Images of America and Americans in Korean War Literature

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Abstract

This study aims to extract images of America and American soldiers out of Korean War Literature, and to search for and understand the persisting, underlying formulae or forms in these images. The results of this study may appear provocative: for over 50 years, Korean writers have failed to give any authentic voices to America as a nation or Americans as characters, mainly due to complex feelings originating from the combined psychology of superiority and oppression.

Keywords: Korean War Literature, image criticism, Bunji, *Namok*, *Taebaek sanmaek*

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A Warning against Positivist Image Criticism

If all that is asked of so-called "image criticism" is to look for the literary equivalents or, more blatantly, the evidence for sociohistorical facts, then this article is already doomed to failure. This must be said, not because I am in accord with most of the contemporary literary critics who have cast doubt on the once prevalent Lukacsian idea of reflection. By now, the old reading habits of aligning the content of the text alongside the reality "out there" are almost gone. Instead, recent literary critics are busy drawing out gaps or silences, discernible in the unconscious level of the text, which help "implode" the manifest content at the conscious level of the text. In other words, what really matters in the process of interpretation is not the correspondence of the text to reality, but the contradictions "within" the text. The accessibility to reality itself is wholly denied at the level of these structuralist or poststructuralist to critical practices. But I firmly believe all literary practices to be able to proceed without using old-fashioned terms like reflection, morality, or truth-value. Contemporary theories have expelled the concept of reality, repeatedly, from the region of literary interpretation. They have adopted the fashionable critical practices of looking only into the text; yet still, we find reality come back again and again through the rear door. Structuralists like Althusser succeed in parenthesizing the referent, i.e., reality, and draw our attention only to the relationship between the signifier and the signified; however, the hour is sure to come when the parentheses are thrown away and reflection then brought in.

Why then, it may be asked, should I express my anxiety about image criticism from the beginning? First, even though I believe in the necessity of the concept of reflection, I am also in agreement with many contemporary critics that have distrusted the blatant argument that an author can directly or mysteriously touch the heart of all external matters. In fact, postmodernist or new historical criticism postulates that there is no fixed entity called History, or that what has been called History is no more than another text that needs to be interpreted; hence, there is not one History but many histories.

Again, I do not "wholly" agree with the postmodern denial of History because its alleged possibility of multiple interpretations causes a tendency to deny an objective existence of History, that is, to deny the possibility of an integrated and interrelated reality with many facets that require diverse interpretations.

Nevertheless, one sure merit of the postmodern idea of history lies in that it blocks "the realist bias."[1] Though stigmatized by modernist theories, the positivist practices of offering a literary text as background for sociohistorical changes still survive mostly in the field of image criticism. In this approach, critics are tempted to take the easy route of comparing or contrasting a literary text with his or her historical knowledge. As mentioned earlier, problems with this kind of methodology do not come from the controversial concept of reflection; rather they spring from the easy error of narrowing down the register of the literary text to the most common linguistic modality: the indicative. Instead of limiting the text to the indicative, however, we can read it in many other modes, such as the imperative, subjunctive, conditional, etc. My defense of the reflection theory also rests on my belief that all these modalities may be compatible with the concept of reflection, and that the combination of the indicative mode with the other modes will help us escape the most dismal structuralist dilemma: the forced choice between reality and language. Only then might image criticism avoid the positivist error and be used for a meaningful approach. With this provision, I now go to the main subject of this article: the images of America and Americans in Korean literary texts about the Korean War.

The Case of "Bunji"

The short story "Bunji" (Dungland) offers a good starting point. The publication of the story was a scandal in the history of modern Korean literature. Nam Jeong-hyeon, who published the story in the

1. Moi (1985, 47).

March 1965 issue of the magazine *Hyeondae munhak* (Contemporary Literature), was arrested and jailed for violation of the notorious Anticommunist Law four months later. During the trial, a heated discussion took place between the prosecution and the defendants over the nature of the text. The charge against the author was that, by siding with North Korea's subversive strategies, the story intended to ignite anti-American sentiments. Literary critics and civil rights activists, however, argued that it only intended to indict the prevailing grim political situation through literary techniques like metaphoric pungency and satirical intensity.

The story is told as a letter written by Hong Man-su, a descendent of Hong Gil-dong, a legendary fictional rebel, to his already deceased mother. Several days after the 1945 liberation of Korea, on her way out with a hand-made star-spangled flag to welcome the U.S. forces, she is raped by GIs. Back home, she exposes her defiled body to her son and daughter, Man-su and Bun-i. Out of shame, she refuses to eat, and dies of paroxysm a few days later. After that incident, Man-su represses any memory of his mother, who reminds him only of sullied private parts. After he is discharged from military service, he suffers from poverty and encounters Bun-i, who has now become a kept woman of Sergeant Speed. Shocked at her change at first, jobless Man-su is forced to join her by trafficking in illicit U.S. camp duty-free goods.

While the story in itself does not stand out at first, it takes a bizarre twist following the mother's crazed behavior. Man-su's sister also ends up leading a miserable life, as Speed torments her sexually every night; the sergeant even compares Bun-i's "cunt" disparagingly with his wife's. Man-su's response to Speed's maltreatment of his sister is depicted as follows:

> Every time I heard my sister's faint sobs as she surrendered without protest to Sergeant Speed, I felt crushed, overwhelmed by inexplicable pain; and I wept with her uncontrollably like an idiot. I was restlessly consumed by one great mystery: the nether regions of Sergeant Speed's wife, the one back home he was constantly

> boasting about. How in the world was her hole constructed? What did it look like? Was it narrow or wide? What color was it? What was its position? Anyway, I knew that I had to solve the mystery once and for all if I wasn't to go crazy.

Reading the citation, contemporary readers will not fail to notice a certain phallocentric orientation, and without this understanding they may have a hard time understanding the development of the story. When Bitch, Sergeant Speed's wife, comes to visit her husband, Man-su takes the opportunity to resolve his doubt. He politely asks her to expose her lower body, explaining the cause of his request. Shocked, the woman starts to run off. But Man-su, afraid to lose this god-sent opportunity, catches her and strips her. Man-su's response is as follows:

> Suddenly, I felt a strange sense of relief, followed by extreme dread. I worried that Mrs. Bitch might go crazy, just like you [Man-su's mother]. But that fear was soon gone, and instead I was overwhelmed by the explosive feeling that I had embraced that so-called human paradise, America.

The incident motivated the Pentagon to mobilize an array of weapons including a nuclear bomb to wipe out the whole area where Man-su ensconced himself for no less than the universal cause of American dignity and human freedom. In the end of the story Man-su addresses his mother, saying that as a descendant of the legendary rebel, he is going to make a brilliant Korean flag of his torn shirts, cross over the sea upon the clouds, and plant it in the navels of the milk-skinned women lying on the great continent.

Looking back to the controversy over this story and its subsequent trial with the advantage of historical hindsight, the "Dungland" case provides interesting points for discussion. First, critics overlooked the story's blatant patriarchal bias, a point that would surely be mentioned if it were published nowadays. The countries involved are represented by women's bodies; the sullied body of Man-su's mother is equated with the disgrace of colonial oppression of South

Korea, while Bitch's voluptuous image signifies a materially affluent America as a human paradise. Therefore, to use currently fashionable terminology, the woman's body becomes "the Other," dominated and disgraced without regard to national identity, because colonial contradictions are solved by Man-su's patriarchical conquest of the bodies of American women. Why do critics of the 1960s hold their tongues about this matter? The fact that they were all male critics may answer this question, but this does not constitute the whole truth. A more complete explanation may be related to a second and more interesting point of controversy: the critics and lawyers defending the author tried to acquit him of the scandalous charge of anti-Americanism, which clearly permeates the text. Critics may have been reluctant to denounce the author for simple-minded anti-American sentiments, as well as his blatant phallocentrism, partly because he stood as defendant at a time when any anti-American voice was almost completely and forcibly silenced by the authorities. As Baek Nak-cheong (Paik Nak-Chung) stated, when deprived of the freedom of objection to America, Koreans cannot openly support America even when they feel they may favor it,[2] and vice versa.

I mention "Dungland" because it demonstrates the dismal status of America, Americans, and Americanism as a literary topic in Korea. In an article from 1983, Baek notes: From a standpoint of national literature, the first remarkable thing is that among the literary works that deal with the significance of America to Korea, there are few works that, by delving into this subject, can be considered great achievements of national literature."[3] Baek's message may be applied even today with no great change. Surprisingly indeed, considering the significance of their relationship with Korea, America and Americans have rarely been treated as literary subjects. Worse, the images of Americans, especially GIs, are in general simplified, fragmentary, and superficial, even in contemporary literature. Following Raymond Williams' argument that imaginative literature is a kind of privileged

2. Baek (1985, 251).
3. Baek (1985, 244).

place where the lived, felt, and also social "structure of feeling" can be articulated as it is in process,[4] the scanty embodiment of Americans in Korean fiction may indicate that the two nations have approached each other for more than a century only for the purpose of national interests or, worse, from the relationship of dominance and subjection. In light of the fact that endeavors are lacking on both sides to think deeply about and further extend mutual relations, it is not surprising that Korean sentiments toward America have changed from perceiving it as its old image of a beneficent country or blood alliance to the more recent image of a merciless, imperialist country.

The Split Image of America and Americans

Apart from its weak characterization, equally noticeable is that images of America do not match with those of Americans in Korean literature. In Korea, America has long signified such positive concepts as democracy, material affluence, and advanced technology. Korea has long looked up to America as a country of spiritual and material plenitude, the home of Christianity, Harvard University, and the spirit of the frontier.

The privileged place America occupies in the Korean imagination may have been strengthened by Korea's peculiar historical course that distinguishes it from other third-world nations. Korea was not colonized by Western imperial forces, but by surrogate imperialist Japan, which had no overwhelming superiority over colonized Korea in terms of either political liberty or cultural autonomy.[5] Instead of resisting the advanced Western countries and branding them imperialist, this peculiar history presented them as models to be emulated in almost every field by Koreans in their desire to gain independent

4. Williams (1977, 133).
5. This, in part, explains the historical rarity of a colonizer investing considerable resources in the colonized country, for example, the laying down of a cross-country railroad system and development of heavy-chemical factories in Korea, which justified Japan's control of a country similar in culture and history to itself.

status. Of the Western countries, America stood out as a role model. This was partly due to the impact of American films, and mostly to Christian missionaries who constituted the prominent vanguard of foreigners in Korea, who were dispatched in the early phase of contact between Korean and the West. Therefore, rather than adhering to their own national traditions, many Koreans under Japanese colonial rule urgently wished to imbibe Western scientific knowledge and imitate sociopolitical and cultural institutions in order to outpace Japan and obtain independence through an earlier attainment of modernity. These attempts were suppressed around the mid-1930s, when Japan's relationship with the United States began to deteriorate. After Korea's liberation, the favorable image of the U.S. was enhanced into one of a beneficent nation, partly as a result of internal revolt against Japanese suppression. This positive image of America was increasingly reinforced when the left-leaning writers critical of America fled to the North, followed by the Korean War and the Cold War era.

The postcolonial image of the U.S. as an imperialist power is no more than two decades old in Korea. The postcolonial understanding of the U.S. as the occupier and supporter of developmental dictatorship began to spread rapidly among students since the U.S. was alleged to have sided with Chun Doo-hwan in the Gwangju People's Uprising of 1980. Since then, anti-American sentiments disseminated across the country, and some progressive intellectuals have tended to ascribe all the agonies the Korean nation has suffered to American interference in its domestic affairs. Nevertheless, generally speaking, the image of America as imperialist is still relatively weak, though recent U.S. unilateral diplomatic policies based on overwhelming military power have influenced many Koreans, mostly young and progressive, in their attitude to the U.S. That is, the image of America as an advanced and democratic country is still dominant even in the minds of progressive Koreans critical of American foreign policies.

The image of the nation-state is quite abstract, hard to delineate, and is more often than not defined by official statements or Hollywood films. Franco Moretti says:

> A modern reality, the nation-state—and a curiously elusive one. Because human beings can directly grasp most of their habitats: they can embrace their village, or valley, with a single glance; the same with the court, or the city (especially early on, when cities are small and have walls); or even the universe—a starry sky, after all, is not a bad image of it. But the nation-state? "Where" is it? What does it look like? How can one *see* it? (author's italics)[6]

Our conception of a nation-state is a vague collection of the abstract, artificially made, and distant, inaccessible images. If we move to images of Americans, we are confronted with real people in everyday life, and their images embodied in Korean literary text become very different. Here again, readers must be warned against limiting textual modalities merely to the indicative. That is, the literary reproduction of reality does not directly reflect the everyday reality we see around us.

The split between the image of America as a nation-state and that of Americans as real persons hardly emerges even to the textual surface during the 1950s and 1960s. There are several reasons for this: the scarcity of contact with Americans before the Korean liberation and Korean War, Korea's aspiration to create an independent, democratic, affluent, and unified nation-state like the United States, and above all, the tension between South and North Korea during the Cold War era. Therefore, it is no accident that this split is captured, though momentarily, by a very private and relatively repression-free text—Kim Seong-chil's diary, written before and during the Korean War, later to be published with the title of *Yeoksa ap-eseo* (Facing History).[7]

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6. Moretti (1998, 17).
7. Recent critical theories that trace the way ideology works in literary text often liken them to diaries. For example, Raman Selden writes:

> By "producing" an ideology in the form of a fiction, the writers make us feel these gaps, silences and absences which in their purely ideological form are less apparent. I would compare this effect with the common human experience of trying to write down in actual words thoughts that appear perfectly coherent in the mind. Such purely mental thoughts often fail to cohere in written form and reveal omissions, lapses and incoherences. In the same way

On 7 December 1945 when he first visited the U.S. Military Government Hall, he noted as follows:

> I saw recently issued American magazines that I have not touched in quite some time. I also came upon the seven issues of *Life* in question. Even though they were issues published during the war, I cannot suppress my wonder at the national power of the United States, as indicated by their high paper quality and their excellent printing technology. How should I describe, then, the Japanese imperialism challenging it: brave, reckless, or aggression-happy mania?[8]

However, his record of Americans is different from previous or official ones, especially when most Americans that Koreans encountered were GIs who, compared with Christian college graduate missionaries of the previous period, were less cultivated and more combat-oriented in their role.

An 8 February 1946 diary records Kim's anger regarding violent treatment he suffered by American soldiers, as well as his expression of sadness as a citizen of a small and weak nation:

> I was attempting to enter the GI-only compound with a pass issued by the U.S. Army Traffic Controlling Bureau, when a few of us Koreans working for U.S. Military Government were badly beaten on the chest. I was broken-hearted and I tried to suppress my tears. Soundly beaten and kicked out like a dog or pig, I managed to jostle into the crowd in a freight compartment.
>
> I had been beaten by a Japanese policeman in my schooldays, and now I was disgraced again by U.S. soldiers. My heart was pierced by the extreme resentment of being a citizen of a small and weak nation. When I was young, I had been beaten due to my

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a literary text, according to Macherey, can show the incoherence of ideology. The presence of ideology in the text is apparent in the silences and contradictions which the text is driven to reveal by the very nature of the ideology it works upon (Selden 1989, 155).

8. Kim (1993, 14).

> revolt against Japanese rule. Today, I was responsible for the disgrace as I flattered them to get a comfortable train seat. I felt more sorry for my foolishness than I resented their barbaric behavior.[9]

I personally understand and sympathize with this exasperation and injured pride, an expression that can often be found in the third-world intelligentsia class in the postcolonial structure. In fact, U.S. forces landed in Korea wholly unprepared, without a prior understanding of the Korean people and their history. Therefore, chances are higher that power politics and economic interests are the only matter of significance. However, I propose to subject this description to interpretation as well. I do not intend to downplay the intensity of the author's anger. The problem I propose here is that readers may approach such a text with their own perspective, and often draw parallels too easily from the form of diary to the discovery of truth. But from a narrative point of view, it is important to note that we are exposed only to one voice—that of the author—which represents all other GIs' voices. Only when readers can hear the other voices—those of the American GIs positioned in Korea, the real, lived, and felt voices of characters successfully embodied in fiction—and hear these voices to the degree that readers can feel their actions independently of the author, can they reach the complex meaning of these unhappy events and thus fathom cultural heterogeneity. Until then, the GIs, who themselves are marginalized back home, are mere "objects" as in the capacity of the Other, and as far as Korean war literature is concerned, remain the object of the Korean gaze.

Throughout his diary, Kim comments on the rudeness of American GIs. He mentions such infamous cases as a retreating GI raping a Korean woman or a GI shooting civilians for preventing him from pressing on with a rape. But Kim also records South Korean enthusiasm toward America. One, for example, takes place during the three-month period when Seoul is seized by North Korea:

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9. Kim (1993, 28).

> The air bombing today destroyed many military and traffic facilities around the Yongsan area; the raid also bombarded the Liberation Village area, causing thousands of innocent casualties. I heard about a woman who, even while her village was burning and bombs were being dropped on her head, stood up on a hill and waved a handkerchief at the bombers. She was rumored to do so not because she was insane, but because her family was ordered that morning to move somewhere else.[10]

In spite of fierce U.S. bombings and the heavy casualties they caused, South Koreans placed high hopes with these bombers. Compared, for example, with the U.S. bombing of Iraq, where the U.S. forces are asked to be wholly responsible for the casualties, this welcome risk to her life may be so embarrassing and ironic that it needs to be interpreted. Later, when the author tries to stop two drunken GIs from raping a relative of his, one of them aims a rifle at him and accuses him of being loyal to North Korea. This incident sheds light on the impulse that caused the woman to wave her handkerchief in welcome at the heavy rain of bombs, or the reason behind the split of the image of America from that of Americans:

> The Republic of Korea is so mired in difficulty that we should beg even foreign soldiers like them [those barbaric U.S. soldiers] to stay here for a long, long time. We were forced to beg the U.S. to stay because of the presence of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Ah, where is our real fatherland?[11]

This attitude towards the U.S. is more attributable to Korean hatred of Japanese Imperialism and the invasion of North Korea than to sincere thanks for the real aid given by the U.S. forces. The image of the U.S. has been magnified into a kind of optical illusion in direct proportion with the level of tensions between South and North Koreas.

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10. Kim (1993, 108).
11. Kim (1993, 308).

The Object of the Gaze

South Korea moves from the extreme hatred of Japan and North Korea to a hypertrophied idealization of America. To this optical illusion, "displacement"[12] may be applied. In this process, unfortunately, Americans have been excluded from Korean authors' attention. Sketches of Americans in Korean literature are mostly short, fragmentary, and often flat, reminiscent of the way native people are depicted in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. We have examined two texts, a diary from the 1950s and a short story from the 1960s. Next, we shall look at a Korean novel from the 1970s, which does include a lengthy description of an American.

Bak Wan-seo's (Pak Wanseo) *Namok* (The Naked Tree), is an initiation novel that deals with the advance of a girl into womanhood during the Koran War. Yi Gyeong is a young woman who works as a promotion manager at the portrait shop in the U.S. Military Camp in Seoul, and lives with her mother, two of her brothers having been killed in U.S. bombings. Again, their deaths do not lead to a hatred of the U.S. forces but to self-incrimination—Gyeong is the one who proposed that they move into the hiding spot where the bomb fell. After that incident, her mother, a stereotypical Korean woman who bases the meaning of her life on the success of her husband and sons, leads an ascetic life in which she denies herself anything that might satisfy her desire. Gyeong is suffocated by the patriarchical values that deny her the expression of desire. She feels her desire unquenched by the pomp and vanity of the affluent and shoddy realities in the U.S. camp. Like young and romantic Dorothea in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Gyeong aspires to an obscure, hardly describable, transcendent world of plenitude, the door to which she finds in an artist who, like Baudelaire's cursed poet, has been reduced to draw commercial portraits of GI sweethearts.

12. "Displacement" is a psychological term that explains that the libido detached from one idea attaches itself to another.

What is impressive about this work is that it includes a sincere, if temporary, expression of pity for the GIs, and portrays the GIs as heterogeneous. This sympathetic attitude toward the GIs is a very rare one even in Korean literature, and may be related to the fact that this novel is narrated from a woman's perspective:

> I wasn't sorry about not recognizing him in the picture. Instead, I shrank back, filled with remorse, thinking he had given up his happiness and family in order to face death on brutal foreign battlefields, like "goddamn Chorwon [Cheorwon]," or "goddamn Changdan [Jangdan]," or on a nameless plateau where the temperature fell to 30 degrees below. If he were to die, what would his cause have been? This war was a crazy thing created by the worst lunatics.[13]

This different image of America may be also attributed to the sexual identity of the author. For example, while to male writers like Kim Seong-chil, America is a nation of advanced technology and material affluence, the narrator of *Namok* envies America and its people because it is a country in which her desires can be fulfilled. Nevertheless, the narrator views the GIs as somewhat savage, and nowhere is this attitude more evident than in the description of their physical heterogeneity. When her friend Mi-suk asks advice about the future of her possible marriage to an American soldier, Gyeong answers:

> "What can I say? The only thing I can guarantee is that if you marry him and have his child, it will be a mongrel. That's one thing for sure, I guess."[14]

While this remark appears cruel, it may be interpreted as her desire to protect her pride both as a Korean and a woman. Because women are forced to wholly depend on their male superiors for existence, they have no choice but to pretend to have contempt for them, which

13. Bak ([1970] 1995, 150).
14. Bak ([1970] 1995, 119).

is usually gratuitous and often feasible only on the verbal level, or to wreak their anger on her woman compatriots.

At first glance, Gyeong's contempt for GIs seems a kind of inverted imperialist gaze based on the inclusion-exclusion principle. However, Gyeong's cruelty or hatred is not directed only at Americans, as the citation shows. In fact, her hatred can be ascribed to the "why-me?" feeling that innocent victims inflicted with material poverty and the loss of family members for which the war is mostly responsible, often get mired in. She hardly allows others, Korean or American, to get close, and she treats American GIs with contempt, as objects of commercial interest. Her contempt intensifies as she regards her dependence on the U.S. camp store as degrading. Gyeong's love affair with a U.S. officer, though short-lived, is a case fit for the analysis of the present topic. The following is from the first scene Gyeong feels attracted to Joe:

> I suddenly glimpsed a hunger hidden behind his boredom. I was jolted. Confused, I said something I should not have.
>
> "You should have bought a woman."
>
> "Who said I haven't bought women? Who in this country could avoid that? The cheap women. Five dollars, okay, one dollar, okay. The cheapest sex in the world. But afterwards, I feel like it's all a waste of money. Korean whores are the world's worst! They're like vending machines. They don't know the first rule of business: That products should offer the buyer the pleasure of shopping in addition to being practical. These women just go crazy when they see dollars."
>
> He challenged me as if I too were a sham, his penetrating beautiful eyes burning with anger.
>
> "I'm sorry." I apologized in confusion, as if I had cheated him already.[15]

Her emotional response comes from the uncanny recognition of Joe's *ennui*, and her feeling of commiseration brings about her sudden

15. Bak ([1970] 1995, 181).

apology. It was hardly feasible for a young woman to talk about prostitutes to a stranger in the 1950s, especially to a U.S. officer. Upon closer reading, however, both characters have much in common: incorrigible egocentrism coupled with pride, unbearable *ennui*, and deliberate violation of petty-bourgeois respectability. Joe appears more like Gyeong's alter ego than an independent, living character. In this sense, Joe is a projection of the author's wish fulfillment. In other words, Joe is a fictional apparatus that enables Gyeong to shed off the traditional patriarchal strait-jacket and satisfy her repressed desires. Joe belongs more to an optative than to an indicative modality:

> He shifted his eyes, which had been locked with mine, pulled out an Old Gold, and inhaled it with pleasure without the slightest movement. I felt a strong physical attraction.
>
> I found myself waiting for Joe all the next day. Finally, he came and squeezed my hand hard with his strong, hairy one. His thirsty, hungry eyes, like those of a starving animal, seemed to lick. As if by magic, I felt I was being transformed into a female animal.[16]

Joe allows Gyeong to break out of her patriarchical cocoon. He also has another function in the novel: to shake Gyeong's mother out of her suffocating lethargy. Gyeong's mother has retreated into a world where her memory still touches her two killed sons. Gyeong's love affair with Joe is a kind of shock therapy. She would like to have an affair with him, not because she loves him, but because by ruining herself, she might obtain recognition from her mother and demand her own existence as an independent being.

In this process, therefore, Joe comes into the text only as a means, as the Other under the gaze of the narrator, primarily to release Gyeong from the dismal memories of the war. When the artist with whom she would like to build a transcendent world declines to share his loneliness with her, Gyeong despairs and visits Joe's hotel. However, a scarlet sheet rekindles bloody memories, recalling the

16. Bak ([1970] 1995, 185).

poverty of war realities. She runs out of the hotel and Joe is forgotten, not reappearing until the end of the novel. In the last scene, Joe has lost all the aristocratic and mysterious features with which the author endows him before, and he is portrayed no differently from other GIs.

> "Oh, no. Please, please don't break me."
>
> I pleaded, rubbing my palms together. Joe, with his hairy arms and chest, looked like a huge gorilla.[17]

The image of Westerners as a beast is expressed once again.

Still, They Are the Other

Baek Nak-cheong argues that only from the 1970s could we see works of intense national consciousness and more mature artistic capability.[18] As evidence, Baek notes Yi Mun-gu's (Lee Mun-gu) "Haebyeok" (The Sea Cliff) and Cheon Seung-se's "Hwanggu-ui bimyeong" (The Shriek of a Mongrel). In the 1970s, the conflicts and contradictions within the South Korea-United States relationship, suppressed since the truce, burst into the foreground in literary texts. Much more thought was given to the meaning of the United States to Korea. Heavily nationalistic writers, identifying themselves with third-world fighters, identified the U.S. military camps stationed in South Korea as concrete evidence of both a political and economic domination-subjection relationship. In consequence, the image of America as a nation in their works has become almost completely in accord with that of Americans. The following section from "The Shriek of a Mongrel" may be one of the most famous images to indicate this deepening third-world consciousness:

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17. Bak ([1970] 1995, 212).
18. Baek (1985, 254).

> I felt a tearing pain at seeing the shoes in front of the room. The shoes, placed parallel on the stand, were too cruelly out of proportion. Besides the pair of white rubber shoes, no longer than a human hand, lie the heavy pair of a combat boots—twice as long.

The contrasted shoes summarize a newly awakened perception about the status of divided Korea, and this kind of political awakening may be regarded as an indication of a deepening political consciousness suppressed since the Korean War.

In my opinion, however, the 1970s literature does not mark a concomitant progress in characterizations of American GIs. In fact, as in previous works, throughout "The Shriek of a Mongrel," Americans are given no voices. Instead, they surface in the text only as metonymical objects like an overwhelming pair of combat boots, or later, a huge, strong, smart dog that weighs down a subservient mongrel.

Therefore, the author depicts American soldiers as oppressors and tormenters of Koreans, and does not let them develop any authentic relationship with Koreans. Moreover, they are simply written off, deprived of voices from the beginning. While reconciliation is more desirable than conflict, conflict with mutual understanding is preferable to reconciliation without genuine understanding. I think it is essential that GIs be given the same embodiment and voicing as their Korean counterparts whether their function in Korea is negative or not. In this sense, America has taken advantage of South Korea for its national interests, so in response Korean writers have marginalized Americans, placing them in a series of binary oppositions in order to bolster their own national identity. This trend intensifies during the 1980s.

Jo Jeong-rae's (Cho Jeong-rae) *Taebaek sanmaek* (The Taebaek Mountains) provides typical evidence of these issues in the 1980s. Before offering a review of its treatment of Americans and GIs, it is important to note that the selection of this novel for analysis may be unfair. This lengthy 10-volume work should be remembered for the scandal surrounding it—many brilliant critics were blindfolded by the

general atmosphere of the age, calling it a supreme achievement worthy of being called great national literature. However, while its publication was welcomed, it revealed a typical feeling of the age.

The author is generally very critical of the role of America and American GIs during the five years spanning from the day of Liberation to the outbreak of the Korean War. Progressive scholars and dissidents in Korea have often argued that these five years were to form the destiny of those living in the Korean peninsula. From the beginning of the work, America is regarded as an "axis of evil." The following remark is an analysis of the 1946 Daegu Uprising.

> People rose up enormously motivated, and judging from the size and intensity of fighting, it was not going to be a simple incident. It was a war against the U.S. military government. As a participant, I saw the excessive exercise of violence by the U.S. forces. They mobilized the fighters and tanks as if to massacre their enemy. It showed that they were occupiers, and that they intended to colonize our land.[19]

Reading the above quote, conservative readers may accuse the author of being biased, but the author shows a very balanced perspective that sees the U.S. and the USSR as similar imperialist nations, a view that redeems the work of the possible charge of discrimination. Unfortunately, he fails to keep this balance throughout the novel. Around the middle of the work, Kim Beom-u, one of the most important characters, who keeps a neutral and critical stance toward both the U.S. and the USSR, begins to lean left. After this, America is asked to claim all the responsibilities for the division of Korea and its accruing sufferings of the people. For example, a left-leaning journalist is exasperated at the U.S. fighters invading the sky of Manchuria,[20] but keeps silent regarding the invasion of South Korea by the North. A female journalist colleague of his assertively argues about the retreat toward Manchuria, saying that without American interfer-

19. Jo ([1986] 1997, vol. 3, 177).
20. Jo ([1986] 1997, vol. 8, 26).

ence the liberation of the Korean people could have been already achieved.[21] Yet she never mentions the fact that the USSR has as much responsible for the outbreak of the Korean War, or that Kim Il Sung capitalized on Korea's division on his way to the assumption of power just as much as Syngman Rhee in South Korea.

Readers partial to this novel may feel that this kind of critique is unfair. In fact, what makes me even more uncomfortable when reading the novel is that these biases are communicated to readers through the most basic novelistic apparatus of characterization. The above citation is addressed by Seo Min-yeong, depicted as one of the most widely respected and unbiased characters in the novel, along with two reliable journalists mentioned above. By contrast, the American GIs in the work are of the nastiest kind: as a mass of racial prejudice, they have uncontrollable libidinal desire, and inhumane arrogance. Note the following dialogue between two American GIs, Simpson, and Armstrong:

> "There is only one thing good in Korea. Everything except women's vaginas is disgustingly barbaric and primitive." Simpson said, grimacing and twisting his mouth in laughter. . . .
>
> "But there is one thing wrong. Korean women are all idiots. The don't know how to fuck. All stiff like a log."
>
> "Right, they don't know how to entertain men. But it's not because they are idiots—it's because Korean men are idiots. Men should train them, but they don't."
>
> "Then, why do Korean men fuck?"
>
> "For the purpose of racial preservation. Koreans are barbaric not merely in their way of life. They are underdeveloped in sex as well."
>
> "I think you're right. Koreans are as barbaric as Africans. Think of their john. Maggots all around, Yuck!"[22]

21. Jo ([1986] 1997, vol. 8, 202).
22. Jo ([1986] 1997, vol. 8, 352-353).

While Americans are deprived of their voice in early works, here they are given a voice. However, these voices are highly unrealistic. Here, their role is only to confirm the author's incriminations. Behind the filmy veneer of novelistic apparatus, the author is clearly pulling the strings. The depictions of Americans reveal the author's lack of self-respect, a fact that is expressed in the text as a displaced hatred of outsiders. In any case, once again Americans are treated as the Other.

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GLOSSARY

Bunji	糞地	*Namok*	裸木
Haebyeok	海壁	*Taebaek sanmaek*	太白山脈
Hwanggu-ui bimyeong	黃狗의 悲鳴	*Yeoksa ap-eseo*	歷史 앞에서