One War, A Divided Peninsula, and Three Conflicting Images : The Korean War as Historical Memory in South Korea, China, and the United States

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Three Shades of Historical Memory about the Korean War

The Korean War was not just the first "hot" war of the Cold War. Even after it ended inconclusively through an armistice which did not satisfy Koreans, Chinese, or Americans, a controversy over the war has endured in three conflicting visions of it, as seen from South Korea, China, and the United States. Even after seven decades have past, contentions over the war still retain fervent heat in the three countries. Why is it that historical memories about the Korean War in these countries remain alive and contentious? This article draws on diverse scholarship on the Korean War and related events, i.e., the cultural Cold War in Korea and the April Third Massacre, depictions of the war in each country's museums and memorials, and scholarship on the Korean War before and after the publication of *The Origins of the Korean War* and *Zhongwai Lishi Gangyao*, a newly revised Chinese middle school history textbook, to examine the nature and role of the historical memory of the War in South Korea, the United States, and China.

After briefly examining the link between historical memories, historical consciousness, and nationalism, I will examine how this link expresses itself in South Korean, Chinese, and American memories of the

Korean War. More specifically, this paper will first examine how historical memory informs nationalist discourses and then apply this understanding to the Korean War as historical memory in South Korea, China, and the United States. I will argue that the persistence of controversy surrounding the war is primarily rooted in a debate over how the general structure of the war ought to be remembered. This debate is deeply influenced by nationalist thoughts and differing geopolitical interests involved in the war. The debate over the war — whether the Korean War was a defensive war against North Korean Communism, a forgotten war, or a war to prevent potential American aggression and secure national borders amidst an ongoing project of national reconstruction — has had a profound influence, such that the involvement of nationalist passions and "ideological correctness" in shaping such divergent memories has become the fundamental root of the continuing controversy over what constitutes "correct" historical memories of the war.

If historical memory is a "vital means to recollect the past" and is "collective," because it cannot have substance outside its social context, as N. Gedi and Y. Elam and B. Schwartz argue, it cannot be "disconnected from the language and symbolic system molded by society." And fundamentally, as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann argue, reality is a social construct in which nature sets the limits of the world and the world reacts to nature, meaning that people have to necessarily interact with such a reality. Past experiences are inherently reconstructions from social contexts in the present.[1] Since historical memory obtains its corporeal essence and means to express itself through thoughts and emotions from a particular nation, conflicting images and interpretations of an event might not just begin and end with the question of what the "proper" di-

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[1] Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, Spring-Summer, 1996, "Collective Memory—What is It?" *History and Memory*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 33; Barry Schwartz, 1982, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory," *Social Forces*, Vol. 61, No. 2, 374; Maurice Halbwachs, 1992, *On Collective Memory*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; Amos Funkenstein, Spring-Summer, 1989, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness," History and Memory, Vol. 1, No. 1, 7; Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, 1966, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Penguin Books, 204.

rection of a historical narrative must be. It is a communal reflection of how a nation generally remembers the event based on national cultural values and norms.[2] The formation of a historical memory also involves asking the equally important question of which elements of the event help maximize chances of the most accurate understanding of the event's procession, since it is possible that collective memory can obscure the relevance of a certain historical moment to the formation of socio-cultural identities in the present.[3] In short, historical memory is socio-cultural and selective in nature because the importance it ascribes to the past always has to mirror some degree of consciousness about the past's relevance and its importance to the present.

In the case of the Korean War, there has been a fundamental shift from the old question, "Who started the war?" to the new question, "Which motivations provide the most ideological and political legitimacy for the decision to fight the enemy, and who precisely was the enemy?" Three conflicting answers to the new question from South Korea, China, and the United States shed light on the continuing controversy over the Korean War. From South Korea's perspective, it was imperative to defend the nation against North Koreans. And that motive was guided by the patriotism and anti-Communism, which informed the social construction of South Korean national identity as distinct from the North Korean one. In China, a radical shift from the traditional emphasis on *Kangmei Yuanchao* ("Resist America and Assist North Korea") to a reinterpretation of the Korean War as a Chinese Communist victory over American "imperialism" has become dominant to the extent that a nationally endorsed

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[2] Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, Spring-Summer, 1965, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique*, No. 65, 125-133; Anthony D. Smith, 1996, "Culture, Community, and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism," *International Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, 445-458; Sunghoon Han, 2015, "The Ongoing Korean War at the Sinch'on Museum in North Korea," *Cross Currents*, No. 14, 153; Alberto Melucci, 1995, "The Process of Collective Identity" in Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans eds., *Social Movements and Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 42-45.

[3] Geoffrey Cubbit, 2007, *History and Memory*, Manchester England: Manchester University Press, 17; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, 1995, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 16.

middle-school textbook mandates this reinterpretation to be the standard narrative about Chinese heroism during the war. Finally, in the United States, there is a rapid movement to take away the old lens of "a forgotten war" through the establishment of numerous memorials, but the old framework of Communism versus anti-Communism still remains in the scholarly community that the debate over revisionism — which Bruce Cumings sought to end through the publication of *The Origins of the Korean War* — is still unfinished. The reason why the revisionist question remains open comes from a persistent contention over whether the slightest indication that the Korean War began as a southern civil war might mean a complete negation of the "orthodox reality" that North Korea initiated the war on June 25, 1950.

In short, the involvement of nationalist passions and discourse in shaping such divergent memories of one war is the fundamental root of the continuing controversy over what constitute "correct" historical memories about the Korean War. As long as nationalism retains its allure in the three countries, the contest of these three conflicting images over one war that divided a peninsula into two separate states continues to have no end in sight.

Literature Review and Methodology

Scholarly treatment of intersections between historical memory and the Korean War is still in a developmental stage. Concerning English-language scholarship on the war, there have been holistic narratives of the Korean War from Max Hastings and David Halberstam, both of which concentrate on depicting how battles were fought and how the conclusion of the war through an incomplete armistice has left scars on the Korean Peninsula. Yet, these narratives are mostly focused on how the war was fought; there is very little discussion about how the war as a historical memory has shaped Korean, Chinese, and American public discourses following the war.[4]

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[4] Max Hastings, 1987, *The Korean War* , New York: Simon and Schuster; David Halberstam, 2008,

There have also been attempts to place the Korean War in an international context from Wada Haruki, William Stueck, Callum McDonald, and Masuda Hajimu, but these scholars pay attention to the global geopolitics of the war and focus on how the war ought to be understood within the milieu of the international Cold War during the late 1940s and 1950s. They do not devote much discussion to how the war as a historical memory has shaped different interpretations of the war and how such interpretations remain contested into the 21st century.[5]

Many recent Korean and English-language studies of the war have investigated a diverse array of topics, such as the outbreak, progress, and conclusion of the war, the division of the Korean Peninsula as a trauma, "small wars" in villages during the war, the legacies of the war, the strategies and weapons used during the war, naval battles, American propaganda during the war, a synthesis of historical methods on studying the war, interrogation camps, and Sino-Taiwanese attempts to change the keyword of the war, from anti-Communism vs. Communism to prisoner-of-war camps. Yet, these studies have largely concentrated on interpreting the political significance of the Korean War strictly in a phenomenological fashion.[6] The dominant assumption that understanding North Ko-

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The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War, New York: Hachette Books.

5 Wada Haruki, 2014, *The Korean War: An International History*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield; William Stueck, 2002, *Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* , Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press; Callum MacDonald, 1986, Korea: *The War Before Vietnam*, New York: The Free Press; Masuda Hajimu, 2015, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

6 Hak-joon Kim, 2010, *Hankuk Chŏnchaeng: Wŏnin, Kwachŏng, Hyuchŏn, Yŏnghyang* (*The Korean War: Causes, Process, Stalemate, Influences*) Seoul, Korea: Parkyoung Publishing; Jeong-ki Kim, 2011, *Hankuk Chŏnchaengkwa Puntanŭi Trauma (The Korean War and the Trauma of Division)*, Seoul, Korea: Sunin Publishing; Ch'ansŭng Park, 2013, *Maŭllo Kan Hankuk Chŏnchaeng: Hankuk Chŏnchaengki Maŭl esŏ Pŏlŏchin Chakŭn Chŏnchaengtŭl (When the Korean War Went to Villages: Small Wars in Villages During the Korean War)* Seoul, Korea: Tolpekae; The Association for Korean War Studies ed., 2000, *T'al Naengchŏn Sitae Hankuk Chŏnchaengŭi Chaechomyŏng (A Reappraisal of the Korean War in the Post-Cold War Era)*, Paeksansŏtang; Youngdae Lim, 2010, *Hankuk Chŏnchaeng: Chŏllyak, Chŏnsul, Muki (The Korean War: Strategy, Tactics, and Weapons)* Seoul, Korea: Sowatang; Tae-gyun Kim, 2005, *Hankuk Chŏnchaeng (The Korean War)* Seoul, Korea: Ch'aekkwa Hamkke; Pyŏng-chun Chŏng, 2006, *Hankuk Chŏnchaeng: 38Sŏn Ch'ungtolkwa Chŏnchaengui Hyŏngsŏng (The Korean War: Clashes Along the 38th Parallel and*

rean agency is more important than that of South Korea has led scholars such as Suzy Kim and Harrison Kim to study post-liberation North Korean society and the prison system in North Korea. However, they are also politically oriented in their attempts to understand North Korean system and leave no room for reflections on the Korean War as a historical memory.[7]

Chinese-language scholarship exhibits a trend similar to its English-language counterpart. Although Chinese scholars have moved away from questioning who was to blame for beginning the war, and begun to examine the importance of human agency, historians such as Zhang Min and Meng Zhaohui still adhere to the Communist orthodox view that South Korea was more responsible for the outbreak of the war than North Korea and that Washington created the manichean milieu of the Cold War.[8] Historians such as Shen Zhihua and Yang Kuisong have examined Mao Zedong's conversations with Stalin and noted that Stalin allowed Kim Il-sung to invade South Korea because he hoped to secure a warm-water port and Mao Zedong wanted to use the momentum of the Korean War to accomplish a far more important task that was left incomplete after the Chinese Civil War: China's "unification" with Taiwan.[9] Historian

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the Formation of Battle Lines) Seoul, Korea: Tolpekae; Malcolm Cagle and Frank Manson and Sin Hyŏng-sik trans, 2003, *Hankuk Chŏnchaeng Haechŏnsa (A History of Naval Battles During the Korean War)* Seoul, Korea: 21-Seki Kunsa Yŏnkuso; Steven Casey, 2008, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics and Public Opinion*, Oxford University Press, 2008; Steven Casey ed., 2012, *The Korean War at Sixty: New Approaches to the Study of the Korean War*, Routledge; Monica Kim, 2019, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press; David Cheng Chang, 2020, The *Hijacked War: The Story of Chinese POWs in the Korean War*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

7 Suzy Kim, 2013, *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press; Harrison Kim, 2018, *Heroes and Toilers: Work as Life in Postwar North Korea, 1953-1961*, New York: Columbia University Press.

8 Zhang Min, 2001, "Lun Chaoxian Zhanzheng de Qiyuan he Jiejue" (The Origins and Outcome of the Korean War), Dangde Wenxian (Party Documents) No. 2; Meng Zhaohui, "Chaoxian Zhanzheng Zhenyang Daqilai" (How Did the Korean War Begin?)

9 Shen Zhihua, 1995, *Chaoxian Zhanzheng Jiemi (Secrets of the Korean War Revealed)* Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Youxian Gongsi; Shen Zhihua, 1996, "Zhong Su Lianmeng yu Zhongguo Chubing Chaoxian de Jueche: Dui Zhongguo he Eguo Wenxian Ziliao de Bijiao Yanjiu" (The Sino-Soviet

Niu Jun also supports Yang's interpretation, arguing that Mao was more concerned about the possibility of the United States deploying the Seventh Fleet to Taiwan amidst the chaos of the Korean War, suggesting the need for future Chinese scholarship to link Sino-Taiwanese relations during the early Cold War with the Korean War.[10]

In general, Chinese scholarship has made significant progress towards analyzing Mao Zedong's interactions with Stalin and linking the Chinese Civil War's aftermath with the Korean War, despite relatively rigid institutional resistance against criticizing North Korea's role in the war. Yet, even the most up-to-date Chinese historiography's extensive use of Russian archives to supplement limited Chinese documents has yet to inspire Chinese scholars to explore the roles of historical memory concerning the Korean War, largely due to the fact that many Communist Party archives have not released crucial documents to allow scholars to critically examine the Communist Party's precise plans and debates before the Korean War. There has yet to be an original attempt to show why the Korean War has an enduring contemporaneous importance into the 21st century, or what we could call the "meta-psychological importance." While it may be true that the war's history as a physical political contest ended with an incomplete armistice, it is insufficient to explain the war's enduring, if problematic, appeal as a controversial historical memory.

To do justice to the complexity of different recollections of a single event, it is essential to understand what kinds of emotions interact, what informs the formation of such emotions, and finally, how these factors in-

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Alliance and China's Decision to Dispatch Troops to Korea: A Comparative Study of Chinese and Russian Materials), *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu (Studies on Contemporary Chinese History)*, No. 5; Yang Kuisong, Fall, 2010, Sidalin Weishenme Zhichi Chaoxian Zhanzheng? Du Shen Zhihua Zhu Mao Zedong, Sidalin yu Chaoxian Zhanzheng (Why Did Stalin Support the Korean War? Reading Shen Zhihua's Mao Zedong, Stalin, and the Korean War), cited in Steven M. Goldstein, "Chinese Perspectives on the Korean War: An Assessment at Sixty," *International Journal of Korean Studies,* Vol. 14, No. 2, 46-70.

[10] Niu Jun, "Chaoxian Zhanzheng Zhong Zhong-Mei Juece Bijiao Yanjiu," (A Comparative Study of Chinese and American Decision-Making in the Korean War) cited in Goldstein, "Chinese Perspectives on the Korean War," 59.

fluence perceptions of national identity and national historical consciousness to remain relevant today. Therefore, the following three sections will examine the unique characteristics of historical memory about the Korean War in South Korea, China, and the United States. By so doing, it will show how historical memory of the Korean War continues to have influence after the end of the war, illustrating the war's enduring psychological importance to the three countries. This article will examine how bitterness and animosity against Communism continue to shape South Korean national identity by considering museums, public memorials, and history books. Also, it will examine how the transformation of the Chinese paradigm on the war, from *Kangmei Yuanchao* (Resist America and Assist North Korea) to an emphasis on heroism and sacrifice, has heightened Chinese nationalistic rhetoric by analyzing *Zhongwai Lishi*, a middle-school history textbook. Finally, it wil also look into how the unearthing of a long-forgotten war has brought forth apprehensions about including the Korean War's civil war phase into the mainstream discussion because of concerns about "revisionism" in the United States, by considering the main scholarly works on the Korean War and war memorials.[11]

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[11] Although it would have been desirable to maintain methodological consistency by considering war memorials and museums on the Korean War for China, having limited myself to mostly English-language articles and books on historical memory concerning the Korean War, I have not found a robust analysis or discussion on the Korean War as a historical memory among Chinese scholars. Although Shuguang Zhang wrote about Mao Zedong's thoughts and approaches to war in *Mao's Military Romanticism* and Shen Zhihua wrote on Sino-North Korean and Sino-Soviet relations during the Korean War and Chen Jian wrote about Chinese strategy and thinking about the Korean War, their books and articles do not exclusively deal with the Korean War as a historical memory, so I do not discuss them in this article. Also, as a non-Chinese scholar, I do not have access to Communist Party documents on the war, so although it is by no means representative, I will concentrate on analyzing the rhetoric of *Zhongwai Lishi* to gauge the kind of public historical memory regarding the Korean War that China wishes to portray to Chinese citizens.

Between Bitterness and Animosity: The Korean War, Ideology, and South Korean Identity

The greatest lingering psychological impact of the Korean War can be found in South Korea, where narratives of victimhood and anti-Communism meld together to form a distinct South Korean national identity. As Roy Grinker observes, the war's clearest and most ominous legacy is the continuation of ideological tensions after the end of the global Cold War. Discourses surrounding the Korean War revolved around the question of how closely Korean nationalism ought to be linked with anti-Communism, to differentiate the nation from the North Korean enemy. On the one hand, North Korea has been vilified based on a comparison between South Korea's Democracy and North Korea's personality cult, but on the other hand, North Korea has been praised among some South Koreans for preserving Korea's traditional culture and values. Such "otherness" has even been extended to be viewed as a challenge to be overcome through unification, by encouraging South Korea to understand unification as a process of homogenization, without entertaining any possibility for understanding and accepting heterogeneity and differences. In short, the Korean War's enduring philosophical challenge is an encouragement of comparisons and homogenization, which, by relying on "otherness," has hindered rather than promoted Korea's unification.[12]

Even into the 21st century, the vestiges of anti-Communism and its influence on informing South Korean national identity still remain very visible in war museums, which generally foreground this theme. While

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[12] Roy R. Grinker, March, 1998, "Elementary Forms of Korean Historical Representation: School Textbooks in South Korea," *Social Analysis*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 89-90; Grinker, 1998, *Korea and Its Futures: Unification and the Unfinished War*, New York: St. Martin's Press. Grinker based his assessment on how the Korean War has been studied on surveys and therefore, some of his assertions, such as his view of South Korean public opinion on North Korea, are not entirely accurate or representative. For a different assessment of sympathetic responses to North Korea, see Choongnam Kim, Spring/Summer, 2003, "The Management of the ROK-U. S. Relations in the Post-Cold War Era," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 52-92 and Heon Joo Jung, September/October, 2010, "The Rise and Fall of Anti-American Sentiment in South Korea: Deconstructing Hegemonic Ideas and Threat Perception," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 50, No. 5, 946-964.

the persistence of such a strong emphasis on ideological nationalism must not lead to Nam-hee Lee's generalization that South Korea is an "anti-Communist society," which is too much of a stretch, it does illustrate that the Cold War has not completely met its demise in Korea, despite the fact that the Cold War "officially" ended in the global sense in 1991.[13] As Suk-young Kim shows, war memorials and museums continue to emphasize North Korea's invasion as the definitive origin of the war, without allotting much space to discussions about the civil war phase. Despite the publicly proclaimed goal of promoting peace and reconciliation between Pyongyang and Seoul, the Demilitarized Zone's (i.e., DMZ) war museum continues to preserve the ideological antagonism of the Cold War by suggesting that North Korea's only fate is an eventual and certain absorption by South Korea. The war museum employs a "technology of memory": a stark contrast between enlarged portraits of Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Kim Il-sung and a message of cooperation and peace printed in small letters for the textual narrative aims to convince the viewers that overcoming and defeating the immutable, totalitarian, and monolithic Communist North Korea is the only method to realize unification.

There is an irony lying in the fact that visitors are also introduced to weapons and vehicles used during the war in another exhibit and are even offered the experience of operating them, encouraging visitors to feel a paradoxical desensitization to the tragedy of war. The method to overcome war and its antagonistic message from the portraits are immediately belied by the introduction to methods for killing people on the battlefield, however indirect such an experience may be.[14] The gulf between the DMZ as a symbol of peace and the DMZ as an essential no-man's-land is reinforced by a museum which ironically teaches viewers

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[13] Nam-hee Lee, 2002, "Anti-Communism, North Korea, and Human Rights in South Korea: 'Orientalist' Discourse and Construction of South Korean Identity," in Mark Bradley ed., *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights*, Rutgers University Press.

[14] Suk-young Kim, October, 2011, "Staging the 'Cartography of Paradox': The DMZ Special Exhibition at the Korean War Memorial, Seoul," *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 63, No. 3, 381-402.

that conquest is the primary means to achieve peace and unification.

It is not just museums which directly reflect the ideological tension of the Korean War. Cities such as Cheorwon represent a physical site of destruction for those who participated in the war. Cheorwan, located between the South and North Korean border and home to the Korean Workers' Party before Korea's liberation, became the site of an intense and bloody battle between the South Korean Army and the North Korean People's Army. Unlike museums, Cheorwon is now also a tourist attraction irrelevant to its former symbolism for those who consider the Korean War a distant event. As Keun-sik Jung argues, the meeting of newcomers and tourists to the city and veterans of the war who continued to preserve memories of the brutal battles in Cheorwon created a "hybridization of war memory" that saw a mixing of two identities. It is simultaneously a city whose cultural heritage is largely derived from its historical value as a site which preserved the scars and wounds of war and a city which has acted as a symbol and an "outpost for unification" since the end of the Kim Dae-jung Administration. A city once known for its "gray" status as a buffer zone between Communists and anti-Communists during the Korean War is slowly making a positive turn towards becoming a "gray" site for reconciling the painful memory of the war and the wounds it left with a hope for progress, healing, and reunification in the Korean Peninsula.[15]

Of course, beyond these important public displays of the Korean War, many scholars have tried to either examine the impact of the war by observing the war's influence on both sides of the Korean Peninsula or understand the Cold War moment in the modern Korean history through non-political lenses such as culture. For example, B. Koh has highlighted that the war not only caused an immense number of civilian deaths and property damage amounting to the total GNP of South Korea in 1949, but that it saw the rise of anti-Communism and military dictatorships in

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[15] Keun-sik Jung, December, 2017, "On the Ruins: Forgetting and Awakening Korean War Memories at Cheorwon," *Development and Society*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 523-555.

South Korea, which closely paralleled the rise of a Communist personality cult around Kim Il-sung in North Korea. In contrast to South Korea's reliance on American and Japanese financial aid to reconstruct its economy, North Korea utilized societal mobilization, ideological indoctrination, and anti-Americanism to facilitate the rebuilding of a national industry based on heavy machinery, chemicals, and nuclear weapons.[16] In short, the Korean War had a devastating and drastic impact on every aspect of the Korean Peninsula: it caused immense physical and psychological damage in both north and south, while political and economic developments in the Korean Peninsula closely mirrored the ideological divide which largely characterized the Cold War.

Charles Armstrong has studied the "cultural Cold War" in the Korean Peninsula, in which both American and Soviet officials during the late 1940s encouraged films as the primary medium for propagandizing the superiority of Democracy over Communism and vice versa, while also unearthing talented Korean musicians, filmmakers and producers to encourage the discovery of "native music" and the production of nationalistic films. By highlighting the strong undercurrents of "Americanization" pitted against "nationalization" in the making of modern culture in the two Koreas, Armstrong shows the enduring influence of the Cold War even near its end in the 1990s and afterwards, as both Koreas search for a definition of native Korean culture amidst the global influence of American culture.[17]

Yet, despite his success in blending Cumings' emphasis on the civil war phase with an original introduction of culture as a non-political venue of analysis in a field dominated by political studies, the framework of Armstrong's study does not diverge greatly from the basic assumption of Korea as a divided country. There have been several notable attempts to address controversial legacies of the Korean War as a civil war by focus-

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[16] B. Koh, Spring, 1993, "The War's Impact on the Korean Peninsula," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 57-76.

[17] Charles K. Armstrong, February, 2003, "The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945-1950," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 1, 71-99.

ing on reconciliation, through analyses of the April Third Massacre from scholars such as Myung-lim Park and Hun Joon Kim, who have argued for the need for reconciliation, an apology from the South Korean government, and an understanding of the Massacre as a human rights problem. Yet, such attempts are still in the early stages of development. New sources on the Massacre are still being unearthed and scholars have yet to dig deeper into Record Groups 59 and 554 to analyze the collaboration of the South Korean police, the South Korean military, and the American military in unleashing the Massacre.[18] Full historical accounts of the Massacre have yet to be written because much of the focus is on reconciliation and the Massacre's aftermath, rather than its origins and unfolding from 1948 to 1954. More extensive use of American military government documents are necessary to get a complete picture of the historical memory of the Massacre, which, through its continuation of the Left-Right skirmishes which served as the Korean War's theme, was another war beyond the Korean War in itself.

In summary, both popular and scholarly representations of historical memory about the Korean War in South Korea have yet to come to terms with an anti-Communist nationalism which focuses exclusively on blaming North Korea, while leaving very little room either for Cumings' re-foregrounding of the civil war or for the agency of reconciliation around the April Third Massacre. Although Korean War museums and memorials have recently emphasized a felt need to realize unification soon, these attempts have shied away from answering the critical question of how to achieve that goal and what kinds of historical memories must be shared between the two Koreas to raise an awareness for the need for reconciliation and eventually lead to unification.

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[18] Myung-lim Park, April, 2018, "Towards a Universal Model of Reconciliation: The Case of the Jeju 4.3 Incident," *Journal of Korean Religions*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 105-130; Hun Joon Kim, 2013, *Massacres at Mt. Halla: Sixty Years of Truth Seeking in South Korea*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Between *Kangmei Yuanchao* and the Rise of China as a Great Power: The Emergence of a "New History" of the Korean War, *Zhongwai Lishi Gangyao*, and Making China Great Again

The idea of victimhood is particularly appealing, especially if the intruding enemy's force is much greater than that of a defending nation, but nationalist passions can easily bind with a necessity for ideological "correctness," if the immorality of the offender is emphasized to magnify the honor and valor of the defender. In contrast to South Korea, where the persistence of ideological divide has produced a Manichean society which outlives the Cold War, China has sought to radically eliminate all traces of an ideological divide by emphasizing the patriotic cause behind China's victory over the "imperialistic" United States. The rise of a "New History" of the Korean War, in which greater emphasis is laid on sacrifice, honor, and anti-imperialism in the face of American aggression, is most markedly promoted by the Chinese government through the establishment of Korean War memorials and the publication of *Zhongwai Lishi Gangyao* (Concise History of China's Foreign Relations). Both emphasize that Chinese soldiers showed valor and courage on the battlefield and sacrificed their lives to clinch a decisive victory against "American imperialists," while criticizing the U. S. for starting the international war with their direct invasion of North Korea. Since the arrival of U.S. armed forces threatened China's national security and also jeopardized China's chances of finishing its civil war with Taiwan, China had no choice but to aid North Korea to resist American imperialism. The memorials and textbook share the claim that this act of resistance not only consolidated Chinese patriotism but also displayed the prowess of a "new" China which could independently fend off imperialism.[19]

China promotes the memorials and *Zhongwai Lishi* as containing

[19] Keun-sik Jung, 2015, "China's Memory and Commemoration of the Korean War in the Memorial Hall of the 'War to Resist U. S. Aggression and Aid Korea,'" *Cross-Currents*, No. 14; *Zhongwai Lishi* Vol. 1, 158.

the latest definitive account of the Korean War's origins taught at the high-school level. However, considering the textbook's adherence to the traditional Chinese emphasis on the war as a civil war without explaining its background, *Zhongwai Lishi* preserved the original approach of absolving China from as much responsibility as possible for invading Korea, by highlighting that it was the two Koreas which initiated the war. In contrast to Cumings' purpose of showing that the war began as a civil war which mushroomed into an international one, the Chinese government's version of the "civil war thesis" has a more nationalistic purpose of emphasizing the anti-American and therefore "anti-imperialistic" nature of the war. Due to the high importance of this purpose, *Zhongwai Lishi* also follows the precedent of not explaining the background to the civil war, as that allows the textbook to better emphasize the American invasion of North Korea and play down China's role in invading South Korea. Furthermore, unlike South Korea and the United States, which view the war's conclusion as indecisive, *Zhongwai Lishi* presents the war as a victory for China, going as far as omitting mention of the sacrifices made on the Chinese side.[20] In essence, heroism and victory over imperialism and America are emphasized to the point that the Korean War appears truncated and imbalanced, both in terms of the event's overall progression and its nature as a war, which inevitably entails casualties for all participants in reality.

This approach is to be expected, given that it is their appeal to nationalism that provides school history textbooks with the stature and authority of delivering "definitive" historical accounts for public education. As Laura Hein, Mark Selden, and several other scholars have pointed out, since school history textbooks have an inherent public function of educating citizens about the "official" narrative of an event, they also serve to mitigate opposition and debates through a "sanitization" process.[21] By framing the war as a struggle against anti-imperialism, the

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[20] Chinese Ministry of Education, 2019, *Zhongwai Lishi Gangyao* (Concise History of China's Foreign Relations), Vol. 1, 158.

[21] Lin Lin, Yali Zhao, Masato Ogawa, John Hoge, and Bok Young Kim, 2009/2010, "Whose His-

Chinese government aims to foster nationalism and patriotism, as well as underline the legitimacy of maintaining Communism by stressing China's "moral and ideological" opposition to the United States in the war. Moreover, as Peter Gries, Jennifer L. Prewitt-Freilino, Luz-Eugenia Cox-Fuenzalida, and Qingmin Zhang (2009) and Philip West (1992) have pointed out, Chinese students in the 21st century and Chinese literature on the Korean War continue to fully adhere to the image of a "war to resist America and aid Korea." Such phenomena not only demonstrate the enduring appeal of the old Maoist narrative of a Chinese "victory" over the United States and prove that "China as a victim" is not replacing the Maoist narrative, but also show that stories about the past strongly impact beliefs and perceptions about it, especially if the past is central to shaping nationalism.[22]

In summary, a nationalist account of the Korean War in China endures not only because the Chinese government wants to strengthen its legitimacy through an appeal to nationalism by "homogenizing" war memories reflected in "hard" mediums, but also because Chinese students strongly perceive and believe that such an account is not only accurate but necessary to heighten their patriotism.[23] A socio-political consensus is the core engine of anti-American nationalism in China with regard to the Korean War.

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tory? An Analysis of the Korean War in History Textbooks from the United States, South Korea, Japan, and China," *The Social Studies*, 223; Laura Hein and Mark Selden ed., 2000, *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States*, Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe. See also Tessa Morris-Suzuki, 2009, "Remembering the Unfinished Conflict: Museums and the Contested Memory of the Korean War," *Japan Focus*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1-24.

[22] Peter Hays Gries, Jennifer L. Prewitt-Freilino, Luz-Eugenia Cox-Fuenzalida, and Qingmin Zhang, September-December, 2009, "Contentious Histories and the Perception of Threat: China, the United States, and the Korean War—An Experimental Analysis," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 433-465; Philip West, 2008, "The Korean War and the Criteria of Significance in Chinese Popular Culture," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Winter, 1992), 383-408; Zheng Wang, "National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 783-806.

[23] Jung, "China's Memory and Commemoration of the Korean War," 64.

That patriotism, anti-imperialism, and anti-Americanism constituted the public stance of China is predicated on the fact that such values received widespread support from the Chinese public. However, as Masuda Hajimu has vividly shown, the public still had mixed opinions about Communism after the end of the Chinese Civil War and there was strong opposition, dissent, and apathy against China's intervention in Korea. Despite the state's efforts to censor and control information about world affairs, Chinese newspapers often published reports and cartoons showing the United States to actually be technologically superior than China's propagandized image of a "paper tiger."[24] Therefore, *Zhongwai Lishi*'s claim that Chinese soldiers fought with valor, for honor and patriotism, must be understood as reflecting what the Chinese government wants contemporary Chinese citizens to believe, rather than what Chinese citizens before and during the Korean War actually felt. The gulf between reality and rhetoric in the consistent concentration on nationalism, patriotism, and anti-imperialism is still large and until more is learned about reactions to the war from the Chinese Communist Party's inner circle, *Zhongwai Lishi*'s coverage of the Korean War leaves open a major question about the degree and presence of unity between society and the state in China during the Korean War.

"The Forgotten War," American Patriotism, and the Debate over "Revisionism" in the United States

That two major participants could perceive themselves as the principal victims in a war points to the existence of another participant with power sufficient to oppress the victims. Yet, because greater military strength also implies the possession of an ability to swiftly conclude the war, it may be easier for the great power to forget the war rather than to remember it. This phenomenon may be especially true if the strong nation had

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[24] Masuda Hajimu, Summer, 2012, "The Korean War through the Prism of Chinese Society," J*ournal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 3-38.

to fight the war in a foreign country which it knew nothing of.

In the United States, the Korean War remained as a forgotten war throughout the first two decades following the armistice, largely because it was the first example of a limited war that did not prove Communist "rollback" to be successful, and was, as historian Paul Pierpaoli puts it, "wedged between the Second World War and the Vietnam War."[25] Early attempts to shed light on the war's unfolding as a contest between North and South Korea did succeed in conveying the gravity of the war as the first "hot" war which signaled the genuine arrival of the Cold War in East Asia. Clay Blair, Callum McDonald, Max Hastings, and David Halberstam had written about the military operations and battles, giving realistic and vivid accounts of the Korean War's brutality and chaos and explaining the war's importance to the Cold War.[26] Yet, the war remained largely "forgotten" to the American public, not helped by a general reliance on Western sources up until the 1990s.[27] This reliance reflected a failure to properly account for the Korean agency in the making of the Korean War by carefully considering the war's origins as a Korean national affair and as a Korean civil war, chiefly because many American military government documents were unreleased to scholars until very recently.

It was not until Bruce Cumings published *The Origins of the Korean War* that the civil war phase of the Korean conflict became widely known, in which the conservative Syngman Rhee was occupied with defeating a disgruntled South Korean Lefttists, which sought to remove pro-Japanese collaborators and landlords in the Rhee Administration,

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[25] Paul Pierpaoli Jr., 2001, "Beyond Collective Amnesia: A Korean War Retrospective," *International Social Science Review*, Vol. 76, No. 3/4, 92-93; see also Robert Jervis, December, 1980, "The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 563-592.

[26] Clay Blair, 1986, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950-1953* (Times Books, 1987); Callum MacDonald, *Korea: The War Before Vietnam*, Palgrave-MacMilan; Max Hastings, 1987, *The Korean War*, New York: Simon and Schuster; David Halberstam, 2007, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War*, New York: Hyperion.

[27] Priscilla Roberts, Spring, 2000, "New Light on a 'Forgotten War': The Diplomacy of the Korean Conflict," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 10.

while the Soviets were busy supporting North Korea's land reforms and removal of "reactionary" and "counterrevolutionary" elements. Yet, despite the fact that many new archival materials were released in South Korea and the National Archives at College Park, Maryland since the 1990s, Cumings' emphasis on the Korean War's origins as a civil war met cold and harsh responses from scholars such as William Stueck and Kathryn Weathersby, who still emphasized the importance of Great Power competition and minimized the Korean agency.[28] They believed that Cumings went too far in downplaying the Chinese and Soviet involvement in the war, to the extent that he was a writing an unwelcome "revisionist" history. This point of view still has its adherents, such as J. Campbell misinterpreting Cumings' intention as identifying how the Korean War morphed from an implementation of a "containment" to a "rollback" strategy, without trying to appreciate Cumings' effort in understanding how the Korean War originally was a Korean national affair.[29]

Although the fundamental question about why the Korean War ought to be referred to as such is not properly answered in the traditional emphasis on Great Power politics, there is still a widespread and persistent tendency to emphasize Chinese or Soviet involvement in the war at the expense of downplaying Korean agency at play in enlarging a civil war rooted in Left-Right tensions across the 1940s. Given that the Korean War has only managed to find its place in American history textbooks since the early 2000s, it is unsurprising that the traditional emphasis on North Korea's preemptive invasion as the origin of the war remains popular among American historians and in public historical memory about the war in the United States.[30]

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[28] Lester Brune, October, 1998, "Recent Scholarship and Findings about the Korean War," *American Studies International*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 5.

[29] Joel R. Campbell, 2014, "The Wrong War: The Soviets and the Korean War, 1945-1953," *International Social Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3, 9.

[30] Roger Dingman, Spring, 1992, "Korea at Forty-plus: The Origins of the Korean War Reconsidered," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 137-143; William Stueck,

This strong tendency to emphasize Northern aggression is most noticeable in several Korean War memorials, which concentrate more on American casualties and activities in Korea aimed at driving out North Korean troops from South Korea. Because there is greater emphasis on veterans' memories of the war, there is almost no mention of prisoners of war and Korean civilians who died in the war, with the aim of invoking American national pride about having participated in a "good war."[31] For the sake of maintaining a positive public impression of Korean War veterans, memorials mention nothing about the crimes committed by Americans in South Korea, such as the April Third Massacre and the No-Gun-Ri Massacre. Yet, as Young-hwea Hong argues, throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, active discussion about these massacres have led to extensive campaigns to unearth documents and establish memorials in Korean provinces, and some of the archival sources have also been introduced to the United States, making it difficult for Americans to ignore the existence of the massacres.[32]

Although the memorials pay great attention to American soldiers who died in battles, they do not reveal much about American prisoners of war or atrocities committed by American soldiers, primarily because popular coverage of the war neglected the prisoners and atrocities. Reporting also generally omitted racial tensions, miscommunication due to language barriers, and the anecdotes of North Koreans providing hospitality regardless of ideological difference. As Judith Keene illustrates, American prisoners of war, despite being veterans who had performed the same duty of fighting against North Korean soldiers, did not receive any decorations or celebrations, and were mostly subject to "turncoat

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2002, *The Korean War: An International Diplomatic History*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press; Kathryn Weathersby, 1993, "Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 19454-1950: New Evidence from Russian Archives," Woodrow Wilson Center Working Paper No. 8, 5-37.

31 Suhi Choi, Winter, 2012, "Mythologizing Memories: A Critique of the Utah Korean War Memorial," *The Public Historian*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 61-82.

32 Young-hwa Hong, 2019, "Towards Archival Justice: The Case of Nogun-ri Massacre During the Korean War," *The iJournal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 14-27.

trials" for being prisoners of the Chinese. Regardless of the sacrifice and hardship the veterans had to endure, the prisoners were not only shunned by the American public but by the American military itself, misjudged as being "passive, of poor caliber, and bereft of loyalty and patriotism." The veterans were continuously subject to FBI surveillance, intense questioning during government hearings, and interrogations by the Joint Intelligence Processing Boards, and only in 1982, nearly 30 years after the end of the Korean War, did the former prisoners of war receive proper acknowledgements as patriots who had justly served their country.[33]

Put differently, as Thibaud Daniel observes, bodies are "relational," for they represent boundaries between knowledge and experience, which require mediation, and therefore, are products of relations based on characteristics and qualities of people's identities.[34] The resuscitation of their honor in service of the hardship they had to endure as soldiers before they became prisoners took three decades – three long decades of battle against a political segregation between war veterans and prisoners of war, despite all being men who fought for their country.

Likewise, American atrocities in Korea has come to enjoy increased awareness, but still, the atrocities are being largely neglected in most American war memorials. As Suhi Choi has argued, the No Gun Ri Massacre received partial coverage in the U.S. media, but it was largely confined to describing American actions with little reference to the Korean victims, the difficulty of communicating with American soldiers, and cultural biases against Asians which led to misunderstandings and killings. Moreover, the fact that some North Koreans offered help to the South Korean refugees to No Gun-Ri village by extricating and feeding them, which American soldiers had denied, suggests that a major reason behind

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[33] Judith Keene, Summer, 2011, "Lost to Public Commemoration: American Veterans of the 'Forgotten' Korean War," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 1095-1113.

[34] Thibaud Daniel, 2017, "Bodies of War and Memory: Embodying, Framing, and Staging the Korean War in the United States, *Miranda*, Vol. 15, 3. See also David Harvey, 2000, *Spaces of Hope*, Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press.

the American public's unawareness about such incidents is the reluctance and negligence of the U.S. media to use North Korean sources on the incident and to present a story of some North Koreans which goes against the popular collective American memory of North Korea — Communist and totalitarian — despite the fact that ideology did not play a significant role in the North Koreans' decision to help the villagers. In short, forgetfulness is always complemented by some degree of remembering, however insignificant the latter may be to the former, such that memories produced by witnesses can serve to "optimize the subversive qualities of counter-memories."[35]

Conclusion

Although more than seven decades have passed since the Korean War has ended, the controversial nature of the war still haunts historical memories of the war in South Korea, China, and the United States in three different ways. In South Korea, a strong current of anti-Communism still pervades historical recollections of the war, which is expressed not only in school history textbooks but also memorials and museums, which concentrate on portraying North Korea as a static, evil, and corrupt society that can only be corrected through an absorptive unification led by South Korea's emphasis on human rights. In the United States, the war is slowly rising from a long slumber as a "forgotten war," but debates ensuing from the publication of *The Origins of the Korean War* have centered on whether it is legitimate to present the civil war between the South Korean Left and Right as the starting place of the war. This phenomenon, along with the recent moves to rehabilitate prisoners of war in memorials, demonstrate the deeply bifurcated nature of how the war was "forgotten" over a long period of time: an external forgetting of the war's Korean origins and an internal forgetting of American prisoners of war who

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[35] Suhi Choi, Fall, 2008, "Silencing Survivors' Narratives: Why Are We 'Again' Forgetting the No Gun Ri Story?" *Rhetoric and Public Affairs,* Vol. 11, No. 3, 367-388.

had equally fought against North Korea. Finally, in China, the Communist Party's influence casts a long shadow over memorials and history textbooks, both of which are forbidden from challenging the official narrative of China's heroic, anti-imperialistic, and nationalistic resistance against "American imperialism." Although this emphasis largely omits the Korean War's fundamental nature as a civil war, the allure of the Chinese government's logic is largely due to Chinese students' willingness to embrace patriotism and nationalism, which shows that propaganda alone is not responsible for the lasting influence of the Maoist narrative.

What these three different images of the Korean War ultimately show is that the enduring debate around the Korean War as a historical memory primarily reflects sharp differences between how South Koreans, Americans, and Chinese people imagine and understand the origins of the war. Despite the fact that the war has ended, albeit inconclusively through an incomplete armistice, the continued invocation of nationalist passions in dictating what constitutes an "ideologically correct," and therefore, "politically acceptable" memory of the Korean War suggests that as long as nationalism is inextricably tied to the question of what must be remembered about the Korean War and how one must remember the Korean War, the divergence of historical memories surrounding the war into three or possibly more directions will become more pronounced. Whether a conclusive end to the war would mean an end to the ongoing controversy over political correctness and historical memory is still uncertain. The longer the Korean Peninsula has to wait for a decisive ending to the war, the more elusive a true international consensus between South Korea, the United States, and China over the war's nature would be, for the emergence of a clear ending is by no means the emergence of a firm agreement on the self-evident nature of the beginning.

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