Korea Journal, vol. 63, no. 2 (Summer 2023): 94–127.
doi: 10.25024/kj.2023.63.2.94

A Place of Memory: *The Ruins of the Korean Workers' Party Headquarters, Cheorwon*

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Abstract

This article examines the multilayered meanings of the Korean Workers' Party Headquarters, Cheorwon (WPHQ) as a place of memory. Originally built by North Korea in 1946, the building was partly destroyed during the Korean War, and taken over by South Korea after the 1953 ceasefire. After decades of desertion within the Civilian Control Line near the Demilitarized Zone, it was eventually registered as a cultural heritage property by South Korea. For decades, the WPHQ remains have built on the collective memory of anticommunism in South Korea and contributed to formulating a sense of national identity. From the standpoint of counter-memory, however, the site calls for a more nuanced approach. Oppressed memory can reemerge to integrate with current experiences and produce new meaning. Through this process, the site is recoded as a part of cultural memory *and transmitted to future generations. Recognized in South Korea for its value as cultural heritage, the WPHQ has become an unintentional historical monument. But reminding us of loss and demise, it has also become an* anti-monument. *In this* uncanny space*, dualities such as south/north, center/periphery, prosperity/collapse, and presence/absence converge and their distinctions are blurred, while the various memories associated with the site lead us to reconsider our views on Korea's modern history.*

Keywords: Korean Workers' Party Headquarters, Cheorwon, Korean War ruins, collective memory, counter-memory, cultural memory, monument, memorial, anti-monument, dark tourism, DMZ

This article is a revised version of the author's earlier article, "A Place of Memory: Ruins of the Labor Party Headquarters Building in Cheorwon," *Seoyang misulsa hakhoe nonmunjip* (Journal of the Association of Western Art History) 47 (August 2017): 53–81. The original Korean text has been translated into English for republication here.

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Introduction

The Korean Workers' Party Headquarters, Cheorwon (hereafter, WPHQ), built by North Korea in 1946, still stands in Cheorwon county, Gangwon-do province, South Korea (Fig. 1). Upon completion, the structure was used by the Workers' Party of North Korea, before being taken over by the South in a state of partial destruction caused during the Korean War. Located right in the middle of the Korean Peninsula, north of the 38th parallel and south of the ceasefire line, until the 1990s it sat on the (former) Civilian Control Line in close proximity to the Demilitarized Zone. Withstanding gradual deterioration from desertion over several decades, and with its use and development prohibited, the half-destroyed building still stands bearing its war-inflicted wounds.

Today, the WPHQ is registered as a modern cultural heritage property

Figure 1. The Korean Workers' Party Headquarters, Cheorwon

Source: Photo by Kuychul Lee (August 4, 2017).

in South Korea, and along with its surrounding area, it has been made into a park for continued preservation and maintenance. The dilapidated building emanates an aura of ruinous beauty, carrying vestiges of tumultuous historical events and memories of a bygone era. While the building remains static, views and perspectives cast on it have fluctuated in accordance with the tide of social change and the actors concerned.

This paper intends to investigate the roles South Korean society has assigned to the WPHQ, and to identify the characteristics of the building's structural ruins and its unique significance as a site of collective and individual memory. Illuminating the WPHQ as monument, which is an extension of memory, it also attempts to present how the building is recoded as a setting of *cultural memory*. Recognizing its usage for practicing mass culture, this study then examines the WPHQ as a dynamic place where the culture of memory is formulated, thereby shedding light on the building's social and cultural meaning in the present time.

Characteristics of the Ruins of the Korean Workers' Party Headquarters, Cheorwon

The WPHQ in Cheorwon county was constructed at a strategic location in the central region of the Korean Peninsula in time for the launch of the Workers' Party of North Korea[1] in 1946, with its construction intended to showcase and reinforce the authority of the Northern regime.[2] Records show that from early 1947 the WPHQ handled tasks assigned by the

1. The Workers' Party of North Korea (Bukjoseon rodongdang) was established on August 28, 1946 through the merging of the Communist Party of North Korea and the New People's Party of Korea (Joseon sinmindang). See Hakjun Kim (2008, 407–454).
2. According to Cheorwon county records, construction on the WPHQ began in early 1946, finishing by the end of the year (Cheorwon-gun 1992). However, locals recall that construction on the structure lasted three months, from spring to mid-summer 1946 (interview with Kim Young-gyu, Director of the Research Institute of Cheorwon History and Culture, Cheorwon, August 19, 2011). If construction on the building actually began in early 1946, one could speculate that the building had initially been intended as headquarters for the Communist Party of North Korea.

central headquarters of the Workers' Party of North Korea, focusing on regime propaganda and the surveillance of residents of Cheorwon, Gimhwa, Pyeonggang, Pocheon, and Yeoncheon (Gangwon Province 2003, 420).

Located along a main road in what was once, before division, the center of Korea, the building stands on slightly elevated terrain with a slope to its back and overlooking a plaza in front. The 3-story concrete structure with square-shaped planes and façades has rectangular windows of bilateral symmetry arranged with regularity and which surround the protruded frontal entrance. Accompanied by columns and arches at the center of its façade, the dominantly heavy horizontal shape highlights a classical elegance and verticality of surface, combining modern innovation and practicality with traditional authority. This architectural style represents socialist realism, as defined by the North, which is an altered version of Soviet socialist realism. The building is exemplary of North Korean adaptation of that style in its early period (Wang-gi Lee 2000, 53–57). In this early period, the main purport of North Korean architecture was to serve the people, the working class, and the foremost concern of architecture was to accommodate the new society's needs, rather than with majestic decorations or the latest features (Ri 1993, 259). Along these lines, public buildings were designed to have a horizontally centralized floor plan to facilitate the performance of complex functions, which was usually compensated by imposing facades. Often the center was emphasized, featured with massive high walls and weighty columns in a symmetrical presentation (Ri 1993, 292–293). In the North, the term socialist realism—usually reserved for an art style—had a political undertone before an aesthetic one, and was adopted to stress state ideology rather than architecture *per se*.

The WPHQ, which before the war had wielded great power in its drive to realize the socialist ideal, had a turn of fortune with the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–1953). In that war, the Cheorwon area became one of the fiercest battlegrounds of the central region of the peninsula. The 1952 Battle of Baengmagoji, for instance, witnessed unprecedented ferocity. In the course of this, the WPHQ roof was destroyed in bombings while the entire

Figure 2. Inside the WPHQ, second floor

Source: Munhwajaecheong (2004, 50).

Figure 3. Bullet marks on an exterior wall and the frontal staircase of the WPHQ

Source: Photo by Kuychul Lee (August 4, 2017).

third floor crumbled (Fig. 2). The building's central stairway still carries the vivid scars of tank tracks, while its columns and walls are pockmarked with bullet holes (Fig. 3).

After the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement (1953), the WPHQ found itself captive within the Civilian Control Line below the Southern Limit Line of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), where for several decades it sat abandoned with limited civilian access. After a long period of inevitable decay, it rebounded with a new role to play; it found usage as a place of ruins. The building can be said to possess hybrid characteristics in that it has both the features of a ruin in the traditional sense and in the modern. These characteristics are summarized below.

First, the WPHQ fell into ruin abruptly over a short period of time due to human-made disaster. The traces of that destruction that remain today acutely remind one of the shocks of war, of loss, and of individual and historical traumas. The building itself is both perpetrator—as it is a site of pre-war violence—and simultaneously a victim marred and ruined by military attack. Its sudden collapse is a metonymy for the modern vulnerability to war and terror, which can demand enormous sacrifices. The case of the WPHQ matches quite closely the urban ruin that Walter Benjamin describes as emerging from rapidly rising mass destruction and

urban dismantlement in contemporary society.[3] Instantly created ruins testify to the discontinuity of history and the ephemeral nature of civilization.

Second, the WPHQ retains the characteristics of traditional natural ruins due to decades of weathering by the natural environment since its wartime destruction (Fig. 4). Natural ruins draw our attention for their "age value," as art historian Alois Riegl puts it (Riegl 1982, 24). Old ruins intertwine artificiality and nature, oozing a unique aesthetics somewhere between culture and nature. According to Florence Hetzler, a scholar of ruins, in ruins the time of nature and humans as well as artificiality converge into a new integration, making them into places of universal time with a beauty approximating sublimity and sanctity (Hetzler 1988, 54–55).

In the WPHQ, winds blow from all directions through glassless window frames, animals come and go, and plants grow on the broken walls and floors. Interior/exterior, nature/artificiality, and center/periphery intersect

Figure 4. Inside the WPHQ, first floor

Source: Photo by author (August 27, 2011).

Figure 5. Back side of the WPHQ

Source: Photo by author (January 21, 2010).

3. Pointing out that modern cities do not go through an extended aging process, but change overnight, which is different from old cities, Walter Benjamin argues that instantly generated ruins betray their temporality (as cited in Daryl Patrick Lee [1999, 26]).

each other, blurring the lines between them. Yet the structure is not completely assimilated with its surroundings but maintains a discreteness.

Thirdly, scaffolding added to the structure to prevent further deterioration may also be seen as ruins, though of a different sort (Fig. 5). Things like pipes, iron supports, railings, and lighting fixtures may not be worn out but are still partial fragments and incomplete skeletons; in this regard, they can be seen as ruins as well. They appear akin to *ruins in reverse*, a concept articulated by land artist Robert Smithson. Smithson finds ruinness in contruction materials left at roadsides, and uses the term in reference to all new building materials and structures (Smithson 1979, 54–55). They are incomplete parts and cut pieces to be built into something else. Contrary to ruins, which are, in the ordinary sense of the word, what have crumbled down after being built, these materials are stacked up for construction. His view of brand-new materials as ruins contains a nihilist perspective that all things of the phenomenal world will inevitably decay.

Those new elements later added to the WPHQ now form a part of it, yet they are still incomplete bits. Temporary braces set up as needed, such as pipes and steel plates, barely protect the building from further degradation. The iron materials are not assimilated into the preexisting battered concrete body and generate an odd-looking appearance. The materiality and fragmentality of bare materials emphasize the nature of their ruinness.

The WPHQ, being human-made ruins, suggests the possibilities for the possibilities of large-scale violence and sudden disaster ever present in contemporary times. And as natural ruins, it reminds us of the sublime rule of universal circularity. It also hints that everything in the world, as *ruins in reverse*, will eventually decay. Having the traits of a hybrid ruin, it contains various elements: the debris and vestiges of abrupt collapse, dilapidation from long weathering, and pieces of buttresses added later. The fragments overlap with one another while retaining their own attributes, thus forming a palimpsest structure. The term palimpsest—meaning a reused parchment on which the original writing has been removed and replaced with new writing—is often used as a metaphor for the multilayered structure of memory (Freud 1997, 184–194). As memory remains suppressed, ingrained on a parchment, only to be suddenly recalled by a trigger event, so the

shadow of demise, that is, an invisible enemy or the sense of violence lurks among the ruins, appears and disappears like a ghost.

The WPHQ, where unassimilated, unfamiliar, and strange existence is latent, produces obsessive anxiety and fear, i.e., an uncanny feeling. The term uncanny—*unheimlich* in German—originally referred to the anxious or uncomfortable emotions one feels when something familiar, such as home (*heimlich*), appears strange and frightening (*unheimlich*), for instance, when one returns home after an absence. Conceptually, it is closely associated with home, a familiar place. According to Freud, there are hidden and invisible things in a home, and it can be, by extension, unfamiliar and scary (Freud 2003, 121–133). In the WPHQ, an uncanny space, what is dead and historically oppressed returns over and over again, obscuring the boundary between opposites, such as life/death, past/present, and nature/culture. In this sense, it is a posteriori place whose nature is defined by how visitors and viewers experience it. Uncanny memory conjured at this place brings on both direct and indirect experiences of the past, including the war, and leads to the formation of new memories in the present context.

A Place of Multilayered Memory

The ruins of the WPHQ are a place of multilayered memories where new texts have been incessantly added and registered by people, nature, and time. Through the times, not just voluntary memories but also divergent prisms of memories selected and reformulated as needed have been stressed here. Particularly, it was utilized as a site for fostering secondary memory of the Korean War, and in that process specific memories which held bare truths were repressed and excluded. Below I examine how different categories of memories were formed about the place using photos and records made of it, which allows us to understand changes in the acceptance and perception of the space.

A Historical Site of Collective Memory

Among visual images made of the WPHQ are photos from the 1950s. One of these shows the rear of the building taken from the hill behind it and showing a large portion of the ground-floor wall missing, likely the result of tank attacks (Fig. 6). Judging from the presence of military barracks and vehicles in the photo, the building may have been used as a military camp or a temporary halting spot. Obviously, it was an important offensive target during the war, and after the war became an impressive prize with great visible effect.

A 1964 photo stored at the National Archives of Korea depicts the WPHQ standing imposingly through a field of weeds. The caption reads: "A frontal view of the WPHQ taken when student representatives of schools in Chungcheongnam-do province visited to deliver care packages" (Fig. 7). In another photo, apparently shot in the late 1960s or the early 1970s, elementary school students visiting the area on a field trip listen to a military

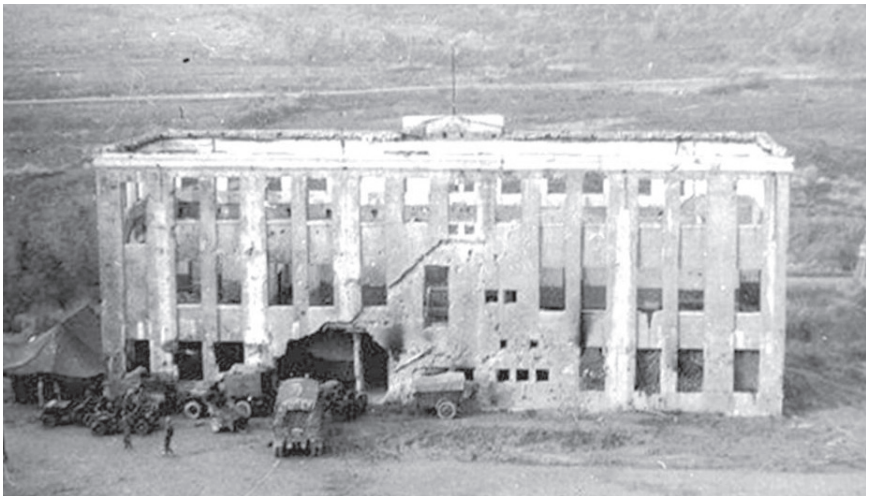

Figure 6. A rear view of the WPHQ, circa 1950s

Source: Research Institute of Cheorwon History and Culture (Cheorwon yeoksa munhwa yeonguso), Cheorwon.

Figure 7. WPHQ in 1964. Caption: "A frontal view of the WPHQ taken when student representatives of schools in Chungcheongnam-do province visited to deliver care packages"

Source: National Archives of Korea.

Figure 8. Students visiting the WPHQ on a field trip, ca. 1960s–1970s

Source: Unknown.

officer (Fig. 8). These pictorials illustrate that, placed under the management of troops based nearby, the place was off limits to civilians, although restricted access was still made available on certain occasions, e.g., comfort visits, field trips, or anticommunist publicity events.

Through South Korea's state-rebuilding and military regime period from the 1960s to the 1980s, the WPHQ was portrayed in the mass media from time to time, mainly as a site of North Korean brutality. In a photo of the building released in the South Korean periodical *Sin Dong-A* (June 1983), a large board hangs above the front entrance, on which is written in large font, "This is where the Cheorwon County Branch of the Workers' Party of the North Korean puppet regime exploited people before the Korean War" (Fig. 9) (*Sin Dong-A* 1983). The same board reappears in a 1981 photo of *Yonhap News*[4] and a June 1989 article in the *Kyunghyang Shinmun* (Yangsam Kim 1989).[5] While the placard is gone in a photo of the

4. Reprinted in *Yonhap News* (2014).

5. The photo shown in the news article is captioned, "The Workers Party Headquarters in

building in the June 1990 issue of the *Maeil Business Newspaper* (Fig. 10), old photos with the board included continued to be used in subsequent publications.[6] South Korean media's use of such photos seems to have been intended to feed hostility towards North Korea and to promote anticommunist awareness by fixing the WPHQ as testament of North Korean brutality. That is, the press sought to remind one of traumatic memories associated with the place, adapt and reconstruct these memories into a dominant narrative, and define them as the official memory. Official memory is not individual memory, but *collective memory*, shared by a social community. According to Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory is selected, organized, and fixed, a process necessary in order to form a collective identity. Halbwachs stated that collective memory provides a group "a self-portrait that unfolds through time, and allows the group to recognize itself" (Halbwachs 1980, 86).

The WPHQ, as an apparatus of the Communist Party of North Korea,

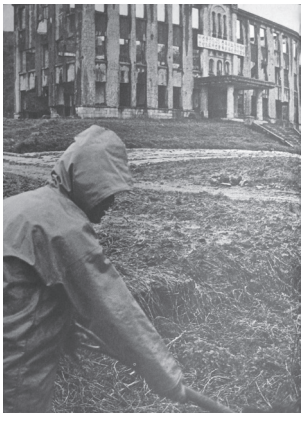

Figure 9. The WPHQ, 1983

Source: Sin Dong-A (1983).

Figure 10. The WPHQ, 1990

Source: Maeil Business Newspaper (1990, 17).

Cheorwon county, where a great number of lay people were massacred."

6. See for instance, Cheorwon-gun (1992, 1765) and Byeongjun Choe (1994a).

exercised power for three to four years until the outbreak of the war, exploiting the people and oppressing anticommunists. During the war, it was shelled by UN forces fighting back the North Korean invasion. The demolished empty place evoked vague fears of unknown enemy soldiers hiding like ghosts; this was the same for both sides, friendly or enemy forces (Cheorwon yeoksa munhwa yeonguso 2011, 109, 164). Every year in June, in commemoration of the outbreak of the Korean War and to honor veterans of that war, the officialized memory of the conflict was circulated along with photos of the WPHQ in South Korean newspapers and magazines to promote anticommunist ideology and reinforce the collective identity of South Korean society.

A Site of Microscopic Experiences of Counter-Memory

The memory of the WPHQ within an anticommunist narrative began to shift with the democratization movement of the latter half of the 1980s and the popular election of South Korea's civilian government in the early 1990s. From the 1990s, critiques of past history began to be made alongside attempts to clarify the true contemporary experiences of the Korean people. This historical momentum resulted in renewed efforts to resurface buried memories. For instance, people's testimonies and verbal accounts were put on record to recall vivid primary memories. Memory which is recovered from exclusion or suppression is called "counter-memory" or "anti-memory" in that it runs counter to dominant memory, i.e., state-led official memory. Counter-memory, a term coined by Michel Foucault, refers to a form of remembering to expose that which has been excluded or silenced from or fallen out of the immense continuity of memory. Accordingly, it gives attention to the disconnected and peripheral, and focuses on discrete singulars. Through this, it pursues a different form of historical narration from the conventional manner of writing history with a linear causal relationship in mind (Foucault 1977, 113–198; as cited in Yeongmok Kim [2006, 74]).

In the context of counter-memory, various perspectives on the WPHQ emerged that had been suppressed by institutionalized memory. To take one

example, photographer Lee Si-woo tracked positive memories of the WPHQ and noted that at the time of its construction, the building might have been an "expression of the aesthetic ideal" conceived by "the people of Cheorwon who were then experiencing a different kind of liberation from that of the South." Quoting a report written by Anna Louise Strong, an American correspondent, after a visit to North Korea in 1947, he assumed that the structure and arrangement of the building to be a representation of North Korean architectural ideology, which sought to express the ideal of the "liberated fatherland" claimed by the "power of people."[7] This view, which derives from the attempt to examine the architectural form in connection with the intent of its construction, reminds us of the need for a deeper understanding of the circumstances of Cheorwon at the time of the WPHQ's construction, which was then under North Korea's control, rather than from the one-sided view of postwar South Korea.

Meanwhile, the postwar memories of the WPHQ are by and large associated with violence and trauma. In the recollections of locals, "American soldiers in their advance north dashed toward the building in tanks and bombarded it relentlessly, destroying the headquarters to punish the perpetrators of the war" (Cheorwon yeoksa munhwa yeonguso 2011, 164). Another testified, "Both friendly and enemy forces passing by in the dark would fire blindly upon hearing something in order to deal with their fear of war and death" (Cheorwon yeoksa munhwa yeonguso 2011, 109). Irrespective of who controlled it or what it was used for, the mere existence of the building was sufficient to create fear and cause aggression. The huge crumbled vacant building was an object of dread to all, soldiers and civilians alike. Even after the war, it remained an uncanny place, haunted by the ghosts of memory.

On the other hand, the memories of others regarding the structure are related to its genuine image as a ruin, its aesthetics, and nostalgia, with a

7. Anna Louise Strong was the first Western correspondent to interview Kim Il-sung. She attested in a report, "I found in fact an almost mystical belief in the 'power of the Korean people'…No North Korean with whom I spoke doubted they were living in a liberated country ruled by 'people's power'" (as quoted in Si-woo Lee 2003 [34–37]).

focus on the years of desertion after the war. Photographer Lee Hae-yong notes that today the WPHQ has lost its old atmosphere due to maintenance, and feels bad about its modern redressing, in the form of tidying up of debris and the installation of steel fences around it. Remarking, "the ultimate tragedy of this architecture is the aesthetic of the ruins bearing the marks of artillery and bullets," he laments that one can no longer imagine the desolation left behind by war and ideology, or wander about the grounds freely" (Hae-yong Lee 2003, 65–66). This view pays prime attention to the building as ruins, and approaches it as a place of special personal experience and as an object that summons an aesthetic awareness.

In Lee's photos, taken before repairs were done on the building, there are no braces or fences added to it. Only weeds and wildflowers grow in

Figure 11. Hae-yong Lee's photograph of the rear yard of the WPHQ, lush with daisy fleabanes

Source: Hae-yong Lee (2003, 65).

abundance, complementing its ruinous character formed through the joint work of nature and artificiality (Fig. 11). The ruins in Lee's images conjure memories of foregone years, of fallen glory, and the inevitable passage of time to arouse nostalgia. This nostalgia leads one to long for the time when the Korean people lived peacefully as one nation without ideological and political confrontation. Relying on nostalgic memory, we can reactivate the values and attainments previously made as one community, and connect them to the present to move beyond the negativity of recent history (Spitzer 1999, 92–96).

The examples above demonstrate that divergent views can be raised regarding the WPHQ depending on which aspects of related events or temporal periods one focuses on. The ruinous building is a place where bits of many different views overlap discretely like in a palimpsest, and where various shades of memories are brought to life and combined with new experiences. When as many memories and experiences as possible are disclosed and the voices of suppressed memories are harkened to, we can come closer to the veracity of the past that has been overlooked by official history.

Monumentality of the WPHQ

Today, the ruined WPHQ, as a mediator of memory, has become a symbolic icon of history and a place to engage in personal recollections and experiences in daily life. Registered as a cultural heritage property by the South Korean nation, it is becoming a sort of a monument and garnering public sympathies as host of a variety of cultural events. This change has occurred largely under the influence of the international movement to preserve and commemorate war ruins around the world. In the remembrance of war ruins, the term "memorial" is more widely adopted than the conventional term "monument." The former emphasizes a reflection upon the negative aspects of certain events and recalling the victims, rather than eulogizing heroes and good deeds. The ruins of the WPHQ, bearing the scars of history, are considered a memorial, as people

impart such value to it, although it was not originally built as such. An *unintentional monument* attaches importance to what was lost over how to conserve the past, and is characterized as fluid, vague, and subjective (Riegl 1982, 21–24). The WPHQ, an unintentional monument, has obtained official status as a monument in the 21st century, joining the list of other monuments of the national heritage. Nonetheless, the WPHQ has the character of a counter-monument, different from traditional monuments. By examining its various attributes as a monument of modern significance, we can comprehend how it mediates the culture of memory in the present.

A Historic Monument and Cultural Memory

In 2002, the WPHQ was designated as Registered Cultural Property No. 22 under the South Korean Cultural Heritage Administration's cultural property registration scheme. The official designation indicates the recognition of the WPHQ as a *historic monument*. A historic monument, which can be seen as an *unintentional monument*, refers to a heritage or relic of historical value in a community (Choay 2001, 12–15).

The WPHQ was registered as a cultural property for its significance in contemporary history, a testament to national partition, war, and the political division of Korea, and for the important insights it provides into early North Korean architecture, being the only public building of the North extant in the South. Further, it has important geographical and symbolic significance as a site where people come to yearn for unification and peace due in great part to its unique location near the border of the only divided nation on the planet. The building is also a tourist attraction, a rich resource of local history and culture.

The WPHQ, as a historic monument and national heritage property, is now approached from a more objective, rational, and integrated perspective. Efforts are being made to restore its original form and reconstruct its meaning by addressing its authentic, unitary, and intrinsic features as a piece of architecture. The building, in its ruinous condition, had been open to visitors with some restrictions before large-scale repair work was done in the 2000s as part of an initiative to preserve historic war sites. While the ruinous

state of the building was for the most part preserved, props and other auxiliary materials were installed in places, and heavy steel fences and ropes were put around the perimeter and internal passageways to block civilian access. In addition, a large panel was placed before the building, informing visitors of its importance as a part of the nation's modern cultural heritage. These devices were employed for several reasons: to prevent further reuse of the building, to reduce the possibility of attaching new meaning to it, and to locate it within the linear historical context by sticking to the preexisting fixed memory of it.

On the official information panel in front of the building is found the following:

> North Korea ruled this area, committing numerous brutal acts, to include torture and killings. The building was so notorious that people used to say, "Whoever who goes in there never comes out intact." At the back of this building, bullet shells and iron wires can be found that were used in acts of unforgivable brutality.

Alerting visitors to the incidents that occurred at the WPHQ when it was controlled by the North, the signboard then attempts to increase visitor awareness of anticommunism and security issues. This approach inherits the negative view officially promulgated concerning the WPHQ from the 1953 ceasefire until the late 1980s. That formerly formed collective memory is thus restored under the guise of objectivity to form a part of the South Korean *cultural memory* of today.

The concept of *cultural memory*, proposed by Jan and Aleida Assmann, German scholars of cultural studies, is based on the idea that memory is not only individually and socially but also culturally created. In Aleida Assmann's definition, cultural memory encompasses the epochs that rely on normative texts as a medium and is institutionally reinforced and systematically handed down, in contrast to orally transmitted retrospective memory or instant communicative memory (Assmann 2011, 13–15). This concept draws attention to a process whereby memory is preserved and transmitted in physical and symbolic forms and acquires cultural meaning.

Therefore, it focuses on the reconstruction of memory and cultural practices, and tries to concretize social relations and institutions based on the formats of cultural representations and identities of a society's members (Tae 2014, 42–43).

The remains of the WPHQ are received as a cultural object that mediates the indirect memories of society's members, in the same way museums, libraries, archives, monuments, or art and cultural media do. In this process, a consensus is formed via cultural heritage programs or social practices, through which that object becomes a public monument. Individual memories of the Korean War are integrated into cultural memory, i.e., the current collective memory, via efforts to build a social consensus.

As one example of such consensus-forming efforts, in 2015, Cheorwon county launched a public art project themed "Transformation," for which it installed the so-called "Temple of Light" across the WPHQ by artist Bae Young-hwan. This was part of a larger project by the Arts Council Korea as a pilot public art initiative geared towards regional regeneration. Bae's piece was the grand prize winner (Fig. 12). The white structure evokes the image of a temple or altar. On its columns are inscribed 26 language characters in disuse or near extinction. Within the structure are displays of photos, videos, and other artwork portraying the history of Cheorwon and configuring the

Figure 12. The "Temple of Light" in front of the WPHQ, 2017

Source: Photo by Kuychul Lee (August 4, 2017).

time and memory of the locale. This site, which serves as a symbolic space of peace and coexistence, is a work of installation art in itself, and it is also designed to function as an archive, a gallery, and a rallying point. Here records are preserved, works of art are exhibited, and participants exchange their experiences in the form of testimonials and conversation. Many cultural events take place here on an on-going basis, so the local residents use it as a place where they can reminisce about former days, appreciate culture, and communicate with one another (Yong-gyu Kim 2015). Experiential memory of witnesses of the past should be reconstructed into cultural memory so as to forego the loss of and preserve and transmit such memories to future generations as new collective memory. And this installation and its surrounding area help people disclose memories, specify their traumas, and foster sympathy and dialogue.

An Anti-monument and a Soft Monument

Existing collective memory ingrained in the WPHQ can be transformed by attending to its experiential memory and its character as ruins. The ruinous place involves aspects of an *anti-monument*, which is found in various forms today. The ruins can also be seen as a *negative monument*, for it is not a commemorative form that fills a gaping hole produced by the event of history, but instead makes a place for the ruins that remain (Merewether 1997, 33). Negative monuments are, in a broad sense, anti-monuments vis-à-vis traditional ones. Traditional monuments work on the belief that the past can be condensed into a spatial construct of today and presuppose a constant presence of a time interval between the past in memory and the living present. On the other hand, in dissipating themselves over time, anti-monuments or counter-monuments make us recognize the dialectic interdependence of time and memory (Young 1992, 76–77).

Revealing what was lost and testifying to its absence, the WPHQ commemorates what is missing rather than feats of the past. The subject of remembering can change depending on what is chosen from the palimpsest-like multilayered memories of the ruins. Further, the WPHQ can serve as another brand of monument, with today's experiences and interpretations

added to the memory of the past. The WPHQ is in origin a product of North Korea, but currently used by South Korea; it was formerly located in a bustling center, but today sits on the fringe. It has been transformed from a fierce battlefield to a place of yearning for peace, and from a socialist/communist office to a tourist spot in a capitalist society. Memory formed around here is not fixed but fluid, overlaps, and is effaced with the passage of time, leading to a realistic awakening. Just as people had contradictory memories of the ruins, the meanings of remembrance of it vary even today, depending on domestic and international political conditions, fluctuating North-South relations, and who temporarily uses the land. Moreover, showing that a monument is not perpetually physical due to the process of continuously "being ruined" (*devenir-ruine*) (Makarius 2004, 236), causes us to realize that all the memories and meanings manifested in its solid form are likewise tentative and accidental. Like Smithson's land art, the WPHQ can be a monument and an anti-monument at once, which alerts us to its inevitable and ultimate extinction.

At the WPHQ, cultural events are held using the ruinous scenery as backdrop. Offering a venue for public events and political/social speeches trying to make the most of its unique setting, the WPHQ has the character of a *soft monument*. Soft monuments, which arose as a new type of monument in the 1990s and early 2000s, are fluid in content and form and nonperennial compared to traditional *hard monuments*. They make practical and fragmental statements about the times in a brief and provocative manner—examples are works of installation art and performance art, public gatherings (mass meetings), and political/social rallies and declarations (Park 2009, 266–267). While they often involve political content and venues, they are mostly practiced in cultural form.

An exemplary case of the WPHQ operating as a soft monument is "Dreaming of Balhae" ('Balhae-reul ggumggumyeo'), a music video released in 1994 by the band Seo Taiji and Boys. The music video is considered epoch-making for its depiction of contradictions in South Korean society and the yearning for unification via pop music and commercial media.

Other examples of the WPHQ as soft monument include the gathering of members of domestic and international NGOs participating in a civilian

forum of the Asia-Europe Meeting 2000 held in Seoul in October 2000, who visited the DMZ and announced the Declaration on the Zone of Peace before the WPHQ. Also, in August of 2015, commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Liberation Day of Korea, about a hundred young artists active in Asia convened at the WPHQ for the DMZ Peace Arts Festival and delivered a message for peace and harmony. Recognized for its unique location along the dividing line of the Cold War, the WPHQ is being recoded as a symbolic place of world peace.

The WPHQ and Mass Culture

The rich monumentality of the WPHQ makes it practical for continued public use, which in turn increases its popular consumption. In other words, it obtains meaning as an arena where the culture of memory is formulated in close relationship with the masses. As mentioned above, as soft monument, it serves as a venue for cultural events, while as a historic monument valued for its cultural heritage, it attracts visitors and functions as a destination for tourist consumption. Becoming intimate with the public, the space promotes such ideals as peace, unification, reconciliation, and dialogue in addition to conventional negative ideas, and is open for people to have their private experiences and memories. This section discusses how the WPHQ's repeated appearance in mass culture reanimates what has been forgotten, and how in being consumed by the public it contributes to formulating the culture of memory in the present context.

A Performance Arena of Subculture

In recent years, the WPHQ has often been used as a cultural space for events of mass participation, such as performances, large-scale gatherings, sports events, and events promoting peace and environmental conservation. Records show how the WPHQ had been exposed to mass culture as early as the 1960s. An August 28, 1965, issue of the *Dong-A Ilbo* includes a photo of filming being done at the location (Fig. 13). The movie concerned was *The*

Figure 13. Filming being done at the WPHQ

Source: *Dong-A Ilbo* (1965, 6).

DMZ (dir. Park Sang-ho), a semi-documentary drama. The shooting was allowed through the special support of the UN Military Armistice Commission and was produced to publicize internationally the nature of the inter-Korean truce line by realistically capturing the tragedy of Korean partition (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1965).

Meanwhile, from the 1990s, the WPHQ as covered in mass media was not limited to the tragedy of war and division, but moved on to the healing of war-inflicted scars, improving South-North relations, and raising aspirations for the realization of national reunification and world peace. The former site of socialist ideology and devastating memories of war was transformed into one that paradoxically also called for peace.

For instance, in 1994, the building served as a stage for a KBS pop music program called Open Concerts (*yeollin eumakhoe*) (Fig. 14). This was a period when anxiety was widespread on the peninsula over the North Korean nuclear issue. The North's rejection of international nuclear inspections in early 1993 caused the heightening of tensions (the first nuclear crisis), which escalated to seriously hostile conditions, taking Korea to the brink of war the following year. On June 15, 1994, former US

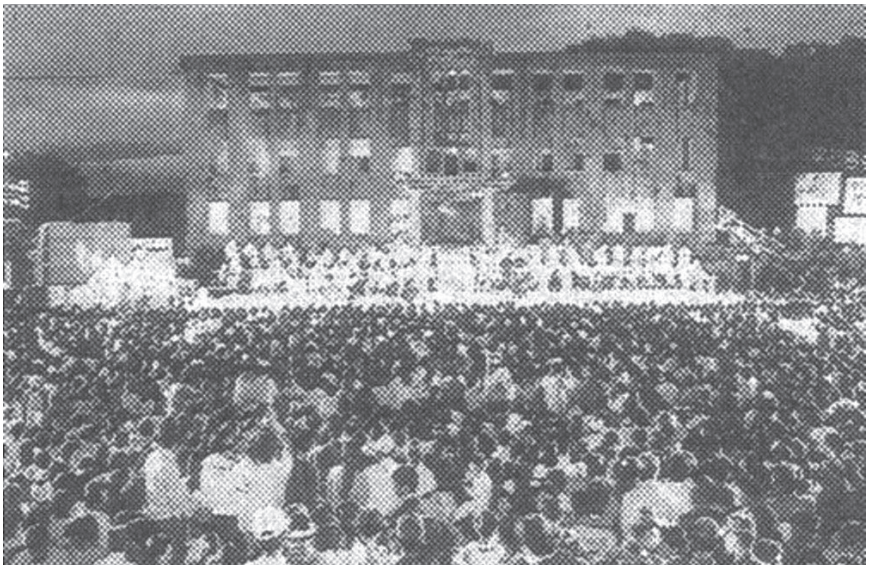

Figure 14. Recording the KBS open concert at the WPHQ, 1994

Source: *Kyunghyang Shinmun* (Choe 1994b, 17).

President Jimmy Carter visited Pyongyang and secured an agreement to hold South-North summit talks. On June 20, a proposal on the procedures for the meeting was made and working-level discussions began (Ministry of Unification 1994). It was at just such a delicate time that the open concert was held at the WPHQ on June 23, marking the first large-scale cultural event ever launched within the Civilian Control Line. Public broadcasting of the concert with thousands of people in the audience under the theme of "Our Peaceful Unification" drew keen attention at home and abroad, along with hopeful anticipations for the upcoming inter-Korea summit (Choe 1994b; Kang 1994; Soondeok Kim 1994).

Ultimately, however, the summit did not materialize due to the sudden death of Kim Il-sung in early July 1994. In August 1994, when South-North relations had returned to a standstill, the band Seo Taiji and Boys released their third album, *Dreaming of Balhae* (*Balhae-reul ggumggumyeo*). The release of the album, with its strong social commentary, was deemed timely,

Figure 15. Stills from Seotaiji and Boys' music video, "Dreaming of Balhae" ('Balhae-reul ggumggumyeo'), 1994

Source: Seotaiji Archive (https://www.seotaiji-archive.com).

appearing as it did in a period of severe inter-Korean conflict when the peninsula was at the crossroads of war and peace (Hyeon-seop Kim 2001, 80–81). As the album's title implies, it conveys the hopes that the Korean people will achieve a peaceful unification and flourish far and wide, just as the state of Balhae was once prosperous and advanced far into Manchuria. For the music video, the WPHQ was chosen as the backdrop and stage for the title song, "Dreaming of Balhae" (Fig. 15). The video begins with a dove flying peacefully, followed by a series of old photos of the WPHQ and the Korean War. Fast-moving scenes depict fragments of the war with flickering images of battles, shelling, displacement, and orphans. It appears as though the agonies of war latent in the WPHQ ruins are now unveiling their bare faces like ghosts. The place serves not only as the background of the song, but as the frame for the video's visual images, a space of experience where memories of the war suddenly burst open. The latter part of the video shows the band members singing and dancing in the ruinous place captured from many different angles. As if the veil has been lifted, the forbidden zone is exposed under the light at close range along with the performers. Finally, the entire building is displayed with a large national flag hanging and the video concludes with bright peaceful scenery.

The essential social message expressed by "Dreaming of Balhae" is the

"contradiction of unification" in Korean society, which confronts us when attention is called to war and the nation.[8] The contradiction of unification refers to the history and the reality of both Koreas claiming to seek peaceful unification yet aiming guns at each other. The WPHQ, a site of conflict, not only reminds us of the tragic past but warns that one wrong move could once more result in war. At the same time, it implies the paradoxical possibility that various players can coexist through reconciliation and peace.

After the release of the music video, the WPHQ earned a new role as venue for practicing subculture. For Dick Hebdige, subculture is "a form of resistance which is symbolized as styles by contradiction and opposition to the ruling class" (quoted in Hyeon-seop Kim [2001, 31]). The year 1994 being the starting point, the WPHQ has continued to host a number of popular performances and events that convey various apolitical/social criticisms in addition to North-South issues.

As the case of the WPHQ demonstrates, ruins can spread memory through popular culture and be revitalized as symbolic places. They can become domains for criticizing the regulated surrounding space and expressing repressed power as they offer a realm of adventure and dreams where banned behaviors can find a route to expression, or an urban playground lying out of sight of public surveillance (Edensor 2005, 17–26). The cumulated layers of numerous events at the WPHQ have made its function and meaning unclear and unaligned. However, that very ambiguity contributes to its transformation to a play arena where prohibitions can be flouted and free-floating activities such as graffiti, entertainment and other events, and popular art can flourish.

The symbolic meaning of the WPHQ can differ depending on its use. Offering a performance stage for subculture, it can be used as a forum to criticize the established system and rebel against contradictions, but it is still frequently utilized to express conservative anti-North, anticommunist ideology. This contradictory phenomenon concerns Korea's dualistic reality

8. According to one scholar, "Dreaming of Balhae" deals with three main types of contradictions in contemporaneous Korean society, i.e., "contradiction of unification," "contradiction of education," and "bourgeoisie values" (Dong-yeon Lee 1999, 176).

of having to pursue both security and peaceful unification concurrently. Moreover, because of the geographic reality of Cheorwon's location near the inter-Korean border, the meaning of the WPHQ can change at any time depending on the current state of inter-Korean relations.

An Attraction of Dark Tourism

The WPHQ, being near the DMZ on the North-South dividing line and carrying vestiges of Cold-War ideology, has great potential as an international tourist destination. Beginning in the 1980s, Cheorwon county implemented projects to tidy up ruinous cultural assets scattered about the old center of Cheorwon city (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1983; *Maeil Business Newspaper* 1987). This was part of plans to build the nation's largest anticommunist tourist complex on the momentum of the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics (*Dong-A Ilbo* 1988). As the Civilian Control Line was gradually readjusted northward several times starting from 1989, the county developed a tour program called "security tourism" by linking areas released from the Civilian Control Line (including the WPHQ) and those still within it (*Maeil Business Newspaper* 1989). The tour was designed to promote security awareness by allowing tourists to witness war-stricken devastation and the danger of the North's ongoing aggression.

Entering the 2000s, the perspective on the war ruins made a shift with South-North summit talks on June 15, 2000, and the sudden turnaround in inter-Korean relations. Korean War site preservation programs were initiated, and ruins in and around the DMZ, including the WPHQ, were designated as Registered Cultural Properties. In Cheorwon, the WPHQ and the surrounding area began to be developed into a peace park with the goal making the DMZ an international tourism destination. This time, these plans were pushed forth under the new appellation of "peace tourism" (in 2012). However, as inter-Korean relations entered another frigid phase following a streak of incidents—termination of Mt. Geumgang tours (in 2008), the sinking of the Cheonan (a South Korean naval vessel), the North's shelling of Yeonpyeong Island (in 2010), the continuation of nuclear tests by North Korea, and the shutdown of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (in

2016), the initiative eventually recovered its old name of *security tourism*.[9] On this, the Cheorwon Hope Coalition issued a statement urging the improvement of South-North relations and calling for "going beyond the outdated frame of security tourism which increases hostility between the two Koreas and switching to a future-oriented unification journey and peace pilgrimage" (Jeonguk nongminhoe chongyeonmaeng 2017). Later, as inter-Korean summit talks resumed in 2018 and a peaceful atmosphere hovered over the peninsula, it was changed once again to "DMZ peace tourism."[10]

Currently, with the development of tour programs, the WPHQ is drawing wide attention, which helps increase national publicity of local places and brings economic benefits. Its utilization as a tourist attraction means its transformation from an ideological site of communism to one of capitalist consumption. The practice of visiting places associated with death or tragedy has been dubbed "dark tourism" (Foley and Lennon 1996). Dark tourism—alternately, "black tourism" or "grief tourism"—is viewed as a new global phenomenon of cultural consumption. Since the 1980s, increasingly large numbers of ordinary people have been visiting sites of massacre and disaster. Following the recommendation of South Korea's National Institute of Korean Language, "dark tourism" is often referred to as "tourism for historical lessons" (*yeoksa gyohyun yeohaeng*). This term makes reference to the insights history might teach us by visiting places stricken by disaster or historical tragedy so that we might be alert to the recurrence of similar incidents in the future (NIKL 2023). But dark tourism, in its original sense, has little to do with *lessons*, and is not even necessarily related to *history*. Its basic intent is to gaze into death and demise and in so doing to attend to what is concealed by the dominant discourse. This mode of cultural consumption reveals a "decoded awareness," which is divergent from conventional practices of commemoration, remembrance, and memorial service (Jung 2009, 531). By approaching the war ruins from the essential,

9. See Cheorwon-gun tour guide pamphlets and the "Tours in Cheorwon-gun" section of its homepage, www.tour.cwg.go.kr (accessed April 6, 2017).
10. See Cheorwon-gun munhwa gwangwang (Cheorwon County Cultural Tourism) homepage, www.cwg.go.kr (accessed April 2, 2023).

paradoxical perspective of dark tourism rather than security or historical lessons to learn, we can readdress and sympathize with individual memories of the Korean War, and pursue a broader understanding and path to healing.

Through mass consumption, the WPHQ not only reveals foregone memories but also ceaselessly produces and records new memories in the present. When we do not bury it in the fixated memory of the past but instead view it as a place of dynamic memory, we can not only comprehend the site's culture of multilayered memory but contribute to its formation.

Conclusion

The WPHQ was constructed by North Korea for political purposes following national liberation in 1945, but the structure, in its now war-destroyed form, was taken over by the South following the Korean War ceasefire of 1953. The building's ruins, deserted and abandoned, lingered on as a place of memory. With civilian access restricted until the 1980s due to its location within the Civilian Control Line, it was publicized as a site of North Korean oppression and brutality via such media as newspapers, magazines, and public information films. This official meaning of the WPHQ was formed into *collective memory*, constituting the dominant memory of South Korean society. As an icon of the war, the WPHQ contributed to shaping the identity of South Korea, where anticommunism was taken up as a tenet of state, and to establishing the dominant narrative of modern Korean history.

From the second half of the 1980s, however, the reflective reconsideration of the history of the Korean people began with the emergence of the democratization movement and the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics. In the early 1990s, social movements began demanding clarification as to what really happened in the past and questioning the then dominant narrative of Korea's modern history. In reformulating memory, which is the basis of history, repeated attempts were made to recover *counter-memories* that had been excluded from existing collective memory. Attention was given to unearthing the specific memories, e.g., particular individual experiences and

traumas, and to locating bits of truth about the past thus far buried within fragmented memories. The rise of this new tide was in fact closely related to the global spread of the culture of memory, in which people were visiting the remains of devastation caused by war and disaster, such as Holocaust sites. Placed in this context, the WPHQ, a vestige of the Korean War, is a space of multilayered memories, including the construction and destruction of a modern state and locality, people's hopes and sufferings, and nostalgia regarding the traumas and ruins of war. Memories revived from there, which are primary memory, are formed into counter-memory vis-à-vis official memory, and help us adopt a more microscopic and multidimensional approach towards the past.

In the 2000s, the WPHQ was designated as a modern cultural heritage property of South Korea, thus becoming a historic monument a posteriori and a place where objective public memory is preserved. At the same time, the WPHQ works as an *anti-monument* in the sense that the ruinous empty space conjures negative memories of the past, of loss, and of absence. Today, the structure serves as a venue for cultural events as a *soft monument*, a performance stage of subculture, and an attraction in dark tourism. Putting behind negative memories of a foregone era, it is being transformed into an arena of communication and peace, and serves both the industry of memory and local publicity. Memory of the Korean War is remade into *cultural memory* through the many roles that the ruins of the WPHQ play and represent: monuments, archives, art projects, cultural events, and tourism. The newly coded cultural memory is handed down to future generations as the collective memory of today. Attention is called to the ruins of the WPHQ in order to remember and transmit the truths of history by debunking slighted memory as well as official memory and integrate them into cultural memory.

The WPHQ, representing at once both the victims and instigators of violence, is where opposites exist side by side. Sitting on the border where the South and the North adjoin each other, it is a physical and symbolic place where distinction between the two Koreas becomes fluid. Today at the WPHQ, various forms of dualities intersect with ambiguity: the double-sidedness of North and South, the hybridity of the ruins, prosperity and

downfall, center and periphery, presence and absence. The traces of memory are parts of history to be ceaselessly reconstructed. Seventy years from the truce, the WPHQ is not just trapped in past memories, but helps people obtain a realistic awakening to the foundation of the past. Diverse memories latent here present important cues for reflecting on the existing narratives of Korea's modern and contemporary history and re-illuminating that history in the present context. Amidst the currents of inter-Korean relations and social change, the ruins of the WPHQ provide an arena of dynamic experience and cultural practice, which are translated into new memories.

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Received: 2023.04.03. Revised: 2023.04.24. Accepted: 2023.06.07.