

Dissident Readings:

Paik Nak-Chung and the Politics of Engagement in South Korean Literature

by

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## ABSTRACT

In the second half of the twentieth century, as the divided Korea became a stage for the Cold War, South Korea experienced military authoritarianism, democratization, globalization, and neoliberalization over five decades. Literature, far from being a mere witness to these transformations, became a privileged site of resistance and acute contestation. Central to this process was the work of Paik Nak-chung, a literary critic and public intellectual who launched South Korea's leading progressive journal *Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng* in 1966 and remained at its helm until 2015, reinvigorating literature as a powerful means of engagement through the journal's pages. This dissertation analyzes the work of Paik Nak-chung as a publisher and theorist, focusing on how active and translational practices of dissident reading led Paik to formulate the concepts of national literature, division system, the double project of modernity, and world literature that have dominated South Korean literary debates over the last half century. It explores the unique tensions and contradictions in Paik's positions as a reader against the grain of conventional or canonical readings, and how Paik's readings generated alternative modes of textual interpretation that became commentaries not only on the contemporary society, but also on the conventions of literary practice in Korea. Paik's mode of dissidence is characterized as a perpetual balancing act between the conceptual limits of decolonization and modernization, between resistance against and co-optation by the state, between nation and the world, as well as between literature of autonomy and

autonomy of literature. By situating Paik's readings in a broader post-Korean War intellectual history, this study proposes a framework for understanding literature's conditions of possibility as a political practice within the local constraints of national division and under the global conditions of the Cold War.

## INTRODUCTION

### Practicing Dissidence in South Korean Literature

In 1963, Paik Nak-chung was a twenty-five year old scholar of English literature who had just returned home from Ph.D. training at Harvard and joined the faculty of Seoul National University's English Department. His success as a member of the academic establishment had been a foregone conclusion for some time, the path prepared by Paik's storied command of the English language. As a high school boy, Paik had won a speech contest sponsored by New York Herald Tribune, and as a graduating senior at Brown, he had been selected to give a valedictory speech. The same newspapers that had covered these triumphs of the young "genius" now reported on Paik's return to Korea with a Harvard feather on his cap. Born into privilege as a scion of a bourgeois family that made its fortune serving the Japanese colonial government, and groomed both by his own intelligence and his educational pedigree to continue in that privilege, Paik was poised for an elegant, if somewhat crusty, life of a college professor ensconced in an armchair and surrounded by tomes of Chaucer and Sterne.

In the summer of 1965, however, Paik published a column in *The Chosun Daily* in protest of the arrest of writer Nam Chŏngghyŏn over the purported pro-Communist/anti-American leanings in his novel *Punji* [Land of Excrement] (1965). "In a society like ours," Paik argued, "literature can grow only by taking on the role of speaking for the



resistance of the people.”<sup>1</sup> The publication of the column resulted in Paik’s interrogation by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency for his “political activity” (*chǒngch’i haengwi*). Taking the authoritarian state’s distinction between literary and political activities, and subverting this distinction with a thoroughness that few critics could match, Paik thereafter embarked on a career of theorizing, analyzing, and indeed practicing literature as a political activity par excellence. This career would situate Paik at the heart of nearly every watershed moment in Korean history of the last half century, from the founding of the influential quarterly *Ch’angjak kwa pip’yǒng* [Creation and Criticism, hereafter *Ch’angbi*] in 1966 and the drafting of “The Statement for Restoration of Democracy” against Park Chung Hee’s Yusin Constitution in 1974, to the joint declaration of North and South Korea in June of 2000.<sup>2</sup> Paik’s career as a critic was defined by literature’s mobilization as political intervention against the state’s repressive, anti-democratic mechanisms. The multifaceted expansion of Paik’s career from an English professor to that of a theorist, editor, publisher, and an activist stands as a fascinating testament to the ways in which dissident intellectuals in South Korea arose as political subjects at pivotal moments in contemporary Korean history.

As exemplified by the *Punji* incident in 1965, Paik was a key figure in enabling the expansion of literary practices by redefining the parameters of what is properly literary. The most notable example of this can be found in Paik’s establishment of the literary quarterly *Ch’angbi* in 1966. *Ch’angbi*’s inauguration brought about a

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<sup>1</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “Chǒhang munhak ūi chǒnmang—chakka Nam Chǒnghyǒn ssi kusok sagǒn kwa kwallyǒn hayǒ” [The future of literature of resistance—regarding the arrest of the writer Nam Chǒnghyǒn], *Chosun Ilbo*, July 13, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> The Yusin Constitution, promulgated in 1972, dispensed with direct presidential elections and made it possible for Park Chung Hee to rule indefinitely. It remained in effect until the assassination of Park in 1979.

paradigmatic shift in the South Korean literary field. The quarterly consciously set itself apart and against the familiar form and function of established literary publications, dominated at the time by the so-called *wŏlgan munyeji* (monthly literary art magazines) that emphasized “pure literature.”<sup>3</sup> Claiming its status as a *chonghap kyeganji* (comprehensive quarterly) instead, *Ch’angbi* allowed literature to dialogue with discourses generated in other disciplines such as history, sociology, economics, religious studies, and political science. In any given issue, there were just as many articles by scholars of these disciplines as there were literary works. *Ch’angbi* thus operated as a major platform for intellectual discourses engaged in anti-authoritarian democratization movement. Literature, as imagined and presented through the medium of *Ch’angbi*, was not an autonomous domain reserved for narrowly defined aesthetic practices, but carried a moral responsibility to address social and political realities. By facilitating the shift from literature as a study of literary arts to literature as a form of contemporary social critique, *Ch’angbi* reinvigorated the role of literature as an effective force that could inspire in its readers a sense of solidarity and thereby promote collective action. In the heavily anti-communist, authoritarian milieu of South Korea, redefining the role of literature away from the kind of “timeless” concerns associated with “purism” and toward representations of “contemporary social reality”—a phrase that still reverberated with echoes of a time when proletarian literature held an important place within the Korean literary field—was a profound intervention against the state.

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<sup>3</sup> Following the end of the Korean War in 1953, the South Korean literary field was dominated by conservative literati that espoused “pure literature” (*sunsu munhak*). Albeit a debatable term, “pure literature” implied a certain disillusionment and contempt for the pre-1945 ideological dictates that emphasized the instrumentality of literature in mobilizing the masses. And in the post-war milieu of anti-communist South Korea, *wŏlgan munyeji* took on the role of promoting the idea of literature as a pure aesthetic project.

Paik's expansion of literary practice into the realm of literary activism created even more physical confrontations with the state during the 1970s. It led him, for example, to play an important role in the formation and operation of the Association of Writers for Freedom and Praxis (*Chayu silch'ŏn munin hyŏbŭihoe*, Chasil), the first anti-authoritarian literary collective in South Korea. Established in November of 1974, with a manifesto signed by a hundred and one men of letters, Chasil became the coordinating organ for writers' resistance during the Yusin era, as the Park regime clamped down on the freedom of creative expression by intimidating, torturing and incarcerating writers aggressively. Yi Hoch'ŏl, a fiction-writer who had collaborated with Paik on a petition against the Yusin Constitution, was charged as a "writer-spy" and imprisoned. Kim Chi-ha, a poet and playwright who wrote an epic poem satirizing the Park regime's corruptions, ended up on the death row for a time. As for Paik, he was stripped of his professorship; his reinstatement came only in 1980 in the heady and chaotic months following the sudden end of the Yusin period.

Above these instances of activism as a publisher and organizer, however, Paik is first and foremost a theorist whose writings had the effect of setting the agenda for major debates that occurred in South Korean literary field over the last half century. Or, as this dissertation will show in the pages that follow, theorizing became a form of activism itself as Paik Nak-chung formulated four key concepts that served as vehicles of intervention: national literature (*minjok munhak*), division system (*pundan ch'eje*), the double project of modernity (*kŭndae ŭi ijung kwaje*), and world literature (*segye munhak*). To intervene, according to the Oxford Dictionary, means to "come between so

as to prevent or alter a result or course of events.”<sup>4</sup> The literal meaning of the word provides a most fitting description of Paik’s critical trajectory. At an impasse after impasse that has structured Korean realities since the end of the Korean War, Paik relied on literature to enable him to “come between” and cleave open an impossible space from which he could “alter... a course of events.” And alter Korean society he did.

Paik Nak-chung has not been without his critics, of course. Over his long career, he has been called an elite product of compromised privilege who embraced leftist issues to assuage his existential guilt<sup>5</sup>, a Korean stand-in for F.R. Leavis<sup>6</sup>, and a businessman whose readings are motivated less by critical urgency than by commercial interests.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Paik’s critical interventions have gained resonance in the larger East Asian context beyond South Korea. An interest in Paik Nak-chung has grown pronounced over the last decade. In the Chinese language, for instance, cultural studies scholar Chen Kuan-Hsing, himself a long-time champion of decolonizing and deimperializing East Asian intellectual landscape, has been actively introducing Paik’s work in translation. An edited volume devoted to Paik was published in 2010 with translations of Paik’s writings on his two main theoretical contributions—namely, the discourse of national literature and division system theory.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Intervene,” Oxford Living Dictionaries, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, Oxforddictionaries.com, Web, 9 September 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Pak Ch’anbu, “Wōllo k’allōm—Paek Nakch’ōng kwa Kim Chiha” [Column on elder intellectuals], *Kyosu Sinmun*, December 24, 2012, accessed September 10, 2016, <http://www.kyosu.net/news/articleView.html?idxno=26479>.

<sup>6</sup> Son Yuyōng, “Paek Nakch’ōng ūi minjok munhak non ūl t’onghae pon 1970 nyōndaesik chinbo ūi han yangsang” [The 1970s’-style progressives—as examined through the Paik Nak-chung’s theory of national literature], *Hangukhak yōngu* 35 (November 2014): pp. 149-174.

<sup>7</sup> Kang Chunman, “Paek Nakch’ōng 3—‘chinbo sangōpjuūi’ wa ‘munhwa tūkkwōnjuūi’” [Paik Nak-chung 3: “progressive commercialism” and “cultural exceptionalism”], Seoul: Kaema Gowon, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Paik Nak-chung et al., *Bai Leqing: fenduan tizhi, minzu wenxue* [Paik Nak-chung: division system, national literature], Taipei: Taipei Shi, 2010.

This recent interest in Paik in different parts of East Asia has much to do with two shared histories in the region. One is the vision of literature, notable across modern East Asia in different ways, as a vehicle for nation-building as well as a possibility for organizing a social movement. That is, literature was a vital tool for “imagining community,” both on the side of the state and the counter-state. In post-1950 South Korea, however, there is a rupture in this history. Following the division of the country along ideological lines and the subsequent fratricidal war, intense anti-communism became the national creed of South Korea, and enforced vigilantly by the state. The literary field was far from a space of exception for the national creed of anti-communism. With left-leaning writers escaping to the North en masse during the turbulent period immediately following the liberation of Korea from the Japanese rule in 1945, the field was naturally “purged” of socially emancipatory vision—a major source of inspiration for modern Korean writers during the colonial period. The right wing domination of the literary field was actively maintained by the state, and this field looked upon words like “social reality” with grave suspicion, and actively fostered anti-communist literature. The ability to shape a collective through literature thus tended to be monopolized by the authoritarian state and the right-wing orthodoxy in post-war South Korea—that is to say, until Paik “intervened” by re-envisioning national literature as a category of resistance.

Though Paik certainly was not the first to come up with the concept of national literature, his articulation of it in the 1970s was different from its predecessors in three distinct ways. One, in willfully refusing to limit its purview to the literature of either of the two Korean states during the age of division (*pundan sidae*), it differentiated itself from literature in service of the nation-state (*kungmin munhak*) and articulated its role as

literature for the people (*minjok munhak*), where the people designated people of both North and South Korea. Two, it asserted that the *raison d'être* of national literature lay in enabling a proper recognition of the national crisis that threatened the very dignity and survival of the people, and not in any impulse to assert a national identity *per se*. Three, Paik positioned South Korea's national literature as a key part of Third World literature.

The recent interest in Paik's work in East Asia also has to do with the status and meaning of North Korea in the East Asian context, which for Paik serves as the basis for his theory of the division system (*pundan ch'eje*). Paik was the first theorist to bring the world-systems theory into the understanding of Korea's continuing division in a meaningful way. Though it seems commonsensical to us today, Paik's call to contextualize the Korean situation both regionally and globally had a profoundly subversive dimension in anti-communist South Korea. By insisting that Korean division was a system, and not an isolated event, Paik situated the maintenance of the division as a linchpin holding in place the post-WWII American world order in East Asia that some have called "Pax Americana"—that is to say, the incorporation of Japan, and the so-called "Four Little Dragons" (Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore) into America's sphere of the "Free World" in an attempt to contain communism. The adjective "free" in "Free World," however, referred first and foremost to the freedom of capitalist enterprise, and not to any freedoms associated with democracy. It is little wonder, then, that at a time when "Pax Americana" in East Asia seems to have courted a rival in a twenty-first century version of "Pax Sinica" that Paik's work would find new audience and fresh relevance.

This dissertation explores the work of Paik Nak-chung and its significance within the changing terrain of Korean, East Asian and global discussions on literature of commitment. Rather than conceiving this project as an exhaustive account of Paik's lifelong oeuvre or a chronological survey of his conceptual formulations, I engage with particular moments in Paik's writings that illuminate his role as an active reader of specific literary texts, key historical moments, as well as social texts.

At the heart of my analytical framework is what I call a practice of "dissident reading." The two terms of my theorization, "dissidence" and "reader," demand a more detailed contextualization here. In the mid-1960s, Paik articulated his mode of dissidence against two related contexts: one, the right-wing authoritarian state that mobilized the category of the nation to expedite the end goal of economic growth and modernization; and two, the idea of autonomous agency implicit in individualist liberalism, which had been the primary literary premise among writers who positioned themselves against the mobilization of the authoritarian state. Against this historical context, Paik issued a call for the moral responsibility of writers to speak out against social injustices. "We [as the educated few] know," Paik wrote in 1966, "that everything depends on our wisdom and conscience as intellectuals the greater the alienation and depravity of the populace in a society. To fulfill our duties, then, we need a foothold upon which we can confirm each other's good will, gain strength, and renew our stance with regard to creation and resistance."<sup>9</sup> As can be detected in Paik's words published in the inaugural issue of *Ch'angbi*, his articulation of literature as practice reveals an intellectual identity that is highly indebted to the East Asian tradition of *munin* (literally, "a man of letters"), a

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<sup>9</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "Saeroun ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng ūi chase" [The attitude for a new creation and criticism], *Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng* 1 (Winter 1966): pp. 38.

writer-intellectual who believes in the power of writing to guide the people in a morally proper path and to create a just society. And it is this emphasis on the social responsibility of writer-intellectuals that animated Paik's theorization of national literature in 1974. Following Paik's theorization of the concept, national literature led the way in militating against the normative separation between art and politics in the South Korean literary field up until the 1970s.

Paik's vision of literature as a means of collective resistance over the past five decades did not always entail a straightforward mode of intervention. Rather, he performed a balancing act between the conceptual limits of resistance against and co-optation with the state, between nation and the world, as well as between literature of autonomy and autonomy of literature. For Paik, anti-state dissidence carried a sense of moral responsibility for promoting collective welfare of the people. To reject modernization, industrialization, and developmentalism in the name of decolonization, democracy, and liberalism, as many radical anti-state writers and critics were wont to do, was to replicate those dichotomies that were engineered by the state. This often led Paik to not only challenge the neocolonial character of the state's capitalist modernization policies backed by the U.S., but to also maintain a critical distance from the radicals that renounced the importance of modernization in post-war South Korea in the name of decolonization from foreign domination.

Therefore, from the 1960s through the 1980s—that is, during the height of his involvement in democratization movement and literary activism—Paik was as vocal in critiquing the black-and-white logic of the democratization camp as he was in challenging the developmentalist authoritarianism of the state. With respect to the literary



field more specifically as well, Paik remained at least partially suspicious of those that argued literature ought to be above all a vehicle for exposing social reality and mobilizing the masses (i.e., the *minjung*) into political action. This was particularly so during the second half of the 1980s when radical developments were underway in the South Korean literary field in the name of labor emancipation. At the height of the labor emancipation movement, “immediacy” (*hyŏnjangsŏng*), “vision” (*chŏnmang*), and “directionality” (*panghyangsŏng*) became prized values. But it was precisely during this time that Paik would invoke the importance of maintaining the necessity of “literariness of literature” (*munhak ũi munhaksŏng*).<sup>10</sup>

The South Korean literary terrain changed rapidly with the advent of an elected civilian government in the period ensuing democratization in 1987. In the absence of an unambiguous enemy to mobilize against—namely, the authoritarian state—writers and critics began to question the necessity of literature, some even decrying what they believed to be a “crisis of literature” (*munhak ũi wigi*). Though the dismal diagnosis about the continuing utility of literature was part and parcel of the postmodern, post-ideological, and post-national turn in the literary field at large, the crisis of literature within the specific location of the post-1989 Korean literary field was largely understood as the doomed fate of national literature and all that it had stood for. In the 1990s the criticism against national literature unfolded along two principal lines: the nationalistic, collectivist tendencies inherent within the concept and its overt politicization of literature. From the perspective of emerging generation of writers and critics, not only did national literature’s politicization in the preceding decades deplete literature of its diverse

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<sup>10</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “*Minjok munhak kwa minjung muhak*” [National literature and people’s literature], in *Minjok munhak kwa segye munhak II*, Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏngsa, 1985, pp. 351.

potential, but the insistence upon the nation (*minjok*) also kept literature from imagining alternative, organic forms of belonging more adequate to addressing local and global changes.<sup>11</sup> This time, against such critics' disavowal of national literature as an outmoded experiment, Paik would engage directly with the discourse on world literature to demonstrate the continued relevance of national literature as an "ongoing literary *movement*" (emphasis added) engaged in the project of overcoming national division, which was itself a direct outgrowth of the capitalist world-system of the post-WWII era.<sup>12</sup> It is in this repeated counterbalancing between the literariness of literature and the social function of literature that I locate the defining aspect of Paik's dissidence.

The site of this dissidence was specific texts; the way to intervene in contemporary society and against existing forms of oppressive power always wound through texts for Paik. For this reason, this study conceptualizes Paik first and foremost as a reader, examining Paik's engagement with theories and literary texts that were often considered unconventional, marginal, or irrelevant, even by those who shared his literary and social vision. How did his acts of reading maintain the tension between "literature" and "movement" in a "literary movement" such as national literature, as well as between "nation" and the "world" in a local-global discussion of the division system? On the whole, Paik remained unconcerned by the conventions of a text or by its existing, "canonical" readings. Paik's readings thus generated alternative modes of textual interpretation which then became a commentary not only on the contemporary society, but also on the conventions of literary practice in Korea. As the following chapters reveal,

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<sup>11</sup> See Hwang Jongyon, "Minjok ūl sangsang hanŭn munhak – hanguk sosŏl ūi minjokjuŭi e taehan pip'anjŏk koch'al" [Literature that imagines the nation – a critical perspective on the nationalism of Korean novels], in *Munhak tongne* 1 (Winter 1994), pp. 13-58.

<sup>12</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "Nations and Literatures in the Age of Globalization," in Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, pp. 221.

the seeming contradictions in Paik's readings offer us a window into the complexity of the historically layered and politically sensitive terrain in which Paik operated, as well as the competing agendas with which Paik wrestled, when we do not yield to the temptation to dismiss these apparent contradictions offhand as logical fallacies.

The temptation is difficult to resist, especially because of the central and powerful place that Paik has occupied in the Korean literary world for decades. Over the course of this research, I have come across many literary scholars in Korea who deny the validity of Paik's literary claims, and hold this opinion even when they recognize the significance of his contribution as a public intellectual. A substantial body of existing scholarship on Paik's writings, too, are critiques of the potential theoretical pitfalls in Paik's thought. Many of these were published by members of the literary quarterly *Munhak kwa chisŏng*, the rival quarterly to *Ch'angbi* in the 1970s and 80s. Then, in the mid-1990s, there emerged a second body of critical writings that proclaimed the kind of questions that motivated Paik's thought as defunct and no longer applicable to Korean literature. Such was the premise of a new literary quarterly, *Munhak Tongne*, founded by an emerging generation of critics in 1994. While the critiques of the past four decades lodged at Paik himself, at national literature, and at the division system provide much insight into the discursive terrain in which Paik's literary and social theories unfolded, they lend little to understanding the nature of Paik's interventions in Cold War South Korea.

Focusing on the moments of counterbalancing, the dissertation pays particular attention to what Paik himself has called the "double project of modernity" (*ijung kwaje*), that is to say, the double task of adjusting to and overcoming modernity, not one after another, but simultaneously. According to Paik, the pursuit of this double project was

particularly crucial in Korea, where the local impact of the post-WWII capitalist world-system was doubly refracted through the operation of the division system. Because of the presence of the communist counterpart that is North Korea, the pressure was all the greater in South Korea to emerge anew as a modern nation-state worthy of its membership in the capitalist “free” world. This meant the elevation of expedient modernization, industrialization, and capitalization, and the labeling by state of everything that would hinder this gospel of development as “pro-communist” and hence “dangerous to the well-being of Korean society.” Decolonization and democratization fell into this dangerous category. Paik’s articulation of the double project of modernity militates against this binary logic of the Cold War that constructed the oppositions of modernization versus decolonization, industrialization versus democratization, capitalism (the “free world”) versus communism (the “unfree world”). How does one adopt and overcome modernity at the same time? The need to pursue this contradictory mission and the delicate balancing act required to keep the contradiction from imploding from its own weight give Paik’s writing its unique tensions and torsions. I have attempted to follow them in a manner finely attuned to the multiple historical contexts and intellectual dilemmas that gave rise to them.

In what follows, then, the dissertation analyzes formative moments in Paik’s career through the lens of the double project. Each of the study’s four chapters focuses on Paik’s reading of a specific work or figure that was instrumental at key junctures of his career. Chapter one explores Paik’s lifelong engagement with the late nineteenth-century British writer D.H. Lawrence. This chapter stands apart in its structure from the other three chapters in that it functions as a concept chapter, introducing the major ideas in

Paik's thought that recur throughout the five decades of his career. It focuses on Paik's readings from three different points in time—specifically 1969, 1982, and 2010. A figure of remarkably contested literary reputation, Lawrence is a writer whose works did not easily conform to the established Western literary tradition of either realism or modernism, and whose political views alternated between that of a reactionary and a progressive. Indeed, Paik's persistent return to Lawrence at critical peaks in South Korean literary field leaves many critics befuddled even to this day, as the very name of the British author simply did not seem to align easily with other better-known examples of leftist writers such as Frantz Fanon, Herbert Marcuse, Upton Sinclair, and of course Karl Marx. This chapter explores how Paik mobilizes such elusive writings of Lawrence to comment upon the dichotomous relationships between the primacy of the individual versus the collective in literature in the 1960s, the hegemony of “the American Dream” versus anti-Americanism in the 1980s, and the push for democratic change in the political regime in the past five years versus call for economic equality in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century South Korea.

Chapter two analyzes Paik's reading of the novel *Pullyegi* [*The Story of Pun'ye*] (1967) by Pang Yöngung in the context of 1960s' South Korean literary field. At the time of the novel's original installment in 1967, Paik's reading and subsequent endorsement of Pang's novel baffled many writers and critics, most of whom pointed to a logical disconnect between Paik, a champion of socially grounded literature, and a novel that seemingly fetishizes the countryside. Identifying this puzzlement as emerging out of the separation of the aesthetic from the political in South Korean literary field of the time, in this chapter I take Paik's reading as an occasion to examine how literature emerged as

a privileged site for proper representation of those oppressed by the state's developmentalism—that is, the peasant *minjung* (the downtrodden people). The chapter addresses the rupture in Korean literary history with regard to their depictions. During the heavily reactionary postwar period, the literary field was dominated by the right-wing orthodoxy, for whom the countryside was the stuff of pastoral, idyllic respite away from the bustle of modernizing cities. It is precisely against such disavowal of objective critique of the rural tradition in the postwar period that Paik mounts an intervention through his reading of *The Story of Pun'ye*. I argue that the extent of Paik's intervention vis-à-vis this novel must be understood in light of the state of the literary field at the time, which was heavily skewed to the right.

Chapter three explores Paik's theorization of the division system, which occurred in earnest in 1992, and his appropriation of Immanuel Wallerstein's concept of capitalist world-system. The division system theory, which Paik maintained was but a subsystem of the larger capitalist world-system, was an intervention on two grounds. One, it challenged the post-1989 discourse that refused to see North Korea as part of the same capitalist world-system and perceived the continued division of the Korean peninsula as an anomaly. Two, the division system theory allowed for a systemic understanding of the division system—that is to say, although the North and South Koreas appear to be ideologically confrontational with each other, the division is actually being maintained by the vested interests of both the North and South Korean regimes. If Paik had enabled an intervention against the increasing depoliticization of literature domain proper by putting literature in dialogue with social sciences in the 1960s, in the 1980s we witness an instance of a literary critic who would wage an intervention against the negligence of

Korea's place in the global context by social sciences—which at the time was widely thought to be the most radical and visionary of all intellectual disciplines.

Chapter four examines Paik's engagement of world literature discourse and two writers in the post-democratization era. I argue there is a tension that emerges in Paik's divergent positioning of the legacy of national literature movement in the 1990s and the 2000s on the local terrain of South Korean literary field, on the one hand, and against the Euro-American articulations of world literature, on the other. With respect to the discourse on world literature, Paik argues against the idea of autonomy of literature by making a case for national literature as a movement for literature of autonomy. On the local front of South Korean literature, he issues a call to reclaim a sense of literariness in literature against socially engaged critics deploring what they diagnosed as a crisis of socially minded literature in post-authoritarian society. Paik does this by engaging closely with the nominal works of two writers, Shin Kyung-sook and Bae Suah, both of whom are better-known by the literary field at large for heralding a kind of 1990's sensibility—that is, a deep preoccupation with one's interiority, everyday stories of one's own life as opposed to “grand” narratives of democratization and emancipation. I argue in this chapter that Paik's double-sided move with respect to how he positions national literature in the 1990s reveals a chasm between local literary experience in Cold War South Korea and the annihilation of such concepts as the double project of modernity in world literature discourse.

The four chapters together reveal three enduring patterns in the evolution of Paik's thought over the past half-century. First, Paik exhibits a constant straddling between decolonization and modernization, as well as between democratization and

industrialization—two sets of dichotomies which were both engineered by the right-wing state and routinely repeated, ironically so, by the oppositional forces in their very attempts to counter the state hegemony. The second recurring aspect about Paik’s work is a curious dialectic between the local (the Korean nation) and the global (the capitalist world-system), which surfaces all the more acutely in his discourse on the division system and national literature. Paik repeatedly deploys the totalizing discourse of the global to shed light on the historical specificities of the Korean local situation, but always with the ultimate aim of changing, revising, or even overcoming the global condition itself through articulation of local particularities. The third and last pattern is Paik’s perpetual shifting back and forth between literature of autonomy and the autonomy of literature.

Finally, in the conclusion chapter, I reflect upon the relevance of Paik’s literary practices in twenty-first century South Korean literature. What did it mean to remain dissident against the right-wing orthodoxy of the state as well as against the radical left in today’s post-authoritarian South Korea?<sup>13</sup> And what does it still mean to keep up a balancing act between literature of autonomy and autonomy of literature in a literary field that was moving fast to embrace “the many small truths of life in place of one imposing Truth”?<sup>14</sup> I ponder upon these two questions by examining a recent controversy involving the plagiarism of the celebrity writer Shin Kyung-sook and its resounding impact upon the fate of the two quarterlies *Munhak Tongne* and *Ch’angbi*.

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<sup>13</sup> In 2006, Paik declared his own political stance as “transformational centrism” (*pyŏnhyŏkjŏk chungdojuŭi*), through which he claimed the necessity of a “middle course” in finding a common ground between two extreme political positions in order to sustain a long-term but gradual and sustainable struggle against the hegemonic world-system. See Paik Nak-chung, *Ŏdiga chungdomyŏ ōjjaesŏ pyŏnhyŏk inga*, Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏngsa, 2009, pp. 272.

<sup>14</sup> Seo Young Chae, *Munhak ūi yulli*, Seoul: Munhak tongne, 2005, pp. 16.



## CHAPTER 1

### Specters of D.H. Lawrence: Paik Nak-chung and the Double Project of Modernity

#### Why Lawrence?

Given that Paik was a scholar of English literature by training, the fact that D.H. Lawrence occupies a significant place in his literary criticism may not strike many as particularly odd. Paik's engagement with the early twentieth-century British writer can be traced back to his days as a Ph.D. student of English literature at Harvard, where he wrote his dissertation on Lawrence's novels *The Rainbow* (1915) and *Women in Love* (1920).<sup>15</sup> However, a prominent Korean literary scholar who went to college in the 1980s used the expression *ttŭngŭm ŏptta* [random] in reference to Paik's interest in Lawrence. To go to class, she said, while her fellow students were being tortured in prisons or setting themselves on fire in protest against the authoritarian government, and hear Paik, a famed activist himself, lecture on Lawrence felt "so random." It was hardly unusual that Paik's decision to lecture on D.H. Lawrence should come as a surprise to student activists in the 1980s, considering how distant Lawrence appeared to be from writers such as Frantz Fanon, Herbert Marcuse, Upton Sinclair, and of course Karl Marx—the stock names among state-banned literatures that in turn served as prime source of leftists inspirations.

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<sup>15</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *A Study of The Rainbow and Women in Love: Expressions of D.H. Lawrence's Thinking on Modern Civilization*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, 1972.

However, given that Paik was also an activist who built his career of five decades calling for literature as a means of political intervention, his persistent harkening back to D.H. Lawrence occasioned bewilderment and skepticism plain as day among even the most literary in South Korea.

In fact, such unenthusiastic reaction to the presiding status of D.H. Lawrence in Paik's criticism was not limited to the context of the 1980s' South Korean literary field. As recently as just one year ago, at a conference in Seoul on the legacies of Paik and the quarterly *Ch'angbi*, two related but different critiques were posed with regard to Paik's preoccupation with Lawrence. One scholar labeled Paik as a Lawrencist ("*Lorensũjuũija*").<sup>16</sup> The other was that Paik misinterprets Lawrence or, to quote the remark verbatim, that Paik, "rather than discover visions of collective emancipation *through* Lawrence, imposes the imperatives of his own literary agenda *onto* Lawrence."<sup>17</sup>

To be sure, the unenthusiastic reaction to Paik's reading of Lawrence in the 1980s was different in what it entailed from the critique I encountered more recently with regard to the meaning of Lawrence in Paik's criticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the criticism in the 1980s mainly stemmed from the inability to see the immediate relevance of Lawrence by leftist activists, the more recent critiques revealed a deeper postcolonial subconscious operating among the South Korean literary scholars today. The critique of Paik as a Lawrencist, on the one hand, implied that Paik was more or less a staunch defender of Lawrence as an –ism of sort, one who resorts to his unconditional reliance upon

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<sup>16</sup> Han Yŏngin, "HK saŏpdan haksul taehoe 'pip'yŏng hyŏnjang kwa inmunhak (chae)p'yŏnsŏng ũl tulŏssan punggyŏngdŭl ch'amgwangi" [Humanities Korea conference "the place of criticism and the scenes of re(constituting) humanities" – an observant's review], February 28, 2015, accessed March 25, 2015, [http://hk-kukhak.yonsei.ac.kr/bbs/board.php?bo\\_table=sub03\\_03&wr\\_id=11](http://hk-kukhak.yonsei.ac.kr/bbs/board.php?bo_table=sub03_03&wr_id=11).

<sup>17</sup> Ko Pongjun, Panel discussion at "HK saŏpdan haksul taehoe 'pip'yŏng hyŏnjang kwa inmunhak (chae)p'yŏnsŏng ũl tulŏssan punggyŏngdŭl ch'amgwangi," Conference, February 28, 2015.

Lawrence whether or not Lawrence was a “proper fit” for the South Korean circumstances. To contend that Paik “imposes the imperatives of his own literary agenda on Lawrence” as opposed to “discover visions of emancipation through Lawrence,” on the other hand, was to assert the existence of a singular essential reading of Lawrence, which Paik allegedly disregards and indeed contaminates in quest of his own vision of what literature should be.

Essentially, there are two contradictory assumptions at play here that are actually two sides of the same coin. One assumption is to see a desire to colonize in Paik’s desire to bring Lawrence into conversation with the Korean reality. The other assumption is that Paik as a Korean (and hence colonized) intellectual cannot possibly be reading the West via Lawrence correctly. Admittedly, however, the same could have been said for any Western writer that Paik may have read. The key question is, then, why did Lawrence surprise when, for example, Balzac or Joyce did not? That such puzzlement and even dismissal of Paik’s reading of Lawrence would persist in the literary field only prompts one to pose, once again, the one question that have dogged South Korean scholars for decades when it came to understanding Paik’s literary world: namely, why Lawrence?

What further frustrates the attempt to pinpoint the rationale behind Paik’s lifelong engagement with Lawrence is the fact that Lawrence is a writer whose literary reputation, as Anne Fernihough remarks, “has undergone extraordinary vicissitudes, fluctuating more wildly than that of any other twentieth-century British writer.”<sup>18</sup> Though born a poor minor’s son in the countryside, Lawrence sympathized greatly with his mother who harbored middle-class aspirations. He later married a German aristocrat with whom he

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<sup>18</sup> Anne Fernihough, “Introduction,” in Anne Fernihough ed., *The Cambridge Companion to D.H. Lawrence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 1.

would go on to live life across four continents. Lawrence never really belonging to any specific social class, nor to any literary or artistic group. His contemporaneous as well as future critics would be baffled by the difficulty of placing him in the proper Western literary tradition, often leading some to read the representations of sexual relations in his work as literary pornography.<sup>19</sup> We need only recall the revealing moment in Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* when he deplores the sardonic remark of a benighted British Council critic who called Lawrence, along with Thomas Hardy and George Eliot, "[Britain's] three great autodidacts."<sup>20</sup> Even more problematic with respect to Paik's own dual agenda of decolonization and modernization for the South Korean society lay in what many critics since Lawrence's time has detected as the writer's tendencies to conceive "primitive" cultures (i.e., non-Western, nonindustrial cultures) as a corrective for the social ills of the modern, industrialized West.<sup>21</sup>

And yet, in spite of the perpetual debate on how to typologize Lawrence—as a realist or a modernist, for example, or as a reactionary or a progressive—critics since Lawrence's own time agree almost unanimously on two characteristics: one, that he never went along with the theories of autonomy so enthusiastically promoted by modernists; and two, that whilst sharing many of the artistic concerns of his modernist contemporaries, Lawrence did not renounce, as his contemporaries T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound did, his Romantic and Realist heritage. "Lawrence's predicament as such," writes Anne Fernihough, "is that of someone radically out of sync with his own culture."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See Marianna Torgovnick, "Narrating Sexuality: *The Rainbow*," in Anne Fernihough ed., *The Cambridge Companion to D.H. Lawrence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 33-48.

<sup>20</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 173.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Bell, *D.H. Lawrence: Language and Being*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 134.

<sup>22</sup> Anne Fernihough, "Introduction," pp. 2.

However, it was precisely these bewildering aspects of Lawrence that made him such a fertile inspiration for Paik throughout the latter's career. Just how these aspects about Lawrence come into play in Paik's interventions with respect to two key dynamics in post-1945 South Korea—namely, of decolonization and modernization, on the one hand, and of industrialization and democratization, on the other—is the basis for this chapter. To demonstrate how and why Lawrence appears recurrently in Paik's intervention over the past five decades, this chapter focuses on three nodal points in Paik's engagement with Lawrence, which also correspond to three pivotal moments in the history of democratization in modern Korea, specifically, 1969, 1982, and 2011. I look at writings by Paik from each of these three years in which he draws his major inspiration from Lawrence's literary and social thought—"Simin munhak non" ["Treatise on citizens' literature"] (1969), "Miguk ũi kkum kwa miguk munhak ũi chim" ["The American dream and the burden of American literature"] (1982), and "D.H. Lorũnsũ ũi minjujuũi ron" ["D.H. Lawrence's theory of democracy"] (2011). By engaging with these three critical moments, this chapter aims to show how it is the very elusiveness of Lawrence's literature and politics that allows Paik to make the persistent call for maintaining a balance among the three basic tenets of democracy—liberty, equality, and fraternity—in the turbulent path to industrialization and democratization over the past five decades.

### **Reading Lawrence in the Wake of an Unfinished Revolution**

On April 19, 1960, a nationwide popular movement led to the overthrow of the autocratic regime of Syngman Rhee. The string of events that are now remembered as the April Revolution, or simply as 4.19 among South Koreans, were triggered by the discovery of the body of a student killed by a tear-gas shell during protest against the electoral corruption that took place on March 15 of the same year. Though sparked by the election fraud, the protests that erupted over the course of two months were expressions of the public's disappointment with the failure of the Rhee regime to deliver social and economic development over his thirteen-year rule, as well as with the continuous corrupt measures through which Rhee remained in power for as long as he did. The overthrow of Rhee and the end of the First Republic was followed by a brief venture into democratic governance by Chang Myŏn. Indeed, it appeared that the dreams of liberal democracy harbored broadly among university students were being realized after all. The students were elated with what they perceived as the fruit of their undertaking, and went on to call themselves the "4.19 generation." They thought of themselves as historical subjects with a moral cause to deliver genuine social transformation to South Korea. If the social status of university students had been somewhat ambiguous prior to 4.19, much in part due to their passivity and silence in the 1950s, through 4.19 the students were able to discard the image of themselves as the "silent generation" and be reborn as "young lions," the active agent of history.<sup>23</sup>

No more than a few months into the unfamiliar territory of democratic governance, however, the ensuing chaos and instability of the new government alerted the students to the ineffectuality of their revolution. No genuine structural change or

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<sup>23</sup> Kwŏn Podŭrae, "Sa-ilgu wa o-illyuk, chayu wa ppangŭi t'oposŭ" [4.19 and 5.16, the topos of liberty and bread], *Sanghŏ hakbo* (October 2010): pp. 101-102.

betterment of society were visible in sight. Chronic postwar poverty, drastic social dislocation, and political corruption still continued to persist. Although their kindled desire for liberty through democracy were not altogether extinguished, it was difficult to dismiss the growing anxiety that they had not been and were still not ready to carry out a genuine revolution. Only one short year following 4.19, South Koreans witnessed a swift military coup d'état by Park Chung Hee. On May 16, 1961, Park came to power proclaiming to inherit the spirit of 4.19 and bring genuine social transformation to South Korea. But every action carried out by the Park regime betrayed the fact that his coming to power was a clear reversal of the course of democracy. The regime paid no heed to popular consensus, and even dissolved the constitutionally elected government that had just been set up in South Korea. By propagandizing promises of modernization, industrialization, and economic growth, the Park regime aborted the short-lived dreams of the 4.19 generation of revolutionizing the social and political fabric of the nation.

In the aftermath of the military coup, which would come to be referred to as 5.16, many university students and intellectuals that had participated in 4.19 became fast disillusioned with the ideals of liberty that had fueled their protest against the state. Although Park Chung Hee's rose to power in the most undemocratic way possible, the social circumstances of the time were dire enough for at least some of the 4.19 intellectuals to foster hope for a miracle in Park's promises of modernity, industrialization, and economic growth. During this time, both among the conservative and the progressive intellectuals, the perceived need of a strong national leader was fast overriding the dream of liberal democracy. The urgency of modernization and development were all the greater due to the widespread belief in Korea's utter

“backwardness.” The progressive intellectuals’ immediate response to 5.16 is revealing of their ambivalent stance toward 5.16. Ham Sökhön, a consummate leftist intellectual at the time, testified that the 5.16 “was bound to happen [...] Because something—*anything*—had to have taken place. The people *had* to have risen, but because they did not, the soldiers did [...] That is why 5.16 occurred.”<sup>24</sup> Thus even as the intellectuals recognized the anti-democratic nature of the Park regime, they felt powerless to rise up not only to the challenge of the increasingly authoritarian state, but also to the equally if not more urgent challenge of bringing about a genuine social transformation.

The literature produced during this period, most notably represented by writers identifying themselves as the 4.19 generation, portrayed the troubled consciousness of these intellectuals. Caught between the hegemony of state-led modernization and ideals of liberty—this was how the literary critic Kim Chuyön envisioned the 4.19-generation writer in 1969, coincidentally the same year in which, through a constitutional amendment, Park Chung Hee legalized a third term for presidency. Kim’s essay was contentious for two main reasons. First, it heralded what he called “petty-bourgeois consciousness” (*sosimin ũisik*) as the spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> generation. Second, it proposed the concept of “trivialism,” or what Kim defined as “embracing the non-triviality of the trivial” as the proper attitude for his generation.<sup>25</sup>

Kim, as with many other writers of the 4.19 generation, found in modernism the proper mode of literary expression for his time and place. Emphasized in Kim’s embrace of modernist aesthetics was the potential inherent in a relativist understanding of an

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<sup>24</sup> Ham Sökhön, as quoted in Kwön Podūrae, “Sa-ilgu wa o-illyuk, chayū wa ppangūi t’oposū,” pp. 105.

<sup>25</sup> Kim Chuyön, “*Sae sidae munhak ũi sōngnip—insik ũi ch’ulballosō yuksip nyōndae*” [Embarking on literature of a new era—understanding 1960s as the start of self-awareness], in *Kim chuyön p’yōngnon munhaksōn*, Seoul: Munhak sasang sa, 1992, pp. 19-20.



individual's place in society. For Kim, "petty-bourgeois consciousness" and emphasis on the individual enabled one to find meaning in a reality where a sense of communality was no longer retrievable in a nation undergoing industrialization and modernization in such dramatic fashion as South Korea was at the time.

It was in building a counter-prescription to Kim's call for "petty-bourgeois consciousness" that Paik theorized the concept of "simin munhak" [citizens' literature] later in the same year. For Paik, the concept of "petty-bourgeois consciousness" and its proclivity towards individualism was in itself a manifestation of the deepening bifurcation between the city and the countryside, a phenomenon that swept through post-war South Korea as the impoverished rural population streamed into rapidly industrializing cities for new economic opportunities. In demanding that literature take on the task of promoting "proper civic consciousness" (*olbarŭn simin ũisik*), not only was Paik countering the modernist writers' withdrawn and defeatist literary representation of their time, but he was also calling upon the writers to cultivate a moral vision to impart to readers for the modern age. It is important to note that Paik is establishing his intervention against modernist representations not through a pre-modern notion of communality, but through the *modern* idea of a responsible citizen concerned with the well-being of the nation. The distinction that Paik is making in his intervention is thus not one between a modern and pre-modern, but between a modernist and modern notion of subjectivity. Even as Paik was deeply critical of the alienation of the countryside that was itself an impact of modernization, Paik still believed in the necessity of modernization for the practical well-being of an underdeveloped nation. Enlightenment and revitalization of the nation's moral fabric, as it were, were very much on his agenda.

Published as “Treatise on Citizens’ Literature” in 1969, the concept of citizens’ literature was the first and major literary concept to be authored by Paik. At the time of his conceptualization, citizens’ literature was criticized for what many diagnosed as Paik’s propensity to assess the status of Korean literature by a measure of Western literary modernity. This charge was not wholly unfounded, given that his call for citizens’ literature was founded upon his knowledge of Western literature and culture – namely, eighteenth-century French Enlightenment literature, German classicism, and nineteenth-century realism. Moreover, throughout the “Treatise” Paik frequently evaluated contemporaneous Korean literature according to the extent of its proximity to nineteenth-century Western realist literature, often stressing its importance for the development of citizens’ literature.

On the one hand, in embracing the tenets of Western enlightenment and modernity in making his call for modern civic consciousness, Paik was admittedly assuming an accommodationist gesture. On the other hand, his turn to the nineteenth-century literary tradition of the West was a counter-move against the predominance of modernist literature in particular its tendencies for expressions of individual consciousness and social withdrawal. And it is precisely on this account that Lawrence served a strategic function for Paik. Here was a writer, a Western writer no less, whose literary vision at times resonated more strongly with his predecessors than his modernist contemporaries, a writer who defied the trends of his day not by being ahead of his time, per se, but by inheriting the social utilities of the preceding literary traditions. Because Lawrence was a Western writer, he is in some sense given the credit of being “advanced” by default. And yet, his actual stance toward modernism was fraught. Paik, by voicing his

own literary view through Lawrence, can be modern and at the same time, anti-modernist.

It is in this recognition of Lawrence's dual position with respect to the Western literary modernity that Paik brings in Lawrence on the discourse on citizens' literature. At a fascinatingly telling moment in the "Treatise," Paik reasons why he considers Lawrence to have a significant bearing on theorizing citizens' literature:

[I turn to Lawrence], though his anti-civilizationism and anti-intellectualism was enough to put Tolstoy to shame, because I believe Lawrence to be *more resonant to the key problematic in our citizens' literature* than Proust or Joyce who found refuge in their own impressive dead alleys, or even Thomas Mann who faithfully inherited the magnificent elements of the bourgeois tradition yet was able to draw a sharp and thoughtful critique of the modern bourgeois society.<sup>26</sup>

Here, Paik is referring to European writers contemporaries of Lawrence, all of whom are readily known as renowned figures in modernist (Proust, Joyce, Mann) literature of the early twentieth century. We might ask, then, what does it mean for Paik to think of Lawrence, a writer who espoused and wrote in a style more akin to nineteenth-century realist writer Tolstoy than his twentieth-century modernist contemporaries, as "closer to the key problematic in the citizens' literature sought by the 1960s' South Korean society?"

In aligning Korean literature not with Western modernism but with nineteenth-century realism by way of Lawrence, Paik reasserts his understanding of the April 19<sup>th</sup> revolution as a task that is yet *incomplete*, neither "failed" nor "finished." As several critics have pointed out to date, it is hard to dismiss the universalist tendency in Paik's detailed recounting of the West's democratic revolution as something to be both

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<sup>26</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "Simin munhaknon" [Treatise on citizens' literature], *Ch'angjakkwa pip'yŏng* 14 (Summer 1969): pp. 478.

embraced and exceeded.<sup>27</sup> However, in the context of the 1960s' South Korea, there was a definite subversive element in reiterating the importance of pursuing the spirit of liberty, equality, and fraternity—the tripartite components of democracy that Paik would reiterate and over and over throughout his “Treatise.”

For Paik, the very notions of “embracing the non-triviality of the trivial” and “rejecting the political” in search for the “individual” in the name of “liberty”—values enthusiastically embraced among the modernists in the 1960's South Korea as we saw earlier—were in and of themselves a reflection of how quick the writers and intellectuals had been to abandon the revolutionary project of 4.19 in the face of Park Chung Hee's military coup. Modernist emphasis on the “self” and “one's subjective experiences” allowed writers to seek refuge from the two master narratives of the nation's economic growth by way of industrialization, on the one hand, and individual liberty by way of democratization, on the other—the central conflict of South Korean society that has its origins in the concomitant experiences of 4.19 and 5.16 in the early 1960s. Indeed, the 1960s' was a time when the discourse of the social and the political rested upon an “imagined opposition between liberty and bread,” as Kwŏn Podŭrae so perceptively put it.<sup>28</sup> “Liberty or not, first thing in order is to live and eat well”—and so the argument would go among those critical of the developmentalist, nationalist propaganda of the state,

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<sup>27</sup> See Kang Kyŏnghwa, “Paek nakch'ŏng ch'ogi pip'yŏng ūi insik kwa kujo” [The mode of perception and structure of Paik Nak-chung's early criticism], *Chŏngsin munhwa yŏngu* 29:2 (Summer 2006): 175-204; Song Sŭngch'ŏl, “Simin munhak non esŏ kŭndae kŭkbok non kkaji: pyŏnhak kŏtkwa pyŏnhaji anŭngŏt” [From citizens' literature to the project of overcoming modernity: the changed and the unchanged], *Chiguhwa sidae ūi yŏngmunhak*, Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏngsa, 2004, pp. 245-268.

<sup>28</sup> Kwon Bodurae, “Sa-ilgu wa o-illyuk, chayū wa ppangŭi t'oposŭ” [4.19 and 5.16, the topos of liberty and bread], pp. 113.

but “if [they] had to choose one between ‘liberty’ and ‘bread’, “[they] would have to forsake the latter.”<sup>29</sup>

How and why did “liberty” (democratization) and “bread” (industrialization) necessarily become inverse of one another in the 1960s? In the attempt to forge a front for coming to power via a military coup, the Park Chung Hee regime moved fast to cast widespread poverty as the most urgent social issue and modernization (via industrialization) its crucial remedy. “Without expediting modernization,” they would argue, “liberty and democracy would merely be the stuff of vanity.”<sup>30</sup> Less than a decade away from the Korean War, the South Korean society was still grappling with the destruction of the war. The task of rebuilding the Korean society was complicated by the corruption of the Syngman Rhee regime. It was therefore no wonder that such “logic” for modernization as perpetuated by the Park regime came to be recognized as “truth” by the general populace still deeply mired in postwar distress for the most part. By the standards of the military state as well as the popular masses struggling to survive, the slow and gradual process of democratization was hardly conducive to the business of “catching up” with rest of the modern world. Modernization, industrialization, and development were the magic words, the promises through which the Park regime enabled mass mobilization of people and integrated them into the rapid process of change.

Against such ineluctable onset of state-driven developmentalism, “petty-bourgeois consciousness” became the name in which writers and intellectuals reasserted the individual and individual liberty in the spirit of liberal democracy. Among modernist writers during this time, especially, disengagement from the realities of state-driven

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 113.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 110.

modernization and withdrawal from society became a way of challenging the legitimacy of the authoritarian state. At the same time, however, the pursuit of liberal democracy by way of disengagement also meant that they were forsaking the possibilities of social welfare that could be realized through industrialization and economic growth.

And it is precisely against such bifurcation between democratization and industrialization that Lawrence served as a means of intervention for Paik. Although Lawrence bemoaned the alienating and demoralizing effects of industrialization, constantly contrasting the “lovely country” against the “cold ugliness” and “raw materialism” of “the industrial problem” that forces “all human energy into a competition of mere acquisition,”<sup>31</sup> he was neither a writer who resorted to a kind of nativist revivalism in refusal of industrialization or modernization. As Paik quotes from Lawrence’s essay “Nottingham and the Mining Countryside”:

That silly little individualism of ‘the Englishman’s home is his castle’—and ‘my own little home’ is out of date. It would work almost up to 1800, when every Englishman was still a villager and a cottager. But the industrial problem has brought a great change. The Englishman still likes to think of himself as a ‘cottager’—‘my home, my garden.’ But it is puerile. Even the farm-laborer today is psychologically a town-bird. The English are town-birds through and through, today, as the inevitable result of their complete industrialization. Yet they don’t know how to build a city, how to think of one, or how to live in one. They are all suburban, pseudo-cottagey, and not one of them knows how to be truly urban—the citizen as the Romans were citizens—or the Athenians—or even the Parisians, till the war came. And this is because we have frustrated that *instinct of community* which would make us unite in pride and dignity in the bigger gesture of the citizen, not the cottager” (emphasis added).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> D.H. Lawrence, “Nottingham and the Mining Countryside,” in James T. Bouton ed., *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of D.H. Lawrence: Late Essays and Articles*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 291-292.

<sup>32</sup> D.H. Lawrence, “Nottingham and the Mining Countryside,” as quoted by Paik in “Simin Munhaknon,” pp. 479. Here I replicated the same portion from the English original from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of D.H. Lawrence: Late Essays and Articles*.

This passage reveals that Lawrence is critical of “individualism” not as a modern psychological phenomenon per se, but as an outdated and petty mindset of the previous agrarian social structure that has long eroded with the onset of industrialization. As mentioned before the above passage, Lawrence did articulate his disgust with “the promoters of industry” through and through for the “monstrous” impact it had on human dignity of the villagers. But as is articulated in this particular passage, a return to a time before industrialization was simply impossible.

In “Nottingham and the Mining Countryside,” as he recalls his own father’s life as a coal miner in the countryside, Lawrence observes a keen sense of comradeship among the miners—a “curious dark intimacy” among the laborers that, curiously enough, shines more brightly in the underground recesses of the coal pit than in the broad daylight above ground.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, what is striking about Lawrence’s record of the mining village are the painstaking details of his childhood memories—not only of his father the miner, but of the entire village. And yet, what is even more striking is the critical distance from the mining community at which Lawrence positions himself. At times the essay reads very much like a non-participant ethnography, and there is a conscientious attempt to analyze the community and its people impartially. There is no ready idealization of either the people or the mining village. While recognizing the coal mining industry as a source of communal life as well as livelihood in the “instinctive” sense of comradeship among its laborers, Lawrence is careful to caution against the danger inherent in working in the industry and getting locked in a passive as opposed to an active form of life.<sup>34</sup> And time and again, Lawrence critiques the “pettiness and paltriness” of individualistic villagers—

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<sup>33</sup> D.H. Lawrence, “Nottingham and the Mining Countryside,” pp. 290.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 290.

going so far as to call for a sense of civic responsibility following in the tradition of “Rome, Athens, or even Paris.”

For Lawrence, the potential danger of getting mired in a passive form of life had to do with the lack of civic infrastructure that would enable the laborers to expand their creative energy beyond the level of individual material acquisition. He argues that it is only by revitalizing the “instinct of community” among the laboring population through formation of a civic society and articulation of social interests that they can emerge as true modern citizens. In Lawrence’s social vision, then, engagement in collective life—that is, democratization—had to attend the process of industrialization. Democratization and industrialization had to be executed in tandem. This point is especially useful for Paik in forging his critique against the social disengagement that informed the discourse of “petty-bourgeois consciousness” in the 1960’s milieu.

Just as it would have been nonsensical, even impossible, for the coal miners to reject industry to pursue solidarity in the name of democracy in Lawrence’s time, it would be just as insufficient to reject social welfare in Paik’s time in the name of pursuing freedom from the authoritarian government. And just as Lawrence prescribes the “bigger gesture of the citizen” to counter alienating aspects of industrialization through unified, cohesive workers’ movements, Paik likewise argues for the necessity of reviving the moral obligation as “citizens” (*simin*)—that is, the mutual responsibility for societal welfare—as an indispensable part of achieving a democratic society in the wake of the incomplete revolution of 4.19 and the subsequent onset of state-led industrialization. Contrary to the propaganda of the authoritarian state, democratization need not and should not be an *alternative to* industrialization, as articulated by Lawrence.



After all, Paik would argue, democracy entailed more than just meditating on one's individual liberty and disengaging from collective life.

Already in the earliest stages of Paik's career, we witness the attempts to address the necessity of pursuing industrialization and democratization concurrently. That he draws upon Lawrence's understanding of industrialization both as a condition to live with and a problem to be critiqued suggests Paik's incipient interest in what he in later years would formulate as *ijung kwaje*, or the "double project of at once learning to live with and trying to overcome the given reality."<sup>35</sup> Invested as he was in industrializing the nation and modernizing the country, Paik was against an all-out attack on the very notions of "growth" (*sŏngjang*) and "development" (*kaebal*).<sup>36</sup> Paik's call for a "civic consciousness" (*simin ūisik*) that embodies the spirit of the French Revolution, the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement of 1919, as well as the April 19<sup>th</sup> uprising of 1960<sup>37</sup> must be seen in light of his attempt to counter the celebration of "petty-bourgeois consciousness" (*sosimin ūisik*) by writers and intellectuals of the 4.19 generation. It was not enough to simply deplore alienation and apathy as inevitable effects of industrialization. At the same time, in the context of the late 1960s, when the very idea of "literature of engagement" was getting increasingly suppressed by the authoritarian regime, "citizens' literature" was the name through which Paik sought to channel the energy for social protest against the oppressive, increasingly unconstitutional measures of the state.

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<sup>35</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "Coloniality in Korea and a South Korean Project for Overcoming Modernity," *Interventions* 2:1 (2000): pp. 80.

<sup>36</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "Pak Chŏnghŭi sidae rŭl ottŏkke saenggak halkka" [How are we to assess Park Chung Hee's era], *Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng* 33 (Summer 2005): pp. 291.

<sup>37</sup> In tracing moments where "civic consciousness" was witnessed in Korean history, Paik refers to the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement and the April 19<sup>th</sup> uprising as two major instances of civic consciousness. See Paik Nak-chung, "Simin munhaknon," pp. 495.

Lawrence's social vision on industrialization and democratization thus enabled Paik to mount a critique against both the "petty-bourgeois consciousness" of the disengaged intellectuals and the state mobilization of the populace in modernization in the context of the 1960s' South Korea. The idea of "double project" would resurface in Paik's criticism in the early 1980s, but this time, it would be within the context of adopting a proper Third World consciousness in carrying out anti-authoritarian democratization under Pax Americana.

### **Reading Lawrence Under Pax Americana – *Studies in Classic American Literature* and the Problem of Anti-Americanism**

The year 1982 witnessed a series of dramatic eruptions of the boiling tension between the rise of popular anti-Americanism and fortification of the ties between the South Korean regime and the U.S. government. On March 12<sup>th</sup> of that year, a group of underground student activists set fire to the U.S. Information Service building in the port city Pusan, largely in protest to what was perceived to be the United States' continued endorsement of South Korea's military authoritarianism. The decade of the 1980s had begun with the massacre of civilians in the city of Kwangju by South Korean soldiers, a military deployment that many Koreans believed would have been impossible without America's tacit consent. In the aftermath of Kwangju, South Koreans, especially on college campuses around the country, began to question the terms of the U.S. hegemony that the Cold War had occasioned and which had been largely taken for granted up until the end of the 1970s. In December of 1982, another group of activists set fire to a USIS

building again, this time in Kwangju. Against such flames of anti-American sentiment, in May of 1982 the South Korean and the U.S. governments celebrated the centennial anniversary of the Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation.<sup>38</sup> Amidst such fanfare and publicity, the celebration culminated in the unveiling of a towering monument, built atop a hill in Freedom Park in Incheon, where a statue of Douglas MacArthur, the former U.S. Commander of the Korean War, has also stood since 1957. And it is in the context of the simultaneous build-up of such antipodean sentiments about America that Paik chose to write about the status of the “American dream” as well as its life and death in American literature.

In “The American Dream and the Burden of American Literature” (1982),<sup>39</sup> Paik performs a close reading of Lawrence’s *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923). Pointing out key moments from Lawrence’s analyses of American literature from the earliest writings all the way up to the late nineteenth-century poetry, Paik traces a lineage of what he calls America’s “colonial mentality” and “nation-building mentality.” As I will go on to show in the following pages, Lawrence for the most part was deeply critical of what he calls the perpetual “American duplicity”—that is, the violent historical beginnings of America that had to be repressed for “American democracy” to take root as an idealized social vision. Quoting Lawrence’s analyses of such well-known writers as Ben Franklin, Edgar Allen Poe, and Herman Melville throughout his own essay, Paik probes into the myth of the American dream, and how American literature represents

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<sup>38</sup> Drafted in 1882, the Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation (*Chomi suho t’ongsang choyak*), also known as the Shufeldt Treaty, was agreed upon between Chosŏn Korea and the U.S. While the general purpose of the treaty was to promote amity and mutual assistance in case of attack, the actual terms of the treaty established trade rights for the U.S. as well as extraterritorial rights for U.S. citizens in Korea. It was the first instance of Korea’s diplomatic relations with the U.S.

<sup>39</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “*Miguk ūi kkum kwa miguk munhak ūi chim*” [The American dream and the burden of American literature], in *Minjok munhak kwa segye munhak II*, Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏngsa, 1985, pp. 204 – 243.

isolation and marginalization as tragic but necessary conditions of achieving that dream.

For instance, Paik quotes at length Lawrence's analysis of *Moby Dick*:

America!

Three giant harpooners to spear the great white whale.

1. Queequeg, the South Sea Islander [...]
2. Tashtego, the Red Indian of the sea-coast [...]
3. Daggoo, the huge black negro.

There you have them, three savage races, under the American flag,  
[...] In a mad ship, under a mad captain, in a mad, fanatic, hunt.

For what?

For Moby Dick, the great white whale.

But splendidly handled. Three splendid mates. The whole thing *practical*,  
eminently *practical* in its working. *American industry!*

And all this *practicality* in the service of a mad, mad chase.<sup>40</sup>

Lawrence's decoding of this American literary classic in terms of racial hierarchy, madness, and oppression in the name of "practicality" or "efficiency" enables Paik to mount an intervention against the interpretive framework that hitherto had governed both the critical and popular reception of the so-called "great American classics," the effect of which, Paik contends, fell short of fundamentally interrogating the hegemony of the American dream.<sup>41</sup> In this passage, we can see how the racial and class differences between the harpooners and the mad Quaker captain are all subsumed under the Stars and Stripes sign of the American flag, the sign of freedom and equality for all – and all in the name of "practicality" that is the basic underlying principle of "American industry." Pitted against these two long-cherished values of the American dream is the enormously insane project represented by the whale hunt. The racial hierarchy on the ship goes unseen in the "splendidly" swift handling of the mad project.

The American dream, as James Truslow Adams once laid out in 1931, is "that dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the

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<sup>40</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, London: Penguin Books, 1923, pp. 158-9.

<sup>41</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "Miguk ūi kkum kwa miguk munhak ūi chim," pp. 220.

fullest stature of which they are innately capable, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.” In the post-1945 world order, the American dream was the worldview that legitimated the American leadership in the “Free World” commonwealth of non-communist nations, a developmentalist narrative couched in the language of hope and promise that seemed to secure peace, prosperity, and most importantly, democracy for all who sided with the U.S.<sup>42</sup> And in the context of South Korea in the 1960s and 70s, a nation that had to double and triple its labors in proving itself as a U.S. ally in order to defend itself against the communist North Korea, the American dream was that much more contagious—tethering itself to conservatives and progressives alike, infecting dreams of industrialization and democracy equally. The romance of the American dream, which had to be that much more piquant in South Korea because of its political rivalry with the North, had the effect of occluding the actual role the U.S. was playing in sustaining the authoritarian regime in South Korea. And it was only in the post-Kwangju climate of the 1980s that anti-Americanism emerged as a discursive formation.

Paik’s motive behind writing about the ideology of the American dream, via Lawrence, in connection to South Korea’s relationship to the U.S. can be seen most clearly in the final few pages of the essay, where he stresses the importance of detecting within Lawrence’s reading the perspective of a “third-world” reader. Paik writes:

In his discussion of American literature, Lawrence shows *earnest interest* in the history of the U.S., an interest that *vibrates on the same wavelength with the position of the Third World* [...] Perhaps readers will feel that I have cited Lawrence much too often in these pages, but I did so because it is crucial for the readers to get as much exposure as possible to Lawrence in his own words [...]

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<sup>42</sup> James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America*, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1931, pp. 214-215.

to seek his assistance in *taking an autonomous approach* (*chuch'ejök chöpkün*) to American literature" (emphasis added).<sup>43</sup>

A curious double-sided move can be detected here. Why does Paik take Lawrence's work as a reader, and make it commensurate with the reading of American classics by a Third-World reader—case in point, a reader like Paik himself? What are the politics involved in this Lawrence-framed deconstructionist reading of American literature?<sup>44</sup>

In the context of the 1980s, anti-Americanism was a process of performing decolonization in South Korea. It involved "not only questioning the predominance of the cold-war mentality, but also questioning South Korea's uncritical adoption of capitalistic development."<sup>45</sup> This work, if successful, would be applicable not just to Korea but to other third-world nations as well. Here, by bringing in the voice of a first-world reader, Paik enables a re-articulation of decolonization as a process that must be undertaken not just by members of the third world, but by members of the first world as well. The interconnectedness that is so central to Paik's thinking about Korea and East Asia, and Korea and the world, can be felt here in his strategic deployment of Lawrence as an authoritative partner in establishing his intervention against the ideology of the American dream as well as the literary conventions of the first world.

At the same time, if Lawrence enables Paik to mount a critique of the American dream, Lawrence allows Paik to equally critique its extreme opposite as well—namely, what Paik diagnosed as zealous anti-Americanism. This can be detected most acutely in Paik's appraisal of Lawrence's *earnest interest* in America's history, which he reinforces even more powerfully in his concluding paragraph, calling it Lawrence's "*burning*

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<sup>43</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "Miguk ūi kkum kwa miguk munhak ūi chim," pp. 242.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 220.

<sup>45</sup> Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007, pp. 111.

*affection* for America's history." Throughout his analysis of Lawrence as a critic of American literary classics, Paik repeatedly contends that the most important feature about Lawrence's mode of reading is his attentiveness to the temporality and the historicity of each literary text that he attends to. But why was Paik's call for taking "earnest interest" in America's history an intervention against zealous anti-Americanism?

To get a better sense of what Paik means by Lawrence's attention to temporality and historicity of American literature, let us take a closer look at how Paik engages with Lawrence's reading of *Moby Dick*. For Lawrence, Paik argues, Melville's *Moby Dick* is far less a transcendental allegory of the danger in attempting to subjugate nature (the whale) to the will of humanity (Captain Ahab) as it had thus far been interpreted by First-World literary critics at large. "According to Lawrence," contends Paik, "*Moby Dick* is a story of the 'last ghastly hunt.' The *Pequod* is 'the ship of the white American soul.' And the white whale is the 'deepest blood-nature' of the white race that is hunted, hunted by the maniacal fanaticism of the white mental consciousness."<sup>46</sup> What Paik finds most fascinating about Lawrence's analysis is that the latter "was able to read between the lines what neither the writer himself (Melville) nor a vast majority of literary critics were able to grasp theretofore."<sup>47</sup> For Paik, the engine driving Lawrence's ingenious reading of *Moby Dick* was none other than the latter's "thoroughly scientific historical consciousness."<sup>48</sup> This is what enabled Lawrence to pierce through the veil of transcendental reading of American literature and see America for what it is. Embedded in Lawrence's analysis of the whale hunt as the "last" hunt by the white race is his diagnosis of the historical temporality, as opposed to a transcendental truth, in Melville's

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<sup>46</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "*Miguk ūi kkum kwa miguk munhak ūi chim*," pp. 232.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 232.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 210.

novel. When we juxtapose this analysis with the preceding analysis of the racial composition of the *Pequod* crew, which goes directly counter to the American ideals of liberty and equality for all, and the mad industry underway on the *Pequod*, we can see that *Moby Dick* for Lawrence becomes an account of the downfall of the American white race. Paik then utilizes Lawrence's historicized readings to make his most important point with regard to American literature: American literature, if read from the proper historical perspective as did Lawrence, provided honest accounts of the real American history that even challenge what the authors believe themselves to be saying through their writing.

In the early 1980s, what Paik diagnosed as “blind anti-Americanism and narrow-minded Third-Worldism” proliferated fast in South Korea in the name of decolonization from U.S. imperialism.<sup>49</sup> For Paik, this was more or less a nativist recourse, and not decolonization proper that would bring about a renewed awareness of the larger structure at work and, subsequently, the struggle for genuine democracy.

In this regard, Lawrence's careful reading of American literature—“the practice of *keen desire* for the history of America”—was an effective medium through which Paik could intervene against both the hegemony of the American dream as well as the anti-American sentiment building up in Korea. In calling out against “blind anti-Americanism” and “narrow-minded Third-Worldism,” there is no doubt that Paik was referring to, though only obliquely so, the USIS building incident that had taken the life of an innocent person.<sup>50</sup> Cautioning against anti-American sentiments was Paik's way of critiquing the violence inherent in zealous and impulsive reaction to the U.S. imperialism

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 244.

<sup>50</sup> In the March 1982 incident at the USIS building in Pusan, the fire inadvertently caused the death of a South Korean university student studying in the library of the building at the time.



as such. So herein lay the complexities within Paik's intervention: although he identified as a dissident broadly speaking, he was still against the nativist, or "Korean-style" opposition to the Cold War U.S. hegemony, which often turned radicals into nativists in search of the authentic. This was something Paik sought to counter by turning to Lawrence's reading of American literary classics.

Understanding the complexities of Paik's double-sided critique necessitates coming to terms with the fraught life and representations of democracy Cold War South Korea. To be sure, democracy was an aspiration, a universal value, but a universal articulated by America and equated with it. In other words, democracy was the mark of distinction separating the "Free World" in East Asia to the "Unfree" (read: Communist). And yet, as far as the successive military dictatorships that ruled South Korea from 1961 to 1987 under the banner of "Democracy, Korean-style"<sup>51</sup> were concerned, democracy was a terribly inefficient process, a roadblock to state-driven rapid industrialization. Here, then, was the central paradox. The rapid industrialization that would allow South Korea, as one of the four "little dragons" (Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore), to become part of the capitalist economic master plan of the American world order in East Asia would paradoxically be achieved by squashing, with repeated violence if necessary, the popular demand for democracy as a universal right guaranteed by Korea's membership in the Free World.

It was in the 1980s that this paradox would blow up and lead to anti-Americanism among radical students. In their minds, democracy was no longer a universal mediated by

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<sup>51</sup> On October 17, 1972, Park Chung Hee declared martial law and called for a program of "revitalizing reforms" (*yushin*). The Yushin Constitution abolished the judicial as well as legislative bodies and essentially allowed Park to rule indefinitely. Park attempted to legitimate his dictatorship by arguing that the decision will allow for a more efficient "Korean-style democracy" that will establish military security, expedite economic growth, and facilitate national reunification.

American values. As far as these dissidents were concerned, America was to be located on the side not of democracy, but of fascism and imperialism. Occupying the USIS building in Pusan again in 1986, for example, these protesters would call themselves democracy fighters in the name of anti-Americanism and anti-imperialism (Struggle for Anti-United States, Anti-fascist, and Autonomous Democratization).<sup>52</sup> Decoupled from America, democracy would become newly coupled with the Korean populace, the *minjung*, and in the context of the 1980s, guaranteed in blood by the Kwangju experience. In turn, the United States became “the main enemy of [their] struggle,” the greatest foreign imperialist threat to democracy on the Korean soil.<sup>53</sup> In its most extreme form, the ethno-cultural mode essentialized democracy as an ascribed status of the people of Kwangju.<sup>54</sup>

In this context too, however, Lawrence’s critical reading of American literature and his deconstruction of the American democratic ideals enable Paik to counter the nativist tendency forming among the dissidents, the binary relation being invoked between the duplicitous, foreign U.S. imperialists and the authentic, indigenous Korean *minjung*. Even in his most critical moments of “American duplicity,” Lawrence’s critiques are carefully mediated by a self-reflexive understanding of the inextricable relationship between Europe and America, and belief in the potential of America’s rebirth. Lawrence writes:

Perhaps at the Renaissance, when kingship and fatherhood fell, Europe drifted into a very dangerous half-truth: of liberty and equality. Perhaps the men who

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<sup>52</sup> In Korean, the group called itself Panmi Chajuhwa Panp’asyo Minjuhwa T’ujaeng Wiwŏnhoe, or Chamint’u for short.

<sup>53</sup> Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, pp. 124.

<sup>54</sup> Ch’oe Changjip et al, “Kwangju hangjaeng ūi yŏksajŏk sŏngkyŏk kwa p’alssip nyŏndae ūi panmi chajuhwa t’ujaeng” [The historical character of the Kwangju protest and the anti-American independence struggle], *Yŏksa pip’yŏng* 5 (1989): pp. 52.

went to America felt this, and so repudiated the old world together. Went one better than Europe. Liberty in America has meant so far the breaking away from *all* dominion. The true liberty will only begin when Americans discover IT, and proceed possibly to fulfil IT. IT being the deepest *whole* self of man, the self in its wholeness, not idealistic halfness.

[...]

The real American day hasn't begun yet. Or at least, not yet sunrise. So far it has been the false dawn [...] Democracy in America is just the tool with which the old master of Europe, the European spirit, is undermined. Europe destroyed, potentially, American democracy will evaporate. America will begin.<sup>55</sup>

Though liberty and equality have their place, Lawrence argues, they are only a “dangerous half-truth” when taken in their idealized isolation. While it cannot be denied that this “half-truth” became a device through which America repudiated against the oppressive parts of Europe, there is another half to the story, Lawrence contends – namely, that of the original Puritan settlers. America may have been founded upon ideals of individual freedom, but it was also a destination of Europeans seeking to escape the new freedoms of thought engendered by Enlightenment, as had been witnessed with the Puritan settlers who denied that freedom to those whose religious beliefs differed from their own. This is how the very purpose of democracy was defeated even from such incipient stages of its history in America, if ironically so. Lawrence’s critique of the fallibility inherent in American conception of liberty and equality is built upon his understanding of the patriarchal colonial power relations between Europe and America. There is a history that precedes the birth of America, a history of colonial entanglement that impacted how “American democracy” legitimated itself solely on the terms of “breaking away from *all* dominion.” But there is more to democracy than radical autonomy, Lawrence argues. Liberty and equality in this sense were only “half,” not “whole,” and “idealistic,” not practical.

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<sup>55</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, pp. 13-14.

The “whole” democracy—what “real American day” should bring—has yet to come. To see that day, Lawrence argues that “you have got to pull the democratic and idealistic clothes off American utterance, and see what you can of the dusky body of IT underneath.”<sup>56</sup> Only by peeling the rhetoric of democracy away from reality can one glimpse into the “American whole soul”—the oppressed and the oppressor, the colonized and the colonizer, the white European settlers and the indigenous peoples, the free and the unfree. For Lawrence, America encompassed all of that. And coming to self-awareness of America *as such* would be the beginning of its true democracy.

This Lawrence becomes the basis for Paik’s argument that America is not to be considered simply as an isolated phenomenon but that it must be seen as an integral part of a longer, broader history of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment. Lawrence’s anticipation for the “real American day” that is bound to come after the death of its “negative ideal of democracy”<sup>57</sup> becomes an effective gesture of hope through which to counter the growing anti-American resentment in South Korea that assumed U.S. to be an absolute symbol of capitalistic exploitation. As critical as he was of the hypocrisy of democratic ideals in the U.S. and the “white man’s” desire to control as he wishes in the name of “liberty,” Lawrence nonetheless sees in America the potential to be reborn as a “dusky” (as opposed to “white”) whole soul. If the sinking of the whaling ship in *Moby Dick* is an allegory of the fall of the “great white epoch,” the drowning of the “aberrant European” who took over another’s continent by force, what follows in the manner of

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 14.

<sup>57</sup> The “negative ideal of democracy” is, Lawrence writes, “straying and breaking away [...] escaping to some wild west” and “doing just what they like.” On true freedom, Lawrence writes, “men are free when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away. Men are free when they are obeying some deep, inward voice of religious belief. Obeying from within. Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, *believing* community, active in fulfilling some unfilled, perhaps unrealized purpose. Not when they are escaping to some wild west. The most unfree souls go west, and shout of freedom. Men are freest when they are the most unconscious of freedom.” See Ibid., pp. 12.

Walt Whitman's poetry is a "new Democracy of Comrades [...] the new cohering principle in the world: comradeship."<sup>5859</sup>

In the fall and renewal of America described by Lawrence as a site of perpetual struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed, the colonizers and the colonized, and competing meanings of freedom and democracy, Paik is able to discover points of connection between the U.S. and South Korea in the name of Third World anticolonial struggles. In asserting the existence of a Third World within the First World of the U.S., Paik invites his readers to complicate the antagonistic construction of dichotomy between the First and Third worlds that was functioning squarely within the discourse of democracy and decolonization in South Korea, and intervene against the tendency to essentialize the Kwangju experience in that regard.

### **Reading Lawrence in the Age of Neoliberalism—"Democracy after Democratization"**

In the preceding two sections, the discussion was focused on Paik's interventions with regard to democracy via Lawrence in pre-democratization South Korea. In June of 1987, a nationwide democracy movement brought the end to Chun Doo Hwan's military authoritarian regime, and South Koreans witnessed constitutional amendments that reinstated direct presidential elections, strengthening of civil rights, and reduction of presidential power—all of which were relics that had been kept in place since the onset of the Yusin Constitution in 1972. Indeed, it appeared that South Korea was finally

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp. 177.

<sup>59</sup> It is curious that, in relation to Whitman's concept of brotherly love as the bedrock of democracy, Lawrence calls him the "first white aboriginal." See Ibid., 182.

becoming a democratic nation wherein its people can exercise their rights as sovereign citizens.

Nevertheless, as political scientist Jang-jip Choi would argue in 2002, democracy in 21<sup>st</sup> century hardly seemed to live up to the promises of liberty, equality and fraternity that should have been delivered in 1987. This was the premise in his book *Democracy after Democratization: The Conservative Origin and Crisis of Democracy in South Korea* (2002), which gained much traction among intellectuals in South Korea since its initial publication. The 1987 democratization movement may have brought an end to overtly authoritarian regimes, Choi states, but its aftermath was much more grim than what the momentous event had seemed to guarantee. According to Choi, democracy in South Korea “has become a mere appendage to the existing structure of vested interests, politics an exclusive domain for upper class activities, and channels of political opposition to such a state repressed.”<sup>60</sup>

Such a treatise as Choi’s on the utter susceptibility of democracy to conservative forces is certainly not something exclusive to South Korea. In recent discourse on democracy there have been various criticisms produced with regard to the theory and practice of democracy, especially where politics is involved, and particularly so in the wake of neoliberalism and global capitalism. Some even go so far as to argue that democracy has become an effective philosophical cover for neoliberalist capitalism to reign throughout the world.<sup>61</sup> There is a growing consensus within and without Korea that

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<sup>60</sup> Choi Jang-jip, *Minjuhwa ihu ūi minjujuūi* [Democracy after de democratization: the conservative origin and crisis of democracy in South Korea], Seoul: Humanit’asū, 2002, pp. 24.

<sup>61</sup> Melissa Tandiwe Myambo, in her discussion of the paradoxical collusion between neoliberal capitalism and the new democratic constitution in post-apartheid South Africa, contends that while the philosophy of “belonging” inherent in the constitution enabled an “philosophical” intervention against racial discrimination, the ideals of racial equality (i.e., “the nation now belongs to both blacks and whites”) as set forth in the constitution did little to address actual race and class divisions that continued in the new

democracy, once a yearning and promise for all, has crumbled under the pressures of the global capitalist order and betrayed its faithful believers.

And indeed, the doomed feelings about the fallibility of democracy in the face of capitalism made their way into the South Korean terrain in a definitive way. The year 2011 was an especially eventful one in the South Korean politics. Following the resignation of the mayor of Seoul—a member of the conservative ruling Grand National Party (GNP)—and the subsequent victory of the civic activist lawyer Park Won-soon in the mayoral bi-election, the issue of expanding public welfare resurfaced. The resignation of the mayor of Seoul was a result of several major affairs, not the least of which was his refusal to endorse the city's spending on free school lunches for students. Not only did the election of a candidate initially independent of both the ruling conservative party and the opposition democratic party spell a sea change for the political establishment in general, but the election results as such also served as a clear indicator of the public's disillusionment with the existing political parties and their growing discontent with the economic disparity between the privileged few and the struggling many. The driving pressure behind the ruling as well as the oppositional parties' pledge to enact welfare reforms resonated heavily with the "1% vs. the 99%" slogan that was reverberating fast around the world following the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York City's financial district. In South Korea, too, addressing economic inequality had long become an almost-mandatory requirement for all politicians seeking voter approval and, in the face of a looming welfare issue on the agenda, "economic equality" became the ultimate

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neoliberal capitalist order. See Melissa Tandiwe Myambo, "Capitalism Disguised as Democracy: A Theory of 'Belonging,' Not Belongings, in the New South Africa," *Comparative Literature* 63:1 (2011): pp. 81.

goal of “democracy,” and “economic democratization” (*kyŏngje minjuhwa*) the means to achieving that democracy in the face of the neoliberal malaise.

It was at such a time of an ever more acute awareness of the need to address economic inequality in the political establishment that Paik once again turned to Lawrence, this time drawing his inspiration from “Democracy” (1919) and *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), where Lawrence engages with Walt Whitman’s democratic vision through the latter’s poem “Song of the Open Road.” But before proceeding to discuss what democracy entails, Paik borrows Lawrence’s critique of Whitman to lay down the foundations of what democracy *is not*. Paik begins by addressing Lawrence’s critique of Walt Whitman’s notion of the “principle of the average [person]” for which democracy exists. Against Whitman’s “Law of the Average,” Lawrence adamantly argues that while the basic material needs of all individuals in a society should be met, ultimately there is no such thing as an “Average.” “[Average] is a pure abstraction,” Lawrence contends, “the reduction of the human being to a mathematical unit.”<sup>62</sup> “Average” was only useful insofar as it provided a way of measuring the basic material resources necessary to survive. To idealize what was “one and all just contrivances for the supplying of the lowest material needs of a people” and to “mistake its other name ‘One Identity’ as the true identity are what gives rise to all the confusion and unhappiness of the modern world.”<sup>63</sup> The real essence of democracy – “new democracy,” as Lawrence would call it – lies elsewhere, as Paik quotes in length in his own essay:

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<sup>62</sup> D.H. Lawrence, “Democracy,” in *Selected Essays*, New York: Penguin Books, 1950, pp. 73.

<sup>63</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “D.H. Lorensū ūi minjujuūi ron,” *Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng* 154 (Winter 2011): pp. 390-391.



Where each thing is unique in itself, there can be no comparison made [...] When I stand in the presence of another man, and I am my own pure self, am I aware of the presence of an equal, or of an inferior, or of a superior? I am not. When I stand with another man, who is himself, and when I am truly myself, then I am only aware of a Presence, and of the strange reality of Otherness [...] So, we know the first great purpose of Democracy: that each man shall be spontaneously himself – each man himself, each woman herself, without any question of equality or inequality entering in at all; and that no man shall try to determine the being of any other man, or of any other woman.<sup>64</sup>

Even as he admits that some notion of equality is necessary to the extent that it provided the basic needs for all people, Lawrence believes that the discourse of equality can also bring about homogenization of human experience and itself turn dogmatic if it were to be taken non-critically as an absolute foundation for democracy.

But for Paik, what could such blunt critique of equality and “average” say about his political thinking? As anyone who is familiar with Paik’s social criticism over the past ten to fifteen years will know, Paik has commented on numerous occasions with regard to the issue of bipolarization, in particular with neoliberal policies that extend capitalist interests.<sup>65</sup> As with many other critics of his time, Paik is keenly aware of the devastating impact of the 1997 financial crisis, known as the IMF crisis, and the need to overcome the neoliberalism that has been aggravated by its onset.

At the same time, however, Paik is cautious to point out that a certain degree of disparity is inevitable given the global reality of free-market fundamentalism. “If there is

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 391.

<sup>65</sup> In an interview from 2006, Paik points to the problem of uneven development and modernization throughout different regions of South Korea as a key problematic aggravating the bipolarization. See Paik Nak-chung, and Kim Yongrak, “Int’öbyu – munhak esö t’ongillo” [From literature to reunification – an interview], in *Paek nakPaek nakch’öng hoehwarok 5* [Conversations of Paik Nak-chung, vol. 5], Paek nakPaek nakch’öng hoehwarok kanhaeng wiwönhoe ed., Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa pip’yöngsa, 2007, pp. 299-324; on several other occasions, Paik has also discussed socioeconomic disparity in connection to the division system of the Korean peninsula. No discussion of economic inequality, Paik contends, would be complete without consideration of the national division. See Paik Nak-chung et al., “Chwadam – pundan hyönsil manggak han yanggükhwa nonüi nün konghö – yuk il-oh sidae üi hanbando ödiro kana” [Discussion of bipolarization in neglect of the division reality is useless], in *Paek nakPaek nakch’öng hoehwarok 5*, pp. 208 – 236.

to be a revolution that is successful in overturning this global trend,” Paik remarks, “it shall be second only to the first civilian revolution in history.”<sup>66</sup> Therefore, Paik argues, while economic fairness is something that must be addressed, it is neither possible nor desirable to assign an arbitrary notion of equality in the age of advanced capitalism. For Paik, as he contends in line with Lawrence, the true purpose of democracy is not to guarantee a redistribution of wealth in the mode of radical egalitarianism in the name of fighting the neoliberal malaise. Therefore, assessing the success or failure of implementing democracy in the nation should not proceed in the form of measuring whether or not it was successful in countering the effects of market-driven economy.<sup>67</sup>

Was democratization in South Korea a “success” or a “failure”? In the wake of the IMF crisis in the mid-to-late 1990s, this had become the central question for politicians and critics and writers, boring through the heart of all discussions on the past, present, and future of South Korean democracy. The same question, in addition to framing democratization in a “success” vs. “failure” paradigm, also invoked different interpretations of how to periodize democratization and by what measures to assess it. What happened in the two and a half decades following the victorious June Uprising in 1987? The former president Roh Mu-hyun had once described the June uprising as a “half-victory,” and democratic revolution “at an unfinished state.”<sup>68</sup> And the conservative forces, while making no mention of the first ten years of the post-1987 era, call the period between 1997 and 2007—that is, the years under the opposition party leaders Kim Dae

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<sup>66</sup> Paik Nak-chung, and Kwŏn T’aesŏn, “Taadam: Hanguk sahoe mirae nonjaeng,” in *Paek nakch’ŏng hoehwarok* 5, pp. 559.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> “Roh Mu-hyun taet’ongnyŏng ‘6.10 minju hangjaeng kinyŏnmsik’ sa chŏnmun” [The complete text of president Roh Mu-hyun’s June Uprising memorial address], June 10 2007, accessed March 1, 2016, [http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS\\_Web/View/at\\_pg.aspx?CNTN\\_CD=A0000415543](http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000415543).

Jung and Roh Mu-hyun's administrations—"the lost decade."<sup>69</sup> Conservative and opposition alike, the legacy of democratization generated reactions of disappointment and skepticism for the most part. The dismal assessment of the state of democracy in South Korea was certainly not restricted to politicians vying for electoral votes. In the face of the neoliberalism, intellectuals rushed to make pronouncements on the doomed fate of democracy, one of the most vehement critiques emerging from, as we saw in the beginning of this section with Choi Jang-jip.

That such grim retrospection and grievances abound demand from us a careful consideration of the different expectations that people held with regard to post-democratization democracy and the ways in which that discussion has been framed. We notice that the discussion is dichotomized into either a success or a failure. Both the conservative and opposition parties were deploying the fact of prevalent socioeconomic inequality in light of the IMF crisis to rally support for their own party. Even the opposition party expressed doubt about whether or not the democratic movement of 1987 really brought about genuine democracy in the nation. Pointing to the "conservatism at the heart of the democratization" in South Korea, leading intellectuals such as Choi were pointing to the existence of a façade of democracy that hides the attempt of corporatist forces to redirect wealth toward an increasingly small elite.<sup>70</sup> Democratization of 1987 is what effectuated such a smoke screen, so to speak, that merely functioned to diffuse direct political action and prevent people from exercising power.

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<sup>69</sup> "Toech' ajün sibnyön? Iröbörin sibnyön? ... Chöngch'ikwön nonjaeng kayöl" [Ten years recovered or ten years lost? The debate gets heated in the political realm], June 10, 2007, accessed March 1, 2016, [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics\\_general/215025.html](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics_general/215025.html).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 249.

Given the context of such pessimistic diagnoses, what critical language was Paik able to draw from Lawrence, and how did this language enable him to re-imagine democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century South Korean society? What Paik finds most provocative from Lawrence emerges out of the latter's reading of Whitman's poem. Calling the 19<sup>th</sup> century poet as America's "first white aboriginal," Lawrence praises Whitman for conceptualizing democracy as an "open road," which Paik quotes in his article as the following:

The Open Road. The great home of the Soul is the open road. Not heaven, not paradise. Not 'above'. Not even 'within'. The soul is neither 'above' nor 'within'. It is a wayfarer down the open road.  
[...] The true democracy, where soul meets soul, in the open road [...] Not by anything, but just itself. The soul passing unenhanced, passing on foot and being no more than itself. And recognized, and passed by or greeted according to the soul's dictate. If it be a great soul, it will be worshipped in the road.  
[...] Democracy: a recognition of souls, all down the open road, and a great soul seen in its greatness, as it travels on foot among the rest, down the common way of living. A glad recognition of souls, and a gladder worship of great and greater souls; because they are the only riches.<sup>71</sup>

Though it is a singular image, the trope of the open road, where individuals walking along greet each other in the name of fraternity while recognizing each other's differences, allows one to imagine democracy in open-ended terms. It provides an illustration of the possibility of movement and potential for politicization in the very act of walking and opening of the self to another. That such democracy happens neither in "heaven" nor "paradise," but along the "open road" as an everyday reality suggests that democracy should not be imagined as an idealized abstraction; doing so would only set one up for betrayal of such fixed ideal. While the recognition of souls "not by anything, but just by itself" refer to aspirations for a more just society and rejection of arbitrary

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<sup>71</sup> D.H. Lawrence, as quoted in Korean translation by Paik in Paik Nak-chung, "D.H. Lorensũ ũi minjujuũ ron," pp. 396, quoted from the English original. See D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Studies*, pp. 181 – 186.

domination by aristocracy, birth, or inheritance, the imagery of the people as “wayfarers down the open road” allows for an articulation of democracy as an inherently, even necessarily, uncompletable project. This, again, is the reason why Lawrence rejects Whitman’s idea of the “Average” and “One Identity,” as they are conceptually incompatible with the idea of the “open road” and its celebratory gesture toward differences. These concepts, in fact, will abort the project of democracy.

How compatible is Lawrence’s democratic vision in Paik’s own time and place? To answer this question, we would have to pose another: where does Paik locate democracy in South Korea? Paik locates the core of democracy not in the group of capitalist elites occupying the state administration, but among the protesters at work *in the streets*. Accordingly, Paik draws our attention to the candlelight protests<sup>72</sup> that rippled through Seoul and other major cities throughout the nation in 2008 in the wake of Lee Myung-bak regime’s railroading of the US-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) ratification bill.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, in several ways the candlelight protests were the most technically-savvy and penetrating social movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Korea.<sup>74</sup> “On some level,” Paik contends, “*the pioneers* of the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ protests arising in various parts of the world are really the candlelight masses of South Korea, and the social grievances that have grown all the more acute in the domestic political scene in light of

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<sup>72</sup> Though commonly remembered as a series of protests primarily against the import of U.S. beef and the danger of mad cow disease, the candlelight protests were actually spawned by the cries of female middle school students against a series of proposed educational reforms designed to further increase competition among students. An item of particular discontent was the Lee administration’s plans to privatize the educational sector, which could bring about longer hours in school as well as an overall decline in the quality of learning environment. The almost concurrent announcement of privatization of education and the U.S. beef import by the Lee Myung-bak administration doubly fueled the dissent among the young students, prompting them to chant the slogan “No Mad Education, No Mad Cows.”

<sup>73</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “D.H. Lorensū ūi minjujuūi ron,” pp. 403.

<sup>74</sup> The organizers and participants of the candlelight protest effectively utilized Internet-based communication technologies such as blogs and digital messaging to encourage people to join. During the protest, which lasted for almost three months between June and August of 2008, the rallies were recorded and aired live by protesters themselves through web-based video sharing platforms.

the ‘candlelight’ are also the grievances of the world” (emphasis added).<sup>75</sup> Indeed, for Paik, the candlelight protests did not necessarily entail that democracy in South Korea was any less effective or any more “abnormal” than other parts of the world. By calling the candlelight protesters as “pioneers” to the much-publicized and highly popular Occupy Wall Street movement, Paik reorients the discourse on democracy and positions it in line with what was happening in the world—namely, the horizontal organization of people in a political protest directly against structural inequality. In some sense, therefore, what was happening in the South Korean domestic political scene was part and parcel of what was ongoing in many other parts of the world inflicted with excesses of capitalism, where an increasing number of people begin to question the effectiveness of their public institutions.

Lawrence’s invocation of democracy in the style of Whitmanesque “open road” therefore allowed Paik to re-envision democracy, and make sense of the transformations taking place in South Korean protest culture in a post-authoritarian, internet-driven age. It also enabled Paik to re-align South Korea’s democracy alongside other democratic struggles around the world, to highlight the potential for a grassroots democracy that was non-violent, sustainable, and gradual in its social transformation. This was not to say that the potential for participatory democracy that was witnessed in the 2008 candlelight protests or the Occupy Wall Street movements were readily translatable into radical systemic reforms in the immediate foreseeable future, and Paik was certainly aware of this as well. Nevertheless, at the heart of genuine reform of the existing political system lay voluntary political participation of the people—hence the recognition of the potency inherent in candlelight protests for transformation into a popular democracy.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 403.

In the short three years from 2008 to 2011, the political scene in South Korea witnessed several key moments including a new president (Lee Myung-bak) of the conservative party entering into office in 2008, the candlelight protests against Lee administration's undemocratic passing of the FTA bill, and a civic activist/independent candidate getting re-elected as the capital's new mayor to replace the former major of the conservative party. Even glossing over just a few of these events makes it hard to deny that time was ripe for discussing radical reform of the very political itself in order to correct the structural inequality that had seeped into every aspect of the people's lives. That South Korea can claim the unenviable status of having the highest suicide rate among OECD nations only makes it more difficult to deny the necessity for political transformation. But Paik asks—will transition to popular democracy itself bring about such equality? And how are we to proceed in achieving popular democracy and its dreams of a more horizontal society?

In answering this question, Paik again turns to Lawrence—this time, to the writer's essay "Education of the People"<sup>76</sup>—and contends that what needs to be explored first are "the process of self-cultivation and the formation of an political order alternative [to the existing system]." Building on Lawrence's broader principle for "leaving the child alone," Paik reasons that "[a child left alone] is bound to learn for oneself and will find the path of education that is right for one's own 'life-quality.'"<sup>77</sup> Fixation over an arbitrary designation of "economic equality" is not a desirable long-term solution that

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<sup>76</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 139.

<sup>77</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "D.H. Lorensŭ ūi minjujuŭi ron," pp. 407.

will ultimately lead to direct governance, and even risks feeding into the conservative forces' capitalization upon the immediate livelihood of the public.<sup>78</sup>

Better self-education for a better democracy—though this is admittedly a truism, we might note the clear element of enlightenment in Paik's prescription, in a way that perhaps may not even seem to be technically advanced enough to deal with the complex challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century neoliberal South Korea. But I would like to suggest that it is through such seemingly truistic prescription that Paik grounds his call for consolidation of popular opposition that was witnessed in the candlelight protests—the grievances of which were indeed reflected in the mayoral bi-election, that is, in the very stuff of the government. At the same time, as much potential as there was in the recent outbursts for democratic reforms and socioeconomic justice, Paik was keenly aware that such popular opposition, as Nancy Fraser puts it, often falls short of “[coalescing] around a solidaristic alternative, despite intense and ephemeral outbursts, such as Occupy and the *indignados* [in Spain].”<sup>79</sup> Here, again, Paik turns to Lawrence, quoting him as the following: “There must be a system. There must be a classes of men; there must be differentiation; either that, or amorphous nothingness. The true choice is not between system and no system. The choice is between system and system, mechanical or organic.”<sup>80</sup>

In this way, engaging with Lawrence's double-sided political view—namely, his critique of both the undemocratic vices of the state as well as the shortcomings of individual freedom gained in resisting that existing system—offers Paik a way to push for

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<sup>78</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *Paek nakch'ong yi taechonhwanüi kirül mutta: kün chökgongül wihan chönmunga ch'irin int'öbyu* [The road to grand transformation: Paik Nak-chung interviews seven experts], Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yöngsa, 2015, pp. 39-40.

<sup>79</sup> Nancy Fraser, “Triple Movement? Parsing the Politics of Crisis after Polyani,” *New Left Review* 81 (2013): pp. 121.

<sup>80</sup> As quoted by Paik in Paik Nak-chung, “D.H. Lorensü üi minjujuüi ron,” pp. 407. The original is from D.H. Lawrence, *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, pp. 111.



the importance of striking the right balance between resistance against and acceptance of the existing system. There were pragmatic constraints that inevitably had to be addressed in bringing about sustainable, realistic reform of the existing structures. For Paik, the idea was to shore up the importance of maintaining both a sense of individual freedom and social belonging in order to counter both the impasse of the radical left's resistance to the existing structures as well as the impasse of the new right's neoliberal policies such as drastic reduction of social welfare budget. From the earliest days of his career in the late 1960s to the late years of his career in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, democracy conceived by Paik was strongly participatory in nature, with keen emphasis on placing active obligations on the people as citizens.

At the same time, as committed as Paik is to calling for a sustainable reform of the existing political structure by way of participatory democracy, it is difficult to dismiss the resounding tension between his simultaneous skepticism about equality as well as unchecked liberty. As is evident in his deployment of Lawrence, Paik is ambivalent about affording an absolute status to the principle of basic equality at the cost of compromising fundamental liberties. At least on a cursory examination, it seems untimely, even uncharacteristic, of Paik—a consummate activist who built his career upon calling for literature of engagement against social injustice in the 1970s and 80s—to reassert liberty over equality in the face of neoliberal onslaught. Indeed, by the end of Paik's treatise on post-1987 democracy in South Korea, what remains unresolved in his thought is the tension between the individual and the collective, and the dynamic between participation of individuals as citizens and social obligations of the state.

## Practicing Dissidence in Cold War South Korea – Reading Lawrence Against the Cold War Logic of Identification

Thus far, this chapter discussed three occasions (1969, 1982, and 2011) on which Paik engaged with writings by Lawrence with respect to key moments in the history of South Korea's path to democracy. There are three major angles from which Paik reads Lawrence: 1) as a social critic of his own time and place, as can be seen in Lawrence's critique of the mining village in the Midlands of England; 2) as a literary critic as seen with his *Studies in Classic American Literature*; and 3) as a political critic, as is witnessed in his critique of Whitman's democracy. Indeed, for Paik, Lawrence was a highly versatile figure, applicable to a variety of contexts. Even to this day, the question resounds as to how "effective" Lawrence is in Paik's development of his own thinking. As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, it is difficult to pin down not only the literary persona of Lawrence, but his political and ideological personas as well. Was he a realist or a modernist? Was he for or against democracy? What was the nature of his relation to the English industrial society in which he had been born and raised? Lawrence's reception was highly divisive among critics of his time as well as of later times—ranging from those who find the explicit sexuality either controversial or downright offensive to those who find his politics perplexing, that is, siding with neither the working class nor the aristocrats.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Lawrence was an "outsider," as John Worthen succinctly puts it, "'nowhere' in the middle-class literary world of early twentieth-century England; but he was equally out of place in [the mining] village in the

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<sup>81</sup> See Louise Welsh, "Introduction," in D.H. Lawrence, *Selected Stories*, London: Penguin Books, 2007, pp. xiv – xxii.

English midlands where he had been born.”<sup>82</sup> He was a writer whose “strange fictions,” to borrow Fernihough’s expressions, persistently thwarted attempts to categorize him according to Western literary trajectory, such that “reading and writing about Lawrence can be a bewildering and often problematic enterprise.”<sup>83</sup>

But what emerges out of Paik’s readings is that it was precisely Lawrence’s torn loyalty between divergent social classes, his fluctuation between different literary traditions, and his uncertainty about the political ideals of either democracy or fascism that proved the most useful for the critic’s articulation of his dissident thinking. The provenance of Lawrence in Paik’s own work is indispensable to understanding the long battle waged by Paik over the past five decades—namely, the battle against what Namhee Lee terms the “narrative of dichotomies” informing the politics of engagement in Cold War South Korea. Be it “authoritarianism versus democracy, dominance versus resistance, enemy versus friend, and the competitiveness of capitalism versus the cooperation of the *minjung*,” to name just a few, the struggle for a more democratic, more livable society operated along the fixed binary logic of Cold War identification that effaced the complexities in diverse modes of dissidence.<sup>84</sup> The modern West simultaneously celebrated itself as the “Free World” and denounced the non-West as a realm of despotism. Such hegemony of the modern West only reinforced the polarities that defined the contours of decolonization and democratization in the southern half of a nation divided along ideological lines. Given this context, Lawrence proved to be particularly

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<sup>82</sup> John Worthen, *D.H. Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider*, Cambridge: Counterpoint, 2005, pp. xxi.

<sup>83</sup> Here, Fernihough is referring to what many literature scholars to date have referred to as Lawrence’s proto-fascist leanings, misogynist tendencies, and the primitivization of non-western cultures. See Anne Fernihough, “Introduction,” pp. 1-5.

<sup>84</sup> Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, pp. 294.

useful for Paik in unsettling the binary oppositions deeply entrenched in the culture of democratization and political protests in South Korea.

As I have tried to show in this chapter, as committed as he was to resuscitating means of social engagement in the context of anti-communist South Korea, Paik always kept one eye turned toward critiquing the very actors of social movements and political protests precisely for what he diagnosed as a penchant for interpreting and conceptualizing repression and liberty in starkly dichotomous terms. Here, we might recall that Lawrence himself was ambivalent about the potential pitfalls of “modern democracy”—in particular the susceptibility of democracy to different political ideologies that attempted to appropriate its principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity exclusively as their own goals.<sup>85</sup> The complex writer who embraced both modern notion of individuality as well as traditional modes of communality, industrialization as well as democratization, totalitarianism as well as democracy, realist as well as modernist aesthetics was a prime figure through which Paik was able to induce reflection upon modes of dissidence in Cold War South Korea.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Lawrence’s pessimism about the fallibility of democracy had much to do with his disillusionment with the state of England and the world at large during World War I, an event during which he believed the world superpowers fanned intolerance in the name of a crusade for democracy. Lawrence writes: “Men have reached the point where, in further fulfilling their ideals, they break down the living integrity of their being and fall into sheer mechanical materialism. They become automatic units, determined entirely by mechanical law [...] This is horribly true of modern democracy—socialism, conservatism, bolshevism, liberalism, republicanism, communism: all alike. The one principle that governs all *isms* is the same: the principle of the idealized unit, the possessor of property.” See D.H. Lawrence, *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, pp. 81.

<sup>86</sup> Paik also writes of Lawrence as a thinker who is perpetually on the fence about revolution in the name of democracy, as in the following passage: “No discussion of the ‘fascist’ aspects of [Lawrence’s novel] *The Plumed Serpent* will go very far so long as it rests on the kind of self-deception about ‘Western Democracies’ that Eliot criticizes, or on a naïve acceptance of fascism at its face value. Which may indeed be why consideration of the novel’s politics has scarcely gone beyond ‘fascism’ to the probably more relevant subject of the movements for national liberation and revolutionary upheavals in the Third World—phenomena which except to the most ardent partisans of bourgeois democracy are distinct from fascism, yet which also contain, except in the estimate of their more doctrinaire advocates, possibilities of fascist or quasi-fascist deterioration.” See Paik Nak-chung, *A Study of The Rainbow and Women in Love*:

Analyzing Paik's reading of Lawrence enables us to see that at the heart of Paik's critical thought is a keen awareness that striving solely for ideals and resisting through absolute, radical means the forms of state repression. To a significant extent, this had to do with Paik's awareness of the deeply entrenched capitalist world-system, the contradictions of which manifested most perceptively through the division system on the very peninsula of Korea. What we must embark on is an admittedly long-term but gradual and sustainable struggle against the hegemonic world-system—hence his call for what he has termed as *pyŏnhyŏkjŏk chungdojuŭi*, or transformational centrism. Paik writes:

What we need is a middle course with principles, a middle course that embodies knowledge and experience, as well as keen faculty for executing that course. I propose the middle course not simply because there are a vast number of people occupying the middle zone, but because, insofar as we are living in the reality of the peninsula's division, no extreme course of thought or action will ever be able to cast off the yokes and shackles inflicting the lives of North and South Koreans. 'Transformational centrism' is my conceptualization of such realization.<sup>87</sup>

And yet, it is precisely on this account that Paik's brand of commitment is criticized from both ends of the political spectrum. For the conservatives, Paik's notion of transformation by way of "civic participation" (*simin ch'amyŏ*) spells the possibility of new social movements aimed at changing the status quo and increasing equity, while for the radical left Paik's coinage of "transformational centrism" itself simply appears as an utopian paradox. That Paik espoused a common horizon where the best of both worlds may be found—that is, modernizing but not losing sight of communality, democratizing but not imposing a reductive sense of oneness—did not sit well with individuals on either

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*Expressions of D.H. Lawrence's Thinking on Modern Civilization*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, Cambridge, 1972.

<sup>87</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *Ōdiga chungdomyŏ ōjjaesŏ pyŏnhyŏk inga* [Where is the middle road and why is it a transformation?], Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏngsa, 2009, pp. 272-273.

ends of the spectrum. And although this is put forth as a pragmatic intervention to the unbearable tension between ideological bipolarism in Korea, even Paik himself is somewhat doubtful of the immediate utility of his concept; no sooner does he envision the “middle road” positively, than he undercuts it with the question of whether or not, and how, the majority of Koreans will partake in such a drawn-out social movement.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, it is possible to detect residual anxiety in Paik’s own assertion: how are we to re-establish the grounds of transformation in a nation whose conditions of everyday life have been exhaustively framed in terms of revolutions, rebellions, or resistance? This is a question that would resurface time and again in Paik’s oeuvre. As we shall see again with Paik’s reading of Immanuel Wallerstein in Chapter Four, the concept of “a middle road” that ultimately leads to a “transformation” will form the foundational bedrock of Paik’s thinking on the division system.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 275.

## CHAPTER 2

### Between Critique and Affirmation: the Problem of *Minjung* in Paik's Reading of Pang Yöngung's *The Story of Pun 'ye* (1967)

#### **The Emergence of *Ch'angbi* and *The Story of Pun 'ye* (1967)**

Born atop a pile of feces and named after the degrading circumstance of her birth, Pun'ye is the tragic heroine of Pang Yöngung's debut novel serialized in *Ch'angbi* in 1967. The ignominious circumstance of her birth only presages a life of utter and unspeakable hardship. After being raped by a distant relative, Pun'ye is sold off in marriage by her own father, and later abused by her gambling husband. *The Story of Pun 'ye* charts the rural woman's subsequent, gradual descent into madness and her ultimate disappearance from the village. "Tongye is a human being who is, [as the name implies], as low as dung, whose life has become so by way of fate," wrote Pang in the postscript to the first edition of the novel.<sup>89</sup> "Some years back when I first heard there was a woman by the name of 'Tongye', I felt something fill me completely—because there are simply too many people on this land whose fate resembled hers."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> In the title of the Korean original text, the protagonist's name is written as Pun'ye, where "*pun*" is the Chinese character meaning "excrement," but in the novel she is called "Tongye," where "tong" is the vernacular Korean for "*pun*."

<sup>90</sup> Pang Yöngung, "Pullyegi ch'op'an hugi" [Author's postscript to the first edition of *The Story of Pun 'ye*], in *Pullyegi*, Seoul: Hongik ch'ulp'ansa, 1967, pp. 8.

Initially a short story, *The Story of Pun 'ye* was Pang's unsuccessful entry for a rookie writers' contest sponsored by a literary magazine called *Sedae*. The story failed to impress the judges, but it was then that the entry was passed on to Paik, then the editor-in-chief of the newly founded *Ch'angbi*. And against the reservations expressed by the publisher of the quarterly about financing the serialization of a novel-length work by a complete unknown, Paik urged Pang to expand the story into a novel, and ensured that it would see the light of day in the space of his magazine. Thus began the three-part serialization of what would come to be known as Pang's most famous novel to date. And proving the gun-shy publisher wrong, the work raised the profile of Paik's fledgling quarterly as well, causing a stir upon its first appearance in the pages of *Ch'angbi*, and enjoying an enduring popularity thereafter, as attested by multiple television and film adaptations of the novel, as well as the novel's subsequent reprints.

However, in the South Korean literary field of the time, Paik's enthusiasm for *The Story of Pun 'ye* left many critics rather puzzled, if not positively baffled. The puzzlement mainly arose from what these critics perceived as a conspicuous discrepancy between the critic, Paik, who had developed a reputation as an advocate of literature as a means of social intervention, and what they saw as the novel's notable absence of historicity. The temporal markers necessary in a work of literature to effect a critical commentary on social realities were hardly visible. The bewilderment was also indicative of how the critics understood the very character of *Ch'angbi*.<sup>91</sup>

Given the context surrounding the birth of *Ch'angbi*, it was no wonder that the one question that dogged Pang had to do with why the text seemed so devoid of any signs

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<sup>91</sup> For an explanation of how and why *Ch'angbi* effected a paradigmatic shift at the time of its birth in 1966, see the introduction chapter.



of historical or social consciousness. Such was the situation at the time of the novel's initial serialization, as Pang would recall several decades later, in spite of the connection that Pang made between the fate of a woman “as low as dung” and “people on this land” in his postscript. Among the many critics who expressed either casual disregard or explicit dislike of the novel, its immense popularity among general readers was to be read not as a sign of its contemporariness but rather its opposite, eliciting the response that the story “fell behind the times and did not resonate at all with the modern problems of Korean society.”<sup>92</sup> In a story that narrates the wretched life of an illiterate woman—who could just as easily have been an eighteenth-century woman as a twentieth—set amidst the shamanic customs and “shabbiness” still intact in a traditional rural village, critics read abominable “timelessness” rather than progress of history, the dark abyss of the past which could occasion neither reflection nor redemption.<sup>93</sup> The mercilessly detailed portraits of the hopeless lives of the rural poor consolidated the “aesthetics of the pathological” or “aesthetically unhealthy.”<sup>94</sup> The explicit representations of sexual acts and the novel's heavily scatological imagination came under attack by those who problematized “obscenity” (*oesŏlsŏng*) in literature.

While Paik conceded to the ahistoricity argument, Paik remained a staunch champion of the author, arguing that the novel displayed “objective” and “healthy”

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<sup>92</sup> Sŏnu Hwi and Paik Nak-chung, “*Chakka Sŏnu Hwi wa maju antta—munhak ũi hyŏnsil ch'amyŏ rŭl chungsimŭro*” [Sitting across from writer Sŏnu Hwi—on literature's engagement with reality], in *Paek nakch'ŏng hoehwarok 1*, pp. 37.

<sup>93</sup> Paik himself appears to have been aware of the fact that Pang's novel would not have been welcomed in the existing literary field of the time. Two years after the first installment of *The Story of Pun'ye*, Paik would speculate upon the possible cause for the cold reception of the novel as symptomatic of “the literary field's force of habit.” See Paik Nak-chung, “Ch'angjakkwa pip'yŏng' yinyŏn pan” [Creation and criticism at two and a half years], *Ch'angjakkwa pip'yŏng* 10 (Summer 1968): p. 369.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 373.

depictions of the countryside.<sup>95</sup> Paik would go on to assert that Pang's work was marked by a refusal to give into the dual temptation, so common to urban intellectuals where depictions of the rural population was concerned, to ridicule or romanticize the countryside.

A cursory survey of the various characters that populate the pages of *The Story of Pun'ye* would prompt the reader to side with Pang's critics rather than with Paik. To start, we might turn to Pun'ye's distant uncle, Yongp'al, who rapes his own niece. Then there is Pun'ye's mother who starves her own children simply to teach her husband a lesson, and Pun'ye's father who sells his daughter off to a fellow gambler Yöngch'öl for a sack of rice and petty sum of money. Finally, Pun'ye's husband Yöngch'öl is a violent cad who nearly beats Pun'ye to death under the false assumption that she is having an affair. Indeed, one is hard pressed to locate signs of "health" in a landscape so overcome in despair and depravity; it seems quite impossible to find any character in the novel that exhibits a modicum of reason or conscience, let alone a sense of hope or optimism about the future of the rural population. If, as was believed, Paik prized literature for its ability to influence and guide society, this only compounded the difficulty of determining why he would find the novel conducive to South Korean literature of the time in the first place.

The apparent contradiction in Paik's reading of *The Story of Pun'ye* cannot simply be disregarded as an instance of "flaw in logic," as has been frequently charged. It is not only possible but essential, I argue, to read the apparent contradiction as a nodal point between two conflicting agendas that were deemed equally urgent by Paik—namely, the imperatives of decolonization and modernization. In fact, Paik's remarks on the "objectiveness" and the "wholesomeness" of *The Story of Pun'ye* raise a number of

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 373.

important questions. Why did this particular novel, in spite of its sensational reception among the general populace, fail to generate serious interest from the period's critics by and large, and why, for that matter, was it such a strategic choice for the novice critic Paik Nak-chung and the literary shaping of *Ch'angbi*? What were the social and political imperatives at stake in Paik's reading of *The Story of Pun 'ye*? How did the "ahistoricity" of the novel enable Paik to make an intervention against the various mainstream ideological projects in which writers, both conservative and progressive, participated under the pressures of the developmentalist regime of Park Chung Hee? What are the tensions that emerge in Paik's own reading as he tries simultaneously to make a call for moral responsibility of the writer and for literary-aesthetic achievement as "the most significant harvest of [Korea's] literary field"?<sup>96</sup> And lastly, what is the significance that this particular novel held with respect to the development of the South Korean literary field in the subsequent years to come?

In answering these questions, this chapter proceeds by addressing major points of tension that can be detected between Paik's reading of *The Story of Pun 'ye* and the critiques of the novel by other literary scholars who either found the novel to be negligent of sociopolitical exigencies of the time or lacking the proper aesthetic/literary qualities to be given full critical consideration. Attending to the opposing readings with respect to those overlapping points of contention enables an investigation of the literary-aesthetic standpoints of the specific critics themselves. More importantly, however, the divergent readings occasion a broader reflection on the literary and political stakes at hand that profoundly shaped the highly variant readings of the novel.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 368.

## The Timeliness vs. Untimeliness of *The Story of Pun'ye*

The 1967 publication of *The Story of Pun'ye* in *Ch'angbi* was unconventional enough on several accounts to pique the interest of many critics, regardless of their literary or political orientation. First, Pang's work was the first novel-length work that the journal had picked up. It was also the debut work of an unknown writer, one who had been rejected by another literary magazine. What's more, in championing Pang's work, Paik had to squash dissenting opinion within his own house. Given all this, it is no wonder that publishing Pang's novel was significant in shaping Paik's own standing as a novice literary critic. In a 1968 essay, Paik reflected upon the quarterly's first two and half years of publication and remarked that he had sought to address *The Story of Pun'ye* not only as a "literary problem" but also as a "societal problem."<sup>97</sup> Indeed, for Paik, not only was the publication of Pang's novel a "timely" gesture with respect to the South Korean literary field, but it was also to be given serious consideration as a mode of address to urgent social problems.

Paik's enthusiasm for *The Story of Pun'ye* was hardly, if at all, shared by the literary field at large. For the most part, writers of the older, conservative establishment such as Sönu Hwi, Kim Tongni, and Cho Yönhöön saw the work as "lacking progressiveness and novelty." During a conversation with Paik on the topic of what "engagement" means in literature, Sönu Hwi noted that the world depicted in *The Story of Pun'ye* was no different from that sketched in "colonial pastorals" of Kim Yujöng, Kim Tongin's *Potato* (1925), or Kye Yongmuk's *Adada the Idiot* (1935). Sönu Hwi further contended that Pang's novel was without even the minimally necessary degree of

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 369.

aesthetic consciousness, and thus fell even further below the accomplishments of altogether “outdated” literary works of the early twentieth century.<sup>98</sup> This was not to say that the countryside and stuff of agrarian life were disavowed by the conservative writers. In fact, many conservative writers during this time were writing about the country in the post-Korean War period, as can be witnessed in the writings of such writers as Kim Tongni, Cho Yŏnhyŏn and Sŏ Chŏngju. But for the most part, these writers depicted the countryside in a pastoral light, the individuals populating the countryside as equally unadorned but respectable characters.

The responses from those whose viewpoints hewed more closely to the “engaged literature” camp were, albeit for different reasons, also critical of the novel’s unquestioning acquiescence to a so-called shamanistic understanding of fate and of the text’s failure to imbue its characters with a sense of historical and social consciousness. Critic Im Hŏnyŏng contended that, “although the novel is set in the late 1940s, it does not at all reflect the colonial exploitation or oppression of the time, and almost gives the impression that it is defending the primitive mentality of [Korea’s] indigenous people. While the novel excels at representing such a world, it must nonetheless be criticized for the ambiguity in its historical backdrop.”<sup>99</sup> Though the reasons stated for criticizing Pang’s novel of its lack of literary values were nominally different, the writers and critics of the two camps on the extreme ends of the literary spectrum were surprisingly united in voicing the same complaint—namely, that it lacked “modern-ness,” or *hyŏndaesŏng*. Not surprisingly, the lack of “modern-ness” was a critique launched by the proponents of

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<sup>98</sup> Sŏnu Hwi and Paik Nak-chung, “*Chakka Sŏnu Hwi wa maju antta—munhak ūi hyŏnsil ch’amyŏ rŭl chungsimŭro,*” pp. 35.

<sup>99</sup> Im Hŏnyŏng, “Pang yŏngung ui chakp’um segye” [The literary world of Pang Yongung], in Pang Yŏngung, *Pullyegi*, Seoul: Hangyŏre ch’ulp’an, 1991, pp. 353.

modernist literature as well. Kim Hyŏn, for example, contended that the novel fails to portray the double process that a “modern” subject undergoes in literary works—first, the subject’s cognizance of the reality itself and second, the subject’s conscientious reflection upon the perceiving self—and rather depicts the “misfortunes of a *pathological individual*” whose self-reflecting conscience has been altogether eliminated.<sup>100</sup>

Sŏnu Hwi, Im Hŏnyŏng, and Kim Hyŏn, three critics who each represented three distinct strands of scholarship in the contentious Korean literary field of the late 1960s, were thus united in their criticism of *The Story of Pun ’ye*, and their voices converged on the work’s purported “untimeliness.” Underlying their perception of the novel’s irrelevance and backwardness with respect to Korea’s contemporary society was therefore a shared assumption about the demands of modernity on the craft of writing. In other words, a demand for a rupture with the shamanic traditions in the context of 1960s’ South Korea was informing their respective critiques of Pang’s novel. For this reason, the critics emphasized the importance of imbuing the novel’s characters with the awareness of the importance of individual choice and condemning traditional ways of life (i.e., retention of colonial and/or shamanic customs) as self-defeating, inferior, and confining. The characters in *The Story of Pun ’ye* were sorely lacking the proper mentality necessary for carrying out the historical task of becoming modern—either through taking part in a proletarian revolution or by duly embracing the principles of individual subjectivity accompanied by critical self-awareness and autonomy of action. As close to the elements as a pile of dung upon which she was born and unable to rise above natural instincts, Pun’ye stood for the past become present within which no hope of the future could reside.

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<sup>100</sup> Kim Hyŏn, “Tasi hanbŏn chamyŏ ron ūl” [Once again, the discourse of engagement], in *Hyŏndae munhak* (April 1968): pp. 314.

The demand for conscientious reform of the peasants into politicized, modern, and wholly autonomous subjects did not prevail among literary critics only. The state also sought to produce “healthy and productive population” out of the lumpen peasants. This was the goal as stated in the state-led discourse of rural development that informed the early- to mid-1960s. Alongside the continuation of anti-communism that began under Syngman Rhee in the 1950s, the 1960s’ South Korea witnessed the twin discourse of modernization (*kūndaehwa*) and development (*kaebal*) emerge as a new powerful ideology that both justified Park Chung Hee’s seizure of power through coup d’etat as well as his oppressive program for accelerated economic growth. As is well-known by now, at the heart of Park’s developmental authoritarianism was the growth of heavy industries. But in its early years, the Park regime promoted the “reform of the countryside” as its first and foremost concern, and not “industrialization” via heavy industries. Indeed, the regime’s early discourse of developmentalism was imbued with the sense that, as Park himself would put it, “[the] sun of Korea must rise not from the eastern sea, but from the mountains or plains of the farming villages. That is the wellspring of our dawning hope.”<sup>101</sup>

The state’s configuration of the countryside as the subject and target of its developmentalist policies was not only expressed in the lofty words of Park Chung Hee. The central tenets of the rural development program—modernization of agricultural techniques, sanitization, relief of extreme poverty, to name a few—were also widely disseminated through numerous agriculture-related magazines, newspaper articles, and slogans. *Nongmin Sinmun* [Farmers’ newspaper] began to be published in the immediate aftermath of the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution in 1960, to be followed by government-issued

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<sup>101</sup> Park Chung Hee, *Kukka wa hyōkmyōng kwa na 2*, Seoul: Hyangmunsa, 1963, pp. 49.

magazines such as *Sae Nongmin* [New Farmer] in 1961. Although specific instances of what constituted “development” varied from one rural region to another, the most commonly cited had to do with the infrastructure: road improvements, replacing traditional thatch roofs with slate ones, land reclamations, and building dykes.

A curious aspect of the discourse of rural development manifested during this time is the emphasis on “self-help,” in spite of the state’s purported enthusiasm and support for rural development. Much of the rhetoric that informed the discourse unfolded around the idea of “*nongmin charyök kaebal*” (peasants’ self-development). Starting in the mid-1960s, media and government agencies took up strong interest in promoting the idea of peasants’ self-development as the highest form of rural improvement—that is, “development driven by the sole efforts of the rural peoples themselves without the support of the state.”<sup>102</sup> By the mid-1960s, instances of villages that fulfilled the state-authored ideals of rural development were introduced as examples of “model rural villages” (*mobŏm maül*) in the media. In February of 1968, Ministry of Home Affairs dispatched writers to twenty villages selected as “model villages,” commissioning a reportage-style collection of data on the “industriousness” and “profitability” of the villages. The data collected resulted in a special issue of the state-authored magazine *Chibang Haengjŏng* [Rural Administration] with twenty articles subtitled “In Search of Pioneers in Rural Self-reliance.”<sup>103</sup> The criteria for judging whether or not a particular village was worthy of the title “model” was founded not upon increased food production for the rural villagers or improvement in their respective living conditions, but upon

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<sup>102</sup> Yi Yangho, “Kiban haengjong kwa charyok kaebal” [Base administration and self-development], in *Chibang haengjong*, 17:172 (1968): pp. 6-7.

<sup>103</sup> See *Chibang Haengjŏng*, 17:172 (1968).



income increases that were accumulated most frequently through export-oriented agricultural industry.

Although the promotion of the idea of “rural self-reliance” would go on to serve as an important prelude to the New Village Movement (*Saemaül undong*) of the Yusin era in the 1970s, in the 1960s the promotion of “rural self-reliance” would remain a rhetorical cover for the state to a large extent, as it concentrated its energies and the nation’s capital on promoting export-oriented industrialization based in the urban centers. The exponential increase in demand for laborers was followed by a call for rapid improvement of living conditions in the cities. Moreover, such concentration of capital and labor in the urban sectors with respect to the accelerated expansion of export-oriented industrialization pushed forth by the Park regime was also coupled by an acute decrease in the overall demand for crop as well as a drastic drop in grain prices—the consequences of which would lead to a dramatic increase in rural exodus at the height of industrialization in the 1970s. For most of the 1960s, therefore, such a whirlwind of changes brought on by the state’s push for industrial modernization centered in urban sectors spelled nothing other than devastation for at least two-thirds of the Korean population—namely, the farming population in the countryside.

Given this historical backdrop, the lack of critical enthusiasm that Pang’s work generated at the time of its initial installment had something to do with the fact that the countryside depicted in the novel coincided readily with neither the representation of the modernizing countryside that the developmental state promoted nor the aspirations for agency that writers sought to locate in the brave new peasant. In fact, the disparate responses to *The Story of Pun’ye* at the time of its initial publication reveal much about

the overall state of the literary field in the 1960s South Korea. At the most conspicuous level, the countryside depicted in *The Story of Pun'ye* did not coincide at all with the healthy, “self-sufficient” images of countryside constructed by writers who were commissioned to do so by the developmentalist state. On yet another level, Pang’s novel did not even feed readily into the well-established convention of “humanist” literature that romanticized the countryside and its traditional ways as a timeless refuge from the fleeting emptiness of modern life, most clearly typified in the works of Kim Tongni and Hwang Sunwŏn. Neither did Pang’s utterly amoral, uncivilized characters satisfy the needs of those historically conscious writers in search of the proper proletarian consciousness and the energies for social reform. And lastly, the world Pang sketched had nothing whatsoever to do with the “petty-bourgeois consciousness” (*sosimin ũisik*) that was being fast embraced by disaffected urban youth and intellectuals in the disenchanted aftermath of the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution, whose poster child was undoubtedly Kim Sŭngok. So divorced from all the prominent ways that the spirit of the times was construed, *Pun'ye* was an oddity in whose story literary scholars in South Korea found little to like and even less to redeem.

Take, for example, the views of Ku Chungso and Im Hŏnyŏng, who were among the critics who espoused the need for proper *nongch'on munhak*. Deeply concerned as they were with the importance of promoting historical consciousness, Kim and Im were dismayed by the fact that *The Story of Pun'ye* fell short of portraying its characters as potential representatives of peasant proletariat of Korea, that is, as members of the group that would play the most progressive role in history. Reiterating this view twenty-five years after the first installment of *The Story of Pun'ye*, Im Hŏnyŏng would note that,

although the plight of the poverty that plagued the countryside was the cause of the “peasants’ *addiction* to indigenous fatalism, [...] this certainly is not the true character of our peasant class proper or peasant proletariat” (emphasis added).<sup>104</sup> As the loaded word “addiction” in Im’s critique gives away, radical leftist intellectuals often regarded shamanic elements—such as the traditions that informed the behavior and thought of the characters in *The Story of Pun’ye*—as something unsuitable, even psychopathic, and altogether undesirable in Korea’s evolutionary passage en route a modern proletarian revolution. The imperative of modernization and enlightenment prevailed commonly among all intellectuals alike, regardless of their individual political inclinations. In one way or another, and for one reason or another, the anxiety about Korea’s “backwardness” (*hujinsǒng*) crept into their psyche. A condition most often attributed to the countryside, “backwardness” was considered no less than a deep-seated “chronic disease” plaguing Korea, against which the intellectuals were able to position themselves as the arbiters of enlightenment—the cure. The drive behind such thirst for self-renewal and “development” was none other than the imperative of modernization.<sup>105</sup>

The critical intellectuals’ reaction to *The Story of Pun’ye* thus revealed a curious affinity between the state and the intellectuals, specifically with regard to their respective stance on modernization. The approaches appeared to be diametrically opposed at first. The state saw the countryside as the locus of state-led mobilization, while the critical intellectuals regarded peasants as the agents of proletarian revolution. Upon closer inspection, however, the two approaches had much in common. Both the state and the critical intellectuals equally emphasized autonomy, as can be seen in the government

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<sup>104</sup> Im Hǒnyǒng, “Pang yǒngung ui chakp’um segye,” pp. 354.

<sup>105</sup> Kwǒn Podŭrae and Ch’ǒn Chǒnghwan, *1960 ūl mutta: Pak Chǒnghui sidae ūi munhwa chǒngch’i wa chisǒng*, pp. 112-113.

rhetoric of self-reliance and the intellectuals' emphasis on subjectivity, while also adhering to the discourse of enlightenment. Moreover, both the state and the intellectuals espoused firm belief in the absolute necessity of modernization, whether as a physical phenomenon to be marked in terms of the number of thatched roofs that have been replaced by slate ones, or in terms of a spiritual embodiment.

One speculation as to why the sense of timelessness or ahistoricity may have resounded more strongly among those reading *The Story of Pun 'ye*, aside from the fact that it is not taking place in the city and has no mention of any major historical events, may be due to the fact that the novel does not indicate exactly where the story takes place. In fact, this novel hinges upon a sense of a remote rural locale that is, by virtue of its lack of specificity, delimited and yet specific to Korea. Indeed, the story's spatiotemporal ambiguity lends the sense that this may just as well be a story about any countryside village in Korea. What is more, the temporality of this unnamed countryside village appears to be remarkably different from the distinctive unmodern, in the sense that it foils a linear progression toward the future.

Notwithstanding the overall spatiotemporal ambiguity, the novel does provide some relatively specific information about the historical backdrop that works to strengthen, rather than alleviate, the sense of a remote past. In terms of time, we can infer that the story takes place in a rural village a few years subsequent to the liberation from Japanese colonial regime in 1945 from the novel's mention of the presence of the widowed women in the village whose husbands never returned home after being drafted to Japan during the World War II.<sup>106</sup> Although there has been a war and liberation did follow in its aftermath, for all its rhetoric of change for the better as well as the promise

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<sup>106</sup> Pang Yöngung, *Pullyegi*, Seoul: Ch'angjakkwa pip'yöngsa, 1997, pp. 19.

of a new beginning, there is no sense of actual change that can be felt in *The Story of Pun'ye*. Indeed, the only impact that the war under the Japanese colonial regime seems to have had on the villagers' lives is reiterated through the continued absence of their men. That there is no news of the village men after they were drafted into the war—the men who can only at best be “presumed” to have died during the war—only reinforces the feeling that the end of the war never brought about the radical rupture from the past that it had promised to deliver. At the same time, however, the men's absence from the countryside—the one mark throughout the text that informs us that this is indeed set in the post-WWII, post-liberation period—is also a resounding reminder of the fact that the war did in fact penetrate the village.

And because village has been touched by the war, there is no hope for resumption of a peaceful past, a past before the onset of the Japanese colonial regime. Nor is there a hope of transformation that can be discerned among the villagers. This is further evinced by characters like Pun'ye's father and her husband Yǒngch'ǒl, who whittle away whatever money they can get their hands on through any mixture of these three activities: gambling, drinking, and visiting brothels. As soon as Pun'ye is old enough to be contemplating marriage, her father sells Pun'ye for some petty cash to Yǒngch'ǒl, a thrice-married gambling addict prone to beating wives. What for Pun'ye was the consummation of a long-awaited dream, albeit marred by the fact that Yǒngch'ǒl is far from the ideal husband she had yearned for, is depicted as a negotiation marked by money—the money that Pun'ye's father receives from Yǒngch'ǒl's mother as a loan in exchange for his daughter as the pawn. Pun'ye has no say in determining the terms of her own marriage. After being raped by Yǒngch'ǒl, Pun'ye is overcome by the guilt over

failing to maintain her chastity, which drives her to excessive self-deprecation and unquestioning acquiescence of what becomes of her life. From Yongp'al to Pun'ye's father to Yŏngch'ŏl, what becomes painfully clear by the end of the story is a miserable sense that all three of them not only exploit her, but also ultimately fail to save her. The crisis of masculinity, doubly enhanced by the presence of utterly immoral men in Pun'ye's life and otherwise conspicuous absence of men due to the war mobilization that swept even through this remote village in the countryside, is in and of itself an indication that the village has come to a historical standstill—a stagnation caused in part by the damaging impact of colonial exploitation as well as the patriarchal gender structure in which the novel's characters are deeply steeped.

Though a return to a past before colonial experience and war is not an option for the novel's characters, the historical stagnation beset upon the village makes it impossible for the characters to seek explanations for their lives in systems of thought beyond what they are accustomed to during pre-colonial, pre-war period. Therein lay the prevalence of shamanic customs throughout the novel. As Im Hŏnyŏng pointed out, the shamanic customs manifest on several occasions throughout the novel, particularly at those moments when the characters are in need of a solution to what they perceive as their inescapable fate. This is most conspicuously depicted in the last chapter of the novel, where, after Pun'ye is beaten and driven out of her husband's household, she is forced by her mother to undergo a shamanic exorcising ritual (*kut*) to cast out the demons that purportedly drove her to an extramarital affair and subsequently to insanity. Pun'ye's mother blindly trusts Yŏngch'ŏl and does not for once question his faulty assumption that Pun'ye has had an affair. Unbeknownst to Pun'ye's mother, then, the *kut* is already

futile even before it had a chance to begin, since its target of exorcism is simply non-existent.

For a progressive critic like Im, the prevalence of shamanic traditions in the everyday lives of the characters was precisely what marked those characters as backward and ahistorical—that is to say, the shamanic traditions impeded the characters’ understanding of the historical conditions that lock them into poverty and demise of their communal order. But one might question at this point whether such recourse shamanic customs is, as many progressive intellectuals in the 1960s were prone to think, indeed *the* behavioral pattern that is preventing the rural population from emerging as truly modern subjects. And it is against such disavowal of the rural population’s ignorance that Paik Nak-chung builds his own case for *The Story of Pun ’ye*, and indeed for the utility of the narrative’s “ahistoricity.” Paik writes:

Just as a majority of the Korean *minjung* have been for generations, just as the *minjung* have lived day by day completely divorced from the volition to actively participate in the creation of history or advancement of society at large, so it is the case with *The Story of Pun ’ye* that there is no sense of historical time. [...] Though this may be a limitation of the novel, we cannot say that this is an aesthetic flaw. In fact, the thorough elimination of historical time in the story can be seen as a device applied to delineate clearly a society in which the people are totally unconscious of their historical time—that is, to amplify the fact that this *is* history itself, the lives that have gone on for ages and generations without knowing that history has left them behind.<sup>107</sup>

I quote the above passage at length for two reasons. First, it shows how Paik fashions the ahistoricity of *The Story of Pun ’ye* as a historical phenomenon in and of itself. Contrary to the charges of ahistorical pitfalls, Paik contends that Pang’s novel does not rest upon some essential, and therefore fixed, notion of pre-modern *authentic* Korea. Indeed, ahistoricity is not a quality that Paik champions; it is first and foremost a historical

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<sup>107</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “Ch’angjak kwa pip’yǒng yinyǒn pan,” pp. 374.

circumstance that befell the rural population after “history has left them behind.” Likewise, the ahistoricity in *The Story of Pun’ye* is symptomatic of the Korean society’s collective effort to forget, and hence “leave behind,” its shared historical experience of subjection to the rule of foreigners in its fraught and accelerated move to embrace the teleology of modernity. For Paik, in this regard, that “the countryside in *The Story of Pun’ye* is *abnormal* attests to the fact that there exists an *abnormal* city that is Seoul” (emphasis added).<sup>108</sup> By characterizing the rapid mode of industrialization in the city as “abnormal,” Paik challenges the legitimacy of the state’s developmentalist discourse. Moreover, by describing the countryside as also “abnormal,” he draws an inverse relationship between the countryside (i.e., Pun’ye’s village and the like) and the city (i.e., Seoul and other industrialized urban centers). In Paik’s analysis, the city and the countryside are two sides of the same coin. On the flip side of the abnormally accelerated development in the city, therefore, is the abnormally slow development in the countryside. For South Korea to recover its state of equilibrium with regard to development, it was important to find a distributive balance between the city and the countryside.

The 1960s was a period that was remarkably different from the one before it, in which Koreans lived through five years of post-liberation, three years of the Korean War, and the stagnant post-war reparation period of the 1950s. It was a time when the social, economic, political, as well as cultural dimensions of the South Korean society were driven by the overarching goals of development and prosperity as promulgated by the state. At the same time, the thirst for genuine transformation of Korean society was an anticipation not just dictated by the statist regime; in the impoverished half of a nation still undergoing postwar turmoil, this was a goal also shared among the general populace

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., pp. 375.



as well as “progressive” intellectuals alike. The widespread consensus among the intellectuals that the April 19 Revolution failed to live up to its name further threw the intellectuals into confusion about positioning themselves with respect to Park’s military coup, which legitimized itself by appealing to the notion that economic stability and development were “more urgent” than the stuff of freedom and democracy.<sup>109</sup> If the state believed that it had the recipe for South Korea’s belated arrival in the twentieth century, the conviction for a radical transformation of South Korean society—whether that transformation be liberal or Marxist in its design—was equally as strong among the progressively minded intellectuals. Indeed, more often than not, what was missing in both of these programs coincided in a striking manner—namely, the subjects of history oppressed and marginalized in the dual discursive paradigms of development and modernization.

To that end, Paik would summon Pang’s novel once again two years after its initial publication in his seminal essay “The Treatise on Citizens’ Literature” (1969). As was discussed in the preceding chapter, in this essay Paik calls for a type of literature that would serve as an intervention against the modernists’ prescription of “petty-bourgeois consciousness” as the fundamental psyche of their time. In the same essay, Paik would go so far as to contend that, although *The Story of Pun’ye* is set in the countryside, the world depicted by Pang is more akin to the space of urban alienation drawn by the modernist exemplary Kim Sŏngok than those drawn by established voices of the nativist literary

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<sup>109</sup> A specific instance of this is the propagandistic tune called “Chal sarabose” [Let’s live well], written and composed in 1962 to be sung at the one-year anniversary of Park Chung Hee’s military coup. The song was commissioned by Kim Chongp’il, one of the original planners of coup. The song became the “spirit of the times,” so to speak, dominating the popular psyche throughout the 1960s and 70s. The lyrics are as follows: “Let’s live well let’s live well / let us live well in abundance / the beautiful land of ours / if we should cultivate it together with one heart / even frugal life is fun / wealth and honor, too, are ours / let’s live well let’s live well / let us live well in abundance.”

tradition such as Ha Kūnch'an or O Yugwŏn.<sup>110</sup> But what could possibly be the “more city than countryside” elements of Pang's novel that drove Paik to liken it to a story that deals exclusively with the tragedy of alienated urban dwellers?

In the 1960s' South Korean literary field, there was a distinct sense of dualism being forged between the city and the countryside. As can be detected from works that received prominent attention in the literary field of the time, such as those of writers Kim Sūngok and Yi Chŏngjun, the literature of this decade proliferated with narratives about lives in the city. In many of these stories writers grappled with the source of their own agonies—namely, alienation as urban dwellers. If countryside and those left behind in the countryside occupied the works of these writers at all, it was in the form of trauma—that is, as intrusive memories of experience that people try to bar from their minds so as to proceed with modern life.

Such is how the countryside is depicted in Kim Sūngok's “Mujin kihaeng” [A Record of Journey to Mujin] (1964), a story narrating a city dweller's trip back to his rural hometown Mujin.<sup>111</sup> Each time the protagonist “I” returns to Mujin, it is with a specific goal of finding a respite from the ups and downs of city life to which he must return. To accomplish his task (attaining a relief from the city life, that is), “I” imagines up an idyllic country with gentle undulating hills, pastoral river valleys, and well-kempt schools surrounded by tall poplars. But the real Mujin, both in his past and present, is far from the Mujin of his imagination. The real Mujin is associated with “the dark days of

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<sup>110</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “*Simin munhak non,*” in *Minjok munhak kwa segye munhak I/ In'gan haebang ūi nollī rūl ch'ajasŏ*. P'aju: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏngsa, 2011, pp. 88. In his works, the writer Ha Kūnch'an often depicted the local folk atmosphere of life in Kyŏngsang Province, while O Yugwŏn frequently drew upon the indigenous aspects of life in Chŏlla Province.

<sup>111</sup> Kim Sūngok, “Mujin Kihaeng” [A record of a journey to Mujin], in *Sasanggye* 12:139 (October 1964): pp. 330-346.

[his] youth,” filled with depressing, painful memories of the Korean War during which “I” had dodged military drafts by hiding in a small backroom. “I”’s only respite back then was dreaming about moving to the city. Upon his return to Mujin in the present, “I” is greeted by a “thick fog, unbearable loneliness, pitiful lyrics of pop songs, bar hostesses taking their own lives, and betrayals.”<sup>112</sup> “I” remains untouched by such social realities of his hometown, simply observing everything from a distance with a disinterested curiosity at best. Such disinterested curiosity drives “I” to engage in a sexual encounter with a woman frustrated with life in the country, all the while knowing that she is the genuine love interest of his hometown friend. Acting on pure impulse, “I” even invites the woman to move to the city with him. Upon receiving a telegram from his wife requesting him to return to Seoul to take up his position at work, however, “I” betrays his own words and leaves Mujin in a hurry. Although “I” feels ashamed of his own violation of trust to his ties in Mujin, he prioritizes his real-life “duties” in Seoul over his brief encounters in the country. By the end of the story, it becomes clear that Mujin exists in “I”’s mind as a misty place for pleasure-seeking, while the city becomes grows stronger in association with “duties” and “diligence.” At the end of the story, “I”’s exit from the country is marked viscerally by the words on the road sign: “You are leaving the town of Mujin. Good-bye.”

In this light, it can be argued that for Paik, *The Story of Pun ’ye* served as one of very few literary works of its time in which the countryside rests not as a barred memory in the unconscious of the urban dwellers, as is the case in “A Record of Journey to Mujin,” but as the very site of subaltern realities. *The Story of Pun ’ye* draws a merciless picture of a countryside village that had been pilfered then abandoned in the process of colonial

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., pp. 346.

exploitation, wartime mobilization, and modernization. At the same time, Paik's reading of the status of *minjung* in *The Story of Pun 'ye* suggests that it is not only the fault of history that the vast majority of *minjung* are in their said predicament, which brings me to my second reason for examining Paik's reading closely. For Paik, the *minjung* were not to be seen as necessarily primordially endowed subjects of historical change. The way that Paik conceived of *minjung* was very different from what it would come to entail. *Minjung* would emerge as a powerful collective category that would grow increasingly essentialized and exclusionary over time, and particularly so at the height of the democratization movement in the 1980s. For Paik, the characters' indifference to progress, moral degradation, and lack of a sense of history are conditions that must be at once recognized as a historical phenomenon and be critiqued as a social problem.

Paradoxically enough, it is therefore none other than *The Story of Pun 'ye*'s conspicuous sense of ahistoricity that enables Paik to make a case for its historicity and, by extension, its timeliness in the context of the South Korean literary field. To that end, enlightenment, as can be surmised from this passage, is necessary and urgent in Paik's conceptualization of *minjung*. I will return to this notion of enlightenment and social critique in the next section of this chapter.

### **“Aesthetics of the Pathological and the Obsecene” vs. “[Healthy] Triumph of Realism”**

In addition to the nearly unanimous claim about the “untimeliness” of the novel, another aspect for which this book was critiqued was on the account of its lack of

“literariness” (*munhaksǒng*). The value-laden term “literariness” itself can be defined and delimited in countless number of ways. And although the attacks that this book was less than literary came from several critical angles, one of the most commonly heard critiques had to do with the novel’s alleged preoccupation with “the pathological” or “the obscene.” This may be illustrated by returning to the aforementioned conversation between the right-wing writer Sǒnu Hwi and Paik in January of 1968, a time at which the two critics had made opposing claims about the literary-aesthetic status of *The Story of Pun’ye* during their larger discussion regarding literature’s sociopolitical engagement. In response to Paik’s praise that Pang’s novel eschews the formulaic use of literature as a vehicle for accomplishing some sociohistorical mission, Sǒnu immediately expresses his dislike of the novel, contending that the text “deliberately impaired the sense of proper aesthetic consciousness.”<sup>113</sup> To bolster his claim, Sǒnu problematizes a scene in Pang’s novel that depicts Pun’ye cleaning herself with blades of grass after defecating. Was such an explicit scene aesthetically necessary, he asked. Unlike writers like D.H. Lawrence or William Faulkner who knew when to “rein in” explicit references to sex, Pang fails to embody even that minimal of an aesthetic consciousness, and thus lacks in his “literary finesse.”<sup>114</sup> Sǒnu is arguing that the more base aspects of life that highlight the animality of the human nature may not be inherently aesthetic, but that their depiction can be aesthetically necessary in a work of fiction. While this is true for Lawrence and Faulkner, it was not so for Pang. Not only does Pang indulge aesthetically unnecessary depictions of scatological acts, he elevates them over what would conventionally be considered the

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<sup>113</sup> Sǒnu Hwi and Paik Nak-chung, “*Chakka Sǒnu Hwi wa maju antta – munhak ũi hyǒnsil ch’amyǒ rŭl chungsimŭro,*” pp. 35.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35.

finer aspects of the human personality. Ultimately, Sönu drives home his disapproval of the novel by asserting that privileging “the sordid, the shabby, the weak, or the poor” as “art” over “the hygienic, the new, the strong, or the wealthy” is problematic.<sup>115</sup>

Refuting Sönu’s claim to the existence of proper aesthetics in literature, Paik contends that, to the contrary, “the scenes depicting certain shabbiness or misery operate on an aesthetic level in Pang’s novel [...] Pang depicts *life as it is*—the aspects of rural life that, no matter how shabby or miserable they may be, must not be neglected” (emphasis added).<sup>116</sup> Paik further maintains that “the reason [he is] drawn to the shabby and the miserable is not out of nostalgia for such things [...] but because [he feels] that the novel touches upon something very important about the times by taking what has thus far been rendered nearly imperceptible (i.e., the rural lives and their ways) and mercilessly *exposing them as they are*” (emphasis added).<sup>117</sup>

The exchange between Sönu and Paik with regard to *The Story of Pun ’ye* reveal much about the importance of reality as a criterion of aesthetic merit in Paik’s understanding of literature. As Paik’s words quoted above reveal, the merit of Pang’s novel center around the fact that it is a story about the countryside, and an exceedingly realistic and concrete depiction at that. In fact, throughout his reading of *The Story of Pun ’ye*, Paik is persistent in stressing the “reality” factor. If the realistic but detailed depiction of “the sordid, the shabby, the weak, or the poor” in the novel led many critics to presume that a certain privileging of the “unhealthy” is operating in the novel, as did Sönu, it is precisely this realistic rendition, the representation of lives “as they are,”

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-38.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp. 37

which Paik deems as “healthy.”<sup>118</sup> Needless to say, such a view struck many of Paik’s contemporaries as paradoxical. Wasn’t Paik’s accolade of the novel’s “wholesomeness” based on a logical fallacy? Just what did it mean for a novel to perform a “healthy” depiction of a degenerate countryside and its pathological people?

The characters in *The Story of Pun’ye* and their ways of life readily evoke images of a degenerate and dilapidated rural village. While the novel does comment upon the impact of the structural nature of the rural village’s utter disconnectedness and alienation from the massive historical changes that had swept through the Korean nation, at the same time it also attributes much of the agrarian society’s deterioration to the filth, backwardness, laziness, and brutality of the characters. Pun’ye’s father and her husband, their consciences eaten away by their addiction to gambling and drinking, typify such depravity. While the life-long dream for Pun’ye’s father is to have enough money to afford himself a trip to the more exuberant of the *kisaeng* (female entertainer) house, he is incapable of performing even the simplest of the daily household management such as fixing the roof.<sup>119</sup>

Indeed, the tone of the narrator in approaching this rural society is critical enough that a reader would be hard pressed to locate any wholesomeness in what he depicts. In painstaking detail, the narrator describes the rural people unable to manage the stresses and responsibilities of a civilized life. Far from being confined to Pun’ye’s household, filth and ignorance are general conditions that pervade the entire rural village, as evinced the narrator’s description of Pun’ye’s neighbor, Ch’ölbong’s family:

Ch’ölbong’s father, dead a few years, had been a dull-witted man though not a complete idiot. Unable to get married until nearly thirty, he somehow wound up

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<sup>118</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “‘Ch’angjak kwa pip’yöng’ yinyön pan,” pp. 373.

<sup>119</sup> Pang Yöngung, *Pullyegi*, pp. 19.

with an idiot wife both blind and deaf. And when she gave birth—lo and behold—idiots issued from her womb, two of them, in fact: Sŭngbong, the older boy, a stammering fool who can't remember a thing he's told for the life of him, and Ch'ölbong, too, a fool through and through fool though he was rather fine in physique. The first time Sŭngbong's wife, the Mute, gave birth, it caused a ruckus in the village. The Mute's opening was too narrow as the baby struggled to pass the threshold to life. The Mute's screams were worse than that that a pig getting castrated. Quack quack—the cry not of a human but of an animal. The baby did not make it out of the Mute's womb alive. It was like that every time, the baby suffocating to death, the Mute nearly dying in the process, too, until last spring, when the mute let out a scream again, but the baby somehow survived [...] But the Mute did not think to even glance at her own child. When her mother-in-law shouted at her to breastfeed the baby, the Mute would throw herself at the baby and squash it to death with her foot, try to kill it [...] The Mute's breasts were always swollen with milk. Instead of giving the milk to her baby, she would give it to her husband. [...] [The news of The Mute breastfeeding her husband] spread fast throughout the village, but the villagers [...] neither cursed nor scolded her. They took it for granted that what goes on inside Ch'ölbong's house was wwhat one would witness in an 'animal pen.'<sup>120</sup>

The narrator's perspective is far from sympathetic. Even the mentally disabled are portrayed as selfish, and childish, and indeed animal-like. At times they are even lesser than animals, as is the case with Sŭngbong's wife the "Mute" who refused to feed even her own baby. That Sŭngbong's wife is unable to speak (i.e., the "Mute") demonstrates that she is at a non-linguistic stage, and thus able only to make the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned. The constant transposing of Ch'ölbong's family members to animals blurs the distinction between the human and the animal. To the extent that morality is constitutive of civilization, this part of the countryside, at last in the eyes of the narrator, is utterly barbaric.

Nevertheless, there are moments in the novel that show a remarkably different slice of life. In most cases, these scenes center on Yongp'al and his wife Pyöngch'un. Living in isolation and detached from rest of the village, they do not readily seek to

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-44.



mingle with the villagers. Pyŏngch'un is portrayed as an impeccable housewife, and Yongp'al a thoroughly industrious husband. In contrast to other households, Yongp'al and Pyŏngch'un's home is well-kempt and sanitized to boot. For the most part, Yongp'al is also depicted as an enigmatic person. And as perhaps the only literate person in the village, Yongp'al reads from his collection of traditional folk tales every night before going to bed. Yongp'al is the only individual that possesses creativity—he sings folk songs and reads literary classics to his illiterate wife. From the beginning to the end of the story, Yongp'al stands in clear contrast to the other non-creative peasants that populate the pages of Pang's novel.

Therefore, Yongp'al emerges as the more redeemable of the characters in the novel alongside Pun'ye herself. Yongp'al's rape of Pun'ye, therefore, has the narrative effect of completing the moral bleakness of the described landscape by eliminating the one possibility of hope and isolating Pun'ye completely. Though utterly impoverished in all ways imaginable, Pun'ye imagines that her life will change for the better once she meets a kind-hearted young man as her husband. However, Yongp'al's rape completely destroys Pun'ye's plan, and her dream of marrying a good-looking, kind-hearted man falls out of reach. At the same time, it is not the memory of rape, but the subsequent awareness of having failed to maintain her chastity that destroys her; it is the immense guilt over having violated the Confucian moral code that impels her to accept the injustices that befall her as the very punishment she deserves. There is no one to inform her otherwise on the irrationality of her moral framework. Though Yongp'al is the only person other than Pun'ye herself who is aware of her situation, he expresses no sense of guilt or responsibility whatsoever for what he has done to her and questions neither his

wrongdoing nor the irrationality of the traditional moral order. The scene in which he and Pyŏngch'un put on a hyper-choreographed façade to make it appear as though the baby left on their doorstep is their biological son attests to the extent to which Yongp'al, too, is obsessed with perpetuating the family's patrilineage under his name. In spite of the fact that he pales closer to civilization than anyone else in the story, he, too, is ultimately one of the major culprits involved in bringing about Pun'ye's tragedy.

As can be discerned in the narrator's descriptions of Pun'ye's, Ch'ölbong's, and Yongp'al's respective families, the villagers featured in the novel occupy varying positions on the social and moral spectrum. The novel is critical not just of the abnormality that pervades the village, but the irrationality of traditional patriarchal moral order as well—the combination of which drives Pun'ye to insanity. And yet, although the countryside is hardly depicted as a safe haven, neither is it depicted simply as a hellish place. Paik found this critical realistic portrayal of the countryside salient in the context of the 1960s' South Korean literary field. For Paik, the novel was “healthy” in the sense that it is an “honest” and “realistic” representation of the lives in the countryside.

To investigate why and how such dismal but objective depiction of the countryside in *The Story of Pun'ye* served as an intervention in Korean literature of the time, Paik's reading must be examined in the context of how the countryside and the agrarian life were being deployed in narratives of Korean history and the production of “Koreanness” vis-à-vis “tradition” during this time. The gradual passing of many veteran writers active during the colonial period, and the fleeing or persecution of a majority of progressive writers over the course of the Korean War and the national division, left the literary field of South Korea populated mostly by right-leaning writers. Starting in the

postwar period of the mid-1950s and through the mid-1970s at least, the literary field became dominated by conservative writers vying for authority in the construction of a new literary order.

In the process of competing for power, there were two main ways that these conservative literati of the time endorsed the Park Chung Hee regime's anti-communism and developmentalism. One, as witnessed in the activities of Kim Tongni, Cho Yŏnhyŏn, and So Chŏngju, was by actively partaking in the state's propagandistic construction of anti-communist, anti-North Korean discourse. As original members of the anti-communist literature collective *Chosŏn ch'ŏngnyŏn munhakka hyŏphoe* (Association of Young Literati of Chosun), these writers equated any and all politicization of literature as pro-communist/pro-North Korean and as the denial of literature itself, and thus sought to "depoliticize" literature by asserting literature's autonomy and transcendence from the flux of reality. The attempt to "depoliticize" literature through the adoption of the purism label was, of course, itself a politicized act.

Indeed, as can be detected from the vast array of "pure" literature published from the late 1940s and onwards, the countryside and its "timeless" features were for the most part posited as a way to re-authenticate a sense of "humanity." For a writer like Kim Tongni, "exploration of the lives and spirit of indigenous Koreans" was "part and parcel of his attempt to comprehend the ultimate *given fate* of humans *placed* in the universe" (emphasis added).<sup>121</sup> The indigenous Korea that the country represented for Kim thus was positioned in diametrical opposition to the ugliness of all the war-related atrocities and the ideological/political battle that beset the nation. Writers such as Hwang Sunwŏn and

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<sup>121</sup> Kwŏn Yŏngmin, *Hanguk hyŏndae munhaksa II*, Seoul: Minŭmsa, 1993, pp. 109.

Kim Tongni looked to the country for images of authentic human and ethical fulfillment—that is, essentialist notions of Koreanness that would remain uninfluenced by the political changes sweeping through. For these writers, the country became the site of ideological purity, unchanging essence, and humble humanism.<sup>122</sup> Exploring the country’s scenic “nature” (*chayŏn*) provided a shelter from the malaise of politics and artificiality of addressing “such issues as public welfare of the times and social significance of literature,” the latter of which fast gained pejorative meaning in its association with North Korea and communism in postwar South Korea.<sup>123</sup> Likewise, that which made such de-politicized literature not only possible but mandatory was none other than the ideological hegemony of anti-communism in South Korea. In writings of humanists such as Kim Tongni and Hwang Sunwŏn, features such as passivity, resistance to ideology, and acceptance of “fate” became accentuated as prime elements of the Korean indigenous. These features then get married to the anti-communist ideology of postwar South Korea. Ironically enough, the one “political” activity that the conservative literati were engaged in from time to time was reaffirming the “exclusion of politics”/“espousal of purity” in their literature by issuing statements in support of the anti-communist autocratic regimes under Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> This is also exemplified in Hwang Sunwŏn’s *Descendants of Cain* (1954), wherein the countryside—and in particular the rural women—becomes associated with elements such as the beauty of nature and traditional legends, that is, as things that would withstand the sociopolitical upheavals, uninfluenced throughout. Set in 1946, amidst the radical land reform in the Soviet-occupied sector of northern Korea, the “life-worlds” of the peasant population are depicted such that they are dismantled severely during the conflict. Although the event at the center of the conflict is a profoundly political one, that which resolves the conflict are “eternal” values such as love and loyalty found in the agrarian communalism of a traditional society—which triumph over greed and opportunism, which in the novel are in large part attributed to the evil consequences of the land reform.

<sup>123</sup> Kim Tongni, “Munhakjŏk sasang ūi chuch’ŏ wa kŭ hwangyŏng—ponkyŏk munhak ūi naeyongjŏk kiban ūl wihayŏ” [The subject of literary thought and its environment—toward the content basis of genuine literature], as quoted by Kwŏn Yŏngmin, *Hanguk hyŏndae munhaksa II*, pp. 49.

<sup>124</sup> Minjuhwa undong kinyŏm saŏphoe ed., *Han ’guk minjuhwa undongsa 2* [The history of democratization movements of Korea, vol. 2], Seoul: Tolbegae, 2008, pp. 61-62.

Another way in which the conservative literati contributed to the state's developmentalist modernization was by partaking in various nation-building cultural policies of the state and the discursive formation of "traditional culture," in particular. From the onset of his rule, Park Chung Hee relied on what he termed "nationalistic democracy" (*minjokchŏk minjujuŭi*) to fend off the calls for liberal democracy issued by his political opponents and critical intellectuals. Particularly in the later part of the 1960s, upon being branded as "pro-Japanese"/"anti-nationalist" for pushing through the Korea-Japan normalization treaty in 1965, Park sought to validate his nationalist leanings once again through various policies promoting "traditional culture." Park would deploy the "traditional culture" discourse at critical moments of his autocratic rule, including the constitutional amendment in 1969 that would permit him to run for a third presidential term as well as the Yushin amendment in 1972.<sup>125</sup> And the memories of the past that were selected in this process of constructing a "traditional culture" specific to Korea were those that would most readily legitimize the statism and militarism of Park's rule. The "invention" of traditional culture as such took various forms—the heroicization of historical military figures such as Yi Sunsin, the nationalization of martial arts (i.e., taekwondo), and the promotion of Confucian values such as loyalty to the state and filial piety (*ch'unghyo sasang*), to name a few.

In a corresponding way, the discourse of tradition that unfolded in the literary field—led primarily by figures like So Chŏngju, Cho Yŏnhyŏn, and Cho Chihun—also called for a revival of "eternal" and "universal" literary aesthetics that would "withstand

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<sup>125</sup> Yun Yŏngdo, "Naengiŏn'gi kungminhwa pŭrojektu wa 'chŏnt'ong munhwa' tamnon yŏn'gu – han'guk, t'ayiwān ūi pigyo yŏn'gu" [The nationalization project and discourse of "traditional culture" in Cold War period – a comparative study of Korea and Taiwan], in *Chungguk ō munhak nonjip* 43 (2007): pp. 340.

the test of time and space.”<sup>126</sup> To be sure, the discourse of traditional literary aesthetics went hand in hand with the literati’s shared sense of the need for a “canon” (“*kojŏn*”) in Korea. As early as the immediate post-liberation period, Cho Yŏnhyŏn contends in his essay “Literature and Tradition” that, although Korea’s modern literary tradition is feeble, he anticipates that Korea would be capable of producing a world-class canon in a short span of time, as did Russia.<sup>127</sup> As such, the discourse of canon was considered less a thing of the past than a project for the present that would place Korea a step closer to joining the ranks of modern nations around the world. More importantly, as with Park Chung Hee’s revival of Confucian values for the purpose of legitimizing his authoritarian rule and dismissing the call for Western democracy by dissidents, the conservative literati’s pursuit of traditional literary aesthetics was also a reflection of their discontent with the younger generation literati’s turn to Western figures such as Sartre and Camus in the name of engagement.

In *The Story of Pun’ye*, what we witness is the degenerate livelihood of a poverty-stricken, underdeveloped countryside, rejected along the urgent path to modernity and remaining externalized literally in the physical form of excrement. This is embodied most viscerally by the tragic heroine Pun’ye. The countryside that Pang draws is profoundly different from its counterparts so readily seen among the 1950s’ and 60s’ humanist literature, wherein the pristine, pastoral state of the countryside appear as “authentic” antidotes to the artificiality of urban life and the chaos of political revolutions, a place of

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<sup>126</sup> Kim Tongni, “Minjok munhak ūi sae kusang—Kim Tongni, Kim Tongsŏk taedam” [New conceptualization of national literature—a dialogue between Kim Tongni and Kim Tongsŏk], as quoted in Kim Yunsik, *Haebang konggan mundan ūi naemyŏn p’unggyŏng*, Seoul: Minŭmsa, 1996, pp. 305.

<sup>127</sup> Pak Mingyu, “Haebanggi ui chont’ongjuui siron yon’gu – ch’ongmunhyop ul chungsim uro” [A study on the traditionalist poetics in liberation period with a focus on the association of young literati of Chosŏn], in *Ŏmunhak* 118 (2012): pp. 265.

respite from an ill-stricken nation. In these works, the countryside is not free from the nation, but becomes a way of imagining it differently. In the imagination of Kim Tongni, for example, the nation is a timeless entity, and the illness that has struck it is temporary political passions that are no more than changing fashions. And herein lay the most crucial reason for Paik's endorsement of *The Story of Pun'ye*. For Paik, as was the case with other socially minded literati of the time as well, revalorizing the natural beauty of the countryside idyll was not a feasible solution to Korea's many social problems. Not only did romanticizing the countryside render it difficult to see that the rural parts of the nation have actually fallen into utter decay over the course of Korea's turbulent historical maelstrom, but it also had the by-effect of reinforcing the growing gap between the city and the countryside. Ironically enough, the romance of the countryside likewise played a crucial role in forging of modern national identity, the reification of which was not too distant from the city turning its back on the countryside and its rural masses.

In that regard, Sönu certainly was not the only critic to point out the “offenses of obscenity/indecency” as it relates to *The Story of Pun'ye*. Similar reactions were often detected among the leftist proponents of “peasant literature” (*nongmin munhak*) as well. This is evinced by the harsh review given by the critic Hong Kisam who describes the novel as a far cry from proper peasant literature, dismissing it as a “non-official historical tale” (*yadam*).<sup>128</sup> By direct contrast, Paik would argue that “regardless of the writer's intentions, or whether or not a single peasant appears in this novel, it would not be wrong to call it a rare and fine example of ‘peasant literature.’”<sup>129</sup> In strategically elevating the status of *The Story of Pun'ye* to that of an exemplar peasant novel, Paik was critiquing

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<sup>128</sup> Hong Kisam, “Nongch'on munhangnon” [Theory of literature of the countryside] in Sin Kyöngnim ed., *Nongmin munhangnon*, Seoul: Onnuri, 1983, pp. 78.

<sup>129</sup> Paik, Nak-chung, “‘Ch'angjak kwa pip'yöng' yinyön pan,” pp. 374.

the very proponents of peasant literature that regarded literature as a vehicle for generating historical consciousness, often at the expense of literary qualities that were crucial for literature to operate effectively as social critique. As committed as Paik was to the notion of literature's "engagement," he was nonetheless very wary of the fraught legacy of leftist literature in Korea. This can be felt in Paik's repeated critique of literary works with slovenly execution of interjecting, and thus intruding, the literary work with writer's ideological stance. Herein lay the reason behind Paik's emphasis on the importance of realism in socially grounded literature and his enthusiasm for *The Story of Pun'ye*, for that matter. For Paik "wholesomeness" did not lie in aestheticization of the countryside that forsook the raw realities, but in objective and candid representation of social realities.

Although Paik constantly lauds Pang for sustaining a "healthy" realism in his objective depiction of the lives of the characters, no matter how morally depraved or hopeless they may seem, the meaning of "health" would take a dramatic turn in Paik's characterization of Pun'ye's passion for life. "The health of *The Story of Pun'ye* is not only felt through the writer's intense faculty for concentration and description, [...] but also in his patience, generosity, and courage to write objectively about people who are as shabby as his characters," writes Paik. "Such health is also embodied by his protagonist Pun'ye. And this *health* reemerges victoriously at the very moment Pun'ye decides against taking her own life out of guilt over lost virginity and overcomes the temptation of death."<sup>130</sup> Though brief, it is important to note that Paik's commentary concerns both the formal assessment of the novel (i.e., objective, concentrated, and descriptive work of realist fiction) as well as the content material of the story (i.e., "about people as shabby as

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., pp. 373.



his characters”). As will be explored in the following section, it is this very tension between the call for a “healthy” social critique and his equally strong wish for a “healthy,” strong peasant-protagonist struggling against all odds and capable transforming into a subject of proper *minjung* consciousness that emerges Paik’s reading of Pang’s novel.

### “‘Discovery’ of the Primitive” vs. “Narrativization of the *Minjung*”

In her analysis of the South Korean literary field, Kwŏn Podŭrae argues that in the late 1960s, the critics associated with *Ch’angbi* had yet to determine the specific contours of their ideological stance that would go on to form the basis of national literature movement in the 1970s. In the late 1960s, therefore, it was none other than the “primitivism” (*wonsijuŭi*) in Pang’s novel, and its attendant “ahistoricity” and “filthiness,” that Paik was drawn to.<sup>131</sup> And the appeal lay, Kwŏn contends, precisely in the perceived potential in explicit, material, and hence absolute otherness that resists domestication by the hegemonic imperatives of state-authored modernization and developmentalism.<sup>132</sup> The primitive aspects *the Story of Pun’ye* were, Kwŏn maintains, a precursor to *Ch’angbi*’s self-conscious “transition to the indigenous” (*t’och’akhwa*) witnessed in the 1970s.<sup>133</sup> Implicit in Kwŏn’s analysis of *The Story of Pun’ye* is her understanding of

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<sup>131</sup> Kwŏn Podŭrae, “Sawŏl ŭi munhak hyŏkmyŏng, kŭndaehwaron kwa ŭi taegyŏl—Yi Ch’ŏngjun kwa Pang Yŏngung, *Sanmun sidae* esŏ *Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng kkaji*” [Revolution in 1960s’ literature: April uprising and the literary strategy of counter-development], *Hanguk munhak yŏngu* 39 (December 2010): pp. 297.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 270.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 295.

Paik's (and *Ch'angbi's*, by extension) position to the modernization and developmentalism of the Park Chung Hee's regime as one of "resistance" (*chǒhang*).<sup>134</sup>

While Kwŏn's provocative reading of *The Story of Pun 'ye* is convincing on many levels, I would nonetheless like to suggest that her interpretation of Pun 'ye as an embodiment of "primitivism" in Paik's criticism—that is, as an otherness to hegemonic images of sanitation and modernity—renders the project of intervention (as envisioned by Paik vis-à-vis *The Story of Pun 'ye*) untenable in praxis. For Paik, it was not enough to posit "the primitive" in and of itself as a viable form of resistance, a force of dissent, or as an "authentic" alternative to the developmentalist imperative of the 1960s. Understanding the intervention that Paik sought to make through *The Story of Pun 'ye* necessitates a more nuanced interpretation of the status of "nativeness" (*t'osoksǒng*).

Instead of casually dismissing Paik's reading on the account of his "paradoxical" or "erroneous" valorization of nativeness in Pang's text, and looking solely at the text of *The Story of Pun 'ye* text as a caliber of Paik's capacity as a literary critic, I argue that it is precisely in examining this site of paradox and the contradictions in Paik's reading that we are able to see the tension that emerges in his call for proper representation of *minjung* through literature. It is in Paik's reading of the novel that I locate the site of meaning production. Nativeness—in all its fragmented and multiple forms—was deployed, reformulated, and negated by Paik in forging the category of *minjung*. The question here is not whether Paik is a "correct" reader of Pang's novel or not. The task is, rather, to figure out the historical context that shaped Paik's reading of the novel and why the novel became an intervention within that historical context.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., pp. 303.

On many levels, Kwŏn’s analysis of Paik’s enthusiasm for *The Story of Pun ’ye* with respect to the novel’s apparent “primitivism” falls in line with the existing scholarship. Several scholars to date have argued that the significance of *The Story of Pun ’ye* in Paik’s career and, by extension, in the development of *Ch ’angbi*, lies in its deep preoccupation with nativeness. In the fervent drive to discover “Koreanness” in the newly founded nation undergoing decolonization, “native” elements—often presented in the form of regional dialects, traditional customs, and details of the agrarian communal life—were posited as the most fertile grounds upon which to reassert the sovereign alterity of Korea.<sup>135</sup>

This is a familiar critique of nativism in Third World nationalisms, the condemnation of how an essentialist understanding of the nation can be forged in the name of resistance to Western imperialism. On various occasions, Paik’s reading of Pang’s novel in 1968 does appear to reflect what scholars have pointed out as Paik’s deep attachment to the nativeness of the countryside. Here, the scholars were referring to what Paik referred to as “*the last bastion* for protecting the people’s subjectivity and the vitality of their lives against the distorted developmentalism of global imperialism” in his theorization of national literature.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, nativeness for Paik was indeed a means of forging resistance against foreign impositions. In the face of thirty-five years of Japanese colonialism, followed by the onset of Cold War empires of the U.S. and the Soviet Union, claiming nativeness was nothing short of an act of decolonization, the strategic reclaiming of one’s sovereignty violently confiscated by a string of colonizer(s).

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<sup>135</sup> So Yŏnghyŏn, “Chungsim/chubyŏn ūi wisanghakkwa hanbandoranŭn lokallit’i—“sŏngji” ga kot “nagwŏn” yi toenŭn il” [Center/periphery topology and the locality of Korea—‘the holy land will soon be paradise’], *Hyŏndae munhak ūi yŏngu* 56 (2015): pp. 25.

<sup>136</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “Minjok munhak ūi hyŏn tangye” [The current status of *minjok* literature], *Ch ’angjak kwa pip ’yŏng* 35 (Spring 1975): pp. 55.

Indeed, Pang's novel does indicate the continued relevance of nativeness in organization of his characters' lives. The villagers' lives are informed by a cyclical pattern of seasons, as well as a traditional pattern of rituals and celebrations—as evinced by the villagers' unanimous excitement over a new communal funeral bier:

The exterior court of the bamboo house was lit brightly, with sizzling torchlights illuminating the spacious court from four corners. A good-looking bier sat in the middle of the court, and people were abustle about the bier. The aged with the other aged, the young'uns with the other young'uns, the maidens with the other maidens, the married women with other married women—those close up against the bier were mostly children. Even the peasant band members had come. Among them was Yongp'al, playing a pipe. Pyŏngch'un sat alone on the embankment of the field, peering at her husband and the bier alternately. "Grandma Tiger" was babbling away with other grannies, her face flushed. She had removed her flappy winter's hat, and neatly donned a dark gray skirt and jacket. By the quince tree was Pun'ye's mother, cutting the rice cakes with other village women, and Pun'ye's father was yelling at the village kids not to touch the bier. The sound of laughter continued from the stone steps of the bamboo house where widows stood, and Sŭngbong's wife the Mute was standing alone like Pyŏngch'un.<sup>137</sup>

Pang dedicates several pages worth of description to the village-wide celebration over the funeral bier. The elaborate treatment of the celebration, attended by almost everyone in the village with the exception of Pun'ye, attests to the fact that there is still a communal order intact in the village. Modern or unmodern, the addition of a new funeral bier in the village is the one event that brings together the young and old, men and women, mad or sane in one communal setting.

At the same time, what is curious about Paik's formulation above is not that he points to the potential for resistance residing in nativeness, but the fact that he would identify nativeness as "the *last* bastion." This potent metaphor implies that there are additional dimensions to Paik's understanding of nativeness, aside from the more apparent element of its proposed salience in the discourse of anti-imperialist resistance.

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<sup>137</sup> Pang Yŏngung, *Pullyegi*, pp. 172.

As a “bastion,” nativeness presides as an indispensable entity in Paik’s characterization of the rural masses and their ways of life. Nativeness was the deepest core of resistance, that which refuses to succumb to the growing assail of imperial forces. At the same time, nativeness as the *last* bastion is also a fortress, a barrier separates the imperial forces from the countryside. The link that Paik here draws between nativeness, the countryside, and “the vitality of [people’s] lives” is more fully illustrated in the following passage from Paik’s reading of *The Story of Pun’ye*:

Historical time may be excluded from *The Story of Pun’ye*, but the text nonetheless depicts the realities of a world wherein the awareness of history is wholly absent. And the depiction of such a world is horrendous in its mercilessness. Sŭngbong, Ch’ŏlbong, K’ongjoji the epileptic madman and Okhwa the madwoman certainly are not an accidental part of this world (K’ongjoji and Okhwa are said to have been actual people that practically everyone in Yesan<sup>138</sup> knew of). The excitement and joy of the villagers over a new communal funeral bier attest to the historical particularity of their lives. These lives—equipped with neither modern historical consciousness nor social consciousness—are nonetheless imbued with their own sense of fulfillment, ethics, and even undeniable dignity. At the same time, however, they are lives that desperately need to be overcome, lives that are at constant risk of finding their relief only through madness.<sup>139</sup>

As evinced in this passage, although Paik duly recognizes the humanity of the rural masses, he is wary of the pitfalls of living in a traditional society severed from the forces of modernity and development. Nativeness as witnessed among the rural masses is salutary to the extent that it provides a sense of deep-rooted communalism, as Paik points out in the scene of the village-wide celebration over the new funeral bier. His affirmation of the novel’s nativeness attests to the utility of nativeness in promoting a sense of organic collectivity that was at stake in his reading. For *minjung* to become properly

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<sup>138</sup> During an interview, Pang, the writer of *The Story of Pun’ye*, mentions that the story’s setting is in the Yesan county of South Chungcheong Province. See Kim Yigu, “‘Pullyegi’ ga palp’yo toego ingi ga yŏnghwa paeu motchi anatchi,” in *Han’gyŏl kattoe nallo saeropge: Ch’angbi osipnyŏn-sa*, edited by Ch’angbi osipnyŏn-sa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏngsa, 2016, pp. 54.

<sup>139</sup> Paik, Nak-chung, “‘Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng’ yinyŏn pan,” pp. 374.

rearticulated as historical subjects, the category had to be “conceived as a unitary and organic whole with an identifiable developmental potential.”<sup>140</sup> And this is precisely where nativeness was a strategic mechanism for Paik.

However, Paik’s privileging of *minjung* vis-à-vis the sense of a primordial community is far from unconditional or straightforward. For Paik, nativeness in *The Story of Pun’ye* remained disconnected from “modern historical consciousness” or “social consciousness.” In Paik’s interpretation, madness—a condition witnessed among several characters in Pang’s novel, including the heroine Pun’ye—was at once the symptom of and release from a closed-off social system with no exits. For this reason, the madness that proliferates in *The Story of Pun’ye*, most prominently through Pun’ye herself, should be seen as the most severe and staggering critique of present-day reality of a hidebound countryside. As much as nativeness was necessary as the “bastion” against foreign threats in Paik’s formulation, left to its own devices it would become the very root of social ills and tragedies. For nativeness to fulfill its potential as a reservoir of resistance—for the rural masses to emerge as subjects at the vanguard of history, that is—it had to be properly anchored in sociohistorical consciousness. In other words, enlightenment and modernization were as important as nativeness in Paik’s conceptualization of *minjung*.

What we witness in Paik’s reading of *The Story of Pun’ye* is a perpetual balancing act on his part, a straddling between a social critique of the demoralized countryside, on the one hand, and a reassertion of the rural masses as agents of historical change, on the other. This is again implied in Paik’s wishing that Pang had drawn a more resilient,

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<sup>140</sup> Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, pp. 292.

stronger character out of Pun'ye.<sup>141</sup> Resilience, in fact, was an indispensable component in how Paik conceived of *minjung*. As evidenced in Paik's appraisal of *The Story of Pun'ye*, while it is clear that he sought to make an intervention through a candid depiction of a degenerate countryside, he was simultaneously anxious about the fact that such realistic depiction itself was prone to undermining the *minjung*'s potential to awaken and rise as triumphant, "healthy" subjects of resistance. Indeed, in Paik's reading of the novel, one gets the sense that his initial enthusiasm for the novel's success at achieving realist aesthetics (which for Paik, as he repeats several times in his reading of the novel, reaches its highest peak at moments when the authorial voice does not interrupt the reality factor of the story) is somewhat abated by his criticism of the author for failing to portray the female protagonist Pun'ye in a more positive light at the end of the novel. Likewise, there is a residual tension that unwittingly emerges in Paik's reading of *The Story of Pun'ye*, precisely at a point when his work as a literary critic collides with the need as a socially minded intellectual to impart a sense of optimism about the impoverished *minjung* through literature.

Paik's employment of the adjective "healthy" in his description of Pang's realist portrayal of rural life as well as in his characterization of Pun'ye's "potential for life" (*saengmyŏngnyŏk*) suggests the purposiveness inherent in both of his agendas. But as Pang's novel gives away, the "healthier" it was in its capacity to depict the countryside realistically, the less efficient it was in articulating a properly "healthy" *minjung* consciousness, and vice versa. Inadvertently, this was an unwieldy, even contradictory, construction, but neither could be dispensed with easily in Paik's thinking when it came to the relationship between literature and representation of *minjung*. And at the nexus of

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., pp. 373.

these two agendas was nativeness—a quality that had to be simultaneously critiqued and endorsed for both of the imperatives to hold. In order to reinvigorate the social function of literature in the 1960s, Paik needed to embark upon a new paradigm of literature that can complicate productively the dichotomy of “pure” literature and literature of “engagement” that had long shaped the literary field, fraught as it was with competing legacies of enlightenment literature, KAPF-led proletarian literature, modernist literature, and nativist literature. Therefore, even as committed as he was to promoting social awareness through literature, it was necessary for Paik to straddle ever so cautiously between the competing demands of literary aesthetics, social critique, and enlightenment of the rural masses, so as to counter both the suspicion of ideological bias as well as the aestheticism of literary autonomy.

### **Conclusion: Reinvigorating the Category of *Minjung* in Literature**

In bringing this chapter to a close, I would like to reflect upon the double meaning of “health” in Paik’s reading of *The Story of Pun’ye* to think about the subsequent relevance of the term “health” in the South Korean literary field. Why is this tension that we detect in Paik’s criticism so vital to understanding the longer history of Korean literature?

In answering this question, we might begin by recognizing that the term “health” (*kõn’gang*) which Paik uses doubly in his reading is encountered again, and with greater vigor, in the 1980s’ literary field at the height of the *minjung* movement, at a time when the category of *minjung* became overdetermined in the process of mobilizing the masses



in the name of anti-authoritarian resistance. In fact, “healthiness” (*kŏn ’gangsŏng*), alongside words like “immediacy” (*hyŏnjangsŏng*) and “vision” (*chŏnmang*) would become one of the most frequently invoked values during this time in debates on how to represent the *minjung*<sup>142</sup> in literature. However, in the 1980s, the descriptive term “healthy” would become restricted to depictions of the *minjung* subjects. As witnessed with so many revolutionary experiments before it, the ideal literary representation of the *minjung* often comprised of values such as “purity, simplicity, spiritual and physical health, and steadfastness.”<sup>143</sup> But to depict the *minjung* in such ways, literature’s capacity for fuller, potentially critical, and more realistic representation often had to be compromised, molded, and made available, rather, to be integrated readily as vehicles of truth that can serve in the larger cause of the democratization movement. Thus it was by no coincidence that in the 1980s we would see a drastic reduction in the output of novel-length works, which was undoubtedly *the* genre of socially grounded literature throughout the 1970s’, and an inverse proliferation of reportages (*rŭpo*), memoirs, or poems. By the *minjung*, for the *minjung*, of the *minjung*—such was the definitive doctrine that shaped the opposition within the literary field of the 1980s. It was no wonder, then, that the tension between “healthy” realism and representation of “healthy” *minjung* that we witness in Paik’s reading of *The Story of Pun ’ye* could no longer be sustained in the 1980s. At the same time, however, it was precisely Paik’s strategic straddling between the two meanings of “health” that ultimately saved him from the solemn and doctrinaire

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<sup>142</sup> As a historically contingent concept, if in the 1960s the *minjung* comprised mostly of the displaced and dispossessed rural population, in the 1980s *minjung* comprised largely of the exploited laborers in the industrial sectors, among other groups of disenfranchised people such as the urban poor, farmers, and even intellectuals. See Pak Hyŏnch’ae, “Minjung kwa munhak” [*Minjung* and literature], in Kim Pyŏnggŏl and Ch’ae Kwangsŏk eds., *Minjok, minjung, kŭrigo munhak*, Seoul: Chiyangsa, 1985, pp. 73.

<sup>143</sup> Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, pp. 286.

elevation of the *minjung* that became so characteristic of the 1980s' democratization movement.

## CHAPTER 3

### Theory as Praxis:

#### The Division System within the Capitalist World-Economy

#### **North Korea and the Division System in Post-1989 Era**

On July 6, 2016, the Obama administration made an announcement with respect to North Korea that was both as surprising as it was expected: on the heels of the fourth nuclear test by North Korea that had taken place in January of the same year, the US State Department would impose human rights sanctions directly on North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un and fourteen other North Korean senior officials on charges of inhuman practices "including extrajudicial killings, forced labor, and torture."<sup>144</sup> This was no doubt an especially hard-line response to North Korea's nuclear program advances, but there was nothing new about America's stance of open condemnation toward North Korea's nuclear weapons program per se, a stance it has maintained consistently since the Agreed Framework for freezing North Korea's nuclear program fell apart in 2002.

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<sup>144</sup> In a statement accompanying the report detailing repression in North Korea, John Kirby, the State Department spokesman said, "The report represents the most comprehensive U.S. government effort to date to name those responsible for or associated with the worst aspects of the North Korean government's repression, including serious human rights abuses and censorship in the D.P.R.K., and we will continue to identify more individuals and entities in future reports." See Julie Hirschfeld Davis, "Obama Places Sanctions on Kim Jong-un and Other Top North Koreans for Rights Abuses," July 6, 2016, *The New York Times*, accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/07/world/asia/obama-puts-sanctions-on-north-korean-leaders-for-human-rights-abuse.html>.

Rather, what made this particular announcement surprising was that it was the first instance of the US government placing sanctions on any North Korean official in the name of *human rights*. The announcement built upon a UN Commission inquiry of 2014 which had charged North Korean leaders with crimes against humanity.

This recent adoption of human rights discourse in condemning North Korea is highly significant in that it implies two strategic American moves, first with regard to North Korea and second with regard America's own positioning in the world order. It represents on the one hand the latest iteration of the American policy of "carrots and sticks" designed to discipline a "rogue nation," and as such, a forceful reification of the power imbalance that has structured the relations between North Korea and the US since the suspension of the Korean War in 1953 and the division of the peninsula along the Thirty-eighth parallel. Addressing Kim Jong-un as a "human rights offender" reinforces the view of North Korea as an "outlaw" communist country ruled by a lineage of ruthless dictators recalcitrant to "strategic patience" of the US administration.<sup>145</sup> Second, by appealing to the universalist rhetoric of human rights, US further isolates North Korea while framing America's national interests as supranational—that is, as a matter of protecting the very humanity of the human race and securing nothing less than world peace.

Twenty-seven years have passed since the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989 supposedly "ended" the Cold War, but what we witness today contradicts the common belief that we are now in a "post-Cold War era." Indeed, the fall of communism in 1989 brought about increasing isolation of North Korea in the face of capitalist globalization

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<sup>145</sup> Sarah Lohschelder, "Three Presidents Facing North Korea – A Review of U.S. Foreign Policy," *The Huffington Post*, Feb 28, 2016, accessed July 25, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/young-professionals-in-foreign-policy/three-presidents-facing-n\\_b\\_9335546.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/young-professionals-in-foreign-policy/three-presidents-facing-n_b_9335546.html).

and post-Soviet transition in the Eastern European bloc. As former socialist allies of China and Russia began forging new economic ties with the US, North Korea was cast as an anomaly, the last communist country to hold out in staunch defense as the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe disintegrated and the U.S. arose as the singular global hegemon.

It is at such a time of revived “Cold War” tensions and increasing isolation of North Korea in the world that we can reread Paik Nak-chung’s theory of “the division system” (*pundan ch’eje*) for fresh relevance. Taking shape in the late 1980s at a time when the US-Soviet rivalry that had sustained the Cold War was coming apart, the division system was Paik’s shorthand for the necessity of rearticulating the relationship between North and South Korea, as well as the relationship between the discourse on social change and discourse on reunification, between the Korean division and the East Asian geopolitics, and between the Korean peninsula and the world order at large.

In undoing the dominant discourse on North Korea and the continuing division of the peninsula, Paik draws his inspiration from the sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis, in particular the latter’s concepts of capitalist world-economy and interstate context of development. This chapter seeks to examine how Paik’s conceptualization of the division system as “a subsystem of the larger world-system” became an act of subversion in the post-1989 context and how it continues to challenge entrenched structures of power in the present day.<sup>146</sup> I proceed with an elaboration of how Paik utilizes Wallerstein’s ideas in his own theorization of the division system. The key intervention enabled by Paik’s creative application of Wallerstein’s world-systems theory to the reality of Korean division involves the notion of systemicity (*ch’ejesǒng*). The

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<sup>146</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “Nations and Literatures in the Age of Globalization,” pp. 226.

paradigm shift it occasioned brought North and South Korea into the same perceptual field and revealed the common structure within which the two states actually operate, despite their mutual hostility and antithetical positioning. The division system, moreover, is not a self-contained structure limited to the Korean peninsula, but a kind of sub-system wherein hegemonic forces and vested interests of the larger world-system are operating with respect to the Korean peninsula. For instance, instead of being painted as a “rogue state” that abides by no international norms and whose mindboggling bizarreness can thus be discussed only as part of comedy routines, North Korea emerges in Paik Nak-chung’s theory as an actor operating within a system, and as such, an entity whose actions must be seen and interpreted in light of actions by the system’s other actors. Given this reframing, how does Wallerstein’s concept of “capitalist world-economy” enable Paik to illuminate the operation of division system on the Korean peninsula in a new way, and what was Paik challenging through his conceptualization? In what ways does Paik depart from Wallerstein in his understanding of Korea’s situation within the post-1989 context, and what are the pitfalls in conceptualizing the division system as a subsystem of the larger world-system?

In approaching these questions, the next two sections explicate how Paik deployed his reading of Wallerstein in three interrelated ways to combat what he saw as the increasing reification and essentialization of Korean division as a historical phenomenon bearing an ahistorical character. First, by drawing on Wallerstein’s concept of capitalist world-economy—that is to say, the view that the entire world operates within a framework of a singular stabilized social division of labor between the core and periphery—Paik challenges the assumption that North Korea is an entity outside of

capitalist world-economy. North Korea may identify itself ideologically as a communist country, but that does not ensure its separation from the capitalist world-economy. Second, the idea of interstate system enables Paik to argue that the division system has implications well beyond the Korean peninsula, and to recast local history in geopolitical terms, bringing state actors hitherto positioned on different planes of political, economic, and even moral economies into the same field of interactivity. Three, Wallerstein's assertion of a structural time in capitalist world-system enables Paik to rearticulate the division system itself as intrinsic to the long but not eternal lifespan of the modern world-system.

The chapter then concludes with a brief consideration of the dialectical relationship between theory and praxis in Paik's life and work, focusing on how his theorization of the division system became a vehicle for his activism within the burgeoning reunification movement (*t'ongil undong*) that represented one response to the changing terrain of progressive politics in South Korea following the country's successful democratization. The discussion will bring us to contemporary events that prove the longevity of Paik's intervention in the discursive formation of the Korean division.

### **Reading Wallerstein in the “Age of Social Science”: The “Unit of Analysis” and “Capitalist World-System”**

Paik theorized division system formally in 1992, but his reading of Wallerstein actually dates back to the early 1980s. Paik was not the first to introduce Wallerstein's

work to the Korean intellectual scene. In fact, Wallerstein's theory of capitalist world-economy was introduced around the end of the 1970s in conjunction with "dependency theory," which provided critical analyses of capitalist imperialism and sought socialist alternatives to the existing world-system.<sup>147</sup> But neither dependency theory nor Wallerstein's capitalist-world economy maintained popularity for very long in South Korea. A majority of progressive intellectuals in the early 1980s felt that Wallerstein's framing of social processes at the level of the world rather diminished the importance of local class issues and thus proved ineffectual in generating the proper social energy for dissident movement.<sup>148</sup>

It was precisely at this time when world-systems theory was losing favor among the progressives that Paik began to insist on the necessity of comprehending the South Korean society as well as the Korean division from a world-systems perspective. As I explicate in this section, there were two main aspects about Wallerstein's thought that proved particularly useful for Paik in the context of the 1980s' Korea: the world (as opposed to singular nation-states) as the basic unit of analysis in social sciences, and the capitalist world-system as a historical (as opposed to a transcendental) system.

In hindsight, it is possible to discern several parallels between Paik and Wallerstein in terms of their intellectual underpinnings and worldviews. Though a sociologist in training and practice, Wallerstein has strove to think about social sciences

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<sup>147</sup> According to Vincent Ferraro, dependency theory was developed in the late 1950s to explain "the economic development of a state in terms of external influences—political, economic, and cultural—on national development policies." It explains "an historical condition which shapes a certain structure of the world economy such that it favors some countries to the detriment of others and limits the development possibilities of the subordinate economies...a situation in which the economy of a certain group of countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another company, to which their own is subjected." See Vincent Ferraro, "Dependency Theory: An Introduction," in Giorgio Secondi ed. *The Development Economics Reader*, London: Routledge, 2008, pp. 59.

<sup>148</sup> Kim Tongch'un, *Hanguk sahoe kwahak ūi saeroun mosaek*, Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yōngsa, 1997, pp. 419.



as historically constituted “structures of knowledge.” As he has asserted on various occasions, Wallerstein refuses to accept the disciplinary divisions of political science, economics, and sociology at face value, and remains critical toward the universalistic knowledge claims of social sciences as a whole. Social sciences, Wallerstein argues, claim the status of scientific truth by asserting themselves to be context-free. But the disciplinary divisions are anything but ahistorical. In fact, for Wallerstein, the disciplinary distinctions between political science, economics, and sociology parallel the distinctions between the state, the market, and the civil society.<sup>149</sup> “The ideas, the concepts, the knowledge that people and institutions within the system create,” he writes, “is part and parcel of that historical system; this knowledge is itself both systemic and historical (just like any other structures of the system). If we are to understand these structures of knowledge, they must be historicized, evaluated, and explained within the framework of this system. We must discover their rules, how these rules came into existence, and how they frame what we might learn about reality.”<sup>150</sup>

Though trained as a scholar of English literature, Paik Nak-chung made his mark as a theorist by freely crossing disciplinary boundaries to draw on sociology, economics, history, and political science—for Paik, too, established structures of knowledge have never been sacrosanct. In fact, he saw any attempt to corral literature into a purely aestheticist stance as an example of the authoritarian South Korean state’s deliberate depoliticization of literature. Wallerstein’s self-reflexivity in his own work as a sociologist no doubt appealed to Paik.

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<sup>149</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein et al., *Open the Social Sciences—Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, pp. 36.

<sup>150</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, “Introduction: Scholarship and Reality,” in Immanuel Wallerstein ed. *The Modern World-System in the Longue Durée*, Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2004, pp. 1-2.

To appreciate Paik's reading of Wallerstein as a subversive act, we need to understand the discursive topography of South Korean society in the 1980s. The decade began with great, albeit somewhat inchoate, anticipations that democracy, so long deferred under the military dictatorship of Park Chung Hee, would finally be realized in South Korea, since the assassination of Park in October of 1979 had ended his Yusin regime. But in a matter of few short months, that dream was crushed by yet another military coup, this time led by Chun Doo Hwan, then the chief of the Defense Security Command. Chun, who had consolidated his control over the military by ousting his superiors in an internal coup in December of 1979, extended his control over the entire South Korean society in May of 1980, and proceeded to orchestrate a bloody crackdown of pro-democracy protesters in the city of Kwangju. Chun's regime proved even more brutal than Park Chung Hee's in some ways, as it failed to achieve the kind of fascistic cooptation of the populace that had characterized Park's Yusin regime. In the aftermath of Kwangju, the belief spread among South Korean university students that the U.S. had given tacit consent to Chun's deployment of Korean military troops for the purpose of massacring civilians in Kwangju. And the apparent U.S. endorsement of Chun's military regime, captured in iconic images of Reagan and Chun sitting side by side, first in the White House and then in the Blue House, led to an explosive spread of anti-Americanism among the South Korean activists.

Kwangju marked a turning point in South Korean democratization movement by forcing a realization that South Korea remains in a state of neocolonial domination. Throughout the 1970s, when "freedom" was still the slogan on dissidents' lips against the Yusin regime, Western liberal democracy had been a source of inspiration for political

action and the United States the embodiment of a political system that had achieved this ideal. After Kwangju, the US no longer symbolized freedom but oppression for a growing number of younger, more radical activists. As their war-cry changed from “liberty”—the kind that would protect individuals from the state whose control over its people extended even to the lengths of their hair—to “liberation”—as in the emancipation of people, whether this category were to be conceived in national terms as *minjok* or in class terms as *minjung*—a bitter critique emerged of the 70s’ activists and opposition politicians, many of whom had framed their resistance in Western liberal terms. These dissidents had failed both in preventing another authoritarian regime from taking power and protecting the lives of civilian protesters in Kwangju, because they had misunderstood both the nature of the Korean problem and where to look for the solution.

Erupting against such a backdrop, the democratization movements of the 1980s, though diverse in form and character, shared three common goals—democracy, genuine independence from foreign domination, and peaceful reunification without foreign interference. Indeed, as Gi-Wook Shin analyzes, the 1980s was a time when the very project of democratization was conceived in direct connection with “national liberation from foreign dominance, believing the former to be unobtainable without the latter.”<sup>151</sup> By the mid-1980s, student protesters, labor activists, and progressive intellectuals were seeking a radical departure from the pursuit of liberal democracy as the vehicle of anti-authoritarian resistance. A decisive break from Cold War epistemologies—centered on and engineered by the West, and complicit with the maintenance of authoritarian regimes

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<sup>151</sup> Gi-Wook Shin, “Marxism, Anti-Americanism, and Democracy in South Korea: An Examination of Nationalist Intellectual Discourse,” *positions* 3:2 (Fall 1995): pp. 508.

in Korea—necessitated “objective” structures of knowledge that would allow the realities of neocolonial Korea to be apprehended as they are.

The name for these “objective” structures of knowledge was “science.” Science, in turn, became synonymous with Marxist analysis, in particular with its dialectical materialism. In one of the books most widely read by university students during the entire 1980s, Yi Chin-kyöng defined “science” as “the act of analyzing the given world with consistency from the position of a particular class with the purpose of bringing about a total transformation of society.”<sup>152</sup> Around 1985, a series of debates unfolded among South Korean intellectuals concerning the subject of “social formation” (*sahoe kusöngch’e*). Inspired by the Marxist concept that refers to “a complex unity of social relations (economic, ideological and political structures) in which the economy is determinant,” these debates centered on analyzing the “mode of production and its conditions of existence” in South Korean society.<sup>153</sup> Such acronyms as CDR (Civil Democratic Revolution), NDR (National Democratic Revolution, and PDR (People’s Democratic Revolution) were widely disseminated among university students and leftist intellectuals at the time amidst extreme state censorship, through underground publications, mimeographs, and even hand-copied transcripts. NL (National Liberation), PD (People’s Democracy), and CA (Constituent Assembly) became labels of competing factions within the student movement. The proliferation of these “codewords” for revolutions was indicative of the widespread realization that a genuine revolution had yet to occur in Korea. The yearning for a revolution, in whatever type or form it may arrive, was that much stronger and all the more urgent in light of heightened state repression.

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<sup>152</sup> Yi Chin-kyöng, *Sahoe kusöngch’eron kwa sahoe kwahak pangböpnön*, Seoul: Ach’im, 1986, pp. 27.

<sup>153</sup> Bryan S. Turner, *Marx and the End of Orientalism*, New York: Routledge, 1978, pp. 35.

But social revolution had to be preceded by a proper diagnosis, which would in turn be provided by the explanatory powers inherent in a “scientific,” as opposed to a “utopian,” socialism.<sup>154</sup> Was Korean society capitalist or still feudalist? If capitalist, was it capitalism of state monopoly (*kukka tokjŏm chabonjuŭi*) or capitalism of a peripheral society (*chubyŏnbu chabonjuŭi*)?<sup>155</sup> Was it a colonial, neocolonial, or sub-imperial system?<sup>156</sup> These debates would continue intermittently even after the success of democratization and workers’ struggle in 1987 and well into the early 1990s, expanding even into various disciplinary realms beyond the social sciences.

Although the professed goal of explaining social reality in “scientific” terms was first and foremost to provide proper guidelines and imperatives for effective collective action, the social formation debates became increasingly academic. Case in point is a roundtable on the topic of the characteristics of Korean society and the task of social movements, moderated by Paik himself in May of 1987. Attended by scholars in the fields of economics, commerce and trade, and sociology, the discussion was centered on the issue of the best theoretical model through which to comprehend the social reality. By social reality, what was meant by and large were economic transformations at the level of the nation-state. Moreover, in their zeal to define the precise nature of South Korean social formation, intellectuals took the nation-state for granted as the proper unit of

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., pp. 219.

<sup>155</sup> In fact, it was through the *Ch’angbi Quarterly* that the social formation debate took off in earnest on the intellectual scene. In 1985, *Ch’angbi* published writings by Pak Hyŏnch’ae, a prolific economist, and Yi Taegŭn. While Pak argued that Korea had reached the stage of a state monopolistic capitalism, wherein the state actively intervened in the nation’s economy, Yi contended that it resembled more of a peripheral capitalism, wherein Korea as a peripheral nation was positioned in an uneven and unequal exchange with core nations in a capitalist world-system. While Pak and Yi differed in their units of analysis (nation versus world), they were nonetheless similar in that neither considered North Korea to be part and parcel of the same nation or the world under analysis. See Pak Hyŏnch’ae, “Hyŏndae han’guk sahoe ūi sŏnggyŏk kwa paljŏn tan’gye e kwanhan yŏn’gu (I) – han’guk chabonjuŭi ūi sŏnggyŏgŭl tullŏssan chongsok iron pip’an,” in *Ch’anggak kwa pip’yŏng* 15 (October 1985): pp. 310-345.

<sup>156</sup> Kim Tongch’un, *Hanguk sahoe kwahak ūi saeroun mosaek*, pp. 316-318.

analysis. As a result, they ended up viewing the situation on the Korean peninsula, divided as it is into North and South, as “clearly a matter of two social formations and two nation-states [...] Division [for social scientists] is just another variable inherent in these individual societies.”<sup>157</sup>

For Paik, this represented the limits of the “scientificity” (*kwahaksöng*) of Marxism in the 1980s’ South Korea. Over the question of how to configure the “subject of social transformation” (*pyönhöök chuch’e*), Paik found himself at odds with progressive social scientists who represented a major force in the democratization movement. Paik pointed out that in identifying historical subjects who would become the agent of revolution as “the *South* Korean working class,” these intellectuals were embracing a “reductive logic of class-based discourse.”<sup>158</sup> For Paik, the category of the South Korean working class had a doubly exclusionary effect. First, by defining membership as specifically South Korean, it elided the problem of North Korea so integral to the workings of South Korean society, reinforcing the misrecognition of the peninsular problem as a matter of interaction/non-interaction between two discrete nation-states. Next, by privileging the revolutionary subjectivity of the working class, it also had the effect of separating out the non-working class as non-agents in the historical struggle.<sup>159</sup> The exclusionary effects of such a conceptualization would become even more pronounced when, following the successes of the democratization movement in the late spring and summer of 1987, a rift opened up between Marxist progressives of the

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<sup>157</sup> Paik Nak-chung et al., “Chwadam – Hyön tangye hanguk sahoe üi söngkyök kwa minjok undong üi kwaje” [(Roundtable) The characteristics of current Korean society and the task of national movement], *Ch’angjak kwa pip’yöng* 15 (June 1987): pp. 63.

<sup>158</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *Hündüllnün pundan ch’eje*, pp. 39.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

*minjung* movement and the more conservative segments of the erstwhile pro-democratic coalition.

It was within this context that Paik found resonance in Wallerstein’s critique of social science theories that take the nation-state as their primary unit of analysis. In *The Modern World-System* (1974), Wallerstein points out the “practical difficulties” he faced in the process of “[falling] back on textbook formulae of the virtues of scientific abstraction,” which led him ultimately to the conclusion that “neither [the sovereign state] nor [the national society] was a social system and that one could only speak of social change in social systems. The only social system in this scheme was the world-system.”<sup>160</sup> For Wallerstein, social inequalities so central to the formation and maintenance of class consciousness, and indeed class-based theories on the whole had to be examined first and foremost at the level of the world. Comparing one nation-state to another in interpreting what happened historically in the world was ineffectual, if not inaccurate. Wallerstein’s call to examine those processes so easily mistaken as discrete national occurrences in terms of “a world-economy”—that is to say, “a large axial division of labor with multiple political centers and multiple cultures”—marked a major paradigm shift in the field of social analysis.<sup>161</sup>

What did Wallerstein’s intervention with regard to the “unit of analysis” enable Paik to do in the mid-1980s in South Korea? First, it allowed Paik to counter the increasingly dogmatic application of Marxist theory in explaining social reality. As we have seen, social sciences—specifically, economics, political science, and sociology—

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<sup>160</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, Berkeley: UC Press, 2011, pp. 7.

<sup>161</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, “World-Systems Analysis,” in George Modelski and Robert A. Denemark eds., *World System History*, Oxford: UNESCO-EOLSS, p. 25.

were regarded as *the* dissident discipline in South Korea in the 1980s, and were made more radical by the importation of Marxism at the beginning of the decade. The sudden rush to adopt Marxist discourse had much to do with the fact that it had been actively repressed ever since the establishment of anti-communist regime under Syngman Rhee in 1948. Because of the way anti-communism provided the ideological underpinning of political suppression in the southern half of divided Korea, Marxism emerged as the key source for the anti-authoritarian resistance as it sought to forge an alternative discourse to combat the continued repression of the authoritarian regime in the 1980s. As Kim Tongch'un has argued, however, social scientists who courted Marxist theory in the 1980s arrived at a "scientific explanation" of social phenomena based on a "few propositions and formulas" for the most part, without fully comprehending the historical and global context in which these phenomena was situated.<sup>162</sup> Discussions carried out over the course of the "social formation" debate rarely exceeded narrowly economic theorization on the subject of how to characterize the South Korean state. As acknowledged retrospectively by many dissident intellectuals in the 1990s, a noticeable gap opened up between "scientific knowledge" and "praxis (of social movement)" in the 1980s, largely due to the ahistorical manner in which they utilized Marxist ideas.

In "The Scientificity of Academic Scholarship and the Nationalist Praxis" (1984), Paik turns to Wallerstein's world-systems theory to address precisely this gap. Expressing discontent over the state of the social sciences for what he perceives to be a blanket application of Marxist doctrine to South Korea's social reality in the name of scientific knowledge, Paik argues that the compulsion toward studying abstract, universal features of social systems risked subsuming the specificities of a local social system within the

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<sup>162</sup> Kim Tongch'un, *Hanguk sahoe kwahak ūi saeroun mosaek*, pp. 317-318.



universal.<sup>163</sup> More gravely, it risked losing sight of the ultimate purpose of sociological research—namely, *praxis* (*silch'ön*), the effectuation of social change. By establishing “science” as a *means* for achieving “praxis” and not an end in itself, Paik espouses a more holistic stance towards social reality. In order to make this point, Paik invokes Wallerstein’s conception of “a single historical social science integrally linked to politics,” a phrase that betrays Wallerstein’s more composite understanding of social changes, and emphasizes the need to look at each local system in respect to its position with the world-system.<sup>164</sup>

The emphasis on praxis and holistic analysis that Paik teased out from his reading of Wallerstein, and which he used to articulate his critique of Marxist social scientists in the mid-1980s became the mainstay of Paik’s theory of the division system in post-authoritarian South Korea. In 1989 and 1990, two events of global significance set the mood for Marxism’s retreat from the South Korean intellectual field and for the emergence of the discourse of reunification: the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and the reunification of Germany not as a merger of two states of equal stature but through the absorption of East Germany by West Germany. The staggering impact of these changes was felt in South Korea as the discussion of rapprochement with North Korea gained definite momentum. South Korean society,

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<sup>163</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “Hakmun ūi kwahaksöng kwa minjokjuüijök silch'ön” [The scientificity of academic scholarship and the nationalist praxis], in *Minjok munhak ūi sae tangye – minjok munhak kwa segye munhak 3*, Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yöngsa, 1990, pp. 343.

<sup>164</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, as quoted in Paik Nak-chung, *Hündöllinün pundan ch'eje*, pp. 342. Wallerstein is highly emphatic on this point. In *The Capitalist World-Economy*, he writes: “I am arguing for an integral connection between historical social science and politics which is avowed and unashamed. I do not believe this detracts from ‘objectivity.’ Quite the contrary, I believe this is the *only possible* road to objectivity [...] Objectivity can only be the vector of work representing fairly the totality of social forces in the social world. This is not truth as the result of Mills’ ‘marketplace of ideas,’ but truth as the composite statement of existent social reality.” See Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, pp. xi.

however, remained remarkably divided in terms of when and how to resume the discussion of reunification. Between 1989 and 1990, the ruling party in South Korea raised the possibility of following Germany's lead, and aiming for gradual absorption of North by the South "on the basis of the [latter's] dominant economic power." Though the idea had a broad appeal at first, interest in the proposal soon dissipated as the dampening effect of reunification on Germany's economy grew more visible. How to achieve reunification also became a point of contention between the two major factions within the progressive forces—People's Democracy (PD) faction and the National Liberation (NL) faction. In the dark years of authoritarian repression before 1987, the PD faction had called for democratization before reunification. The NL faction, by contrast, had called for reunification before democratization. Following democratization, a similar difference persisted, with the task of "reform" now taking place of democratization. On the subject of reunification, PD maintained that, rather than acceding to North Korea's proposal of a confederation system, South Korea should pursue a policy of achieving "reforms [in South Korea] first, reunification later" (*sŏn pyŏnhyŏk, hu t'ongil*).<sup>165</sup> NL, on the other hand, argued for a policy of "reunification first, reforms later" (*sŏn t'ongil, hu pyŏnhyŏk*) and asserted the possibility of reunification by forming a confederation.<sup>166</sup>

On this subject, Paik maintained that neither the PD's nor the NL's position gets at the heart of the problem, as their respective agendas were premised upon ultimately restoring or reconstructing a "single homogeneous nation-state." Neither appears, argued Paik, to be adequately cognizant of the fact after more than four decades of division, a return to an (imagined) state of homogeneity is impossible. To think that fostering

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., pp. 133-134, note 90.

<sup>166</sup> Chŏng Haegu, "Nambuk t'ongil kwa kungnae chŏngch'iŭi pyŏnjŭngbŏp," *Tonghyang kwa chŏnmang* (August 1990): pp. 54.

reunification in the name of “one nation, one people” will resolve the different ways in which the two societies have evolved since the division was idealistic to say the least. The discussion of social transformation was still limited to South Korea only. Even proposals for a “federal union” (“one nation, two regimes”) fell short of recognizing the central task: transformation of the world-system itself by way of transforming the division system.<sup>167</sup>

Why and how was the division of the Korean peninsula still being kept in place, even after the fall of the socialist regimes in other parts of the world and the supposed end of the Cold War? What vested forces at local, regional, as well as global levels were maintaining this system, at the cost of the well-being of the Korean people on both sides of the division? For Paik, these were the key questions that were being overlooked in the rush to debate whether to pursue domestic reform first or inter-Korean reunification first, as though reunification was a foregone conclusion. The operation of the division system did not end with the official conclusion of the Cold War elsewhere in the world, but this important political reality was not being bridged fruitfully with the question of how social and political movements must proceed in post-democratization, post-1989 context.

It was during this critical transitional period not only in Korea but also in the world at large that Paik found in Wallerstein’s world-systems theory and capitalist world-economy a means for situating North Korea and the Korean division meaningfully in a global historical context. There are three key related elements in Wallerstein’s world-systems theory that play crucial role in Paik’s development of the division system theory: (1) capitalist world-economy; (2) interstate system, including the concepts of core, semi-

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<sup>167</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *Hündöllinŭn pundan ch’eye*, pp. 108.

periphery, and periphery; and (3) the *longue durée* of the modern world-system/historical capitalism.

Against the common understanding of North Korea as a post-colonial state that has deliberately withdrawn itself from the capitalist world, and against North Korea's perpetual self-assertion as an autonomous communist entity, Paik repositions North Korea as a regime operating within the capitalist world-economy. The main cause of Korean division is thus not an ideological battle between capitalism and socialism, as was traditionally presented. "It would be more accurate," Paik argues, "to think of the Korean division as a phenomenon occurring within the parameters of the 'Cold War system,' *which is itself a historical manifestation of the modern world-system*" (emphasis added).<sup>168</sup> It is also in light of such overwhelmingly and fully capitalist world-economy, particularly in the post-1989 world order, wherein even China had "opened up and reformed," that North Korea was left vulnerable to the forces of the capitalist world-system.

To say that even North Korea is an integral part of the capitalist world-economy despite all appearances to the contrary is not to argue that North and South Korea are indistinct from one another. That is to say, to emphasize world-systems is not to discount the distinct societies of North and South Korea themselves, but rather to argue that North Korea is as much an actor *within the modern interstate relations* as any other political entity. The "interstate system," according to Wallerstein, is "a set of rules within which the states had to operate and a set of legitimations without which states could not

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., pp. 21.

survive.”<sup>169</sup> Drawing on this concept, Paik highlights the pan-peninsular, pan-Asian, and indeed the global nature of the division system; no state, not even “socialist states” like North Korea, resides outside the boundaries of the interstate system. Another aspect of Wallerstein’s interstate system is a “hierarchy of power”: “The rules of the interstate system were of course not enforced by consent or consensus, but by the willingness and the ability of the stronger states to impose these restrictions, first upon the weaker states, and second upon each other. The states [are] located in a hierarchy of power.”<sup>170</sup>

This is an important aspect of the interstate system for Paik’s thinking, as the hierarchy of power allows Paik to characterize North Korea as what Charles Armstrong has called “‘a weak actor’ in the modern system of interstate relations.”<sup>171</sup> In the Korean situation, the inequalities arising from the persisting core-peripheral power imbalance within the interstate system further compounds the inter-Korean relationship, the enduring tension between the North and South which is actively utilized and perpetuated by the post-WWII American world order.

What did it mean to see North Korea as part of the interstate system and in what sense did this serve as an intervention in the post-1989 context? First, it challenged the Cold War central assumption was that there are “two worlds” of capitalism and communism that persisted in an antagonistic struggle with each other. Paik concurred with Wallerstein in that the socialist regimes of the Cold War were not self-contained entities. They were rather “socialist or pro-socialist political/economic institutions partially established within the formidable elasticity and adaptability of the capitalism

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<sup>169</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilizations*, New York: Verso, 1983, pp. 57.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 57.

<sup>171</sup> Charles Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World 1950-1992*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013, pp. 3.

world-system.”<sup>172</sup> For this reason, North Korea was as integral a part of the capitalist world-system as any other state entity. Second, precisely because North Korea was part and parcel of that system, the recognition of North Korea as a member of the interstate system complicates, by default, the simplistic interpretation of socialist regimes as “entities that have successfully overcome capitalist forces” or “as part of a ‘socialist world-system’ that has diverged from the course of capitalist world-economy.”<sup>173</sup>

The last aspect of the capitalist world-system analysis that proves useful for Paik in thinking about the Korean situation is what Wallerstein, following the French historian Fernand Braudel, has called the “*longue durée*” of history. Applying Braudel’s argument regarding capitalism, Wallerstein contends that the capitalist world-system is a historical system with a beginning, middle, as well as an end. The capitalist world-economy is a rhythmic structure of material and economic production that has grown durable over time.<sup>174</sup> The key argument, therefore, is that the current capitalism world-economy is durable in its structure but not permanent in its duration. Because world-systems are not permanent, they always hinge on the possibility for transformation into a new kind of system. But because they are also durable, reforms must be gradual, repetitive, and continual in order to bring about genuine transformation. By conceptualizing the Korean division system as a product of the modern world-system or historical capitalism at a particular juncture of its development, Paik asserts that the project of overcoming the division system is a process that is both subject to and capable of transforming the functioning of the world-system itself. As with the capitalist world-system, overcoming the division system too cannot be achieved in a short span of time.

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<sup>172</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *Hündüllnün pundan ch’eje*, p. 121.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>174</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, pp. 269-272.

Equipped with a strategic reading of Wallerstein, whose theory shifted the focus from the nation-state to the world-economy as the basic unit of analysis, Paik thus combated the great preoccupation of the 1980s' progressive intellectuals: the precise nature of South Korean society in politico-economic terms, and the reification of dialectical materialism as an objective science. Political and economic development of South Korea could not be understood, argued Paik, by studying the nation-state of South Korea in isolation from the rest of the world. By the same token, the division of the peninsula, as well as the presence of North Korea, must also be analyzed in terms of how it has sustained and continues to sustain the capitalist world-economy. The view effectively militates against the Cold War construction of two antagonistic systems, and re-positions all nation-states within the core/semi-periphery/periphery power dynamic. Wallerstein also enables Paik to argue against the temptation to essentialize Korean historical experience and view the division of the peninsula as a uniquely Korean outgrowth of the Cold War. The "*longue durée*" of history that allows Wallerstein to trace the rise of the current capitalist world-economy back to the sixteenth century is an inspiration for Paik's repeated call for expanding the spatiotemporal scope of what is examined under the heading of Korean division.

### **Division System Theory in Post-Democratization Korea**

Korea's division has long been a preoccupation of Paik's. As Paik has acknowledged on countless occasions since debuting as a critic in 1966, the task of overcoming Korea's national division has been a singular driving force in Paik's career

both as a literary critic and an activist. It was, in fact, one of the two central imperatives in his theorization of national literature (*minjok munhak*) in the 1970s, the other being the “task of comprehending social reality from the position of the oppressed.”<sup>175</sup> But as national literature came under the critique of elitism in the 1980s for ignoring the primacy of class, its central task of overcoming national division was also renounced for the same reason—namely, that it lacked scientific understanding of the working-class.<sup>176</sup>

This discursive topography changed dramatically in the post-authoritarian, post-socialist milieu of the 1990s. Leading up to this change domestically were the establishment of a civilian government in 1987 and notable victories in the labor movement; outside of Korea, the collapse of socialist regimes in 1989 and the emergence of the U.S. as the sole hegemon in the world-system contracted the horizon of collective, utopian imaginings. Indeed, in the absence of a hypervisible enemy (i.e., the authoritarian state), it was hard for collectivization to be undertaken with the same gusto and commitment as it had been in the 1980s. Within this climate, the most radical of social theories were the first to be disavowed.

No sooner had the people of South Korea emerged as agents of history over the course of democratization and workers’ struggle in 1987 than their yearning for collective

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<sup>175</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “Minjok munhak kwa pundan munje,” in *Minjok munhak ūi sae tangye*, Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa pip’yōngsa, 1990, pp. 155-156.

<sup>176</sup> With regard to the national literature movement of the 1970s, led by Paik through an oppositional literary collective called the Association of Writers for Freedom and Praxis (*Chayu silch’ōn munin hyōbūihoe*, Chasil), literary critic Kim Myōngin maintains a fairly critical point of view and asserts that it was at best a “civic national literature” (*siminjōk minjok munhak*) whose key interest lay in “national liberation” via reunification than with the true subjects of history—namely, the laboring masses. He argues: “The movement referred to by the name ‘Chasil’ in the 1970s was less a movement carried out ‘as literature’ than it was a movement carried out by ‘writers.’ It was an anti-authoritarian movement for democracy led by petit-bourgeois members of the conscientious intellectuals. And as such, it was no more than a defensive intellectual movement operating at the level of a private coalition.” See Kim Myōngin, “Chisigin munhak ūi wigi wa saeroun minjok munhak ūi kusang,” in Hwang Sōgyōng et al eds., *Chōnhwangi ūi minjok munhak*, Seoul: P’ulbit, 1987, pp. 62-109.



justice and social equality lost its momentum. Both locally and globally, the “age of revolutions” that had marked the 1980s’ South Korea came to an end with shocking abruptness. As Namhee Lee puts it, the late 1980s in South Korea was “not only postauthoritarian and postmodern, but postideological as well.”<sup>177</sup> Accordingly, the hope that the coalition of progressives—intellectuals, university students, and labor organizers—had placed in the socialist system as a viable historical alternative to the reign of the capitalist world-system diminished dramatically. As categories of collective belonging retreated from public discourse, they were replaced by representations of the individual consumer in thrall to the lure of the capital. The virulent anti-Americanism of the 1980s had no place to go when the US was no longer a country, albeit a hegemonic one, but the world.

It was within this global context of America’s ever-expanding power and the start of post-democratization era in South Korea that the discourse of reunification (*t’ongillon*) made its reappearance in earnest. While one might argue that the discourse had never really gone away in the first place—for example, *Sammint’u*, a radical student-led organization formed in 1985, declared as its three goals the reunification of the nation (*minjok t’ongil*), attainment of democracy (*minju chaengch’wi*), and liberation of people (*minjung haebang*).<sup>178</sup> But the question of how to achieve reunification had in reality been shelved away during the dual pursuit of democratization and labor emancipation that characterized the 1980s’ anti-authoritarian resistance. It was only *after* democratization was achieved in South Korea that reunification discourse emerged as a

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<sup>177</sup> Namhee Lee, “From *Minjung* to *Simin*: The Discursive Shift in Korean Social Movements,” in Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Y. Chang eds., *South Korean Social Movements: From Democracy to Civil Society*, New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. 44.

<sup>178</sup> Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, pp. 23.

topic of contention both within the progressive movement, and between the progressive and conservative segments of the society at large.

Rather than taking this post-democratization shift to reunification discourse as a natural course of events, Paik Nak-chung problematized it and interrogated as to why social transformation and reunification can only be conceived sequentially and not in tandem with each another. This inquiry in turn served as the basis for his formal theorization of the “division system” in 1992. The division of Korea, according to Paik, should be seen as a symbiotic system encompassing both North and South Korea, which allows vested interests on both sides to maintain the oppressive status quo at the cost of people’s well-being. Paik’s theory of the division system also challenged the widespread understanding of Korea’s division as an anomaly, as well as the increasing tendency to see North Korea as a rogue state that threatens the entire “free world,” not just its enemy down south.

Two key notions characterize Paik’s division system: systemicity and self-reproducibility. The word “system” in Paik’s conceptualization refers to three levels: “the world-system, the division system within it, and the two ‘systems’ that constitute the division system.”<sup>179</sup> As suggested earlier, the main critical contribution of the division system theory to the existing discourse on the Korean division and North Korea’s status in the world is that it conceives North and South Koreas not as self-contained entities, but as constituent parts whose operations depend on a *system* that maintains division. The division system, moreover, is self-reproducing. Paik maintains that the one reason why the Korean peninsula still remains divided, whereas Germany, Vietnam, and Yemen have all undergone reunification and ended their respective post-WWII divisions, is that

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., pp. 5.

despite the mode of ideological and military confrontation that the two Korean states have maintained toward each other, the Korean division has stabilized into a system; the two states are now interdependent.<sup>180</sup> Attempts to achieve genuine reunification or peaceful coexistence, or otherwise improve people's lives in both North and South Korea, must therefore take into account this fact of systemicity and self-reproducibility which has allowed the Korean division to survive the end of the Cold War.

At the local level, the forces with vested interests in the division system are the authoritarian-communist regime in North Korea and the capitalist/neoliberalist regime in South Korea. Despite the two states' rhetoric of peaceful reunification, they remain in a state of suspended hostilities because it would not be in their respective interest to normalize relations. Overcoming a division *system*, as opposed to simply division, thus requires much more than a mere territorial unification of the peninsula. To effect genuine transformation of the Korean society, Paik argues, reunification must be conceptualized beyond the level of obliterating the physical barrier between the north and south. By extension, then, this implies that the two Koreas may not necessarily have to undergo obliteration of state borders in order to bring about peaceful coexistence. Because “*overcoming a division and bringing about reunification are different from overcoming a division system,*” Paik cautions, “it is possible that the division system will remain intact even after reunification” (emphasis in the original).<sup>181</sup> It is for this reason that Paik coined the paradoxical expression “division system without a division” (*pundan öpnün pundan*

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<sup>180</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *Hündüllinün pundan ch'eje*, pp. 179.

<sup>181</sup> Son Hoch'öl, “Pundan ch'ejeron' üi pip'anjök koch'al,” as quoted in Paik Nak-chung, *Hündüllinün pundan ch'eje*, pp. 94.

*ch'eje*).<sup>182</sup> What the phrase suggests is that the division system can be regarded as a *habitus* in Bourdieu's sense of the term, since it represents not just the territorial division but also internalized cognitive structures and embodied dispositions.

What solution, then, does Paik offer as a way to overcome such a complex and durable mechanism at work? Insofar as he conceives the division system theory as enabling “a crucial shift from a state- or ideology-oriented approach to a people-oriented one,”<sup>183</sup> Paik locates the greatest potential for overcoming the division system in a “reunification movement on popular initiatives rooted in daily life.”<sup>184</sup> There are two important—and telling—features in this phrase. First, this passage implies how Paik envisions the process of reunification first and foremost in *practical* terms. Reunification must proceed not as a radical, drastic measure to be imposed from above but through the building of gradual, collective awareness among the people of the ways in which the division system operates as a mechanism of oppression. Second, the term “popular” (articulated as *minjung* in the Korean original) in the phrase addresses those oppressed by the division system on *both* sides of the Thirty-eighth parallel, and simultaneously encompasses members of all socioeconomic classes. While the term *minjung* had privileged the “oppressed classes” (read: the proletariat broadly conceived) in its usage within the 1980s' anti-authoritarian resistance, Paik adopts the term in a much broader sense to address the entire civil society. This is evident in Paik's impassioned call for “pan-*minjung* solidarity” (*pŏm minjungchŏk yŏndae*) as opposed to class-specific alliance, “pan-peninsular solidarity” (*pŏm hanbandojŏk yŏndae*) as opposed to South or North

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<sup>182</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “Chigu sidae ūi minjok munhak,” in *T'ongil sidae ūi hanguk munhak ūi poram – minjok munhak kwa segye munhak 4*, Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏngsa, 2006, pp. 69.

<sup>183</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *The: Essays on Contemporary Korea*, Berkeley: UC Press, 2011, pp. xvii.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17.

exclusivity, and even “global solidarity” (*pŏm segyejŏk yŏndae*) as opposed to ethnocentrism.<sup>185</sup>

Paik’s deliberate call for national, peninsular, and global solidarity had much to do with the fact that, in the course of the labor struggle in 1987, the “(working) class” had become the most privileged identity marker within counter-state, counter-hegemonic movements. As discussed earlier, the category of “class” excluded even as it created a collective identity, by rigidifying the boundaries of that collective. Put differently, Paik advocated for the praxis of nationalism to mitigate the fissures that the radicalized decade of the 1980s had created among different classes. The post-democratization, post-revolutionary era, as Paik was fully aware, did not herald an era free of economic inequalities. At the same time, it was the systemic nature of the national division that legitimated and aggravated those inequalities, often operating unbeknownst to the very people most oppressed by this system. Paik’s response to the charged situation was, rather than dismiss the category of *minjung* [the oppressed/the people] which had become synonymous with “the working class” by the end of the 80s, to make it synonymous with *minjok* [the nation/the people].

But if the possibility of praxis for overcoming the division system was expanded by opening up the collectivity, it was precisely this move from class to nation that generated the strongest opposition from many progressive intellectuals in the first half of the 1990s. A key example is the 1994 critique of the division system by the political

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<sup>185</sup> Here I chose to translate these terms as literally as possible, rather than rendering them into English more fluidly, to give a sense of Paik’s emphasis on building a collective consciousness that transcends class divides, inter-Korean division, as well as international borders. See Paik Nak-chung, *Hŭndŭllinŭn pundan ch’eye*, pp. 36-40.

scientist Son Hoch'öl.<sup>186</sup> Questioning the viability of the division system as a concept applicable to Korea's situation, Son made two main points. First, Son argued that the antagonistic states of North and South Korea are built on two incompatible political systems, and as such cannot exist in a symbiotic relationship with each another. Son expressed a deep skepticism of Paik's argument for the presence of a "system" that encompasses both the North and the South. Unlike the capitalist world-economy, the division system was not a complete and self-sufficient *system* in and of itself, and neither did it have its own internal division of labor that a proper sub-system of the world-system should. Seen from Son's perspective, Paik's theory ran the risk of reducing all social phenomena of the North and the South to the conditions of the division system.<sup>187</sup> Second, Son stressed the "theoretical looseness" and "unfeasibility" of the division system concept. Unlike clearly determinable contradictions that give rise to class antagonism, the contradictions inherent in the division system were ambiguous. Furthermore, Paik's call for "people to mobilize in order to combat the anti-autonomous, anti-democratic division system, basing this action upon concrete realities of daily life" was an idealistic vision, impossible to achieve.<sup>188</sup> Son concluded his critique with a middling recognition: "In a word, my provisional assessment at present is that, while I do not agree with the various theoretical aspects or supporting hypotheses of the division system model, it may still prove useful in thinking about the problems of North and South Korea simultaneously, albeit in a loose sense and without the kind of theoretical rigor ascribed to it by Paik."<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Son Hoch'öl, "Pundan ch'ejeon' ūi pip'anjök koch'al" [A critical examination of the division system theory], *Ch'angjak kwa pip'yōng* 22 (Summer 1994): pp. 316-345.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 344.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 339-342.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

Son's remark reveals his firm belief in the difference between North and South Korea as entities founded upon fundamentally incompatible systems of socialism and capitalism, respectively.<sup>190</sup> What is more noteworthy about Son's comment is the use of the expression "simultaneously" (*tongsi e*), which already implies the presence of two or more otherwise distinct components. Unwittingly, then, this reveals the extent to which Son—and other progressive social scientists of his time—was prone to engage with North and South Korea as separate entities in light of their status as sovereign political units. But as even Son's reluctant recognition acknowledges, the division system made the first crack in the deeply entrenched edifice of how we conceptualize the relationship between North and South Korea, as well as between Korea and the world. By situating the division of the peninsula itself, not simply the political entities of South Korea and North Korea, within the larger capitalist world-system, Paik articulated both the possibilities for peaceful co-existence and eventual dissolution of the division system, as well as the conditions of those possibilities.

Operating at the heart of Paik's division system is a kind of resilience that informs the connection between theory and praxis, indeed that allows theory to become praxis. In contradistinction to what many of his critics have presumed, Paik maintained that the division system was not conceived system as a proper theoretical model per se, that it was meant to remain "loose" enough to accommodate the evolutions and heterogeneities that the division system will attain over time.<sup>191</sup> The significance of this resilience becomes better discernable when we contextualize the development of the division system theory

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<sup>190</sup> Son reiterates the existence of two separate worlds—socialist world-system and capitalist world-system—several times throughout his critique. See Son Hoch'öl, "'Pundan ch'ejeron' ūi pip'anjök koch'al," pp. 316-345.

<sup>191</sup> See Paik Nak-chung, *Hündüllinün pundan ch'eje*, pp. 8-9.

with respect to emancipatory narratives that preceded it in the 1980s. An example of theory divorced from praxis, the earlier mentioned social formation debate of the mid-1980s ultimately resulted in the adoption of radicalized and abstracted Marxist theory. The call of materialist understanding became increasingly irrelevant to the actual conditions of the material base. By conceiving the division system theory as a means of engaging in the practice of reunification feasible here and now, and within the dynamic conditions of the world-system at large, Paik reshaped the dominant reunification discourse toward a more gradual, step-by-step approach to peace and reconciliation.

### **Korea Between Pax Americana and Pax Sinica: The Division System in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Paik began the work of conceptualizing the division system at a time when tectonic shifts were occurring around the world. Paik's emphasis on a pragmatic, gradual, and cumulative approach to reunification—what his critics have identified as the looseness of the division system as a theoretical model—should be seen in this context of domestic and global transformations, as a reflection of Paik's desire to reinvigorate a social movement toward reunification sustainable in daily life beset by changes. Without essentializing and privileging the working class as had been the case in the Great Workers' Struggle, Paik sought to illuminate the systemicity of Korean division within the existing capitalist world-economy that has exacerbated the structural inequalities in Korea. And without elevating reunification to the status almost of a categorical imperative, an end to justify all means, Paik sought to bridge the gap between the



movement for social reform and the movement for reunification. Applying Wallerstein's world-systems theory to shed light on the division system, Paik also challenged the long-entrenched construction of the division as a conflict of ideologies. Put simply, the division system theory was, to borrow Paik's own words, "an attempt to understand the realities of the Korean division in a more comprehensive, systematic way," rather than an apparatus with aspirations toward a transcendental sociological theory that could be universalized.<sup>192</sup>

And yet, in spite of Paik's confession that his intent is not to theorize the division system for the sake of generating a timeless theoretical model, the continued relevance of the concept has been witnessed on many occasions in the twenty-first century. To be sure, since its inception, the division system has been the target of critique from other intellectuals, as illustrated in earlier sections with Son Hoch'öl. If Son represented a distinctly left-wing response to Paik's theory, the sharpest right-wing attack has come from An Pyöngjik, a key member of the New Right in South Korea. In 2006, An engaged in a diatribe against Paik's concept of the division system, bemoaning the role that it played in bringing about the joint declaration between North and South in June of 2000, which he argues only aggravated the state of affairs for the South Korean state administration. An denies Paik's contention that there is such a thing as a division *system* operating on the Korean peninsula as a whole:

Division system was invented by Paik to assert reunification as the state's top priority over all other matters such as economic development [...] The reason for the failure of Paik's theory lies in its theoretical weakness and his erroneous understanding of the Korean society. His theory illustrates the characteristics of a society in transition from the pre-modern to modern [...] But Korea has already succeeded in economic development and democratization and is on the brink of

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<sup>192</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *Hanbandosik t'ongil, hyönjae chinhaenghyöng*, Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yöngsa, 2006, pp. 45.

joining the ranks of advanced nations. For this reason, such theory as Paik's is applicable only to transitional societies and can in no way be the proper tool of analysis for a country like ours.<sup>193</sup>

In An's view, South Korea has already completed the teleology of capitalist modernity in attaining high economic growth and achieving full democracy, thereby rightly gaining its own place alongside other advanced nations. With such hallmarks of modernity already accomplished in South Korea, there is no need to delegitimize the prevailing modern world-system.

With his own appeal to a capitalist teleology, An's critique lays bare the teleology implicit in Paik's explanation of the status of the Korean division. The ends for which the capitalist teleology is deployed by each critic, however, are entirely different. For An, the capitalist world-system becomes a criterion by which South Korea's national success in the twenty-first century can be measured. For Paik, however, the capitalist world-economy was a system that had to be recognized, then problematized, and ultimately transformed into a "better system" by way of overcoming the division system. It is no wonder, then, that Paik's division system and his strategic utilization of an accommodationist frame did not sit well with someone like An.

What neither the left-wing nor right-wing critique of the division system theory thus managed to capture adequately was its emphasis on everyday praxis, which in turn, enables it to be adaptable to changing times. Long after the more radical discourse of class struggle, social inequality, and labor emancipation has become relegated to the revolutionary passions of a bygone era, Paik's division system theory remains relevant

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<sup>193</sup> An Pyŏngjik, "Uri sidae ūi chinbojŏk chisigin – Paek nakch'ŏng non (Hŏgurosŏ ūi pundan ch'eje – 'pundan'ūn issŏdo 'pundan ch'eje'nūn ŏptta)" [Progressive intellectual of our times – on Paik Nak-chung (a division there may be, but a division system there is not)], in *Sidae chŏngsin* (Winter 2006), accessed July 13, 2016, <http://www.sdjs.co.kr/read.php?num=62>.

and at times even prescient. During his keynote speech at Cheju Peace Conference in August 2003, for example, Paik asked whether “a peace regime is possible on the Korean peninsula and in East Asia?”<sup>194</sup> and discussed the importance of Northeast Asia in the maintenance of the post-WWII American world order: “the fall of the Berlin wall and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet empire were less a victory of the US-dominated capitalist world-system than the beginnings of its real crisis [...] American power today is less a genuine hegemony than a reckless, unilateral military domination over weaker states.”<sup>195</sup> Characterizing the early twenty-first century as a period of “great crisis under heaven” (*ch’ŏnha taeran*), Paik argued that American hegemony would increasingly become contingent on Northeast Asia. Northeast Asia, in turn, was highly contingent upon the status of the Korean division system. “Korea is at a fork in the road,” Paik predicted. “It can let itself be engulfed by the chaos of the ‘crisis under heaven’ or build a new system better than the division system [...] The latter choice will not only prevent East Asia from incurring yet another war imminently, but go on to become an exemplary case of a peace regime construction.”<sup>196</sup> Conceptualized in the post-democratic, post-socialist climate of the early 1990s as a means not only of understanding the persistence of Korean division but of continuing to move toward reunification—even at a time of prevailing disillusionment with words like “solidarity”—the division system theory would continue to provide. In terminating the “crisis under heaven” and bringing about “peace under heaven” in the new twenty-first century, Paik argued, the division system was just as crucial as it had been in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>194</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *Hanbandosik t’ongil, hyŏnjae chinhaenghyŏng*, pp. 219.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221-224.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 228-241.

A very recent example demonstrates almost exactly what Paik had prophesied in 2003 with regard to the division system, Northeast Asia, and the U.S. On July 13, 2016, over 5000 residents of Seongju, a rural county in the Northern Gyeongsang province of South Korea, gathered under a sweltering sun to stage a demonstration. Countless protestors donned red headbands and held banners bearing the slogan “We oppose THAAD with our lives,” chanting the same words in an angry protest against the sudden announcement of US and South Korea’s joint decision to deploy Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), an advance American missile defense system intended to safeguard against North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missiles provocation. Many residents expressed deep concern regarding the consequences of installing the defense system, in particular with respect to the serious threat posed by the missile system on their health as well as the agricultural economy of the Seongju region. Still others feared that the deployment will make their towns prime targets for attacks from North Korea in the event of war.<sup>197</sup> The news of plans for THAAD deployment also triggered vehement opposition from neighboring countries of North Korea and China. While North Korea stated it will “take physical counter-action as soon as the location for THAAD deployment is determined,”<sup>198</sup> China warned that the US-led missile system will “harm the foundation of [...] mutual trust between China and South Korea” and ultimately

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<sup>197</sup> Choe Sang-hun, “South Korean Villagers Protest Plans for U.S. Missile Defense System,” *The New York Times* July 13, 2016, accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/14/world/asia/south-korea-thaad-us.html>

<sup>198</sup> Yi Sanghyŏn, “Puk ‘Ssadŭ wich’i hwakjŏng sigak put’ŏ mullijŏk choch’i’ ... hanmi palp’yo hu ch’ŏt panŭng (chonghap)” [North Korea’s response following U.S.-South Korea announcement: “physical measures to be taken as soon as the location for THAAD deployment is determined”], *Yŏnhap News*. July 11, 2016, accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2016/07/11/0200000000AKR20160711011352014.HTML>

provoke an arms race in the East Asian region.<sup>199</sup> This had much to do with the fact that the THAAD's radar, while focused centrally on North Korea, could also be used to track China's military capabilities.

The internal as well as external responses to the US-South Korean plans for THAAD deployment reveal much about the changing conditions for peace and stability in the Korean peninsula as well as the larger East Asian region. There was no doubt that South Korea was hesitant in deciding whether or not to deploy the US-authored defense missile system in light of blatant opposition from China, the largest trading partner to South Korea. The purported reason for THAAD installation was, of course, to defend against North Korea's nuclear threat. But the hyper-sensitivity that China displayed in response to the US defense system and its broad surveillance capacity was proving otherwise. Maintaining the division system in Korea by keeping North Korea under watch was not only a way to exert the continued military hegemony of the US, but also a means of combating the danger of a new world order—that is, a twenty-first century Pax Sinica. A hostile, erratic, and volatile North Korea, in other words, is a vital counter-partner to the continuance of American military dominance. It legitimates American presence in Asia and allows it to check the rise of China as a superpower. The recent controversy over THAAD deployment attests to the continued status of the Korean peninsula as a hotspot of geopolitical competition.

Here, the current South Korean president Park Geun-hye's response to voices of dissent against THAAD deployment is also very telling. Park's conviction that "there are no alternatives to THAAD" is a reminder of the American military presence presiding

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<sup>199</sup> Jack Kim, "China says South Korea's THAAD anti-missile decision harms foundation of trust," Reuters, July 24, 2016, accessed July 25, 2016. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/china-says-south-koreas-thaad-anti-missile-decision-015545360.html>

over the peninsula, perpetuating itself as the peacekeeper of the world and holding sway not only over the relations between North and South Korea, but over Northeast Asian geopolitics at large. That South Korea was prone to accepting America's imposition of its security interests unquestioningly can be felt in Park's decision to push ahead with the THAAD deployment. "Should there be any other way to protect our citizens against North Korean missiles, pray let me know," Park opined.<sup>200</sup> The note of inevitability that permeated the South Korean president's speech as she renounced the territorial sovereignty of her country with such ease may itself be seen as an internalized cognitive of the division system, the *doxa* that continues to shape South Korean politics and diplomacy.

Four days later, it was Paik who took it upon himself in the capacity of the co-chair of the Korea Peace Forum (*Hanbando p'yŏnghwa p'orŏm*) to rise to Park's challenge by drafting a counter-response. Arguing that there *are* alternatives to deploying American missile defense system, Paik stressed the necessity of "easing the security tensions and encouraging denuclearization through diplomatic relations with the North."<sup>201</sup> Reiterating that THAAD deployment should be understood as a form of aggression by the US in the Korean peninsula and not a means of self-defense against possibility of nuclear aggression from North Korea, Paik contended that "the THAAD deployment cannot strengthen Korea's national defense [and that] it actually provokes the

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<sup>200</sup> Kim Hyŏngsŏp, "Pak taet'ongnyŏng ũi kanggong, U Pyŏngu kamssago, sadŭdo chŏngmyŏn tol p'a" [President Park's THAAD offense: embracing U Pyŏngu and taking the bull by the horns], *Newsis*, July 21, 2016, accessed July 25, 2016, [http://www.newsis.com/ar\\_detail/view.html?ar\\_id=NISX20160721\\_0014236717&cID=10301&pID=10300](http://www.newsis.com/ar_detail/view.html?ar_id=NISX20160721_0014236717&cID=10301&pID=10300).

<sup>201</sup> Kim Chinch'ŏl, "'Sadŭ' tae an itnyago? Itta! Pak Kŭnhye taet'ongnyŏng chilmune taphanŭn p'al mun p'al tap" [Are there alternatives to THAAD? Yes! An eight by eight q and a to president Park Geun-hye's question], *Hangyoreh*, July 25, 2016, accessed July 25, 2016, <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/defense/753811.html>

fortification of the North's nuclear program, much less resolve the nuclear issue."<sup>202</sup> As can be seen in Paik's counter-response, when it comes to addressing issues of national security and negotiating the geopolitics of the American world order, Paik's activism is characterized by appealing simultaneously to the question of principle as well as practice. This is why Paik criticizes not only the US encroachment upon Korean territorial sovereignty, but also North Korea's refusal to terminate its nuclear program.

The THAAD deployment controversy proves what Paik had foreseen in 2003—namely, that Korea will be caught in a maelstrom of the “great crisis under heaven” within which it will have to decide what its course should be. But the situation today is even graver than when Paik had diagnosed the division system to be in “crisis” in 1998, as well as when he had diagnosed “Korean-style reunification” (*Hanbandosik t'ongil*) to be unfolding in “present progressive form” (*hyŏnjae chinhaenghyŏng*) in 2003. In 2016, Korea finds itself caught in a shaky position between Pax Americana that has yet to see its glory fade and Pax Sinica that has yet to reach the apogee. If, as the famous Confucian saying goes, “there are not two suns in the sky,” then the current state of affairs is a “great crisis under heaven” indeed.

As obvious and commonplace as it may sound, Paik asserts that the answer lies in the resumption of peace talks between North and South Korea—both at the level of the state and the civil society. To what extent is this possible in Korea today? Here, returning to the human rights interrogation of North Korea with which I began this chapter may help illuminate the continued relevance of the division system in Korea today. The flooding of defector narratives in South Korean popular media seemingly validates the view of North Korea as a human rights violator. When even human rights discourse gets

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.,

usurped by the vested interests in the name of universal justice, it is clear that the stakes for a theorist/activist such as Paik himself are paradoxically much higher today than back in the late 1980s when he first began conceptualizing the division system.

In all of Paik's writings and speeches on the topic of the division system, perhaps the one word that recurs more often than "division system" itself is "*silch'ön*" (practice). Motivated less by the intellectual exercise of theorizing than by theories' usefulness in the present, Paik turned the insights of Wallerstein's world-systems analysis into the *conditions of possibility* for achieving a more peaceful system on the Korean peninsula than the one which has been the Cold War's legacy. Through the political, social, and economic vicissitudes of the last several decades, Paik has maintained a pragmatic perspective, approaching the problem of North Korea and reunification with flexibility that at times made him suspect for his critics. But it is this flexibility, borne of the desire to engage in theory that is at the same time praxis, which may be keeping the division system theory current. It remains today the single most important and sustained intellectual attempt to effectuate—not merely articulate—lasting conditions of peace on and surrounding the Korean peninsula.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *Hündöllinün pundan ch'eje*, pp. 183.



## CHAPTER 4

### World Literature and Its Discontents: Shin Kyung-sook, Bae Suah, and the Price of Globalization

#### **From “Nation” to the “World”**

When it came to criticism of “nation” in the age of globalization, Korean literature was certainly no exception. In the post-1989 world of the dissolving socialist bloc and unfettered, borderless capitalism, literature too appeared poised to break free from the category of the nation. Never, it seemed, had Marx’s famous formulation in *The Communist Manifesto* rang truer for those seeking literatures without borders—namely, that “national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature.” In South Korea, two major revolutions—the June Democracy Movement and the Great Workers’ Struggle—had already taken place in 1987 to end the era of overt military dictatorships. The 1990s in Korea ushered in further rounds of liberalization in economy as well as politics. Indeed, it appeared that both on the level of local and global affairs, the end was nigh for the “age of national revolutions” that had defined the twentieth century. In keeping with the times, Korean critics prescribed a new role for literature now that the major battle of democratization was won.

And yet, when we consider the central role that national literature played in contesting the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes in the 1970s and 80s, the rejection of its legacy in the ensuing decades merits a closer examination. In 1974, at the height of authoritarianism under Park Chung Hee's Yusin regime, Paik theorized national literature as a "practice based on the realization that a nation's independence and the welfare of the majority of its members are faced with a serious threat." Paik argued that "the proper development of national literature was based upon the writer's deep engagement with social reality."<sup>204</sup> Paik thus helped to wrest the category of the nation away from the state and mobilize it as a nomination for people oppressed by the authoritarianism and the division system operating in and around the Korean peninsula. As discussed in previous chapters, the term that came to designate the nation in this oppositional sense was *minjok*. Reconfiguring national literature as *minjok munhak*, Paik played a central role in catapulting it into a veritable social movement by turning *Ch'angbi*, the quarterly he founded in 1966, into *the* platform for literature's opposition to the authoritarian state. Throughout the 1970s, until the state shut it down by force in 1980—*Ch'angbi* would resume regular publication only in 1987 after the success of the democratization movement—the journal, the man who founded it, and the literary movement it spearheaded became a trinity of resistance. Indeed, it would hardly be an overstatement to say that, by the 1990s, Paik was synonymous with national literature on the one hand and with *Ch'angbi* on the other. The syllogism made *Ch'angbi* synonymous with national literature as well.

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<sup>204</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "The Idea of a Korean National Literature Then and Now," *positions* 1:3 (Winter 1993): pp. 559.

But over the course of the 1990s and 2000s in South Korean literature, *minjok* which had been a privileged constituent of a collective politics of resistance against the authoritarian state in literature came to be renounced as a byword of oppression and thus subject to execution and abrogation. Nationhood—whether on the side of the state or the counter-state—came under fire for its assertion of homogeneity and for undergirding a logic of collectivist identification. With new recognition that the “national crisis” was no longer a legitimate cause for “constricting” literary imagination, the category of *minjok* came to be seen as unnecessary and even cumbersome to many writers and critics. Paik, national literature, and *Ch’angbi* all came under attack, for overdetermining literary development or, more specifically, for demanding moral responsibility on the part of writers in the name of the nation. Paik himself may have been aware that he was, at least in the eyes of his critics, treading on a slippery slope when it came to invoking the nation in literature. “[The] concept of national literature assumes a thoroughly historical character,” Paik had written in 1974, “a significant concept only insofar as the historical circumstances which give it substance continue to exist, and, in the event those circumstances change, it is fated either to be negated or to be absorbed within a concept of a higher order.”<sup>205</sup> And it was precisely such “fate” of national literature—the fate which was most often understood by its critics to be a natural order of its “extinction”—that would be decried in the post-revolutionary milieu of the 1990s.

Expressing such dissent most vocally was an emerging generation of younger writers and literary critics that proposed to launch a new literary culture. In their inaugural issue, published in 1994, the editors of *Munhak Tongne* declared their aspiration to “promote communication amongst different strands of literary positions, as

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.,

well as to provide a venue where literary diversity is respected and writers are not bound by shackles of one particular ideology.”<sup>206</sup> In the view of the new generation of writers and critics, *Ch’angbi*—most closely associated with Paik and national literature—was not letting literature simply be literature. The critics affiliated with *Munhak Tongne* further maintained that the national imperative was what “kept the writers of national literature still lingering in the 1980s, unable to enter the 1990s.”<sup>207</sup> As this commentary on time gives away all too easily, the underlying verdict was that national literature, as well as the literary establishment *Ch’angbi* had become, were stuck in the past and unequipped to face the new realities of a post-authoritarian South Korea. Korean society was changing and the *minjung* [the oppressed populace] that had once welcomed national literature with enthusiasm had long left its side. The very notion of national sovereignty itself was fast becoming caricaturized in the cultural market of the globalizing world.<sup>208</sup> And yet, national literature “knew not when to wake up from its long winter’s sleep.”<sup>209</sup>

The disavowal of national literature was a frequent subject of discussion for *Munhak Tongne* throughout the 1990s. In 1996, Ryu Posŏn wrote that “adhering to the very concept itself is what limits the writers of the national literature camp, time after time, from accurately interpreting a reality that was bound to change with time [...] national literature has reached a point where it is no longer capable of effecting a healthy development of Korean literature itself in any definitive manner.”<sup>210</sup> Ryu then proceeded

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<sup>206</sup> “Kyegan munhak tongnerŭl ch’anggan hamyŏ” [Inaugural address for munhak tongne], *Munhak tongne* 1 (Winter 1994): pp. 7.

<sup>207</sup> Ryu Posŏn, “Chŏnhwangijŏk hyŏnsil kwa minjok munhak ŭi unmyŏng” [The reality of transitional period and the fate of national literature], *Munhak tongne* 1 (Winter 1994): pp. 96-97.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100.

<sup>210</sup> Ryn Posŏn, “Minjok munhak ŭi hollan, hogŭn duryŏum ŏpnŭn chŏngsin ŭi chŏlmang” [The confusion of national literature, or, the despair of a fearless psyche], *Munhak tongne* 7 (Summer 1996): pp. 42.

to conclude that “the problem lies—stressed as ever in the 1990s as it had been in the 70s—in realism.”<sup>211</sup>

Two curious moves can be detected in this passage. One, there is a conscious differentiation being forged between “national” (*minjok*) literature and “Korean” (*Hanguk*) literature. Two, the central problem with national literature lay in anachronistic privileging of realism, as opposed to modernism or postmodernism, as the proper mode of representation. What did it mean for Ryu, joined by other inaugural members of *Munhak Tongne* critical of the reign held by national literature, to call for “Korean literature” in place of “national literature”? Would Korean literature now aspire to espouse the potencies of the first world—modernist, individualist aesthetics that stress the private psyche, according to *Munhak Tongne*—in place of the third world representations of underlying material circumstances to be found in realist, collectivist novels?

In demanding that Paik recognize the transformation that South Korea has undergone and re-calibrate his literary paradigm accordingly vis-à-vis national literature, Ryu was ascribing to Fredric Jameson’s notion that third-world literatures are necessarily national, political allegories, as opposed to first-world literatures that foreground the individual and the autonomy of literature from politics.<sup>212</sup> The driving critique was that, in the process of articulating national division, political democratization, and economic disparity as the most urgent and important crises, “national literature” had dominated the literary scene, subsequently bankrupting literature of possibilities for alternative forms of representation and belonging. “Rather than asking ‘*how*,’” Kwōn Yōngmin contends, “national literature was obsessed with the question of ‘*what*’ should be voiced through

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., pp. 45.

<sup>212</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital,” *Social Text* 15 (Autumn 1986): pp. 69.

literature.”<sup>213</sup> Others also deplored that what had begun as a counter-hegemonic movement had increasingly become entrenched as the establishment after successfully migrating from the margins to the center in the course of South Korea’s successful democratization. Given this context, the critique/disavowal of “national literature” in pursuit of “Korean literature” in the 1990s can be interpreted as a call to de-politicize literature in an attempt to challenge the putative institutionalization of “national literature.”

But if national literature became by the 1990s *the* central target of post-ideological critique for what the younger generation of writers saw as its steadfast refusal to adapt to the changing times, it is the very refusal to cast away the category of the nation that has provided Paik with a key resource for intervening in the re-emerging discourse of world literature. In this chapter I argue that Paik’s work over the last four decades as a literary critic—his theorization of national literature as well as his readings of contemporary Korean literary works—must be understood in light of his position vis-à-vis the Euro-American discourse of world literature, in particular, Paik’s critique of the twin universalist criteria of modernity and autonomy that informs this discourse. Since the mid-1990s, critics of Paik have pointed to a kind of discrepancy between the type of literature that he espouses in theory and the writers whose work he has engaged with most closely. Because Paik never disavowed his commitment to national literature even under the kind of criticism put forward by the *Munhak Tongne* editorial board, the close attention Paik showered on writers like Shin Kyung-sook and Bae Suah became a point of puzzlement. The confusion was all the greater because neither Shin nor Bae appeared to fit the literary paradigms espoused by *Ch’angbi*. Shin came to prominence as a writer of interiority and Bae’s fantastical prose elicited adjectives like “heretical” and “autistic.”

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<sup>213</sup> Kwön Yöngmin, *Hanguk hyöndae munhaksa 2*, Seoul: Minümsa, 2014, pp. 251.

Both were women writers whose “new literary sensibilities of the 1990s” aligned most closely with the post-ideological inclinations of *Munhak Tongne*. Even those of “*Ch’angbi* camp” expressed their unease: Just how was one to comprehend the inconsistency between Paik’s work as a theorist of national literature commenting on world literature as a Euro-American project, and his engagement with literary output on the domestic literary scene?

Rather than perceiving Paik’s recent criticism as inconsistent and discrepant, a view that premises a monolithic understanding of Paik’s writings before the 1990s, a more fruitful approach would be to navigate through the four decades of his career as a theorist of national literature and chart the continuities and discontinuities in his mode of reading, specifically in relationship to world literature. I begin by examining Paik Nak-chung’s conceptualization of national literature in the context of the 1970s, a dark time of fascist militarization, and then turn to the 1990s when South Korean society underwent rapid globalization and neoliberalization. Paik’s readings of Shin Kyung-sook and Bae Suah in the 1990s will anchor this discussion.

### **The *Ch’angbi* Quarterly, National Literature, and Literary Activism**

The 1970s is remembered in South Korea as an era of unprecedented state control, comparable only to the last decade of the Japanese colonial rule. Following the constitutional amendment that legalized a third presidential term in 1969, Park Chung Hee in 1972 dissolved the National Assembly and suspended the Constitution under the pretense of strengthening “unity of the nation” (*kungmin ch’onghwa*) and maximizing

national efficiency. Shortly thereafter Park promulgated the new Yusin Constitution. By eliminating the guarantee of direct presidential election, the new constitution made it possible for Park to rule indefinitely. Thus began the Yusin period when South Korea turned into a “police state run by the scissors of censors, the sirens of curfew-keepers, and the gavels of emergency military courts.”<sup>214</sup> The period would last until 1979 when Park’s assassination brought the regime to an end.

During this time, it was *Ch’angbi* that led the way in driving the opposition movement against Park’s authoritarian regime by providing the print space for articulations of dissent against mechanisms by which the Park regime maintained its power—the collusion between the state and the conglomerates, developmentalist ideology, and anti-communism couched in the rhetoric of national security. Roundtable discussions (*chwadam*), frequently moderated by Paik himself, featured experts in economics, political science, history, and literature, activating inter-disciplinary dialogues among a diverse group of scholars. The broad scope of the journal had much to do with the fact that while *Ch’angbi* identified itself first and foremost as a literary journal, it resembled something akin to a comprehensive quarterly in its actual composition. This quality became most apparent in the 1970s.

In literature specifically, it was the concept of *minjok munhak* or national literature that provided the “cultural logic” of anti-authoritarian resistance throughout the tumultuous decade. Paik emerged as its preeminent theorist, though he was by no means first on the scene. *Minjok munhak* had been the subject of a lively debate among critics and writers across an entire political spectrum in the 1920s after the March First

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<sup>214</sup> Youngju Ryu, *Writers of the Winter Republic: Literature and Resistance in Park Chung Hee’s Korea*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2016, p. 3.



Movement of 1919; in the “liberation space” at the end of Japanese colonial rule when the question of state-building came to the fore, the concept gathered critical import again. By the 1970s, however, *minjok* had also become a catchword for the Park Chung Hee regime as a strategy in its project of fascist collectivization. Under that banner of *minjok munhak*, for example, the kind of literary theory that Paik deplored as “ultranationalist” ascribed a timeless essence to the Korean ethnos. Recuperating “patriotic” figures and values from Korea’s past, such a discourse of *minjok* buttressed the state’s rhetoric of the need to sacrifice individual desires at the altar of the nation, and prepared the way for Yusin.

Against this backdrop, Paik offered a definition of *minjok munhak* as “a literary practice seeking to engage with the national crisis brought on by forces that make people’s lives exceedingly difficult.”<sup>215</sup> Maddeningly general at a first glance, Paik’s deceptively simple definition recalibrated *minjok* as an alternative name for the *minjung*, that is, the Korean people oppressed by historical “forces” rather than a timeless, unchanging ontological entity. That these forces referred in the first instance to the authoritarian configuration of Park Chung Hee’s rule is borne out by the activism that accompanied Paik’s practice of literary theory. In a crowded tearoom in January of 1974, a few months before the publication of his famous essay on national literature, Paik read out loud a petition against the Yusin Constitution drafted by critic Yŏm Muung and signed by sixty-one writers. Marking the beginning of writers’ collective resistance against Yusin, the petition helped to bring about Park Chung Hee’s declaration of

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<sup>215</sup> Paik’s first engaged articulation of national literature was in July of 1974, when he wrote a piece in the *Joongang Monthly* titled “Recent Developments in the Concept of National Literature” [Minjok munhak ūi yinyŏm ūi sin chŏngae]. This would later be published as “Minjok munhak kaenyŏm ūi chŏngnibŭl wihayŏ” [Toward the conceptualization of national literature].

Presidential Emergency Decrees that suspended all democratic process in South Korea, led to the arrest of writer Yi Hoch'öl and others in the so-called "writer-spies" incident (*munin kanch'öptan sakön*), and paved the way for the launch of the Association of Writers for Freedom and Praxis that became the organizational umbrella for writers' resistance. It was none other than Paik Nak-chung who came up with the final version of the name of the organization.

Throughout the 1970s, therefore, the *Ch'angbi Quarterly*, national literature, and literary activism formed an effective tripartite collective struggle for freedom against state repression. In this struggle, the nation (*minjok*) was invoked as a way to promote a sense of moral responsibility on the part of writers and intellectuals in the broad combat for freedom. By subverting the state's use of *minjok* and wresting the collective category of the nation away from the authoritarian state, Paik enabled a different historical trajectory for *minjok*, while retaining the utility of the term in generating social movements and political protests. Against the assumption that to invoke *minjok* was to harken back to a time before modernity, Paik re-articulated national literature as a distinctly modern, vanguard literary practice that addressed the social reality of the historical present. "Only when the literature of Korea has begun to recognize and duly act upon the historical demand for which it cannot but be 'national literature,'" wrote Paik, "will we be able to say that our literature has entered the 'modern' phase."<sup>216</sup> In so doing, Paik positioned national literature not only against the state's strategic traditionalism but also against the view that national literature, motivated as it was by a political agenda, went against the true purpose of literature and thus impeded Korean literature from joining the ranks of world literature. Paik intervened against the ready separation of

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., pp. 156.

literature as an autotelic domain, and pushed against literature's retrenchment. In the process, he secured a broad appeal beyond the literary realm for both *creation* and *criticism*. Paik's theorization in 1974 represents an importance instance in the history of South Korean literature when a non-fictional work of a literary critic became the stock reading material for individuals outside of the domain of literature proper.

Why did Paik insist on *minjok* in place of *minjung*, and why did he insist on *minjok munhak* in place of *Hanguk munhak*? Paik's persistent call for social movement in the name of *minjok* had to do with the status of the division system in Korea. As "a historical concept contingent upon the concrete, changing processes and conditions of the Korean society," it was only imperative that its central task be configured as the project of overcoming the division, which for Paik was the key factor locking in and even systematizing various forms of repression.<sup>217</sup> The very fact that both of the terms *minjung* [the oppressed masses] and even *Hanguk* [Korea] automatically connoted *South* Korea specifically, as opposed to the entire peninsula or South *and* North Korea, had to do with the deeply entrenched operation of the division system that isolated the two Koreas from one another. By contrast, *minjok* still carried within it a sense of shared ancestry. It connoted one ethnic nation over two separate nation-states. For this reason, it was a pragmatic choice for Paik to opt for, in that it enabled the possibility of imagining reconciliation and reunification.

If the domestic manifestation of the oppressive forces that "make people's lives exceedingly difficult" was authoritarianism, the international manifestation was neo-colonialism. National literature thus promoted the necessity of cultivating a "modern

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., pp. 154.

consciousness in resistance to the neocolonial intervention of foreign powers.”<sup>218</sup> From its inception, Paik construed national literature as part and parcel of the larger Third-world literature aimed at building solidarity among African, Latin American and Asian toward a collective struggle against neo-imperialism and toward decolonization. “The true meaning of the Third World,” Paik wrote in 1979, “lies not in dividing the world into three separate entities, but rather in seeing the world as one, though seeing it not from the position of the strong and the rich in the First World or the Second World, but from the position of the *minjung*.”<sup>219</sup> By aligning national literature with the emergence of Third-world literature—whose aim was to facilitate a critical perspective of the worldview perpetuated by the First World—Paik disallowed the assumption of national literature as a self-contained object of study bound by some fundamentalist notion of ethnic difference.

In the post-democratization, post-ideological milieu of the 1990s, as national literature began to gather the charges of being unfree and undemocratic—precisely what it had stood *against* during the peak of its anti-authoritarian resistance in the 1970s and 80s—the discourse of world literature would come to provide the platform upon which Paik could argue for the continued relevance of national literature. The following section explores how.

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<sup>218</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “Minjok munhak kaenyŏm ūi chŏngnibŭl wihayŏ” [Toward the conceptualization of national literature], in *Minjok munhak kwa segye munhak I / Ingan haebang ūi nollirŭl ch’ajasŏ*, Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏngsa, 2011, pp. 155.

<sup>219</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “Che sam segye wa minjung munhak” [The third world and people’s literature], *Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏng* 51 (Fall 1979): pp. 50.

## Discovering Shin Kyung-sook in the Age of Globalization

In November of 1994, at the Globalization and Culture Conference held at Duke University, Paik presented a paper titled “Nations and Literatures in the Age of Globalization.”<sup>220</sup> Addressing the “challenges of the global age”—the benefits and the costs of late capitalism’s overarching reach—Paik turned to what he diagnosed as an attendant postmodern turn in literature. Its celebrating the conjunction of the global and the local, argued Paik, “represents a suppression and disintegration, rather than the ‘hastening’ or ‘arising,’ of a world literature.”<sup>221</sup> Though needed now more than ever in the new age of globalization, the direction in which world literature seemed to be headed in the putatively postmodern, post-national world hardly coincided with what Goethe and Marx had prophesied, that is to say, “world literature as a multiplicity of particular literatures.”<sup>222</sup>

That Paik would refer to Goethe in renewing the call for a world literature is hardly surprising; Goethe, after all, is commonly known as the originator of the term *Weltliteratur* in 1827. But what I find more relevant here about Paik’s deployment of Goethe is his reminder that the latter had been engaged in a German *national literature movement* of his own *prior to* his conceptualization of world literature. And as much as Paik is aware that it is “further progress in globalization [that ultimately brought] on the need for and the possibility of a ‘world literature,’” what interests Paik the most about Marx’s articulation of the term in 1848 is its focus on the “interdependence of

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<sup>220</sup> Paik’s talk, as well as those of other scholars present at this event, has been published in 1998 as an edited volume titled *the Cultures of Globalization*. In this chapter I am quoting Paik from this volume. See Paik Nak-chung, “Nations and Literatures in the Age of Globalization,” pp. 218-229.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 224.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 223.

nations.”<sup>223</sup> Perplexing as Goethe and Marx’s calls for world literature are in their capacity to mean so much and so little at the same time—indeed, we need only look at just how many theorists of world literature turn to Goethe and Marx for their own unique interpretations of the former’s *Weltliteratur* and latter’s further articulation of the term—Paik invites his audience to interpret the call as the following: “what Goethe [and Marx] meant by the term [...] was not so much a bringing together of the great literary classics of the world, but rather a networking among intellectuals of various lands [...] through reading of one another’s work and shared knowledge of the important journals as well as through personal contact. That is, something much more like what in our day would be called a transnational *movement* for world literature.”<sup>224</sup> And it was this potential of literature as a movement, what Paik dubs “the Goethean-Marxian project” of world literature, that was facing the threat of extinction by the excesses of capitalist globalization, the material processes of which have “gone to lengths probably unimagined by Marx himself.”<sup>225</sup>

But why would Paik, invested as he is in a “transnational” networking among writers, intellectuals, and critics, invoke the concept of “national literature” in thinking through the possibility of “world literature” that would adequately address the problems of the global epoch? After all, for the sciences, social sciences, and humanities alike, the 1990s was an era that encouraged “thinking and feeling beyond the nation,” to borrow the title of Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins’ book. The three catchwords of the decade were

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., pp. 222.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., pp. 223.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., pp. 224.

“globalization, transnationalism, even postnationalism.”<sup>226</sup> As the grand narratives of socialism and capitalism that had informed the pre-1989 world order disintegrated, there was no doubt that nationalism was also being undermined. At the core of the then-emerging discourse on the all-encompassing globalization was the declining position and status of the nation-state. Frequently coupled with the decline of the nation-state was the fast-permeating postmodern argument that there was no common reality that existed outside the individual. Prioritizing the individual over the collective promoted decentralization of politics, but it also undermined the efforts to understand the structural inequalities and material differences, and raised suspicion with regard to the emancipatory agency in collective forms of belonging. Such critique was not restricted only to the statist nationalism built upon ideals of patriotism, its content often imperialistic and xenophobic, but was also applied to the other strand of nationalism that was articulated as a form of protest against foreign imperial impositions as well as the authoritarian state’s oppressions.

In 1934 when Pak Yŏnghŭi, a proletarian critic, declared his return to art after serving as the chairman of KAPF (Korea Artista Proleta Federatio; 1925-35), he was famously quoted to have said that “gained was ideology and lost was art itself.”<sup>227</sup> Although Pak admittedly was referring here to the socialist ideology at the heart of the KAPF movement, the renunciation of the “nation” in the literary field in the early 1990s showed a similar mourning for “lost [literary] art.” As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, such denunciation of the social function of the collective category of the nation

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<sup>226</sup> See Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Felling Beyond the Nation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, pp. 20.

<sup>227</sup> Sunyoung Park, “The Colonial Origin of Korean Realism and Its Contemporary Manifestation,” *positions* 14:1 (Spring 2006): pp. 183.

was widespread in South Korea's literary field as well, particularly among the younger generation of writers and intellectuals who were critical of what was increasingly being perceived as a unity of repression, forged through reduction of social and political differences. For some at least, the marriage between literature and movement was a pure contradiction, wherein "the illogic couched in the name of resolution ultimately could not win over the passion for literature."<sup>228</sup> Deconstructing the tenets of "national literature movement," then, was the gesture of the younger generation of writers and critics to open up a space for more diverse creative efforts, the struggle to extricate themselves from what Jameson calls the "situation of the third world artist,"<sup>229</sup> for whom "the personal and the collective [necessarily] coincide."

Nevertheless, fully aware as he is of the outcries for the revision, even disposal, of the concept of national literature in the South Korean literary scene, at the 1994 conference on globalization Paik would present the movement as a source of inspiration and intervention against the universalist strand of globalization that was threatening the very practice of literature itself:

"If 'world literature' [...] is threatened by this particular version of globalization,<sup>230</sup> so would be national literature a fortiori. Not only 'national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness,' but any distinctly national traditions even within the larger life of a world literature must be condemned in this rush toward 'uniformity of thought and style.' For the vaunted diversity of postmodernism amounts in reality only to what 'the cultural logic of late capitalism' allows and to some extent demands. If this is so—if both world literature and national literatures are among the objects to melt into air as a consequence of capitalism globalization—then those attached to the idea of the former should look upon the proponents of the latter with more sympathy than suspicion, indeed, even with an

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<sup>228</sup> Pang Minho, "Liöllijüm, liöllijüm" [Realism, realism], *Munhak tongne* 7 (Winter 1996): pp. 117.

<sup>229</sup> Fredric Jameson, as quoted in Kirk A. Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893 – 1945*, pp. 60.

<sup>230</sup> Here, Paik is referring to what Tariq Ali has suggested of globalization—namely, the "growing tendency to uniformity of thought and style. Trivia reigns supreme and literature becomes a branch of the entertainment industry. Instead of 'socialist realism,' we have a 'market realism.'" See Paik Nak-chung, "Nations and Literatures in the Age of Globalization," pp. 225.



active sense of solidarity [...] We in the movement for a Korean national literature, at any rate, having always aimed at joining the ranks of world literature, now find an additional justification for our endeavors in discovering those ranks in such disarray that contributions by a movement like ours seem essential to the very survival of world literature.<sup>231</sup>

As can be detected in this passage, Paik builds an impassioned case for the value of South Korea's national literature movement in challenging the encroachment of capitalist globalization on world literature, the experience of a movement through which its participants are ideally positioned to shift the discourse of world literature as a phenomenon to one of world literature as a movement. Demanding "an active sense of solidarity," Paik invites fellow writers, critics, and scholars around the world to think about the relevance of South Korea's national literature movement to the project of revitalizing the project of world literature precisely at a time when literature itself is faced with the threat of "melting into air" by the winds of capitalist globalization—namely, what Pheng Cheah has recently defined as "a radical rethinking of world literature as a literature that is an active power in the making of worlds, that is, both a site of processes of worlding and an agent that participates and intervenes in these processes."<sup>232</sup>

Shifting the discourse on world literature as a world-making activity vis-à-vis the national literature movement allows Paik to counter the argument that the national literature movement is nationalist and essentialist in any simple sense of the two terms. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the collapse of the socialist bloc in the Second World and the transition to democracy from military dictatorships in the Third World signaled the end of what Michael Denning calls the "age of three worlds (1945 – 1989)," while the currents of globalization reinforced the feeling that it was now the epoch of one

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., pp. 225-226.

<sup>232</sup> Pheng Cheah, *What is a World?: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, pp. 2.

(the First, and capitalist) world.<sup>233</sup> Given this context, the relationship of South Korea's national literature movement to the Third World literature's struggle against forces of dehumanization, dominance, and subjugation enables Paik to alert his readers to the possibilities in and the necessity of the project of world literature to offer critical social functions in and against the unifying force of global capitalism. Ultimately, by bringing the concept of national literature onto the world stage and making it freshly relevant to the emerging discourse on globalization and world literature, Paik generates a counter-argument against those who had grown suspicious of the currency of national literature in South Korean literary field.

It is worth recalling that Paik presented on the relationship between national literature and world literature in 1994—that is, a few years before the discourse on world literature effectively took off in the Euro-American academia at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So while Paik gestures towards the newfound importance of thinking critically about the conditions of possibility for world literature, he does not engage critically with other articulations of world literature per se in this particular article. Nonetheless, I find his double interpretation of Goethe and Marx's signals for world literature—that is, world literature as a commercial byproduct a la Marx of increasing transnationalism and globalization, on the one hand, and world literature “plurality of literatures and a great variety and multiplicity of literary productions, on the other”—useful for thinking about the anxiety between the nation and the world that is at the heart of Paik's thinking on world literature. The concept of world literature as a global and globalizing practice is necessary for Paik, for the national literature movement to find fresh relevance on a new

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<sup>233</sup> I borrow this term from Michael Denning. See Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, London: Verso Books, 2004.

world platform. At the same time, it is the very forces of capitalism behind globalization that “threaten [...] not only national literatures but also world literature, [as] global capital and its cosmopolitan cultural market, rather than ‘national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness,’ that represents the chief danger” in the global age.<sup>234</sup> “We must thus see in the current globalization,” Paik thus argues, “both a threat and an opportunity.”<sup>235</sup>

As exemplified through the article presented at the Duke conference in 1994, in the 1990s Paik was deeply invested in revamping the concept of world literature by putting it in conversation with South Korea’s national literature movement and its participation in the Third world literature movement. But while such move on Paik’s part is more clearly drawn out on the level of discourse, in his criticism on actual works of literature, we begin to see a more puzzling picture. In fact, it was also in the 1990s that critics began pointing to a noticeable disparity between the kind of literature Paik had endorsed as national literature exemplar in the 1970s and 1980s, and the kind of literature that he was turning to in the 1990s. Nowhere was this fissure more perceptible than in his reading and assessment of writer Shin Kyung-sook.

As deplored by many critics and writers at the time—in particular by writers claiming to have shared and participated in Paik’s vision on what and how literature should be in the 1970s and 1980s—Shin’s writing appeared to be much more attuned to navigating one’s own interiority, and far from the kinds of literature that stressed political progressivism, people’s resistance, and exposure of social injustices. In the eyes of those whose own literary practices fell squarely in line with the national literature in the 1970s and people’s literature in the 1980s, Shin’s writing did not exhibit enough social

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<sup>234</sup> See Paik Nak-chung, “Nations and Literatures in the Age of Globalization,” pp. 228.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 227.

purposiveness to qualify as a literary work proper. And although she had debuted in 1985, neither Shin nor the majority of leftist-minded writers identified her work with literatures of *minjok* (the national), *minjung* (the people), or *nodong* (the laborers)—three collective markers that drove the resistance movements throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Paik’s enthusiasm for Shin’s *Oettan Pang* [*A Room Apart*] (1995) therefore raised eyebrows of more than a few. Paik commended Shin on her “superb literary exploration of reality,” calling *A Room Apart* an “inspirational work of labor fiction [(*nodong munhak*)].” What was more, he maintained that the novel takes its place beside some of the most prominent works of twentieth-century Korean literature and exceeds “even in its formal narratological qualities alone” works such as Cho Sehŭi’s *Dwarf* (1976-1978), Hwang Sŏgyŏng’s “Far from Home” (1971), Yŏm Sangsŏp’s saga *Three Generations* (1931), and Hong Myŏnghŭi’s *Im Kkŏkjŏng* (1928-1940).<sup>236</sup> All of these writers and literary works are those that Paik has identified as exemplary national literature at one point or another in his career, pointing to their “rich depiction of social reality” or “clarity of *minjung* [the people/oppressed] consciousness.”<sup>237</sup> So although Paik did not explicitly identify Shin as a writer of national literature, per se, his positioning of her alongside some of the most prolific, influential writers was enough to reveal his high appraisal of her work with respect to Korean literature at large.

*A Room Apart* is an autobiographical novel that recounts the events in the final years of the Yusin regime when the protagonist “I” had worked as a teenage worker at a factory in an industrial district. But the novel does not begin there. It begins, in fact,

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<sup>236</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “*Oettan bang’i mutnŭngŏtkwa irungŏt*” [“A room apart”: its achievements and its inquiries], in *T’ongil sidae Hanguk munhak ūi poram – minjok munhak kwa segye munhak 4*, Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa pip’yŏngsa, 2006, pp. 274-75.

<sup>237</sup> See Paik Nak-chung et al., “Chwadam: Kungmunhak yŏn’guwa sŏyang munhak insik” [Studying national literature and understanding western literature], in *Paek nakch’ŏng hoehwarok 3*, pp. 193-197.

sixteen years later when the worker-cum-writer “I” begins to ruminate upon the meaning of literature after receiving a phone call from Kyesuk, a former factory co-worker, inquiring: “You seem to write a lot about your childhood, your college years, and stories about love, but I did not see a single story about us. [...] Are you embarrassed of your past? [...] You seem to be living a life different from our own.”<sup>238</sup> And it is with this past that came calling on the phone unexpectedly that “I” is prompted to re-open the chapter in her life that she had kept closed for the past sixteen years. “I” is driven to start re-thinking the premise behind her act of writing, the responsibility of representation, the purpose of literature: “This book, I believe, will turn out to be not quite fact and not quite fiction, but something in between. I wonder if it can be called literature. I ponder the act of writing. What does writing mean to me?”<sup>239</sup> The novel traces “I”’s shuttling back and forth between her writer’s present and worker’s past. Kyesuk’s somewhat accusatory remark resurfaces on several occasions throughout the text, disturbing “I”’s present state of contentment and gnawing at her guilty conscience. The novel accordingly charts “I”’s moral growth during the formative years of her life. Aside from a few scenes, “I”’s present is almost wholly preoccupied by the question of the ethics involved in narrating the lives of “them,” her former co-workers.

But why the guilty conscience? After all, much of what “I” recounts of her past was now a story that rang a bell for many Koreans, made familiar through countless testimonies, interviews, reportages written by worker-activists and underground student activists. After moving to the city from the hometown countryside in 1978 at the age of sixteen, “I” shares a small one-room living space with her older brother who works in the

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<sup>238</sup> Shin Kyung-sook, *Oettan pang*, Seoul: Munhak tongne, 1995, pp. 36.

<sup>239</sup> Shin Kyung-sook, *The Girl Who Wrote Loneliness*, Ha-Yun Jung trans., New York: Pegasus Books, 2015, pp. 1.

janitorial department at a civic office during the day and studies law attending college classes in the evening. Though “I” works in the factory during the day, early into the story we discover that working in the factory is not her ultimate goal. In fact, for “I” the work operates as a means for her to obtain a high school education through the “special classes for adolescent industrial workers” program in the late 1970s.<sup>240</sup> Such a life was hardly uncommon in the late 70s among the working population in the industrial sector. And at night, drifting off to sleep after a long day’s work, the sixteen-year-old teenager nurses a secret dream—that of becoming a writer.

So what was it about her past as a factory worker that made “I” so reluctant to address it in her writing, that is, until it was pointed out to her as a matter of living up to her conscience? At the root of “I”’s reluctance about facing her past lies two events: her withdrawal from workers’ union to attend high school,<sup>241</sup> and the failure to prevent the death of a co-worker, housemate, and friend Hŭijae. Nevertheless, once “I” opens the firmly shut doors to the “rooms apart”—the remote rooms of the makeshift lodging wherein “I” had lived with her older brother, cousin, and Hŭijae—it sparks a flooding back of memories, ranging from the disorienting experience of the city and yearning to emulate the works of established authors, to the unbearable shame she had felt withdrawing herself from the labor union in order to be allowed to attend high school.

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<sup>240</sup> “In 1977 the [South Korean] government established “standard rules and regulations on special classes for adolescent industrial workers’ education” (*sanŏpch’ e kŭnro ch’ ōngsonyŏnŭi kyoyugŭl wihan tŭkbyŏl hakkŭp dungŭi sŏlch’ I kijunryŏng mit sihaengsech’ik*) that required companies to provide night classes for their employees [...] To comply with these rules, companies [...] had to allow workers to attend high school classes in the evenings.” See Seung-kyung Kim, *Class Struggle or Family Struggle?: The Lives of Women Factory Workers in South Korea*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 31.

<sup>241</sup> Namhee Lee writes: “As education was one main route for upward mobility in South Korea, most workers came to night schools wanting education above anything else. In the 1970s and early 1980s, it was not unusual for workers to choose a particular factory because the manager promised to allow them to attend night school.” See Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea*, pp. 230.

The feeling that she had disavowed her comradeship to other fellow worker-friends in pursuit of her education, and subsequently her dream of becoming a writer, only grows more intense after witnessing the tragic, lonely death of a close friend.

The private memories of “I”’s days as a teen, her unrewarding days as a “factory girl” (*yŏgong*) offset by the nightly dreams of one day becoming a writer, are interspersed with more public memories of political upheavals and social movements of the time. In the span of three years between 1978 and 1981, “I” witnesses some of the most intense moments of South Korea’s history: the untimely death of a textile plant female worker during a sit-in protest, the assassination of Park Chung Hee in October 1979; the short-lived “Seoul Spring” (the period of freedom between Park’s assassination and Chun Doo Hwan’s takeover in May 1980), followed by the state-authored massacre that left the city of Kwangju drenched in blood. These political events are not just wholly external to “I”’s everyday life, as we see with her older brother, a law student who is chased after by the authorities after participating in anti-authoritarian student movements. While “I” struggles to pursue her personal aspirations to become a writer at the cost of forsaking her comradeship and friendship with fellow workers, the older brother goes against his family’s wishes and participates in anti-state activities, in the public cause of collective resistance. As we shall see, well into the 1990s, there emerges between “I” and this older brother (who had also wanted to become a writer) two conflicting perspectives on what literature should do:

[Older brother said,] ‘If you’re a writer, you must not look away from such things. That coup [by Chun Doo Hwan] in the end caused what went on in Kwangju. It’s a frightening thing.’

[...] I don't know, *Oppa*<sup>242</sup>. To me, worrying about whether the briquette fire was still going, or whether you had to sleep on the streets after packing up and leaving, things like that feel more important. Like why it was so cold back then [...] *Oppa*. What I really hated back then was not the president's face but things like the knife refusing the slice through the radish that we had bought to make soup because it had frozen solid. Like on a snowy morning when I turned the tap. I loved it when the water gushed out unfrozen, and hated it when it was frozen and refused to come out. I wanted to write not because I thought [literature] would bring about change. I simply loved it. [Literature], in itself, allowed me to dream about things that in reality were impossible to achieve, things that were forbidden. From where had that dream seeped in? I consider myself as a member of society. If I can dream through [literature], doesn't that mean the society can dream, too?<sup>243</sup>

In this scene, "I"'s older brother and "I" stage what has come to be recognized as the key point of contention between writers of the 70s and 80s, on the one hand, and 90s, on the other. This scene confronts head-on the question with which it begins and ends: what is the responsibility of writers and the role of literature? If the act of writing was a way of exposing social and political injustices for the older brother as it was for many student activists, writers, and intellectuals of the 1970s and the 80s, and literature a medium for depicting the grand narratives of democratization, for "I" it was first and foremost a deeply personal activity and a means of escape from the constrictions of everyday life. Even as she lived through some of the most turbulent and politically charged years, she despised poverty more than political repression, desired escape from the circumstances over solidarity with other factory workers. Her dreams vis-à-vis the act of writing were not necessarily synonymous with the dreams of democracy. What is furthermore interesting about this passage is how "I" feels she needs to justify her alternative motives, so to speak, for writing. Confronted by her brother who tries to tell her what a proper writer should heed attention to, reminding her that there is still work to be done via

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<sup>242</sup> Korean word that denotes an "older brother." Also used by younger females addressing their older brothers.

<sup>243</sup> Shin Kyung-sook, *The Girl Who Wrote Loneliness*, pp. 179.



literature towards social change, “I” defends her grounds for writing by asserting the validity of her dreams and claiming herself (if somewhat feebly so) as a rightful member of the society at large. Passions for literature as “I” envisions them were indeed manifold, and not addressing the visions of social change in explicit terms as her brother may have, perhaps, did not necessarily make those passions any less legitimate. Pursuit of her own dream, she stresses, is in itself a channel through which the society can dream as well.

But even in light of “I”’s attempt to bridge herself and the larger society through her act of writing, it is difficult to deny that what triggers this particular story is the conspicuous difference and distance she feels between herself and her former co-workers in present-day South Korean society. Kyesuk’s pointed comment—namely, that “I” seems to be living a different life from “theirs”—gets at the heart of the chasm that “I” also admits to in the process of retrieving her past. On several levels, “I”’s life parallels the transition from a developing Third World into a fully industrialized and newly developed First World that South Korea experienced within the short span of time between the 1960s and 1980s, or what since has been oft-touted as the “Miracle on the Han River.” Born in the early 60s in the countryside, in the late 70s at the height of state-driven industrialization “I” moves up to Seoul in search of employment and greater opportunities in life. Working as a “factory girl,” in the 80s she builds her way to becoming instantaneously successful and hailed as *the* writer of the 90s.

But a large majority of those that may have lived through similar economic, social, and political terrain have no such tale of success to tell, and the gap between her former co-workers and “I” remains large. Persistently signifying such chasm in the text is the tragic death of Hūijae, whose end is so vastly different from “I”’s own, the friend from

whose lifeless, maggot-infested body “I” had run away from without once looking back. The death of the frail, passive, soft-hearted figure whose own high school education was put on hold for the sake of bare livelihood serves an important allegorical function in the text, challenging both the narrative of national success perpetuated by the sign of the “Miracle” and the narrative of resistance and emancipation. “[Hūijae] was the alley itself,” “I” writes, “She was the power pole, the vomit, the inn. She was the factory chimney, the dark marketplace, the sewing machine. The thirty-seven lone rooms [of the shabby boardinghouse] were her, the venues of her life.”<sup>244</sup> Neither the oppositional narrative of collective resistance nor the developmentalist narrative of the fascist state—both of which equally relied upon the same positivist image of “industrial workers” (*sanŏp ūi yŏkkun*)—was able to successfully rescue Hūijae from such tragedy.<sup>245</sup> The image that “I” draws of Hūijae is therefore powerfully contrastive in its passivity: “positioned in front of the constantly moving conveyor belt, or in front of the needle, always threaded, on the sewing machine, [...] eyes weary, never round or wide [...] a pale shadow.”<sup>246</sup> Confronting Hūijae’s tragic life through the act of writing, “I” is finally able to remove herself from a place of guilty silence, move into a new place of social conscience, and address the question raised by Kyesuk which prompted “I” to begin writing in the first place:

Only now I call them my friends, they who had to continue moving their fingers, all ten of them, and keep producing things, without end, their names forgotten, their efforts completely disassociated from material riches. I shall not forget the social will that they have spread in me. That they, my anonymous friends, have given birth to a piece of my inner world, just as my mother gave birth to my

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., pp. 290.

<sup>245</sup> Hagen Koo, *Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001, pp. 140.

<sup>246</sup> Shin Kyung-sook, *The Girl Who Wrote Loneliness*, pp. 34.

essential self... And that I, on my part, must give birth, through my words, to their own place of dignity in this world.<sup>247</sup>

The passage embodies simultaneously a sense of closure and the onset of a new beginning. It is a closure, on the one hand, in that this passage marks an end to “I”’s recounting of the painful memories of her time as a member of the working class in the late 1970s. On the other hand, it is also a new beginning in that she is now able to confront her past and recognize the necessity of giving them a voice through her writing. More importantly, the passage also reveals that “I” can now call her former co-workers and classmates as friends even if she had disassociated herself from the labor union and had felt guilty for having done so. But there is a catch here. Though “I” may address them as friends now, doing so is easier for her precisely because she is now able to distance herself from them without feeling the guilt of doing so—hence “I”’s reference to them as “they,” not “we,” and “*their* own place of dignity,” not “*our* own place of dignity.”

Although this ultimate split between “I” herself and the worker-friends is what several critics point to as a major shortcoming in Shin’s text, for Paik this is precisely what made it so significant for forging a new role of literature in the post-democratization, post-workers’ struggle terrain of South Korea in the 1990s, a role that would be corollary to the shifts that were witnessed in that terrain. But if this were so, then how are we to interpret Paik’s comment that this text is an “inspirational work of labor fiction”? This becomes a sticky point of contention among literary critics. During a roundtable discussion in spring of 1998, just a couple years after the publication of Shin’s *A Room Apart*, critic Kim Yŏnghŭi countered Paik’s positive reading of the novel, arguing that it

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., pp. 365.

cannot and should not be categorized under “labor fiction” proper. According to Kim, not only did Shin’s novel “fall short of vividly depicting the *actual scene of labor* [(*chagöp hyönjang*)] or the *immediacy of everyday lives* [(*saenghwal hyönjang*)] of the laborers,” it also failed to deliver a strong sense of *minjung*-oriented vision of an awakened laborer” (emphases added).<sup>248</sup> Other critics would also remark upon what they perceived as a stark difference between the story told in Shin’s text and the stories of resistance told under the banner of *minjung* [the oppressed] and *nodong* [labor] in the 1980s.<sup>249</sup> Shin’s novel, in the eyes of the embattled writers and poets of the 80s, was much less a medium of resistance as it was a nostalgic, individual account drawn at the cost of romanticizing the difficult lives of the laborers who suffered through some of the most turbulent years in recent Korean history. The class consciousness that had been indispensable to literature of the 1980s was, it seemed, nonexistent in Shin’s novel. But if such residual chasm between “I a writer” and “they the laborers” in Shin’s autobiographical novel was precisely that which failed to impress the proponents of literature of labor emancipation, it was within that very chasm that Paik found a key to the role of literature in the 1990s.

Paik argues:

In spite of the protagonist’s claim that ‘[her] reason for doing literature is not because [she] believed literature would *change* something’, we can see how the act of writing in [Shin’s] text transforms the very protagonist “I” herself. Whether that transformation will stop at the level of “I” or spread out to the larger society remains to be seen. As a critic who has been speaking on the topic of national literature for some time now, I will add that only the ‘testimonies of an era’ [(*sidae üi chŭngön*)] or ‘literature of social indictment’ [(*sahoe kobal munhak*)] that entail such genuine transformation at the level of the individual will be able to bring about a meaningful social change, as well as live up to the name of national literature.<sup>250</sup>

<sup>248</sup> Paik Nak-chung et al., “*Hoegabül majün paek nakch’öng p’yönjibin ege munnünda*,” in *Paek nakch’öng hoehwarok 4*, pp. 48.

<sup>249</sup> Paik Nak-chung, and Kim Yongrak, “Int’öbyu – munhak esö t’ongillo,” pp. 309.

<sup>250</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “*Oettan bang’i mutnüngöt kwa irungöt*,” pp. 281.

Here, Paik valorizes Shin's text for what he perceives as the text's perpetual balancing act that both questions and acknowledges the opposition between individual and the collective, a distinction that was routinely collapsed in the 1980s' literature of resistance. As many critics have pointed out, Shin was a writer who clung steadfastly to "the world of interiority" (*naemyŏn ũi segye*); and yet, Paik would argue, the boundaries of that individual inner world are porous to the social in her text, and from that emerges Shin's capacity for writing about the lives of the laborers without necessarily collapsing the difference between the individual and the collective. Paik's above qualification of 'testimonies of an era' and 'literature of social indictment'—the mainstays of class conscious literature for much of the 1980s—with the importance of individual affect in literature is therefore his attempt to reclaim the social role of literature while acknowledging the shifts toward the private that have occurred in the 1990s' literary field. Therefore, at least within the context of the South Korean literary field, Shin's text was useful for Paik in that it actively shuttled back and forth between understanding literature as a social movement with a specific collective objective versus literature as an expression of private aesthetic satisfaction.

However, when we juxtapose Paik's reading of *A Room Apart* as an instance of national literature against what he articulates as the viability of national literature as a movement in the discourse on world literature, a curious disconnect emerges. As I have tried to draw out in the preceding pages, *A Room Apart* was a distinctly different literary voice from those that occupied the ranks of national literature in the 1970s and 80s. At the most conspicuous level, it was a non-combatant response to the master narratives of

development and modernization, against which national literature proper at the height of the movement in the 1970s and 80s had launched a total war in the name of anti-authoritarian resistance, on the one hand, and global hegemony of capitalism, on the other. As several critics have pointed out to date, *A Room Apart* was not a story of resistance per se, and to a certain extent it did not even seem to challenge the conventional developmentalist narrative that tells the tale of a successful, rapid transition from the Third World to the First World. And it was precisely on this account that Paik's positive assessment of Shin befuddled so many writers and critics.

What we witness here, then, is a tension in Paik's dual thinking on national literature. As we can see in his attempt to admit a wider range of writers and writings (such as Shin Kyung-sook and her works) into the territory of socially grounded literature, Paik is much more careful about resuscitating the continuous viability of national literature as it had manifested in the 1970s and 80s on the home front. In the 1980s when the principle of class struggles had become a dominant creed, national literature had also become a banner and a battle cry in the broader course of literature's radicalization. And for this, in the 1990s' terrain where movement for freedom and democracy was no longer an indispensable pressing cause, the same concept and practice of national literature were condemned as coercive and exclusionary by way of its association with the radicalization of the literary field in the 80s.

But if the awareness of such pitfalls of literature as a means political intervention as witnessed in the 1980s prompted Paik to make a recuperative call for national literature as "literature" as opposed to a literary "movement," in the context of world literature discourse Paik would find himself reasserting the "movement" aspect of

national literature movement, and pitching literature once again as a site of intervention against the modern capitalist world-system in a much more deliberate, purposive manner. In the following section, I show how such duality in Paik's positioning of himself with respect to discourse on South Korea's national literature and world literature manifests once again, and even more conspicuously so, between his reading of the South Korean writer Bae Suah and his critique of Pascale Casanova's theorization of the world literary space.

### **Provincializing the Discourse of World Literature and Paik's Reading of Bae Suah**

If in his engagement with the discourse of world literature in 1994 Paik cautioned against the facile disposal of the category "nation" in light of global exchange and commerce (which in turn signaled for him an overall tide of dispensing with the nation as a concrete, lived reality as well), in light of the development on the discourse of world literature in 2010, the stakes are much higher for him than it had been in 1994. Although the rush toward world literature as a critical practice was certainly a development on several levels—not the least of which was the interrogation into Eurocentricity and canon formation inherent in traditional understanding of it—for Paik, the rejection of canonicity and subsequent emphasis on world literature as a mode of circulation and hence subject to multiple iterations at any given time and space do not necessarily spell out a productive re-engagement with the concept.

Over the past two decades, the discourse on world literature has proliferated in English-language scholarship both as a response to and intervention against the

intensifying globalization. In response to calls for a “planetary” understanding of literary practices, scholars to date have shed light on the problems and contradictions that underlie the concept of world literature. Some of the more prevailing critiques concerned the Eurocentric bias in literary-aesthetic standards of world literature, the inequality of representation that determine the scope of the “world” and “literature(s)” in the composite term, and the practical difficulties emerging in the attempt to move beyond literary practices traditionally demarcated on national terms. David Damrosch in his own approach to interrogating these terms, asks the following set of questions:

“What does it really mean to speak of “world literature”? Which literature, whose world? What relation to the national literatures whose production continued unabated even after Goethe announced their obsolescence? What new relations between Western Europe and the rest of the globe, between antiquity and modernity, between the nascent mass culture and elite productions?<sup>251</sup>

Reliant upon oppositional concepts such as West versus the rest, antiquity versus modernity, and popular versus elite, these questions signal Damrosch’s concern with the grounds of comparison that the term world literature alludes to. If pursued more rigorously, these questions could have led Damrosch to articulate a more critical assessment of the inequalities and assumptions that underlie the term world literature as hitherto understood. But these questions are suddenly dropped altogether for a utopic contention that world literature is a “mode of circulation and of reading, [...] available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike [...] It is important [...] to realize that just as there never has been a single set canon of world literature, so too no single way of reading can be appropriate to all texts.”<sup>252</sup> While Damrosch’s articulation of world literature as such does exhibit the virtue of deconstructing the established notion

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<sup>251</sup> David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* Translation/Transnation Series, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 1.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5.



of canon as a fixed, timeless set of great books, his vastly optimistic view on world literature ultimately falls short of questioning the power inequalities that have set the Eurocentric literary norms in place.

For Paik, world literature as it is conceptualized in the Euro-American discourse still embodies a Eurocentric notion of modernity and autonomy that does not bode well when it comes to determining the two qualities in Korean literature. This is his greatest point of contention with Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* in 2010. In "Globalization and Literature: World Literature, National Literature, Regional Literature," Paik decries Casanova's Eurocentric spatiotemporalization of literary modernity, within which she naturalizes the developmentalist history linking realism and modernism as pure aesthetic, pure literary concepts.<sup>253</sup> The axis of organization of this spatiotemporality is what Casanova coins as the "Greenwich Meridian of literature," named after the prime meridian that set up the international time zone system. As a common standard for measuring time for the unification of literary space through competition, Casanova maintains that the Greenwich Meridian of literature is also "an absolute point of reference *unconditionally recognized by all contestants [in world literary space]*" (emphasis added).<sup>254</sup> Literary time that is organized by the Greenwich Meridian of literature is, as Casanova would have it, timeless and thus "supersedes other temporalities, whether of nations, families, or personal experience."<sup>255</sup> Similar approach is taken with respect to her notion of the universal, timeless literary aesthetic. Casanova claims that the literary core

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<sup>253</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "Segyehwa wa munhak: segye munhak, kungmin/minjok munhak, chiyök munhak" [Globalization and literature: world literature, national literature, regional literature], *An kwa pak* 29 (November 2010): pp. 27-28.

<sup>254</sup> Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, M.B. Debevoise trans., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. xii.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93.

of cosmopolitan Paris played an indispensable role in inspiring the literary autonomy of modernist aesthetics from around the world. In Casanova's literary world, realism—be it socialist or magical—lends itself to political interests and purposes much too readily, and thus represents “the preeminent form of the literary *heteronomy* experienced by writers in literary spaces under political domination” [emphasis added].<sup>256</sup> She then goes on to cite the example Sin Kyöngnim, one of the most important poets of the South Korean national literature movement, as an example of a poet whose entire body of works is replete with the “functionalist aesthetic” of realism.

Herein lay, then, Paik's strongest point of opposition against Casanova. Paik first argues that Casanova's very assumption of the Greenwich Meridian as a reference point that is “unconditionally recognized by all contestants” in the world literary space is “closer to a dogma than it is to a simple analogy.”<sup>257</sup> In decrying Casanova's reliance upon the Greenwich Meridian as a dogma, Paik calls into question her attempt to draw a singular literary-world a la Wallerstein's notion of a singular capitalist world-system with a singular criterion of literary autonomy that is free of the power dynamic between national polities. Indeed, Casanova remains oblivious to the fact that her analogy of literary time with respect to the geopolitical reference of Greenwich Meridian is in itself deeply hegemonic and inextricably linked to the imperialist status of England at the time of its establishment in mid-nineteenth century.

In countering Casanova's insistence upon the existence of an absolute literary time and autonomy in world literary space, Paik brings South Korean national literature

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., pp. 197.

<sup>257</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “Segyehwa wa munhak: segye munhak, kungmin/minjok munhak, chiyök munhak,” pp. 26.

as a means of critical commentary upon her wholesale rejection of the national and the political. The national and the political in Casanova's world literary space are conceived solely as factors that impede a work of literature's entry into the "autonomous space" of "international literary competition." Paik counters this by arguing that the inverse relationship Casanova draws between global literary autonomy and national/political does not take into consideration that literary autonomy in the local context of South Korea has a very different relationship to the national and the political.

For Paik, articulating this difference involves a two-step process. First, he must maintain that the word "nation" carries a more complex history in the case of Korea. The "nation" (*kungmin*) as defined by the South Korean state is limited to the southern half of the peninsula as a way to maintain the division system, but the "nation" (*minjok*) as conceived by Paik in national literature movement is inclusive of the people on both sides of the division. National literature (*minjok munhak*) is thus differentiated from national literature (*kungmin munhak*) which works in service of the state. The distinction between *kungmin* and *minjok* that Paik engineered through his theorization of national literature becomes effaced in the translation of the national literature movement into Euro-American paradigm of world literature. Second, Paik must articulate that it was in and through the very name of the nation (*minjok*) that literature was able to assert its freedom from the state's hyper-surveillance. In Korea, literature had to assert the political and the national in order to recover its autonomy from the state.

As can be discerned in his critique of Casanova's simplistic understanding of literary autonomy from national politics by way of explaining the difference of Korean literary experience, Paik's commentary is marked by a distinct sense of what I interpret

as “provincializing” the Euro-American discourse of world literature.<sup>258</sup> But it is Paik’s placing South Korea’s national literature movement and its realist experience at the *vanguard* position to re-articulate world literature as an intervention against the literary autonomy capitalist world-system that inadvertently puts him in what Walter Mignolo has once called “Chakrabarty’s dilemma” on the subject of Indian historiography, quoting him as the following:

That Europe works as a silent referent in historical knowledge itself becomes obvious in a highly ordinary way. There are at least two everyday subalternities of non-Western, third-world histories. Third-world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate... ‘They’ produce their work in relative ignorance of non-Western histories, and this does not seem to affect the quality of their work. This is a gesture, however, that ‘we’ cannot return. We cannot even afford an equality or symmetry of ignorance at this level without taking the risk of appearing ‘old fashioned’ or ‘outdated.’<sup>259</sup>

As Chakrabarty has pointed out, there is no questioning that the project of undermining the Eurocentric criteria of literary autonomy via South Korean national literature movement underlies the risk of appearing anachronistic and even politically suspect in the modernist domain of world literature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Part of the reason for the difficulty on Paik’s part has to do with the fact that literary practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century South Korea have grown quite different from what it used to be during the height of literature’s combat against the authoritarian state in the 1970s. Thus even as he engages critically with world literature discourse through national literature movement, Paik consciously admits to the necessity of re-calibrating his literary vision in post-

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<sup>258</sup> I borrow this term from Dipesh Chakrabarty’s writing on provincializing Europe, which is essentially to deconstruct Europe’s claims to universality and propose alternative ways of telling the histories of Europe that “deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices.” See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 45.

<sup>259</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, as quoted in Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 204.

authoritarian South Korea. “While the utility of ‘national literature’ as a political rallying cry in the national democratization movement during anti-authoritarian era has been virtually exhausted,” Paik acknowledges, “the meaning of a kind of ‘national literature’ wherein both north and south of the Korean peninsula and even the Korean diasporic communities around the world participate has expanded more than ever.”<sup>260</sup> As can be discerned here, while Paik does diagnose the need to modify the purposive premise of national literature, he nonetheless maintains firm grounds on its continued relevance of the concept in 21<sup>st</sup> century Korea.

At least upon a cursory glance at Paik’s more recent literary engagements, Paik indeed appears to have become better aware of the increasing disconnect between national literature and South Korean literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At least this is how it appeared to be in 2004 when Paik wrote a critical acclaim of writer Bae Suah’s *Eseyisŭtŭ ũi ch’aeksang* [*The Essayist’s Desk*] (2003), indeed to the surprise of many critics at large. A writer who is best known for her highly experimental style, Bae emerged on the 1990s’ literary scene and quickly rose to prominence. In *The Essayist’s Desk*, Bae tells the story of a female Korean writer “I” living in Berlin, German, who falls in love with her female German teacher, named M. Brilliant in the area of music and linguistics, M has an illness and has only a limited time remaining to live. Sickly and lonely, M lives almost in complete alienation in her own country that is Germany. Though “I” feels isolated in the perceived cultural difference between Korean and German cultures, subsequent to her meeting with M, her preconceived notions of cultural/linguistic difference are shattered. Be one a German or Korean, be one in Germany or in Korea—the categories themselves

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<sup>260</sup> Paik Nak-chung, “Segyehwa wa munhak: segye munhak, kungmin/minjok munhak, chiyŏk munhak,” pp. 21.

appear to dissolve away in gradual recognition that feelings of isolation and vanity of death are universal.

In spite of their originary relationship as language teacher and student the linguistic communication between M and “I” remains rather stunted. Rather, it is their shared passion for music that brings them together. Where their linguistic point of contact fails to render the perfect expression of each other’s feelings, music comes in as the alternate form of expression. And yet, *The Essayist’s Desk* is far from a simple love story. In the face of betrayal, jealousy, and hurt pride, “I” and M end their relationship. Reflecting upon the relationship in its aftermath, “I” wishes that she’d only learnt music and not language from M, pondering as the following:

If we’d only conversed with each other through music and not language,” “I” ponders, “I would have either learnt nothing at all about M or, inversely, learnt everything there was to know about M. I would have either been completely let go by M or completely have had M. The language we’d used to get to know each other was no more than a mere dialect. In the name of expression, language was imitating M and “I.” Because we relied on language, I was gradually becoming less and less of myself and M was becoming less and less of herself. Perhaps things would have been different had we conversed through music.<sup>261</sup>

As the above passage implies, this novel is a text that is deeply concerned with the limits of representation inherent in language. Therein lay the protagonist’s inclination toward music, as music “does not express itself unless it is complete in itself.”<sup>262</sup> *The Essayist’s Desk* is also concerned with formal aspects of literary writing, as can be told in the writer’s own assertion in her postscript that she wishes not to write a “novel” but an “essay.” For Bae, literature that concerns itself with the norms of plot sequence is what constricts the writer from experimenting with the very act of writing itself as a

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<sup>261</sup> Bae Suah, *Eseyisūtū ūi ch’aeksang* [The essayist’s desk], Seoul: Munhak tongne, pp. 145.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., pp. 145.

meaningful gesture.<sup>263</sup> This reveals Bae's desire as a modernist writer to deconstruct the representational norms of literature.

But in spite of writer's wish to write and be read as an "essayist" and less a "novelist," Paik begins his own reading of *The Essayist's Desk* asserting that it is a "rare accomplishment among Korean novels for its capacity in organizing the speculative ponderings of intellectuals as an organic part of the storytelling process."<sup>264</sup> And throughout his reading, Paik constantly refers to specific moments throughout Bae's text that are rendered *realistically* to such an extent that it cannot even be called a modernist text. To that end, he even refutes the writer's own assertion of the deliberate lack of a plot in the text. "Far from not having a plot," Paik contends, "*The Essayist's Desk* is a narrative unfolding in the most calculated and precise manner, in a most deliberate sequential course, to the point of appearing cunning and sly."<sup>265</sup> He then goes on to reconstruct a plot sequence from the clues and cues allotted in Bae's text.

Indeed, this is where Paik's reading of Bae's text encounters the greatest opposition, leading many critics to decide once and for all that Paik simply did not know how to read a literary work that was not overtly realist and political. Aside from the fact that Paik's extensive reading of Bae is the first substantial treatment of a literary work since his reading of Shin's *A Room Apart* in 1997, this was why his reading of Bae elicited such heated counter-arguments. Critic Kim Yŏngch'an, for one, stressed that Paik

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<sup>263</sup> Bae Suah, "Chakka ūi mal" [Author's postscript], in *Eseyisŭtŭ ūi ch'aeksang*, pp. 197.

<sup>264</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "Sosŏlga ūi ch'aeksang, esseyisŭtu ūi ch'aesang – Pae sua changp'yŏn sosŏl 'esseyisŭtu ūi ch'aesang' ilkki" [A novelist's desk, an essayist's desk – a reading of Bae Suah's novel *The Essayist's Desk*], *Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng* 124 (Summer 2004): pp. 30-31.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34.

simply did not understand the formal beauty unique to Bae’s literary persona and tried to impose a “realist reading” (*liöllijŭm iranŭn tokbŏp*) upon a modernist text.<sup>266</sup>

While Kim’s critique of Paik as a realist reader may be technically correct, I would nonetheless argue that Kim falls short of recognizing that Paik’s “realist reading” is essentially an attempt to recover a sense of purposiveness in literature, even from a text of such clearly modernist stripes as *The Essayist’s Desk*. In concluding his reading, Paik quotes the final scene from *The Essayist’s Desk*, where “I” attributes the greatest importance to the very act of writing. “Therefore,” “I” concludes, “where I came from and where I am going do not mean anything.”<sup>267</sup> Against this, Paik maintains that “insofar as Bae is a good novelist, [he] hopes that she will extend her literary inquiry into asking even the question of where we came from and where we are going.”<sup>268</sup> Here again we can see how Paik attempts to walk a fine line between maintaining a sense of purposiveness in literature and acknowledging the importance of formal aspects. This is why even as he acknowledges the modernist finesse of Bae’s work, Paik remains ever so cautious of acclaiming its status as an essay that refuses to be a novel—that is to say, as a work that denies the very premise of literature as a proper domain of purposive craft.

As we can see in Paik’s reading of Bae in 2004, even as he embraces the modernist aesthetic of the twenty-first century South Korean literature, Paik does not disavow his belief that literature should embody purposiveness—that is to say, that aesthetic or contemplative elements of literature were not in and of themselves literature. Indeed, Paik’s decision to read Bae encountered criticism from the practitioners of

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<sup>266</sup> Kim Yŏngch’an, *Pip’yŏng kūkjang ūi yuryŏngdŭl: Kim Yŏngch’an p’yŏngnonjip*, Seoul: Changbi, 2006, pp. 26.

<sup>267</sup> Bae Suah, *Eseyisŭtŭ ūi ch’aeksang*, pp. 174.

<sup>268</sup> Paik



national literature most active in the 1970s and 80s that maintained that Bae's writerly persona did not align with the "*Ch'angbi*'s identity established in the 1970s and 80s,"<sup>269</sup> as well as from modernist or post-modernist critics of the 1990s and 2000s affiliated with *Munhak Tongne* that found Paik's method of reading downright offensive. Even amidst his recognition that national literature as a literary concept and practice must be modified to be able to address the issues of a new era, his central faith in the notion of moral responsibility of writers remains remarkably persistent and unaltered in the four decades from the 1970s to the 2000s.

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<sup>269</sup> Paik Nak-chung, and Kim Yongrak, "Int'öbyu – munhak esö t'ongillo," pp. 299.

## CONCLUSION

### Pursuing the Double Project of Modernity

As argued throughout this dissertation, behind Paik Nak-chung's mode of dissidence is the imperative of what Paik himself has called the "double project of modernity," or the "double project of simultaneously adapting to and overcoming modernity."<sup>270</sup> This notion of a double project emerges in Paik's criticism again and again over the course of the last half-century. Each time Paik issues a call for the necessity of a double project, the term "modernity" in his construction varies in what it entails. Within the realm of literature proper, the notion of double project surfaces in his straddling between the literature of autonomy and autonomy of literature. When literature's connection to social reality remained elusive, as was in the 1960s' literary field, Paik pushed for literature's capacity as a political practice. But during the period of the most intense radicalization in the South Korean literary field such as in the 1980s, Paik contended against the utility of turning literature into a means of leftist propaganda. In discussion of the key problematic in post-1945 Korea, Paik continuously maintained his ground upon the necessity of pursuing decolonization and modernization at the same time. Reassessing Park Chung Hee's authoritarian developmentalism in the twentieth century century, Paik argued that industrialization was a process that was integral to

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<sup>270</sup> Paik Nak-chung, "The Double Project of Modernity," in *New Left Review* 95 (October 2015): pp. 65-79.

achieving democratization. The principle of double project also emerged in Paik's theorization of the division system, specifically in his call for thinking about the overcoming of class disparity and the division system not as separate and unrelated tasks but as a comprehensive project that must proceed in tandem with one another.

Indeed, the double project remains the central methodology in Paik's thinking—from the start of his career as an editor of *Ch'angbi* in 1966 and up to the present-day in his work as a public intellectual voicing opposition against the South Korean state's draconian measures in matters of national defense. As crucial as the concept is to understanding Paik's intellectual world over the last five decades, the same duality in his thinking is also what triggers the critiques against Paik and the frustration felt by both progressives and conservatives.

Two telling examples, one from 1993 and the other from 2012, attest to such frustration and critique leveled at Paik from two diametrically opposite ends of the political spectrum. During a debate on the formation of a modern society and the problem of modernity in Korea in 1993, the right-wing historian An Pyŏngjik critiqued the double project of modernity for what he diagnosed as “logical impasse” (*nollijŏk ōryŏum*) of the concept, an ideal as impossible as “being faithful both to one's lawful wife as to his mistress.”<sup>271</sup> In 2012, we see an even more searing critique issued against Paik by Kim Chiha, *the* poet of resistance against the Park Chung Hee's regime in the 1970s. In 2012, Kim shocked oppositional writers, critics, and politicians by declaring his support for Park Chung Hee's daughter Park Geun-hye, who at the time was the conservative party candidate for the presidential election. Kim's turn to the conservative party had to do

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<sup>271</sup> An Pyŏngjik, Kim Myŏnggho, et al., “Palje 2: Hanguk kyŏngje paljŏn ūi che chogŏn” [Presentation no. 2: the preconditions of advancement in South Korean economy], *Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng* 21 (December 1993): pp. 34.

with his deep disappointment in the ineffectuality of the oppositional politicians to transform the existing political paradigm and convince the people of the oppositions' initiatives.<sup>272</sup> During the 2012 presidential elections, Paik actively pushed for the consolidation of the opposition parties to consolidate against the ascendancy of the conservative power. Herein lay the trigger for Kim's turn against Paik. With regard to Paik's call for consolidation amongst the opposition parties, Kim argued that Paik's understanding of politics was no more than mere "rubbish," that the latter's political views were no different from "diluting *soju* with *makkŏli*."<sup>273</sup>

If An's critique in 1993 was founded upon the sense that Paik was attempting to attain the best of the both worlds—that is, internalizing modernity while also remaining critical about it—Kim's critique in 2012 was based upon his impatience with Paik's moderation that appeared to be simply politically inarticulate. In calling Paik's duality a matter of "being faithful both to one's lawful wife as to his mistress" and "diluting *soju* with *makkŏli*," both An and Kim were ultimately pointing to what they diagnosed as symptoms of Paik's inability to maintain a theoretically and politically consistent vision. To some extent, the critique of inconsistency leveled at Paik is not wholly unfounded. As I demonstrated in earlier chapters, Paik perpetually straddled the middle course in his thinking on the relationship between literature and politics, between decolonization and modernization, between class and nation, and between nation and the world.

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<sup>272</sup> Kwŏn Taeyŏl, "Tanilhwa oe hanŭnji tamnon ōpssi...utkigo itta" [No rationale whatsoever for consolidation...what a joke], *Chosun Ilbo*, November 21, 2012, accessed September 10, 2016, [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2012/11/21/2012112100221.html?Dep0=twitter&d=2012112100221](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/11/21/2012112100221.html?Dep0=twitter&d=2012112100221).

<sup>273</sup> Chŏng Unhyŏn, "Kim chiha, paek nakch'ŏng e 'kkangt'ong ppalgaengi' toksŏl" [Kim Chiha's biting remark: "Paik Nak-chung is a phony leftist"], *Chinsil ũi kil*, December 4, 2012, accessed September 10, 2016, [http://www.poweroftruth.net/news/mainView.php?uid=2325&table=byple\\_news](http://www.poweroftruth.net/news/mainView.php?uid=2325&table=byple_news).

Not surprisingly, then, the one word that shows up frequently in all of Paik's corpus is "*tongsi e,*" or "at once"/"simultaneously." To this day, it is Paik's insistence upon pursuing two seemingly divergent tasks "at once" that sits at the nexus of the critiques against him and his concept of the double project. In my own engagement with Paik's corpus, I have tried to historicize and contextualize Paik's insistence upon the necessity of the double project by analyzing Paik not through his theory *and* praxis but through theory *as* praxis. That is to say, rather than contextualizing Paik's work as purely academic or theoretical, I stressed the utility of his theories in activating his praxis in engaging with social reality. For Paik, the importance lay not so much in maintaining a consistent vision in theory regardless of whether or not it aids one in changing the status quo, but in becoming better cognizant of what the theory under discussion will generate in the realm of social transformation. But the question remains—does Paik's emphasis on social change have repercussions in his literary practices? After all, his concept of engagement in literature still led him to perpetually straddle between literature as literature, on the one hand, and literature as movement, on the other.

Though many literary critics have argued against the relevance of Paik's literary thought in the South Korean literature today, a very recent example may prove just the opposite. As we saw in Chapter 4, Paik's reading of Shin Kyung-sook and Bae Suah straddles what appear to be two polar opposite conceptions of literature, frustrating critics from either ends of the spectrum. A closer examination of Paik's actual readings of these two writers of the post-authoritarian era shows us that Paik's insistence upon the purposiveness and pragmatic faculties of literature remains intact, though it may also provide a striking example of Paik's balancing act. In this light, what has been seen as a

disconnect in Paik as a critic in the authoritarian era and Paik as a critic in the post-authoritarian era can also be turned around and rearticulated to illuminate what remained consistent in Paik's literary world, and what accounts for the continued relevance of literature in twenty-first century Korea.

The force inherent in Paik's criticism as witnessed in his reading of Shin and Bae has in recent years led other critics to see Paik not simply as an erroneous reader, but as a "dictator in the literary field," one who has "imposed his own creed in the *Ch'angbi* establishment" by supporting writers whose sensibilities were clearly far detached from what *Ch'angbi* identified as its own mission.<sup>274</sup> In fact, many opponents of Paik have even attributed his praise of Shin in particular as a "calculated move" on his part to generate capital for the Ch'angbi publishing house after predicting Shin's commercial success in the industry. Vehement criticism has always been abound with regard to the collusion between influential literary critics and major publishers, and the corruption of the literary field that such ties potentially entailed for the development of South Korean literature—particularly so starting in the mid-1990s and up to the present. However, the polemical extent of the criticism directed at the seeming collusion between critics, quarterlies, and publishers have never been stronger than it was during a recent incident involving allegations lodged at Shin's plagiarism.<sup>275</sup>

A main reason as to why the allegations of Shin's plagiarism reverberated as it had, shocking not only literary critics but the general readership as well, had to do with

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<sup>274</sup> O Kilyŏng, "Paek Nakch'ŏng osipnyŏn ch'eje kkaeya ch'angbiga sanda" [Changbi must shatter the fifty-year institution of Paik Nak-chung in order to survive], No Cut News, June 19, 2015, accessed June 28, 2015, <http://www.nocutnews.co.kr/news/4431184>.

<sup>275</sup> On June 16, novelist Yi Ũngjun made an open allegation that a passage in Shin Kyung-sook's "Legend," published in 1994, was almost identical to a passage from a Korean translation of "Patriotism," a 1961 story by the Japanese writer Yukio Mishima.

the success she encountered in the world literary market over the past five years. After her *Ömmarül put'akhae* [*Please Look After Mom*] (2008) was translated and published in 2011 by Knopf, a major U.S. publishing house, Shin entertained an instantaneous surge of popularity in the U.S. literary market, ranking 14<sup>th</sup> on the New York Times bestsellers' list, a phenomenon unprecedented in the history of Korean fictions' reception in the American literary market. Indeed, the success of Korean fiction in the first world literary market of the U.S. as such was not only documented and reviewed on the pages and airtime of renowned, well-respected U.S. media such as The New York Times and the National Public Radio (NPR), but was also celebrated in Korean media with headlines like “Korean novels a major step closer to the ranks of ‘world literature!’”<sup>276</sup> In fact, for literary agents in Korea the sensational success of Shin's *Please Look After Mom* in the U.S. market was a sure indicator that Shin's novels “pass” as literature worth reading, which in turn accelerated the drive to further market Shin's future works for English readers abroad.<sup>277</sup>

The allegation of Shin's plagiarism stoked a fire among those who had long harbored discontent with how things have operated in the literary field, which soon led to an outpouring of criticisms at the “once-dissident literary critics” that have sold their souls to the capitalist market for financial profit, and thus corrupting the literary field by succumbing to the relentless force of the market. The label “once-dissident literary critics” was a reference mainly to the critics affiliated with *Ch'angbi* and *Munhak*

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<sup>276</sup> Kim T'aehun, “Segye munhak' e hanbal to tagasön hanguk sosöl!” [Korean novels: a major step closer to ‘world literature’], *Chosun Ilbo*, January 17, 2011, accessed January 18, 2014, [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2011/01/16/2011011601090.html](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/01/16/2011011601090.html)

<sup>277</sup> Chöng Wonsik, “Segye wa t'onghanün hanguk munhak: Sin kyongsuk, yöngmigwon sijang chinch'ul kün kidae” [Korean literature in the world: high expectations for Shin Kyung-sook making headways in the English language market], *Kyunghyang Weekly*, July 20, 2010, accessed January 18, 2014, [http://weekly.khan.co.kr/khnm.html?mode=view&dept=116&art\\_id=201007161153431](http://weekly.khan.co.kr/khnm.html?mode=view&dept=116&art_id=201007161153431).

*Tongne*—namely, the two major quarterly-publisher corporations that had both critically acclaimed and published major works of Shin’s, albeit on account of different reasons and for different political interests. Indeed, through the fast-paced course of events following Shin’s lukewarm apology, *Ch’angbi*, *Munhak Tongne*, and the literary critics associated with these two literary houses came under powerful attacks. In the initial phase of the incident, the criticism was weighing towards Paik and *Ch’angbi* more so than toward *Munhak Tongne*. One literary scholar, O Kilyŏng, even openly condemned Paik, reiterating the urgent need for *Ch’angbi* “to break away from the fifty-year regime of Paik Nak-chung in order to survive.”<sup>278</sup>

In spite of the criticism lodged at Paik’s lack of literary-critical capacity as well as the totalitarian way in which he guided the development of national literature via *Ch’angbi* throughout the years, the longevity of *Ch’angbi* and indeed of Paik in twenty-first century South Korea was witnessed again through the divergent consequences that befell *Ch’angbi* and *Munhak Tongne*. While *Ch’angbi* remained relatively unshaken in the attack against its collusion with the (capitalist) literary market, *Munhak Tongne*—a quarterly whose founding premise was essentially a manifesto of literature for literature’s sake—underwent a major disruptive change wherein the entire first-generation of editorial board members stepped down.

How the two quarterlies’ fared in the face of a “literary storm” is indicative of the divergent character of *Ch’angbi* and *Munhak Tongne*. For *Ch’angbi*, while literature did lead the way for other intellectual disciplines in the movement for democracy, literature was never isolated on account of its autonomy. *Ch’angbi*’s interdisciplinary foundation,

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<sup>278</sup> O Kilyŏng, “Paek Nakch’ŏng osipnyŏn ch’eje kkaeya ch’angbiga sanda.”



which at times mirrored the multifaceted expansion of Paik's own career, both enabled and sustained the balance between literature of autonomy and autonomy of literature. But above all, *Ch'angbi* never renounced its moral obligation to produce socially minded literature. For *Munhak Tongne*, on the other hand, the founding an "open community for all literary voices" to be heard regardless of ideological leanings had translated to its renunciation of the purposiveness of literature. In the face of frontal attack against its very principles of existence, *Munhak Tongne* unwittingly ended up becoming vulnerable in its own domain of literature proper.

In the divergent fate between *Munhak Tongne* and *Ch'angbi* witnessed in the twenty-first century, we can see how the very act of embracing both literature of autonomy as well as autonomy of literature—at times concurrently, at times separately—kept Paik and *Ch'angbi* resilient through the political storms that Korea underwent over the last half-century. In keeping a measure of critical distance from either extremes of literature of autonomy and autonomy of literature, Paik was able to maintain literature's capacity for rebound in the face of calamity. It is this resilience inherent in the relationship between literature and politics that Paik has articulated over the course of his career which may become a lesson to learn in withstanding the demands of the twenty-first century.

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