant songs of victory, people who hide trembling in the office of the magistrate, people who cannot stop laughing like madmen, people who have fainted, people who pray to the Lord with folded hands." Mun is obviously troubled by the massacre (and one wonders if perhaps the internecine slaughter before and during the Korean War was also in his mind when he wrote this), but in the final analysis suggests it was inevitable. It was the "martial law of the Mountain Spirit" who ordered the death of the Catholics; it was no one's fault, a curse from the gods, the consequence of the sad history of the island. The Hwangch'ŏn sword of the General (read: Yi Chaesu) merely expressed the deep-seated thirst for revenge of the people, nourished by long years of iniquity. In a footnote to his own poem, Mun says that the massacre was an exorcism of imperialism and feudalism, a ritual of destruction necessary to create a new order. This eventually allows him to aestheticize the massacre: "How beautiful were the torches in the walled city of Cheju that had turned into an altar of death."

At the end of the poem, Yi Chaesu actually wants to continue the battle, regretting that he has not managed to kill the French missionaries, the "evil French spirits,"[62] but he sends the people home to attend to the old and sick and care for their young children. After his death, he continues to watch over Cheju (his eyes remain alive!), fulfilling the same function that is assigned to him in shaman songs, although there he shares this burden with a host of other warriors of the past.

By justifying violence, Mun Mubyŏng fits in the left-wing tradition of historians like Eric Hobsbawm, who has written: "Vengeance, which in revolutionary periods ceases to be a private matter and becomes a class matter, requires blood, and the sight of iniquity in ruins can make men drunk."[63] Mun expresses this, however, in the idiom of the unleashing of pent-up resentment (*han p'uri*) that he has borrowed from shamanism, reinforcing his message with content that comes from the culture of the masses, thus lending his poem nationalistic or local-patriotic overtones. This use of the concept of *han* is not unique to Mun Mubyŏng, but a recurrent motif in *minjung* literature. [64] Mun's condoning of violence can also be seen in the context of a decade that had seen brute counter-violence in the suppression by the authoritarian government of the Kwangju movement for democracy.

As we have seen, both oral and written sources quite early on give a privileged place in the 1901 revolt to Yi Chaesu, a place he did not have from the outset. In Kim Yunshik's account, his name first crops up when the rebels enter the city. Kim states that their commander is "a young fellow, a certain Yi (李哥Yi-ga)," about whose status he is not quite certain, but who seems to be a government slave by origin.[65] In spite of his lowly background, Yi Chaesu makes quite an impression, seated on horseback,

62 This was mainly due to the intervention of Ch'ae Kusŏk who, knowing what had happened in China not long ago, foresaw great problems not only for Cheju, but for the whole of Korea if foreigners would be killed. Risking his own life, he therefore stopped an attempt to make them share the same fate as the native Catholics. The missionaries were actually prepared to die with the native Catholics and had to be forcefully kept from joining them; Yu Hongnyŏl, *Kojong ch'iha sŏhak sunan-ŭi yŏn'gu*, p. 412-414, and Kim Okhŭi, "Cheju-do sinch'ungnyŏn (1901) kyonan-ŭi wŏnin," p. 214.

63 Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963), p. 25.

64 Chungmoo Choi, "The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Literature: South Korea," in Tani E. Barlow (ed.), *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 361-362.

65 Yu Hongnyŏl, *Kojong ch'iha sŏhak sunan-ŭi yŏn'gu*, p. 411.

Still from The Rebellion of Yi Chaesu, depicting Yi as a revolutionary

dressed in military garb, wearing glasses (which at the time had a connotation of seniority), and carrying a big sword. With this sword he started the frenzy of killing, literally disemboweling the Catholic exile Ch'oe Hyŏngsun who was held responsible for the raid on the camp of the protesters. Ch'oe was also widely hated because he had played an important, though sordid and duplicitous, role in the suppression of the 1898 rebellion. When the rebels left the city, Yi Chaesu again managed to draw attention to himself: he appeared on a fine horse, wearing a coat of mail and a peacock feather in his hat and holding a western-style umbrella above his head. Here we see the origin of the legendary fame of Yi Chaesu. The people, Kim Yunshik notes, all admired him and said that he had been born as a true hero, a person destined for great things because of the pure essence of Mt. Halla.[66] Showing their respect they accompanied him until he was outside of the city gates. Kim Yunshik contrasts this with the much more discreet behavior of the other commander, the literatus O Taehyŏn. He refused a horse and went on foot, dressed in simple clothes, and instructed his men not to trample the barley fields.[67] In the collective memory of the island, however, as in the public imagination of later times, Yi Chaesu is the true representative of the rebellion. This is not necessarily a distortion of history. If one locates the significance of the revolt primarily in its more radical phase, that is, after O Taehyŏn had been captured and Yi Chaesu had taken the lead, Yi indeed becomes the main protagonist, for better or for worse. During this final stage of the rebellion, the cautious, reformist course of action taken by the *yangban* leadership had been replaced by the more aggressive approach of the resentful, down-trodden lower-classes: the peasants, especially the destitute slash-and-burn farmers, the diving women, the *kisaeng* and the shamans. In such an interpretation, Yi Chaesu may in Hobsbawm's terminology be called a "primitive rebel," who only because of his lack of proper class consciousness thought of himself until the end as a loyal servant of the very nation that oppressed the likes of him. His protestations of loyalty to a monarchy that in later years very few have been willing to defend have not, however, hurt his standing in recent representations of the revolt, which portray him as a champion of the people.

A crucial factor in the public awareness of the revolt has been the 1999 film *Yi Chaesu-ŭi nan*. This film was directed by the highly esteemed director Pak Kwangsu and loosely based on the 1983 novel *Pyŏnbang-e ujinnŭn sae* (A Bird Calling in the Periphery) by the Cheju author Hyŏn Kiyŏng. It was not a commercial or critical success, in spite of thorough preparations, a very high budget and international cooperation. Some of the criticisms directed at the film were unfair. Pak Kwangsu has been accused of reducing the rebellion to a love story,[68] but Yi Chaesu's love for a diving girl takes up only a small part of the film and is moreover used to good effect, namely to develop the larger narrative. Pak avails himself of it, for instance, to show how Yi Chaesu, once he tastes power as a leader, changes from a fresh-faced youth to a grim, blood-thirsty warrior who sacrifices his love for his new role.[69] The changes in him are reflected in the very different way the diving girl looks at him after his transformation, wordlessly conveying that she knows he is no longer hers and

66 "Explaining" a person's character on the basis of the nature of his or her place of birth was a classic trope in traditional Korean literature, a consequence of the widely accepted belief in geomantic theories.

67 Yu Hongnyŏl, *Kojong ch'iha sŏhak sunan*, pp. 414-415.

68 Yi Yŏnggwŏn, *Saero ssŭnŭn Cheju-sa*, p. 273.

69 Cf. the interview with Pak in *Kino*, March 1998, pp. 66-67.

that he is destined to meet a tragic end. Conversations with the girl also allow the spectator to hear Yi Chaesu's inner motivation for resistance. The real weakness of the film is a lack of sustained dramatic build-up. Pak Kwangsu has tried to add too many nuances, cramming numerous allusions to historical facts in short scenes. In addition, rather than explicitly showing some events he merely hints at them, in an attempt to shun too much emotionality. At the end of the film the great massacre is skipped entirely; after the opening of the city gates only the final outcome of the rebellion, Yi Chaesu's execution, is shown, eliding the most controversial episode in his life. Whatever the film's merits or shortcomings, however, it has raised the profile of Yi Chaesu nationwide, whereas before he was famous on Cheju only. Ironically, Pak Kwangsu has claimed that he was not particularly interested in the story as an example of grassroots resistance to foreign encroachment, although this is one of the aspects that seem to appeal most to the general public interested in Yi Chaesu. Rather, Pak was fascinated by the beauty of collective action seen in the revolt.[70] He also suggests that the events of 1901 have a bearing on our age, by ending the film with a bird's-eye view of modern Cheju City. In the original script, the screenplay had the film also begin with scenes from the late twentieth century, making the suggestion of a relation between the revolt and present-day Korea even more emphatic. Although Pak Kwangsu does not make clear what exactly is the significance of the events of 1901 for our times, in recent years others have made consistent efforts to find contemporary significance in Yi Chaesu's tale.

THE SOCIAL AFTERLIFE OF THE REBELLION

Not surprisingly, the interpretation of the revolt, of which the bloody massacre was one of the central events, became a matter of controversy. This is apparent in the history of the monument for the Three Righteous Ones. When it was first erected in 1961, it stood at a busy thoroughfare where it could be seen by many. In the 1980s it was moved to a much quieter spot; under pressure from Catholic circles, it was rumored.[71] When a new stele was erected in 1997, Catholics covered the text on the stone with paper by day, while the villagers removed the paper by night; only after four months this conflict was resolved in favor of the villagers.[72] It is said that the text on the new stele was less critical of the Catholics than the old one, which reputedly accused "riff-raff" of joining the Church to indulge in robbery and rape. [73]

What is worth noting, however, is that recently in many instances when the rebellion is remembered the massacre is no longer seen as one of its essential elements. In his epic poem, Mun Mubyŏng already inclined to this view, although the massacre did bother him so much that he felt obliged to dwell on the circumstances that led to it. On many occasions "resistance," to feudal oppression or to foreign aggression, is seen as crucial characteristic, and even Catholics these days accept it as such.[74] As part of the celebration in 1996 of fifty years of Cheju as a separate province, a "scene of resistance" was recited from Mun's epic about Yi Chaesu. A committee formed to organize commemorations of the "resistance of Cheju in the year *shinch'uk*" speaks of the rebellion as a form of "creative history for us to live in the present."[75] The concept that history can be a way leading to a happier future, rather than merely being a reconstruction of past events, is quite common in Korean historical debates and one of the reasons for the social importance of history.[76] A professor of Cheju University suggested at the meeting of the committee in 2005 that 1901 should be seen as the point of departure for the resistance of the islanders against oppression by foreign powers and that both Catholics and the other islanders suffered because of it (silencing evidence that the Catholic victims were more than twice as numerous as the non-Catholics although they consti-

70 Ibid.

71 Yi Yŏnggwŏn, *Cheju yŏksa kihaeng*, p. 220.

72 Yi Yŏnggwŏn, *Cheju yŏksa kihaeng*, p. 223.

73 Ibid., p. 219.

74 Yi Yŏnggwŏn, *Cheju yŏksa tashi pogi* (Seoul: Shinsŏwŏn, 2005), p. 218. A Catholic priest was part of the committee that discussed the commemoration of the centenary of the rebellion. A website of the Sŏgwip'o church has a page dedicated to the events of 1901, where the rebellion is discussed in a spirit of reconciliation and harmony: http://church.catholic.or.kr/seogwipo/menu5_4.html ; accessed 22 November 2009.

75 http://www.jejusori.net/news/articleView.html?idxno=41785# ; accessed 27 September 2009.

76 Cf. Han Yŏngu, *Uri yŏksa* (Seoul: Kyŏngsewŏn, 1997), p. 47. This conceptualization of history could be an example for other nations. Currently, in the Netherlands a debate is raging about a "national historical canon" that should cement a sense of Dutch identity. It would be more profitable if this debate, instead of focusing on "identity" and glorious past achievements, would concentrate on the ways in which social harmony has been achieved or threatened in the past. Such discussions could be used as an inspiration to actively strive for a just and harmonious society, driving home the fact that this is something that needs constant efforts to achieve and maintain.

tuted only about 2.5% of the population of the island[77]). That year the commemoration of the rebellion comprised the performance of a play that attempted to clarify what the rebellion, "a popular revolt against the feudal exploitation of the government and a mass movement of resistance against the cultural expropriation of the western great powers represented by Catholicism" means for the inhabitants of present-day Cheju.[78] The play, a celebration of the Three Righteous Ones, on the other hand was oriented toward the future. It emphasized that the community of the islanders, while naturally being disturbed by the events, was restored in the end.[79] In 2003 there had already been sufficient agreement on the significance of the events of 1901 to organize an art exhibition devoted to them in a mainstream institution such as the Cheju National Museum.[80]

In recent years these commemorations of the rebellion of Yi Chaesu have turned into a regular annual feature. When they started in 2001, exactly one hundred years after the rebellion had taken place, Mun Mubyŏng suggested in a column in the *Halla ilbo* newspaper that one of the reasons for commemorating the rebellion was that in this way one could foster the "*changdu* spirit." A *changdu* 狀頭is the first signatory of a petition and the term was used for O Taehyŏn, Kang Ubaek and Yi Chaesu, gaining the connotation of "leader." The spirit Mun refers to is especially that of Yi Chaesu. Yi volunteered for the position to save the people, knowing that quite likely he would pay for it with his life, because in such cases the government tended to deal harshly with the leaders, while showing leniency toward the followers.[81] This is just one of the attempts that have been made to make the rebellion relevant for the present. For that purpose it is necessary to constantly seek links with current developments. In 2008, the program included a shamanic ritual and the recitation or singing of poetry, with one of the texts entitled "Island Of Peace."[82] This phrase refers to the official government policy instituted in 2005 of advertising Cheju as a venue for peace conferences and other peace-related events in order to stimulate the development of the island. The performance of this song of course fits recent reinterpretations of the significance of the revolt, silencing by common consent the carnage of 1901.

As an example of resistance, the 1901 rebellion also has become part of the pedigree of the uprising of 3 April 1948 (usually referred to as the 4.3 Incident), arguably the most traumatic event in the entire history of the island. The incident was so bloodily suppressed that it is estimated that the Cheju population was literally decimated.[83] The memory of this tragedy had been kept under wraps for decades, but democratization after 1987 made it possible to publicly discuss and investigate the true course of events. For this purpose and to restore the honor of the victims a committee was formed (National Committee for the Investigation of the Truth about the 4.3 Incident), which on its website repeatedly refers to 1901.[84]

The reputation of Yi Chaesu extends also to the mainland, where a website called "Cyber Hall for Democracy and Human Rights Information" provides a synopsis of *Windy City* (*Param t'anŭn sŏng*), a play by Christian author Yi Pan which deals with the 1901 rebellion.[85] Here Yi Chaesu declares himself a champion of peace and equality for the islanders when he enters the walled city. He does not heed the admonitions of the magistrate of Taejŏng Ch'ae Kusŏk to spare the Christians, however, because of the injustice done to the common people by

77 O Sŏngch'an, "Sŏnggyonan-ŭi chudongja Yi Chaesu," p. 21.

78 Chwa Sŭnghun, "'Yi Chaesu ŭi nan' chomyŏng… isil chae chik'il su' kongyŏn," article in *Cheju t'udei* 14 December 2005; accessed on the internet, 17-5-2009: http://www.ijejutoday.com/news/articlePrint.html?idxno=18917 . The play took the form of a *madanggŭk*, a form of theater that was most popular at the height of the *minjung* movement. *Madanggŭk* does not use a raised stage, but is performed at the same level as the spectators, like *p'ansori*, which was performed in the yard (*madang*) of a house.

79 It is difficult here not to think of Benedict Anderson's insistence, in the wake of Renan, that "forgetting" (or rather, ignoring) the horrors of the past may be an essential step in creating an identity for an imagined community; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (revised edition London: Verso, 1994 (1991)), pp. 199-203.

80 http://www.ijejutoday.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=1318 ; accessed 27 September 2009.

81 "Changdu chŏngshin," *Halla ilbo*, 19 May 2001. Kim Yunshik viewed Yi Chaesu's acceptance of leadership in a different light. He assumed that it was youthful ignorance that made him accept the position of *changdu*; Yu Hongnyŏl, *Kojong ch'iha sŏhak sunan*, p. 412. O Taehyŏn, in contrast, seems to have accepted leadership only reluctantly; Pak Ch'anshik, Pang Sŏngch'il nan-gwa Yi Chaesu nan," p. 328.

82 http://www.issuejeju.com/jbbs/bbs.html?mode=view&bcode=free&cate=&page=79&search=&keyword=&no=639 ; accessed 17 May 2009.

83 John Merrill, "The Cheju Rebellion," *Journal of Korean Studies* vol. 2 (1980), pp. 139-197.

84 See for instance http://www.jeju43.go.kr/sub/print.php?CatNo=43&boardit=board_pds02&mode=view&no=1614; accessed 27 August 2009. The Korean name of the committee is "Cheju 4.3 sakŏn chinsang kyumyŏng mit hŭisaengja myŏngye hoebok wiwŏnhoe."

85 http://cyberhumanrights.com/Kor/Information/1st/ARTVIEW.html?lang=KOR&no=508&code1=ART03; accessed 27 August 2009. The play should not be confused with *Windy Island* (*Param t'anŭn sŏm*), a novel about the 4.3 rebellion by Hyŏn Kiyŏng. The website makes this mistake, while also giving Pang T'aesu, the leader of the theatre group that performed the play in 1983, as its author.

Catholics. When the government troops arrive, Japanese appear who urge Yi Chaesu to continue the fighting and make the island independent. Although his troops are willing to fight, Yi Chaesu refuses "because the bond of the nation (*minjok* 民族) cannot be broken." National sentiments top local loyalties. Yi Chaesu surrenders and is killed.

As an example of resistance against foreign powers the rebellion of Yi Chaesu also figures on a website devoted to the defense of Korean authority over the island of Tokto against Japanese claims.[86] Accordingly, the Catholic mission is depicted as a "powerful political weapon" which the French government used to promote colonialism and commercial expansion. The native Catholics collaborated in this, relying on the extra-territorial rights of the mission to obtain economic privileges and suppress the original beliefs and rituals of the islanders. On this website, Yi Chaesu serves a national cause. While such a take on Yi Chaesu goes against the views of an author who praises the film *Yi Chaesu-ŭi nan* because it provides a local rather than a national view of history,[87] it is probably not in contravention of Yi Chaesu's own convictions.

Considering that Yi Chaesu is so often regarded as a champion of the oppressed people and a paragon of the struggle against feudalism, it is ironic that today he also serves capitalist, commercial interests. Thanks to the film – which together with other artistic, but at the same time commercial, products, such as the novel and a play, started the commodification of Yi's memory – his story is used to attract tourists to the island. Travelers are invited to visit the places that are connected to the actual rebellion as well as locations related to the making of the film. The local historian Yi Yŏnggwŏn has jumped on the bandwagon of the fashion for travelogues that trace historical events as set off by Yu Hongjun[88] and written *Cheju yŏksa kihaeng* (Historical Trips on Cheju) for the publishing house of the national daily *Han'gyŏrye shinmun*.[89] One of the itineraries in this book, which can be enjoyed by both armchair tourists and real travelers, is devoted to the rebellion of Yi Chaesu, following the course he took on the western part of the island. (The "Eastern Column" of the rebellious army headed by Kang Ubaek, which marched to the city along a different route, is not deemed worth a tour.)

Commercial exploitation of Yi Chaesu is also seen on the website of Natural Cheju Food Co., which advertises the natural foods that Cheju has to offer, such as honey. To raise the profile of the island and ultimately the value of its brand, the company presents an overview of Cheju history, including a quite extensive and well-balanced account of the rebellion of Yi Chaesu. To a large extent based on the diary of Kim Yunshik and quite well-written, it shows that commercialization does not necessarily lead to inferior historiography.[90]

CONCLUSION

One time: the year 1901, and one place: Cheju Island. Yet the past contained in that time and place contains innumerable stories; stories in very different genres with conventions of their own which have colored the tales. This has not impeded connections between the different forms the stories of 1901 have assumed. Historians, from metropolitan professors to local amateurs, have mined official archives and personal diaries. They have been inspired by oral tradition and the imaginative recreations of the events by writers and film makers. This "inspiration" has been negative in the case of certain historians, such as Kim Okhŭi, who have explicitly attempted to provide a counter-narrative to the popular perception of 1901 in the collective memory. We have reviewed some of the narratives that have been spun out of what remains in the form of evidence from the past (popularly known as "facts"), with or without additives to suit the taste of the customer. Increasingly these stories have focused on Yi Chaesu, pushing others to the background. The question of what evidence is significant is always a matter of debate. Can the Japanese involvement in the events (already mentioned by Kim Yunshik in some detail) be passed over as easily as most modern interpretations do, or was Yi Chaesu, as has been suggested, a servant of Japanese interests, albeit unwittingly? Did he rebel against the iniquity of the feudal system, or rather against excesses that the system – at least in theory – condemned, or did he protest against newly instituted taxes that were part of

86 http://www.dokdocenter.org/new/island/island_jejudo.htm?tb=openb_island_jejudo&curDir=etcmenu/island&idx=7&page=1&searchfield=&searchword=&mode=r ; accessed 18 May 2009.
87 Kim Kibong, "Yŏnghwa-rŭl t'onghan yŏksa kyoyuk: kuksa kyoyug-ŭl nŏmŏsŏ, "*Yŏksa kyoyuk* 97 (2006), pp. 247-276.
88 Yu Hongjun, *Na-ŭi munhwa yusan tapsagi* (Seoul: Ch'angjakpip'yŏngsa, 1993).
89 Yi Yŏnggwŏn, *Cheju yŏksa kihaeng*, pp. 207-230.
90 http://www.nfc.co.kr/about/Modern_Times/Modern_Times&04/ ; accessed 4 December 2009.

efforts to modernize the government in response to the demands of changing times? Was he a true champion of the oppressed, or did he rather regard himself as answering the call of both the Taewŏn'gun and King Kojong to defend the country against the threat from abroad?[91] This was the claim he persisted in during his trial, and a goal he shared with Confucian scholars on the island and elsewhere who adhered to the ideology of "reject heterodoxy and defend the right learning" (*ch'ŏksa wijŏng*斥邪衛正), a slogan that has been characterized as "exclusivist, conservative and anti-modern."[92] There are many ironies in Yi Chaesu's story, most of them usually unspoken. Few of those who choose to represent him as a fighter against foreign encroachment pause to reflect on the fact that Sands's very presence most likely served to keep the French at bay. This is the most probable explanation for the court's decision to send Sands down to Cheju. As a Westerner, the reasoning must have been, he would be better able to keep the French in check. The French, with their warships and marines, might very well have launched a bloody military operation on the island, perhaps even seizing the opportunity to establish a permanent bridgehead there. Sands himself indicates as much, saying of the French, who had arrived in the Far East too late to take part in the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion:

Yi Chaesu-related pictures in publicity of a Cheju tour operator

> *I had a sinking feeling that they might want to make up on our people [the Koreans! BW] for lost opportunity to bombard the Chinese Boxers, if French missionaries had been hurt.*[93]

Consequently he tried to get to Cheju as fast as possible, and "raced the French gunboats." Seen in this way, Yi Chaesu and Sands, who cannot be said to have pursued immediate American interests, were ultimately on the same side.

Another irony is found in Yi Chaesu being considered as a forerunner of the resistance of the islanders that led to the 4.3 rebellion and the massacres that ensued. Concentrating on the resistance, one can indeed pursue this line of argument, in which case Yi Chaesu emerges as a gallant, fearless defender of the interests of his community. However, a different perspective is possible. If we believe the claims he made during his trial, namely that the Catholics were killed because they were traitors to the nation, we may wonder to which extent Yi Chaesu's insistence on their wholesale extermination is different from the attitude of the perpetrators of the 1948 bloodbath, who indulged in a similarly merciless orgy of slaughter of "Reds," who were considered equally traitorous. One may judge it crucial to note that the nature of the massacres was quite different – the one "internal," islanders against islanders, the other coming from the mainland; the one committed out of bitter resentment by the marginal and oppressed, the other by forces sent by the oppressive metropolis – both were driven by an ideological furor that considered its values more important than individual lives.[94]

91 Martina Deuchler, *Confucian Gentlemen and Barbarian Envoys: The Opening of Korea, 1875-1885* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), pp. 105-106.

92 Pak Ch'anshik, "Cheju kyoan-e taehan ilgŏmt'o: sowi 'samŭisa-ŭi hwaltong-ŭl chungshim-ŭro," *Cheju-do yŏn'gu* 8 (1991), p. 247. Chai-sik Chung, *A Korean Confucian Encounter with the Modern World: Yi Hang-no and the West* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1995), p. 226.

93 Sands, *Undiplomatic Memories*, p. 165.

Although some choices of historical perspective are more defensible than others, when different perspectives are possible (and they always are) it is not always a matter of one or the other. One can regard the figure of Yi Chaesu positively, for instance, as a "pre-political" fighter against oppression who had not yet found his own language to express what really moved him. Yi therefore formulated his aims in the terminology of loyalty to the very state that oppressed him, however paradoxical that may seem if his actions are defined as "anti-feudal."[95] Similarly one may appreciate his resistance against arrogant foreign intruders from a left-wing *minjung* point of view, while simultaneously recognizing that his rhetoric against nefast foreign influences seems borrowed from conservative political figures of the late nineteenth century. What is clear, however, is that in many instances it is values rather than facts that are important if we are to judge whether an interpretation is acceptable. If we think, with Mun Mubyŏng, that Yi Chaesu's willingness to sacrifice himself for his community is an example for present generations, it is perfectly legitimate to emphasize this point. Our appreciation for Yi Chaesu as a person may be damaged by all the people he killed, but that does not detract from his "*changdu* spirit." For better or for worse, values direct the selection and organization of the countless sources furnished by the past and they are the object of historical debate as much as the slippery category of "data." This means that a basic question in the writing of history is the question of why it is written, for what audience and for what purpose. In other words, the social context of historiography is essential to understanding what it is about. At the same time, awareness of the social context and social uses of historiography also obliges us to seriously consider the truth claims that historical narratives make; for in spite of all the possible perspectives and interpretations, without these truth claims, history as a social process becomes meaningless.

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94 In *Shadows at Dawn: A Borderlands Massacre and the Violence of History* (the subtitle of which would fit Cheju 1901 perfectly), Karl Jacoby demonstrated in a similar manner that the conviction that their act was justified self-defense or an inevitable part of the spread of "civilization" drove otherwise quite innocuous citizens from Tucson to commit the Camp Grant Massacre, slaughtering 150 Apache Indians, mainly women and children.

95 Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels*, p. 2.

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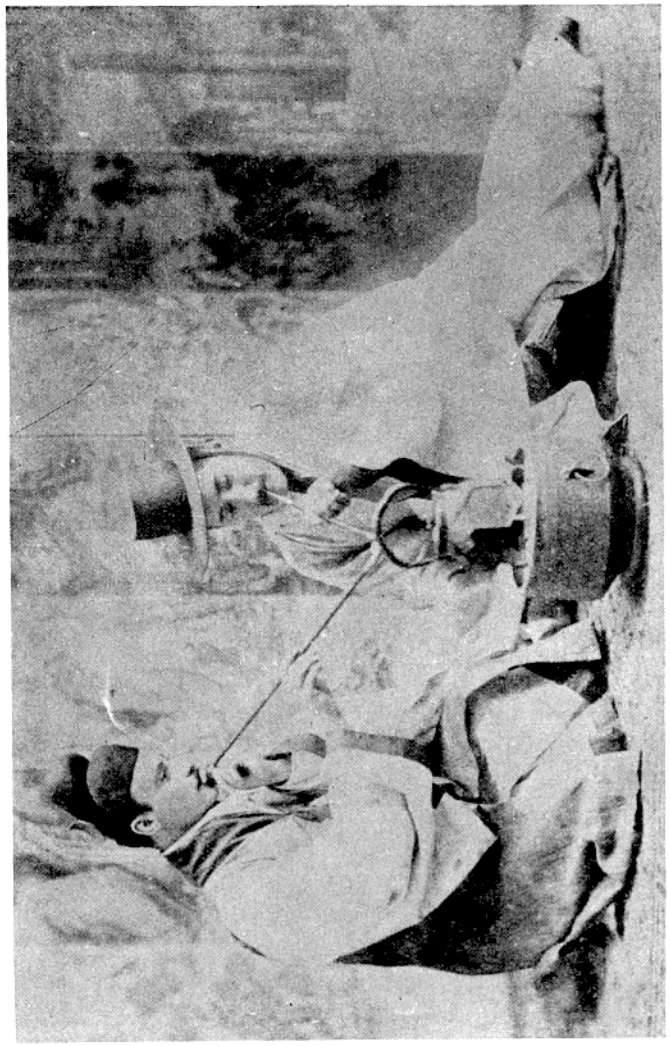

(Frontispiece)

The author (left) and a friend in native Korean dress.

UNDIPLOMATIC MEMORIES

The Far East 1896–1904

by

WILLIAM FRANKLIN SANDS

ILLUSTRATED

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disease that had eaten off her nose and lips and around her eyes till she looked like a living death's head. She was quite cheerful about it, and told me that her husband and children were all that way too. It was hard to separate her and the dancing girls from all the other bad dreams that went crowding through my aching head. During waking moments, for which General Ye watched patiently, we distributed our officers along the border posts and got the garrisons to show their teeth to the Manchu raiders. There was no sign of Russians, but there were Japanese who from their description were not coolies or pedlars. I was only active in spots. Ye did the work, consulting me when I looked sane, for most of the time I could not move and was not conscious of anything but pain.

It was a great relief when my soldier-servant foundered a good horse to reach an American passing some sixty miles away, who turned out to be a doctor. It was he who told me I had typhoid and might live since I had survived so long without him, if I would consent to be carried down country to his home and be nursed by him and his wife ; bless all missionaries and their wives ! I mended rapidly under their care, but most ungratefully broke his strict orders and ran away one night to try to get back to Euiju. It was no use. I fell off my horse and lay in the ditch until some miners carried me to their hut and notified the garrison that I was dead. I was awakened by the little general with a funeral procession come to bury me, and he put me in a carrying chair and sent me back to Seoul—so I never hanged Chang Tso Lin.

CHAPTER XI

THE AMAZONS

THE Boxer outbreak was in full blast. The Allies were slowly fighting their way up from Tientsin and no one knew if the beleaguered legations and missionaries in Peking were alive or dead. As a gesture, to impress the Koreans as well as Europe with the friendly attitude of the emperor toward the Western nations, I had chartered a steamer, loaded it with the only things we had to offer, rice and cigarettes, and sent it to the allied troops. I was not in the least sure, however, that some anti-foreign spark might not be fanned to a blaze on our side and watched everything that happened. Returning from one of my expeditions into the country I learned that word had come up from the island of Quelpaert of what seemed a formidable rebellion. A Catholic mission had been caught by it. Many people had been killed and there was a rumour of a massacre of Christians. Two small French gunboats, *l'Alouette* and *la Surprise*, had happened into Chemulpo harbour too late to take part in the China operations and had set off at once to the island. I had a sinking feeling that they might want to make up on our people for lost opportunity to bombard the Chinese Boxers, if French missionaries had been hurt.

There was a small Korean coasting steamer in Chemulpo ; the nearest troops I could find who were not quite useless were one hundred Kang Wha men. I had to take their captain (a Seoul politician),

but added several of the young Japanese trained officers from the military academy ; got my interpreter Ko Hei Kiung to come along and raced the French gunboats. I knew they had not docked for a long time and hoped for even fouler bottoms than my own disreputable little tramp.

Coming from Japan to China by way of Fusan, the southernmost Korean port, Quelpaert looms up as a great blue volcanic cone, lying to the southwest of the steamer's course. It is well out of the way of all liners. It only serves to whet the curiosity of the traveller by its mystery before it fades out gradually as the liner rounds the lower end of the Korean peninsula and pokes into the tangle of currents and rocks and sea-washed mountains, which gave the emperor of Korea the title of lord of ten thousand isles and, less romantically, constitute a menace to navigation. I was glad of the chance to see and explore this island, in spite of my anxiety. It is not known even how the name of Quelpaert originated since the native name is Ché-ju. On old Chinese or Japanese maps it is indicated as the island of women. In recent years its only European visitors had been some rare missionary who had wandered over from the mainland only to be promptly expelled, or some surveying party landed from a passing man-of-war, which did its work as quickly as possible in the face of plain hostility and got aboard again. It was known only that the coasts was so difficult and the inhabitants so unfriendly that even the Korean steamship company never landed there, but ran in a boat as near as they dared at long intervals, to take on from local junks whatever cargo the weather permitted, of dried fish, mother-of-pearl shell and thick-skinned bitter shattuck fruit. What trade there was in these things, and

in potash got from seaweed, was carried to market mainly by the stout little craft of Japanese smugglers. half junk, half schooner, or in the frail native fishing boats, fastened together with wooden bolts and carrying sails of straw matting, which are drawn up on the shore well out of reach of the sea when the weather threatens. The Japanese smugglers had buttressed their own trade by fostering anti-European feeling on the one hand, and the old local feeling of independence from Korea on the other. Because of its isolation, the island was used by Seoul as a penal colony for political prisoners. It was nominally administered from Seoul but only nominally, for not only this tradition of independence but another curious custom made it a difficult place to govern. Man, in this lost corner of the world, was the inferior being ; the woman was everything. She was the real house-bond. She owned all the property ; her children bore her family name, and she never took a permanent husband. Men were allowed to come over from the mainland once a year, but were not encouraged to stay long, and when they returned, took with them all boys who had reached thirteen years. A few men lived in the three cities, almost as foreigners lived in the open ports of China, on sufferance. These and the political prisoners made up the whole male population, and the women dominated the life of the island even in public matters. It was more than a matriarchy ; it was a real Amazon community, for the women were always ready to assert their power and uphold it by force. These two traditions were so strong that the governor sent down from Seoul was never permitted to bring his wife with him, lest a son born in the palace of the native kings, which was his official residence, should lay claim

to the throne of the island kingdom, which he would have the right to do. The natives did not want a Korean king, nor the Koreans a king of Quelpaert, so the custom suited both.

The political exiles could not leave the island, but were otherwise free and unsupervised. They could live where they liked and make their living as they pleased.

The native men were hunters, fishers, coast traders and smugglers. They stayed away from the women as much as possible, either at sea or in the mountain forest, and left all land work to them.

The rocky volcanic soil gave scanty crops of millet, and that only in fields built up of boulder walls filled with earth carried in baskets. Nearly all cereal food was brought sixty miles from the nearest point on the mainland, often a week's journey through the twisting currents and the rough sea which prevailed along that part of the coast.

The women were fine swimmers and divers. Young and old would swim out through the breakers, leave a basket buoyed by gourds floating on the surface and dive fathoms down for abalone shell or a bunch of edible seaweed. They would cut it out with a short sickle (the same weapon they used on the men when annoyed), attach an empty gourd to it, drop the stone with which they had weighted the gourd and let it float to the surface to be picked up when they were ready to come up themselves. They could swim and float about for hours, dive as simply as a duck, and work or move about from place to place under the water as easily and as long as so many sea fowl. While resting on the surface they would keep up a monotonous

whistling in different keys to warn chance men in the fishing boats to keep their distance.

The island is obviously a volcano. All around the coast are sunken, needle-pointed reefs. The foreshore is the same formation and almost impossible to walk on except by the worn trails. The whole island rises abruptly through chains of foothills to the crater of Hanra-San (pronounced Halla-San), the Mt. Auckland of our maps, 6,558 feet high.

The " dragon's gates," two great rifts, fall from the top of the mountain to the northern and southern coasts. Over their beds of lava, small streams flow which were said to come from a lake in the crater. There were hunters who claimed to have seen the lake, but it was a sacred and dangerous spot that most people avoided

According to Korean history, which is so full of myths that it is difficult to judge the historic value of anything, in a vague year of an equally vague reign, a huge commotion took place in the sea off the southern coast, and a great mountain arose, spouting fire. When the flames had cooled, the three families of Ko, Pu and Yang came up from three caves and peopled the island as rulers, nobles and peasants, respectively. These first men, become demigods, still lived on the shores of the crater lake. Sometimes they allowed themselves to be seen, sometimes they punished the intruder.

The Ko family were the ancient kings of Quelpaert, which is exactly why I asked Ko Hei Kiung to go along, hoping that his name would weigh more heavily than a hundred ragamuffin soldiers with single-shot rifles salvaged from the Franco-Prussian war. His family, one of the most noble in Korea, still worshipped theoretically at the temple built

over the entrance to the cave from which their founder came out to be king.

There are three cities on the island. The capital, Ché-ju, on the northern shore, raises its walls and towers almost from the water, all overgrown with ivy, centuries old, and its roofs nearly hidden by huge salisburia trees, pomegranates of extraordinary size, with groves of pummelo or shattuck, and bitter oranges.

Higher up on the slopes of the lava hills, groups of low houses appear, built of cobblestones and bits of lava, with heavy rocks and rope nets protecting the thatched roofs from the sea winds, like the cables stretched across Porto Rican roofs to hold them against hurricanes. Beyond are grassy slopes and higher still a thick tangle of bamboo and brier, a real jungle covering the higher peaks from Mt. Sarabon to Halla-San. There is plenty of game above, wild cattle, boar and deer, and wild ponies slender as deer, and with hoofs of iron from the jagged lava rocks. The islanders lasso them as needed and break them with a stout club, before shipping them to the mainland as tame.

Of the other two walled towns the important one was Tai-jung, as the seat of a sort of rival government. Tai-jung is evidently the " Tadiane " of Hendrick Hamel, a Dutch trader who was wrecked not far from the town in the *Sparrow Hawk* in 1653. His description, under the title of " Narrative of an Unlucky Voyage " is the only description that existed thirty years ago, and is accurate, for his errors can be identified as only misunderstanding. For example, he calls Ché-ju " the town of Moggan or Moksa." Evidently his captors told him they were taking him to the Mo-gwan or Moksa, that is, the governor, who has always had his residence

in the old capital. Nothing had ever been published about this island except this Hamel narrative, and references to it in ships' logs, or a brief account of the adventures of two American missionaries who were landed and promptly expelled.

The " Sailing Directions " for 1904, quoting from the survey of Capt. Sir E. Belcher, H.M.S. *Samarang*, state that " the island is about forty miles long, seventeen in breadth, oval in shape and of great height, with only one anchorage for sailing vessels, at the east end between Quelpaert and Beaufort Island."

In and around the three towns and in the narrow strip between sea and mountain lived a population computed by the Korean government at a hundred thousand. The Koreans had no basis at all for their calculation, mine was of the crudest, and as the British survey is undoubtedly correct the population was probably much lower than that, but with the whole island in unanimous rebellion, and one hundred unreliable men to restore peace and keep order, they certainly looked numerous.

It looked very ugly. The first rumours of trouble reached Seoul in May, through a trading steamer which had been fired on and driven off, but hearing nothing from the acting governor, the emperor had not paid any attention to it. A month later a telegram reached the French legation with a frantic appeal for help from two priests who had settled in Ché-ju the year before. From their account the insurgents had called over a large force of turbulent characters from the mainland, captured or destroyed all native boats by which messages could get over, and imprisoned the acting governor. They also reported that the Japanese on the island were in sympathy with the disturbance, were

urging the rebels to kill the two foreigners and their adherents and promising the support of the Japanese navy in case of foreign intervention. No news of the uprising had leaked out through the Japanese in our direction, for those who frequented the island were of a type that is not in communication with its officials. These two priests apparently had met with great success in their mission, for there were still Christians on the island exiled during the great persecution and they had made many new converts. For some reason that was not yet clear, the insurgent movement had taken the form of a drive against the Christians, who had withdrawn to Ché-ju, and were defending the town under the leadership of the two priests. They had armed themselves, some of the townspeople and a handful of the governor's police, with antiquated weapons from the government arsenal, and were besieged by a wild mob estimated at ten thousand islanders, malcontents and brigands from the mainland.

That is what started the two French gunboats to the rescue. They beat my old tramp steamer in the race but by a margin too narrow to take control or do anything more than open communication with the missionaries and take aboard some Christians. I informed the French senior officer of my authority, and proceeded to land my men on the narrow water front, under the walls of a dead city. Hardly had the priests' messenger got through the blockade to the nearest telegraph office on the mainland, when the women of the town, fearing starvation, opened the city gates at night to the rebels and led a complete massacre of the defenders. Not a shot nor a sign of life came from the walls. The city gates hung wide open and the narrow streets were cumbered with dead bodies. I counted a group of ninety, young

and old of both sexes, all horribly mutilated, before the governor's gate on the market place, where they had been lying for ten days in rain and sun. Not a living soul showed in the town till after we had entered, stored our provisions and ammunition, closed the gates and placed sentries on the walls. The two priests had survived. From one and a few eye-witnesses of the massacre I got the story of that night, ten days before. Everyone who had a grievance, public or private, or a debt, seized his opportunity and killed and looted, ally or enemy alike. When the destruction was complete, the victors withdrew from the town to the foothills to see what would happen next. Except the few Christians who had escaped there was not a man in town. There was no one to bury the dead, and my soldiers would refuse to do it. I knew that and did not want to risk a mutiny right at the start. It was another week before I could capture and pay enough coolies to give the bodies decent burial, and I had to live just where they were thickest, in the governor's palace. I found a room opening on the garden as far away from them as I could, but even there a wretched bird flew over my table and dropped a long mesh of hair in my food with a bit of skull attached. Outside the town masses of men showed up on all the hills to landward ; all day long, after the first day and night, they kept a dropping fire of jingals and mediaeval bronze cannon, which generally fell short of the walls ; every time I showed myself a quite recognizable rifle shot, a little more accurate, warned me not to stand too long in one place. Fortunately, the average Japanese boatman is no better with foreign shooting weapons than the Koreans. All night, flames from some burning house or village and the campfires

all over the hills warned us that the siege might begin again if the rebel leaders found out how few we were. The presence of the *Surprise* and *Alouette* kept them in doubt until it was too late for them to act. Captain de Mornay was a thorough sportsman. As soon as I had got into the town he sent an officer to say that he yielded " to Korean government authority " and left the situation in my hands. Having given his official message, the young officer asked if he might give a private one as man to man, and told me that the French officers were much concerned by the appearance and lack of discipline of my soldiers. They would withdraw the two gunboats if I required it, but would prefer to stand by in case of need. They did not quite like " to leave a white man in such a mess." He then brought out a bundle containing rockets and flares for use in an emergency at night and signal pennants for day use. They would either send in boats to bring us off, give us a landing party to assist or throw a few shells over toward the dense crowds on the hills, which were quite visible to them with a telescope. They also wanted to know if I were adequately armed " even against my own men " and well supplied with decent food. I did not have to use their offer, but I was grateful for it and much more comfortable about the result of my campaign. The first thing to do was to impress the watchers outside that we had a military force and that it was alert, so I had the whole hundred move about singly, as sentries on the walls. Next, one of my young officers came and told me that the commanding officer claimed to have secret instructions not to fight. He was to withdraw if there was any danger. He also reported that the soldiers were discussing going off to the steamer and

returning to the mainland without their officers and leaving me there. It began to seem that we must meet these simple souls with guile. I sent our only vessel away and let them know it had gone to bring more troops. The two French priests and the acting governor had been saved as prisoners by the influence of one of the political exiles, a Seoul man, a leader in the local revolution, who had been implicated in the murder of the queen in 1894. His wider experience showed him that the killing of foreigners was a much more serious matter than a simple revolt against unjust taxation. It had also come out that the Christian massacre was accidental to the real revolt, and not a primary factor. Taxes in Quelpaert were sporadic. They were always unpopular and rarely collected. Some years before my time there had been a tax revolt and the collectors had been driven off the island. An imperial proclamation then had relieved the " loyal islanders " of all back taxation, and none had been collected since. Early in this year one of that infernal tribe of go-getters, which is not confined to the United States, had offered to the emperor to produce a much-needed sum for the privy purse by collecting all back taxes in Quelpaert, including those remitted years before. On arrival he had invented some new ones in addition. When the islanders objected he discovered that in former times he had been a follower of a French missionary and joined up again with the Christians ; it was even alleged that, unknown to the priests, he had promised exemption from taxes for native Christians. When the revolt came he had a place of refuge and Christianity became an issue in the fighting. We promptly suppressed the tax collector who was only too glad to get away, and I got a message to

the Seoul exile, through one of my faithful servants, that I was grateful to him for his intervention on behalf of the missionaries, and could say the same on behalf of the French legation, and that I would remember it when I began to wipe out the insurgents. I also let him know that heavy reinforcements were on the way, but that I did not propose to wait for them. My man was instructed to let it drop that I was an ambitious young person who did not want the general arriving with the new troops to take credit for suppressing the revolt, so I might be expected to attack at any moment with what men I had, who were plenty to handle undisciplined mobs. My man was also to say in the course of his gossip that I was asking the Japanese government to send over and arrest any Japanese who might be on the island, suspecting that anyone there would not face the risk. I further let it be known that before starting a general slaughter I wanted assurance that Mr. Ko would be unmolested if he went out to worship at the shrine of his ancestors, as everybody realized was his duty, and which it would be sacrilege to prevent.

Through the same young officer-conspirator who arranged the messages, I organized drills outside the walls, for the besiegers were getting courage and coming down too close. The commanding officer was not at all inclined to show his ignorance by drilling the men ; I had it pointed out to him that it was very dangerous not to drill them, for if they remained idle they might quite easily mutiny and kill us all. In his innocence he turned the drill over to the lieutenant. My lieutenant opined that if anybody hurt our ruffians they would fight. So we took them for a walk outside the walls hoping for the worst. We drilled up and down the

countryside with fixed bayonets at the double, none of the hostile groups waited for us to come up, and none of the Japanese snipers hit me. It was comic opera, perhaps, but when I thought of that I also thought of the look of the shambles through which we had passed the day we landed. Presently the poison I had sent out in my messages began to work. The exiled leader saw visions of amnesty because of his intervention on behalf of the priests and the governor. Then more messages went out, addressed to no one in particular, just memoranda in which I discussed with myself the utility of executing certain leaders named in the paper as against the guarantee of trial if they surrendered, with consideration of any extenuating circumstances, which I allowed to be lost and found by the rebels. That also had its effect and presently requests for private interviews began to come in. Once negotiations had started, I felt they could be kept alive till the arrival of the two hundred and fifty trained troops I had sent for.

As soon as I believed that these could not be very far off I got out a proclamation, warning the people of the island that I was about to begin a drive with my soldiers, so that all honest men might remain indoors. In it I said that the emperor would listen to grievances, and a committee might come in to present them, but that my special object was to catch the leaders of the revolt, whose names were all in my possession, though even to these I would guarantee a fair trial by the supreme court at Seoul.

I announced that if these chiefs surrendered voluntarily it would be in their favour. If they were brought in prisoners by loyal subjects, the latter would be remembered ; but I added that in any case the revolt was now over and I intended

to clean up the guilty immediately, before the new troops arrived, in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. It was not such a long chance, for the two gunboats still hovered off the coast, as near as weather permitted, and the islanders all knew what they were, even if they did not know that they were not Korean and part of my force. Negotiations were well on, when a pompous and much uniformed colonel turned up with the regiment I had asked for. A number of leaders gave themselves up ; some were arrested, and the rest fled in Japanese fishing boats.

We arranged then for a surrender of the whole rebel army. They were to come in and deliver their weapons, listen to an address from our gallant and imposing colonel, and go home. The two gunboats left ; the priests settled down and reopened their mission, and I put thirteen principal captives on board my steamer, perfectly free of the ship and only under guard on the way up to Seoul, when we reached port.

The final grand tableau of my little comic-opera war was really impressive. Thousands of rebels came in ; I could only estimate them in their huddled masses. They were armed with prehistoric weapons. Some wore armour made of iron plates fastened to a cumbersome leather tunic or to a quilted and wadded cotton cloak. Some were dressed in leather cloaks with hairy dog-skin hats, like the coon-skin caps of American pioneer riflemen, the tail of the dog dangling over the shoulders. Some had bows and iron-tipped arrows ; others had the usual Korean matchlock guns. Many had spears and flails, made of a short cudgel studded with iron points fastened by two interlocking rings to a long staff. There were many jingals, those

long-barrelled Malay and Chinese fortress guns, which have to be laid on a wall or a heap of rocks to fire them, and are loaded with a handful of slugs, scrap iron or stones. There was a museum collection of small bronze hand cannon, of great age. They were real cannon, of Chinese origin, big enough to carry an impressive load, and small enough to be taken from place to place on the back of one man or even one small one in each hand. Also, there were some shotguns of Japanese make and a Murata army rifle, of the latest model. A hundred well-disciplined native soldiers under trustworthy officers would have had no trouble with them, even with thousands of them, for they had nothing that could come within range even of the wretched Berdan and Gras survivals of 1870 that a French government had permitted to be sold for the equipment of the Korean army. My hundred tatterdemalions with their smarter city reinforcements looked like an army and like real soldiers beside these island scarecrows. My weakness was treachery within, rather than rebel numbers. An added weakness always was my unwillingness to use force with the Koreans. I was trying to save and rebuild.

After the surrender, I left them in the hands of the colonel and the new governor who had come down with him, after a full understanding with them that there were to be no reprisals and no taxes levied until a new tax law had been worked out and a commission sent down from Seoul to explain it.

I have always been sorry that the weeks I spent in Quelpaert were so full of other things that I had no chance to explore it. My visit there was probably the last of the Amazon tradition. A garrison remained until the Japanese occupation of Korea. After that, it is said, the island was fortified by the

Japanese government, and where their fortresses exist there is no exploring. Unless the missionaries gather something of its history, Quelpaert will remain a mystery as it was before.

The sequel to the war was the trial of the rebel leaders at Seoul. I wished it to be an exemplary trial. It should be the first illustration of the new order of justice in Korea. Beyond presenting a report to the emperor of the reasons of the revolt, what had happened and the circumstances under which the accused were presented for trial, I intended to have no part in it except to sit as an observer with the Korean judges and to see to it that the men had a proper defence and that witnesses were admitted in their favour as well as against them. The French legation asked for and obtained the privilege of having a representative present, because of the attack on the French missionaries. I did not like that. I wanted a Korean trial, without any feature that could be construed as foreign pressure. Next, the local Japanese reporters asserted a right to be present. They had no such right, of course, but I would have permitted it, for I wanted them to hear whatever evidence might be produced as to the presence of Japanese among the rebels or at the massacre of Christians. I suspected strongly that their wish to hear what was going on came from the same reason and might be connected with those Murata rifle bullets which were noticeable whenever I appeared on the walls and were never wasted on Korean soldiers.

I wanted their legation to ask as the French had done through the proper channels that they might be present, but they would not do that and the reporters and some soshi forced the door of the judges' room where we were in private session,

terrifying the native policemen on duty and throwing the judges into panic, for they were armed with sword canes, the usual Japanese civilian weapon. I explained once more that there were ordinary decencies to be observed, and when they still insisted on breaking up the court I threw them out personally and vigorously, which was the beginning of a new rabid newspaper campaign against me extending to the Tokyo press.

I was disappointed in the efficiency of our new model of justice. Seeing that I did not intend to try them myself, and would not testify though I knew their cases, so as to give them every possible chance, accused and witnesses looked me blandly in the eye and lied brazenly. Finally the chief justice turned to me and said that though he hated to disrupt the course of Western justice, he felt that an ever so slight return to primitive methods might give better results, and asked if he might threaten to use the paddle. It seemed to me that if he threatened it might show the prisoners that they had better not force the issue, and I consented to his ordering the paddles brought out, if he promised to accept defeat if they called his bluff, in which case I would agree to testify. The court servants brought out a kind of saw-buck over which the victim was to be held while being spanked, and the paddles. The effect was instantaneous. They all clamoured to be readmitted to examination as they had remembered something. The instruments were removed and the trial finished in an orderly manner, but it was the last trial on the Western model as well as the first.

Quelpaert brought two interesting new acquaintances. Admiral Pottier with his flagship *Redoutable* was a figure of the eighteenth-century sea fighters.

Under his sea-wolf bluster he was a shrewd diplomat. and under his weather-beaten skin he was a man of peace. He got for me the Cross of the Legion of Honour for preventing the bombardment of the island by his own ships and for keeping Korea out of the Boxer movement. When detailed to the China station to close a long career of diplomacy and action in the Mediterranean, he had selected as his flagship the oldest of old French ironclads, for he detested the discomforts of the new mechanical fighting machines. His quarters were fitted like a Paris apartment, and across the stern he had run out nothing less than a glassed balcony where he raised flowers. Ladies, when lunching or dining with the admiral (and he entertained like an ambassador), were warned by his aides that they must under no circumstances understand half of what he said, for he had a queer trick of speech, filling his brilliant conversation not only with hair-raising oaths but with quite impossible barrack-room terms, at which, if a lady took offence, she proved herself no lady, for she had no business to understand them. He was served aboard by a civilian butler-valet who had sailed with him, according to the tale, for over forty years, and with whom he stood in relations only possible with an old French or Italian family servant. The old valet had been with the admiral through all his most intimate experiences, and kept a stern eye on the admiral's stories.

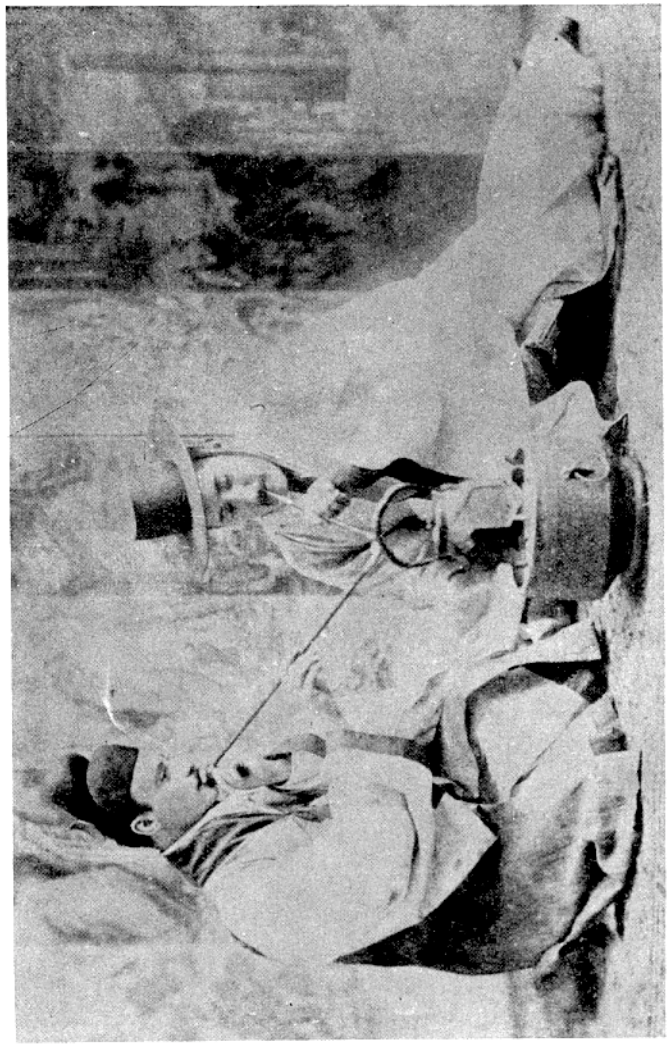
" Admiral, you exaggerate," would come suddenly from the background, " You know it happened *this* way—— "

A spluttering of oaths from the admiral, and a fiery debate between the two old men was sure to follow, during which the service halted and the guests, if they knew the peculiarities of their host,

rocked with delight. The old gentleman was a museum piece ; he belonged at least a century back, for even his shrewd and kindly wisdom belonged to the great period of territorial rather than commercial empire building. He belonged with Clive.

On his staff was a Commander Vignaud, better known as Pierre Loti, a short little man, with high heels to give him stature, corsetted tightly as a belle of former days, cheeks and lips rouged like a modern flapper. It was incredible that any man could live under such studied rudeness and contempt as that of the sturdy Breton officers of the flagship. They disliked his effeminacy as only a blue-water sailor can detest such things ; they studied the insults in which they expressed their feelings as only a French courtier could—to remain well within bounds of civilized intercourse while making life unbearable for one whom they quite plainly believed to be unfit for the company of men. Yet it surely cannot be said that Bretons have no appreciation of the soul of a poet. Perhaps they prefer him bearded and bardlike.

The admiral did not even trouble to be civil. His language about Pierre Loti and to him was unstudied and without reserve.



(Frontispiece)

The author (left) and a friend in native Korean dress.

UNDIPLOMATIC MEMORIES

The Far East 1896–1904

by

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disease that had eaten off her nose and lips and around her eyes till she looked like a living death's head. She was quite cheerful about it, and told me that her husband and children were all that way too. It was hard to separate her and the dancing girls from all the other bad dreams that went crowding through my aching head. During waking moments, for which General Ye watched patiently, we distributed our officers along the border posts and got the garrisons to show their teeth to the Manchu raiders. There was no sign of Russians, but there were Japanese who from their description were not coolies or pedlars. I was only active in spots. Ye did the work, consulting me when I looked sane, for most of the time I could not move and was not conscious of anything but pain.

It was a great relief when my soldier-servant foundered a good horse to reach an American passing some sixty miles away, who turned out to be a doctor. It was he who told me I had typhoid and might live since I had survived so long without him, if I would consent to be carried down country to his home and be nursed by him and his wife ; bless all missionaries and their wives ! I mended rapidly under their care, but most ungratefully broke his strict orders and ran away one night to try to get back to Euiju. It was no use. I fell off my horse and lay in the ditch until some miners carried me to their hut and notified the garrison that I was dead. I was awakened by the little general with a funeral procession come to bury me, and he put me in a carrying chair and sent me back to Seoul—so I never hanged Chang Tso Lin.

CHAPTER XI

THE AMAZONS

THE Boxer outbreak was in full blast. The Allies were slowly fighting their way up from Tientsin and no one knew if the beleaguered legations and missionaries in Peking were alive or dead. As a gesture, to impress the Koreans as well as Europe with the friendly attitude of the emperor toward the Western nations, I had chartered a steamer, loaded it with the only things we had to offer, rice and cigarettes, and sent it to the allied troops. I was not in the least sure, however, that some anti-foreign spark might not be fanned to a blaze on our side and watched everything that happened. Returning from one of my expeditions into the country I learned that word had come up from the island of Quelpaert of what seemed a formidable rebellion. A Catholic mission had been caught by it. Many people had been killed and there was a rumour of a massacre of Christians. Two small French gunboats, *l'Alouette* and *la Surprise*, had happened into Chemulpo harbour too late to take part in the China operations and had set off at once to the island. I had a sinking feeling that they might want to make up on our people for lost opportunity to bombard the Chinese Boxers, if French missionaries had been hurt.

There was a small Korean coasting steamer in Chemulpo ; the nearest troops I could find who were not quite useless were one hundred Kang Wha men. I had to take their captain (a Seoul politician),

but added several of the young Japanese trained officers from the military academy ; got my interpreter Ko Hei Kiung to come along and raced the French gunboats. I knew they had not docked for a long time and hoped for even fouler bottoms than my own disreputable little tramp.

Coming from Japan to China by way of Fusan, the southernmost Korean port, Quelpaert looms up as a great blue volcanic cone, lying to the southwest of the steamer's course. It is well out of the way of all liners. It only serves to whet the curiosity of the traveller by its mystery before it fades out gradually as the liner rounds the lower end of the Korean peninsula and pokes into the tangle of currents and rocks and sea-washed mountains, which gave the emperor of Korea the title of lord of ten thousand isles and, less romantically, constitute a menace to navigation. I was glad of the chance to see and explore this island, in spite of my anxiety. It is not known even how the name of Quelpaert originated since the native name is Ché-ju. On old Chinese or Japanese maps it is indicated as the island of women. In recent years its only European visitors had been some rare missionary who had wandered over from the mainland only to be promptly expelled, or some surveying party landed from a passing man-of-war, which did its work as quickly as possible in the face of plain hostility and got aboard again. It was known only that the coasts was so difficult and the inhabitants so unfriendly that even the Korean steamship company never landed there, but ran in a boat as near as they dared at long intervals, to take on from local junks whatever cargo the weather permitted, of dried fish, mother-of-pearl shell and thick-skinned bitter shattuck fruit. What trade there was in these things, and

in potash got from seaweed, was carried to market mainly by the stout little craft of Japanese smugglers. half junk, half schooner, or in the frail native fishing boats, fastened together with wooden bolts and carrying sails of straw matting, which are drawn up on the shore well out of reach of the sea when the weather threatens. The Japanese smugglers had buttressed their own trade by fostering anti-European feeling on the one hand, and the old local feeling of independence from Korea on the other. Because of its isolation, the island was used by Seoul as a penal colony for political prisoners. It was nominally administered from Seoul but only nominally, for not only this tradition of independence but another curious custom made it a difficult place to govern. Man, in this lost corner of the world, was the inferior being ; the woman was everything. She was the real house-bond. She owned all the property ; her children bore her family name, and she never took a permanent husband. Men were allowed to come over from the mainland once a year, but were not encouraged to stay long, and when they returned, took with them all boys who had reached thirteen years. A few men lived in the three cities, almost as foreigners lived in the open ports of China, on sufferance. These and the political prisoners made up the whole male population, and the women dominated the life of the island even in public matters. It was more than a matriarchy ; it was a real Amazon community, for the women were always ready to assert their power and uphold it by force. These two traditions were so strong that the governor sent down from Seoul was never permitted to bring his wife with him, lest a son born in the palace of the native kings, which was his official residence, should lay claim

to the throne of the island kingdom, which he would have the right to do. The natives did not want a Korean king, nor the Koreans a king of Quelpaert, so the custom suited both.

The political exiles could not leave the island, but were otherwise free and unsupervised. They could live where they liked and make their living as they pleased.

The native men were hunters, fishers, coast traders and smugglers. They stayed away from the women as much as possible, either at sea or in the mountain forest, and left all land work to them.

The rocky volcanic soil gave scanty crops of millet, and that only in fields built up of boulder walls filled with earth carried in baskets. Nearly all cereal food was brought sixty miles from the nearest point on the mainland, often a week's journey through the twisting currents and the rough sea which prevailed along that part of the coast.

The women were fine swimmers and divers. Young and old would swim out through the breakers, leave a basket buoyed by gourds floating on the surface and dive fathoms down for abalone shell or a bunch of edible seaweed. They would cut it out with a short sickle (the same weapon they used on the men when annoyed), attach an empty gourd to it, drop the stone with which they had weighted the gourd and let it float to the surface to be picked up when they were ready to come up themselves. They could swim and float about for hours, dive as simply as a duck, and work or move about from place to place under the water as easily and as long as so many sea fowl. While resting on the surface they would keep up a monotonous

whistling in different keys to warn chance men in the fishing boats to keep their distance.

The island is obviously a volcano. All around the coast are sunken, needle-pointed reefs. The foreshore is the same formation and almost impossible to walk on except by the worn trails. The whole island rises abruptly through chains of foothills to the crater of Hanra-San (pronounced Halla-San), the Mt. Auckland of our maps, 6,558 feet high.

The " dragon's gates," two great rifts, fall from the top of the mountain to the northern and southern coasts. Over their beds of lava, small streams flow which were said to come from a lake in the crater. There were hunters who claimed to have seen the lake, but it was a sacred and dangerous spot that most people avoided

According to Korean history, which is so full of myths that it is difficult to judge the historic value of anything, in a vague year of an equally vague reign, a huge commotion took place in the sea off the southern coast, and a great mountain arose, spouting fire. When the flames had cooled, the three families of Ko, Pu and Yang came up from three caves and peopled the island as rulers, nobles and peasants, respectively. These first men, become demigods, still lived on the shores of the crater lake. Sometimes they allowed themselves to be seen, sometimes they punished the intruder.

The Ko family were the ancient kings of Quelpaert, which is exactly why I asked Ko Hei Kiung to go along, hoping that his name would weigh more heavily than a hundred ragamuffin soldiers with single-shot rifles salvaged from the Franco-Prussian war. His family, one of the most noble in Korea, still worshipped theoretically at the temple built

over the entrance to the cave from which their founder came out to be king.

There are three cities on the island. The capital, Ché-ju, on the northern shore, raises its walls and towers almost from the water, all overgrown with ivy, centuries old, and its roofs nearly hidden by huge salisburia trees, pomegranates of extraordinary size, with groves of pummelo or shattuck, and bitter oranges.

Higher up on the slopes of the lava hills, groups of low houses appear, built of cobblestones and bits of lava, with heavy rocks and rope nets protecting the thatched roofs from the sea winds, like the cables stretched across Porto Rican roofs to hold them against hurricanes. Beyond are grassy slopes and higher still a thick tangle of bamboo and brier, a real jungle covering the higher peaks from Mt. Sarabon to Halla-San. There is plenty of game above, wild cattle, boar and deer, and wild ponies slender as deer, and with hoofs of iron from the jagged lava rocks. The islanders lasso them as needed and break them with a stout club, before shipping them to the mainland as tame.

Of the other two walled towns the important one was Tai-jung, as the seat of a sort of rival government. Tai-jung is evidently the " Tadiane " of Hendrick Hamel, a Dutch trader who was wrecked not far from the town in the *Sparrow Hawk* in 1653. His description, under the title of " Narrative of an Unlucky Voyage " is the only description that existed thirty years ago, and is accurate, for his errors can be identified as only misunderstanding. For example, he calls Ché-ju " the town of Moggan or Moksa." Evidently his captors told him they were taking him to the Mo-gwan or Moksa, that is, the governor, who has always had his residence

in the old capital. Nothing had ever been published about this island except this Hamel narrative, and references to it in ships' logs, or a brief account of the adventures of two American missionaries who were landed and promptly expelled.

The " Sailing Directions " for 1904, quoting from the survey of Capt. Sir E. Belcher, H.M.S. *Samarang*, state that " the island is about forty miles long, seventeen in breadth, oval in shape and of great height, with only one anchorage for sailing vessels, at the east end between Quelpaert and Beaufort Island."

In and around the three towns and in the narrow strip between sea and mountain lived a population computed by the Korean government at a hundred thousand. The Koreans had no basis at all for their calculation, mine was of the crudest, and as the British survey is undoubtedly correct the population was probably much lower than that, but with the whole island in unanimous rebellion, and one hundred unreliable men to restore peace and keep order, they certainly looked numerous.

It looked very ugly. The first rumours of trouble reached Seoul in May, through a trading steamer which had been fired on and driven off, but hearing nothing from the acting governor, the emperor had not paid any attention to it. A month later a telegram reached the French legation with a frantic appeal for help from two priests who had settled in Ché-ju the year before. From their account the insurgents had called over a large force of turbulent characters from the mainland, captured or destroyed all native boats by which messages could get over, and imprisoned the acting governor. They also reported that the Japanese on the island were in sympathy with the disturbance, were

urging the rebels to kill the two foreigners and their adherents and promising the support of the Japanese navy in case of foreign intervention. No news of the uprising had leaked out through the Japanese in our direction, for those who frequented the island were of a type that is not in communication with its officials. These two priests apparently had met with great success in their mission, for there were still Christians on the island exiled during the great persecution and they had made many new converts. For some reason that was not yet clear, the insurgent movement had taken the form of a drive against the Christians, who had withdrawn to Ché-ju, and were defending the town under the leadership of the two priests. They had armed themselves, some of the townspeople and a handful of the governor's police, with antiquated weapons from the government arsenal, and were besieged by a wild mob estimated at ten thousand islanders, malcontents and brigands from the mainland.

That is what started the two French gunboats to the rescue. They beat my old tramp steamer in the race but by a margin too narrow to take control or do anything more than open communication with the missionaries and take aboard some Christians. I informed the French senior officer of my authority, and proceeded to land my men on the narrow water front, under the walls of a dead city. Hardly had the priests' messenger got through the blockade to the nearest telegraph office on the mainland, when the women of the town, fearing starvation, opened the city gates at night to the rebels and led a complete massacre of the defenders. Not a shot nor a sign of life came from the walls. The city gates hung wide open and the narrow streets were cumbered with dead bodies. I counted a group of ninety, young

and old of both sexes, all horribly mutilated, before the governor's gate on the market place, where they had been lying for ten days in rain and sun. Not a living soul showed in the town till after we had entered, stored our provisions and ammunition, closed the gates and placed sentries on the walls. The two priests had survived. From one and a few eye-witnesses of the massacre I got the story of that night, ten days before. Everyone who had a grievance, public or private, or a debt, seized his opportunity and killed and looted, ally or enemy alike. When the destruction was complete, the victors withdrew from the town to the foothills to see what would happen next. Except the few Christians who had escaped there was not a man in town. There was no one to bury the dead, and my soldiers would refuse to do it. I knew that and did not want to risk a mutiny right at the start. It was another week before I could capture and pay enough coolies to give the bodies decent burial, and I had to live just where they were thickest, in the governor's palace. I found a room opening on the garden as far away from them as I could, but even there a wretched bird flew over my table and dropped a long mesh of hair in my food with a bit of skull attached. Outside the town masses of men showed up on all the hills to landward ; all day long, after the first day and night, they kept a dropping fire of jingals and mediaeval bronze cannon, which generally fell short of the walls ; every time I showed myself a quite recognizable rifle shot, a little more accurate, warned me not to stand too long in one place. Fortunately, the average Japanese boatman is no better with foreign shooting weapons than the Koreans. All night, flames from some burning house or village and the campfires

all over the hills warned us that the siege might begin again if the rebel leaders found out how few we were. The presence of the *Surprise* and *Alouette* kept them in doubt until it was too late for them to act. Captain de Mornay was a thorough sportsman. As soon as I had got into the town he sent an officer to say that he yielded " to Korean government authority " and left the situation in my hands. Having given his official message, the young officer asked if he might give a private one as man to man, and told me that the French officers were much concerned by the appearance and lack of discipline of my soldiers. They would withdraw the two gunboats if I required it, but would prefer to stand by in case of need. They did not quite like " to leave a white man in such a mess." He then brought out a bundle containing rockets and flares for use in an emergency at night and signal pennants for day use. They would either send in boats to bring us off, give us a landing party to assist or throw a few shells over toward the dense crowds on the hills, which were quite visible to them with a telescope. They also wanted to know if I were adequately armed " even against my own men " and well supplied with decent food. I did not have to use their offer, but I was grateful for it and much more comfortable about the result of my campaign. The first thing to do was to impress the watchers outside that we had a military force and that it was alert, so I had the whole hundred move about singly, as sentries on the walls. Next, one of my young officers came and told me that the commanding officer claimed to have secret instructions not to fight. He was to withdraw if there was any danger. He also reported that the soldiers were discussing going off to the steamer and

returning to the mainland without their officers and leaving me there. It began to seem that we must meet these simple souls with guile. I sent our only vessel away and let them know it had gone to bring more troops. The two French priests and the acting governor had been saved as prisoners by the influence of one of the political exiles, a Seoul man, a leader in the local revolution, who had been implicated in the murder of the queen in 1894. His wider experience showed him that the killing of foreigners was a much more serious matter than a simple revolt against unjust taxation. It had also come out that the Christian massacre was accidental to the real revolt, and not a primary factor. Taxes in Quelpaert were sporadic. They were always unpopular and rarely collected. Some years before my time there had been a tax revolt and the collectors had been driven off the island. An imperial proclamation then had relieved the " loyal islanders " of all back taxation, and none had been collected since. Early in this year one of that infernal tribe of go-getters, which is not confined to the United States, had offered to the emperor to produce a much-needed sum for the privy purse by collecting all back taxes in Quelpaert, including those remitted years before. On arrival he had invented some new ones in addition. When the islanders objected he discovered that in former times he had been a follower of a French missionary and joined up again with the Christians ; it was even alleged that, unknown to the priests, he had promised exemption from taxes for native Christians. When the revolt came he had a place of refuge and Christianity became an issue in the fighting. We promptly suppressed the tax collector who was only too glad to get away, and I got a message to

the Seoul exile, through one of my faithful servants, that I was grateful to him for his intervention on behalf of the missionaries, and could say the same on behalf of the French legation, and that I would remember it when I began to wipe out the insurgents. I also let him know that heavy reinforcements were on the way, but that I did not propose to wait for them. My man was instructed to let it drop that I was an ambitious young person who did not want the general arriving with the new troops to take credit for suppressing the revolt, so I might be expected to attack at any moment with what men I had, who were plenty to handle undisciplined mobs. My man was also to say in the course of his gossip that I was asking the Japanese government to send over and arrest any Japanese who might be on the island, suspecting that anyone there would not face the risk. I further let it be known that before starting a general slaughter I wanted assurance that Mr. Ko would be unmolested if he went out to worship at the shrine of his ancestors, as everybody realized was his duty, and which it would be sacrilege to prevent.

Through the same young officer-conspirator who arranged the messages, I organized drills outside the walls, for the besiegers were getting courage and coming down too close. The commanding officer was not at all inclined to show his ignorance by drilling the men ; I had it pointed out to him that it was very dangerous not to drill them, for if they remained idle they might quite easily mutiny and kill us all. In his innocence he turned the drill over to the lieutenant. My lieutenant opined that if anybody hurt our ruffians they would fight. So we took them for a walk outside the walls hoping for the worst. We drilled up and down the

countryside with fixed bayonets at the double, none of the hostile groups waited for us to come up, and none of the Japanese snipers hit me. It was comic opera, perhaps, but when I thought of that I also thought of the look of the shambles through which we had passed the day we landed. Presently the poison I had sent out in my messages began to work. The exiled leader saw visions of amnesty because of his intervention on behalf of the priests and the governor. Then more messages went out, addressed to no one in particular, just memoranda in which I discussed with myself the utility of executing certain leaders named in the paper as against the guarantee of trial if they surrendered, with consideration of any extenuating circumstances, which I allowed to be lost and found by the rebels. That also had its effect and presently requests for private interviews began to come in. Once negotiations had started, I felt they could be kept alive till the arrival of the two hundred and fifty trained troops I had sent for.

As soon as I believed that these could not be very far off I got out a proclamation, warning the people of the island that I was about to begin a drive with my soldiers, so that all honest men might remain indoors. In it I said that the emperor would listen to grievances, and a committee might come in to present them, but that my special object was to catch the leaders of the revolt, whose names were all in my possession, though even to these I would guarantee a fair trial by the supreme court at Seoul.

I announced that if these chiefs surrendered voluntarily it would be in their favour. If they were brought in prisoners by loyal subjects, the latter would be remembered ; but I added that in any case the revolt was now over and I intended

to clean up the guilty immediately, before the new troops arrived, in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. It was not such a long chance, for the two gunboats still hovered off the coast, as near as weather permitted, and the islanders all knew what they were, even if they did not know that they were not Korean and part of my force. Negotiations were well on, when a pompous and much uniformed colonel turned up with the regiment I had asked for. A number of leaders gave themselves up ; some were arrested, and the rest fled in Japanese fishing boats.

We arranged then for a surrender of the whole rebel army. They were to come in and deliver their weapons, listen to an address from our gallant and imposing colonel, and go home. The two gunboats left ; the priests settled down and reopened their mission, and I put thirteen principal captives on board my steamer, perfectly free of the ship and only under guard on the way up to Seoul, when we reached port.

The final grand tableau of my little comic-opera war was really impressive. Thousands of rebels came in ; I could only estimate them in their huddled masses. They were armed with prehistoric weapons. Some wore armour made of iron plates fastened to a cumbersome leather tunic or to a quilted and wadded cotton cloak. Some were dressed in leather cloaks with hairy dog-skin hats, like the coon-skin caps of American pioneer riflemen, the tail of the dog dangling over the shoulders. Some had bows and iron-tipped arrows ; others had the usual Korean matchlock guns. Many had spears and flails, made of a short cudgel studded with iron points fastened by two interlocking rings to a long staff. There were many jingals, those

long-barrelled Malay and Chinese fortress guns, which have to be laid on a wall or a heap of rocks to fire them, and are loaded with a handful of slugs, scrap iron or stones. There was a museum collection of small bronze hand cannon, of great age. They were real cannon, of Chinese origin, big enough to carry an impressive load, and small enough to be taken from place to place on the back of one man or even one small one in each hand. Also, there were some shotguns of Japanese make and a Murata army rifle, of the latest model. A hundred well-disciplined native soldiers under trustworthy officers would have had no trouble with them, even with thousands of them, for they had nothing that could come within range even of the wretched Berdan and Gras survivals of 1870 that a French government had permitted to be sold for the equipment of the Korean army. My hundred tatterdemalions with their smarter city reinforcements looked like an army and like real soldiers beside these island scarecrows. My weakness was treachery within, rather than rebel numbers. An added weakness always was my unwillingness to use force with the Koreans. I was trying to save and rebuild.

After the surrender, I left them in the hands of the colonel and the new governor who had come down with him, after a full understanding with them that there were to be no reprisals and no taxes levied until a new tax law had been worked out and a commission sent down from Seoul to explain it.

I have always been sorry that the weeks I spent in Quelpaert were so full of other things that I had no chance to explore it. My visit there was probably the last of the Amazon tradition. A garrison remained until the Japanese occupation of Korea. After that, it is said, the island was fortified by the

Japanese government, and where their fortresses exist there is no exploring. Unless the missionaries gather something of its history, Quelpaert will remain a mystery as it was before.

The sequel to the war was the trial of the rebel leaders at Seoul. I wished it to be an exemplary trial. It should be the first illustration of the new order of justice in Korea. Beyond presenting a report to the emperor of the reasons of the revolt, what had happened and the circumstances under which the accused were presented for trial, I intended to have no part in it except to sit as an observer with the Korean judges and to see to it that the men had a proper defence and that witnesses were admitted in their favour as well as against them. The French legation asked for and obtained the privilege of having a representative present, because of the attack on the French missionaries. I did not like that. I wanted a Korean trial, without any feature that could be construed as foreign pressure. Next, the local Japanese reporters asserted a right to be present. They had no such right, of course, but I would have permitted it, for I wanted them to hear whatever evidence might be produced as to the presence of Japanese among the rebels or at the massacre of Christians. I suspected strongly that their wish to hear what was going on came from the same reason and might be connected with those Murata rifle bullets which were noticeable whenever I appeared on the walls and were never wasted on Korean soldiers.

I wanted their legation to ask as the French had done through the proper channels that they might be present, but they would not do that and the reporters and some soshi forced the door of the judges' room where we were in private session,

terrifying the native policemen on duty and throwing the judges into panic, for they were armed with sword canes, the usual Japanese civilian weapon. I explained once more that there were ordinary decencies to be observed, and when they still insisted on breaking up the court I threw them out personally and vigorously, which was the beginning of a new rabid newspaper campaign against me extending to the Tokyo press.

I was disappointed in the efficiency of our new model of justice. Seeing that I did not intend to try them myself, and would not testify though I knew their cases, so as to give them every possible chance, accused and witnesses looked me blandly in the eye and lied brazenly. Finally the chief justice turned to me and said that though he hated to disrupt the course of Western justice, he felt that an ever so slight return to primitive methods might give better results, and asked if he might threaten to use the paddle. It seemed to me that if he threatened it might show the prisoners that they had better not force the issue, and I consented to his ordering the paddles brought out, if he promised to accept defeat if they called his bluff, in which case I would agree to testify. The court servants brought out a kind of saw-buck over which the victim was to be held while being spanked, and the paddles. The effect was instantaneous. They all clamoured to be readmitted to examination as they had remembered something. The instruments were removed and the trial finished in an orderly manner, but it was the last trial on the Western model as well as the first.

Quelpaert brought two interesting new acquaintances. Admiral Pottier with his flagship *Redoutable* was a figure of the eighteenth-century sea fighters.

Under his sea-wolf bluster he was a shrewd diplomat. and under his weather-beaten skin he was a man of peace. He got for me the Cross of the Legion of Honour for preventing the bombardment of the island by his own ships and for keeping Korea out of the Boxer movement. When detailed to the China station to close a long career of diplomacy and action in the Mediterranean, he had selected as his flagship the oldest of old French ironclads, for he detested the discomforts of the new mechanical fighting machines. His quarters were fitted like a Paris apartment, and across the stern he had run out nothing less than a glassed balcony where he raised flowers. Ladies, when lunching or dining with the admiral (and he entertained like an ambassador), were warned by his aides that they must under no circumstances understand half of what he said, for he had a queer trick of speech, filling his brilliant conversation not only with hair-raising oaths but with quite impossible barrack-room terms, at which, if a lady took offence, she proved herself no lady, for she had no business to understand them. He was served aboard by a civilian butler-valet who had sailed with him, according to the tale, for over forty years, and with whom he stood in relations only possible with an old French or Italian family servant. The old valet had been with the admiral through all his most intimate experiences, and kept a stern eye on the admiral's stories.

" Admiral, you exaggerate," would come suddenly from the background, " You know it happened *this* way—— "

A spluttering of oaths from the admiral, and a fiery debate between the two old men was sure to follow, during which the service halted and the guests, if they knew the peculiarities of their host,

rocked with delight. The old gentleman was a museum piece ; he belonged at least a century back, for even his shrewd and kindly wisdom belonged to the great period of territorial rather than commercial empire building. He belonged with Clive.

On his staff was a Commander Vignaud, better known as Pierre Loti, a short little man, with high heels to give him stature, corsetted tightly as a belle of former days, cheeks and lips rouged like a modern flapper. It was incredible that any man could live under such studied rudeness and contempt as that of the sturdy Breton officers of the flagship. They disliked his effeminacy as only a blue-water sailor can detest such things ; they studied the insults in which they expressed their feelings as only a French courtier could—to remain well within bounds of civilized intercourse while making life unbearable for one whom they quite plainly believed to be unfit for the company of men. Yet it surely cannot be said that Bretons have no appreciation of the soul of a poet. Perhaps they prefer him bearded and bardlike.

The admiral did not even trouble to be civil. His language about Pierre Loti and to him was unstudied and without reserve.

REMCO BREUKER

Korea's Forgotten War:

APPROPRIATING AND SUBVERTING THE VIETNAM WAR IN KOREAN POPULAR IMAGININGS[1]

INTRODUCTION

Helicopter from the Maenghodae Division

One of the best films made in Korea during the cinema boom of the nineties and the noughties, is *Raybang* 라이방, a movie that would not have been made without the Vietnam War and that is in fact one large indirect reference to the South Korean participation in that war and the issues surrounding that participation. The title of the movie, *Raybang*, is the Korean pronunciation of the American brand of sunglasses Ray-Bans, made popular in Korea during the Vietnam War, when many soldiers would send home pictures of themselves wearing those sunglasses, purchased in the post exchanges (PX) of the US army.[2] In the movie, three taxi drivers try to find a way out of their economically difficult lives and finally settle on attempting to rob a wealthy woman in their neighbourhood. With the money, they plan to escape their poverty-ridden and dead-end lives to start all over again in Vietnam. One of the taxi drivers has an uncle who runs an army dump and has fought in Vietnam. This uncle dresses in fatigues as if he is still serving, offering advice to his nephew and staying in touch with other veterans. Never married and active in a socially little appreciated profession, he symbolizes the status of Vietnam veterans in contemporary Korean society: marginalized, unrecognized for their contribution to South Korea's economic growth and only accepted if they detach themselves from their war experiences (which is something the uncle cannot and will not do). *Raybang* is a subtle tribute to the unrecognized toils and sacrifices of the silent majority of hard-working men and women who never had any prospect of making good. In the movie, their sunglasses serve to demarcate the space between the outside world and its demands, and their inner space, which is filled with their dreams. Other elements in the movie, such as the distrust of one of the men, a university alumnus, of the domestic media and the economic and political analyses presented by the uncle, not only show

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Shin Hyunjoon 신현준 and Dr Kim Yerim 김예림, who helped me in thinking about the topic and who obtained articles for me which I would otherwise have not been able to consult in time. Professor Yook Youngsoo 육영수 commented on this article and had some very helpful suggestions, for which I am thankful.

2 It is now used as a generic term for any kind of sunglasses, in particular those that resemble the pilot sunglasses made popular during the early seventies. This example is from Hwang Sok-yong's first published short story *Camel's Eye*: "그는 믿기지 않는다는 듯이 라이방을 벗고 자세히 살핀 다음, 손가락에 끼워 운전수의 귓전에다 비벼 주었다."

a high degree of understanding about their position in South Korean society, but also reinforce the importance of the multivalent image of Vietnam in South Korean popular imaginings.

The story of the South Korean participation in the Vietnam War also offers insight into the interaction between professional and public or amateur views on history. I will argue that the mainstream professional views on the history of South Korean participation owe everything to the public/amateur views that preceded them. With the exception of a tiny number of professional historians (who furthermore have only recently started publishing on this subject), professional, official and public perceptions of the Vietnam War largely coincide, even if the significance read into it may be different. The historical understanding of the South Korean participation seems to have escaped a defining characteristic of post-Korean War South Korean historiography: the notion that in writing history, the historian (whether professional or amateur) should attempt to hold accountable persons (events) in order to arrive at a moral evaluation of a particular part of history. Despite the importance of the Vietnam War in Korean history, this did not happen with regard to historical narratives of the war in South Korea. Instead, the politics of suffering (the exploitation for political ends of human suffering) have determined and, I would add, obstructed the debate. It is this phenomenon that I wish to look into here as it will provide excellent insight into the junction of public, private, professional and official historiography.

This article mainly deals with the experiences of South Korean soldiers who went to Vietnam. As such, it deals only with male experiences. Yet, the Vietnam War was a war fought and experienced by women as much as by men. Moreover, the war was fought not only by Vietnamese, but also by Korean women, as one recent movie (*Sunny* 님은 먼 곳에) shows.[3] Korean women went to Vietnam for many of the same reasons Korean men went: to escape from poverty, chase the desire for change and adventure, grab an opportunity for success and wealth, or because they were forced by their jobs. The women who went there were entertainers, singers, dancers, musicians, prostitutes, businesswomen and merchants. Fortunately, the subject is not completely ignored,[4] although much research remains to be done on this subject to dispel the powerful myth that women in Vietnam were, like the myth says they are in most conflict situations, passive bystanders or victims. This article, however, is not the place to do that.

It should be mentioned here that the exploitation and suffering of certain groups for political ends is a widespread phenomenon. Not only in Korean history (the way the comfort women's suffering has been mobilized in the interest of the nation comes to mind), but particularly so in post-colonial contexts. Examples of American reactions to the Vietnam War, Dutch denials of the horrors wrought by colonial domination in Indonesia or Japanese failures to come to terms with the atrocities committed during World War II (and in Korea) come to mind – a complete list of similar cases would be virtually endless. These cases are united by a mechanism that prioritizes (and ultimately exclusively recognizes) the suffering of the perpetrators and depends on the (tacit) approval of the public.

The participation of South Korean army units in the Vietnam War is a largely forgotten event in South Korean popular imaginings, even if the financial benefits associated with what was then called the *wŏllam p'abyŏng* 越南派兵 (dispatch of troops to Vietnam) made possible

3 In this movie by Yi Chunik, the female protagonist (Suni or Sunny) goes to Vietnam to find her husband, sleep with him and bring his seed home in her womb to start a family, all on the insistence of her mother-in-law. Although I read *Sunny* at first as not much more than a (particularly well-executed) tearjerker, the struggles of a young married woman with patriarchy (enforced by older women) and her journey from a virginal performer to an experienced entertainer who uses her body to entice men in order to realize her objectives, make this movie stand out between similarly themed movies. I owe the suggestion not to dismiss *Sunny* as a work of art that sincerely engages with these problems to Dr Choi Kyeong-Hee, which I gratefully acknowledge here. As a film dealing with the subject of women going to war in Vietnam, it is an important contribution. As a film dealing with the ROK participation in the Vietnam War, it is much less so for reasons I will explain later. Just before this issue of *Korean Histories* went to press, an article was published that examined two South Korean films dealing with the Vietnam War, one of which was *Sunny*. The author explains *Sunny* as a movie that turns the battlefront into a home front, thus removing the ideological aura of the Vietnam War for Korea from the historical experience. Although that article is a thoughtful study which lays bare several links between popular culture and the Vietnam War in South Korea, I cannot but disagree with this particular statement. As I will argue, the process of turning the Vietnam War into a Korean affair (a process encountered in literature and historiography as well) is *ipso facto* ideological by harnessing the historical experience of the South Korean participation in the Vietnam War in narratives of South Korean development. A particular poignant example is a newspaper article that includes the 350,000 ROK soldiers who went to fight in Vietnam as part of the Korean diaspora, turning an act of military aggression into a cause of pride. See Im Sunman 임순만, "창간 20주년 맞아 '한국인 디아스포라의 재발견' 특집 시리즈," 국민일보 10 December, 2008, p. 41; Youngju Ryu, "Korea's Vietnam: Popular Culture, Patriarchy, Intertextuality," *Review of Korean Studies* 29.3 (2009): pp. 101-123.

4 Kim Hyŏna 김현아, *Chŏnjaeng-gwa yŏsŏng: Han'guk chŏnjaeng-gwa Paet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng sog-ŭi yŏsŏng, kiŏk, chaehyŏn* 전쟁과 여성: 한국 전쟁과 베트남 전쟁 속의 여성, 기억, 재현 (Seoul: Yŏrŭm ŏndŏk 여름언덕, 2004).

South Korea's remarkable economic growth during the late sixties and seventies. The reluctance in popular media to reminisce about the Korean participation in the Vietnam War – where an estimated total of 350,000 South Korean soldiers were deployed during a ten-year period, there never being less than 50,000 soldiers for most of this period – is tied to a complex set of perceptions of Vietnam, the Vietnam War and Korea's role in it. This reluctance is also reflected in the lack of historical studies confronting this essential part of post-war South Korean history.[5] Ironically, in more recent decades South Korea has looked at Vietnam with renewed interest, seeing it as a country to make investments in, to get cheap but educated labour from and to import brides from. Vietnam is also looked upon as a mirror, both with regard to Korea's future as an already unified country and with a sense of nostalgia as a developing country. The presence of historical memories of Vietnam – a country where 350,000 ROK soldiers fought and over 5,000 died – is nonetheless surprisingly limited.

Inscription that says that all invaders of Vietnam with blood on their hands will not return home. Still from R-Point (2004)

State censorship concerning historical research about the Vietnam War can offer no more than a partial explanation for this phenomenon.[6] The potential embarrassment for the ROK government is still enormous: massacres committed by ROK troops in Vietnam are known to have happened. Given South Korea's experience of US massacres during the Korean War, the ROK government would find itself in a very awkward position if it were to be accused of similar atrocities by the Vietnamese government.[7] As a result, censorship of academic research did exist and the Vietnam War is still a much neglected topic in Korean academia.[8] Censorship has been lifted for more than a decade, but the Vietnam War is still as absent as ever in South Korean popular imaginations. The only place where the Vietnam War and the South Korean participation in it seem to be remembered, is in the arts, in particular literature and cinema, and even then not in any abundance. In this article, I will scrutinize literary and cinematic perceptions of the Korean participation in the Vietnam War against the backdrop of contemporary relations between South-Korea and Vietnam. This backdrop – which is inhabited by immigrant

5 Comprehensive histories of modern Korea barely pay any attention to the Vietnam War and the consequences the ROK army's presence had. For an insightful overview of the lacunae in research on the Vietnam War in South Korea, see Pak T'aegyun 박태균, "Han'guk-kun-ui Pet'ŭnamjŏn ch'amjŏn 한국군의 베트남전 참전," *Yŏksa pip'yŏng* 역사비평 80 (2007): pp. 288-311.

6 Pak T'aegyun 박태균, "Han'guk-kun-ui Pet'ŭnamjŏn ch'amjŏn," pp. 288-311.

7 As indeed happened several times. It needs to be pointed out here that the ROK government was initially opposed to an in-depth investigation of the Nogŭn-ri massacre. Charles J. Hanley, Sang-Hun Choe and Martha Mendoza, *The Bridge at No Gun Ri: A Hidden Nightmare from the Korean War* (New York: Holt, 2001). For an account of massacres perpetrated by ROK troops, see Kwon, Heonik, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai (*Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

8 Most research focuses either on technical issues, such as the minutiae of the decision-making processes leading to the South-Korean participation, or positions itself squarely behind the then government, citing the need to fight communism in Asia. A few scholars have undertaken the task of charting the influence of the Vietnam War on the South Korean economy (and culture), but their work, valuable though it is, has not (yet) been made part of mainstream historical narratives in South Korea or abroad. These articles are particularly worth reading: Pak T'aegyun, "Han'guk-kun-ui Pet'ŭnamjŏn ch'amjŏn," pp. 288-311; Ch'oe Ch'ŏnggi 최정기, "Han'guk-kun-ŭi Pet'ŭnamjŏn ch'amjŏn, ottŏk'e kiŏk-toego innŭn-ga? Kongshikchŏk kiŏk-kwa taehang kiŏg-ŭi ch'airŭl chungshim-ŭro 한국군의 베트남전 참전, 어떻게 기억되고 있는가? - 공식적인 기억과 대항기억의 차이를 중심으로," *Minjujuŭi–wa in'gwŏn* 민주주의와 인권9. 1(2009): pp. 65-92; Yun Ch'ungno 윤충로, "Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng ch'amjon kunin-ŭi chiphapchŏk chŏngch'esŏng hyŏngsŏng-gwa chibae ideollogi-ŭi chaesaengsan 베트남전쟁 참전 군인의 집합적 정체성 형성과 지배 이데올로기의 재생산," *Kyŏngje-wa sahoe*경제와사회76 (2007): pp. 196-221, 324; idem, "P'awŏl kisulcha-ŭi Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng kyŏnghŏm-gwa saenghwal segye-ŭi pyŏnhwa파월(派越) 기술자의 베트남전쟁 경험과 생활세계의 변화," *Sahoe-wa yŏksa* 사회와역사71 (2006): pp. 217-250; idem, "Itch'in chŏnjaeng, itch'in saramdŭl: 'kunpŏn-omnŭn kunin' p'awŏl kisulcha-ŭi Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng iyagi 잊힌 전쟁, 잊힌 사람들 - '군번없는 군인' 파월기술자의 베트남전쟁 이야기," *Mal*말248 (2007): pp. 72-77; idem, 'Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng shigi 'Wŏllam chaebŏl'ŭi hyŏngsŏng-gwa p'awŏl kisulcha-ŭi chŏhang: Hanjin-gŭrup-ŭl chungshim-ŭro베트남전쟁 시기 '월남재벌'의 형성과 파월(派越)기술자의 저항 - 한진그룹의 사례를 중심으로," *Sahow-wa yŏksa* 사회와역사79: (2008): pp. 93-128. Finally, Kim Yerim has written about the formative influence the Vietnam War exercised in the formation of middle class life in South Korea in the sixties and seventies: Kim Yerim 김예림, "1960nyŏndae chunghuban kaebal naesyŏnŏllijŭm-gwa chungsanch'ŭng kajŏng p'ant'aji-ŭi munhwa chŏngch'ihak 1960년대 중후반 개발 내셔널리즘과 중산층 가정 판타지의 문화정치학," in "*Naengjŏn Ashia-ŭi munhwa p'unggyŏng 2: 1960-1970nyŏndae* 냉전 아시아의 문화풍경 2 - 1960~1970년대, edited by Sŏnggonghoedae Tong-Ashia yŏn'guso 성공회대 동아시아연구소 (Seoul: Hyŏnshil munhwa yŏn'gu 현실문화연구, 2009), pp. 403-431.

labourers, import brides, expatriate businessmen and investors, war veterans, popular language and culture guidebooks, and North Koreans in transit – places the virtual absence of shared memories in South Korea of the Vietnam War in an intricate and interesting perspective, one that obfuscates rather than clarifies matters. Such a perspective moreover begs the question how it is possible that one of the defining events of Park Chung-Hee's 박정희 presidency, and indeed of modern Korean history, has remained so neglected, while at the same time being so accessible. The majority of Vietnam veterans are still alive, yet other than through their activities in (now also web-based) veteran associations for which there is little interest outside of the group of veterans themselves, they are not very visible in South Korean society as a significant social group.

The neglect that has befallen the role of the Vietnam War as the economic catalyst in the developing economies in Asia during the sixties and seventies is mirrored in the disregard in South Korea for the Korean participation in this war. The wealth of American literature and movies on the Vietnam War contrasts sharply with its virtual absence in South Korea.[9] Australia, which sent less than 4,500 soldiers to Vietnam, also produced so-called Vietnam War literature.[10] South Korean literature has produced just a handful of novels or novellas dealing with the Vietnam War, although among these novels, *The Shadow of Arms* by Hwang Sok-yong is one of the masterworks of postwar Korean literature. Similarly, Korean cinema, despite experiencing a boom in the last two decades and despite having a fixation with historically themed movies, has not produced many movies that deal with the Vietnam War. Moreover, among the movies that in one way or another deal with Vietnam and the war, there are no truly excellent movies, no movie that is in any way comparable with Hwang's *The Shadow of Arms*. Interestingly, American literature on the Vietnam War generally deals with the experiences of individual soldiers during and after the war, while its Korean counterpart displays a very strong awareness of the larger international circumstances, which made the individual soldiers in their own estimation in fact 'American mercenaries.' [11] This awareness contrasts sharply with the selective remembrance the Korean participation has encountered in Korea itself, where that same awareness is almost completely lacking. It is this tension between the awareness of the position of the Korean soldier in Vietnam (both by himself and by the nation that sent him there) and his crucial contribution to the economic and social development of Korea on the one hand, and the oblivion to which he was sentenced in Korea after the war on the other hand that is at the centre of this article.

SOUTH KOREAN TROOPS IN VIETNAM, 1966-1975: HISTORICAL PERCEPTIONS

When in 1965 the first Korean combat troops were shipped out to Vietnam (after an initial commitment in 1964 of 130 military instructors and 10 Taekwondo instructors),[12] President Park Chung-Hee in his farewell speech likened the leaving soldiers to a crusader army, clearly signifying the epochal nature of their mission. Park's decision to respond positively to Lyndon Johnson's call for troops was considered to be 'inevitable,' as it would enable the ROK government to repay the sixteen countries that had come to the ROK's military aid in 1950.[13] While this was quickly realized by the president and his advisors,[14] however, it was at the same time decided that the South Korean troops would not come cheap for the US.[15] According to one high-ranking bureaucrat in the Park administration, Vietnam was "Korea's El Dorado, where riches could be gained instantly."[16] Besides the obvious economic benefits associated with participating in the Vietnam War, the disappearance of security concerns related to a possible withdrawal of US troops from the peninsula was

9 John Newman with Ann Hilfinger, *Vietnam War Literature: An Annotated Bibliography of Imaginative Works about Americans Fighting in Vietnam* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1988).

10 Jeff Doyle, Jeffrey Grey, and Peter Pierce, *Australia's Vietnam War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press Consortium, 2002).

11 Pak Jinim, *Narratives of the Vietnam War by Korean and American writers* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007).

12 Ironically, the export of Taekwondo to Vietnam during the war is celebrated as a positive achievement in South Korea. See Pak Chŏngjin 박정진, "Mu-rŭl t'onghae pon Han'guk munhwa: Han'gug-ŭi ch'oego- bŭrandŭ T'aegwŏndo 武를 통해 본 한국문화: 15. 한국의 최고 브랜드," *Segye ilbo* 세계일보, 23 September 2009, pp. 26-32.

13 Pak Jinim, *Narratives of the Vietnam War,* p. 78; Robert M Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's "More Flags,"*(Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Company, Inc.); Ch'oe Chŏnggi, "Han'guk-kun-ŭi Pet'ŭnamjŏn ch'amjŏn, ottŏk'e kiŏk-toego innŭn-ga?" pp. 65-92.

14 Kyudok Hong, *Unequal Partners: ROK-US Relations during the Vietnam War* (PhD. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1991).

15 Although the impact of the Vietnam War on Korea's economic development has been decidedly understudied, the decision-making processes leading to South Korean participation have been studied rather intensively.

16 Yun Ch'ungno, Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng shigi 'Wŏllam chaebŏl'ŭi hyŏngsŏng," p. 96.

South Korean entertainers in Vietnam. Still from Sunny (2008)

also taken into account.[17] Participation was furthermore considered to exercise a beneficial influence on domestic solidarity, constituting an effective means of countering the spread of communism in Asia.[18] The point that North and South Vietnam also furnished a compelling example to the Korean situation hardly needs to be made. Historians agree that security concerns and economic profit were the main reasons why the South Korean government agreed to send troops to Vietnam.[19] Economic benefits consisted of direct and indirect US financial aid, a per capita remittance for each soldier sent, the pay for the soldiers, advantageous loans, more favourable conditions for Korean export goods on the US market and the chance to manufacture and sell Korean products in Vietnam to the US army. Although Park's appraisal of the economic opportunities South Korea would gain on account of its participation in the Vietnam War – which were based on the example of the enormous profits Japan made during the Korean War – was correct, ironically Japan (which did not send troops to Vietnam) would make ten times more profit from the Vietnam War than South Korea.[20] Nonetheless, the South Korean economy was quite literally built on the economic profits generated by the Vietnam War and it is probably not an exaggeration to suppose that the miracle on the Han would not have taken place had South Korean troops not served in the Vietnam War.[21] Interestingly, there have been only very few analyses that stress the importance of the Vietnam War for the emergence of the economic miracle in South Korea (and in other Asian countries).[22] A representative general history of Korea (one of the best-selling histories of Korea in Korea) states the following:

> *The dispatch of troops to Vietnam was criticized on the ground that it was like 'selling the blood of our young people' and indeed many soldiers died over there, while there are even now veterans who suffer all kinds of after-effects caused by the defoliants [used in Vietnam], but it also considerably helped along economic development. Construction companies penetrated Vietnam which opened the way for the export of labourers, and after the war these labourers and their installations came to penetrate the Middle East. Leaning on the special privileges associated with the Vietnam War, economic development began to become visible after the second half of the sixties.*[23]

This view of Korea's economic development attributes much more weight to other factors, such as Park Chung-Hee's administrative policies (in which the state planned

17 See for instance Ch'oe Chŏnggi, "Han'guk-kun-ŭi Pet'ŭnamjŏn ch'amjŏn, ottŏk'e kiŏk-toego innŭn-ga?" p. 76. According to a 2004 report by the Ministry of Defense, there were three reasons why South Korea decided to intervene in the Vietnam War: 1. the mission served the strengthening of domestic political stability and international (US) ties; 2. to raise the strategic and fighting capabilities of the ROK army and increase its military self-reliance; 3. to obtain economic support and cooperation from US and to secure special prerogatives connected to Vietnam mission, which would in effect mean the establishment of the foundations needed for rapid economic growth. It was also noted in the same report that the defeat in Vietnam was used for propaganda purposes in order to strengthen authoritarian rule in South Korea. See Kukpangbu (ed.), *Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng-gwa Han'guk-kun* (Seoul: Kunsa p'yŏnch'an yŏn'guso 군사편찬연구소, 2004).

18 Ch'oe Chŏnggi, "Han'guk-kun-ŭi Pet'ŭnamjŏn ch'amjŏn, ottŏk'e kiŏk-toego innŭn-ga?" p. 76.

19 Pak T'aegyun, "Han'guk-kun-ui Pet'ŭnamjŏn ch'amjŏn," pp. pp. 288-311.

20 Kyudok Hong, *Unequal Partners* ; Richard Stubbs, *Rethinking Asia's Economic Miracle: The Political Economy of War, Prosperity and Crisis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Ch. 4.

21 Stubbs, *Rethinking Asia's Economic Miracle*. See in particular Chapter 4 "The Vietnam War as economic catalyst."

22 Stubbs, *Rethinking Asia's Economic Miracle*, Ch. 4; Woo, Jung-en, *Race to the Swift: State and Finance in Korean Industrialization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 86.

23 Han Young-woo (Han Yŏngu), *Tashi ch'annŭn uri yŏksa* (revised edition, Seoul: Kyŏngsewŏn, 2005), p. 594.

and led the economy), American development aid (while neglecting to specify how Vietnam War-related spending boosted regional economies in Asia) and the virtues of the export-oriented economy.[24] As in the example cited above, one paragraph is the length usually devoted to the Korean participation in the Vietnam War.[25] The successful penetration of Vietnam by Korean construction companies is seen as the first step to South Korea's remarkable economic growth and as such celebrated. Any attention to non-economic details is reserved for the consequences suffered by veterans, whose illnesses and traumas have never been recognized by the government.[26] In most accounts of the Vietnam War (and certainly in the most influential ones), criticism of the government is aimed at its neglect of its loyal soldiers, not at the decision to go to Vietnam and fight. The critical attitude characterizing much modern historiography has been entirely focused on domestic issues connected to the Vietnam War, blurring its international aspects.

Domestically, the consensus among professional and official historians is that both for economic and security-related reasons, South Korea did not have any option but to send troops to Vietnam. Even when acknowledging the Vietnamese suffering that resulted from this decision, which of course was allowed to stand for a decade, the tone of the debates emphasizes that the Koreans themselves suffered as much as the Vietnamese (if not more: the peninsula has still not been unified after all). There are roughly three categories of Korean suffering routinely invoked in discussions of the Vietnam War: 1. Korean casualties (over 5,000 soldiers died in Vietnam and many more were wounded); 2. traumatized and wounded veterans 3. the fact that the training and experience gained by the ROK army in Vietnam was used against its own people when troops were put on the streets during the suppression of the Kwangju rebellion (when Vietnam veteran Chun Doo Hwan was president). This last point in particular is noteworthy. It is indeed true that the ROK army gained the skills, weapons and means to crack down on the insurgents in Kwangju in Vietnam. However, such a perception – that the Vietnam War caused the bloodshed in Kwangju – also makes clear to what extent the public ignores the consequences of the Korean participation in the Vietnam War for Vietnam itself. It is hard to imagine that such a bold statement, which completely passes over in silence any Vietnamese suffering, would otherwise be possible. At the same time, the consequences of the participation in the war that were beneficial to Korea are also not acknowledged, not even by left-leaning scholars.

Table 1 contains the number of ROK troops that served in Vietnam between 1964 and 1972. Both the soldiers themselves and the Korean government were paid by the US per soldier sent overseas; in addition, the ROK benefitted in several direct and indirect ways from increased US funding and from preferential treatment by the US. It goes without saying, then, that the full economic impact

24 Stubbs, *Rethinking Asia's economic miracle*, Ch. 4.

25 This is also true for South Korean histories of Vietnam. While such works treat the Vietnam War in detail, the Korean participation in this war is quickly glossed over. See for instance Yu Insŏn류인선, *Pet'ŭnam-sa* 베트남사 (Seoul: Minŭmsa민음사, 1987); Song Chŏngnam송정남, *Pet'ŭnam-ŭi yŏksa* 베트남의 역사 (Pusan: Pusan taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu 부산대학교출판부, 2001; Ch'oe Pyŏnguk 최병욱, *(Ch'oe Pyŏnguk-gwa hamkke ilgngŭn) Pet'ŭnam hyŏndaesa* 베트남 근현대사 - 최병욱 교수와 함께 읽는 (Seoul: Ch'angbi 창비, 2008). An exception to some degree is Yu Insŏn 유인선, *Saero ssŭn Pet'ŭnam-sa* 새로 쓴 베트남의 역사 (Seoul: Isan 이산, 2002). Han Honggu's *Taehan min'guk-sa 2: Arirang Kim San-esŏ Wŏllam Kim Sangsa-kkachi* 대한민국사 2 - 아리랑 김산에서 월남 김상사까지 (Seoul: Hangyŏre shinmunsa, 2003) is the only general history (although focused on a limited number of themes and by no means comprehensive) that takes issue with the victim consciousness that pervades perceptions of popular and professional Korean histories . In a provocative chapter Han Honggu deals with the Korean involvement in the Vietnam War. The title of this chapter is "From Arirang Kim San to Merchant Kim from Vietnam," juxtaposing the life of a Korean communist guerrilla in Manchuria with the economic profits derived from the ROK's army mercenary activities in Vietnam. It should incidentally not pass unnoticed that this book was published by the Hangyŏre company, whose weekly *Hangyŏre 21* initiated the debate about Korean atrocities committed in Vietnam.

26 The articles by Yun Ch'ungno have remedied this situation to some extent. In several articles he makes use of history based on archival research and oral history to compile pictures of the formative influence of the Vietnam experience on Korean society and the growth of its export-oriented economy. Through interviews with technicians who went to Vietnam and whom he called "soldiers without service numbers," Yun established that these men shared their motivation to go to Vietnam with the ROK soldiers. For them too escape from poverty, new professional experiences and an escape from the daily drudge of their lives at home were the main reasons to go to Vietnam. Yun's research offers an excellent avenue to appreciate how through the waging of war militarism, authoritarianism and developmentalism may be positioned in such a way as to unite with a people's desire for wealth, in effect establishing developmentalism and authoritarianism as the mainstays of a healthy economy (or at least, such perceptions). See Yun Ch'ungno, "Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng ch'amjŏn kunin-ŭi chiphapchŏk chŏngch'esŏng hyŏngsŏng," pp. 196-221, 324; idem, "P'awŏl kisulcha-ŭi Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng kyŏnghŏm," pp. 217-250; idem, "Itch'in chŏnjaeng, itch'in saramdŭl," pp. 72-77; idem, 'Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng shigi 'Wŏllam chaebŏl'ŭi hyŏngsŏng," pp. 93-128. Also see the intermittent mainstream newspaper articles about Agent Orange and the suffering of South Korean veterans, such as for instance: U Hyŏnsŏp 우현섭, "Yŏron madang: 'chalmot' injŏng anŭn kukka yugongja 여론마당/ '잘못'인정않은 국가유공자," *Munhwa ilbo*, 5 April 2001, p. 7; anon., "Nyusŭ kkurŏmi: Koyŏpche kohyŏrap, p'ibuyŏm wonin il sudo 뉴스 꾸러미/ "고엽제 고혈압, 피부염 원인일수도," *Kyŏnghyang shinmun*경향신문, 14 October 2004, p. 10; Pyŏn Yŏngjun 변영준, "'Weekend raunji: 'Chŏnu-yŏ, 40nyŏn man iguna' p'awŏl yongsa tashi mungch'inda," Weekend 라운지/ "전우여, 40년 만이구나" 파월 용사 다시 뭉친다." *Kungmin ilbo* 국민일보, 23 May 2009, p. 5;' Pak Kŏnhyŏng 박건형, "6il hyŏnch'ungil… toere koeroun kukka yugongja-dŭl 6일 현충일… 되레 괴로운 유공자들," *Sŏul shinmun* 서울신문, 6 June 2009, p. 8.

Table 1: ROK troops in Vietnam (1964-1972)

		Regular troops					
	Total	Total	Army	Navy	Airforce	Marines	Misc.
1964	140	140	140				
1965	20,541	20,541	15,973	261	21	4,286	
1966	45,605	45,605	40,534	722	54	4,295	
1967	48,839	48,839	41,877	735	83	6,144	
1968	49,869	49,838	42,745	785	93	6,215	31
1969	49,755	49,720	42,772	767	85	6,096	35
1970	48,510	48,478	41,503	772	107	6,096	34
1971	45,694	45,663	42,345	662	98	2,558	31
1972	37,438	37,405	36,871	411	95	28	33

Source: Ministry of Defense, Kunsa p'yŏnch'an yŏn'guso, *Pe'tŭnam chŏnjaeng-gwa Han'gukkun* (Seoul: Ministry of Defense, 2004), p. 196.

of the Vietnam War in South Korea was immense. The economic benefits associated with the Vietnam War have of course not gone unnoticed, although their full measure has rarely been taken.[27] As with the argument that the Koreans suffered as much as the Vietnamese, the economic motives for participating in the war are more often than not presented as being coercive:

> *The testimony of the minister of National Defense shows that the Korean government could not withdraw their soldiers from Vietnam because Korea was able to enjoy enormous economic benefits from sending its soldiers to Vietnam [….] according to the statistics in America, the amount of money Korean soldiers in Vietnam have earned is as much as 171 million dollars in 1968 and 200 million dollars in 1969. Besides, the suggested amount of financial support from America when the Korean government dispatches additional military forces was 200 million dollars. Considering that Korean GNP was no more than 5.2 billion, it is obvious that Korea could not withdraw from the Vietnam War.*[28]

To put it differently, the poverty of South Korea in the sixties made it impossible to refuse the economic (and other) benefits associated with going to war in Vietnam. The poverty argument is not only popular with economists, but is advocated by mainstream historians as well.[29] It has also found expression in literature and cinema, more about which below.

A crucial element of the way the Korean participation in the Vietnam War is perceived is the mirror function attributed to Vietnam. Not only do Vietnamese and Koreans share the burden of being Asian in a century marred with wars, exploitation and colonization, on a more mundane level Vietnam represented how Korea had been in the past as well as how it could be in the future. Interestingly, historians agree that the consideration of this mirror function played a part in the decision-making processes that led to the ROK army's participation.[30] As Ch'ae Myŏngshin, the first commander of the ROK troops in Vietnam, put it in his biography *The Vietnam War and Myself: The Memoirs of Ch'ae Myŏngshin* (베트남 전쟁과 나: 채명신의 회고록), in the end the downfall of freedom and South Vietnam should serve as a lesson to

27 According to documents only declassified in 2005, South Korea received 546 million dollars from the US between 1965 and 1969 for the soldiers it had sent to Vietnam. From 1970 onwards, more money was paid on the condition that the number of South Korean troops in Vietnam would increase. Interestingly, the salary of ROK soldiers (officers, NCOs and privates alike) was lower than that of the Philippine or Thai army. In all, during these five years, South Korea earned less from the Vietnam War than Japan and about as much as Taiwan. Both countries, of course, never sent troops to Vietnam. According to the same documents, the pay per diem for the troops (including NCOs) ranged from 1.25 dollar to 1.90 dollar. See Ch'a Yun'gyŏng 차윤경, "Pet'ŭnamjŏn oegyo munsŏ konggae: Pet'ŭnamjŏn 5nyŏn ch'amjŏn kyŏngjejŏk idŭk 5ŏk tallŏ 베트남전 외교문서 공개/베트남전 5년 참전 경제적 이득 5억 달러," *Segye ilbo* 세계일보, 27 August 2005, p. 7.

28 Mun Changgŭk 문장극, *Han-Mi kaltŭng-ŭi yŏn'gu* 한미 갈등의 연구 (Seoul: Nanam 나남, 1994), p. 129. Quoted in Pak Jinim, *Narratives of the Vietnam War*, p. 91.

29 Han Young-woo, *Tashi ch'annŭn uri yŏksa*, pp. 594.

30 See Ch'oe Chŏnggi, "Han'guk-kun-ŭi Pet'ŭnamjŏn ch'amjŏn, ottŏk'e kiŏk-toego innŭn-ga?" p. 76.

31 Ch'ae Myŏngshin채명신, *Wŏllam p'abyŏng-gwa na: Ch'ae Myŏngshin-ŭi hoegorok* 베트남 전쟁과 나: 채명신의 회고록 (Seoul: P'albokwŏn 팔복원), p. 484.

South Korea.[31] While for the soldiers who went there Vietnam mirrored their own experiences of almost two decades before, for policy makers the Vietnamese case offered useful food for thought. The notion that Vietnam could serve to show what would happen in a country that had been unified by arms but was still divided by ideology, was closely related to the idea of Vietnam as a training ground for Korean troops to prepare for the inevitable clash with communist Asia in general and North Korea in particular. The ROK troops were trained in practical skills, among others obtained through the numerous search-and-destroy missions undertaken by them; they also acquired and familiarized themselves with new weapons (most notably the M-16). Vietnam moreover represented a battlefield where the struggle against communism could be fought and rehearsed in case that struggle would visit the peninsula again.[32]

Colonial associations. Still from Muoi (2007)

Such a perception of Vietnam in relation to South Korea inevitably obscures the view of the true importance of the Vietnam War for South Korean development. It makes an indexation of the profits derived from the war impossible, even though it clarifies South Korea's position in the world and shows its powerlessness in the face of US imperialism. Both of these latter lessons have been learned and incorporated by historians of South Korea. The first has been neglected. Along with a severe underestimation of the economic importance of the Vietnam War for South Korean development, two other issues have received less critical treatment than otherwise might have been the case. The first issue is the question whether the South Korean soldiers were mere mercenaries fighting just for money. The second is the contentious issue of the massacres allegedly perpetrated by ROK troops on Vietnamese civilians.

Opinions are divided on the suggestion that the ROK soldiers were mercenaries,[33] but here it is not so much the answer but rather the debate itself that is of interest. This discussion clearly shows that the moral dimensions of the South Korean participation in the Vietnam War are being debated (the implicit principle being that fighting as a mercenary is morally wrong, while fighting to root out communism or to repay a debt is not), but also that those moral dimensions are restricted to Korea. There is little to no debate concerning the participation itself; the discussion merely centres on its status. This is a theme that also frequently recurs in fictional works on the Vietnam War, since it is an issue closely related to the self-perception of the Vietnam veterans.

The second issue is much more serious and has deeper implications. Partly prompted by American debates about massacres such as My Lai, reports about massacres of civilians were already in circulation during the decade that ROK troops were active in Vietnam. The efficiency of the ROK troops inevitably came at a high civilian cost,[34] prompting Commander-in-Chief Ch'ae Myŏngshin to issue instructions on how not to hurt civilians. A source of pride for Ch'ae, at the same time the issuing of these instructions served as a red flag for historians.[35] In his memoirs, Ch'ae offered the following explanation for the numerous civilian massacres:

32 A recent paper from the (government-funded) Korea Institute for Industrial Economics and Trade (KIET, 산업연구원) provides a good example of this notion. It uses Vietnam as an example in an attempt to devise realistic (trade) policies with regard to North Korea. See Kim Sŏkchin 김석진, *Pet'ŭnam sarye-rŭl t'onghae pon Pukhan taeoe muyŏk chŏngsanghwa chŏnmang* 베트남 사례를 통해 본 북한의 대외무역 정상화 전망 (Seoul: Sanŏp yŏn'guwŏn 산업연구원, 2007).

33 Comprehensive histories tend to skirt the issue. The debate is basically divided between conservative voices who maintain that the ROK troops fought in the name of freedom and anti-communism, and non-conservatives who think that the ROK troops were simply sent to Vietnam for money. This is one of the reasons why Vietnam veterans are usually more sympathetic to the conservative forces in South Korean society than to the progressive camp.

34 Ch'ae Myŏngshin, *Wŏllam p'abyŏng-gwa na*, pp. 177-192.

35 Kim Hyŏna, *Chŏnjaeng-ŭi kiŏk, kiŏg-ŭi chŏnjaeng* (Seoul: Ch'aekkalp'I 책갈피, 2002), pp. 12-16.

> *The massacres of civilians perpetrated by the Vietcong were manufactured to look as if the Americans had committed them.*[36]

He also claimed that the massacres had been carried out by the Vietcong and North Korean soldiers dressed as South Korean soldiers.[37] While these claims cannot be taken as representative, South Korean involvement in these massacres is a thorny subject. The issue is from time to time revisited at the insistence of the Vietnamese government and it is still a source of embarrassment for the South Korean government.[38] Although one historian estimates that between 1970 and 1972 alone thirty-one civilian massacres took place, [39] the issue is mostly neglected in official and professional histories. Historians generally choose to either not mention the issue or to quote Ch'ae Myŏngshin's famous instructions to his soldiers that it is "better to let 100 guerrillas escape than to kill one innocent man," implicitly elevating this statement to the plane of historical truth.

Except for the recent work of a very small number of historians, the South Korean involvement in the Korean War is severely lacking in research. This is particularly noteworthy given the war's epochal importance for the development of South Korea and the present importance of Vietnam for South Korea. This short overview of professional and official perceptions of the Vietnam War suggests that the origin point of these perceptions should perhaps not be located within the realms of professional historiopgraphy, given the noticeably restricted nature of the investigations and their similarity with the views already popular with both politicians and the people on the streets. As mentioned above, the arts are a good place to start looking for perceptions of the Vietnam War. One of South Korea's most celebrated authors, Hwang Sok-yong, quite literally built his career on his experiences in Vietnam. His prose debut *Camel's Eye* (낙타 눈깔)[40] is a short story about a Korean soldier who has just returned from Vietnam and is waiting for his train home. *The Shadow of Arms*, arguably Hwang's greatest work of fiction, is an exploration and demasqué of the economic and political global mechanisms behind the Vietnam War.

THE VIETNAM WAR IN LITERATURE

The deployment of Korean troops in Vietnam lasted a decade and committed some 350,000 soldiers, but only a handful of mainstream novels and novellas have been devoted to this subject. These novels are Hwang Sok-yong's *The Shadow of Arms*,[41] Pak Yŏnghan's *The Faraway River* and An Junghyo's *White Badge*. The dearth of Vietnam War literature in South Korea has been related to South Korea's 'passive' contribution to the war.[42] The argument is basically that since the South Korean soldiers were involved in the war as mercenaries, their emotional attachment was not sufficient to produce 'real' literature in any significant amount.[43] The absence of a literary tradition on the Vietnam War has also been understood as a consequence of the virtual neglect of the war in South Korean public discourses.[44] Regardless of the reasons behind this phenomenon – which can probably not be separated from the general disinterest in the Vietnam War – the few novels dedicated to the Korean participation in this war share a number of similarities with the general discourse. Even though *The Shadow of Arms* and *The Faraway River* are products of what is usually known as the progressive forces in South Korean society, the lack of other novels dealing with similar concerns, themes and background has created a situation in which the interpretation of the significance of the Vietnam War is not truly contested.[45] A similar situation is found in Korean cinema, if only because the connection between literature and cinema is traditionally strong in South Korea.

36 Ch'ae Myŏngshin, *Wŏllam p'abyŏng-gwa na*, p. 484.
37 Ibid., p. 487.
38 See http://www.hani.co.kr/h21/vietnam/vietnam280.html for an index of the stories *Hangyŏre 21* covered [accessed 5 February 2009].
39 Yi Samsŏng 이삼성, *Iship segi munmyŏng-gwa yaman* 20세기 문명과 야만 (Seoul: Han'gilsa 한길사, 1998), pp. 221-226.
40 English translation to be found at http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article.php?lab=CamelsEye [accessed 10 February 2009].
41 For an excellent explanation of *The Shadow of Arms* as a critique of US aggression in Vietnam Korean war memories as a counterhistory of the Vietnam War, see Theodore Hughes, "*Korean Memories of the Vietnam and Korean Wars: A Counter-History", Japan Focus*, 12 April 2007, found at http://japanfocus.org/-Theodore_Hughes/2406 [accessed 12 February 2009].
42 Song Sŭngch'ŏl 宋承哲, "Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng sosŏllon: Yongbyŏng-ui kyohun베트남전쟁 소설론: 용병의 교훈," *Ch'angjak-kwa pip'yŏng* 80 (1993): pp. 77-94.
43 Although this may explain a lack of interest from the part of the South Korean audience, this does not explain the lack of works produced.
44 This neglect in public discourse is among others caused by the fact that the suffering of Korean Vietnam veterans is conceptualized as individual suffering rather than suffering resulting from their participation in the Vietnam War. See Ch'oe Chŏnggi, "Han'guk-kun-ŭi Pet'ŭnamjŏn ch'amjŏn, ottŏk'e kiŏk-toego innŭn-ga?" pp. 65-92.
45 Which cannot be said about any other event of similar importance in Korean modern history.

Both the official and the popular perceptions of the participation in the Vietnam War reappear in literary guise in these works. The realization that money was the main motivation for participation and that the young soldiers, often from poor backgrounds themselves, were sacrificed in order to maintain the economic momentum, pervades in particular *The Shadow of Arms*.[46] This novel is almost completely devoted to the economic mechanisms behind modern warfare; it can be read as an exploration of the economic motives leading to and sustaining warfare.[47] The universal approach underlying this novel also underscores the mirror function Vietnam has with regard to Korea: Korea also experienced a similar civil war and occupation by the US army. The protagonist of *The Shadow of Arms* is well aware of his position in Vietnam, sandwiched in between the US army and the Vietnamese. Both in the novel and in separate essays, Hwang stressed that poverty was the main reason for Korean soldiers to enter the Vietnam war.[48] At the same time, Hwang denies the responsibility of the average Korean soldier, arguing that the ROK had little choice in the matter:

First volume of the Korean original of The Shadow of Arms by Hwang Sok-yong

> *What difference was there between my father's generation, drafted into the Japanese army or made to service Imperial Japan's pan-Asian ambitions, and my own, unloaded into Vietnam by the Americans in order to establish a "Pax Americana" zone in the Far East during the Cold War?*[49]

Forced by the US, whose imperial ambitions were no less than those of the Japanese empire of the thirties and forties, the ROK sent troops to Vietnam and – this is what is implied – bears no more responsibility for atrocities committed in Vietnam than for the atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army in World War II.[50] The novel never confronts the issue of Korean atrocities in Vietnam directly, but in several passages it is clear that Hwang recognizes that the erstwhile victims of civil war and US massacres have now become perpetrators themselves.[51] Nonetheless, in the end Hwang's approach is universal: massacres are an inescapable truth of war that have little to do with the nationality of the perpetrators[52] (although in the novel only real massacres, committed by US soldiers, are described, while Hwang remains silent about the massacres committed by ROK troops of which he had personal knowledge).[53] *The Shadow of Arms* is a literary masterpiece of rare quality precisely because it manages to describe the inevitable mechanisms of modern warfare and their consequences in uncomfortably measured and restrained universal language. At the same time, however, the parallels Hwang draws between the Vietnamese and

46 Hwang writes: "After peering over the cliff of sudden death dozens of times and at long last emerging from the jungle swamps, a fighter about to embark for Korea would be unlikely to have saved from his combat pay more than three hundred dollars, a paltry sum of money stuck in a savings account somewhere back home. 'A life worth two bits' had become a familiar phrase among crawlers. Putting our lives at risk brought us each forty dollars a month, in fact, apart from the economic, military and financial support provided by America back home and the privileges received by businessmen in Seoul. And army privates would sail back home with their plywood crates holding a couple of Japanese appliances or electronic items they had conjured up on the sly." Hwang Sok-yong, *The Shadow of Arms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Program, Cornell East Asia Series 73), translated by Chun Kyung-Ja, pp. 201-202.

47 The author has repeatedly confirmed that such a reading of *The Shadow of Arms* is correct. Personal communication with Hwang Sok-yong on November 4 and 5, 2008.

48 A significant number of soldiers had volunteered to go to Vietnam instead of waiting to be drafted and not knowing where they would end up. Vietnam was widely regarded as an opportunity to earn money in South Korea, which explains why young men would risk their lives there without external pressure. An escape from poverty was their motivation.

49 Hwang said as much in his essay "Yanusŭ-ŭi ŏlgul" in *Hangyŏre 21* (1999) when he stated that "the suppressed are cruel towards the suppressed. " See http://www.hani.co.kr/h21/data/L990906/1p949601.htm [accessed 4 February 2009].

50 The comparison Hwang draws, while certainly not without merits, is also misleading. Although there certainly was an element of coercion present in the process that led to the dispatch of troops to Vietnam, the situation South Korea found itself in during the late sixties was in no way comparable to the colonial situation. One major difference, for instance, was that now South Korea stood to gain from imperialism instead of suffering from it. Rather, the colonial metaphor seems to be applicable to Vietnam.

51 Hwang later repeated this statement literally in the above-mentioned essay on the Vietnam War.

52 It should be mentioned though that Hwang did play an important role in the *Han'gyŏre 21* initiative that aimed to expose the massacres and obtain compensation for the survivors.

53 See his short story *Pagoda*.

the Koreans in terms of their suffering as Asians in the twentieth century preclude any sense of wrongdoing on the part of the Koreans. If anything, the Koreans suffered as much as the Vietnamese, and they suffered alongside them. In a revealing scene, Hwang detaches the South Korean soldiers from their US allies by having an American soldier hypocritically declare to the protagonist that the Korean soldiers are in fact honorary whites, just as their women are:

> *"You're a Korean, aren't you? Your girls are also nice. There were two Korean girls in the strip show at the club last night. Both of them looked exactly like American women."*
> *"You mean an American club?"*
> *"Yes, but Koreans can go there if they're working for investigation headquarters. No gooks, though."*
> *"Who are gooks?"*
> *"Vietnamese. They're really filthy. But you are like us. We're the Allies."*[54]

Later developments make it abundantly clear that the US army does not consider Korean soldiers as being fully equal to American GIs. Hwang is consistent in his assertion that the Koreans and the Vietnamese share infinitely more with each other than with the Americans. Early on in their relationship, the Vietnamese assistant of the protagonist An Yŏnggyu (Ahn Yong Kyu in the English translation) unambiguously states one of the book's main themes, namely the similarity of Koreans and Vietnamese and their respective histories:

> *"You and I, Ahn, we're both gooks. Slopeheads.'*
> *'In the eyes of the Americans I suppose.'*
> *'In our own eyes, too. It's nothing to feel bad about.'*[55]

Given the fact that the most used racist term for Vietnamese was 'gook,' the irony of the scene is not lost on the reader (especially not since Hwang explains the etymology of 'gook' as being derived from 'Hanguk'; during the Korean War this term was used to denote Koreans in the same racist way). ROK soldiers are not white nor honorary whites; they share the vicissitudes of modern fate with the Vietnamese. Later on in the novel, conversations between An Yŏnggyu, a Korean, and his Vietnamese colleague and friend point in the same direction: the Koreans have no business being in Vietnam and they know this, as they have been through the very same experiences themselves. To a certain extent, these shared experiences enable the South Korean soldiers to see Korea mirrored in Vietnam. *The Shadow of Arms* contains a number of evocative passages in which the Korean suffering during the Korean War is directly reflected in the suffering of the Vietnamese.[56] Ahn Junghyo's soldiers also see home echoed in their Vietnamese experiences: they have frequent flashbacks to their own experiences during the Korean War, most of them triggered by the young Vietnamese boys that can always be found around them. The mirror function of Vietnam is not restricted to the past; Korea's future is also mirrored in Vietnam's future (which was the present when the three novels were written and hence the present of their readers) as a unified country. *The Shadow of Arms* in particular forges a strong link between Korea's future and Vietnam's present as a unified country.[57] Incidentally, as discussed above, this also functions as a mechanism to subject the image of Vietnam to suit South Korean (governmental) purposes.

Their kinship with the Vietnamese (through their shared historical experience as well as their shared Asian heritage) makes the Koreans as much victims as perpetrators: neutrality ("first, do no harm") is their only way out, both ethically and practically. Hwang's take on South Korea's position in the Vietnam War effectively shifts the blame to the US and the international world, although it needs to be mentioned that Hwang does not present an easy excuse for the South Korean participation as Ahn Junghyo does (by stating that the Korean soldiers did not have any choice). Hwang's reasoning is not without merit; his meta-analysis of how modern wars are started, fought and maintained transcends the South Korean participation in the Vietnam War and as such also leaves behind the complicated issue of blame. From this vantage point, the choice to "do no harm" that Hwang's protagonist adheres to, is wholly understandable. The subsequent disappearance of the moral question marks associated with the South Korean participation are logical and,

54 Hwang, *The Shadow of Arms*, p. 25. The "Ttaihan" (as the South Koreans were known among the Vietnamese) rank somewhere in between a US soldier and a Vietnamese soldier in terms of ransom it costs to free them. See Ahn Junghyo, *White Badge* (New York: Soho, 1989), p. 56.
55 Hwang, *The Shadow of Arms*, p. 140.
56 In *White Badge*, the protagonist has a flashback to the moment he was chasing GIs during the Korean War, when he himself is chased by Vietnamese boys.
57 Paik Nak-chung, "Foreword," in *The Shadow of Arms*, pp. v-vii.

against the background of domestic discourses in South Korea, conventional. The following passage, in which the protagonist of *The Shadow of Arms* is involved in a heated discussion with an American deserter he had helped to leave the army, is representative of Hwang's view:

> *As I work with Americans, the one thing I hate most is to listen to you people say how alike we are, how I'm no different from an American, and other garbage like that. In the same breath I hear you guys whispering how filthy the Vietnamese gooks are. 'Gook' is the label American soldiers picked up in the Korean War from the word 'Hanguk,' mispronouncing it 'Han-gook.' Americans used it with a racist edge. I just point out to you people that I'm more like a Vietnamese myself.*
>
> *The conditions we're living through now are the exact same conditions almost all Asians have endured for the past century. On many continents whites have fought each other with bloodied teeth and claws, like predators quarrelling over prey. Don't pretend to be alarmed. Even if you refuse to take part in this lousy war and succeed in escaping, you'll have to live the rest of your life burdened by what you've seen and heard on the battlefield. It'll be the same with me, of course, but I've made up my mind to make up for it when I go back home.*
>
> *In your newspapers I saw photos of demonstrators carrying picket signs that read: 'We don't want to die for Vietnam!' What could be more absurd and hideous than that? What? Die for Vietnam? Your soldiers were dragged over here from the back alleys of filthy slums, from the dark bars where they were drinking, from the supermarkets where they rushed with discount coupons, from greasy floors beneath automobiles. You ask me why? Because the children of the wealthy were not about to come, that's why. Ask your businessmen and their salesmen who conduct politics. It's for them that you've been dying like dogs in the swamps of Vietnam.*[58]

There is however a problematic element hidden in Hwang's position. In the above-mentioned essay, Hwang states with brutal honesty that the very fact that South Korea is now in a position to question the massacres perpetrated by ROK soldiers in Vietnam only signifies that South Korea succeeded in obtaining the economic (and hence psychological) freedom or luxury to enjoy 'Western humanity.'[59] Leaving aside the issue of the questionable (and lazy) morals underlying this statement, it does point at an uncomfortable moral dimension of the Korean participation that apparently needs solving. The moral question marks have not completely disappeared, it seems. This argument, both honest and dangerous, is also found in a simplified version in *White Badge*, where the bloodshed of civilians is considered tragic but inevitable.[60] This argument, however, is only applicable to Vietnam; as soon as it is applied to Korea during the Korean War, more personal considerations come into play. The tension between the inevitability of innocent bloodshed in any war and the bloodshed in the Korean War is present in all three novels and not resolved anywhere. Perhaps the solution of the protagonist in *The Shadow of Arms* is the only one realistically attainable: maintain a stance of strict neutrality in so far as it is feasible. The protagonist makes a promise to himself not to make things worse and not to profit from the war at the expense of the Vietnamese.

Profit from the war South Korea did, however. Reliable detailed estimates are not available, but in pure financial terms, up to ten percent of the South Korean GNP was derived directly from the Vietnam War, which lasted from 1968 to 1973.[61] The realization that money, goods and privileges were taken home from Vietnam pervades all three novels, but none of the novels (not even Hwang's narrative, which is otherwise extremely aware of economic causes and effects) followed through with an appraisal of what happened to the money once it arrived in South Korea.[62] The elements for constructing the story of how the Vietnam War paid for the economic growth of South Korea are all there, but the story has not been put together.

In the end, even the soldiers who fought there them-

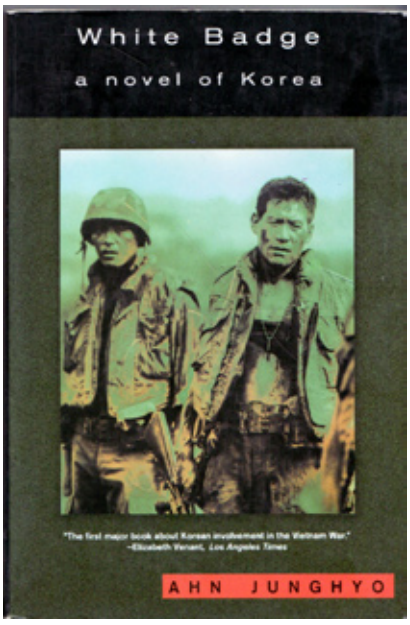
58 Hwang, *The Shadow of Arms*, pp. 343-344.

59 Hwang, "Yanusŭ-ŭi ŏlgul," http://www.hani.co.kr/h21/data/L990906/1p949601.htm [accessed 4 February 2009].

60 Shin Sŭnghŭi신승희, "Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng-gwa Han'guk munhak: 'Hayan chŏnjaeng-ŭi munjejŏm 베트남전쟁과 한국문학: '하얀 전쟁'의 문제점," *Ŏmun yŏn'gu*어문연구 77-78 (1993): pp. 214-227; Chang Tuyŏng 장두영, "Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng sosŏllon: P'abyŏng tamnon-gwa-ŭi kwallyŏn-ŭl chungshim-ŭro 베트남전쟁 소설론-파병담론과의 관련을 중심으로," *Han'guk hyŏndae munhak yŏn'gu* 한국현대문학연구 25 (2008): pp. 383-425; "Song Sŭngch'ŏl, Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng sosŏllon: Yongbyŏng-ui kyohun," pp. 77-94.

61 These figures do not take account of indirect financial aid from the US, the economic effects of the advantageous import duties for South Korean products in the US, and the like.

selves did not consider the Vietnam War as a Korean war. The Koreans did not belong there, they were there merely because they were drafted into the war by the workings of US imperialism. As a result, any moral blame associated with the Vietnam War shifted to the US. What remains is the Korean suffering, which, just like the suffering of the Vietnamese, was caused by the US. While *A Faraway River* and *White Badge* emphasize the suffering of the ROK soldiers in Vietnam (and as veterans after returning home), caught between their commanders and the US army, *The Shadow of Arms* squarely places the blame on the US:



English translation of White Badge, made by the author himself.

> *We are here because you asked us to come. Your government wanted us to join you to save the lives of young American men. We have nothing to do with this filthy war. True, we've sold ourselves for the paltry sum of money you threw at us, and now here we are. But don't forget this, those two soldiers just barely survived combat operations set in motion by a command from your headquarters. They were on the front instead of you. The money you snatched and won't give back is blood money!*[63]

The tension between the South Korean motivations to go to war in Vietnam, the suffering of the soldiers and the suffering of the Vietnamese is not solved in the novels dealing with it. At the very most, novels on the Vietnam War transfer the problem onto the US, which is considered to be the main culprit. Furthermore, Vietnam is not as central to the novels as South Korea is, even if according to one influential critic a novel like *The Shadow of Arms* should have contained more explicit references to the South Korean situation to emphasize its importance as a novel for South Korean society.[64]

Although not a Vietnam veteran himself like the three writers mentioned above, and as such not within the scope of this article, the work of Pang Hyŏnsŏk should not go unmentioned here. A notable exception in the literary scene in Korea in the sense that his books depict Vietnam on its own terms (or at least, not only on Korea's terms), Pang Hyŏnsŏk's novels indirectly deal with the Vietnam War and with Vietnam's position in Korea. A founding member of the *Society of Young Writers For Understanding Vietnam* (베트남을 이해하려는 젊은 작가들의 모임), Pang is a writer who from the eighties onwards has shown himself to be a staunch supporter of the progressive forces in South Korean society. In his *Form of Being* 존재의 형식 (recipient of the 2003 Hwang Sunwŏn Literary Prize 황순원문학상) he tackles the problems of literary translation and intercultural communication by having a Korean writer and a Vietnamese translator work on the translation of a film script about the Vietnam War.[65] In his novel *Time To Have Lobsters* 랍스터를 먹는 시간, he records the following dialogue about the Iraq war and the decision to send ROK troops there:

> *"We too know that the US is not right. But we still cannot disobey the words of the US, so we send troops despite the resistance of the people. Couldn't they call the soldiers going to Iraq 'Roh Moo Hyun's soldiers,' just like you called the soldiers coming here to Vietnam 'Park Chung Hee's soldiers?'"*
> *Kŏnsŏk now tried to brush it aside with a joke. But Pham Banh Cuc was having nothing of it. The smile*

62 In *White Badge* there is a scene in a hostess bar where friends (Vietnam veterans) start arguing about the father of one of them, who got rich from the war by supplying the military. The son then uses the money to pay for a prostitute for his complaining friend. The symbolism in this scene (whether intended or not) is very rich. First, it emphasizes the central importance of money in the historical memory of the Vietnam War. Second, the unequal distribution of the wealth earned in Vietnam is acknowledged, as is the sacrifice of life and limbs by the young soldiers (who are now men approaching middle age getting drunk). Third, women are used as a means of barter: the money earned in Vietnam is used to purchase a female body for one of the soldiers, who sacrificed their youths in Vietnam. Like in most narratives of the Vietnam War, women do not get to play a role other than that of passive victim or active hooker.

63 Hwang, *The Shadow of Arms*, p. 208.

64 Paik Nak-chung's criticism of *The Shadow of Arms* states quite explicitly that the novel did not deal sufficiently with South Korean contemporary society. Paik Nak-chung, "Foreword," pp. v-vii.

65 Pang Hyŏnsŏk 방현석, "Chonjae-ŭi hyŏngshik," in *2003 che 3hoe Hwang Sunwŏn munhaksang susang chakp'umjip* 2003 회황순원문학상수상작품집 (Seoul: Chungang Ilbo, Munye Chungang 중앙일보, 문예중앙, 2003).

that had lingered on his face now disappeared:
"So the Iraqi people have to understand a Korea that comes at them with a gun pointed towards them, just as happened in Vietnam. Don't you think that idea is a bit too easy?"
"Many Koreans feel sorry about Vietnam."
"Then all they have to do is feel sorry about Iraq too, once that's all over."[66]

Pang's literary and social engagement with Vietnam is reminiscent of the *Hangyŏre 21* initiative that was supported by Hwang Sok-yong. Just like this initiative's relative marginality with regard to the continuation of South Korean perceptions of Vietnam though, Pang's literature (at least with regard to his view on Vietnam) has also remained restricted to a small minority: the same minority that was sympathetic towards the *Hangyŏre 21* initiative. South Korean popular perceptions of Vietnam are not monolithic; there are dissident voices, but these are heard by few people. Compared to the enormity of South Korea's commitment to the Vietnam War and the far-reaching influence it exercised on the formation of contemporary South Korean society, very little has been written about this war by literary authors, and even less has been written from a vulnerable position such as that of Pang.

THE VIETNAM WAR IN CINEMA

A number of high-profile movies have been made about the Korean participation in the Vietnam War.[67] Foremost among them would be the cinema version of *The Shadow of Arms*, but despite years of rumours of its imminent shooting (a director was chosen and the project was supposed to be a co-production with the Vietnamese government), the movie has not yet been made. Another novel was made into a movie: *White Badge*, starring An Sŏnggi, was released in 1992. This Vietnam movie was followed by the horror flick *R-point* in 2004, by teen horror slasher *Muoi* in 2005 and by *Sunny* (a terrible translation of the original literal meaning *My Love in a Faraway Place*) in 2008. All together, a very modest number of movies have been made about the Vietnam War, and particularly so when compared to the number of American movies dealing with the same subject. *Raybang* can in fact not be counted among these movies, since it does not deal with the Vietnam War and only uses Vietnam as a symbol. Paradoxically, it is perhaps the only movie that deals with the true significance of the Vietnam experience for South Korean society.

Korean cinema has a strong tradition of producing movies that are critical of contemporary society, whether by using realism, sarcasm, comedy or drama. Just as in the literature on the Vietnam War, however, a critical attitude is not easily located in movies dealing with Vietnam. *White Badge* is a fairly faithful adaptation of the novel, stressing the plight of the South Korean Vietnam veterans, whose suffering went unrecognized and whose memories were not allowed in the public arena.[68] The emphasis in the movie is on the traumatic experiences of the Vietnam veterans, most clearly portrayed by the protagonist, a former sergeant who ends up committing suicide. In its conception and execution *White Badge* is very much like the archetypical American Vietnam War movie: avoiding any direct confrontation with the issue of South Korea's participation in Vietnam, it centers on the suffering of the ROK soldiers and to a significantly lesser extent on the suffering of the Vietnamese. At the same time, there is a distinct sense of mirrored experiences, with the Vietnamese going through what the Koreans had gone through some decades earlier. A revealing scene takes place in a sex club in It'aewŏn, the bar district frequented by American GIs stationed in Seoul. The similarity between Vietnamese and Koreans is emphasized by showing Korean women (sex workers) servicing American GIs, while earlier scenes in the movie depicted Vietnamese women servicing South Korean soldiers. Intriguingly, the comparison between the Vietnamese and the Koreans is repeatedly alluded to (both visually and textually in the novels), while the latent comparison between ROK soldiers in Vietnam and American GIs in South Korea is left

66 Pang Hyŏnsŏk, *Rabsŭt'ŭ-rŭl mŏngnŭn shigan* 랍스터를 먹는 시간 (Seoul: Ch'angbi 창비), 2003, p. 170.

67 See the following articles: Kim Kwŏnho김권호, "Han'guk chŏnjaeng yŏnghwa-ŭi palchŏn-gwa t'ŭkching: Han'guk chŏnjaeng-esŏ Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng-kkachi한국 전쟁영화의 발전과 특징 - 한국전쟁에서 베트남전쟁까지," *Chibangsa-wa chibang munje* 지방사와 지방문화 제9.2 (2006): pp. 77-108; Kang Sŏngnyul강성률, "Namhan yŏnghwa-rŭl t'onghae pon Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng-ŭi kiŏk남한 영화를 통해 본 베트남전쟁의 기억 - 반공영화 〈월남전선 이상없다〉 에서 동지적 유대감의 〈님은 먼 곳에〉 까지," *Yŏksa pip'yŏng*역사비평84 (2008): pp. 404-425; idem, "'Hayan chŏnchaeng,' 'R-Point'-wa Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng: uri-egye Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng-ŭn muoshinga? <하얀 전쟁> <알 포인트>와 베트남전쟁 - 우리에게 베트남전쟁은 무엇인가," *Naeil yŏnŭn yŏksa* 내일을 여는 역사21 (2005): pp. 253-258. I have not included older movies dealing with the Vietnam War in this article on account of their generic proximity to propaganda.

68 The protagonist, played by An Sŏnggi, tries to get his novel about Vietnam published, but he is obstructed by the government. During the time the movie was set (the early eighties), President Chun Doo Hwan banned veteran associations (one of which had been active since the late sixties).

for what it is. Other themes present in the original book (which are also present in the two novels by Hwang and Pak discussed above) also appear in the movie. *White Badge* presents the cinematic version of the often-used excuse given to explain civilian massacres: that the confused ROK soldiers did not know who was the enemy and that they had suffered casualties (due to boobytraps) before murdering an entire village. The theme of poverty also surfaces. Just before embarking to Vietnam, the soldiers of the platoon gather and get drunk. Towards the end of the inebriated evening, the camera zooms in on the wall where one of them has written: 'Wait for me, Sunja, I will return a rich man from Vietnam.' Finally the idea that Vietnam was an exercise for Kwangju returns in the dramatic finale of the movie: the protagonist has just picked up his former corporal from the hospital where he had been admitted on account of having sliced off his own ears (in an act of atonement, as this was the same fate that befell dead Vietcong and dead Vietnamese civilians who in official reports were listed as Vietcong). Walking through the streets of Seoul, the soldiers get lost in a student demonstration. Battlefield scenes and flashbacks of massacres merge with the increasingly violent demonstration and scenes of police brutality, underscoring the point of Vietnam as a prelude to and a metaphor for modern South Korea's tribulations.

South Korean soldiers as the colonizer in R-Point (2004)

The 2008 movie *Sunny* was eagerly anticipated, as it was directed by Yi Chunik. Yi had also directed *The King and the Clown*, a sensitive historical movie about the love between two men, and *Once upon a Time in a Battlefield,* which despite its awkward English title is a very good movie about history, regional tensions and personal sacrifice. Yi Chunik has proved himself to be an innovative director who is not afraid to tackle sensitive subjects such as homosexuality and regionalism. Moreover, he does so in a way that enables these taboos to be discussed within society. In both movies Yi succeeded in giving the silent (and oppressed) minorities a voice. With *Sunny* he produced an ambiguous movie. In one sense, it is a powerful movie showing the quest of a young woman trying to find her husband who is serving in Vietnam in order to get pregnant and take his unborn baby back home. Urged to do so by her mother-in-law, *Sunny* is a sensitive portrayal of one woman's struggles with patriarchy. It is also a coming-of-age story in which a naive, virginal country girl is transformed into an experienced and sexually assertive entertainer. The setting of the story in Vietnam gives it the necessary dramatic mass to engage the viewer in the implausible quest of Suni, but at the same time, it gives the movie a colonial and Orientalist flavour within the black-and-white tradition of British Orientalist cinema. The Vietnamese hardly figure in *Sunny*, though, other than the (predictable) bunch of mama-sans, whores, innocent youths and Vietcong guerrillas (whom one only recognizes as Vietcong soldiers when it is already too late). In one memorable scene, Suni and the group are taken captive by a group of Vietcong and asked why they are there. "To earn money," they answer, at which the Vietcong commander retorts: "So you're here for the same reason as the South Korean army." This scene is memorable both for this exchange, which shows unambiguously what the director thinks of the ROK army's role in Vietnam, and for the shameless and facile sentimentalist take that follows. When the group is about to be executed, Suni starts to sing, unlocking all kinds of pent-up emotions in their Vietnamese captors. The group members are then made captive guests, working alongside the Vietcong guerrillas and their families, digging tunnels and such after which in the evening they all come together to listen to Suni, swaying and handclapping along with the Korean songs she sings. The notion that the South Koreans and the Vietnamese are fundamentally alike and that it is only the war (the US in other words) that keeps them apart, is clearly

Poster for Muoi (2007)

Poster for Sunny (2008)

Poster for Sunny (2008)

articulated in this sequence of scenes. After the underground guerrilla shelter is raided by the US army and the guerrillas killed or taken prisoner, it is again music which saves the group members. When three guerrilla leaders are executed on the spot, the band leader starts to sing the *Star-Spangled Banner,* signalling the South Koreans' likeness with the Americans. Re-establishing their difference with the Vietnamese vis-à-vis the US army, the South Korean group members survive by singing tunes from the US. Although the director has a proven track record and although he has turned a movie about homosexual love into the most popular movie ever made in South Korea (until this record was surpassed by *The Host* the following year), he does not further explore this fundamental ambiguity of the South Korean position in Vietnam. While the movie is commanding as a story about a woman's quest in an extremely male-dominated environment, and while it certainly does not shirk difficult choices (such as when Suni decides to sleep with the American commander who can help her find her husband), *Sunny* is a solidly Korea-centric movie, in which the Vietnam War takes a back-seat to more pressing domestic concerns. Perhaps the interpretative tradition associated with the Vietnam War was too strong for the director to overcome or maybe there were other points he wanted to make, but the unambiguous depiction of the complete impotence of the South Korean army in Vietnam with regard to making its own decisions or to helping Sunny find her husband only reinforces the same point made over and over again in South Korean Vietnam literature, historiography and cinema: that the ROK army was only in Vietnam as a mercenary force. It did not have a say in its actions and consequently did not bear responsibility for its deeds. In this movie, as in the literature on this subject, the responsibility needs to be located with the US army.

The horror movie *Muoi: Legend of a Portrait*, in which a South Korean writer visits an old friend of hers in Vietnam and becomes fascinated by the tragic story attached to a portrait of a young girl, is in all senses of the term a colonial movie. *Muoi* is the type of exotic horror movie that is situated in an exotic foreign location. This setting is at first presented as a veritable Garden of Eden: the rich foliage of the tropics is adorned with servile males and beautiful maidens, who are dressed in their seductive white *ao dai*. It is a mysterious place where money can buy infinitely more than at home: the evil counterpart of the protagonist is able to maintain a posh lifestyle in her own villa with the inheritance she brought with her from Korea. Despite the pretty pictures and the capable cinematography, which show Vietnam in alluring detail, this movie is not about Vietnam. It is about Korea and at most about Korean imaginings of Vietnam. While the Korean part in the Vietnam War is neither discussed nor alluded to, the similarity between the recent history of Vietnam and Korea is remarked upon several times.

The colonial aspect of the way South Korea imagined Vietnam is also clearly played out in another horror movie, *R-point*. Vastly superior in all aspects (cinematography, production values, acting, script, direction, editing, and the like) to *Muoi*, it is the story of a platoon of ROK soldiers sent to an abandoned French plantation (the so-called R-point) where they must find out what

happened to another Korean platoon that went missing there. Strange things then start to happen and the soldiers start going mad or die suddenly, while it slowly becomes clear that the Koreans are being targeted because they are invaders and occupiers of Vietnam. The plantation was built on a reclaimed lake that had been the site of a battle between Chinese invaders and a Vietnamese army. A small stele with an g comes into view at the end of the movie upon which it has been written that all invaders of Vietnam will be killed. The Koreans, as allies of the Americans, are placed in the same line of colonial conquerors as the Chinese, the French and the Americans, all of whom had been killed at the same site. *R-point* is an exception in the sense that it actually assigns blame to the ROK soldiers for their actions in Vietnam. Again, as in the other movies, the Vietnamese do not really figure in this film, but *R-point*'s message is unambiguous: invaders are morally wrong and will be punished – in horror movies at least, if not in real life. The subtle way in which *R-point* makes it almost impossible to judge whether the hapless Korean soldiers who one by one fall victim to vengeful Vietnamese ghosts are victims, perpetrators or both is reminiscent of *The Shadow of Arms*, in which the same dilemma is presented but not solved. *R-point* goes one step further in assigning blame; the movie still fits in the South Korean discourse though, as it portrays the South Korean soldiers in Vietnam first as victims (of their government, the US and the Vietcong), before acknowledging the colonial power they exercised (and the abuses associated with it). The hypocrisy of *Muoi* or *White Badge*, films which emphasized the shared suffering of Vietnam and Korea, is absent, but the Vietnamese still remain invisible (in this movie often quite literally so).

In the end, *Raybang*, while not a movie about Vietnam, is perhaps the best symbol for Vietnam in Korean popular imaginations. The movie barely mentions Vietnam, yet without Vietnam there would have been no movie. Vietnam figures as the site on which dreams may be projected and where money can still be earned (as the corny picture of the uncle wearing Ray-Bans with a pretty Vietnamese woman standing next to him suggests). The allusion to Vietnam is triple: it exists in the history of the sunglasses themselves, in the dreams of the three taxi drivers to escape to Vietnam and lead better lives there and in the implicit comparison between the sacrifices to the economy made by the generation of the uncle, and the sacrifices made by this generation to the same economy, while suffering the same misrecognition. Vietnam is often hidden away, but it always remains present as the site of unfulfilled dreams and untold sacrifices.

PERCEPTIONS OF VIETNAM

Vietnam experienced a high amount of interest in South Korea in the nineties and the early years of the new millennium. After diplomatic relations had been restored in 1993, South Korean businessmen started to travel to Vietnam to recruit trainees (who are cheaper than Korean workers and easier to get work permits for), outsource manufacturing and establish branch offices or factories.[69] The articles written by a South Korean businessman right after the re-establishment of diplomatic relations are revealing in that they reflect what was popularly thought of Vietnam.[70] The writer chronicled his excitement tinged with fear in a manner that is more than a little reminiscent of writings from colonial authors visiting the outer provinces of the empire:

> It is said that Koreans visiting Vietnam recently have experienced the strange phenomenon of personally experiencing the superiority of Koreans rather than experiencing fear of socialism.[71]

The combination of fear of the unknown and feelings of superiority is a well-known colonial trope (in particular when combined with the economic exploitation of Vietnamese trainees and workers in South Korea during the nineties). The same attitude is also reflected in the ease with which the author employs colonialist stereotypes to dismiss memories of the Korean participation in the Vietnam War. The Vietnamese, like other Southeast Asian peoples, forget their suffering easily and "the past is the past."[72] Moreover, as the author asserts, the Vietnamese now like the Koreans: "The scars from the war are still present, but the Vietnamese have forgotten about South

69 The outpour of Vietnamese language books, Vietnamese travel guides and investment handbooks testify to the enormous popularity of Vietnam as a country to invest in.

70 The titles of these articles are revealing in themselves: "Vietnam, the unknown country where they imitate capitalism," "Looking for the Pearl of the Orient of yesterday's movies, Hanoi," "Twenty tear-stained years… My father was a Ttaihan." See Kwŏn Sŏuk 권서욱, "Chabonjuŭi-rŭl hyungnae-naenŭn miji-ŭi nara Pet'ŭnam 자본주의를 흉내내는 미지의 나라 베트남," *Pukhan*北韓 9 (1993): pp. 94-99; idem, "Yet yŏnghwa toech'ajŭryŏnŭn 'Tongyang-ŭi chinju' Hanoi 옛 영화 되찾으려는 '동양의 진주' 하노이" *Pukhan* 10 (1993): pp. 142-147; idem, "Nunmul-lo ŏllukchin 20-nyŏn…. Na-ŭi abŏji Ttaihan눈물로 얼룩진 20년… 나의 아버지 '따이한,'" *Pukhan* 11 (1993): pp. 136-141.

Korea's participation on the side of the US."[73] The war is still present in the back of the minds of the South Korean visitors; it has not been forgotten, merely repressed and ignored, like the black sheep in the family, the awkward uncle no one wants to meet. At the same time, the writer merrily travels the country, looking for the "Pearl of the Orient," as the French called Hanoi.[74] Every page of his travel writings breathes a sense of nostalgia for the lost colony of olden times. Remarking that "Vietnamese farming villages look just like our Korean farming villages,"[75] the author is completely immersed in a colonial daydream. His apprehension about the war seems to be unfounded. Everywhere he goes, he is told that "Ttaihan [South Korea] number one!"[76] Nowhere does he engage in a discussion about the war, not even in his travel writings. The only remnant of the war that is allowed into the present is what he (and others) call the "second generation Ttaihan," or children of South Korean fathers and Vietnamese mothers. The entire war is reduced to these children, many of whom have had difficult lives on account of their ancestry. To sum it up, this kind of attitude (that pervades this kind of travel writings published in popular weeklies and monthlies) is colonial and patronizing in a literal sense: the author mentions several businessmen who have taken a paternal interest in the second generation Ttaihan children and pose as their fathers. Any sense of wrongdoing regarding the war is sublimated in righteous indignation concerning the fate of the Korean-Vietnamese children – it should not escape notice that these children are seen as second generation Koreans and that the consequences of the South Korean participation in the Vietnam War are predominantly seen in terms of the human cost to the second generation of Ttaihan in Vietnam.

Vietnam could all but disappear from the popular consciousness and resurface only as a site of projected dreams, partially because of how Vietnam veterans were received upon returning home. Towards the end of the military involvement on Vietnam the reception of the veterans in South Korea changed dramatically, becoming negative in the early seventies. There are several factors that contributed to this shift: the attitude of the US media, which was increasingly negative, rising casualty numbers among the South Korean soldiers, victories obtained by the North Vietnamese Army and, lastly, the growing awareness within South Korean society of massacres of Vietnamese civilians committed by ROK troops.[77] According to one sociologist:

> *The most decisive factors for the memories regarding Vietnam never taking hold as a collective memory, was the fact that this was a minority experience that never received the approval of the South Korean people; consequently, the empathy from the people as a whole was never secured.*[78]

If we add state censorship and the suppression and subversion of memories to the equation, this statement certainly rings true. As a result, something that is akin to the orientalization of Vietnam took place. On the back of South Korea's rapid economic development and its hunger for overseas investments in the nineties, Vietnam was reconstructed in the popular consciousness as a site of possibilities, the place where a man might go and make something of himself. The war seemed to have been forgotten. When speaking to the Vietnamese president in 1992 on the eve of the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, President Roh Dae Woo (a Vietnam veteran himself) barely mentioned the war. He merely stated: "I find it regrettable that there was a very ill-fated period in our histories."[79] Kim Dae Jung was as circumspect when he addressed the Vietnamese president in 2001:

"I regret the fact that by participating in an ill-fated war we unwillingly caused the Vietnamese people to suffer and offer you these words of consolation."[80]

Although the war is indirectly referred to, it is also clear

71 Kwŏn Sŏuk, "Yet yŏnghwa toech'ajŭryŏnŭn 'Tongyang-ŭi chinju' Hanoi, p. 146.
72 Ibid., p. 146.
73 Ibid., p. 143.
74 Ibid., p. 143.
75 Ibid., p. 143.
76 Kwon Sŏuk, "Nunmul-lo ŏllukchin 20-nyŏn… Na-ŭi abŏji 'Ttaihan,'" p. 137.
77 Shim Chuhyŏng 심주형, *Pet'ŭnamjŏn ch'amjŏn-e taehan kiŏg-ŭi chŏngch'i* 베트남전 참전에 대한 기억의 정치 (Seoul: MA thesis, SNU, 2003), pp. 37-38.
78 Ch'oe Chŏnggi, "Han'guk-kun-ŭi Pet'ŭnam ch'amjŏn, ŏttŏk'e kiŏk toego innŭnga?" p. 75. As mentioned before, Ch'oe also concluded that the individualized suffering of the veterans precluded their being accepted as a social group within South Korean society.
79 *Kyŏnghyang shinmun*, 23 December 1992, quoted in Ch'oe Chŏnggi, "Han'guk-kun-ŭi Pet'ŭnam ch'amjŏn, ŏttŏk'e kiŏk toego innŭnga?" p. 77.
80 *Munhwa Ilbo* 문화 일보, 24 August 2001, quoted in Ch'oe Chŏnggi, "Han'guk-kun-ŭi Pet'ŭnam ch'amjŏn, ŏttŏk'e kiŏk toego innŭnga?" p. 77. This is as far as Kim would go. Responsibility for the murder of Vietnamese civilians was not taken then or at any other time.

that the responsibility for what happened is not located in South Korea. At the same time, however, Vietnam was regarded with new interest in South Korea and the South Korean popular consciousness. With South Koreans forming the second-largest group of expats in Vietnam (54,000 in 2007 and 84,000 in 2009),[81] investments in Vietnam soared from $2 billion in 1996 to $ 11 billion in 2007.[82] There are between 2,000 to 3,000 marriage agencies established in South Korea that actively mediate between Vietnamese women and South Korean men.[83] Banners advertising "Vietnamese virgins 베트남 처녀" are consequently frequently seen flying in non-urban areas. These agencies seem to be quite effective as well: from 2006 onwards approximately 5,000 Vietnamese women each year have married South Korean men (farmers mainly), in search of financial security and the elusive lifestyle popularized by the Korean Wave (soap operas in particular were well-received in Vietnam).[84] Practical guides, popular histories of Vietnam and Vietnamese language kits flooded the market, although interestingly in the histories the presence of ROK troops during the Vietnam War is barely mentioned (if mentioned at all).[85] The present importance of Vietnam for Korea is complicated by the past the two countries share. When President Lee Myoung Bak visited Vietnam in 2009, controversy surrounded the preparations for the visit. Like his predecessor Roh Moo Hyun, Lee decided to visit the mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh to lay a wreath there, explaining that Ho "as the leader of the Vietnamese people is a symbol that I cannot simply pretend to not know." He did this despite considerable domestic resistance against the idea of the South Korean president paying his respects to a man who had once been the country's enemy. Neither Kim Young Sam nor Kim Dae Jung had visited the mausoleum during their visits to Vietnam in 1996 and 1998 respectively. Complicating matters this time was Lee's signing of a legislative proposal designed to improve the treatment of South Korean Vietnam veterans. This proposal included the following phrase, to which the Vietnamese government strenuously objected: "the meritorious veterans of the Vietnam War who contributed to the maintenance of world peace." The South Korean government gave in to Vietnamese pressure and promised to "pursue a course that would leave out any expression which would be diplomatically offensive to either party." Having to navigate between his own conservative supporters by "being extremely sincere with regard to our [national] past" and "humbly" seeking important "future-oriented" economic relations with Vietnam, Lee experienced the pitfalls of South Korea's perceptions of the Vietnam War.[86]

The autobiography of General Ch'ae Myŏngshin, Commander-In-Chief of the ROK forces in Vietnam

Vietnam (due to its close economic ties with South Korea and its status as a communist state) also plays an important role in the handling of North Korean refugees. South Koreans operate several safe houses in Vietnam for North Korean refugees and the road to Vietnam is not

81 See http://www.korean.net/morgue/status_4.jsp?tCode=status&dCode=0105 [accessed 2 October 2009]. According to these statistics Vietnam is tenth on the list of countries with South Korean populations. According to an article in the *Korea Times*, a whopping 500,000 South Koreans are (temporarily) staying in Vietnam. These figures, incidentally, are not supported by the official government numbers: http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2009/05/211_13761.html [accessed 2 October 2009].

82 See http://members.forbes.com/global/2006/0918/028.html [accessed 9 February 2009]. For detailed figures, see the website of the Korean Trade-Investment Promotion Agency ((대한무역투자진흥공사): http://www.kotra.or.kr.

83 See http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/21/world/asia/21iht-brides.4670360.html?_r=1 [accessed 2 October 2009].

84 See for instance So Tonghun 서동훈 and Pak Yŏnggyun 박영균, "Hallyu-ga Pet'ŭnam ch'ŏngsonyŏn-ŭi munhwa ŭishig-e mich'inŭn yŏnghyang 한류가 베트남 청소년의 문화의식에 미치는 영향," *Han'guk ch'ŏngsonyŏn kaebalwŏn yŏn'gu pogoso (yoyakchip)* 2007 (2007): pp. 100-102. For an analysis that smacks of cultural imperialism (on how to "guide" Vietnamese viewers to the "right way" of understanding Korean culture through Hallyu products), see Kim Sŏngnan 김성란, "Pet'ŭnam-esŏ-ŭi Hallyu-e taehan p'yosangjŏk punsŏk: yŏsŏng p'yosang-ŭl chungshim-ŭro 베트남에서의 '한류'에 대한 표상적 분석 - 여성 표상을 중심으로," *Inmun k'ontench'ŭ* 인문콘텐츠12 (2008): pp. 61-79.

85 Any browsing session in a (sufficiently large) Korean bookstore will confirm this.

86 Kim Sanghyŏp 김상협, "MB, pandae murŭpssŭgo Ho Cchimin myoso- chamber MB 반대 무릅쓰고 호찌민묘소 참배," in *Munhwa ilbo*, 21 October 2009, p. 4.

as dangerous as other escape routes.[87] In 2004 Vietnam incurred the wrath of North Korea by allowing 468 refugees to be airlifted out of Vietnam and into South Korea.[88] Vietnam, in other words, plays the role of middleman in the North-South Korean relationship.

What is the role of the Vietnam veterans in this new relationship between Vietnam and South Korea? Almost none, it would seem. They have been edited out of the picture rather efficiently. After having been ignored for two decades, in 1992 it was made public that many veterans were suffering the aftereffects of Agent Orange and other defoliants used in Vietnam.[89] Several veteran associations campaigned to have the symptoms recognized and the veterans compensated.[90] While this battle is still raging, Vietnam veteran associations are mainly active on the web, displaying few activities in other areas. Maintaining websites that are steeped in nostalgia for a Vietnam that disappeared four decades ago, the veterans' associations through these websites and their members aim to keep alive the memories of the Vietnam War: the sacrifices that were made and the horrors that were experienced.[91]

There is one exception to the almost total amnesia regarding South Korea's part in the Vietnam War. Right in the middle of the Vietnam boom in 1999, the leftist weekly *Hangyŏre 21* launched an initiative to repair the damage done to the Vietnamese by the ROK troops.[92] The 'Let us pray that our embarrassing history may be forgiven'-initiative aims to raise funds for various purposes: to build hospitals in Vietnam; to enable journalists to pay visits to the sites of civilian massacres for research purposes; and to conduct interviews with Vietnamese survivors of such massacres as well as Korean ex-soldiers who are willing to talk about their part in the massacres.[93] The initiative quickly gained the support of the Korean women who had been forced to serve Japanese soldiers in World War II as comfort women.[94] Rapidly obtaining a (provocative) reputation, the initiative made possible the emergence of three NGOs that are concerned with offering reparations to Vietnam in the form of humanitarian aid. At the same time, it predictably angered the Vietnam veterans who felt betrayed now that the moral justification for their personal sacrifices was denied by *Hangyŏre 21*. They staged protests and even attacked and invaded the premises of the Hangyŏre group, assaulting several of its employees with iron bars.[95] Through the years, there have also been other voices urging a reconsideration of South Korea's role in the Vietnam War, but these voices have been lonesome, never coming close to gathering the recognition (or infamy to some) of the *Hangyŏre 21* initiative. Despite its scale and one-year-long activities (with hundreds of articles published on the massacres in Vietnam), it did not succeed in penetrating South Korean popular consciousness. This is clear from the fact that the South Korean population had not significantly changed its perceptions with regard to Vietnam after the initiative ended in 2001: products from popular culture (movies, TV dramas, novels et cetera) still prefer not to discuss the Vietnam War and South Korea's involvement in it.

CONCLUSION

While the profits accrued during the Vietnam War were essential for South Korea's rapid economic developments during the seventies, the strength of the discourse of what may be called 'the politics of suffering' in South Korea has caused the South Korean participation in the Vietnam War to be conceptualized in terms of Korean suffering,

87 North Korea recognizes Vietnam as a model in developing its economy and the Vietnamese leader visited North Korea in 2007. See Chang Hyangsoo 張亨壽, "Pet'ŭnam-ŭi kukche hyŏmnyŏk kyŏnghŏm-i Pukhan-e chunŭn shisajŏm 베트남의 國際協力 경험이 北韓에 주는 시사점," *Kyŏngje yŏn'gu* 經濟硏究24.1 (2003): pp. 85-96; Cho Myŏngch'ŏl 조명철 and Hong Ikp'yo 홍익표, *Chungguk, Pet'ŭnam-ŭi ch'ogi kaehyŏk, kaebang-gwa Pukhan-ŭi kaehyŏk kaebang* 중국.베트남의 초기 개혁 · 개방정책과 북한의 개혁방향 (policy report, Seoul: KIEP, 2000); Pak Songgwan 박성관, "Pukhan-ŭi Taedongnam-a oegyo pyŏnhwa 북한의 대동남아 외교변화," *Kukche chŏngch'i nonch'ong* 國際政治論叢 4.3 3 (2003): pp. 235-253.

88 See the following articles: http://theseoultimes.com/ST/?url=/ST/db/read.php?idx=816 [accessed 1 October 2009]; http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/30/international/asia/30korea.html [accessed 1 October 2009]. Although in far lesser numbers, North Korean refugees still find their way to South Korean through Vietnam: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/25/world/asia/25korea.html [accessed 16 October 2009].

89 Ch'oe Chŏnggi "Han'guk-kun-ŭi Pet'ŭnam ch'amjŏn, ŏttŏk'e kiŏk toego innŭnga?" pp. 73-79.

90 See http://www.vietvet.co.kr (Wŏllam p'abyŏng tongjihoe월남파병동지회) [accessed 9 February 2009].

91 See http://cafe3.ktdom.com/vietvet/main.htm [accessed 8 February 2009]. Also see http://www.vvk.co.kr/index.php[accessed 9 February 2009].

92 This initiative was succeeded by three NGOs with roughly similar aims: I and We, Medics with Vietnam, and Peace and Young Korean Writer's Solidarity for Vietnam. These NGOs aim to follow up the Hangyŏre initiative to look into and atone for the massacres committed by the Korean soldiers in Vietnam War. See Ngoc Pham Die, *Pet'ŭnam chŏnjaeng-gwa kwallyŏn-toen Han'guk tanch'edŭr-ŭi hwaltong-gwa Pet'ŭnam panŭng* 베트남전쟁과 관련된 한국단체들의 활동과 베트남의 반응 (MA thesis, Sŏnggŏng Taehakkyo NGO taehagwŏn 성공회대학교 NGO대학원, 2006).

93 See the index of the initiative at: http://www.hani.co.kr/h21/vietnam/ [accessed 5 February 2009]. Several hundred pages with testimonies and research articles are attached to this site.

94 See http://www.hani.co.kr/h21/vietnam/vietnam282.html [accessed 5 February 2009].

95 Cho Hyŏnch'ŏl 조현철, "Han'gyŏre shinmunsa nanip shiwi 한겨레신문사 난입 시위," *Kyŏnghyang shinmun*경향신문, 28 June 2000, p. 19.

with some minor exceptions. This discourse claims that Korea suffered as much from the war as Vietnam, a statement whose truth has not and cannot be measured. This discourse further harnesses the mirror-like image of Vietnamese history within the narrative of South Korean economic development for the sake of South Korean discourse of identity and history. The politics of suffering now firmly belongs to the public domain, having been planted there by decades of government-led censorship on Vietnam War-related research. The very real suffering experienced by the ROK soldiers in Vietnam and the South Korean labourers who contributed to the miracle on the Han have fortified the discourse. The few novels written about the Vietnam War by Vietnam veterans strengthened the image that the Korean participation in the war was forced, the ROK's responsibility absent (the US being deemed responsible) and Korean suffering as great as that of the Vietnamese.

Professional historiography has for the main part uncritically followed popular perceptions of the Vietnam War to the extent that a history of Vietnam published in Korean by a professional historian completely omits the issue of the participation of ROK troops. The failure of professional historians (until very recently) to engage with what one Korean historian has called "the most influential international event that Korea was ever confronted with outside the Korean War,"[96] has made it possible for two popular historical and defining national myths to remain unchallenged: the myth that the miracle on the Han was completely homegrown instead of funded by the Vietnam War and the myth that Korea has never invaded another country. These myths – which are in fact mythomoteurs or constitutive political myths – are of crucial importance in maintaining contemporary South Korean self-perceptions and national identity. Reconsideration of the significance of the Vietnam War in South Korean history and society would inevitably come to involve a reconsideration of South Korean contemporary national identity.

In many ways, the Vietnam War is an atypical field of historical inquiry. The moral debates that often surround other contentious issues in Korean historiography are undercut by the politics of suffering and there seems to be little to no dialogue or discussion possible between the realms of popular perception and professional inquiry. Instead, in most cases professional inquiry took its cues from popular perceptions. One striking example is furnished by the *Hangyŏre* newspaper (issued by the same publisher that supported *Hangyŏre 21*, which started the atonement initiative). On the same day the front page was dominated by a large and indignant article about the massacre of civilians committed at Nogŭn-ri by US troops in 1950 and the absence of US apologies, page three featured an interview with general Ch'ae Myŏngshin, former commander-in-chief of ROK troops in Vietnam, in which Ch'ae defended himself against Vietnamese accusations that his men massacred Vietnamese civilians. According to Ch'ae, the ROK soldiers were not to blame, since they could not tell the difference between Vietcong guerrillas and Vietnamese civilians. Ironically, this same argument was used by the US soldiers who committed the Nogŭn-ri massacre.

It needs to be stated unambiguously that the treatment that has befallen the Vietnam War in modern Korean history is certainly not without parallels. Many nations, in particular those with a colonial past, furnish similar examples in their national histories. An example close to home is the way in which the colonial past of the Netherlands has never been recognized in Dutch popular consciousness (and not nearly enough by its professional historians). In a manner that is reminiscent of how the suffering of the Koreans during the Korean War and ROK soldiers during and after the Vietnam War have drowned out the Vietnamese side of the story, the Dutch suffering in the Japanese internment camps during World War II[97] has made it virtually impossible to face the consequences of 350 years of colonial policy (exploitation, abuse, massacre) in Indonesia.[98] The suffering of Dutch veterans during what is still euphemistically called the 'Dutch police actions ' (now widely regarded as attacks instigated by the former colonizer to quell Indonesia's struggle for independence) also contributes to the silencing of Indonesian voices in Dutch popular debate.[99] Like their Korean counterparts, the Dutch soldiers had experienced a long war at home

96 Ch'oe Chŏnggi "Han'guk-kun-ŭi Pet'ŭnam ch'amjŏn, ŏttŏk'e kiŏk toego innŭnga?" p. 86.

97 Where ironically many of the guards were in fact Korean; the generation of forced soldiers Hwang Sok-yong alluded to.

98 See for instance Marjan Bruinvels (ed.), *ZO is het gebeurd: 20 jaar historische visies op de tweede wereldoorlog in Z.O. Azie* (Stichting Gastdocenten Wereldoorlog II, werkgroep Z.O. Azië, 2008); Pieter Joost Drooglever and Marian Schouten (eds.), *De kolonie en dekolonisatie: Nederland, Nederlands-Indië en Indonesië: een bundel artikelen aangeboden bij het afscheid van het Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis* (Den Haag: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 2006); Rudy Kousbroek, *Het Oostindisch kampsyndroom* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1995).

99 As opposed to academic debate where Indonesian voices are heard.

before they were sent to the tropics. Their (incidentally very real) suffering, both during and after the independence war, still obstructs a more liberal view of colonial history, one in which self-interest is not paraded as altruism. The politics of suffering, the exploitation for political ends of human suffering, have no nationality. This story can be found virtually anywhere, in endless variations, shapes and forms, the only constant being the presence of human suffering and its manipulation.

The prevalence of the politics of suffering in remembering the Vietnam War (aided by government censorship) created a distorted picture of Vietnam in which it was remembered only as a site of possible profit and adventure and a place to show Korean superiority. The Vietnam boom in the nineties confirmed this notion *in extremis*, as a result of which South Korea is now Vietnam's largest investor. Korean movies about Vietnam reflect this attitude faithfully. Like popular writings on Vietnam, they are in general colonialist, orientalizing and exoticist in nature. The Vietnamese are depicted (if they are depicted at all) as typical Southeast Asian people, easy to please and happy to forgive, their surroundings lush, tropical and mysteriously exotic. In this, these movies show a striking resemblance with exoticizing movies set against colonial backgrounds from all over the world. Earlier I referred to Hwang Sok-yong writing that there was in his estimation not much difference between his father's generation having to serve in the Japanese Imperial Army and his generation having to serve and die in Vietnam for the US. The author could have extended this comparison by remarking that the place held by Manchuria in the Korean colonial imagination during Japan's rule of Korea as a site of profit, adventure and possibility was taken over by Vietnam in the nineties. While Manchuria was the colony's colony (at least in the popular imagination) during the Japanese colonial period, Vietnam became the colony's colony during the period of US dependency in the late sixties and seventies.[100] Both spawned narratives of conquest (sexual and otherwise), profit and the promise of exotic adventure. The war, if mentioned at all, is merely a forgotten memory, a body lying in an unmarked grave. At times, though, its stench is noticeable.

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100 This is part of my on-going research and as such still unfinished. A provisional conclusion based on research in colonial period films suggests that Manchuria was consistently depicted as a place where fortunes could be made by resourceful and courageous men. In these movies, Manchuria is portrayed as an uncivilized (despite the age of its civilization) and untamed country, ready for the taking. Gangsters (or freedom fighters, the distinction is blurred in Korean popular discourse) who made it in Manchuria were seen as being supremely powerful. Both imagined representations, (movies, literature and songs) and daily-life factors, such as large-scale immigration, independence fighters, and bandits, worked together to create Manchuria as the screen upon which the dreams, hopes and fears of the colonized could be projected.

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The failings of success

THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS MEANING IN MODERN KOREAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

A truly religious person does not rashly hope in the world, but religiously wants success and failure to signify equally much, that is, equally little, and does not want the religious to have significance by way of or along with something else, but wants it to have absolute meaning in itself. (Søren Kierkegaard)[1]

In 1987, Ahmad Aijaz was moved to take issue with Frederic Jameson's assertion that there was a category called Third World Literature that had to be defined exclusively in terms of "the experience of colonialism and imperialism."[2] There was no such thing as Third World Literature, he countered, and the definition provided for this imagined category was a sheer imposition.

> *If this 'Third World' is constituted by the singular 'experience of colonialism and imperialism,' and if the only possible response is a nationalist one, then what else is there that is more urgent to narrate than this 'experience'? In fact, there is nothing else to narrate. For…if the motivating force for history here is neither class formation and class struggle nor…conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region, and so on, but the unitary 'experience' of national oppression…then what else can one narrate but that national oppression?*[3]

We could, in the case of Korean history writing, relate this to the move that some of us have engaged in to break away from an exclusively political representation of Korea's recent history, but I want to apply the sharp edge of Aijaz Ahmed's argument more specifically to the continued subscription to prescriptive political categories in modern Korean historiography that allows no independent narrative for religion as a historically relevant agent of change. For modern Korean historiography is largely a story of the politization[4] of Korean history, whereby the extraordinary richness of the early 20th century especially is forced into a procrustean bed of predominantly post-colonial categories and terminology. Even though some of the most recent studies of Korea's modern history offer some variety of approach, there is a question whether this variety itself does not stem from an attempt to conquer the richness of the historical experiences of the time.[5] Partly by considering Korea as a partner in the debates

1 Søren Kierkegaard, *Two ages: The age of revolution and the present age* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 13.

2 Aijaz Ahmed, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'," in *Social Text* 17 (1987), reprinted in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 78.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

4 I am using this word, "politization," in the sense often used to refer to the habit of relating human phenomena to political frameworks, whereby it is presumed that their real meaning is illuminated. A good analysis of this habit is found in Marjun Anttonen, "The Politization of the Concepts of Culture and Ethnicity: an Example from Northern Norway," in *Anthropology Today* 14.1 (1998): pp. 7–15. But the term is itself of older lineage, and its use and elaboration in the early 1960s by the "religious" sociologist, Jacques Ellul, underlines a central point in this paper, that we need to recover a language through which to express the perspectives, motivations and objectives of religious figures and movements in history.

that occupied the peoples of all Northeast Asia at the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, Andre Schmid has made a good start on rectifying the thinness of the terms used in modern Korean history writing,[6] but there is scope for much more effort in this direction.

Indeed, a new challenge has arisen in the form of a virulently politizing application of the doctrine of post-colonialism, one that locates the history of Christianity in Korea within the political objectives of western nations, and thereby ensures not only that these nations and not Korea remain in the centre of the stage but also that the western academies that champion such political theories can perpetuate their presumption of being the academic metropole for knowledge and understanding of the supposedly post- but still-colonized world. As much as this post-colonial doctrine might appear supportive of nationalistic complaints and accusations made by members of this other world,[7] it is in fact one of the more serious forms of cultural imperialism to issue from the contemporary western academic environment. In the spirit of Ahmad Aijaz and with as much justification, we should demand to know on whose authority the experience of Koreans and of Korean Christianity from the 1870s to the present day must be subsumed under the category of the post-colonial, and question this imposition on Korean history of a scheme whereby its chief agents are non-Koreans and historians can narrate only a single, unitary political determinant. We need to question further why contemporary Korean academics' understanding of the thought, perspectives and culture of the people who live on the Korean peninsula must follow the modernist and post-modernist paths prescribed by academics elsewhere in order to gain recognition, and why the narrative of their own recent history must and can only follow a progression from pre-colonial to colonial to postcolonial.

To say that all the strands in Korea's modern history are necessarily conditioned by the political forces of imperialism, nationalism, and neo-colonialism is to say, in effect, that any experience or movement operating within that historical space that is not relatable to these political contexts is either not real or is an instance of false consciousness. Even if, for the sake of argument, we were to concede that they must therefore be categorized as false consciousness, that would not dispose of the question whether false consciousness ever has crucial effects on historical outcomes. But false consciousness is no longer a category that is fashionable, and the common position is simply that they are not relevant to historical outcomes, or in other words they are not historically real, except in so far as they are adjuncts to political power.

The politization of history enjoys a wide provenance and has determined historical understanding of the relation between religion and history, even where the formative role of religion is recognized. For such recognition is only up to a point, a point where the religious is given its true worth through a political consummation. A case in point is the religious-political connection espoused in the pioneering work on women's history in Europe carried out by Gerder Lerner in the early 1990s.

> *The insight that religion was the primary arena on which women fought for hundreds of years for feminist consciousness was not one I had previously had…. I listened to the voices of forgotten women and accepted what they told me…. Women's striving for emancipation was acted out in the arena of religion long before women could conceive of political solutions for their situation.*[8]

What is germane here is not only Lerner's recognition that religion had historical agency, but also that it did so only in default of political options, which are presumed to be on a higher and historically much more important level.[9] This we might term the politization of the modern historian's consciousness.

Given how extensively this politized consciousness pervades modern historiography, it is not surprising that it informs mainstream historical writings on modern

5 Cf. Paul Feyerabend, *Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 12ff.

6 Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires: 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

7 As an example of such an approach, see Ryu Taeyŏng 유대영, *Kaehwagi Chosŏn-gwa weguk sŏn'gyosa*개화기 조선과 외국 선교사, (Seoul 서울: Han'guk Kidokkyo yŏksa yŏn'gusa 한국기독교역사연구사, 2004), in which, ironically, the author claims that western scholars are unable to appreciate the truth of the post-colonial approach to Korea. A more balanced use of the theory is found in a recent work by Choi Hyeaweol, *Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women, Old Ways* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), although the idea that the application of the postcolonial theory to Korean Christian experience represents some kind of breakthrough is strongly evident, and does lead to some procrustean passages. To be sure, a postcolonial approach does provide a different perspective, but that cannot be its own justification.

8 Gerder Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. vii-viii.

Korea. One could argue that in the case of Korea, this consciousness is more pronounced, and is possibly required by the nature of Korea's modern history itself. The literary scholar Kim Uchang, for instance, has pointed out that although in East Asian tradition culture is supposed to work from the inside as a civilizing agent that determines the outer, material world, including state policy, this ideal order "has been completely reversed in the actual historical unfolding of events in modern Korea," so that the consequent wholesale yielding of cultural activity, including scholarship, to politics has itself become "part of the dynamics of culture."[10]

Accordingly, the idea that religions suggested ideas and directions of change to significant numbers of Koreans, that they inspired whole programs of social reform and that they motivated national leaders and their followers to take decisive action in relation to the challenges of their times—in short, that religious beliefs determined key positions historical figures held and acted upon—goes against most interpretations of modern Korean history. Instead, religion is viewed as a matter of personal idiosyncrasy rather than as a body of beliefs and observances structuring its adherents' conceptual world and providing them with the metaphors by which they lived and sought to change their society. Even when some historical agency is admitted for ideas, these ideas are almost entirely political or ideological. And where religions have been allowed, belatedly, some historical significance, they possess this significance only by way of or along with something else, which is to say that religions have no particular agenda of their own, or are admitted meaning primarily in relation to agendas that originate elsewhere.

The most outstanding problem with this dominant view of the relation of religion to history in modern Korea is the judgment that precisely where Christian religious movements and their members succeeded in terms of their own agendas, they were failures in terms of the nation's history. Having succeeded in transmitting to a reasonably large minority of fellow Koreans the basic premises of Christianity, its impartial inclusion of all peoples, its timeless call for individual and communal holiness, and the relation of all temporal objectives to the eternal destiny of each human being, they were accused of becoming distracted and useless, even at times fifth columnists.

Perhaps the most outstanding contributive element in this judgment is the lack of language with which to express religion in history. Behind this lack of terms and categories to represent in historical terms the inspirations, motivations and immediate and final objectives of the religious, lies a number of developments in societies around the globe, of which I will briefly mention only two: the substitution of materialist for spiritual worldviews, and the actual rise of secular societies and related theories of secularisation.

The Russian Vekhi group of intellectual activists, led by Chestov, Berdyaev, and the like, had viewed the changes sweeping their world from the mid-nineteenth century in religious terms and had developed a language that accorded with this worldview.[11] But they lost the language battle to Lenin, under whom the Bolsheviks realised they had to change the religious terminology, not only of the Vekhi of course but of the whole established Russian Orthodox edifice, and replace it consciously with historical-materialist terminology. Such became the central thrust of the USSR education system.[12]

The rise of secularism, or at least of the secularisation thesis of secular society's inexorable replacement of the failing sacred orders of civilization around the globe, has played a large part in the loss of language to express the religious in history. The secularisation thesis has a long and involved history, and has recently undergone a flurry of revisions, and so I will not go into such a huge topic here except to note a couple of conclusions drawn from the thesis that appear to be *non-sequiturs*. In those areas of the world where religious belief declined, religion did in fact lose agency in a general sense as well as politically. However, it does not follow that the point of view of those who used to or still do hold religious beliefs—that is, that religious beliefs did determine the shape of societies and histories—was itself mistaken. Yet not believing religion is

9 Which is very interesting, given that for some time now it has been recognized that education and employment have been more effective than political franchise in achieving progress on women's livelihood issues. Religion was, after all, the sphere of education and extra-familial employment for women over many centuries, and remains so.

10 Uchang Kim, "The Agony of Cultural Construction: Politics and Culture in Modern Korea," in *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*, edited by Hagen Koo (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 166 & 194.

11 See Nikolai Berdiaev, *The Meaning of History* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1936 [Trans. George Reavey]), and Christopher Read, *Religion, Revolution and the Russian Intelligentsia, 1900-1912* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

12 See my chapter, "The Place of Religion in North Korean Ideology," in *Korea: The Past and the Present*, edited by Susan Pares and J. E. Hoare (Folkstone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2008), p. 249.

true and believing religious beliefs have not shaped history continues to be a common conflation.

From this conflation has issued a lack of interest in the content of religious belief[13] and a focus on what we might call the non-religious, social reasons for religious movements, a focus that is encouraged by the belief that religious doctrines in and of themselves are not the motivating forces of history. When looking at the social activities of religious movements, sociologists and historians almost invariably analyse these movements as if these social activities were the religious movements' cause. This *non sequitur* in turn has led to a misreading of religious leaders' inspirations, motivations and objectives. The consequence of this misreading is a serious misunderstanding of the relation between religion and social change. Put another way, it sets aside as of no account the conceptual nature of religion when examining its relation to history and society.

One element in this tendency to ignore the nature and content of religious systems seems certainly to stem from what Terry Eagleton has termed the appalling ignorance of theology among his intellectual peers.[14] Partly, I believe his complaint issues from his own Catholic background—and he does typify the journey a number of Jesuit scholars have taken from a transcendent moral cosmology to an immanent moral ideology. But he attributes to this ignorance the now common failure to appreciate that theologies and their equivalents have been the frameworks through which life in all its dimensions has been grasped and grappled with, and have thereby played a dominant role in the development of human culture, thought and civilization.

For the big, basic questions that religions addressed did not disappear with the rise of materialist interpretations of history or of the secular state. Recognition of the sacred and saintly kept re-emerging even in the representations Marxist ideology made of its own role and value, as it had to, for the moral fervour of the ideology was prophetic and inspirational. It required and constantly referred to exemplars, and once the ideology took an active historical form, a hagiographic movement began to move ever closer to its centre. For certainly one big question could not disappear from view: Does one support the liberation of the oppressed classes because science proves history is going that way or because oppression is humanly and morally unacceptable? If the former, becoming anti-Marxist, or fascist, or neo-conservative when what Marx anticipated failed to materialise and when these seemed now to have history on their side, is hardly inconsistent with the logic of becoming a Marxist revolutionary in the first place. In the face of mounting uncertainties, it became necessary to make the Marxist creed even more religious: the withering away of the state had to rank alongside the second coming of Christ. Far more than nationalism, *pace* Benedict Anderson, ideology became *ersatz* religion. Indeed, there was something millenarian about Marxism from the outset. It was to sweep away the old order and replace it with an entirely new vocabulary and grammar. One could say that Marxism was a sacral idea, and certainly became so as a movement. In Korea, too, the Korean Marxists positioned themselves in relation to the meaning of history in a more than mundane manner.[15]

In the twentieth century, Chestov and Berdyaev were followed in western nations by, among others, Simone Weil, Georges Bataille, and some of the surrealists, and later Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jacques Maritain, Karl Barth, Jacques Ellul, the Niebuhr brothers, Herbert Butterfield, Harvey Cox and Peter Berger, who have striven to restore religious language and metaphors to discourse about history and society. But the positions forwarded by some of these were taken as rather offbeat, idiosyncratic: Trotsky could only respond to Weil by suggesting she was a little insane.[16] But what they did was to give intellectual form and favour to the religious impulses and perceptions of ordinary people who were committed to a conception of society as a spiritual structure. In some sense this paralleled Marx's economic structure of society, in relation to which he claimed a scientific language for the everyday

13 I am aware that religion is hardly a matter only or even chiefly of beliefs, and recognize the legitimacy of those such as Donald Lopez who point out that ritual is in many cases far more important (Donald S. Lopez Jr., "Belief," in *Critical Terms in Religious Studies*, edited by M.C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Chapter 1). But I include rituals in the content of religion and am, moreover, referring to the debate in relation to Protestant Christianity, for which beliefs are at a premium.

14 "Love, death and the big issues," an interview of Terry Eagleton by Christina Patterson of *The Independent*, reprinted in *The Canberra Times*, 11 October 2003.

15 Because of post-1945 developments it is mostly forgotten that leftist ideologies in Korea were initially introduced and led almost exclusively by Protestants. How far they viewed socialism religiously is another question that has not been studied to date.

16 Francine Du Plessis Gray, *Simone Weil* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2001), pp. 68ff. This occurred in 1933, before Weil became openly religious, but was occasioned by changes in her perspective on violence and revolution at the onset of her search for a new language that honoured human sanctity and her realization that religious language fitted the bill. Indeed, Trotsky was already accusing her of being a Salvation Army follower.

experiences and impulses of the ordinary person. But in western scholarship since the mid-twentieth-century, one finds very little further development of this line, so that we still we suffer from a lack of terms and methods to analyse religion in history.

When we find few pointers in contemporary scholarship or thought, perhaps the best way forward is to go back to a time when writers had not yet abandoned the conception of a spiritual structure of society and history, and while not taking up the issue whether their beliefs were true, learn from them how to engage in a systematic study of the religious in history, and thereby rediscover a language that copes with the relation of religion to history. Edith Wyschogrod considers contemporary theory has come to an impasse because of postmodernism's glaring inability to lay any consistent basis for addressing present matters of undeniably moral hugeness. While remaining within the postmodernist tradition, Wyschogrod proposes it needs to take a radically new approach, that is, an approach both ancient and postmodern, one that avoids the amnesia of nostalgia yet reinstates the saintly tradition of fashioning "lives of compassion and generosity".[17] This approach entails life narratives, analogous to the lives of saints, "defined in terms that both overlap and overturn traditional normative stipulations and that defy the normative structure of moral theory."[18] Life narratives show what moral living means, without getting sidetracked by the "procedural and linguistic disputes in which modern ethics has become entrapped." Saints offer "not airy discourse but their own flesh," and enact beliefs in real-life situations, not through abstractions.[19]

Alexander Irwin has followed this suggestion up by forwarding the thesis that one way religion relates to history is its "political mobilisation of the category of the sacred."[20] The sacred can be mobilised politically by self-sacrifice, and so two thinkers as contrasting in their values and worldviews as Georges Bataille and Simone Weil "believed a positive renewal of political forms… depended on a transformation for which the language of religion provided the least inappropriate vocabulary."[21] For their own reasons, European right-wing forces of the time believed the same, but only instrumentally. Bataille and Weil's positions were highly critical, rejected all orthodoxies, religious and political, and believed in self-transformation as individuals in the most exacting manner: enactment in their own lives of all they wrote. For writing is communicating, but living one's writing is *real* communication. Weil meant her *self* to be read. Weil shaped her life and death as acts of communication: her death was to be a metaphor "for the courage, devotion to the supernatural good, and pure sacrificial love she believed were the qualities required not only of the Christian, but of the loyal citizen of a country in the throes of affliction."[22]

If we turn our attention at this point to the ongoing debate over the merits and demerits of two protestant figures in early twentieth-century Korea, namely Kim Kyoshin 金敎臣 and Yun Ch'iho 尹致昊, one might detect in that debate a serious distortion of both men's positions by imposing on them the shackles of the normative structure of nationalist moral theory, and condemning them where they overturn these normative stipulations: condemning Yun at least for doing so and missing the fact that Kim does so even more fundamentally. Similar issues arise in relation to the life narratives of two leading Protestant women of the same period: Kim Maria 金瑪利亞 and Kim Hwallan 金活蘭.

But there is more at issue here. If one engages in life narratives, it becomes apparent very quickly that the search for consistency in a life of tense engagement with a flesh and blood world is an illusory quest. In my own research, I cannot find internal consistency in the details of the opinions and judgments about how to understand or act in Korea's world in the diaries of Yun Ch'iho, Kim Kyoshin and An Ch'angho 安昌浩, and nor should I expect to. Moreover, I cannot put much credence in the measured consistency that I do find in the autobiographies of Kim Hwallan, Park Indŏk 朴仁德, and others, and do not ignore for a moment the fact that in looking back they are changing the pasts of themselves and of others. But what I do find in all these writings, both diaries and autobiographies, is that they share a surprising degree of consistency in their perceptions of

17 Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 257.
18 Quoted in Alexander Irwin, *Saints of the Impossible* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. xx.
19 *Ibid.*, p. xxi.
20 *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
21 *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
22 *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

existence, its meaning and significance, and of what is success and what is failure; and this consistency is of paramount importance. For although autobiography is not honest, it is not dishonestly written.[23]

Much of the inconsistency one finds in the lives of such people may be attributed to Wyschogrod's insight that "saints" cannot wait for completion of a search for some elusive common theoretical stance among possibly irreconcilably divided camps holding self-righteously to one militant and usually reductionist position or another. They live in the present and that means in the flesh, existentially, where theoretical coherence is not something to begin with and perhaps need never be achieved. For them, the focus is "the-time-that-is-left in which to alleviate suffering before it is too late."[24] In this light, the requirement by their critics of consistency in the Korean Christian leaders' positions has prevented a grasp of their actual defining differences with other definitions of and approaches to the critical issues in Korea at the time. Every worldview lays claim to a solution and is defined and recognised by the solution it claims. If one begins with a spiritual premise, one cannot end with an exclusively secular solution. It is consistency in this regard that needs to be sought in order to understand a religious view of life.

Ironically, failure to apprehend this kind of consistency leads observers to judge religious actors' positions and actions as inconsistent chiefly because they follow a system of objectives and values the observer either doesn't hold or cannot understand. Thus contemporary activists whose view of the world was "normal," at times regarded Korea's Protestant activists as valuable comrades and at other times as major hindrances to their causes.[25] Where agreement on ends or course of action did occur, it was usually coincidental and temporary. Wherever ends or actions did not coincide, what the Protestant Korean considered the merit of the enterprise, the "normal" counterpart regarded as wholly beside the point.

It is at this point that a historian needs at least to consider the possibility, and imagine what it might mean, that adherents to a religious system hold a reasonably coherent view of life and society and history according to which success in certain finite, temporal goals is of only relative importance and may even be regarded as a distraction. Further, the fact that the success of the Korean Protestants even before but more acutely after 1920 to distinguish the spiritual meaning and purpose of their lives and aspirations from the political conceptions of life that surrounded them and to separate their motives in engaging in social movements from the general material objectives of the time has been judged a withdrawal from historical relevance, ought to prompt us to reconsider this kind of politization of historical meaning.

The Protestant activists in early twentieth-century Korea regarded matters such as oppression and liberty as real categories, but more than that, as essentially spiritual categories. Oppression was the outworking of sin, reconciliation the outworking of repentance and forgiveness, self-sacrifice the outworking of divine love. At bottom was an epistemology: faith as a structure that not only fits experience in this world but replicates the way we have to live in it and therefore the way we have to think about and conceptualise it. Faith, therefore, was the path to knowledge of one's own or the human condition, and applying that knowledge was the outworking of faith. It is in this context that we need to place the series of speeches and writings of An Ch'angho on repentance, love, and the contrast between heartless and compassionate societies. In these speeches but evidently more concretely in his own life, An radically challenged both the prevailing norms of social hierarchy, language protocol, interpersonal deference rules, and regional discrimination, and the mainstream solutions for the times.

Herein, in short, lies the consistency of the sacred/profane distinction, with Wyschogrod's "saints" endeavouring to embrace the whole of lived experience within the sacred. The category of the sacred is that which derives from outside of this world, in contra-distinction and often in opposition to the profane, which derives only from within the world.[26] Thus bread is bread, needed for

23 Yi Kwangsu's 李光洙 confessions, his *Na-ŭi kobaek* 나의 告白, is somewhat exceptional: I do not think I have ever read an account of this kind that is so honest. At the other end of the scale, there are of course autobiographies, sections of which one has to think were dishonestly written, such as Yim Louise's *My Forty-Year Fight for Freedom*, and although I am sure this is not a popular position to take, I would also place Kim Ku's 金九 *Paekpŏm ilchi* 白凡逸志 at this end of the scale.

24 Wyschogrod, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

25 Likewise even a seasoned historian decries or praises actions of religious groups or individuals in Korea in accordance with his own and certainly not their view of what they are or should be about.

26 In this regard, Jacques Maritain's idea of a superimposition of sacred history over the mundane relates well to the life narratives of Yun Ch'iho and Kim Hwallan, and underlines the pietistic tendency of Kim Kyoshin's. See Jacques Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History* (New York: Scribner, 1957).

biological existence, but it does not of itself belong to the sacred or the profane. Action, motivation, objective, intention, and response in relation to the conditions of biological existence are divisible in this way. The sacred is a category of existence and encompasses both the destructive and the liberating. Hate and love both emanate from the realm of the sacred and all human bondage is at bottom spiritual.[27]

I will now turn to two quite different areas in the early twentieth-century Korean historical experience where the perspectives on and solutions to pressing national issues require us to consider the relation between religion and Korean history: women's and other social reform; and death in the course of participation in national affairs. In the first case I will look in some detail at the life narrative of Kim Hwallan, whose record has become entangled in the politization of modern Korean history, and very briefly at the approach to social action of Kim Kyoshin, whose reasons and objectives have been largely misunderstood. In the second case, I will look at the literary solution sought by Chŏn Yŏngt'aek 田榮澤 for the death of his infant daughter as a result of his wife's incarceration for participating in the 1919 March First Movement.

PROTESTANT WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN COLONIAL KOREA

Let me begin *in medias res*. In 1928, Kim Hwallan, founder in 1922 of the Korean YWCA, and some years before that of the Korean Patriotic Women's Association, was elected a lay delegate to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, held in Kansas city, Missouri, at which conference she single-handedly thwarted an attempt to place Korea and the Philippines under one joint bishopric, and ensured Korea's fully independent status in the world body. Being recognised in this way and travelling far a field on the international stage was becoming a habit. In 1922 she had represented Korea in Beijing at a Conference of the Student Christian Federation. In 1927 she had served as a delegate to the 2nd Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations in Honolulu. There she spoke, and I cite her own records, on behalf of the "preservation and encouragement of the cultural and racial identity of the Korean people along with others over whom aliens of stronger nations were ruling."[28] In Honolulu, she met Syngman Rhee, renowned nationalist and later first president of the Republic of Korea, and not surprisingly, was blacklisted by the Japanese authorities and subjected to repeated visits and interrogations by police agents after her return to Seoul.

Kim Hwallan nevertheless obtained permission to attend the 1928 Methodist Conference in Missouri, and in the same year travelled to Shanghai, Saigon, and France by boat; and from France overland to Jerusalem, to participate in a meeting of the International Missionary Council. On the way to Jerusalem, Kim spent two weeks in Denmark, where she investigated the principles and practices of the Danish Folk High Schools, which the Korean YWCA and YMCA jointly planned to implement in Korea. And on her return, she opened training classes for rural men and women of four to six weeks' duration, normally in winter for men and in spring for women. There are a number of reports on these rural schools, all of which point to their popularity and look forward to their rapid diffusion throughout the land. But this was not to be: four years later the Government-General Education Bureau ordered them to cease. On what grounds? A combination of factors probably accounts for their closure, but for now let me mark their passing with the rueful obituary of Kim Hwallan herself: "The success of this project was too much for the Japanese authorities to overlook...."[29]

In the meantime, and undaunted by memories of police surveillance on the previous occasion, Kim set off in 1929 for the 3rd Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations in Kyoto. On this occasion, however, the Japanese delegation argued that insofar as the focus of deliberations had shifted to political and economic matters, only the Japanese, who bore responsibility for Korea's economy and governance, could rightfully represent the peninsula. The Institute of Pacific Relations executive accepted the logic of the Japanese delegates' position, and the Koreans were duly expelled.

As if such activities were not enough, Kim Hwallan was a founding member and first president of the Kŭnuhoe 槿友會, the sister-body of the Korean united front organisation, the Shin'ganhoe 新幹會, which was active from 1927 to 1931. There were other matters of

27 On this ground, the Hitler phenomenon will not submit to A. J. P. Taylor's thesis that Hitler simply did what Germans at that time expected of their politicians, since even if in an abstract sense that might have some truth in terms of his aims, its concrete form belonged to the sacred, the realm of evil, and not simply of mundane national aspirations. For the religious at least, evil belongs to the sacred, as does holiness.

28 Potts, J. Manning (ed), *Grace Sufficient: The Story of Helen Kim by Herself* (Nashville: The Upper Room Press, 1964), p. 80.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

considerable importance in her life during this period. For one thing, she had her hair cut short while in Marseilles in 1928, and thereby broke a cultural taboo for women, and on her return she thought it advisable to clarify her reasons in print, in a concise but confident article published in the cultural nationalist journal, *Tonggwang* 東光. When in 1929 her father died, she again broke tradition by having her name included with her brothers' on his tombstone. She had already determined not to marry, believing marriage for a woman in Korea at that time was incompatible with devotion to the cause of women's education and social advancement.[30]

And it was on education that she resolved now to focus her energies. If we were to proceed chronologically from here, we would follow her to the College of Education at Columbia University in New York, where she became the first Korean woman to earn a PhD, writing on the topic, "Rural Education and the Regeneration of Korea."

But I will not proceed any further with her story at this point, but instead turn to some issues that this vignette of Kim's life, and my subjects of research generally, raise. These are principally methodological issues, and there are several, but I have time to deal here only briefly with the understanding of the role of "cultural" movements such as religion and gender in history. Both of these cultural issues are closely linked to the study of women's movements in colonial Korea, and so I will endeavour to address them together.

As I argued in the introductory section, the cluster of nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, and neo- and post-colonialism reinforce a politization of historiography that is very pervasive. It is all but mandatory that a historical examination respects a supposedly all-encompassing, interlocking political reality. It is assumed that the highest expression of humanity, of aspirations, organisation, civilizational form, and so on, is political. In historical method, this means that religion must be examined in terms of its national, usually political function. If something is apolitical, it is ahistorical. I discovered in my earlier work that in trying to save religion from the nation, I was fooling myself to some extent, since exactly where I thought I was de-centring the nation, I was making it some sort of default adjudicator, and was busy justifying the motives, intentions and activities of historical figures for whom reality was a religious structure, in relation to national political imperatives. I had to do so in part because of the historical sources themselves, in which religion was being judged precisely this way. But I was quite aware of the fact that the actors I was studying did not measure themselves this way and that the insistence both of their contemporaries and of my contemporary historians that they do so meant that they were being gravely misunderstood and, in historical narrative, or mimetic terms, gravely misrepresented. Further, I could see clearly how difficult it would be to write a history in which an apolitical religious objective could be given greater importance than a national political agenda, or further, in which a national political agenda would have to justify itself to a religious framework.[31]

Women's movements in colonial Korea have been obliged to demonstrate their relevance to supposedly generic national objectives, whether pursued in conjunction with centre-right nationalist or socialist nationalist movements. There was very heavy pressure exerted on women activists in the 1920s and 1930s to consent to the claim that the proper path to women's acceptance and agency in the public realm was participation alongside men in movements on behalf of nationalist political ends. I have argued that the consequences of the women's consent to this claim were the subversion and even annulment of their objectives of transforming the gender structures of their families and communities.[32] There is more than one, single, unified history, and the liberation of a nation and movements for gender change are different stories. What Kim Hwallan's case and a large body of sources from the period also demonstrate is that the avenue most readily and most effectively taken by women to gain recognition and agency in the public realm was, in fact, religion.

The pressures on women during the colonial period have their counterpart in recent historical studies of their movements, in which it is taken for granted that there is a historical teleology in which these movements must find their place and, more importantly, their meaning. The meaning of the movements consists

30 This deliberate decision not to marry was of itself revolutionary for its time, and was of singular importance in Kim's life and career and example, but for some reason is often passed over in discussions of her contributions to gender reform movements. It is surprisingly not even mentioned in Choi Hyeaweol's recent work (*op. cit.*, 2009), when in fact it is of considerable importance in demonstrating the real independence of mind and objectives of these early female Protestant activists not only from tradition but also, and crucially, from the foreign missionary women.

31 I have summarized my findings on this subject in my chapter, "Providence and Power: Korean Protestant Responses to Japanese Imperialism," in *Reading Asia: New Research in Asian Studies*, edited by Frans Hüsken & Dick van der Meij (Richmond, Kurzon: 2001), pp.154-172.

in their approach to full, autonomous engagement in the political and economic life of the nation. This is immensely problematic. For any such approach was either very distant or quickly abandoned. Indeed, for the majority of the women's movements, any such approach was not even considered; the historical teleology was in some cases not even approved. And if that is the way in which their historical meaning is measured, we might logically have to conclude that Korean women's history not only of the colonial period but for the whole 600-year Chosŏn dynasty as well was a story of deprivation. (And we would have to conclude the same for almost all males throughout almost all the history of the globe.)

Admittedly, to describe women's history during the colonial period as deferred fulfilment—a revolution postponed—is not the same thing as to characterise Korean women's history as a story of endless delay, centuries of marking time, for the simple reason that the rise of the idea of women's liberation in Korea in the early 20th century is itself a historical phenomenon, and so must be studied synchronically. However, this does not dispose of two important matters. First, the contemporary South Korean political order is described as patriarchal democracy and its economic culture as industrial patriarchy. What status does this imply for women in the public realm? Is the meaning of women's history always something in the future, a never-never story? Secondly, with the exception perhaps of some neo-colonialist approaches, historical studies of the Korean colonial period are dominated by a grand epic framework, in which a nation's history has a proper path—from which there can be aberrations but to which it must ultimately return—blazoned by a central dynamic that is either materialist, in which case it will share some universal characteristics, or spiritual-cultural, in which case it will be particular, perhaps unique. For colonial Korea, its status is an aberration, and the central meaning of its history then is the dynamic that leads to nation-statehood, or politically independent nationhood. Religions and women's movements have their place in history insofar as they belong to this dynamic. The lessons are: that which is apolitical is invisible; in any case, historically inconsequential. And to be political meant to engage in some form of resistance to Japanese rule.

Yet if one pursues the questions whether women in colonial Korea were invisible when they lacked political status, whether political means were the means they chose, and whether political ends were what they regarded as their ends, the answer one comes up with depends on the approach and the sources one chooses to employ. When a macro approach of situating women's movements and history within a so-called wider political history of national imperatives and fortunes is adopted, or one that collapses all historical phenomena that are deemed to be important into a single theoretical statement, it is difficult to support a negative answer without depriving the women in question of historical significance. Yet a micro-historical approach, similar to Wyschogrod's life-narrative approach, will include not only greater detail but also favour more intimate sources.

The first significant work of microhistory is generally believed to be Giovanni Levi's *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorcist*, published in 1987,[33] and so it is fitting to preface my discussion of the microhistorical answer to the serious shortcomings in the epic-historical approach to matters of nationalism, ideology, religion and social change, with the concise definition proffered by Levi himself in 1990: "To practise micro-history does not mean to look at little objects, but to regard things on a small scale." This does not mean giving case studies of instances of the general, macro-historical narrative that will be expected to flesh out in miniature the pattern and meaning of the big picture of historical forces and changes. On the contrary, micro-history is about discovering fundamental clues about history. It is, above all, opposed to fixing hierarchies of historical subject-matter, where large processes such as modernisation, industrialisation, the formation of nation-states and so on are considered central, even all-encompassing. It is incorrigibly anti-Hegelian. It arises in part from doubts over the validity of identification of peoples with "larger units, be they a nation or a state, be they big parties or trade unions or even the movement of progress itself." (Christian Meier)

Dissatisfaction with the broad depiction of large historical forces is not the only justification for micro-history. There are of course positive grounds. Alf Lüdtke, for example, in his "People Working: Everyday Life and

32 Wells, Kenneth M., "Expanding their Realm: Women and Public Agency in Colonial Korea," in *Women's Suffrage in Asia: Gender, Nationalism and Democracy,* edited by Louise Edwards & Mina Roces (London: RoutlegeCurzon, 2004), pp.152-169.

33 Giovanni Levi, *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorcist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988 [trans. Lydia G. Cochrane]).

German Fascism," pays attention to "the practical and the emotional dimensions of historical processes," and in so doing demonstrates persuasively that what some might deem to lie on the surface of historical dynamics is of fundamental importance in understanding "the entire social reality." [34] Lüdtke is referring to matters of change over time, that is, limiting himself to historical structures, not claiming an all-encompassing theory. Even in cases of power exercised dramatically over groups by virtue of their category—in Lüdtke's study, the category of race, but we can add religion, gender, class—where he finds a patchwork of practices, various forms of resistance, a range between compliant acceptance and active complicity, the microhistorical approach does not just "fill in" meaning, but reveals a number of subtle but consequential changes and elements of permanency in the historical process that were undetected hitherto. Other studies that have analysed the strategies adopted by survivors of Nazi concentration camps suggest these strategies are meaningful, they are not just private imprints on a history already known, "in spite of the fact that the camps aimed at reducing human beings to a state of utter dependency and exposed them to the arbitrary threat and omnipresent reality of death."[35]

Micro-historians appear to have taken on the hardest cases to prove their point—politically unconnected religious figures, shockingly unequal and vicious power relationships, poor, rural households—and have come out on top. They have in important ways shown the assumed macro-historical substances such as *the* state, *the* industrialisation process, and even *the* family and *the* individual, to be misleading.

The micro approach is less apt to mislead because in looking at the small scale, it always does so "with a view to the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions and relationships that are expressed in and through them."[36] Things naturally occur above the micro dimension, but the higher the level of generality, the thinner, more incomplete the history, where matters are viewed from a great distance.

What challenges does using this approach pose for general history in relation to women's movements in colonial Korea? I believe I can tentatively pose three challenges. First, that in their movements for public recognition Korean women turned to religion, not because they could not conceive of political solutions but because they regarded religion as more fundamental than politics. Secondly, that Christianity was not valued so much for its supposed social and political functions, as for the ideals associated with it concerning the value and dignity of the individual, or to be truer to the Korean terms, of personhood (*in'gyŏk* 인격). And thirdly, that the principal practical vehicle women chose to gain entry to the public domain was education, believing that through knowledge they could attain economic independence and participate also in the written media.

It is evident that from the early 20th century, Korean women who wished to combat gender ideology that excluded them from direct participation in public affairs sought to build social capital in the family or in religion or in both. I am supported in these findings by Laurence Fontaine and Jürgen Schlumbohm's findings cited above in which they note that households are the units that conceive strategies for taking advantage of or coping with social and historical change. My research prompts me to go further: in colonial Korea, households, and the women in them, in many cases *initiated* the changes. In addition to or if necessary in default of family activity, they sought support in religion, usually Protestantism, in part because of the example of single, female missionaries, but more because of the doctrine of individual dignity and responsibility, backed by the supportive structures of church and other communities. Kim Hwallan's case of an intersection of family and religious support represents a pattern that continued throughout the colonial period and beyond.

As with a large number of cases, Protestant Christianity took hold of Kim's family through women: introduced to her mother by an itinerant "Bible woman," or colporteur, in 1905, the religion was adopted by Kim Hwallan and her siblings, and last of all her father, a point that was marked by a dramatic event, a service at which all the animist paraphernalia and the family tablets were incinerated. This conversion to Christianity effected a unification of the family's religious activities, hitherto divided along gender lines: the males attended to ancestral rites, the

34 Alf Lüdtke, "People Working: Everyday Life and German Fascism," *History Workshop Journal*, 50 (2000), p. 75.

35 Laurence Fontaine and Jürgen Schlumbohm, "Household strategies for survival: An introduction," in *Household Strategies for Survival 1600-2000: Fission, Faction and Cooperation. International Review of Social History: Supplement 8*, edited by Laurence Fontaine & Jürgen Schlumbohm (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), p.9.

mother placated the household spirits alone. Gender divisions were further weakened at community level, since males and females attended the same church services, although initially they sat in pews on different sides of the building. Then the emphasis of the Protestant churches of the time on Biblical study and catechism training spurred the spread of female literacy programs within the churches in the 1910s, which had several broader and often unintended consequences for gender relations as women thereby gained access to sources of information far greater than ever before. It was only a natural development for Christian women to organise public women's associations and events independent of both family and church.

A major concern of these associations before 1920 was female liberation. But according to the sources, at this point they felt unfree, as women, not because of politics, or colonialism, but because of the family and kinship system, which hindered them from acting autonomously in the domestic sphere and from participating in the organization of the public realm. They therefore developed strategies in relation to the household, negotiating their objectives with other family members and also persuading the household as a unit to negotiate with so-called wider structures of society. But the mass uprising of March 1919 for national independence, which was largely organised by Protestant leaders in cooperation with an indigenous new religious movement, Ch'ŏndogyo 천도교, and in which an unusual number of women were active, most of them Protestants, has attracted attention to the political history of Korean women's movements in colonial Korea, and has favoured the view that political objectives were at the top of a hierarchy of aspirations of the women's movements and that Christianity especially was valued for the support it could give to the pursuit of these objectives.

My research so far indicates that this is highly misleading characterisation. I have no problem at all with the view that Korean women's involvement in the March First Movement enhanced their public profile and increased the willingness of some male leaders to give them a greater role in the politics of nationalism, in a way comparable to some degree with the positive effects for their cause of the British suffragettes' active support of the war effort in World War I. The problem lies in casting political means and ends as the main actors on the stage of the women's historical drama during the whole colonial period.

For Kim Hwallan, both because of her religious creed and because of the immediate, pressing problems of women's lives, there was a deliberate teleological suspension of the national imperative. The national unit was not big enough for her, and she, like Uchimura Kanzōin Japan and indeed, Virginia Woolf in England,[37] was made a "citizen of the world" by her beliefs. And the function of her beliefs, according to her own experience, was often to raise fundamental questions about the common assumptions around which society was organised. Like Han Yongun for Buddhism, Kim and other Protestant activists tried to mount a platform on which to challenge the dominant thinking of their fellow Koreans, a platform from which to mount a critique of the world and a rationale for changing it. To do so, they had to construct platforms at the edge of things, and had to create a base there for persuasion, hence they were, initially at any rate, eccentric.

This put Kim and a major stream of Korean Protestantism at the time at odds with the nationalist framework. For a strict nationalist, national liberation is an absolute end. To seek national liberation as a good, but as one good among others, is not to seek it as a nationalist. Kim Hwallan had no doubt that national liberation was a good thing, and she at times worked consciously for it, but it was a relative good that she was prepared to defer in favor of her central mission, the emancipation of women, which she did not see as identical to or dependent on political independence. The former Korean rulers had certainly not supported her idea of female emancipation, and the vast majority of Korean men, including nationalists, still did not. National liberation might or might not be attained; the important thing was that neither the universal substance of her beliefs nor the objectives of her work with women be subordinated or relativised.

36 Hans Medick, "Weaving and surviving in Laichingen, 1650 – 1900: Micro-history as history and as research experience," in *Agrarian Studies: Synthetic Work at the Cutting Edge*, edited by James C. Scott and Nina Bhatt (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 287.

37 "As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman I am a citizen of the world." (Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1938), p.197) Woolf was referring to women's lack of psychological investment in war and nationalism, whereas Kim Hwallan was referring to her religious struggle to lift herself out of hatred of Japan and form herself into a woman who wants to serve all women everywhere. In this sense, she stood closer to Uchimura Kanzō.

KIM KYOSHIN, SOCIAL ACTION, AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Very briefly, I believe an appropriate term to apply to Kim's Kyoshin's approach to social reform and activism is faith externalising itself.[38] He viewed social engagement as a natural component of a life of Christian faith that might or might not coincide with social aims and methods of his compatriots. Unlike Kim Hwallan and Yun Ch'iho and the majority of Protestant activists, Kim Kyoshin did not consider it the business of Christians to engage in social work or create movements or institutions for social change. Kim acknowledged that it was common moral decency to feed the starving before preaching to them and that Christians were interested also in industrial movements for this reason. "So when discussion over amelioration of the rural economy, consumer co-operatives, etc., arises, we sometimes look like advocates of wholesale reform of society…. But the essential function of our faith is not social work.... Even if literacy movements are needed because knowledge is power…, still no rest for our souls will issue from this."[39]

Kim Kyoshin also objected to the common explanation for a minor slump in the growth of the church in the early 1930s, that it was because of its alleged withdrawal from social work.

> *Some say it is because it has lost the former reason for its welcome by Koreans. The Korean church used to be the salt of the earth and a light to the world, they say, because it didn't just talk about going to Heaven after death but promoted temperance movements, the removal of prohibition on widow remarriage, and reform of social life, gave clear support for the one-man-one-wife principle, threw itself into rural industry, showed the way ahead for the nation, taught han'gŭl at Sunday schools and night classes, eradicating illiteracy and raising national consciousness. Whatever big enterprise was under way, the Church of Christ was at the centre. Now it has forgotten this and talks about going to Heaven.*
>
> *One cannot deny what Christians have done or withhold praise for their achievements. Nevertheless, my objective in believing in the Church of Christ is only to go to Heaven." All those other things can be done better by other organizations such as enlightenment clubs, the [Tonga ilbo] newspaper's "Narod" movement, and so on, and as for raising national consciousness, Poch'ŏn'gyo and Ch'ŏndogyo do it better. But the church of Jesus is the only thing that can save a sinner and lead him to Heaven.*[40]

Of critical importance is the way in which Kim coupled national consciousness raising with social activism as an area in which Christians would engage only incidentally if at all, in cases where it might come up in the course of carrying out the central mission of Christian believers in aiding others along the path to heaven. And in fact Kim did not at any stage join a nationalist body or participate in a nationalist movement, nor in his school-teaching career did he challenge Government-General education laws. On the contrary, he accompanied his students to Seoul Central Railway Station to say farewell to Korean soldiers heading off to the Sino-Japanese war-front and later, in the early 1940s, worked under a Japanese foreman in a munitions factory in northern Korea. These are inconvenient facts that have been ignored or even camouflaged by contemporary scholars who wish to use his life narrative in the service of nationalist rather than religious hagiography. But why has Kim Kyoshin's rather pietistic persona been so susceptible to politization?

Partly it is because Kim indulged in the notion of a Korean soul, and it was on this ground that he opposed Kim Hwallan's Denmark-style agricultural Korea and the push for an urban-industrial or a communist-style Korea. But the main reason is that with Ham Sŏkhŏn咸錫憲 he developed an idea of providence, he on the providential character of Korean geography and Ham on that of Korean history.[41] Kim aligned Korea's virtues of *chi* 知, *chŏng* 淸 and *ŭi* 意 with the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity, and taught that it was Korea's

38 Cf. Min Kyŏngbae 閔庚培, "Kin Kyōshin no mukyōkaishugi to 'Chōsenteki' kirisutokyo 金教臣の無教會主義と'朝鮮的'キリスト教," in *Kan* 韓 8.2 (1979): p. 37.

39 Kim Kyoshin, "Na-ŭi shinang- ŭi ponsaek 나의 信仰의本色," in *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn*聖書朝鮮, August 1934.

40 Kim Kyoshin, "Na-ŭi yesugyo 나의 예수敎," in *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn*, December 1932.

41 Both contributed to Kim Kyoshin's journal *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* from the late 1920s to early 1940s. Ham was a much more prolific writer than Kim, however, and is better known in South Korea today for his activities and publications as a public intellectual after 1945. He changed his approach quite dramatically over time and became much more nationalistic in his approach to religious belief to the point of adopting positions that Kim most certainly could not have approved. In his earlier writings, however, Ham was a strong supporter of Kim's line.

mission to spread this throughout the world.[42] One can detect an inconsistency in his approach here: at the same time as he refused to accept any input from outside Korea and argued for the total fusion of Korea with the Bible, he exhorted Koreans to deliver this Korean form to the world. Thus it is true enough to say he gave his faith a nationalist twist, and he developed with Ham an idea of Korea moving from a history built on suffering to one in which it carried out its world-historical mission. Yet even this idea of a mission within temporal history must be relativised by the principle that he repeated in many forms during his life, that "our real country is in Heaven, this world is just a traveller's house."[43]

Nevertheless, the importance of the doctrine of divine providence is that it is itself a theory of history. In this connection, one could apply not only to Kim but also to almost all the Korean Protestant activists, the grammar of divine providence worked out long ago by Giambattista Vico in relation to his thesis on the Ideal Eternal History. Unless one understands the role played by the doctrine of divine providence among Korea's Protestants from the late nineteenth century, and thereby recognises the religious nature of their starting point and historical vision, it is difficult to see how a satisfactory history could be written of their activities.[44]

DEATH AND THE NATION

> *[The children] played. They did not stop playing except to go and die. To die of destitution. Everywhere and in all times…. No doubt children died everywhere like that—in the Mississippi River Valley, in the Amazon, in the cadaverous villages of Manchuria, in the Sudan and on the plain of Kam. And everywhere throughout the world, as here, they died of misery. The mangoes of misery. The rice of misery. The milk of misery. [Marguerite Duras, The Sea Wall][45]*

At the point when Korea was losing its political independence to Japan in full earnest, the Christian intellectual and activist, Yun Ch'iho, wrote that the "greatest issue for the dying is how they should be living."[46] He was at the time the foremost public intellectual living on the peninsula and a widely recognized nationalist leader. In 1911, he was falsely charged with organizing a plot to assassinate the Governor-General of Korea, General Terauchi Masatake, and thrown into jail, where he came close to death himself. Death, of course, is a feature of imperialist invasions and national resistance movements, and to be a martyr for one's country is considered to be an honourable way of dying. For those religions that emphasize fidelity to and practice of sets of beliefs, dying for these beliefs is also martyrdom and also honourable. But death is also as old as life and is its most certain feature. Yet although it is a constant presence, a part of everyday experience, an inevitable element of social organization and practice, often unpredictable but always final and almost always painful, although another's death and the prospect of one's own are among the most difficult things for any person to cope with let alone understand, literal death has become largely absent from historical narratives. Metaphorical deaths, such as the death of the peasantry, a culture, nation, or art form, are certainly the stuff of history, but not normally literal deaths, except in cases of unusual statistical dimensions or when they can be related as in the case of nationalist or ideological struggles to some political movement or teleology.

This is partly the result of the actual growth of secular societies, but partly it is a Freudian slip. Just as William Barrett had to wonder how it was that whole generations took as fundamental truth the assertion that the entire history of the extraordinarily rich development in every major and minor civilisation of the religious quest for meaning and understanding could be reduced to and accounted for by infantile bleatings in the cradle,[47] so

42 Kim Chŏnghwan 金丁煥, "Kin Kyōshin no minzoku seishinshiteki isan: *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* no nikki o chūshin toshite 金教臣の民族精神史的遺産- 聖書朝鮮の日記お中心にとして," *Kan* 8.2 (1979): pp 160-161.

43 Kim Kyoshin, *Diary*, 25 March 1937.

44 Indeed, one does need to go back as far as Vico to recover a vocabulary on the relation of divine providence to history. A. Robert Caponigri's *Time & Idea: The Theory of History of Giambattista Vico* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953) is a good start, and Maeve Edith Albano's *Vico and Providence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986) is particularly helpful, but one needs to go to the originals: Vico's first and second volumes of *New Science* and *On the Study Methods of our Time*. I am engaged in a long-term study of this issue in relation to Korean history, tentatively titled "People and Politics, Providence and Power," and so I shall not go into it in any more detail here.

45 Quoted in Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*: *Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 61.

46 Yun Ch'iho 尹致昊, "Kumiin ŭi Chosŏnin'gwan e taehayo 구미인의 조선인관에 대하여," in *Han'guk taep'yo sup'il munhak chŏnjip* 1 한국대표수필문학선집 1 (Seoul 서울: Ŭryu munhwasa 을유문화사, 1975), p.117. No precise date has been supplied, but it is likely to have been shortly before or following Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910.

47 William Barrett, *The Truants: Adventures Among the Intellectuals* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1982).

we might wonder how it can be that in historiography we could have failed to include something so universal, inescapable and final as death among the most compelling factors in human choices, hopes and apprehensions of meaning. Whereas there are quite natural and sound reasons for some of this silence in historical writings, it is nevertheless the case that religions, in particular salvation religions, have a great deal to say about death, not only in relation to individual grief and destiny but also in relation to the meaning of the whole canvas of lived life and the question of historical destiny. The politization of history does not allow much room for consideration of the religious approaches to death and consequently the meanings they attach to life and the reasons for choices made while living.

In this regard, I wish to analyse the case of Chŏn Yŏngt'aek, whose loss of an infant daughter in the early 1920s due to the imprisonment of his wife for nationalist activities while pregnant, is normally presented as a casualty of imperialism and an indirect martyrdom, but which he comes to terms with in a quite different manner. In effect, he personalises the political, but beyond that he locates, in his literary writings, both his personal loss and its political connection on a broad canvas the central motif of which is the essential spirituality of life. The difference between his canvas and that of the common representation of his daughter's death, illustrates how the personal and historical richness of this tragic experience has been flattened by the thinness of our historical language and categories.

Chŏn Yŏngt'aek (1894-1968) began writing short stories in the 1910s, at a time when what literary scholars call Modern Korean Literature was in its early formative stage, following the enlightenment phase of the late nineteenth century. It was a time when various movements are identified: naturalism, realism, humanism, "new tendency" writers, and so on. But if one were to take these movements as a starting point for an evaluation of Chŏn's significance as a writer in this period, it would be counter-productive. For Chŏn did not really belong to any of these movements or phases; he is quite unplaceable in these terms; his writings were different. Some critics have explained this by observing, usually a little dismissively, that this is because he was just a Christian writer. This is significant, in that it does recognise that there might be a category of writing that one may call religious literature, and because it sidelines such literature as of no real consequence.

Reviewing the critical reception of Chŏn's works, Cho Chin'gi 조진기 observed that his writings have been subject to less appreciation than warranted, since scholars have viewed him mainly in terms of his life, such as his commitment to Christianity and to humanism, not in terms of his literary works themselves. In this sense, the critical reception of Chŏn contrasts markedly with that afforded Kim Tong'in 金東仁, with whom Chŏn created the first purely literary journal, *Ch'angjo* 創造 (Creation), in Japan in 1918. And Cho concludes in much the same way as myself, that Chŏn's literature has been under appreciated as it has been categorized as literature of Christianity.[48] And so the question rises for literary studies also: why has there been so little attention to religious underpinnings of the development of Modern Korean Literature? Whereas no one questions the value of the many studies that relate the literature of the KAPF writers to socialist ideologies, there has been almost no serious work done on the relation of writers such as Chŏn Yŏngt'aek, Chu Yohan 朱耀翰, Chu Yosŏp 朱耀燮, Yi Kwangsu, Yun Dongju 尹東柱 and many others to religious worldviews. To be sure, Han Yongun 韓龍雲 is touted as a Buddhist poet, but until quite recently, the principle focus has invariably been on his writings' nationalist credentials.[49]

One reason for the lack of attention to religious writings is doubtless habituation to the growth of secular society and beliefs in western nations and the development of similar conditions in South Korea. But we need to go further than this, for much of what fuelled secularization itself derives from religious language and categories in the West. "It is fascinating," wrote Paul Feyerabend, "to see how many modern ideas emerged from detailed and rather sophisticated theological debates."[50] But we have forgotten the influence of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a writing of a kind and an influence that bears comparison with Karl Marx's works, and of Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, which is a much earlier and much more acute investigation of the human condition

48 Cho Chin'gi 조진기, "Chŏn Yŏngt'aek ch'ogi sosŏl-gwa hyŏnsil inshik – 1920-nyŏndae riŏllijŭm munhak-kwa kwallyŏnhayŏ 전영택 초기 소설과 현실인식 - 1920년대 리얼리즘문학과 관련하여," in *Yŏngnam ŏmunhak* 영남어문학 10 (1983): p. 213.

49 The chief exceptions to the rule are Gregory Evon and Park Pori, and of course Jung-Shim Lee, a contributor to this issue of *Korean Histories*.

50 Paul Feyerabend, *op.cit.*, p.7.

than Foucault's anti-humanism thesis on how in our search for liberty we humans strip ourselves of freedom. Luther's is in some ways a better analysis than Foucault's partly because it does not fall into the academic trap of proclaiming itself to be a breakthrough in our understanding. Whereas Foucault labours the point that moves purporting to liberate humans sexually were a progressive captivity, the major world religions had already been aware of this fundamental characteristic of human efforts to rid themselves of all restraints to their autonomy for many centuries, discerning that every effort to pull ourselves up by our boot strings has sunk us further into the mire. And of course they have given their respective diagnoses of this age-old dilemma, which are neither more nor less disprovable than Foucault's but possibly more persuasive and long-lasting, for they relate it to something fundamental about the human condition, more than simply a sin of the humanist enterprise but the very grounds for its failure; more than an epistemological breakdown but something inescapable that relates to the basis of the human desire for knowledge. Unlike China's ancient cultural heroes and the scientific geniuses of much more recent times, neither Christ nor Buddha contributed a single piece of artifactual knowledge, yet their contribution to civilisation is immense, notwithstanding M. Polanyi's claim, again not disprovable, that Augustine set back the progress of science and knowledge in Europe a thousand years.

Chŏn himself was aware of the somewhat dismissive approach to the religious substance of his works, but not particularly bothered by it, as far as one can tell from this recollection that he included in the "Writer's Preface" to his 1965 *Ŏmun'gak* collected works: "Referring to my works, critics have described my earlier pieces as belonging to naturalism and my later works to humanism. Whatever they say is all right by me; I just wrote whatever I wanted to write." But then he added, "It is natural that who I am as well as my religious attitudes are directly reflected there." This remark frames my inquiry into what we might mean by religious, and in this case Christian literature, and its relation to history. As in the case of Wyschogrod's and Irwin's insistence on the need to read the writings and lives of such religious thinkers as Simone Weil as a connected narrative, so it is advisable to treat Chŏn's case as an enactment of one's beliefs in one's writings.

In 1919, Chŏn Yŏngt'aek married his fiancée shortly before she was arrested and imprisoned for her participation in the March First Movement in P'yongyang. She was pregnant when jailed and their child, a daughter, died aged three months as a result of malnutrition and other deprivations his wife suffered in prison. This was an extremely bitter time and there were numerous trials for the couple over the next decade.

The two major influences on Chŏn's development up to his participation as a young writer in the creation of *Ch'angjo* in 1918 were his father and the Protestant leader An Ch'angho. His father, Chŏn Sŏg'yŏng 全錫泳, was an early dissenter from the traditional neo-Confucian framework, traveling between Seoul, Inch'ŏn, and Shanghai, where fled for a time because of connections with the Kaehwadang 開化黨 (Reform Party). He established a school in his hometown of Chinnamp'o and sent his son to P'yongyang to study English when quite young, before enrolling him in 1908 in Taesŏng College, the school founded by the Protestant colleagues, Yi Sŭnghun 李昇薰 and An Ch'angho. His father was renowned for his concern and generosity towards the farmhands, and Chŏn's writings reflect this in their constant attention to the impoverished and unfortunate. Chŏn could stay at Taesŏng barely two years before having to return home on his father's untimely death. Thereafter he became a devoted reader of the writings of Ch'oe Namsŏn 崔南善 and Yi Kwangsu, but the most significant event in his life was his conversion to Christianity, following the lead of an elder brother.

On becoming a Christian, Chŏn became associated with key participants in events leading to and following the March First movement, such as No Chŏngil 노정일 and Kim Hongshik 김홍식. He developed a natural blend of committed faith and devoted nationalism. He had no dramatic conversion experience, but the consequences were deep: he gave up medical studies and undertook theological training to become a Methodist minister. His whole life became situated in his decision to become a Christian. But on going to Japan he found his natural niche among the foremost literary figures, Chu Yohan, Yi Kwangsu, Kim Tongin and Kim Hwan 金煥, all of whom were from the same northern region, Sŏbuk 西北, and were thereby distinguished from Yŏm Sangsŏp's 廉想涉 group centred on Seoul and Kyŏnggido.[51]

51 P'yo Ŏnbok 표언복, "Nŭlbom Chŏn Yŏngt'aeg-ŭi saengae-wa sasang 늘범 전영택의 생애와 사상," *Kidokkyo sasang* 기독교 사상 (January 1966), pp 181-192.

The passport of An Ch'angho

Kim Tongin, Chu Yohan and Chŏn Yŏngt'aek

Kim Kyoshin and Ham Sŏkhŏn

Chŏn joined the *Ch'angjo* group with intention of departing from the enlightenment frame of literature and developing colloquial language literature.[52] His views that he professed at the time of launching the publication of *Ch'angjo* reveals his early conception of what Korean literature should be: it should not remain at the level of either revealing or edifying concerning the social matters in Korea; literature should engage with matters of "life" itself. To the extent that his works highlighted the matters of life, it may be natural that death becomes an important motif on the one hand and that his autobiographical details flow into the making of his works on the other. These two aspects can be understood more precisely in relation to their connection to his Christianity, on which I will comment more later.

Ch'angjo was significant as the first journal to be devoted exclusively to literature. It was followed by Yŏm Sangsŏp's *P'yehŏ* 廢墟 *(Wasteland),* with which it competed as a rival for a while, but they joined hands to create *Chosŏn Mundan* 朝鮮文壇. Kim Tongin moved from a simple naturalist position to psychological plots and character delineation. At that time Chŏn published his short stories – "Ch'ŏnch'i-nya? Ch'ŏnje-nya? [Idiot? Genius?]" and "Togyag-ŭl mashinŭn yŏin [The woman who drinks poison]" - about which he recalled that the painter Kim Ch'anyŏng 金瓚永 fell in love with the titles and Chu Yohan ironically remarked that he had grown out of childhood and entered his dotage![53]

In 1924, he became editor-in-chief of *Shin Saengmyŏng* 新生明, and participated in the *Chosŏn mundan* journal alongside his brother-in-law, Pang In'gŭn 方仁根, pen-name Ch'unhae 春海, who had married Chŏn's sister Chŏn Yudŏk 劉德傳, an activist in the women's movement. Chŏn ended up doing the lion's share of the work, because the nominal editor, Yi Kwangsu, was busy with the *Tonga Ilbo* newspaper. Chŏn's commitment to Christian publication activities is reflected in his involvement in publishing *Sin saengmyŏng*, *Sae saram* 새사람, *Kidok-*

52 Kim Yangsu 김양수, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

53 Chŏn Yŏngt'aek 田榮澤, "Mundan-ŭi kŭ shijŏr-ŭl hoegoham 문단의 그 시절을 회고함," in *Chosŏn ilbo* 朝鮮日報, 21 September 1933.

kyo sinmun 基督敎新聞, and *Pogŭm sinmun* 福音新聞.

Did Chŏn hold a coherent idea of what constituted religious literature? His writings, short stories and essays indicate that he did. Chŏn was a particularly conscious Christian, who related his faith to every element of life. He was in this respect hardly exceptional, for at this stage no Korean who was a Protestant Christian began as one, and there was no natural Christian environment, no tradition, no social milieu, no domestic precedents and no general understanding of what Christianity meant. His essays and journalism reveal that he was quite deliberate in incessantly relating his new beliefs, as a coherent view of human life in the actual world, to his literary activities. He was self-critical, and also critical of the mindset and what he considered shallowness of many of his fellow Christians.

If we turn to his hopes for *Ch'angjo*, that it would leave behind the moral didacticism of the enlightenment literature and develop prose that reflected actual life experiences in colloquial language, it is evident that Chŏn perceived an element of populism in the Christian message that he encountered through An Ch'angho and like-minded reformers. The reason behind the adoption by the missionaries of the pure *han'gŭl* script rather than the classical writing system, he opined in 1936, was the fact that Christianity is essentially a religion of the masses (*taejung* 대중) and commoners (*p'yŏngmin* 평민), and so the élite vehicle was rejected. Christianity was the only field in which pure *han'gŭl* was used. That this happened at a time when the people (*minjung* 민중) were being introduced to a new way of looking at life, and that the new religion did not honour the divisions between old and young and male and female, gave Christianity a most singular position and significance. By now, he pointed out, 17 million bibles had been distributed, with an average lately of 60-70,000 copies printed per year.[54]

But what of the relation between religion and literature? Chŏn believed that history and experience demonstrated that the creation, publication and distribution of written material, especially of literature, played a huge role in the shaping of a society or nation, especially at times when they are undergoing revitalisation. He cited Dante's *Divine Comedy* as being behind the European artistic renaissance and maintained that the French Revolution had its genesis in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and Rousseau's social contract theory, and the liberation of black slaves in the USA in writings about the harrowing condition of the slaves. In Christian history, the Reformation sprang from Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and the manifold writings of Luther and Melancthon, and the use of the German vernacular. Germany's reformation, he opined in a very interesting insight, hinged on the production and selling of texts.[55]

We find the clearest statement of an inextricable relation between religion and literature in an essay published in 1939, where he argued that in primitive societies, religious art always developed alongside literature so that it was not possible to demarcate one from the other. Religion and literature were not two categories but one. Beliefs, prayers, liturgies, were all formed through literary expressions, and the texts of all religions, especially Christianity and Buddhism, were works of literature. Noble and truthful literature was the fragrance and light of religion. Works not penned by religious figures also carried the flavor and colouring of religion, for at bottom literature and religion spoke essentially of humans and the world; they tasted, drew and depicted human life, boring down to its deepest layers. Chŏn cites several passages from the Old and New Testaments to illustrate how he gained his greatest literary experiences and inspiration from them. From his childhood, he learned spiritual truths and beautiful expressions and idioms simultaneously through the same medium.

Chŏn noted that although Christ left no writings of his own, his sayings rang with poetry that was sublime and difficult to match: "The foxes have holes and the birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." The opening lines of the Sermon on the Mount were high poetry, and his parables were another instance of the literary quality of his sayings. Could Aesop's fables or Tolstoy's folk stories really compare, he asked. The power and pathos of Job surpassed that of any modern play he knew, and the Song of Solomon ranked among the greatest love poems ever written. He regarded Hosea as inspirations for novels and the prophecies, such as the new heaven and the new earth passage in Malachi, as sublime instances of the indivisible connection between religion and literature.[56]

Finally, although this was written in a rather different

54 Chŏn Yŏngt'aek, "Kidokkyo-wa Chosŏn munja 기독교와 조선문자," in *Han'gŭl* 한글 (September 1936).
55 Chŏn Yŏngt'aek, "Kidokkyo munhak undong 기독교 문학운동," in *Kidok shinbo* 基督新報, 16 January 1929.
56 Chŏn Yŏngt'aek, "Sŏngsŏwa munjang 성서와 문장," in *Munjang* 문장 (April 1939).

time and circumstance, I will summarise a reasonably sophisticated theory of what constitutes religious literature that he penned in South Korea in 1957.[57] Chŏn opens with a passage from the Sermon on the Mount:

> *The birds of the air neither sew nor do they reap...*
> *Consider the lilies of the field, they toil not nor do they spin,*
> *Yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these*

and comments: "The more one reads this passage the more one's faith is deepened and the more one reads it the more one's poetic senses are uplifted... It is at one and the same time a confession of a strong and healthy faith and a literary expression of the highest order." The reason for this, he continues, is that in former times great people of faith were poets: they related human life to the cosmos directly, and what others failed to see or hear, that they passed on through a verbal medium. Both literature and religion rise from the roots of human life, of humans who while physical beings, aspire for limitless and eternal existence. Christianity deals with the conflict inherent in this world between material needs and desires and eternal aspirations. Chŏn appeals to St Augustine and Pascal as men who perceived in all humans a god-shaped hole that they sought to fill: the image and voice of God in every human. Human culture is that which is fashioned in defiance of that hole, and so all cultures are relativised in relation to God, though all are by the same token educable or elevatable, and it is in this that literature serves an important role: although it is fettered by the limits of its own cultural environment, it is not paralysed by it.

It is very difficult, Chŏn maintains in the same essay, to define the essential character of Christian literature. In a very broad sense it means literature that embeds the times and conditions of people's lives in a religious framework or explanation of those conditions. More narrowly, it refers to the production of a literary work, where the process is deeply rooted in and fully informed by one's faith. In Western literature, this is the case with Dante, Milton, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Chesterton, Francois Mauriac and Paul Claudel. There we see the record of humans in consequential negotiation with an actual, existing, personal god, not the god of the philosophers invented by reason but one that moves into the lives of sincere human individuals. It is a story framed by loss and alienation followed by a spiritual movement in the midst of human life that moves towards rediscovery, recovery and reconciliation. True religious literature should embody this framework, and it can only arise from a writer whose character and life, and whose orientation, exist within this framework.

The encounter of an individual soul with the actuality of the divine at a point in time leads to what Kierkegaard called the "concept of dread": the spectre of the loss of existence itself leading to authentication of one's existence. World War I made this dread a reality and necessitated the questions: what is a human, what does it mean to live, what is the world and for what does one live in it? As a result, Dostoevsky became popular as a novelist of dread, evoking the gulf that lies at the heart of existence. All his novels set the world against the Christian view of life, its meanings and orientations, and the possibility of redemption. It is not necessary that Christian literature take religious characters, religious life-styles or church activities as its themes. What is required is that Christian faith inform the writing from the bottom up.[58]

But for Chŏn, the distinctive work of Christian literature is that although like others its practitioners must grapple with suffering, misfortune, and oppression, it shows that hope and deliverance are present in the pain itself. In naturalism, realism and the like, pain is pain, a fact, something necessarily built into the natural order or the system humans create. WWII had a huge impact in the West, and encouraged a rise in Nietzsche's thought and Sartre's new brand of humanism, which Chŏn contrasts with Kierkegaard's interpretation of this sort of human experience and dilemma. One is the working out of a denial of god, the other of the affirmation of god, the way of faith. There is a sickness unto death, but after or by means of death there is real life. Appealing once more to Kierkegaard, Chŏn asserts that this simply follows the framework of St Paul and Pascal: wrestling with God. The refinding of self and God in this wrestling amidst suffering, this is Christian literature, and the antidote to the despair of losing both oneself and God.[59] To be sure, we might add, each death, especially that of one's child, and

57 Chŏn Yŏngt'aek, "Munhangnon 문학론," in *Kidokkyo sasang* 기독교사상(January 1957).
58 *Ibid.*
59 *Ibid.*

especially one caused by the oppressive acts of others, may be "the rice of misery", but in Chŏn's view tragedy is not the last word. For human history does not have the last word on human destiny.

There are different ways to characterise the types of fiction Chŏn wrote. One can discern a serious attempt to examine death and separation. These themes figure large in "Hyesŏn's Death 혜선의 죽음"; "Idiot? Genius?"; "Destiny운명"; "Spring of Life생명의 봄"; "The Woman Who Drinks Poison"; "K and His Mother's Death K와 어머니의 죽음" (incomplete); and "Hwasubun 화수분". Then there are (semi-) autobiographical works, which include "Spring of Life" (written from the perspective of the husband whose wife was imprisoned, released, and revived after sickness) and "Loneliness" (written from the imagined perspective of his own daughter who describes her parents' life). The former reaches the level of Christian exploration of life after death, an exploration mediated through his thoughts on Luther's awakening. For example, "White chicken 흰닭" describes the protagonist's sympathy for the chicken which is left alone after he feeds his guests with chicken he has been raising; "Picture 사진" deals sympathetically with a schoolgirl bearing the burden of ugliness; and "Windy Evening 바람부는 저녁" portrays a forlorn old woman who is ignorant and maltreated.

It is in relation to the theme of death, on which Chŏn wrote his best pieces, that Chŏn's writings might best be termed religious literature, in the sense that he himself espoused, for without any reference to any religious tradition, ritual or doctrine his quite unemotive language and depiction of people and events in his narratives of death compel the reader to search for meanings within the temporal order that nevertheless transcend it. In this respect Chŏn's unflinching "objectivity" in these narratives compares well with the writings of Graham Greene.

Chŏn's first published work, "Hyesŏn's Death" (1918), not only explores death but the condition of womanhood in Korea. Indeed, in all his treatments of death, women feature either as the main character or in tandem with a male partner as an equal protagonist in the drama. In this earliest work, the uneducated Hyesŏn discovers that her husband has fallen in love with an educated woman while studying in Japan. Hoping that new education may change herself and hence his attitude towards her, she attends a girls' school even though it was not customary then for a married woman to do so. There, a friend tries to persuade Hyesŏn to give up on her husband, on the grounds that it is a mistaken idea of virtue among Korean women at large to think of their husband as the unquestioned object of loyalty and chastity. But Hyesŏn is unable or unwilling to appreciate her friend's point, and upon discovering that her husband had gone ahead and married his lover after having filed for divorce, she regards this development as her destiny and throws herself into the Han River.

The most poignant of Chŏn's writings on death are those through which he struggled to come to terms, along with his wife, with the death of their infant daughter. Yet despite the autobiographical underlay of these writings, the absence in them of sentimentality is admirable, evidence of strong literary discipline but perhaps also of the sufficiency of the religious meaning suffusing them to carry the weight of the painful experience.

"The Woman Who Drinks Poison", published in 1920, is a short story through which Chŏn dramatizes his and his wife's struggle over their daughter's death. The story as a whole portrays the ways in which the couple finally accepts their daughter's death under and within the providence of the Christian God. In the postscript, which it appears he added after Korea's liberation in 1945, Chŏn confirms that this piece was written to commemorate his own child's death.

The narrative contains a brief but important phrase that refers to a child as "God's gift." The phrase appears in words spoken by a dove during a set of dialogues among fowls and animals. A possible construction of Chŏn's view is that human beings receive God's gifts such as children and take care of them as divine gifts. But in certain situations, the "gift" can turn into a "poison." Chŏn's postscript, which contains an autobiographical account, allows one to piece together the reference to poison in the story as follows: he and his wife received God's gift, their child; but his wife actively participated in the March First movement and was arrested and imprisoned, as a result of which the divine gift suffered malnutrition and death. Seeing the child suffer and die was poisonous to the couple, but there was not much they could do about it.

In 1925, Chŏn published in *Chosŏn Mundan* the short story "Hwasubun", the piece that is today the most well-known of his writings. Also narrated in the first person, this story follows Chŏn's own standard for religious writings of addressing the conflict inherent in this world between material needs and desires and eternal

aspirations. As one critic has noted, it portrays the tragedy of a family in composed strokes, unemotively. Unlike the "New Tendency" writers, it did not exude a politically charged atmosphere but sustained to the end an objective delineation of the couple who, owing to the difficulty of their impoverished lives, froze to death together in their mutual longing, leaving their infant daughter to be picked up by another, without intruding his own feelings. And thus a clear picture of the basic human-heartedness in life is revealed in the worst of situations.[60]

Set in old Seoul, the story is narrated by a master of a family with a wife and a few children, a member of a social class wealthy enough to hire a hand to help around the house. Hwasubun is the manservant's name, and as was the custom, he and his wife and two daughters, aged three and nine, live in the master's compound and receive lodging as payment. They own nothing but the clothes they are in and often go hungry.

The story opens with the sound of Hwasubun sadly wailing in the middle of a wintry night, which the master hears. A neighbour, a rice merchant, had suggested to Hwasubun's wife that she give up her elder daughter to a wealthy lady who was passing by shortly. Hwasubun says it is up to her, which precipitates severe agonising in the mother, a scene that is very well depicted. She resolves to give up her daughter for the daughter's and family's sake, and the daughter, without even slight hesitation, follows the lady. The daughter's response is in such contrast to the painful deliberation and anxiety the mother suffered that the cruelty of poverty is underscored without any spoken words or commentary, a narrative strength that runs through the entire story. Heart-broken, the mother searches in vain for her husband in the village to talk about retracting the decision, but in vain, and she has to inform him later in the evening. Hence his sad wailing that night.

A few days later, Hwasubun, whose father and elder brother had already died, has to leave to take care of the small farm of his second brother, who has been laid low by an accident. After waiting a long time for his return, his wife decides to join her husband, since she had injured her hand and was unable to make a livelihood for herself and infant daughter in the cold winter. She persuades the master to write a letter to Hwasubun, telling him she is going to join him, fastens her daughter on her back and departs.

One late winter day, his sister, whose in-law family introduced Hwasubun in the first place, visits the master. She tells them about Hwasubun falling ill while working in his brother's place and how after receiving his wife's letter he leaves immediately to meet her. Close to sunset and from the top of a hill, he espies a greyish lump under a pine tree. It is his wife and daughter. Hwasubun holds her and her eyes open but she cannot talk. Neither can he.

Next morning a woodcutter passes by and finds two corpses hugging each other. A child between them has just woken up, sitting with the sun on her back, banging on the bodies. He picks her up and takes her away on his ox, leaving the dead parents where they lie.

"Hwasubun" seems to be a development of the same theme mentioned in "The Woman Who Drinks Poison," in the sense that the couple in the later story partially but significantly reflect Chŏn and his wife in their terrible situations. In "Hwasubun", Chŏn lets the child survive while making the couple die. In this sense, he stresses the importance of the spirit and soul (in this story, of the couple, who really struggle to give life to the child) over and beyond physical death.

CONCLUSION

Literature falls pre-eminently under the order of language, before the historical, and yet in Chŏn Yŏngt'aek's case as in many others, it bears an essential relation with history. It might therefore offer a lead in the recovery of a language that can heighten rather than flatten the immediacy of living humans in their time and place to an incomprehensible world and thereby restore the ability to relate religion more meaningfully to history. To do so requires us to recognise that the inspiration, motivation and solutions of members of religious systems who engage in social movements are normally not confined to and are frequently incompatible with those that derive from a material or secular conception of society and history, and that for the religious person, death's meaning cannot be covered by a political interpretation, even where political conditions directly cause it.

A major obstacle to such recognition is that religious language, and with it religious literature, appears esoteric, a sideshow, a private matter, an aberration, unless it is diluted to conform to either "ordinary" language or the "discourse" language of contemporary scholarship. But neither ordinariness nor academic categories are

60 Kim Yangsu, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

religion's subject. Referring to a verse from Psalm 77 in the Old Testament etched on the gravestone of a fisherman's drowned son—"Thy way *is* in the sea, and thy path in the great waters: and thy footsteps are not known"—Adam Nicholson comments: "That is not consolation, nor the muffling of experience by religion: it is the heightening and realising of experience through language, a statement of the cruelty of things and the unknowable purpose of the universe. A lament written in the seventh or eighth century BC, translated 400 years ago, by Laurence Chaderton's company in Cambridge, communicating itself now in a way which is quite unaffected, neither literary nor academic, not historical, nor reconstructionist, but transmitting a nearly incredible immediacy from one end of human civilisation to another." [61]

It is now a truism that we can never restore matters as they used to be, since they were inextricably part of their time. This, indeed, is what Vico pointed out centuries ago, and the claim with which Wyschogrod concluded her book, *Saints and Postmodernism*. Something artistic is lost with the passing of classical Greece, but so with it, Vico aptly observed, is the rather bloodthirsty culture of the time, which made heroes violent, unashamedly lethal in intent and act. We don't want to restore the Great Britain of the King James Bible, where royal power was wedded to divine, and to interpretations of the divine, where dissenters were executed, where religious and military and legal power were fused. Nor should we belittle the actual negative consequences of the arrogance of power, such as that exercised by imperial powers over their subjects.

But we certainly do have to discover anew a way of expressing religious realities. For that, we have to restore some principles, such as the depth of death and the poignant unknowableness of life. We are in critical need now of language that reconnects, bridges us to human experience across time, so that we might grasp how they saw matters and what might have been meant, when someone like Socrates said that philosophy is a preparation for death. And when a Korean religious leader, Chŏn Yŏngt'aek, the bereaved lover of solitude, struggled in his literary sanctuary with the ways in which death—its reality, its inevitability and its parallels in so many other breaks and separations in human experience—itself serves as a point of connection, joining one empathetically with others both across the ages and in one's own time.

61 Adam Nicholson, *Power and Glory: Jacobean England and the Making of the King James Bible* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), pp. 242-243.

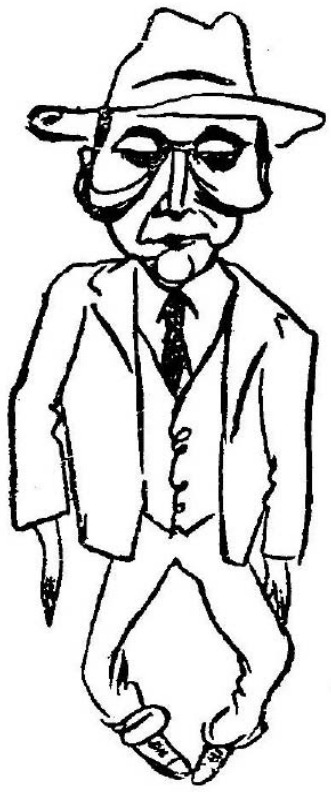
JUNG-SHIM LEE

History as colonial storytelling

YI KWANGSU'S HISTORICAL NOVELS ON FIFTEENTH-CENTURY CHOSŎN HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

On a cool autumn evening in 1453, Prince Suyang 首陽大君, accompanied by a group of warriors, visited the then minister Kim Chongsŏ 金宗瑞 and handed him a letter. When Kim tried to read the letter by moonlight, one of the warriors hit him on the back of the head. It was the beginning of a bloody *coup d'état*, known as 'Kyeyu chŏngnan' 癸酉靖難, in fifteenth-century Chosŏn. Prince Suyang continued to slay his political rivals, his opponents, and even his own brothers. By dethroning his young nephew, King Tanjong 端宗, he finally ascended the throne himself as King Sejo 世祖 in 1455. These events are not dealt with seriously in official records or in historical studies.[1] However, recollections of that time have been eagerly reproduced in unconventional, non-historical, artistic narratives such as *yasa* 野史 (collections of interesting anecdotes, essays, memoirs, and fragments), *pangoein munhak* 方外人文學 (outsiders' literature), historical novels and up-to-date TV drama series. As an example of a *yasa* in the Chosŏn period, *Taedong yasŭng* 大東野乘[2] informs us how many Confucian scholars were traumatized by Sejo's usurpation of the throne. They had heated debates as to whether the seizure of kingship by force could be morally justified and politically legitimate according to Confucian principles.[3]



Caricature of Yi Kwangsu. (Jan. 1932)

More interesting events occurred 500 years after the *coup d'état*. A number of leading writers in colonial Korea revisited their fifteenth-century history and wrote imaginative reworkings of it, in particular in historical novels. These writers singled out various historical personages and fictionalized different views of the period. This reproduction of fifteenth-century history during the colonial period has little to do with restoring Confucian moral and political idealism. The writers do not appear to be driven by intellectual curiosity with regard to the veracity of historical facts. The fifteenth-century history captured in the literature of the colonized writers is not the past itself, but a reconstructed past written from the perspective of the colonial present. Hence, the imaginative reworkings of history tell the reader more about colonial Korea than about the country's actual past. The colonized writers' use of such interplay with history to show their take on colonial reality is an example of the strategic politics of memory.

1 Historians mainly focus on politics during Sejo s reign or on Sejo s reorganization of the administrative system and establishment of new governmental institutions. There are some studies on the Tanjong restoration movement, but few on Sejo s usurpation of the throne.

2 This is a collection of anecdotes, essays, jokes, and the like dating from the early Chosŏn period to c.1650.

3 Yi Kang'ok 이강옥, "Chosŏn ch'o chunggi sadaebu mit p'yŏngmin ilhwa-ga Chosŏn hugi yadamgye sosŏl-lo palchŏnhanŭn han yangsang: Hong Yunsŏng irhwarŭl chungshim-ŭro 조선 초,중기 사대부 및 평민 일화가 조선 후기 야담계 소설로 발전하는 한 양상: 홍윤성 일화를 중심으로," in *Ko sosŏlsa-ŭi che munje* 고소설사의 제 문제, edited by Sŏng'o So Chaeyŏng kyosu hwangap kinyŏm nonch'ong kanhaeng wiwŏnhoe 성오 소재영교수 환갑기념논총 간행위원회 (Seoul: Chimmundang 집문당, 1993), pp. 851-853.

The history of the fifteenth century, suffused with power struggles, greatly appealed to writers in colonial Korea. In their eyes, the shifting of political powers from Tanjong to Sejo bore a strong resemblance to the process of the colonization of Korea by Japan at the beginning of twentieth century. Historical similarities enabled colonized writers to regain their voices from the censorship of colonial rule and speak about their experiences of colonization from a variety of perspectives. The shifting of political power involves not only a change of rulers, but also political changes, moral ambiguity, identity crises, conflicts between personal and public interests, and so on. Making a political choice between the former and the new ruler is no simple matter, for each decision entails huge political and personal risks. Using the fifteenth-century historical past as an allegory of the colonial present, colonized authors plunged into an intense debate on the predicament of living lives trapped between competing political powers. In this way, history was transformed into a social practice for colonized authors. Their historical fiction, in turn, became an unconventional source for colonial historiography, providing a nuanced understanding of multivalent experiences of colonization, including psychological transformation and polyphonic voices from colonial Korea. I will now proceed to briefly sketch the literature of colonized writers drawing on the fifteenth-century historical figures and events. Thereafter, I will focus my attention on Yi Kwangsu's 李光洙 two historical novels. In these two novels, written ten years apart, Yi reproduces different historical events of the life of King Sejo. Yi's telling and retelling of stories will show us how he was keenly aware of the changing political and social tides of colonial Korea. His revised novel *Sejo taewang* 世祖大王 (1940), in particular, will demonstrate itself to be an important alternative source for illuminating the controversial issue of the writer's later collaboration with the colonial authorities.

FIFTEENTH-CENTURY KOREAN HISTORY AND COLONIAL LITERATURE

The first colonial writer to draw on the history of Sejo's usurpation was probably Yi Haejo 李海朝 (1869-1927). He is well-known as one of the first modern novelists to write in a new genre of fiction (*shin sosŏl*), a transitional form between classical and modern literature. Among those works of fiction, there are two interesting novels: *Hong Changgunjŏn* (The Story of General Hong) and *Han-sshi poŭngnok* (A Record on the Reward of Lady Han's Virtue).[4] These novels were written in 1918 and published as part of a series of Korean hero stories. Surprisingly, its main characters are the first class meritorious retainers during Sejo's usurpation. Hong Yunsŏng 洪允成, who took part in Sejo's coup and later ascended to the position of prime minister, became the protagonist of the first novel. In this book, Yi Haejo depicts Hong Yunsŏng as a 'righteous' person who does not tolerate injustice and unfairness, punishes the wicked severely, and rescues those in danger. For example, when Hong's unfaithful sister-in-law poisons her husband (Hong's elder brother) in conspiracy with her lover, Hong reveals the truth and kills both of them in revenge.[5] Likewise, he fights against and punishes his society's wrongdoers, ranging from a depraved monk to a pimp. In the novel, Hong undergoes several adversities (death sentence, exile, and the like) but is finally rewarded with a happy marriage to a beautiful woman and is conferred an honourable title after death.

The second novel relates to Han Myŏnghoe 韓明澮. Han made a crucial contribution to the success of the coup and broke down the ensuing rebellious movement against Sejo in 1456, which later became known as the Sayukshin Incident 死六臣事件. As a result of these exploits, Han finally rose to the highest state position, that of prime minister, twice. However, Yi Haejo does not refer to the aforementioned exploits in his novel at all. Borrowing various folktales and legends related to other figures, Yi Haejo instead creates a heroic image for Han Myŏnghoe. The protagonist receives aid and protection

4 There are two competing views with regard to the authorship of this novel. One view is that the novel is written by Yi Haejo; the other view is that it is a classic novel written by an anonymous author. In his *Chosŏn sosŏlsa* 朝鮮小說史 (Korean History of Fiction, 1933), Kim T'aejun 金台俊 wrote that there was a new novel entitled *Han Myŏnghoejŏn* and its author was Yi Haejo. For some reason, his statement is regarded as a misunderstanding. Ch'oe Wŏnshik (1986), however, discovered a book commercial issued in 1918 which informs that Yi Haejo wrote and published two novels, *Hong Changgunjŏn* and *Hansshi poŭngnok*, therefore it may not be problematic to see Yi Haejo as the author of the novel in question. See Ch'oe Wŏnshik 최원식, *Han'guk kŭndaesosŏl ron* 韓國近代小說史論 (Seoul: Ch'angjak-kwa pip'yŏngsa 창작과 비평사, 1986), p. 161.

5 According to Ch'oe Wŏnshik, this account is borrowed from a Chinese novel, *Shui hu chi* 水滸誌, ibid., p. 162. Yi Kyŏngsŏn 李慶善 compares Yi's novel with *Shui hu zhuan* 水滸傳 in more detail and analyses what is similar and different between the two novels. See her article "Hong Changgun-jŏn yŏn'gu 洪將軍傳 硏究" in *Han'gukhak nonjip* 韓國學論集 5 (1984): pp. 219-248.

from a mysterious source, and the novel is full of lofty family stories. The tale of Han's birth is extraordinary; his appearance and character dignified. Han's attitude is honest, open and above-board, far from cunning and deceitful. When he kills a calf he has found playing on the grave of his parents, he finds the owner and compensates him for his loss. Once he is caught in bed with the wife of a thief and is threatened with death. However, his fine personality and lordly behaviour win the thief over. The thief later comes to help Han and together they hunt for bandits in the country, a praiseworthy deed. Heroically, Han protects Sejo from an attack; as a result he is promoted to the position of high-level state official and ends his life in honour and wealth.

By borrowing and reworking various folktales and anecdotes about other figures, Yi Haejo creates fictional stories in which he portrays his protagonists (Sejo's devoted retainers) as righteous and morally upright heroes who always stand on the side of justice. Even if Hong Yunsŏng's rage with regard to injustice is always expressed in ruthless killing and revenge, Yi Haejo does not see such cruelty as problematic. Hong's killing of the calf is praised by the writer as evidence that he shows filial piety. Likewise, his ill-advised affair with the wife of a thief is interpreted as proof of Hong's bravery rather than condemned. In this way, the writer chooses to interpret Hong's negative acts in a positive light. The writer also takes a rosy view of Han Myŏnghoe, portraying him in his novel as dignified, lordly, noble-mannered and indirectly opposed to trickery and violence. However, these fictional characters are far removed from the historical reality of Hong and Han. Many anecdotes about Hong Yunsŏng in the aforementioned collection of unofficial narratives from the Chosŏn period inform us that he abused his political power, had a crude, uneven temper, and committed atrocities. Fearful of the exposure of his evil deeds, Hong killed his aged uncle and buried him in his yard. When Hong's horse died passing by a shamanistic shrine, he set fire to the shrine in anger. He robbed an old woman of her rice paddy. When she cried, he bounced a rock off her head and abandoned her dead body on the street.[6]

Similarly, the historical Han Myŏnghoe proved himself to be a master schemer rather than a man of literary arts. Sejo's bloody *coup d'état* was designed with great sophistication and coordinated by Han's outstanding trickery and stratagems.[7] Han's achievement in the novel of gaining first place in the state examination, thus demonstrating his nobility and dignity, is entirely fictional. He failed the state examinations time and again and finally began his career as a palace keeper. It was in fact Kwŏn Ram, another well-known retainer of Sejo, who won first place in the state examination, not Han.

It is noteworthy that in both novels factual accounts of the bloody murders committed during the usurpation and the cruel execution of the six loyal officials to the former king (the Sayukshin Incident) are boldly omitted or at best contracted into one or two sentences, such as "Afterwards, Prince Suyang was asked by Tanjong to accede to the throne" (*Hong Changgunjŏn*).[8] Another example is:

> *Afterwards, Prince Suyang showed his immense dignity and finally ascended to the throne. This divine king, possessing both literary and military arts, established peace and reformed the country's politics. The royal court was as firm as rock.People came to sing a song of peace (Hansshi poŭngnok).*[9]

In this way, the most dramatic historical events, from which a writer could create a truly intriguing story, are glossed over. Yet this oversight implies that Yi's intention was to prevent the possibility of controversy arising and to avoid questions as to what is hidden below the surface of the heroes' moral uprightness. The succinct remarks on the events reveal Yi's tacit acceptance of Sejo and his servants.

How is the history Yi Haejo depicted in his fiction related to the colonial context he lived in? Firstly, his fiction can be understood in the broad context of the period at the beginning of the twentieth century, in which many heroes in history were rediscovered and reproduced. Under the influence of the social-Darwinist power politics and logic, many Korean enlighteners aimed to deliver the urgent

6 Ibid., pp. 161-164; Yi Kang'ok, "Chosŏn ch'o chunggi sadaebu mit p'yŏngmin ilhwa-ga Chosŏn hugi yadamgye sosŏlo palchŏnhanŭn han yangsang: Hong Yunsŏng irhwa-rŭl chungshim-ŭro," pp. 855-858.

7 Kim Sunjin 金舜鎭, "Hansshi poŭngnok yŏn'gu: sosŏr-ŭi yŏksasŏng-gwa hŏgusŏng koch'ar-ŭl wihan shiron 韓氏報應錄 硏究: 小說의 歷史性과 虛構性 고찰을 위한 試論", in *Ihwa ŏmun nonjip* 이화어문논집 5 (1982): pp. 16-18.

8 Ch'oe Wŏnshik, *Han'guk kŭndaesosŏl ron*, p. 163.

9 Kim Changdong 金章東, "Hansshi poŭngnokko: Sŏrhwa-wa yŏksasŏng-ŭl chungshim-ŭro 韓氏報應錄攷: 說話와 歷史性을 中心으로" in *Andong taehak nonmunjip* 안동대학논문집 4 (1982): p. 11.

Tong'a Ilbo (3 Jan. 1929). ***Tanjong aesa*** **was serialized from Nov. 1928 to Dec.1929 in the Tong'a Ilbo with illustrations by Yi Sangbŏm. The illustration above depicts an exciting scene where Prince Suyang and Kwŏn Ram make secret and elaborate plans for the future.**

message to young boys and girls that "only the strongest can survive. Raising spiritual and bodily strength is the only way for our country to survive in this competitive world." To promote patriotism, they eagerly translated biographies of Western heroes, such as Napoleon, and created stories about Korean war heroes and generals, such as Yi Sunshin and Ŭlchi Mundŏk.[10] However, this 'hero fever' was limited to a period at the start of the 1900s before colonization, known as the patriotic enlightenment period (Yi's novels were written much later). Yi's protagonists are no such war heroes, nor do they show their military fighting spirit in his fiction. Yi created a different type of hero, in a very different time period, at odds with the heroes of the patriotic enlightenment period.

Secondly, Yi's historical novels hint at a cautious embrace of Japanese colonial power as Korea's new ruler. It is not difficult to draw a parallel between Sejo and the Japanese colonizer. They are both new political powers who took over sovereignty via political struggles, in the fifteenth and twentieth centuries respectively. Thus, a tacit acceptance of Sejo's seizure of power and rule in both novels alludes to a tacit acceptance of the Japanese domination of Korea. However, embracing the new ruler (colonial Japan) does not necessarily entail turning one's back on the former ruler (Chosŏn Korea). As Ch'oe Wŏnshik observes, Yi Haejo does not denigrate Sejo's political rivals and rebels against the king. Victims of Sejo's political struggles, such as Prince Anp'yŏng, are commemorated in *Hong Changgun-jŏn*. In this novel Mun Chongnyŏl, on behalf of the *sayukshin* (the six martyred ministers) and other rebels, is given a voice to defend Sejo's political opponents and to admonish against reckless killing.[11] These depictions are not included merely to show sympathy for the losers. As Jahyun Haboush claims, such a commemorative act is a tactical device to impart a subversive message about the established order and current legitimacy, which means Yi's novels tacitly embrace the colonial authorities and at the same time, tactically invert them.[12]

Perhaps most importantly of all, Yi Haejo projects his own experience of colonization onto the protagonists. Hong Yunsŏng and Han Myŏnghoe serve the new ruler, Sejo. Historically, they were Sejo's officers, his loyal servants, and his advisors when he took over the throne, stabilized and developed the country. Their position and role in fifteenth-century history eerily resemble Yi's own in the early twentieth century. In 1910 when Korea was colonized, Yi received the title of viscount 子爵 from the colonial government and was appointed a member of the Chungch'uwŏn 中樞院 (Privy Council), a body which primarily played an advisory role for the governor-general.[13] Although this institute was nominally designed to give

10 During the patriotic enlightenment period, the biographies of heroes were taught in school history lessons. Famous nationalist historians such as Shin Ch'aeho initially wrote biographies of generals and war heroes but gradually began to write works of fiction about those figures. For a more detailed discussion, see Yi Sŭngwŏn 이승원, *Hakkyo-ŭi t'ansaeng* 학교의 탄생 (Seoul: Hyumŏnisŭt'ŭ, 2005), pp. 105-115; Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Narratives of Nation Building in Korea: A Genealogy of Patriotism* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), pp. 3-19.

11 Ch'oe Wŏnshik, *Han'guk kŭndaesosŏl ron*, pp. 163-164 and 168-169.

12 Jahyun Kim Haboush, "Dead Bodies in the Postwar Discourse of Identity in Seventeenth-Century Korea: Subversion and Literary Production in the Private Sector *Journal of Asian Studies* 62.2 (May 2003): 415-442. See in particular pp. 418-423.

13 It is not clear how long Yi Haejo kept the titles of nobleman and Chungch'uwŏn member. Among those who were granted such titles, there were some who directly returned them or were divested of them owing to bankruptcy or even participation in nationalist movements.

the impression of continuity, with a link to the Taehan Empire 大韓帝國, and of Korean participation, officially Yi Haejo became a Japanese nobleman and a founding official in direct service to the new ruler. Yi Haejo makes an elaborate attempt to view Sejo's retainers in a positive light in order to legitimate his own new position and to seek a new identity and role as a colonial official. The portrayal of the protagonists as righteous, dignified and noble men may have been a self-portrait of Yi Haejo.

Following in Yi Haejo's footsteps, Pak Chonghwa 朴鐘和 (1901-1980) evoked another historical figure from fifteenth-century history. "Mok maeinŭn yŏja" ("Woman Hanging Herself," 1923) is Pak's first attempt at a short story and deals with Shin Sukchu 申叔舟 (1417-1475) in the first years of Sejo's reign of terror. The historical Shin Sukchu served King Sejong as a trustworthy Chiphyŏnjŏn (Hall of Worthies) scholar and vowed to safeguard his grandson (later King Tanjong), but after Sejong died and Prince Suyang staged a coup, he broke his vow and switched his allegiance to Suyang. When many of his Chiphyŏnjŏn colleagues, such as Sŏng Sammun 成三問, plotted to restore the deposed King Tanjong and met a cruel death, with their arms and legs being torn apart, he did not involve himself in the plot, choosing to keep himself safe instead. From the end of the seventeenth century onwards, Sŏng Sammun began to symbolize scholarly fidelity whereas Shin Sukchu came to be seen as a typical symbol of betrayal in Korean history.[14] A popular example of the way this symbol has been used is the fact that mung bean sprouts are called *sukchu namul* because they soon spoil. It is often claimed that Shin Sukchu's wife took her own life, ashamed of his political disloyalty. This story is not true, for his wife had actually died from disease five months before the Sayuksin Incident. Surprisingly, this misconception originated from a short story by Pak Chonghwa, published in the literary magazine *Paekcho* 白鳥 (Swan) in 1923.

In this short story, Pak Chonghwa chooses Shin Sukchu's wife to be the speaker, observing events through her eyes. However, the popularly accepted interpretation that Shin Sukchu is belittled as a betrayer whose heart is smaller than a woman's (his wife) is not what the author intended at all. The focus of his short story is not to apply moral judgements to historical figures and expose their immorality. Rather, Pak questions why these figures made certain decisions. Using the power of imagination, he tries to show Shin's life experiences and the psychological distress lurking beneath the surface of his political disloyalty. As Shin's wife believes at home, one of the basic principles of Confucian morality is that a loyal servant does not serve two kings, in the same way that a faithful wife does not serve two husbands. Her expectation that her husband, armed with sound morals, will dethrone Sejo and restore Tanjong represents the point of view of a third person who is not yet involved in the event.

However, Shin Sukchu's agonized look demonstrates that the political choice of either Tanjong or Sejo is not a simple matter at all. In the novel, Shin Sukchu is not a betrayer from the beginning. At first he rejects Sejo's proposal that Shin be his servant, and prepares himself for death. Thinking of a posthumous reputation as a faithful retainer, he even smiles. However, he comes to yield to Sejo. Why? Because Sejo threatens to kill all of his sons. Shin Sukchu suddenly realizes that the decision he has to make between Tanjong and Sejo is not merely one between loyalty and disloyalty, but a matter of life or death. What's more, it's not only his own life, but the lives of his children which are in danger. Pak dramatizes Shin Sukchu's experience of conflict and intense agony under the menace of Sejo through the heroine's eyes, and informs us that Shin's decision is not made easily. Seeing her agitated husband with a pale and haggard face, returning home with a tired body late at night and lamenting drunkenly, Shin's wife expects him to choose death rather than disloyalty, but in fact Shin Sukchu makes the opposite choice in order to save the lives of his children. His wife is so ashamed of him that she takes her life by hanging herself.

In this way, Pak explores multilayered conflicts and psychological distress: the human motivation behind Shin Sukchu's political disloyalty. Shin's political decision is usually condemned as immoral and unethical. Pak questions whether it really is immoral if the decision is made out of paternal love to save the lives of his children. Pak vividly depicts the seriousness of death, with its accompanying fear, anxiety and worry. He also tackles the difficult question of which should come first: reality or ideology, the value of human lives or the value of a Confucian virtue, family or state, and parental love or loyalty to the king.

14 Pak Ŭnbong 박은봉, *Han'guksa sangshik parojapki* 한국사 상식 바로잡기 (Seoul: Ch'aekkwa hamkke 책과함께, 2007), pp. 137-145.

It is no simple question. Pak himself does not try to reach a conclusion, but rather confines himself to showing two opposing choices, and focusing on another conflict, that between man and woman. Pak highlights this conflict by inverting the traditional gender roles, so that despite being a man, Shin Sukchu chooses reality, human lives, and parental love for his children, whereas his wife follows the lofty Confucian ideals, in particular the virtue of loyalty to the king rather than the family virtue of love for one's children.

Tong'a Ilbo (15 Dec. 1928). A female reporter visited Yi Kwangsu's personal library. In the picture, Yi Kwangsu is writing *Tanjong aesa* sitting at his desk.

Unlike Yi Haejo, Pak Chonghwa does not create heroes in this story. He tries to restore the humanity of Shin Sukchu and his wife and reproduce their experiences and feelings of conflict, fear, anguish, and anxiety.[15] This act of historical imagination and storytelling enables him to dramatize the experiences of the March First Movement of 1919 and the attempts to continue life in its aftermath. In the story, Shin's wife thinks that "His words and actions say he [Shin Sukchu] will dethrone Sejo and restore Tanjong." She also expresses the thought that "[s]ince the incident happened this year, something is going to happen to him as well."[16] Both of these thoughts are illusions to the Sayuksin Incident. This historical movement, designed to restore the deposed Tanjong as king, is very much comparable to the March First Movement, the attempt to restore the collapsed state of Chosŏn in the twentieth century. In fact, in the twentieth century the deposed Emperor Kojong 高宗 was set up as a focal point to unite people and to rebuild the country. But Kojong met a sudden and mysterious death, as did Tanjong 500 years before him.[17] Both movements failed miserably. In the fifteenth century six martyrs were brutally executed, but they were not the only victims of the Sayuksin Incident. Scores of people were put to death, and hundreds of family members and relatives were given to other officials as slaves and concubines.[18] In the twentieth century, during the March First Movement, around 7,500 people were killed and nearly 16,000 were wounded (according to the Japanese colonial government, 553 were killed and around 1,400 were injured).

Looking back in history at the Tanjong Restoration Movement, Pak Chonghwa actually questions the cause and result of the March First Movement. As the thoughts of Shin's wife show, deposing the Japanese ruler (Sejo) and restoring Korean sovereignty (Tanjong) was believed by the Koreans to be the due course of action and morally right. Pak shows that this type of national ideology cannot embrace all the experiences the Koreans had at that time. While this national ideology was presented to the Koreans as a supposed solution to their suffering, Pak shows that in fact it caused more problems and conflicts. He emphasizes that before his characters are Korean, they are human. Is it easy and realistic for a human being to devote himself to a political ideology without considering their daily life, their reality under colonial rule, their family and children? Which is morally better, love for one's children or love for the nation? By depicting the

15 Yun Pyŏngno 윤병로, "Wŏlt'an Pak Chonghwa-ŭi munhaksegye 월탄 박종화의 문학세계" in *Pak Chonghwa-ŭi munhak-kwa sasang* 박종화의 문학과 사상, edited by Wŏlt'an Pak Chonghwa t'ansaeng paekjunyŏn kinyŏmmunjip kanhaengwiwŏnhoe 월탄 박종화 탄신 100주년 기념문집 간행위원회 (Seoul: Pŏmusa 범우사, 2001), p. 54.

16 Ibid., pp. 55-56.

17 *Han'guksa* 한국사 47 (Kwach' ŏn: Kuksa p'yŏngch'an wiwŏnhoe 국사편찬위원회, 2001), pp. 307-308.

18 For more detail about the punishment of those rebels, see Yang Chiha 양지하, "Sejo i-nyŏn (1456) Tanjong pogwi sakkŏn-ŭi sŏngkyŏk 세조 2년 (1456) 단종 복위사건의 성격" (Seoul: Ewha Womans University, 2008), pp. 45-51; Yu Yŏngpak 柳永博, "Tanjong pokwi moŭijadŭr-ŭi sabŏp ch'ŏri: Tanjong pokwi moŭi-e kwanhan yŏn'gu 2 端宗復位 謀議者들의 司法處理: 端宗復位 謀議에 관한 硏究 2" in *Chindan hakpo* 震檀學報 78 (1994): pp. 125-145.

choices of two protagonists, Pak poses questions rather than offering answers.

As seen in the heroine's thought and actions, patriotic nationalism, which in this novel is allegorized by Confucian loyalty to the king, too easily imposes sacrifice and death on people. Indeed, it often brings about a disastrous amount of damage and the sacrifice of human lives, as in the March First Movement. Seeing such deaths, one usually condemns the aggressor for brutality and praises the victims for their patriotism, but the cruelty and aggression of the national ideology, which imposes death as the practice of sound morality, remains hidden. The writer argues against national ideology, claiming that death is no easy choice. It is a fearful and terrible experience for every human being. Both of his protagonists are distressed when faced with their own death and the death of their children. In this way, Pak Chonghwa depicts the agitated life experiences and psychological distress of both politically loyal and disloyal Koreans under the menace of colonial and nationalist powers.

Up to now, I have examined how Yi Haejo and Pak Chonghwa deal with fifteenth-century history in their novels and how differently they grasp the historical past in terms of the concerns of their colonial present. In the following colonial period, there were many more colonized writers who had a keen sense of history and used it as a convenient tactic to talk about colonial events and their experiences of colonization. Among them, Yi Kwangsu is definitely the most distinguished. He depicted ancient Shilla's ill-fated crown prince Maŭi in his novel *Maŭi t'aeja* 麻衣太子 (Crown Prince Maŭi, 1926-1927). After looking around ruins related to General Yi Sunshin during the Imjin War (Hideyoshi Invasions), he began serializing his novel *Yi Sunshin* 李舜臣 (1931-1932) in the *Tong'a Ilbo*. Since he had converted to Buddhism, he recalled the lives of the first Buddhist martyr, Ich'adon 異次頓, and Shilla's prominent Buddhist monk, Wŏnhyo 元曉. With regard to the fifteenth century, he created two versions of the story of King Sejo: *Tanjong aesa* 端宗哀史 (1928-1929) and *Sejo taewang* 世祖大王 (1940). These two interpretations of parts of the life of King Sejo will give us another view of, and another narrative depicting, Korea's colonial history, in particular Yi's personal and public struggles with the country's changing sociopolitical situation.

TANJONG AESA: TRAGIC HISTORY, COLONIZATION AND THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

Yi Kwangsu's *Tanjong aesa* 端宗哀史 (1928-1929) was serialized in *Tong'a ilbo* 東亞日報 for one year. The novel chronicles Tanjong's life from birth to death. However, the main character of the novel is Prince Suyang (later King Sejo) rather than Tanjong. The main event in the novel is the process of Prince Suyang's usurpation of the throne. The novel begins with a scene in which Tanjong is born. Hearing the news, the then king Sejong (Tanjong's grandfather) entrusts two officials, Sŏng Sammun and Shin Sukchu, with the care of his grandson after his death. Tanjong grows up. Prince Suyang, along with Kwŏn Ram, is already beginning to gather people one by one and form a secret and elaborate plan for the future. The following long chapter gives a detailed description of Suyang's *coup d'état* (Kyeyu chŏngnan). Suyang's right-hand man, Han Myŏnghoe, draws up a hit list of their enemies. Suyang's warriors kill every single opponent on the list and their families, accusing them of treason. Suyang is ruthless, and kills anybody who expresses the slightest dissent towards him. The cruelty reaches a peak in a detailed description of a killing, in which his warriors even murder two and three year old toddlers.[19] In the third chapter Suyang dethrones Tanjong and ascends to the throne himself. Through the successful coup, he becomes the main holder of power, occupying more than one position including that of prime minister, but his ambition does not stop there. Suyang forces Tanjong to abdicate the throne in favour of himself. Then, the novel recalls the Sayuksin Incident. Officials who support the deposed King Tanjong plot to assassinate Sejo and his officials, taking the opportunity of the visit of a group of Ming envoys to carry out the assassinations. However, their plan fails due to an internal informant, and the six plotters are tortured to death. The novel ends with the death of the ex-king in exile.

Yi Kwangsu offers a rich storyline and depicts a series of incidents associated with Sejo's usurpation in full detail. The majority of the characters and events in the novel are not fictional but correspond to real historical figures and incidents. It is as Yi Kwangsu himself stated in "Tanjong aesa-e taehayŏ 端宗哀史에 對하여" ("On *Tanjong aesa*," 1929):

19 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 李光洙全集 4 (Seoul: Samjungdang, 1971/1973), p. 369.

> *The officially recorded documents on the young king are not so informative but non-official narratives* 野史 *provide important insights into the character. Now I am using both official and non-official narratives as sources and I will try to refrain from fictionalizing them. My attempt in the novel is to reconstruct the historical events and reproduce the historical figures as they were.*[20]

However, the novel is in no way an exact copy or representation of the succession of historical events. In his exhaustive study on Yi Kwangsu, Kim Tong'in 金東仁 (1900-1951) disclosed that Yi's novel was very much based upon a certain document written by Nam Hyoon entitled *Yuksinjŏn* 六臣傳 (Biographies of Six Scholars), and that Yi accepted Nam's view and errors uncritically.[21] Yi himself also admitted that although he tried to write down impartially what the historical records stated, he could not look dispassionately at fifteenth-century history but was as eager as if he was writing his own autobiography or drawing his own 'portrait.'[22] This remark informs us that the historical past recaptured in this novel is not entirely removed from Yi's view of life in the colonial present.

The period in which Yi was writing and serializing this novel in the *Tong'a Ilbo* 東亞日報 was a critical moment in his life. He underwent a life-or-death struggle with chronic tuberculosis, and in January 1927, he relapsed, coughing up blood several times and losing consciousness. In the middle of writing this novel, the disease attacked him again. In May 1929, he underwent a major operation, in which his left kidney was removed. The process of writing this serialized novel was interrupted eleven times.[23] His experiences of the unbearable disease and painful operations awakened Yi to the religious foundation underlying life and death. As he states in his essay "Susultae wi-esŏ 수술대 위에서" ("On the Operating Table," 1927), one realizes that faced with death, everything except religion disappears.[24] In particular, the Buddhist view of impermanence 無常 appealed to him. The suffering of death is not constant and soon disappears 苦空. Nothing is permanent, not even the self 無我. Yi clearly felt the sadness and transience of life. These feelings intensified whenever he prepared for his death and thought of his children, whom he would have to leave behind.

Contemporary tragedy typically evokes memories of the rise and fall of individuals and countries. There are many tragic incidents in Korean history but Yi Kwangsu sees the Tanjong story in particular as a dramatic reflection of the vanity of life. It is no coincidence that the beginning of the novel corresponds to Yi's religious insights and moods in a secularized form. Tanjong's grandfather King Sejong 世宗 worries about the poor health of his son Munjong 文宗. The sick Munjong is heartbroken, thinking of his all-too-short life and seeing his little son (Tanjong), a simple and innocent child, happily playing games. It is obvious that what King Sejong and King Munjong feel mirrors the writer's suffering when seeing his own children. The novel proceeds to depict the transience of life, in a scene in which the now King Tanjong is degraded to the much lower noble rank of Nosan'gun and is sent into exile by his uncle Suyang. To emphasize this focus on transience, Yi has court ladies realize the uncertainty of life upon seeing Tanjong's dethronement and the death of various people in the course of Suyang's usurpation. Their only solace is in reciting the Buddha's names, chanting mantras wishing that Tanjong be reborn in paradise in the next life, or venting their animosity (towards Suyang). They also pray for the dethroned king's good fortune, believing that it is all they can do. Such a description of the transience of life is based upon a secularized understanding of impermanence.

Still, sadness, loneliness and the transience of life is not the writer's main concern. Yi's primary focus is the similarity between fifteenth-century history and contemporary colonial reality, which he encapsulates in his novel as follows:

> *The merits and deficiencies of our ancestors living 500 years ago reappear among us today so clearly and in such a similar manner. Even the incident which discloses their disposition is analogous to the current event. This might be the reason why historical reading is so exciting.*[25]

20 In *Samch'ŏlli* 三千里 (June 1919). Republished in *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 10, p. 507.
21 Kim Tong'in, *Ch'unwŏn yŏngu* 春園硏究 (1934). Reprinted as *Ch'unwŏn yŏngu* 春園硏究 (Seoul: Ch'unjosa 春潮社, 1956), pp. 108-126.
22 Ha Ch'ŏljong 하철종, "Ch'unwŏn-gwa Tong'in yŏksa sosŏr-ŭi taebi-chŏk yŏn'gu: *Tanjong aesa*-wa *Tae Suyang*-ŭl chungshim-ŭro 춘원과 동인 역사소설의 대비적 연구: 단종애사와 대수양을 중심으로" (MA thesis, Ch'angwon University, 2005), p. 44.
23 Song Paekhŏn 송백헌, "Han'guk kŭndae yŏksa sosŏl yŏn'gu 韓國 近代 歷史小說硏究" (Ph.D. dissertation, Tanguk University, 1982), p. 71.
24 In *Munye kongnon* 文藝公論 (July 1929). Republished in *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 8, pp. 333-334.
25 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 4, p. 404.

Yi Kwangsu in 1935 (In *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip pyŏlkwŏn*. Seoul: Samjungdang, 1971-1973)

Yi Kwangsu in 1940 (In *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip pyŏlkwŏn*)

What was the historical similarity he found? What incident is he talking about? What Yi Kwangsu saw on looking back to Sejo's usurpation of the throne in the fifteenth century is not the historical event per se, but what happened in the early twentieth century: Japan's colonization of Korea. In other words, Tanjong aesa is a narrative, in the disguise of fiction and history, about the process of Korea's colonization by Japan. That is why Yi chose Tanjong rather than Sejo, to be the novel's title character, even though the novel's protagonist turns out to be Sejo. In the novel, King Tanjong is portrayed as an effeminate and innocent child, Prince Suyang as a strong, ambitious and greedy grown-up. These historical figures allegorize colonized Korea and Japanese colonial power respectively. In his fictionalization of the historical past, the writer tacitly explores colonial relationships and the asymmetry of political power. Contemporary readers felt a great deal of sympathy and empathy for the young king, as his tragedy was reminiscent of their colonized condition. They too were deprived of their sovereignty by powerful and military authorities, in their case those of colonization. Tanjong's sorrowful life represented their own lives under colonial rule, which is why this novel maintained enormous popularity among its contemporary readership.

It is interesting though, how Yi tried, as do today's historians, to take "a dispassionate look at the colonial state and its policies [...] and to uncover the internal coherence and dynamics of colonial state polices and their effectiveness."[26] In the novel, Sejo is depicted like a Japanese samurai. He prefers archery and horse riding to reading Confucian classics, and cannot compose a line of Chinese verse. In his view, ancient Chinese history is musty, tiresome and mere words. Due to an inferiority complex, he harbours antipathy towards Confucian men, classics and rituals.[27] Such a depiction of Sejo is redolent of Japan by the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century. Japan pursued a policy of militarism and was viewed by Confucian Koreans as a less advanced Sinocentric culture. After introducing the new civilizing power of westernization, enhanced national prosperity and a military army, Japan began to show contempt towards Confucianism, Confucian civilization and Confucian countries like Chosŏn Korea.

Suyang's *coup d'état* and the first years of his reign of terror are viewed as akin to Japan's annexation of Korea, which also appealed to military force, and the first ten years of *budan seiji* 武斷政治 (military rule). In the novel Suyang draws up elaborate plans for seizing political power and finally taking over the throne from Tanjong. First he gathers a group of warriors, who will play the leading part in the Kyeyu chŏngnan and remove all his enemies. Yi emphasizes, however, that the purpose of this coup is to kill two key powerful men, Kim Chongsŏ and Hwang Poin 皇甫仁. The coup is successful and, as a result, Prince Suyang becomes the main power holder. He gains all the important positions, including prime minister, minister of personnel and minister of defence, but young Tanjong is still king. Sejo's next step is to force Tanjong to abdicate the throne in favour of himself; Tanjong is thereby deposed and Suyang ascends to the throne. This process of usurpation strongly resembles the process of imperial Japan's annexation of Korea.

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the

26 Koen de Ceuster, "When History Matters: Reconstructing South Korea's National Memory in the Age of Democracy", in *Contested Views of a Common Past: Revisions of History in Contemporary East Asia*, edited by Steffi Richter (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2008), p. 90.

27 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 4, pp. 272, 290, and 291.

twentieth century, military power was a prerequisite for a country like Japan, in order for it to be recognized as a colonial power before falling prey itself to other imperial powers. Japan strove to enhance its militarism and demonstrated this policy through two wars: the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1905). The removal of China and Russia was similar to Sejo's military *coup d'état*, which was also aimed at taking two key powers out of the equation. The way in which Yi specifically explains the Kyeyu chŏngnan targeting Kim Chongsŏ and Hwang Poin corresponds to this parallel with the colonization of Korea. As a result of winning the two wars against China and Russia, Japan was able to wield more power over the politics of Korea. In 1905, right after the victory of the war against Russia, Japan took over Korea's diplomacy; in 1907, it gained full control of military affairs. Thus, step by step, Japan impelled the Taehan Empire (Korea) to abdicate sovereignty to it and in 1910, the Korean state ceased to exist.

The political actions taken in order to colonize Korea were neither accidental nor forceful. In fact, the colonization was officially arranged via a form of treaty legal under international law, although effectively Korea was subject to the menace of Japanese militarism throughout the colonization process. Yi projects this experience of being colonized onto the novel. Whenever Suyang removes his political enemies, he makes up good reasons for doing so, such as protecting and safeguarding Tanjong from dangerous and ambitious officials who could pose a threat to his authority. Suyang appears with the heads of the killed officials and shows them to the king; an indirect way of frightening him. He even brandishes his sword and kills eunuchs in front of Tanjong.[28] The king, who trembles in fear and shock, represents contemporary Korea under the menace of Japan. Suyang's sophisticated rhetoric of 'protection' is highly reminiscent of a series of protectorate treaties (signed in 1904, 1905, and 1907) between Korea and Japan. In those treaties, it is repeatedly stated that Japan will protect the independence and sovereignty of Korea from threatening powers, and that it will secure peace in Asia. However, whenever Japan won more power through military victories, the promises made in the treaties were broken.

Sejo's early reign is characterized by a rule of terror. After brutally eliminating all enemies on his way to the throne, he now forcibly subdued any rebels. As mentioned above, in Yi's story Sejo's warriors dominate the country. They wield immense power, cruelly killing women and babies for fun. With such a scene of brutality, Yi dramatizes colonial life in the first ten years under Japan's military rule. Following the annexation of the country, only military officers were appointed governor-generals of colonial Korea, and they suppressed disobedience with guns and swords. As well as alluding to the process of colonization and early military rule in colonial Korea, Yi Kwangsu wanted to deliver another hidden message about the contemporary colonization: the importance of a nationalist self-reconstruction movement.

The writer focuses on the confrontation between the usurper Suyang's selfish greed (*yoksim* 欲心) and the six martyred ministers' selfless loyalty (*ch'ungŭi* 忠義) to King Tanjong. Yi starts by describing Suyang's uncontrollable craving for the throne and diagnoses it as the cause for the entire tragedy that would ensue.

> *He [Suyang] was smart enough to know everything. But all his virtue and all his brightness were subjected to an irrepressible greed […]. It was his fate which let him become the protagonist of the tragedy, due to his uncontrollable ambition. Such a shortcoming in personality was stronger than intellect.* [29]

The writer tries to refrain from judging his characters and from authorial empathy, does not portray Suyang as absolutely evil. In deferring judgement, Yi depicts Suyang instead as a mere human being who could not rid himself of his desires; desires which resulted in a bloody tragedy. On the one hand, the writer depicts him as a wise, virtuous, brave, talented and competent prince; on the other hand, he also depicts the way a shortcoming in Suyang's personality overwhelms all his positive qualities. The writer's interpretation of the tragedy, however, is not historically accurate. The usurpation was an elaborate plan based upon Prince Suyang's political intelligence and strategic tactics. When the young King Tanjong was on the throne, the then ministers abused their powers with disregard to the king, and Prince Anp'yŏng was plotting to seize power. Suyang forestalled them in their political struggles. Notwithstanding this undoubtedly praiseworthy deed, why does the writer emphasize Suyang's per-

28 Ibid., pp. 348-350.
29 Ibid., p. 407.

sonality flaw as the origin of the tragic incident? How is Suyang's desire for the throne linked to colonial reality?

According to Ch'oe Chuhwan (2005) and Chang Sŏnggyu (2007), Sejo's pursuit of personal desire and his guilty conscience represent the author's own inner conflict between his personal and public desires. Active as a cultural nationalist in colonial Korea, Yi could not avoid a degree of cooperation with the government-general, which is assumed to have caused him guilt. However, I should mention here that Yi's critical view of Suyang's personality flaw is evocative of the contemporary self-cultivation movement. Yi was the leader of the Suyang Tong'uhoe (Moral Self-Cultivation Society) in colonial Korea from 1921 onwards, and the issue of personality was the core concept of the movement. In his controversial essay "Minjok kaejoron 民族改造論," ("A Treatise on National Reconstruction," 1922), Yi had already argued:

> *Is it not clear that a defect in our moral character is the fundamental reason for the decay of the Korean nation? To reconstruct a nation, one should begin with morality because that is the basis of national identity.*[30]

He criticized the decadent morality of the Koreans, focusing on their lying, egoism, and laziness, and called for moral improvement as a gradual but fundamental approach to the progress of national affairs. The fictionalization of how Suyang's shortcoming in personality brought about disaster alludes to the question of why the self-cultivation movement was necessary for the Koreans.

Yi himself makes his point clear. Discussing his own novels *Yi Sunshin* and *Tanjong aesa*, he states that in "Mujŏng tŭng chŏn chakp'um-ŭl nonhada" ("Reviews of All My Works Including *Mujŏng*," 1939), he intended to depict the shortcomings of the Korean nation in the guise of historical personalities. The villainous retainers, whose minds are consumed by ambition and enmity, are seen as the archetype of the majority of Koreans. However, in the novel *Tanjong aesa*, he takes the opposite approach and underlines 'the gallant character of the Korean nation.' The six martyred ministers' devotion to righteousness 義, regardless of personal benefit and self-interest, represents the moral and spiritual strength of the Korean people.[31] In other words, Yi intended Sejo's greed and ambition to represent the weakness of the moral character of the Korean nation, and the loyalty 義 or constancy 志操 of the six martyred ministers, to represent one of the nation's strengths.

> *The flesh and blood of righteous people make this land righteous. Even grasses that grow on the tombs of the righteous fertilize this land. Without such righteous people, this land will be ruined. Fearlessness in service to loyalty is the foremost enemy of Suyang.*[32]

The writer depicts the clash between Sejo's uncontrollable desires and self-interest and the six martyred ministers' notions of justice and loyalty. The martyred ministers refuse all the bait Suyang throws at them, and risk their lives for the sake of King Tanjong. Their Confucian loyalty in serving their sovereign is the strongest weapon they have to scare Suyang away and to defy his uncontrollable desires. Their attempt to restore King Tanjong failed in actual history but they did not, in their fearless and selfless service to Tanjong, die in vain. Their spirit of righteousness and loyalty lived on and continued to protect the land. With regard to the Confucian vocabulary Yi uses in his description of the struggle between Sejo and the six ministers, it is widely believed among scholars that Yi Kwangsu aimed to evoke a 'national consciousness' (*minjok ŭisik* 民族意識) by expressing the notion of Confucian loyalty and the principle that loyal servants do not serve two kings (*ch'ungshin pulsa i'gun* 忠臣不事二君). In considering Yi's return to traditional values, some scholars concluded that this was a retreat from his early progressive views, which were critical of Confucianism.[33]

In my opinion, however, Yi's emphasis on Confucian virtues could be viewed more accurately in terms of a reinvention of tradition within the framework of a nation-building project rather than as a retreat to a more conservative way of thinking. Confucian virtues such as loyalty to the king are traditional concepts, whereas nation (*minjok* 民族), the nation-state and national consciousness are basically modern concepts. Traditional virtues

30 Republished in *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 10, p. 186.
31 Ibid., pp. 522-523.
32 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 4, p. 407.
33 Kim Yunshik 김윤식, *Yi Kwangsu-wa kŭ-ŭi shidae* 이광수와 그의 시대 2 (Seoul: Sol, 1999-2001), p. 171; Ha Ch'ŏljong, "Ch'unwŏn-gwa Tong'in yŏksa sosŏr-ŭi taebi-chŏk yŏn'gu: *Tanjong aesa*-wa *Tae Suyang*-ŭl chungshim-ŭro," p. 21.

demand service to a king as one's sovereign, not to the imagined community of the Korean nation. Yet, drawing a parallel between history and reality, Yi reinvents loyalty to the king as political devotion to the nation.

However, one thing remains to be considered. The Confucian virtues emphasized in this novel directly allude to the Sayuksin Incident. As mentioned above in my discussion of Pak Chonghwa's short story, this incident was a failed attempt to restore the deposed Tanjong to the throne and bears a resemblance to the March First Movement (1919). Pak's story focuses on the various human experiences of the nationalist movement and the psychological agitation beneath the political ideology and practice; he was writing only a few years after the movement had ended at the price of great sacrifice. However, when Yi wrote *Tanjong aesa*, a whole decade had passed since the March First Movement. Yi offers a different perspective of the event, by presenting a different view of the Sayuksin Incident. Yi depicts the six martyred ministers as righteous and loyal officials who risk their lives in service to Tanjong. They are seen to demonstrate the moral and spiritual strength of the Korean nation. In Yi's view, the contemporary movement which showed the same Korean spiritual bravery and strength even though it did not achieve its goal was the March First Movement. The paragraph quoted above regarding the commemoration of the death of the six martyred ministers is thus intended to commemorate the sacrifice of so many of the participants in the March First Movement. By the same token, it is no accident that 1929, the year in which this novel was written, was the tenth anniversary of the March First Movement. The novel was a reminder for the Koreans to remember the national event of a decade earlier and to consider its national historic significance.

SEJO TAEWANG: BUDDHISM AND THE SUYANG TONG'UHOE INCIDENT

Ten years after writing *Tanjong aesa*, Yi Kwangsu published a follow-up novel: *Sejo taewang* 世祖大王. This novel also has Prince Suyang (now King Sejo) as its main character. However, the writer does not cover the whole thirteen years of Sejo's reign, but only the last years before his death. The focus is not on the king's reorganization of the administrative system or on his effective frontier defence, but on his ardent promotion of Buddhism.

In fact, in order to write this novel, Yi read a vast number of Buddhist scriptures, amounting to four or five thousand pages. Such effort is evident in *Sejo taewang*. The novel contains many direct quotations from a wide range of sutras such as the *Complete Enlightenment Sutra* 圓覺經, the *Diamond Sutra* 金剛經, the *Suramgama-Dharani-Sutra* 楞嚴經 and the *Lotus Sutra* 法華經. Yi copied a number of phrases and passages from those sutras and included them verbatim in his own text in Sino-Korean. These quotations, however, make the novel deviate from the genre of fiction and come closer to being a collection of sermons. No specific incidents occur; the text consists of a sequence of sermons, one after the other. This novel with little plot is difficult to penetrate and understand, which is perhaps why only a few studies have been conducted on it.

The overabundant dharma-preaching functions, surprisingly, as a reminder of controversial issues in history. A series of murders, from the usurpation of the throne Kyeyu chŏngnan in 1453 and the Sayukshin Incident three years later to the death of the dethroned King Tanjong in 1457, are constantly recalled. In the novel no one, from Sejo and those immediately surrounding him to his subjects in the rest of the country, puts the past behind them. Observing Sejo's Buddhist undertakings, such as the building of temples and the publication of Buddhist sutras, the people think their king intends to avoid retribution for his evil deeds by praying for help from Buddha. They still remember the series of incidents ten years before, when Sejo stole the throne from young King Tanjong, whom he demoted in rank, sent into exile and finally killed. They would not forget that he had killed loyal servants of the former king and even his own brothers to secure his political position. Once Suyang becomes king, he rules the country well, and his accomplishments are admired by the people. Some of his controversial policies and violent acts are even forgiven, mainly by blaming the villainous retainers around him. But still, the homicide Sejo committed ten years earlier is neither forgotten nor forgiven by his subjects.

The king in the novel does not feel free from the heavy burden of the past either. He had lost his first son just after he had put the dethroned king to death (in the second year of his reign). His son's death caused him grief but, moreover, a feeling of anxiety that his son paid with his life for his evil deeds. Yi Kwangsu describes how through his death, Sejo's son skilfully led Sejo to Buddhism (*pangbyŏn* 方便). Yet, historically this is not correct, because Sejo had already shown great enthusiasm for Buddhism when he

was still a prince, helping his father Sejong to compile and publish Buddhist scriptures. His son's sudden death only deepened Sejo's faith. It is actually Yi Kwangsu who was led into Buddhism through the death of his son; he lost his son Ponggŭn 봉근 in 1934, read Buddhist scriptures in grief and experienced a spiritual awakening.[34]

Most scholars interpret Sejo's inclination towards Buddhism in the novel as an expression of repentance. In contrast to this view, however, Sejo does not in fact feel guilty. Upon close analysis, it is clear that he is not simply doing penance for his cruel deeds. Whenever Sejo is scared of karmic causality, he soothes his worries away, saying "I committed [atrocities] to bring glory to the prosperity of the monarchy and to lead living beings to the right way, not to gratify my own desires."[35] The sentiment he expresses here has nothing to with repentance. Sejo has temples constructed and sutras printed not in order to expiate himself or to avoid the revenge of the dead, as his subjects in the novel presume. The protagonist does confess, however, that his Buddhist undertakings are inspired by his intention to pray for the repose of his son's soul. He also intends to collect good karma for the kings who preceded him and those who will succeed him, so that they will be blessed with prosperity; he is not acting out of concern for his own comfort and security. It is while holding a celebration for the completion of the Wŏn'gak temple that he first realizes that his desire to collect good karma for other kings is still motivated by self-centred concern. As a result of his realization, he has a change of heart, and prays instead that all the karmic benefits associated with his undertakings be offered to Buddha and that all living beings benefit from them. His great sense of vocation, that he was born as a king in order to enlighten and to save the entire people, allows him to avoid thinking about his illness, the death of his son, the vengeful souls of the preceding Koryŏ 高麗 dynasty, Nosan'gun (the former King Tanjong), and the others he has killed. Sejo experiences no angst or unease, and even becomes overconfident, comparing himself to the great Indian Buddhist King Asoka. Sejo's son does repentance in place of the king in the novel by copying seven volumes of the *Lotus Sutra* and two of the *Diamond Sutra*. The king himself barely atones at all for the wrongs he has wrought.

In the novel, despite strong objections from his Confucian officials, King Sejo holds Buddhist memorial services for those who were murdered by his hand or at his command. One might think that such mourning is an act of repentance and an expression of remorse for his misdeeds. However, when Prime Minister Shin Sukchu discretely asks him whether this is the case, Sejo states that he regrets neither the coup nor the executions of the six martyred ministers. He claims that the coup took place at a critical time, and that without his seizure of power, the state could have collapsed, the country been plunged into disorder, and the northern regions been lost to foreign barbarians. He emphasizes how he only seized power for the good of the country, without thinking of his own safety and self-interest. Hearing Sejo's explanation, Shin Sukchu is ashamed because he, in contrast, had striven hard to win fame and guarantee his own safety, both during that period and afterwards. Sejo goes on to say that he has done what is known in Confucianism as sacrificing one's own life in order to preserve the virtue of benevolence (*salshin sŏngin* 殺身成仁), but above all, what is known in Buddhism as carrying out the practices of a bodhisattva (*posalhaeng* 菩薩行). Like a bodhisattva, Sejo will accept the torments of hell and undergo *samsara* or reincarnation for the sake of other living beings. Even though Sejo admits responsibility for the murder he committed, he still expresses no remorse and feels no guilt.[36]

Sejo's lack of remorse is constant throughout the novel. Though he is troubled with feelings of unease and anxiety due to the tragedies of the past, he is more concerned by others misunderstanding his intentions. As mentioned above, Sejo's subjects misinterpret his enthusiasm for Buddhist undertakings as acts of repentance. Sejo's servants, too, misread his heart and his purpose. Sejo prays for others, while they believe the king prays for himself. The king is distressed whenever others mistake his intentions, for he knows where the misunderstanding originated:

> *The reason for the misinterpretation [of his intentions] is that he stole the throne. Yet, becoming a king had nothing to do with his desire for the position. He just believed that without him the country could not be safeguarded.*[37]

34 Yi Kwangsu, "Ponga-ŭi ch'uŏk 봉아의 추억" in *Insaeng-ŭi hyanggi* 인생의 향기 (Hongji ch'ulp'ansa, 1934). Republished in *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 8, pp. 268-269.
35 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 4, p. 504.
36 Ibid., pp. 513-517.
37 Ibid., p. 551.

Later when Sejo abdicates the throne in favour of his son, he makes the point clear once again.

> *Even in many years to come, there will be people who will accuse me of the crime of killing the former king and [members of the] royal family as well as officials whom previous kings trusted and favoured. I have never addressed the issue before in public and I have never wanted to make an excuse for myself. In place of that, I will say one thing only. Since the usurpation of the throne, I have never been concerned with my own interests […]. One might think that I desired the throne and hence acted as I did. Others might think that I was heartless and thus committed the murder […]. However, [the truth is that] it was my duty to my country. Without me the country could have perished. I just wanted to make a better country.*[38]

Such a mindset is far removed from feelings of guilt and acts of repentance. But what is more striking is the articulation that the tragic homicide has nothing to do with his greed for the throne. In *Tanjong aesa*, Yi Kwangsu depicted Suyang as greedy and ambitious and explained that these character flaws were the origin of the tragedy. In its sequel, Yi depicts Sejo as selfless. The tragic incident that killed Tanjong, as well as princes and loyal officials, was not caused by Sejo's self-interest but, on the contrary, by his selfless sacrifice for the country. To safeguard his country from a crisis in which it could have perished, the protagonist went as far as committing the crime of homicide.

Moreover, Yi seeks the origins of the tragedy not in Sejo's personality, but elsewhere. First, there were already precedents that princes would fight for the throne. Chosŏn's third king, T'aejong 太宗, for instance, had also usurped the throne; Suyang (Sejo) thus followed in his footsteps. Second, a misguided state policy that prohibited princes from taking part in politics worsened the situation. Competent and ambitious princes could not bear to see inept officials administer the country. Third, it is the egoistic and jealous servants who usually stir up the princes Yi considered these three factors to have effected the tragic events. For example, Munjong (Tanjong's father) excluded his brothers (including Suyang) from his deathbed. The then king expressed his last wishes only to his most trusted ministers. These wishes might have included the wise advice to watch Suyang's ambition. Regardless of what was said, Yi sees the secrecy as misguided and having the counterproductive effect of angering the prince. The dying king's trusted ministers are not described as evil, but disparaged as aged and incapable men. Other evil officials pull the strings of these aged men and prohibit the interference of members of the royal family in politics because they are jealous of the princes' outstanding abilities and intelligence. Their motive is simple: hatred of and resentment towards the distinguished princes.

In *Sejo taewang*, the author takes the opposite approach to Sejo and the origins of the tragedy from that which he took in *Tanjong aesa*. In *Tanjong aesa*, Prince Suyang takes no interest in Confucian study and shows contempt for it. In *Sejo taewang*, however, the prince is depicted as an intellectual and talented man who becomes the object of jealousy. In *Tanjong aesa* Suyang's bad temperament is held responsible for his misdeeds, whereas in *Sejo Taewang* all blame is shifted from Sejo to a group of "wicked officials": "One should accuse the wicked officials of the responsibility for the murder of the young king [Tanjong], rather than the king [Sejo]."[39] Why does Yi suddenly absolve Sejo of the charge of murder? Why does he search for a different reason for the historical tragedy, one that depicts King Sejo as innocent? How are the altered historical memories linked to the contemporary colonial reality? What does Yi Kwangsu try to tell us by recalling the past?

In *Tanjong aesa*, the Six Martyred Ministers Incident functioned as a means to promote the importance of moral cultivation within the framework of the Suyang Tong'uhoe movement. This historical event was also evocative of the March First Movement, as it demonstrated the spiritual strength of the Korean nation. However, by the time Yi comes to recapture these same tragic incidents, while writing *Sejo taewang* in 1940, they are related to different events: the Suyang Tong'uhoe Incident and Yi's personal experience of the betrayal of the nation. The changes in the way the past is depicted represent the changing sociopolitical reality of colonial Korea. This was a period in which Japan's war against China did not end, but rather was about to be expanded into the war against Western imperial powers. In order to be able to conduct total war, the industrial structure of colonial

38 Ibid., p. 590.
39 Ibid., p. 513.

Korea was shifted towards heavy industry. The Koreans were tightly mobilized under a coercive assimilation policy which advocated the principle of Japan and Korea being one body (*nissen ittai* 內鮮一体). All Korean institutions and associations were either forced to shut down or reconstructed into 'imperial organizations.' Officially, the Koreans were willing to become imperial servants armed with the ideology of 'spirit of Japan,' but in practice, they were forced to do so. In 1940, a directive was implemented requiring Koreans to adopt a Japanese family name in place of their original Korean one. Yi's personal and public life became very deeply involved in this series of sociopolitical events.

Yi Kwangsu in 1941 (*In Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip pyŏlkwŏn*)

In 1937, Yi was arrested by the Japanese police together with about 180 other Tong'uhoe 同友會 members and imprisoned together with forty-two of the movement's central figures. Six months later, Yi Kwangsu and another of the leaders, An Ch'angho 安昌浩, were moved from jail to hospital due to their critical health conditions. An died soon afterwards, and Yi was released on bail. This incident is known as the Suyang Tong'uhoe Incident 修養同友會事件.[40] The Tong'uhoe was a legal nationalist movement pursuing moral cultivation in colonial Korea. In the midst of total war, the association was faced with the choice of voluntary dissolution or imperial reorganization. Before the members could reach a tactical decision, a tragic incident befell them. They were accused of harbouring "dangerous thoughts of national independence." The trial against them took more than four years before all the accused were released in 1941 with a verdict of "not guilty." During this time Yi Kwangsu, who was in charge of the movement, underwent a dramatic change from being a respected national leader into becoming an active collaborator. In 1939, he paid a consolatory visit to the Japanese Imperial Army in the north. When the directive to adopt a Japanese family name was implemented in February 1940, he ostentatiously publicized his Japanese name (Kayama Mitsuro 香山光郎) in the *Mail sinbo* 每日申報.[41]

Sejo taewang was written amid this stalemate. A significant number of literary critics still presume that Yi Kwangsu wrote of Sejo's acts of repentance and remorse, and through this character depicted his own interior landscape suffused with feelings of fear, anxiety, guilt and regret for his collaboration. However, as I demonstrated above, Yi did not depict Sejo as suffering from feelings of guilt and repentance. Rather than simply acknowledging the crimes he has committed and blindly reproaching himself, Sejo struggles in the novel with unease and distress. What the writer tries to convey is the true motive behind Sejo's betrayal of the nation and collaboration rather than his emotional reaction to those events. This portrayal of history sheds light, indirectly, on Yi Kwangsu's own experiences: Yi committed the unforgivable acts of abandoning his loyalty to the nation and becoming a collaborator with the colonial authorities. Simultane-

40 Details about the Tong'uhoe Incident can be found in Kim Yunshik, *Yi Kwangsu-wa kŭ-ŭi shidae*, pp. 322-337; Kim Wŏnmo 김원모, "Ch'unwŏn-ŭi yŏksa ŭishik 춘원의 역사의식" in *Ch'unwŏn yŏn'gu hakpo* 春園硏究學報 1 (2008): pp. 24-53.

41 Kim Wŏnmo tells an alternative story of the creation of Yi's Japanese name of Kayama Mitsuro 香山光郎. Yi himself officially announced that he chose the name after the Japanese emperor's place of origin. But Kim found evidence that Yi had already created it as a kind of pen name when he published his novel *Sarang* 사랑 in October 1938, four years earlier than 1942. Kim explains that the first two characters refer to Myohyangsan, a mountain onto which Tan'gun, Korea's mythical founder, descended from Heaven. The last character refers to ancient Shilla's *hwarang* warriors. Therefore, it was not a Japanese name but, on the contrary, a very nationalistic one. See Kim Wŏnmo, "Ch'unwŏn-ŭi yŏksa ŭishik," pp. 113-115.

ously, he was engrossed with Buddhist practice. His contemporaries, as well as later generations, assumed that he became a collaborator out of personal interest and concern for his own safety. His enthusiasm for Buddhism might be understood as an attempt to forget worldly concerns. Through this novel, Yi himself argues that he was misunderstood, and implies that he does not regret his actions. As in Sejo's time, the country faced a crisis in which it would either collapse or survive. Therefore, Yi became a collaborator only to safeguard and preserve the country. His collaboration was like the sacrificial act of a Bodhisattva, undertaken to save the lives of living beings (*chungsaeng* 衆生); a selfless act in which he even risked his own life.

Interestingly, Yi's fictionalized account in the novel is, to some extent, analogous to his confessions after the liberation. In *Na-ŭi kobaek* (My Confessions, 1948), he makes it clear that he will not write a note of repentance, even though those surrounding him strongly suggested that he do so. Why not? Yi raises the subject of fifteenth-century history, and writes that it is correct and good for the nation to admire people like Sŏng Sammun 成三問 (one of the Six Martyred Ministers) and to criticize people like Shin Sukchu 申叔舟 for their betrayal.[42] He claims that, like Shin Sukchu, he deserves to be condemned for his collaboration. However, he denies that he acted out of self-interest. The motive for his pro-Japanese collaboration was his wish to "preserve the nation" 民族保存 by sacrificing his reputation as a nationalist. He writes that it was a period in which the Koreans were suffering under suppression and would eventually face vengeful massacres if they failed to cooperate in national (read: Japanese Imperial) emergencies.[43] Scenting the danger for the nation, Yi decided that he had to pose as a collaborating Korean nationalist, because such an act was regarded as a yardstick to measure the cooperation of the Koreans. This complex reasoning behind his act of collaboration could be made public after liberation, but until then he had to be satisfied by explaining it in metaphors and through the reproduction of historical events in his colonial novel *Sejo taewang*.

Yi's collaboration and the logic that accompanied it was one of the most controversial issues in the postcolonial period. There were many collaborators who were accused of being national traitors and summoned to court. The public attention, however, focused on Yi Kwangsu and Ch'oe Namsŏn who, as popular writers, were extremely well-known, influenced the public and were much admired. As recorded in the *Panminja choesanggi* 反民者罪狀記 (Record of the Charges Against National Traitors), it was assumed that Yi had betrayed the Korean nation in pursuit of his own personal welfare and safety.[44] Some sympathized with Yi, saying that he feared for his life because he would not have survived in jail, being in such frail health. People believed that he must have had a sensible reason for his actions.

However, in Yi's mind, none of these conjectures were the real reason for his political decision to become a collaborator. Like Sejo, he was distressed when his motives were misconstrued by others. As Yi mentions in the quotation cited above, he did not dare to explain his motives either, because at the time such an explanation would sound like the excuse of someone who knows he has done wrong. Yi would not simply do penance for his sins. That is why when he stood in court as a national traitor in February 1949, he could not simply express repentance like Ch'oe Rin 崔麟, who cried: "A person like me who committed a sin [in front of the Korean nation] deserves to die."[45] When the prosecutor on behalf of the nation asked Yi what he did during the colonial period and why he was involved in pro-Japanese collaboration, he could not help but repeat "Concerning that matter, I will write a letter of confession" and "I have too many things to say. Hence, it is hard to answer right now."[46] As An Pyŏngjik laments, Yi's confession sounds like an excuse or self-justification and disappoints those who expected sincere regret.[47] People were furious with him when he explained his idea of 'collaboration for the sake of the nation.' The explanation was criticized as sophistry or as a convenient and shameless excuse. If Yi had pretended to show his sincere regret, he would at least have received some sympathy, but he denied any regret whatsoever. Why? Is there something he did not mention in *Na-ŭi kobaek*?

42 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 7, p. 282
43 Ibid., p. 277.
44 Kim Hangmin and Chŏng Unhyŏn 김학민 정운현, *Ch'inilp'a choesanggi* 친일파 죄상기 (Seoul: Hangminsa 학민사, 1993), pp. 273-275.
45 Ibid., p. 202.
46 Ibid., pp. 276-277.
47 An Pyŏngjik 안병직, "Chakp'um haesŏl 작품해설" in *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 7, p. 663.

SEJO TAEWANG: AN UNCONVENTIONAL NARRATIVE OF COLLABORATION

With regard to the issue of Yi Kwangsu's collaboration, the only source scholars have used is his postcolonial text *Na-ŭi kobaek*. Scholars argue over whether the account is trustworthy or not and few of them seek more sources to investigate this matter. I will argue that *Sejo taewang* can serve as an unconventional source for research on the controversial issue of Yi's collaboration. This novel will explore what the postcolonial text cannot: faith in Buddhism as a key factor in colonial events.

If in *Tanjong aesa* Sejo represents the Japanese colonial power, in *Sejo taewang* the king stands for Yi Kwangsu himself, or to put it more precisely, the historical figure becomes a mirror in which Yi is able to reflect himself. There is therefore an important distance between the historical person and Yi. The historical Sejo chose to kill his political rivals and was afflicted afterwards with resentment for being a murderer. In the colonial reality, in which Yi was involved in the Tong'uhoe Incident, Yi made the morally ambiguous choice of saving the life of his companions rather than maintaining his political loyalty to the Korean nation. If Sejo preferred politics to human lives, Yi, in contrast, tried to be faithful to the principle of respect for human life, even though in doing so he had to be unfaithful to the political idea of the nation. In narrating Sejo's grievous and irreparable crimes and the ensuing psychological burden, the writer convinces himself that he has not repeated Sejo's mistake and that he has made the right choice. What is this conviction based upon?

In *Sejo taewang*, this conviction can be located in the writer's condemnation of Confucian virtues and praise of Buddhism. In *Tanjong aesa*, Yi had condemned Suyang's irrepressible greed and held in high regard the Confucian virtues of righteousness and loyalty demonstrated by the six martyred ministers. However, in *Sejo taewang*, the previously highly admired Confucian virtues become a target for condemnation. Confucian statecraft is still seen as a useful political tool to govern the country, while Buddhism is regarded as necessary for the people's moral and spiritual life. To a certain extent, Sejo tries to balance the two religions and to be both a Confucian and a Buddhist king. Yet, from a religious point of view, he ranks Buddhism higher than Confucianism; in his view, the teachings of Buddha are sufficiently broad to integrate the words of Confucius. He further states that the doctrine of salvation in Buddhism – the principle of saving living beings regardless of one's own life and death – is unthinkable in Confucian moral ethics. The Confucian officials around him, despite being his servants, do not follow Sejo's ideals, disdaining Buddhism and even its well-respected monks. Instead, they cling to the Confucian principle of righteousness, and show envy, arrogance, and enmity towards expressions of Buddhism. The discord between the Buddhist King Sejo and his Confucian officials becomes increasingly tense in the wake of the Tanjong Incident.

Sejo and his Confucian officials had killed Nosan'gun (the former King Tanjong), advocating this course of action in the name of greater righteousness (*taeŭi* 大義). It was against Confucian principle to have two kings in a country; therefore, the dethroned king was seen as deserving to die. Ten years later, the Confucian officials still see nothing wrong with the Confucian principle they appealed to when killing the former king. Sejo, however, who has become a sincere Buddhist, comes to have a different insight into the event. He sharply criticizes the Confucian rhetoric of greater righteousness, questioning it as follows:

> *The current Confucian scholars maintain that the murder follows the Confucian principle of justice* 義*, but the future generation of Confucian scholars will rebuke it as a violation of justice. If so, what is justice on earth?*[48]

The protagonist points out that the Confucian principles invoked are a mere pretext for self-deception and for masking the sins perpetrated. Whatever the excuse, murder remains murder and can never be justified as a righteous act. Thus Sejo condemns himself and his accomplices as sinners who have killed the previous king, members of the royal family and loyal servants of the state.

Sejo's criticism of the notion of Confucian righteousness in the novel shows how the writer's view has completely changed. In *Tanjong aesa*, Confucian officials represent righteousness and are admired, whereas Suyang is denounced for his self-interest and hunger for power. In *Sejo taewang* it is the Confucian officials who are criti-

48 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 4, p. 515.

cized for their self-interest and hunger for fame. The righteousness they advocate is denounced as mere rhetoric attempting to justify the crime of murder. In contrast, King Sejo is depicted as far from greedy and self-interested. As a Buddhist, he is described as the only one who can see the truth – that murder is murder – and acknowledge that he is destined to be judged and to go to hell for his crime. It remains to be asked why Yi Kwangsu reinterpreted Confucian virtues and what his reinterpretation suggests with regards to the colonial reality, which at that time was enveloped in the flames of the Pacific War.

As discussed above, in *Tanjong aesa* the Confucian virtues of loyalty and righteousness are reinvented as political allegories of constancy or loyalty to the Korean nation. However, when Yi wrote *Sejo taewang* in 1939-40, he had been implicated in the Tong'uhoe Incident and had begun to collaborate with the imperial Japanese wartime government. Under the circumstances he deliberately, perhaps unavoidably, broke his pledge of political loyalty to the Korean nation. Yi's political transformation under contemporary colonial rule was expressed in *Sejo taewang* as a changed view of Confucianism. Yi no longer depicts the Confucian notion of righteousness as a powerful opponent of greed, but instead as the very expression of greed and self-interest. He no longer honours the notion, but rather denounces its hypocrisy. This depiction of Confucianism is far from a humble apology for his disloyal conduct and an expression of deep remorse for his ruined nationalist leadership. However, before simply rebuking Yi's lack of shame for his political disloyalty, one should question what made him so unyielding and prevented him from repenting.

It is Yi's Buddhist conviction that he had been faithful to the absolute truth of life and death, even though he was unfaithful to relative truths including the sociopolitical interests of the Korean nation. While suffering a potentially fatal illness at the end of the 1920s and the death of his son in 1934, Yi realized that life and death is the most important thing in human life and the universe. His essay "Chilli-ŭi sangdaesŏng" ("The Relativity of Truth," 1933) imparts, "As far as the nation and the nation's political, social and economic interests are concerned, its precepts look entirely relative."[49] Seen from a Buddhist point of view, the historical Sejo disregarded the absolute truth of the overriding importance of human life, and brutally killed a number of people. Although he strove to follow the principle of a relative truth (that of the importance of political, economic and social achievements for his country), he could not be absolved of the murder he had committed. The crime had already taken place; he could not bring the former King Tanjong back to life, and he could do nothing to evade the terrible penalty for his actions. All he could do was to avoid adding any more sins to those he had already committed, as the Confucian officials did by denying the crime.

However, Yi Kwangsu decided not to repeat history himself under Japanese colonization. He did not want to become another Sejo and end his life as a murderer. Looking back at history, he made a different choice: to abandon the relative truth and follow the absolute truth. Yi's awakening to the insight that life is the most fundamental good directly affected his decision with regard to the Suyang Tong'uhoe case. In one of his essays, he remarks:

> *For what reason did I pose as pro-Japanese? [...] The reason is, in short, to save my compatriots from suppression even though I had to make sacrifices and even though I could save only a few [...]. I simply felt an affinity to the Buddhist imperative that if you can save even one living being in exchange for your life, you must consider yourself fortunate.*[50]

Yi's choice was to save the lives of a few Koreans, and thereby relinquish his loyalty to the nation. Saving lives was of greater concern to him than political and national interests. In acting as he did, he raised the controversial question of which sin is greater: murder or the betrayal of the nation? Who was the true sinner – Sejo, who committed homicide, or Yi Kwangsu, who abandoned his political loyalty to the nation in exchange for the lives of forty-two people? The Buddhist view of life and death grounded Yi's conviction that he had made the right choice and did not have to feel remorse or guilt. Han Yongun also emphasized the Buddhist view of respect for life in his novel *Pangmyŏng* 薄命 (*Misfortune*, 1938-1939), although in a slightly different way. He claimed that all acts of compassion are equally great, regardless of the object of that compassion. His statement that "a sacrifice made for the state and society is no bigger than a sacrifice made for

49 In *Ilsa Irŏn* 一事一言. Republished in *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 13, p. 380.
50 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 10, p. 539.

an individual,"[51] is comparable with Yi's political choices which were informed by his Buddhist views.

There is another Buddhist notion that played an important role in the shaping of Yi's perspective of Japan's colonization of Korea: the notion of *sunyata* (空) or emptiness. Yi links this notion to the central topic of the novel. The memories of the murders Sejo committed when seizing power recur, thus the way in which the tragedy is viewed and resolved is a key part of the novel. Confucian officials, on the one hand, mask the incidents; Sejo, on the other hand, tries to reconcile himself with the tragic past by holding a Buddhist memorial service for his victims. It is noteworthy that Sŏlcham Kim Shisŭp 雪岑 金時習 officiates the ceremony, because he is one of the *saengyukshin* 生六臣 (six living loyal officials) who remained loyal to the former king Tanjong by abandoning their offices. Sŏlcham, then, is in charge of resolving the tragedy. He preaches his own interpretation of the *Diamond Sutra* to the audience and the souls of the dead. Sŏlcham teaches the following: that living beings stir up judgements of good and evil and emotions of grief and joy in their mind. Such things do not really exist; they are all false images created in the mind. The profound meaning of *sunyata* is explained with terms like 'void,' 'no rising or falling' and 'calmness.' Accordingly, wealth and prosperity, grief and joy, right and wrong, good and evil are all nothing but dreams and phantasms. This being the case, how can one still cling to grudges, resentment, sadness, memories of bloody events, and the denial of sin? One should instead endeavour to reside in the tranquillity of the mind without producing those false images. One should become mindful to the notion of impermanence. Emphasizing certain notions of *sunyata*, non-self and 'no rising or falling,' Sŏlcham comforts the deceased and attempts to disentangle Sejo's complicated relationship with the tragic past.

The attempt in the novel at reconciliation with the ghosts of the past equates with Yi's desperate struggle to unravel the complex and confused situation he faced in his own life. As the leader of Suyang Tong'uhoe, he had launched the self-cultivation movement in colonial Korea and headed it for fifteen years. As Korea's most popular writer, he had tried to help his compatriots construct a vision of their community (a united nation) through his writings as a group where they would feel they belonged. He firmly believed that the self-cultivation movement was essential for the Korean people. However, when faced with his potentially fatal illness, he realized the truth of the words of the *Diamond Sutra* that "all appearances are false and unreal 凡所有相皆是虛妄" and experienced "the emptiness of all phenomena in their true aspect 一切法空如實相" [52] – two excerpts that he quoted in his novel. The cultivation of personality cannot solve the fundamental fact of human existence: life and death.

Likewise, Yi's Buddhist awakening was not merely the product of an inclination towards a religious world, but resulted in confusion, disillusionment and scepticism with regard to the nationalist movement he was so devoted to. This he articulated succinctly in his long essay "Yukchanggi" 鬻庄記 ("Selling a Villa," 1939):[53]

> *Anyhow, I have struggled to be a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra for the six years since I built this house. I realized the fleetingness of the nationalist movements and the hopelessness of the moral cultivation movement, which I have led for more than ten years. Of course, ideologically, it is progress that I perceive the moral cultivation movement as the proper way to rescue the Korean people and political activities. Notwithstanding, through my own experiences I have realized that moral cultivation is useless if it is not rooted in a religious belief.*[54]

As Yi states later in the essay, he made an effort to stand by the main principles of the self-cultivation movement, including not lying, keeping promises, being aware of one's responsibilities, working on behalf of the group, and loving and respecting others. But while believing in and practising Buddhism, he realized that the moral cultivation in the self-reconstruction movement could not remove his greed (*t'amshim* 貪心) and cravings (*pŏnnoe* 煩惱). The movement was more fundamental than political movements or the armed independence movements, but it was still superficial and irrelevant with regard to questions of life and death. Having tried to help construct an imagined national community for fifteen years, he could not help but see a ghost image of the nation, a

51 *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 韓龍雲全集 6 (Seoul: Pulgyo munhwa yŏn'guwŏn, 2006), p. 288.
52 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 4, p. 594.
53 In *Munjang* 文章 (Sep. 1939).
54 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 8, p. 43.

The cover of Yi's novel *Sejo taewang* (1942, the 4th edition from Pakmun sŏgwan)

The cover of My Confessions (1948)

concept which was without substantiality by its very nature. At several points in *Sejo taewang*, Yi employs phrases containing the words emptiness (*kong* 空), illusions (*hwan* 幻) and dreams (*mong* 夢), quoting the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Complete Enlightenment Sutra* 圓覺經.[55] He thereby expresses his perception that all phenomena (including the nation, loyalty to the nation, the betrayal of one's national community, heavy mental burdens and physical afflictions) are non-substantial. He tried to regard these as being merely what his mind creates. The Suyang Tong'uhoe Incident was the decisive event which led him to experience the non-substantiality of the concept of the nation. Standing on the dividing line between the empty image of the nation and the lives of living people, he chose that which truly existed – in other words, the lives of forty-two Tong'uhoe members – and discarded the emblem of the nation (*minjok*).[56] In this respect, *Sejo taewang* is not merely a historical or a Buddhist novel, but a document which explains why Yi Kwangsu, Korea's most revered writer and prominent nationalist leader, committed political apostasy and turned away from the nation.

Yi's Buddhism was his main reason for making this difficult political decision; in fact, his political choice of disloyalty to the nation resembles a religious act of apostasy (*paegyo* 背敎). It is helpful here to briefly discuss the theme of apostasy, as it was also debated in Endō Shūsaku's 遠藤 周作 (1923-1996) historical novel *Chinmoku* 沈默 (*Silence*, 1966).[57] This novel deals with Portuguese Catholic missionaries suffering from fierce persecution in sixteenth-century Japan. Christians are put into jail by the local authorities, where they are tortured and many of them die. Foreign priests (among whom was a certain Father Rodrigues) are forced to step on a picture of Christ. By doing so, they symbolically demonstrate their apostasy from the church in exchange for the lives of Japanese Catholics. Hearing groans and seeing people dying, Father Rodrigues is faced with the dilemma of whether he should die as a martyr for his faith or become an apostate by treading on a painting of Christ and in so doing save the Japanese Catholics from more suffering. Which is the true expression of faith? Is it the decision to choose martyrdom in order to express one's own salvation without helping others? Or is it the decision to commit apostasy in order to disguise one's cowardice under the pretext of love and empathy for others? Intriguingly, this example of religious apostasy is analogous with Yi's political apostasy from the 'church' of the nation.

As examined in *Sejo taewang*, the Buddhist notion of *sunyata* gave Yi a critical insight into the emptiness or non-substantiality of the concept of nation. The Buddhist view of life and death as the absolute truth enabled him to realize that the importance of national interests is by nature only a relative truth and that national undertakings are not as fundamentally important in colonial Korea as the lives and deaths of real people. Yi's act of political apostasy was to be faithful to the religious principle of respect for human life rather than adhere to the nationalist principle of the primacy of the nation. His disillusion with the nation, nationalism, and nationalist movements was exacerbated by his Buddhist views and, more impor-

55 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 4, pp. 593, 594, 596, 602 and 603.

56 One might question why Yi did not see his forty-two compatriots as non-substantial and empty. *Sunyata* is seen not as a negation of existence but rather as an insight into non-distinction and the non-duality of reality. It is aimed at realizing the middle-way without excessive attachments to things.

57 With regard to Endō Shūsaku's novel, I refer to the studies by Shin Ikho 신익호 *Munhak-kwa chonggyo-ŭi mannam* 문학과 종교의 만남 (Seoul: Han'guk munhwasa, 1996), pp. 115-130; Im Yŏngch'ŏn 임영천, *Munhak-kwa chonggyo: Kidokkyo-wa hyŏndae munhak* 문학과 종교: 기독교와 현대문학 (Kwangju: Chosŏn taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2000), pp. 173-209.

tantly, underlies the logic that led him to his collaboration with the Japanese.

It is noteworthy that some of Yi's writing from 1940 and 1941 falls under the rubric of 'repentance' (*ch'amhoe* 懺悔). What Yi's repentance concerns is his attachment to the concept of nation. In his essay "Chosŏn munhakŭi ch'amhoe 朝鮮文學의 懺悔," ("Repentance for Korean Literature," 1940),[58] he clarifies his thoughts as follows:

> *What I feel deeply remorseful for, looking back on a lifelong creation of literary works, is the underlying attitude to life which I clung to, this being the concept of the nation (minjok kwannyŏm* 民族觀念*) [….] My conversion to religion [Buddhism] in Showa 4 (1934) was a decision I made in order to thoroughly clear up the confusion and the errors [inherent to this concept]. My efforts appeared in my literature starting with* "Mumyŏng" 無名 *(1939).* Sarang *(*Love*, 1939),* Ch'unwŏn sigajip 春園詩歌集 *(1940), my latest novel* Sejo taewang *(1940) and other short stories were all written in order to outgrow the confused and erroneous concept of the nation [I used to rely on].*[59]

This paragraph informs us of Yi's real grounds for repentance. He does not repent on account of his collaboration, as some scholars have assumed in their studies on *Sejo taewang*, but for his adherence to the conceptual image of the nation. As is clearly articulated in the quotation above, Buddhism helped him become disenchanted with the nation and the narrow-mindedness of nationalism. *Sejo taewang* is, as he states, a literary work that relies on his scepticism with regard to the nationalist enterprise.

Yi's disenchantment with the illusory community and his inclination towards collaboration are partly presented in *Sejo taewang*. As Yi Kyŏnghun (1998) points out, one or two pages near the end of the novel are controversial because they depict Sejo's pro-Japanese inclination. Due to his country's historical intimacy with Japan and their shared religion of Buddhism, Sejo feels a tie to Japan and tries to promote a good relationship with Chosŏn's neighbour. But his Confucian officials adhere to a policy of putting Confucian China at the centre the world and oppose Sejo's policy. Yi condemns those Confucian officials for depending on China and for their slavish imitation of Sinitic culture, whereas he admires the historic Buddhist figures as independent nationalists (*kuksujuŭija* 國粹主義者) who searched for an indigenous spirit and culture (*koshindo* 古神道) in Korea. Such a depiction seems arbitrary because historically Korea had strong historical ties with China; significantly more intimate and more frequently reinforced than those with Japan. Many Buddhist schools were introduced into Korea via China. Turning away from China and advocating Korean independence were, even then, early notions which had been led, in particular, by the Independence Club (Tongnip hyŏphoe 獨立 協會) around 1895. This begs the question of why Yi would suddenly bring these notions back into discussion.

The disdain for Sinitic culture is not irrelevant to the context of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937). It was the midst of the war against China. The outbreak of war in 1937 was caused by the refusal of Chinese nationalists to accept the pan-Asian ideology, according to which Japan would assume superiority and leadership in Asia.[60] Instead of yielding to Japan, the Chinese nationalists joined forces with the Chinese communists and opposed Japan as a united front. Such a China was condemned by many of those in favour of collaboration, including Japan. Yi's collaborationist writings written during 1937 and 1938 contained contempt and antipathy towards China.

There are more ways to problematize Yi's depiction of Sejo promoting intimate ties with Japan. Yi enumerates many cases of ancient Koreans becoming the ancestors of Japanese noble and royal families, Korean monks preaching Buddhism to Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 and supporting the construction of temples in ancient Japan, and so on. Scholars such as Yi Kyŏnghun note that Yi's depiction of ancient history and Buddhism is an expression of *nissen ittai* (內鮮一体, the theory that Japan and Korea are one). However, one needs to read the descriptions more carefully because, as Kim Yunshik (2003-2004) demonstrates, Buddhist history was also a powerful cultural treasure for Yi, which he used to insist on the authority and superior-

58 *Maeil sinbo* 每日新報 (Oct. 1940).

59 Yi Kwangsu, *Ch'unwŏn Yi Kwangsu ch'inil munhak chŏnjip* II 춘원 이광수 친일문학전집 II, edited by Yi Kyŏnghun 이경훈 (Seoul: P'yŏngminsa, 1995), p. 121.

60 For more detail about Pan-Asian thought in relation to China, see Sven Saaler, "Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Overcoming the Nation, Creating the Region, Forging an Empire," in *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders*, edited by Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann. (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1-18.

ity of Korea over Japan.[61] The controversial depiction of Sejo's admiration of Japan is only a short passage, and does not fit particularly well within the novel as a whole. However, there is a more pressing controversy that calls for our attention.

After the liberation in 1945, Yi rescued the idea of the nation from oblivion. At this time, while Korea was in labour, waiting to give birth to the Korean nation-state, he began to say things like: "I only collaborated for the sake of the nation" and "I don't feel the slightest morsel of shame in saying that I lived and died for the nation."[62] Do these statements reflect what he had hidden at the bottom of his heart during the turbulent war period? Or are they mere sophistry and the kind of shameless excuses that many alleged them to be? In his postcolonial text *Na-ŭi kobaek*, Yi gives a detailed explanation of the story behind his overt collaboration. In this text, he emphasizes how important the self-cultivation movement was and how the movement shared a common destiny with the Korean nation. Therefore, if the organization had been dissolved and its leading members had met their deaths, the Tong'uhoe undertaking would have ceased to be. It would have meant that the life of the nation had come to an end. For the survival of the nation, Yi felt responsible for the rescue of the Tong'uhoe's leaders.[63]

Such statements, surprisingly, deny what Yi argued in the texts, including *Sejo taewang*, that he wrote under colonization. In these texts, he made it clear that the self-cultivation movement was no more than a superficial remedy for the Koreans, which could not redeem even one life. The fundamental human condition was seen by Yi to be resolved by Buddhism. His disillusionment with the moral cultivation movement is not mentioned in *Na-ŭi kobaek*. In *Sejo taewang*, Yi emphasized the importance of saving living persons and prioritized that over politics and national interests. In *Na-ŭi kobaek*, he claims that his reason for appearing to collaborate with the Japanese is the fact that he had to prevent the Tong'uhoe movement from disbanding because the life of the Tong'uhoe was linked to the life of the nation. In this way, he suddenly endorses the nation and nationalist movements, mentioning neither his scepticism over the concept of the nation nor his criticism of nationalist movements, and remaining silent about Buddhist insights into the life of an individual. He does not talk about his conscious choice of disloyalty to the illusory community of the nation, insisting instead on his 'collaboration for the sake of the nation.' What he attempts to put across is that he renounced the nation and committed to pro-Japanese collaboration in order to save the real subjects of the nation, and not the empty concept of the nation, as he articulated in a fictionalized form in *Sejo taewang*. I am not claiming that the postcolonial text of *Na-ŭi kobaek* is not an honest or trustworthy confession. However, the text should be seen not as a unique historical source but, by nature, as a postcolonial representation in which memories of the colonial past are reconstructed to meet the needs of the new age in which the Korean nation-state is being built. Therefore it will not be like texts such as *Sejo taewang* which, being contemporary cultural products, paint a vivid picture of many aspects of colonial life.

Another account in *Na-ŭi kobaek* might furnish us with a different explanation for Yi's actions. Apparently, although it is impossible to verify, there was a death list drawn up by the Japanese imperial authorities which contained the names of 30,000 to 38,000 national leaders and members of the elite. The rumour of the existence of this list made Yi Kwangsu realize that such a massacre would be the most catastrophic thing a nation might befall next to the entire nation's collapse. Yi judged that in the case of such a national emergency, non-cooperation might provoke a vengeful massacre.[64] Therefore, he volunteered to collaborate with the Japanese in order to prevent the nation being eliminated before independence was even achieved. By doing so, he sacrificed his reputation as a national leader. Whether or not such a danger really existed, it remains the case that Yi tends to conflate certain individuals (such as members of the national elite) with the concept of nation. The individual deaths of members of the national elite do not, however, equate with the death of the nation. Yi's previous criticism of the emptiness of the concept of nation is thoroughly silenced. It is not hard to believe that Yi collaborated with the Japanese colonial authorities in order to save the lives of anonymous individuals and the nation. Even so, the question remains why he then called for or

61 Kim Yunshik 김윤식, *Ilche malgi Han'guk chakka-ŭi Ilbonŏ kŭlssŭgiron* 일제 말기 한국작가의 일본어 글쓰기론 (Seoul: Sŏul taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2003/2004), pp. 112-137.

62 "Ingwa 因果" in an unpublished manuscript of the collection of poems *Nae Norae* 내노래.

63 *Yi Kwangsu chŏnjip* 7, p. 274.

64 Ibid., p. 277.

persuaded those same living persons (young Korean student soldiers, for example) to die for the nation or for the Japanese Empire. If he had really been concerned about their lives in the first place, he would hardly have suggested they should die for the sake of the nation. When he tried to rebuild the illusory community of the nation, was he taking after Sejo in sinning against the absolute truth, and thereby repeating the same historical tragedy?

CONCLUSION

Korean writers in the 1930s considered themselves to be living in "an age of historical fiction."[65] Kim Kijin wrote that "At this moment, historical fiction acts as a host in the literary world of Korea."[66] In the mid-1930s, both history and fiction dominated the literary and social realms of the era. Socialist writers and critics reproached these historical novels for what they perceived as their unrealistic, escapist and old-fashioned heroic tendencies. Conversely, nationalist writers insisted on the role these novels played in educating Koreans about Korean history and fostering national consciousness (*minjok chŏngsin* 民族精神). These colliding views are still held today. Scholars such as Kim Yunshik assure that many historical novels, including those written by Yi Kwangsu, should be classified as trivial *yadam* 野談 (historical tales) rather than as serious novels in the modern sense, because they entirely neglect historical reality and the meaning of the lives of those behind the scenes.[67] Overall though, the dominant view of historical novels written during the colonial period is a nationalistic one: the view that all of those novels were generated from nationalism which aimed to awaken a national spirit and identity and to overcome the predicament of the nation under colonial rule.[68]

The historical fiction based on fifteenth-century history that I have examined in this article was no temporary fad, neither was it insignificant nor simply and always concerned with nationalistic ideology. Colonial writers drew on history not to escape from colonial reality but rather to approach it tactically, in order to avoid the limitations of censorship. The historical past recaptured in their novels was not the past itself, far removed from the colonial present, but a past which they had reinterpreted from their contemporary point of view. In other words, it was not an echo from the fifteenth century but a voice from colonial Korea. More importantly, the voice was not a single narrative exclusively linked to a nationalist ideology and purpose. The writers were more concerned with colonial life, the experience of which was by nature complicated and raised many questions. Their voices could never be homogenized. None of those writers simply raised a voice against Japanese colonialism and for nationalist resistance, nor did they consistently vent their anger. Through singling out various historical personages and narrating different versions of the same history, they showed that there were many more aspects to history under the surface of the nationalist ideology. They explored other aspects of human life apart from political ideology, such as family, children, basic human love, individual socioeconomic status, and the fundamental religious question of life and death. They then delved into the question of how people, both collectively and individually, including the writers themselves, had to come to grips with those life experiences before and while they served either the political ideology of the colonial state or that of the Korean nation.

Historical fiction throughout the colonial period was not confined to a literary genre. Authors in colonial Korea were not merely people whose profession was that of writing fiction. Rather, writers were powerful social actors who already had a keen sense of the politics of memory and of the role of literature as social practice. Yi Kwangsu was the representative example of such writers. As a considerable number of his historical novels demonstrate, he was keen to produce colonial stories in the guise of history. The colonial stories were not a single narrative aimed at inspiring 'national spirit,' as most previous studies assume. *Tanjong aesa* and *Sejo taewang* present a particular form of nation-building through the reinvention of Confucian tradition rather than through nationalism itself. *Tanjong aesa* advocates a particular nationalist movement based upon self-cultivation, in place of a more generalized nationalism. Moreover, both novels tell more about the experiences of those colonized than about colonial or national ideologies, focusing on the depiction of collective experiences of the colonization process, from wars and the protectorate, to military rule

65 Yŏm Sangsŏp 廉想涉, "Yŏksa sosŏl shidae 역사소설시대," in *Maeil sinbo* (Dec. 1934). Quoted in Yi Chŏng'ok 이정옥, *1930-nyŏndae Han'guk taejung sosŏr-ŭi ihae* 1930년대 한국 대중소설의 이해 (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 2000), p. 200.

66 Kim Kijin 金基鎭, "Chosŏn mundane-ŭi hyŏn tangye 조선문단의 현단계" in *Shin Tong'a* 新東亞 (1935), p. 195.

67 Kim Yunshik, *Yi Kwangsu-wa kŭ-ŭi shidae*, pp. 242, 246-247 and 458-460.

68 As an example, see Yi Chŏng'ok, *1930-nyŏndae Han'guk taejung sosŏr-ŭi ihae*, pp. 192-202.

and the March First Movement. A broader range of individual experiences are expressed in these novels rather than silenced, as they are in nationalized narratives on colonial history. In this way, Yi's historical novels have come to serve as unconventional sources which produce counter-narratives to the existing nationalist narrative.

Colonial novels drawing on fifteenth-century history have had far-reaching and long-lasting effects. Yi Kwangsu's *Tanjong aesa*, for instance, encouraged another writer, Kim Tongin, to write the reactionary novel *Tae Suyang* 大首陽 (Great Prince Suyang, 1941). Yi's own novel was remade as the first large-scale theatre performance; it had fifteen acts and was performed throughout the 1930s. *Tanjong aesa* was later adapted into two movies, which were released in 1956 and 1963. This story is used to promote tourism of Yŏngwŏl in Kwangwŏn province, which was the deposed King Tanjong's place of exile. Fifteenth-century history has been reproduced in spectacular TV drama series. From 1998 to 2000, KBS (Korea Broadcasting Company) broadcast the lengthy TV drama *Wanggwa pi* (Kings and Queens), a chronicle of Chosŏn royalty including the stories of Tanjong and Sejo. From 2005 to 2007, South and North Korean broadcasting companies jointly shot a TV drama series about the *sayuksin* (six martyred ministers). When they both broadcasted it in 2007, it drew great public attention.

It is interesting to note that the trend of revisiting and reappraising fifteenth-century figures and events is still in fashion in today's Korea. The figure of Han Myŏnghoe is a good case. In his recent book *Ch'aeksa Han Myŏnghoe* (Han Myŏnghoe, *A Man of Resources*, 2006), Yi Sugwang offers a new insight into the man known as Sejo's retainer and a man of trickery and intrigue. In Yi Sugwang's book, Han is interpreted as an outstanding prime minister, a skilled conversationalist, a good judge and a circumspect strategist; in short, an ideal man in twenty-first-century terms. History does not usually remember the voices of women. In this respect, Kim Pyŏra's recent novel *Yŏngyŏng ibyŏl yŏng'ibyŏl* (*Goodbye Forever*, 2005) is noteworthy. Her novel focuses on Lady Chŏngsun (Tanjong's wife), who had to keep on living in silence for several decades, since Tanjong died at such a young age. Kim Pyŏra has, for the first time in Korean literature, depicted fifteenth-century history from a woman's perspective.

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