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Under Occupation, After Armistice:

Stories of Enemy and Traitorous Property

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Abstract

The question of enemy property (jeoksan) and its dispensation wends its way across a number of literary works in the late 1940s and 1950s. Among others, prominent writers such as Gye Yongmuk, Yeom Sangseop, Im Ogin, Chae Mansik, and Choe Jeonghui addressed this material history in varying ways, all of which find common ground in an interrogation (at times implicit) of the meaning of liberation (haebang) itself, a term closely associated with the post-1945 articulation of anticommunism (bangong) in the Republic of Korea (ROK). During the Korean War, the notion of traitorous property (yeoksan), referring to homes of communist sympathizers, gained currency. This article follows what we might call the property trail in the works of Chae Mansik (1902–1950) and Choe Jeonghui (1912–1990) from the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s, a time when the dispensation of enemy property was widely perceived as central to the newly forming socioeconomic order of the ROK. For both writers, haebang becomes something other than a marker separating past from present. Their work seeks to write history in another form, as the story of a property trail and its attendant feelings, attitudes, suspicions, desires. To follow this property trail is to approach the untoward coincidence of liberation and division of the peninsula manifest in habitation of the enemy/traitorous home.

Keywords: enemy property, traitorous property, anticommunism, literature, history, liberation, division, Korean War

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Figure l. In the Namdaemun Market

Figure 2. Former homes of the departed Japanese

Source: *Dong-A Ilbo* (December 27, 1946), *Dong-A Ilbo* (December 28,1946).

"What a frightening scene. No gunfire, but a war zone nonetheless." Such are the thoughts of a young man in Gye Yongmuk's "Counting Stars" (Byeol-eul henda, 1946; illustrations by Choe Youngsu) as he observes an acquaintance fight it out with a merchant in the Namdaemun Market. His friend refuses to pay asking price for a jacket he's tried on and simply walks off with it—against the protest of the hapless seller (Fig. 1). The young man is suddenly fearful not only for his friend but of the crowd milling about: "Is it possible that silent weapons abound, buried deep within the hearts of all of these people?" (Gye 1946). This young man had made it back to Korea by boat from Manchuria a year earlier, accompanied by his mother and carrying his father's remains, which they intend to bury once they settle into a new home. But no place of residence awaits. Japanese colonialism is over, but the peninsula has been divided (Soviet military occupation in the north; US military occupation in the south). Their hometown is north of the 38th parallel, and they find themselves struggling to survive, living in what amounts to a hut, scavenging for food. This after nearly a year of life in a

vacated "Japanese home" (*ilbon jip*).

The young man's acquaintance (they had met on the boat) offers to help. He'll take the young man to his place, a Western-style house adorned with red roof tiles, in all likelihood, we're told, the former residence of a corporate bigwig. He's previously explained how to evict those who've taken up residence in these homes once owned by the repatriated Japanese: push them out on the grounds that they haven't followed "procedures" (*susok*). "'That's how I got this house, too,'" he tells the young man (Fig. 2) (Gye 1946). The latter recoils. He's rejected his friend's offer to secure a Japanese house in this way once before. He and his mother had been evicted using the same method and he can't bring himself to do what has been done to them to others. *Dong-A Ilbo* closed the year 1946 with the serialization (December 24–31) of Gye Yongmuk's story of fear, desperation, ethics, mourning, return—all linked to the experience of the unhoused, an exposure to the elements. You count stars when there's no roof over your head.

"Counting Stars" invokes a natural law, a reality: survival of the fittest. For the young man's friend, this is a scene of opportunity. If the young man imagines affinity (for the family he would push out from a Japanese home), his friend appeals to replacement. He gets rid of those who do not possess the wherewithal themselves to assume the place of the former Japanese inhabitants. The battle is over colonial remains and their dispensation.

In late September 1950, the United States Army Government in Korea (USAMGIK, 1945–1948) made sales of state-owned Japanese property to Koreans without USAMGIK permission null and void, retroactive to August 9, 1945. This measure did not preclude the possibility of individual sale of privately held Japanese property to Koreans. Nor did USAMGIK move immediately to vest that property. Under direction from Washington, though, USAMGIK would soon change course, taking control of all Japanese property (both privately and publicly held) via Ordinance 33 (December 6, 1945).[1] While USAMGIK's December 1945 claim to private property contrasts both with its earlier position and with the 1907 Hague Convention (which, in fact, stipulates that 'enemy property' in occupied

1. See Bae (2014, 50–52).

territories does not include privately-held assets), it would prove lasting, recognized formally by the 1952 San Francisco Treaty (Bae 2014, 53).

"Counting Stars" alludes to the use of force and influence-peddling that surrounded the legal ordinances issued by USAMGIK—the *procedures* that conferred the right to occupy (but not purchase) these homes.[2] To what, then, does one return? The post-1945 movement of peoples (returning from the expanses of empire and, later, fleeing/returning during the Korean War) brings the question of survivability and ethics into conversation with ideas about what exactly constitutes a proper, postcolonial modernity.[3] Gye Yongmuk's story is telling in its urgency. To be sure, the dispensation of former Japanese properties involved a reckoning with the colonial past. Even more pressing, though, was survival in the present and the emerging battle over the future. The realities surrounding dispensation were themselves questionable, if not suspicious. The removal of Japanese bodies was one thing, what was left behind on the ground was another. As we see in Gye Yongmuk's work, these remains bore the mark of unethical practices that implicated the present; the *procedures* surrounding the dispensation of former Japanese properties could serve to question the notion of *liberation* (*haebang*) itself.

Gye Yongmuk's short story, in fact, appeared at a time when the notion of "enemy property" (*jeoksan*) was first achieving cultural currency in what would become the Republic of Korea (ROK). While it is likely that reference to the Hague Convention was reflected in the emergence of *jeoksan*, the preferred terms in USAMGIK documents are "vested property," "Japanese property," and "ex-Japanese property."[4] The term *jeoksan* came into play as

2. For profiteers (*moribae*) interfering in the dispensation of Japanese homes, see *Chosun Ilbo*, May 10, 1947; July 17, 1947; January 20, 1949; and October 3, 1949.
3. For a sustained analysis of enemy property and its appearance in late 1940s' literary texts, see Yim (2023, 58–91). For the complex relation among survivability, "individual ethical choice" and the "national plight" in Gye Yongmuk's work and others under military occupation, see Yim (2023, 104–106).
4. Reference to "enemy assets" appears occasionally, as does "Jap property." For the latter, see Mitchell (1948, 58, 60). For a more extensive USAMGIK record that includes numerous legal opinions related to a range of vested properties, see Department of Justice, United States Military Government in Korea (1948).

the question of the proper dispensation of these properties (homes, factories, farmland) heated up, linked as it was to broader concerns over land reform.

While the term *jeoksan* began to circulate widely in the contemporary Korean media in 1946, many literary texts continued to refer to these properties as "Japanese" throughout the period of military occupation. By the early 1950s, though, such designations as "Japanese home" (the term used in Gye Yongmuk's late 1946 work) or "Japanese property" (*irin-ui jaesan*) had been completely left behind. "Japanese" had become "enemy." *Jeoksan*, then, came to assume multiple and lasting connotations in the late 1940s, including its figuring of the colonial past itself as illegitimate (and illegal), as well as a reconfiguration of the relation with the former metropole (the former Japanese empire) in the post-imperial present.

This post-1945 movement from "Japanese property" to "enemy property" carries to yet another term, one much less well known: *yeoksan* (traitor's property). This term, never formally encoded in law, emerged during the Korean War and referred to certain homes owned or occupied by families thought to have collaborated during periods of DPRK occupation of southern territory (particularly Seoul from late June through late September, 1950). The traitorous, like the Japanese, had no right to title. Used on occasion to evict entire families from their homes, the notion of *yeoksan* sought to define a future that rendered the communist as at once traitor and enemy. The Japanese were gone, their remains present only in *jeoksan*, markers of their illegal occupation. The traitorous had made their communist inclinations visible; given the opportunity, this latency would rise to the surface. The traitorous could be anywhere.

This article sketches a property trail, the movement from former Japanese property/enemy property to traitor's property. Two 1946 texts by Chae Mansik—"Mister Pang" (Miseuteo Bang) in conversation with "Tale of a Rice Paddy" (Non iyagi)—underscore the importance of the calendar year 1946 as a literary point of departure. *In the Time of Solitude* (Jeongjeok ilsun, 1955), Choe Jeonghui's post-armistice reflection on wartime, DPRK-occupied Seoul, will serve as a destination. To follow the property trail from *jeoksan* to *yeoksan* is to address the dispensation/appropriation of property rights in a particular sense, conferral and/or denial of the ability to reside in

a given home under military occupation.

"Mister Pang" and *In the Time of Solitude* are revelatory works. They ask for a reading that is at once a viewing. They place habitation/residence on display, and in doing so locate in the home a mise-en-scène that reveals history-in-motion, a place that troubles definition given the fold of colonialism into military occupation, division, and war. For both Chae Mansik and Choe Jeonghui, liberation (*haebang*) becomes something other than a discrete event, a historical marker that distinguishes past from present. Both seek to write history in another form, the story of what remains, of residence and its attendant claims, feelings, attitudes, suspicions, and desires. The home in which one finds oneself reveals its own history of the present.

Template and Temporality

The US quickly assumed a managerial role in the southern zone of the Korean Peninsula that would fall in line with the building of a new East Asian order. Central to this project was repatriation, the determination that Japanese would exit the US occupation zone, return to Japan, and Koreans, those willing, would return to Korea, largely from Manchuria (although many would remain) and the Japanese home islands. USAMGIK management of this operation was at once tactical (involving the disarmament and relocation of the Japanese Imperial Army) and strategic in its larger reordering of civilian populations. USAMGIK considered this operation a success. Working with US Army tactical units and civilian relief agencies, the Displaced Persons Division "repatriated most of the Japanese to Japan [700,000 estimated in Korea] and brought back to Korea nearly 1,000,000 Koreans in three and one-half months" (Gane 1946, 1).

Accompanying this operation in late 1945 was property transfer, also central to the new order. The end of Japanese colonial rule in Korea had given rise to a pressing question: Who would assume ownership of Japanese assets (state-owned and private), estimated to comprise 80–85 percent of the former colony's wealth? Questions (and court cases) surrounding

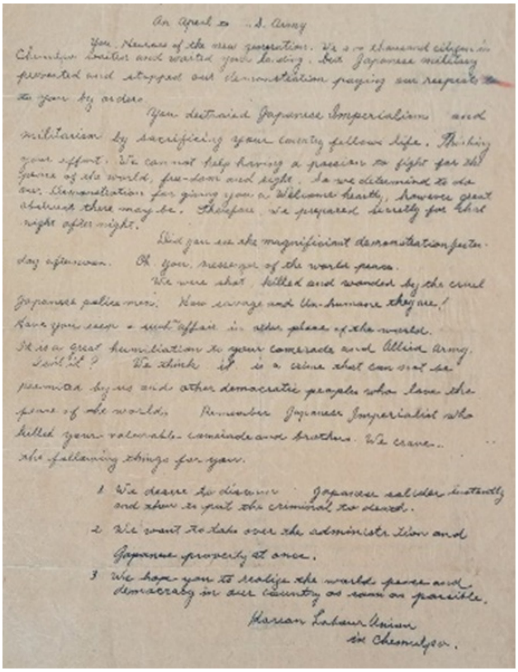
the distribution and possession of what to this day is known in the ROK as "enemy property" would last for decades.

A property custodian would oversee the vesting and transfer operation, with most properties leased (not sold) to Koreans during the Occupation. Exception was made for farmland formerly owned by the Oriental Development Company (ODC). USAMGIK formed the New Korea Company in February 1946 in order to administer ODC assets. The sale of former ODC properties took place in 1948 under the auspices of the successor to the New Korea Company, the National Land Administration. This exemplary sale was meant to serve as the template for the dispensation of Japanese properties under the ROK, as well as for broader land reform.[5] As the *Final Report and History of the New Korea Company* indicates, "the land sale program now underway by the National Land Administration… may well become the model for land reform schemes for all the Asiatic countries" (Mitchell 1948, 2). USAMGIK did not lose sight of the bigger picture.

Legal preparations for property transfer in the ROK began in early 1949 and stretched through the first half of 1950. Initial ROK sale of properties commenced on June 22, 1950. While this sale was quickly interrupted by the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25, 1950, it would recommence in 1951 and continue through the late 1950s. Those who had obtained leases of former Japanese property under USAMGIK were given primacy of purchase under ROK dispensation, which meant that USAMGIK actions and procedures—beyond the sale of ODC assets as a template for broader land reform in the ROK—retained relevance for property transfer in the 1950s.

The story of vesting former Japanese property (tangible and intangible) is inseparable from the USAMGIK management of the movement of peoples in and out of the Korean Peninsula, the reordering of empire into nation-state, the movement away from the category of imperial subject (*sinmin*) to nationalized identities ('Korean' or *hangugin* in the case of those would reside in the ROK). As noted above, USAMGIK took full control of all Japanese property in early December, the month it declared

5. See I. Kim (2016).


An appeal to [illegible] Army

You, Heroes of the new generation. We [illegible] thousand citizen in Chemulpo [illegible] and waited your landing. But Japanese military prevented and stopped our demonstration paying our respects to you by order.

You destroied Japanese Imperialism and militarism by sacrificing your country fellows life. Thinking your effort. We can not help having a passion to fight for the peace of the world, freedom and right. So we determined to do our demonstration for giving you a Welcome heartly, however great obstruct there may be. Therefore we prepared secretly for that night after night.

Did you see the magnificient demonstration yesterday afternoon. Oh you, messenger of the world peace.

We were shot, killed and wounded by the cruel Japanese police-men. How savage and Un-humane they are! Have you seen a such affair in other place of the world. It is a great humiliation to your comerade and Allied Army. Isn't it? We think it is a crime that can not be permitted by us and other democratic peoples who love the peace of the world. Remember Japanese Imperialist who killed your valuable comrade and brothers. We crave the fallowing things for you.

1 We desire to disarm Japanese solider instantly and them to put the criminal to dead.
2 We want to take over the administration and Japanese property at once.
3 We hope you to realize the world peace and democracy in our country as soon as possible.

Korean Labour Union
in Chemulpo.

Figure 3. Handwritten letter addressed to "US Army," signed "Korean Labour Union in Chemulpo," no date (likely September 8–10, 1945)

Source: Wilbur John Whitsell Scrapbook.

the repatriation effort a success. USAMGIK's reordering of populations coincided with its dispensation of property. As manager of property and people, USAMGIK was mediating the meaning of liberation itself. Indeed, the arrival of the first divisions of US XXIV Corps at Incheon on September 8, 1945 was met with a handwritten letter (written in English and signed 'Korean Labour Union in Chemulpo'), containing this appeal: "We want to take over the administration and Japanese property at once."[6] Such a desire defines decolonization as the commencement of control over the former colonizer's possessions.

USAMGIK would seek legitimacy in multiple ways, in a broad sense as the victor in war and therefore the arbiter of enemy territory. Most

6. Handwritten letter addressed to "US Army," signed "Korean Labour Union in Chemulpo," no date (likely September 8–10, 1945), Wilbur John Whitsell Scrapbook, unpublished, held by the Whitsell family.

important, perhaps, was USAMGIK's emerging articulation of its very existence as interim. The New Korea Company's sale of former ODC property to small landowners in early 1948 took place as this interim status was confirmed. A separate election in the US occupation zone would establish a new nation-state, the ROK. The New Korea Company was to provide a template central to the formation of this new Korean state. It is, in fact, the claim to interim administration of enemy territory—which includes the reordering of populations within much of the former Japanese empire and the accompanying dispensation of former Japanese assets—that promotes the assumption of a military government as change-agent, revolutionary in its own way.[7] The interim privileges the template as that which will instantiate itself, over time, as universality. As it moved forward with repatriation, the vesting of Japanese property and the formation of the New Korea Company, USAMGIK would aspire to dissolve itself into the embodiment of a future for Korea and "all the Asiatic countries."

History of the Present, History of the Future

"Han Saengwon straightened up, overcome with a sense of triumph when he heard that the Japanese (*irin*) had been chased out, nothing but the bundles on their backs, their land and everything else they'd owned left

7. Such change is tempered on the legal register by accommodations to existing Japanese civil code and colonial practices. See, for example, the "Background note" to the March 14, 1946 legal opinion on providing rent-free homes to government officials: "It was the Japanese practice in Korea…A 'Free house" was part of the consideration for services, and there was nothing irregular or illegal about it" (Department of Justice of Korea 1948, 1:6). See also the May 26, 1946 legal opinion responding to "criticism…in the local press" that members of the same family had attained leases on four individual homes. "From a purely legal standpoint," the opinion indicates, "the execution of leases to separate individuals does not constitute the execution of more than one lease to one person…" Still, the Property Custodian is given discretionary authority, insofar as the Japanese Civil Code (Article 749) indicates that "'Members of a house may not fix their places of residence against the will of the head of house." That is, "the Property Custodian may desire to bear in mind the nature of the Oriental family…" (Department of Justice, United States Military Government in Korea 1948, 1:93).

behind" (Chae 1946b, 105). Thus begins Chae Mansik's "Tale of a Rice Paddy" (Non iyagi, 1946). What constitutes a Japanese person is departure and dispossession, the two components central to the late 1945 USAMGIK project of repatriation. Han Saengwon embodies his elation, which alters his very posture in the world. We shortly learn more about his attitude toward liberation from Japanese rule: "He didn't at all feel this kind of joy on August 15, the day of Korea's independence. It didn't even occur to him to lift his voice in celebration then, but he now found a shout of 'hurrah!' spontaneously issuing forth from his lips" (Chae 1946b, 105–106). Chae's story is of land, of the relation to land as possession.

Typical of other characters satirically portrayed in Chae Mansik's work, the self-interested Han Saengwon is concerned solely with his own history of possession and dispossession. What little land he had left was sold under straitened circumstances to a Japanese investor (Yoshikawa), and for decades Han lived in anticipation of the day he would get it back. That emancipatory time has arrived, or so he thinks. He finds out that Yoshikawa's Korean property manager has found a buyer, who's paid cash for the property. The narrator intervenes to offer historical context: "Everything was topsy-turvy right after August 15. The old laws went out the window, and those quick on their feet, the ones with capital, cut deals with the Korean managers of the Japanese farms and companies. This happened all the time, the buying up of Japanese properties (*irin-ui jaesan*) before any new ordinances came into effect" (Chae 1946b, 120). This leads to an exchange between Han Saengwon and the village head that takes place in the text's final section. We're told that some time has passed and there's a rumor that "Japanese properties are now to be sold to Koreans." Han is aghast when the village head tells him it's the *nara* (often 'country' but here, 'state') that has assumed the position of seller. Their conversation carries the text toward its close:

> "What is it that this so-called *nara* has ever done for anyone? What gives it the right to gobble up the land left by the Japanese and sell it, my land? That's what we're supposed to call a *nara*?"
> "It's only natural that Japanese property becomes the property of the Joseon *nara*."

"Natural?"
"Absolutely." (Chae 1946b, 121)

Han Saengwon will be given the last word. "Tale of a Rice Paddy" ends with a mutter to himself: "Yeah, when they were all hollering about independence, I did the right thing to keep my mouth shut, stay away from that 'hurrah' stuff" (Chae 1946b, 121). As is often the case, Chae's work (or a character within it) says one thing to mean another—a convenient mode for a colonial-period writer well-versed in the art of navigating a strict censorship regime. It is easy to lose sight of the title in the text's satirical, almost cartoonist, sketch of Han Saengwon. The story, though, is about land. And this story, as is clear in the narrator's interventions, offers a history told as a story, a history that listens to what people are saying, to rumors—to what will not enter official documents. This is a history that presents conversations, self-asides as pointing to some form of truth, if only in part. Chae's work describes the arrogation of the right to set the template for the sale of Japanese property and places it at the center of a circle around which post-August 15, 1945 history revolves.

To be sure, Han Saengwon reveals a self-interestedness that begs for generalization.[8] But Chae's work does not quite rest with ethical critique of those who consider August 15, 1945 less as national *haebang* than as opportunity for a land-grab. Perhaps a history of dispossession does indeed require some form of reparation? Is it possible that Han, object of satirical critique, makes a valid point because he is allowed to, as one whose mutterings are to be discounted? All those eyes on the event itself, the ears that listen to the shouts of celebration, the feelings that hold the event dear—does this coalescence obfuscate and thus call for another form of historical truth, one best told in a tale (*iyagi*)? Chae's work plays on the ambiguity of *nara*, used in the text as a blanket term to refer to what is portrayed as a wildly corrupt late Joseon dynasty, Japanese rule, post-1945 "Joseon *nara*"

8. For Yim Sehwa, Han Saengwon serves as representative of the rural population, "farmers whose life of forced labor and requisitions under an oppressive legal apparatus…leads to a practicable ethics, an apprehension of liberation solely in economic terms" (Yim 2023, 88).

(but never USAMGIK). These three entities exist in a certain continuity (Han Saengwon feels he has suffered at the hands of each). "Tale of a Rice Paddy," then, presents what it never names—a history of the USAMGIK present, its assumption of control over Japanese property, the rules it has established for dispensation, the profit that will ensue from all that surrounds these rules. The task of "Tale of a Rice Paddy" is to render something visible without naming it: USAMGIK is the state authority, the *nara*, in 1946.

"Tale of a Rice Paddy," in fact, is in close conversation with Chae's earlier "Mister Pang" (Miseoteo Bang, February 16, 1946), a work that provides a more well-known character study, that of the similarly self-interested Pang Sambok.[9] Standing between these two texts is the February 21, 1946 USAMGIK ordinance establishing the New Korea Company, as well as the March 6, 1946 official announcement of land reform in the Soviet-occupied northern zone.[10] These texts bookend a historical moment marked by extensive codifications and discussions of land reform in both north and south, including the increasing circulation of the term "enemy property" in the latter. Both of Chae's works coincide in their play on what can be said/shown and what seems to be either best left unsaid or given elliptical mention (and thus underscored all the more powerfully). "Mister Pang" never makes use of the terms "Japanese property" or "enemy property." But we learn fairly late in the text that this is what Chae has placed on display without saying so the entire time.

"Mister Pang" begins with a "host" (*juin*) entertaining a visitor. The former is Mister Pang himself, the latter Squire Paek. The tables have turned. Paek's visit is for the purpose of currying favor with a former farmhand and illiterate wanderer, the lowest of the low in their home village. How did these two find their way here, to a meet-up in late-1945 Seoul? The narrator will quickly embark upon what appears as an aside but, in fact, comprises much of the text. This lengthy explanation of Mister Pang's history induces a forgetfulness of the present location in which the narration occurs, the

9. "Tale of a Rice Paddy" has the date April 18, 1946 on its final page, indicating an unexplained gap between submission of the story and actual publication in October 1946.
10. For land reform under Soviet occupation, see G. Kim (2005, 127–142).

home itself in which these two convene.

Eschewing life as a tenant farmer, Mister Pang left his wife and children and wandered off into the empire, the Japanese home islands, as well as Shanghai. He'd come back to Korea, made his way up to Seoul, picking up some English while working at a POW camp. Sensing an opportunity upon the Japanese surrender, he buys a secondhand suit and roams the city streets, eventually meeting a US lieutenant. He'll become his interpreter and go-between. The result: "a dazzling metamorphosis" (Chae [1946] 2013, 402). As for Squire Paek, his family's done well in the empire, with one son receiving an order of merit and another becoming a village headman in Manchuria. He curses "Independence or whatever they call it" and wonders "Where had those good old days gone?" (Chae [1946] 2013, 400). His central worry is to secure as much of his property as possible.

This linear history eventually finds its way back to the two men in the present. Only now does the narrator provide a description of the place, "the home of a high-ranking banker prior to August 15" (Chae 1946a, 263). Mister Pang, we're told, moved in three days after meeting Lt. S. The layout: "A luxurious two-story house, conceived as an equal combination of Japanese and Western styles. The garden was beautiful, trees and flowers in full autumnal color, fish fluttering about in a lotus pond" (Chae 1946a, 263). Linear past folds into a spatial present. The events of the previous fall—the advent of USAMGIK, the departure of the Japanese, the scramble by many to map their way through this shift in power and demographics—crystalize *in situ*. The description of the home, though, is less symbolic than revelatory, portrait of a mise-en-scène withheld from view. What is it Chae's readers are now asked to see? More information is needed.

Mister Pang's wife interrupts the conversation, bustling upstairs with the latest envelope stuffed with cash. But not enough for Mr. Pang: "I'll show this jerk. Buying up a dispensation (*bulha*) for a hundred thousand and selling it for a million. Doesn't he know that a single word from me to an MP and he's finished?" (Chae 1946a, 264). The aesthetics of outward appearance moves to an emptied-out interior (Mister Pang hasn't bothered with interior decorations), a sparse stage where influence-peddling makes or breaks futures.

"Mister Pang" is, in fact, something of a stage play that invites its audience to witness what takes place behind closed doors. This backroom conversation itself is the reveal. It is here, on this stage, that the sale of a dispensation (the right to occupy and/or control former Japanese property, including smaller-scale companies) appears. The belated description of the home asks for a heightened appreciation of its architecture in a broader sense, the place of this colonial structure under post-1945 military occupation.

"Mr. Pang" carries a subtitle on its first page, in diminished font: "Portrait of a Goblin in Daylight 1." That which belongs to the night makes an untoward appearance in the day (and more works are to follow). The story of Pang Sambok, his transformation into Mister Pang is something of a prognostication, a prescient portrait. The reveal takes place in a moment the text waxes descriptive, presents the image of the home, stages two characters engaged in conversation in a second-floor room, interrupted by a wifely figure bearing an envelope. This image is of the here and now, history-in-the-making—a setting in which the dispensation of colonial remains portends a future.

"Mister Pang" offers a take less on the rise of a new class than a collusion and negotiation between two existing classes (with attendant modalities) that sought to survive and profit under Japanese colonial rule, the comprador elite aristocracy and the entrepreneurial, risk-taking element among the lower rungs of society who wandered the empire—the scrappy ones out for their own interests. The notion of trusteeship embodied in USAMGIK's vesting of all Japanese property (public and private) becomes, in "Mr. Pang," something else, a circulation of influence and interests, an exchange of favors for property. It is no accident that Mister Pang acquired his present domicile a mere 72 hours after meeting Lt. S.

"Mr. Pang" will close with a disastrous and sudden fall from grace. Mr. Pang spits a mouthful of water out of the window that just happens to fall on Lt. S, who's come to see him. He scurries down to explain, only to be met with an "uppercut" (transliterated in English, in the original) from Lt. S. We are left with a freeze frame, a still. That the blow is based on a misunderstanding is no matter—it had always stood in reserve, at the ready. No explanation given as to further consequences. The former home of the

bank manager, the room in which Mister Pang and Squire Paek converse, the closing uppercut that opens up consideration of the on-the-ground workings of dispensation (the invisible hand made visible)—all that belongs to the night appears in the day. "Mister Pang" is a revelatory text by way of its own, careful dispensation of images, its assemblage of an untoward history in the making.

What, then, of the event? It lies not in a performative naming of August 15, 1945 as *haebang*. Nor does it rest in simple continuity or replacement of one colonial power by another. "Mister Pang" extends itself to a play of darkness and light, to that which is out of kilter, to the revelation of the desires and interests flowing through the implementation of a property management system, a custodianship that will leave an imprint in backroom conversations and exchanges, in the favors it bestows and takes away, in the claim it makes on the future.

Gye Yongmuk's "Counting Stars," then, closes the calendar year 1946 with an inflection of Chae Mansik's take on self-interest, opportunism as central to the post August 15 landscape. Gye's ethical critique is more explicit, moving from narrator to protagonist, the young man's recoil from what amounts to a battle zone. The young man does not take a revolutionary position (the text emphasizes that things are little better up north). The question of ethics extends to the foreclosure of a future, the young man and his mother's recognition that there is no place for them on the Korean Peninsula—neither in the north, nor in the south. This sense of a broader state of the unhoused rests upon a general call for community based on reciprocity, mutuality, care. Gye's work folds this exhortation into the reality of the dispensation of Japanese property, the battle with the *procedures* that give the right to occupy.

The term *jeoksan* (enemy property) is not to be found in these three 1946 short stories. This term, while increasingly popular, had yet to achieve the hegemony it would as the ROK assumed control of former Japanese properties in late 1948 and set in motion the legal procedures for sale. Inheriting guardianship from USAMGIK, the ROK's sale of these properties as *jeoksan* would help to place the newly formed state as decolonizing agent, rectifying the illegality of all Japanese ownership. Private and public

ownership coalesce here, both subsumed under the name "enemy." The very currency of *jeoksan* is conclusive—the enemy has no moral or legal right to property. In this sense, the term *jeoksan* inheres a sense of forfeiture and reparation that would carry over to a new term circulating during the Korean War, *yeoksan* (traitor's property). Those deemed traitorous (*yonggong*, procommunist) are the enemy, and as such they have no right to title. I turn now to the story of one of these traitorous homes, which also happens to be a story of reciprocity and possessiveness in a battle zone (this time *with* the sounds of war).

Timelessness as History

Installment six of the *Kyunghyang Shinmun*'s weekly column "Women Writers (*yeoryu*)—My Representative Work" (June 5, 1971) featured Choe Jeonghui and her pick of the best from over one hundred short stories and four novels: *In the Time of Solitude* (Jeongjeok ilsun 靜寂一瞬, 1955). This

한국이란 상황하에서 모성애
그린「정적일순」을 최정희여
사는 대표작으로 들고있다。

Figure 4. Choe Jeonghui

Source: *Kyunghyang Shinmun* (June 5, 1971).

novella caused a "sensation in its expression of a Korean…motherly love so deep it…could be contained neither by political ideology nor the terror of war."[11] The article also tells us that this work, which Choe indicates took a year to conceptualize and three to write, was nominated for the Asia Foundation's Free Asia Literature Prize but was ahead of its time, denied this honor by several members the Awards Committee due to its purported "procommunist smell" (*yonggongjeogin naemsae*). This 1971 reflection, then, mediates the accusation of procommunism via appeal to a motherly love expressed as *Korean*, a coupling repeated in the article's tethering of the category of "woman writer" to particular expression of the *Korean situation*.[12] Such a mediation reflects a move within *In the Time of Solitude*—the appropriation of motherly affect to render ideological polarization ridiculous, even childish.

While not mentioned explicitly in this 1971 article, a number of scholars have viewed the entirety of Choe's post-1945 work as an attempt to atone for her personal history under colonial rule, as well as in the immediate postliberation and wartime scene.[13] For this strand of scholarship, Choe's post-1945 literary project amounts to a self-vindication in the face of accusations of collaboration, pro-Japanese and leftist.[14] I frame Choe's

11. Such an assessment continues to center much of the scholarship on Choe Jeonghui's mid-1950s work generally. Eom Miok considers Choe's portrayal of wartime mothers' care for family on the home front as a "mobilization" that echoes her figuring of wartime motherhood in the late Japanese colonial period (Eom 2010, 284–285). Bak Subin, however, emphasizes the ways in which Choe's late colonial texts gesture toward the notion of a "motherhood devoted to war mobilization" while, in fact, offering a "true sense of women's liberation" (Bak 2020, 162).
12. *Kyunghyang Shinmun* (June 5, 1971).
13. Choe Jeonghui lectured and wrote on behalf of the Japanese mobilization effort during the Asia-Pacific War, served as an embedded writer (*jonggun jakga*) with the ROK Air Force in the Korean War, and was the leader of the ROK cultural support group sent to Vietnam in 1967.
14. Lee Byung Soon, for example, divides Choe Jeonghui's post-1945 work into two strands. The first occurs in an autobiographical mode that seeks exculpation from her past as "collaborator-leftist-traitor: she is a victim, a "weak woman" forced to make choices in circumstances beyond her control. The second takes place after she becomes a wartime embedded writer: she now "increasingly moves away…from portrayals of a suffering

Solitude less in relation to Choe's personal history than in conversation with the possibility referenced in the *Kyunghyang Shinmun*'s feature: How might Choe's work give rise to charges not of self-vindication but of procommunism itself? The *Kyunghyang Shinmun* recovers motherly love as preferred site of mediation, beyond all question. *Solitude*, though, stakes a claim about motherly care, worry, love that looks askance at ownership, possessions, possessiveness. It is here, in this very specific gesture, that the mediation between political ideology and the terror of war proceeds. *Solitude* is another story about a home.

Solitude was first published in *Hyeondae munhak* in two installments (September and October, 1955), each prominently placed as lead to the journal's fiction section. Told from the perspective of an "old woman" (*nopa*), the narrative frequently moves back and forth in stream of consciousness, the old woman's recollections interfused with her thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the present, alone under the second communist occupation of Seoul in early January 1951. Such an interweaving interiorizes her life, produces a depth to her wartime loneliness, longings, anxieties, and fears.

Married to a wealthy landlord who commits suicide after losing everything following the redistribution of property under the Soviet occupation, the old woman came south with her two sons (a daughter was already residing in Seoul) in 1948. The oldest achieves rapid success (in large part due to connections in the construction business) and proceeds to build a large two-story western-style house for the family. He manages to escape capture by the communists during their first occupation of Seoul in the summer of 1950 by hiding out in a make-shift bunker The old woman's daughter, however, leaves to the north, following her husband, a member of the Communist Party. Her younger son was forcibly conscripted and taken north by the communists. As the North Korean People's Liberation Army (NKPLA) advances on Seoul for the second time, her eldest son

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object to an increasingly fervent anticommunism that calls for active participation in the war as subject" (Lee 2009, 57). For a more recent discussion of Choe Jeonghui's appeal to womanhood (*yeoseongseong*) as means to "conjure up an apolitical, non-ideological subject position" both under colonial rule and as a "remainer," see Yoo (2021, 287).

urges her to flee with him to Busan, but the old woman refuses, insisting she must remain in case her two other children somehow find their way south. What follows, in the description of the old woman's solitude, is arguably the most sustained, multilayered portrait of a wartime mother in the 1950s, something of a template for later figurations of mothering as a non-ideological, reconciliatory site, prominent among them Yun Heung-gil's canonical *Rainy Season* (Jangma, 1973), published two years after Choe Jeonghui's self-selection of *Solitude* as her representative work.

Solitude is less interested in the old woman's status as refugee from the north than in her dislocation in place, her life as a wartime "remainer" (*jallyupa*) who stays behind in Seoul, in a home she profoundly dislikes. Hers is a story of loss, of imaging one's children in others' faces, of being left with nothing but material objects, photographs, memory images. We watch as the old woman moves foodstuffs and other items around the house. Back and forth she goes, looking for places to hide what is necessary for survival from looters, scavengers she fears will make their way inside. The home becomes hers, to the extent she makes motherly use of it. While her initial concern is solely for her family, she will extend her maternal labor (physical and affective) to others as the story proceeds.

She hears what seems to be the sounds of soldiers marching in and quickly flashes back to the end of NKPLA occupation and the return of ROK troops to Seoul on September 28, 1950: "They've come. They're here. Just like last time. Just the same" (Choe 1955, 69). She makes her way down the hill to the village, asking one of the soldiers marching by if the president has also come back. But these soldiers are from the north: "Gone crazy, old woman?...We've forced those bastards out. And you're still waiting?" Her immediate thoughts are of her younger son and daughter: "From the north? They say it's beyond words, all the bombing (*pokgyeok*) up north, but look at all of these people, alive. My kids might be, too" (Choe 1955, 70–71). Such talk is of survivability. "They say it's beyond words, all the bombing up north"—the old woman will mutter this phrase time and again in *Solitude*.[15] The refrain is followed by differing expressions, on one occasion

15. See, for example, Choe (1955, 56, 57, 62, 71, 93).

a prayer for the safety of her daughter and her family. If worry projects itself outward, beyond the home in which the old woman resides, the silent sound of bombing travels through walls, inhabits the old woman's stream of consciousness, made available to the text's readers, who listen in silence not to the sounds of destruction but to the sounds of a bombing beyond words.

The NKPLA commandeers the old woman's home as a field hospital. But she will not view them as the enemy, even as they associate her with the bourgeoisie and indicate an awareness of her eldest son's flight to Busan. As NKPLA deaths mount, "She felt in her heart (*maeum*) that it might be best if she made some of the rice she had hidden available to them. She was thinking of her youngest son, of the possibility that somewhere he was suffering the same circumstances" (Choe 1955, 92). She also grows close to a partisan, Jeong Jahye. The latter quickly calls her "mother," and for her part the old woman considers her a daughter. When Jeong heads back to the hills to continue the struggle, the old woman makes a rucksack for her, filling it with creams and ointments: "The old woman forgets that Jeong was on the side of the communist party she hated so much. In her heart, she just felt like she were seeing off her daughter" (Choe 1955, 82). The NKPLA withdraws and the ROK Youth League assumes control over the area. The old woman is an immediate target of suspicion, accused of collaboration. They know of her communist son-in-law, her making of rucksacks for the communist soldiers. And they are aware that she was called "mother" by the communists (Choe 1955, 98–99). They designate the home she never liked in the first place a *yeoksan*, a traitor's property. Her questionable acts render her property forfeit. If *Solitude* is about motherly love, it is also a meditation on suspicion made manifest, realizing itself in the world through the objects it names, here the home.

As Yerim Kim points out, even as the term *yeoksan* was "marked by a degree of ambiguity, it was still a category, a fusion of the economic and ideological." *Yeoksan* was not itself given a legal definition but was "determined structurally, 'produced' by ordinances referring to *yeoksan* when prohibiting illegal residence in or assumption of ownership of properties designated as such" (Y. Kim 2021, 17). These ordinances targeted those seeking to profit from accusations, rumors of collaboration. *Yeoksan* achieves

legal designation negatively, as a form of vigilante justice. In practice, though, such a designation worked to concretize suspicion, to punish not merely by extra-legal evictions but by funneling rumor into clear demarcation and action. This designation reveals, makes latent inclinations manifest. Those whose properties have been deemed *yeoksan* occupy a new space, that of an enemy within, the one who has no right to title. *Yeoksan*, then, appeals to the notion of reparation, payment for a crime against a community.

We have watched the old woman inhabit this Western-style *yeoksan* house, built by her son, testimony of his accomplishments. The old woman is no revolutionary, but she never felt comfortable in this home and lived a life utterly uninterested in profit-taking, gaining wealth. She lives in a world of care for others, not exchange. She hoards with a purpose—she has no desire to accumulate. Her task in *Solitude* is not only to contest the suspicion attached to the blanket label of "remainer," but to demonstrate the impropriety of her own refugee family's trajectory, the one that led to quick financial success and a posh home.

The old woman's stream of consciousness, the depth of her past and present feelings and experiences, renders attempts by the opposing camps to categorize her actions along ideological lines and guilt by association awkward, one-dimensional, plays of the surface.[16] Does the old woman transcend history in her mothering? To be sure, her position is at once defamiliarizing and redemptive, a site from which motherly care will extend both to communists (whose rigid adherence to dogma has led to self-alienation) and to the members of the nationalist Youth League, who are quick to shroud her in suspicion as a communist sympathizer.[17] While this move could, in fact, could open itself to charges of *yonggong* or procommunism (as the 1971 *Kyunghyang Shinmun* article demonstrates), such a dual critique would, in fact, become a mainstay in ROK literary works addressing the Korean War and national division.

What appears as transhistorical, timeless motherly care introduces a

16. For guilt by association, see Kwon (2020).
17. For the old woman's "motherly love" as transcending war, ideology, death in *In the Time of Solitude*, see Jeong (2014, 50).

redemptive temporality. It is the old woman's stream of consciousness that centers her post-1945 experience of division, displacement, war. And who is to say that such a history is less valid than that of competing states and what are often called the *isms*? That she does not really distinguish between an ROK soldier (*gukgun*) and an NKPLA soldier (*inmingun*) opens her (and Choe's text itself) to suspicion. It is by way of this opening that she enters a history of the present and the possible, precisely via the demonstration (a showing, not a telling) of the isms themselves as groundless, mirroring forms of misrecognition, hopelessly ahistorical in their quick assignment of guilt and betrayal.

Solitude closes with the passing of the old woman. She falls drowsily upon the earth, thinking of her family, her marriage, her mother, of what she'd planted the past summer even in the midst of the chaos of war, the "blue bean flowers, white coffee flowers opening their leaves in blossom, mixed together affectionately like siblings" (Choe 1955, 104–105). She is something more than a casualty of a war she does not understand. Her passing blends death with life, humans with nature. Her death is transformative, a rejuvenation. Such a play of life and death turns upon a circularity, a vitalism, a relation to the earth and to time that is primary (and well beyond the confines of possessiveness).

Conclusion: Rehabilitations

Choe Jeonghui's short story "Maelstrom" (Soyongdori, 1955) tells the story of a questionable life of a mother and the immediate post-armistice breakdown of what remains of her family (she ignores her two children in favor of a dissipated life). This story of despair, depravity (highlighted by her sexual encounters) takes a turn as it come to a close. We learn that her husband never returned from the war (likely dead but details are scant). The censorious frame of a questionable life gives rise to a more sympathetic view. Her story is multilayered, more complex than we have been led to believe—her wartime and post-armistice life has been one of precarity and survivability.

We also learn in "Maelstrom" that the home in which the entire narrative takes place is at once a *jeoksan* and a *yeoksan*. We're given a hint that the mother has been forced to leverage every possible connection she has to secure and maintain residence in this *jeoksan/yeoksan* during a period that spans from military occupation, through war, into the post-armistice ROK. The designations *jeoksan* and *yeoksan* intertwine, coalesce. These two terms are not necessarily commensurable, overlapping, or existing in a temporal relation, the latter an iteration of the former. They swirl, cloud together. They occupy the same space. They speak to the maelstrom, to history as maelstrom, but provide no clear answers. They are markers of porosity, of the entrance into a living space of the questionable, the suspicious, of that which unsettles. They speak of a colonial past, the material remains of which (*jeoksan*) recall the former habitation of what has become the enemy. And they speak of becoming-enemy, present habitation in this space stamped with accusations of communist collaboration (*yeoksan*). Choe Jeonghui's invocation of a maelstrom, then, is perversely rehabilitative in its blending, mixing, its demonstration that the figuring of colonial *enemy* inhabits accusations of procommunist *traitor*. Rehabilitation, here, lies in a particular implication of the accuser, the one who designates. This is the one who secures the propriety of a liberation that must at once become anticommunist. Something is lost in this declaration of mutually informing demarcations, the former resting on a clear-cut temporal division (a post-liberation period), the other assuming a timeless opposition (anticommunist/procommunist).

Choe Jeonghui, then, joins contemporary writers such as Kim Tongni and Hwang Sunwon who would work to dismantle oppositional logic, to move beyond the communist/anticommunist dyad. Associated with "pure literature" (*sunsu munhak*), these writers often turned to sexuality, the sensory, the folkloric, the epiphanic to offer what they considered a deeper, more authentic mode of being in the world. Rather than simply oppose communism, they dispense with the communism/anticommunism binary. The "anti" (*pan*) becomes superficial. If such a literary trajectory could view itself as primal—and as a purity—it did so in relation to the ideological not simply as profane but as engaged in a play of surfaces, mirroring in

opposition. The procommunist, the anticommunist, the naming of one to prove you are the other—becomes little more than instrumentalist. To call the *pan* into question in this way is to engage in a particular form of mediation, an act of representation that attempts to place ideological polarization within the realm of the remediable. Oppositions will not hold in a relational ecosystem marked by interconnecting lines, naturalist forms, a criss-cross of interactions among humans, nature, things—all of which are to be found in the contemporary work of writers associated with pure literature, as well as with "new realist" artists (*sinsasilpa*) of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

To follow the literary property trail from the late 1940s emergence of the terms "Japanese/enemy property" to the wartime appearance of "traitor's property" is to arrive at a place where "property" (*san*) becomes something of an impropriety, itself traitorous. To be sure, such an implicit, and at times explicit, distancing from possessiveness intersects with the longstanding colonial and proletarian critique of what amounts to a "petty bourgeois mentality" (*sosimin geunseong*) or "petty bourgeois consciousness" (*sosimin uisik*). As we see in Choe Jeonghui's work, though, to dispense with an attachment to property (as well as with the attachment of accusatory designations to property) is to enter into the transformative possibility, a place where wartime and post-armistice survivability (often associated with scavenging and repurposing) posits a vitalism of use, circulation, interconnection that seeks to move beyond both self-interest (a survival of the fittest mode) and the call for proletarian revolution.

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