Article

Rethinking Korean Chain-Drama and Historiography: Hong Earn's *Compatriots* (*Dongpo*) Published in San Francisco (1917)

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Introduction

During the Japanese colonial period, Koreans created a variety of discourses about the idea of nation, including a seemingly paradoxical one, which contended that the spiritual nation could exist only outside of its geographical boundary. As Andre Schmid (2002) argues, Koreans began to conceive the Korean peninsula as tainted by colonialism, and expected the Korean diaspora to inform the nation's future. Korean immigrants in the U.S. received particular attention, as they had been developing an unprecedentedly organized diaspora community since the start of large-scale immigration to Hawaiian sugarcane plantations in 1903.[1] They were believed to have the advantage to experience the Western *original* modernity over peninsular Koreans who could only observe its *shadow* introduced via Japanese mediation. By taking advantage of the distance from Japanese colonialism and proximity to Western modernity, early Korean American communities self-proclaimed, and peninsular Koreans accepted, to building a *pure* modern Korea. News about this allegedly *pure* modern Korea were conveyed, disseminated, and circulated into the Korean peninsula via mass vernacular newspapers, which Benedict Anderson's landmark study of nationalism identifies as the main medium with which an imagined sense of modern collective identity is constructed (Schmid 2002, 224-52; Anderson 2006). Thus, it is highly likely that these diaspora newspapers served to construct the imagined sense of modern national identities, particularly during the 1910s when no other Korean vernacular press operated on the peninsula. Focusing on this historical view of *transnational* coordinate of Korean nationalism, this essay examines the play *Compatriots* (*Dongpo*) published in the San Francisco-based Korean newspaper, *The New Korea* (*Sinhan minbo*).

The New Korea serially published *Compatriots* from August 30 to December 20 in 1917, identifying its playwright as Donghae Subu.[2] Donghae

1. Since 1903, approximately 7,000 Korean workers moved to sugar plantations in Hawai'i until the Korean government was forced to terminate the emigration policy upon becoming a protectorate of Japan in 1905. Many of those workers in Hawai'i (slightly over 1,000) eventually moved to the West Coast (Patterson 1998).
2. *The New Korea,* August 30, 1917; September 6; September 13; September 20; October 4; October 11; October 25; November 8; November 15; November 22; November 29; December 6; and December 20, reprinted in Cho 1999, 6:1141-61. When citing the play in this essay, I will use the page number from Cho Kyu-ick's anthology.

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Subu was one of Hong Earn's (1880-1951) pseudonyms, along with Hae-ong, Chu-seon, and Richard Hong.[3] It is known that Hong Earn's birth name was Jong-pyo (or Chong Pio), and that he emigrated in 1904 to Hawai'i where he appears to have gone by the name of Hong Earn for reasons not known. He worked on a sugarcane plantation until 1907, when he became involved in the publication of Korean-language newspapers and journals. In 1911, he moved to the West Coast, and then participated in the Korean National Association (Daehanin gungminhoe)—that served as the governmental role for the Korean diaspora in the U.S.—as well as the Young Korean Academy (Heungsadan)—founded by Ahn Chang-ho as a global Korean leadership training organization.[4] Such political activities, however, were not Hong's priority; he devoted himself mainly to writings while playing various roles in the publication of *The New Korea* (Park 2002, 164). Hong published hundreds of articles and literary works, including plays, poetry, novels, travelogues, and history writings until his resignation from the post in 1919. Subsequently Hong occasionally published his writings and took charge of the newspaper when necessary; he was appointed as *The New Korea*'s editor-in-chief in 1939. Thus, one can understand Choi Ki-young's (2012, 39) remark that *The New Korea* was almost "Hong Earn's solo performance."

Compatriots is not the only play Hong Earn wrote; his plays published in *The New Korea* include *A Peninsular Hero* (*Bando yeongwoong*, 1915) and *Passionate Play* (*Heemun yeolhyeol*, 1923). Nevertheless, *Compatriots* appears noteworthy in many respects. First, the play imagines a step-by-step process for Korean independence from the Japanese colonial rule, remarkably by staging a full-scale war against Japan. The play begins with a meeting for planning a war against Japan, presents an actual war process, and ends with a reunion of people who led the initial meeting. The actual war process—supposedly portrayed in the middle of the production—specifically includes an intense naval battle between Korean and Japanese fleets, which ends with Japan's crushing defeat

3. In referring to individuals, Korean and Japanese names are arranged in the traditional Asian order—the family name first followed by first name. Yet, this rule does not apply to names that have officially adopted a Westernized or romanized form.
4. Hong Earn's resume that he submitted to the Young Korean Academy (Heungsadan) serves as a main source with which to determine Hong's biographical information (Bang 1989, 259-302).

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and the Japanese emperor's humiliating surrender. In presenting such spectacular war against Japan as well as Korea's ultimate victory, one can interpret *Compatriots* as written to express Koreans' uncompromised patriotism and strong will to independence. Simultaneously, however, its place of publication appears to produce another, meta-textual meaning; this play could have been read to highlight the Korean diaspora's privileged position in Korean nationalist movements, as it demonstrates how freely and explicitly the dreamed future of Korean independence could be embodied outside of the reach of Japanese colonial censorship.

Moreover, this notably spectacular play could have served as a dramatized lecture on the significance of independence war, which many nationalist leaders residing in the U.S.— including Ahn Chang-ho—promoted as a path to independence. Though often described as a non-political moderate reformist in Korean historiography, many historians have highlighted that Ahn did not eschew military engagement or other violent means. For instance, Jacqueline Pak (2012, 193) highlights that Ahn asserted "an open war" (*gaejeon*) in many of his speeches, and strategically mentioned the issue of "independence war strategies" in his last meeting with the executive council of the New People's Association (Sinminhoe) that Ahn established in 1907. Kim Sam-woong also presents a similar point by citing Ahn's words specifically: "Those who oppose the war also oppose independence." Ahn proclaimed the year 1920 as the "Year of the Independence War" and published an editorial in *The Independent* (*Dongnip sinmun*)—a newspaper established as an organ of the Provisional Government in 1919—that includes the above statement.[5] Ahn's vision was more than likely shared with Hong Earn considering Hong's deep respect for Ahn. Hong genuinely supported Ahn's various activities since their first meeting in San Francisco in 1911, and took the lead in keeping up Ahn's legacy after Ahn died in 1938 (Choi 2012, 18). Above all, Hong presided as one of eight founding members of the Young Korean Academy, which was, in Jacqueline Pak's (2001, 149) expression, "the patriotic organization closest to Ahn's heart." Thus, one can speculate that Hong Earn, as a prolific writer, would have aimed to popularize Ahn's vision that he admired through the writing of *Compatriots*.

5. *The Independent*, January 17, 1920 qtd. in Kim 2013, 115. Quotations from Korean sources are my own translations, unless otherwise indicated.

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While the above reasoning could not but remain a speculation, the play features another remarkable characteristic: the play is structured in a multi-genre format with scenes labeled as motion picture. In other words, this play is written as a chain-drama (*yeonswae-geuk*), which appeared in the early twentieth-century, as a hybrid form combining elements from both film and theatre, and allegedly proceeding with the plot by *chaining* motion picture to live performances. In *Compatriots*, the motion picture scenes depict the war process covering land and sea, and Japan and Korea. Filming such large-scale scenes would be tremendously difficult, if not impossible, considering the lack of capital, technology, and manpower required for filmmaking in a Korean immigrant community in the U.S. in the 1910s. In fact, no records remain to attest to any production of this play, with or without the motion picture scenes. In the play, however, the playwright appears as himself, and adroitly suspends Koreans' disbelief in the possibility of filming those series of scenes by appealing to their wish to realize the contents of the filmed scenes—the independence—in reality. The hybrid form of chain-drama, after all, appears as having been essential to envision the nation's future on stage for Hong Earn.

The publication of *Compatriots* in 1917 asks to rewrite the history of Korean chain-drama for factual and theoretical causes. First, the *Compatriots*' publication date tempts one to claim the play as the first Korean chain-drama, at least among the ones published; *Compatriots* preceded *Royal Revenge* (*Uirijeok gutu*), which premiered on October 27, 1919, and had long been considered the first Korean chain-drama. However, more important than initiating such debate on which one is really the *first*, would be to question what revised understanding historians gain when including *Compatriots* in the discussion of Korean chain-drama. Indeed, *Compatriots*, I contend, promotes a new perspective. As I will later articulate in detail, *Royal Revenge* gained enormous popularity, and provided an impetus for the subsequent development of chain-drama in Korea; yet, this pioneering piece has troubled Korean theatre and film historians for its undeniable trace of Japanese colonial influence. The historians accordingly have taken issue with its *impurity* in the genre's development history as well as its aesthetics, and criticized the chain-drama as an anomalous, colonialist hybrid form that ultimately hampered the development of modern aesthetics. In this context, *Compatriots* sheds new light on the chain-drama's *im/purity* debate by demonstrating that the allegedly *impure* hybrid form of chain-drama readily served as an ideal medium to embody the *pure* modern Korea, though it being

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merely a fragile fantasy. In other words, an examination of *Compatriots* leads to the debunking of the illusive concept of *im/purity* that developed to define the nation and its arts in the colonial context.

In what follows, I first review the historiography of Korean chain-drama, and then challenge Korean theatre and film historians' dismissal of chain-drama merely as a colonialist hybrid form. I do this by clarifying that the chain-drama form, though not called so, was practiced globally in the early twentieth century—including in the U.S. where Hong Earn composed *Compatriots* as such. Specifically, I suggest that Hong, in 1910s' San Francisco, was highly likely exposed to two strands of developments in representation: multimedia productions called "a cinema-theatrical entertainment" as well as full-fledged cinematic arts. These American practices would have confirmed the legitimacy of chain-drama for Hong and motivated him to further experiment with motion picture beyond the modest way adopted in Japanese chain-drama practices. While developing an alternative chain-drama format, Hong ultimately envisioned staging a full-scale war against Japan and the ensuing construction of a modern nation. My discussion of *Compatriots* will invite one to reexamine the Korean historiography of chain-drama, theatre and film, and the nation.

Chain-Drama: Not a Colonial Hybridity But a Globally Practiced Popular Art Form

Korean theatre and film historians have long criticized chain-drama. Right after its advent, theatre director Yun Baek-nam (1920) denounced the genre as "a perverted drama" that had no potential in leading the populace to civilization and enlightenment. Following Yun's criticism, pioneering theatre historians in post-colonial Korea—Lee Doo-hyun and Yoo Min-young—writing separately, described chain-drama as "a canned art [containing] neither theatre nor film" and "decadence in theatre" (Lee 1966, 70; Yoo 1996, 292-96). Their argument was that chain-drama productions provided only "anachronistic" repertories and therefore could not respond to Korean audiences who were, in their interpretation, in need of "purely modern" aesthetics. Film historians have also raised objections about including chain-drama in Korean film historiography. For instance, Kim Su-nam, a colonial Korean film historian, contends that filmed scenes in a chain-drama production served only a "supplemental" role

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in the development of the plot, and consequently had a viable function only in the expansion of theatrical expressions—but not in the development of film aesthetics. Considering the historical condition of chain-drama's introduction and development in colonial Korea, Kim (2011, 53-54) further argues that the "first" Korean chain-drama production, *Royal Revenge*, was nothing more than an unoriginal imitation of the Japanese chain-drama, devoid of any serious review or reflection.

While widely accepted as the *first* Korean chain-drama production, *Royal Revenge* has been a point of discussion as well as a troubling piece of work. Theatre and film historians have paid exclusive attention to *Royal Revenge*, although approximately 24 more chain-dramas were produced until the form gradually declined in the 1920s, finally disappearing in the 1930s (Kim 2011, 60-61). This exclusive focus on *Royal Revenge* has derived not only from it being the *first* Korean chain-drama production but also its production being relatively well documented. Given that no concrete visual evidence remains for any chain-drama production, the only materials that outline the specific characteristic, organization, and reception of chain-drama are recollections and fragmentary documentation, both of which are available for *Royal Revenge*. As articulated below, the available historical materials clearly attest to the strong Japanese influence in its inception, production process, and the produced performance.

Royal Revenge was produced by Kim Do-san's Singeukjwa and premiered at the theatre Danseongsa on October 27, 1919. While stating that this chain-drama production enjoyed an overwhelming box office success and a long-three year run, Young-il Lee and Young-chol Choe assert that the producer Kim was directly inspired by a Japanese chain-drama, *The Captain's Wife*, performed by a Japanese troupe, Setonaikai, at Hwanggeumgwan in Seoul in 1918. To shoot the filmed scenes, Kim also secured the service of a Japanese cameraman, Miyagawa Sounosuke, from the Japanese chain-drama company Osaka Dengassa. Lee and Choe (1998, 25-26) also posit that those Japanese-filmed scenes were this chain-drama's major point of attraction by citing a review that praises the quality of filmed scenes as "not only lucid and beautiful but also…as good as those made by western filmmakers." With a slightly different focus, theatre director Bak Jin's (1905-1974) recollection—as the most detailed description among the available—implies that he was mostly drawn to the mechanism of chain-drama by having watched *Royal Revenge* when he was young. Yet, it also attests to Japanese influence; Bak's (1972, 161-62)

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description of how filmed exterior scenes were projected onto a lowered screen between staged performances appears critically similar to Japanese recollections of Japanese chain-drama productions.[6] In short, Kim Do-san produced *Royal Revenge* in a similar manner to the Japanese chain-drama, by deriving inspiration from Japanese chain-drama production as well as seeking practical assistance from Japanese manpower.

Along with the aforementioned factors, the advent of Japanese chain-drama prior to Korean chain-drama and the older form's likely impact on cultural productions in Japanese colonies have led many historians to believe that chain-drama developed in Korea under strong Japanese influence. The chain-drama form arose in Japan as early as the turn of the twentieth century. The first Japanese attempt to incorporate motion picture into live performance is known to be *The Imperial Army Attacks Russia* staged at Masago Theatre in Tokyo in 1904. While depicting heroic episodes of Japanese soldiers participating in the Russo-Japanese War, this piece included a short projection of documentary war footage filmed antecedently to and independently from the theatre production. Such early chain-drama-like arrangement was soon adopted by *kabuki*, and further developed by *shinpa* theatre troupes. Referred to as *rensageki* (literally meaning chain-drama), this hybridizing practice took hold of the popular imagination in Japan's Kansai region and sustained enough popularity over the years to support its own theatre in Tokyo, Asakusa Theatre (Anderson and Richie 1982, 27-28; Ernst 1956, 248-52; Kenji 1998, 1-13).

Shortly after, its popularity gradually spread outward, first across the Japanese islands and then to the overseas colonies of Taiwan and Korea. The imported Japanese chain-drama productions in Korea included *One Sided Love* in Pusan in 1915, *Revenge of Civilization* in Seoul in 1917, and *The Captain's Wife* in Seoul in 1918, the last of which Kim Do-san watched before producing *Royal Revenge* (Woo 2011, 291-92; Kim 2011, 48). Yet, the Japanese chain-drama's popularity did not last long. During the 1910s, Japanese critics and filmmakers formed the "pure film movement" to render a cinematic work to solely represent a director's self-expression. In concert with the movement,

6. In regard to the Japanese recollection of the Japanese chain-drama production, refer to film historian Tanaka Junichiro's account regarding his experience at Asakusa Theatre in 1917. Its English translation is available in Bernardi 2001, 301.

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the Tokyo Metropolitan Police, in 1917, laid down the Regulations for the Control of Motion Picture Screening, most of which aimed toward facilitating censorship. Though having almost opposite intentions, film reformers and officials alike took an issue with live aspects of movie screening, and ultimately banned the chain-drama practice in 1917 (Masato 1998, 14-23).

For Korean historians, this chronology—with the end of chain-drama in Japan (more precisely in Tokyo) in 1917 and the start of chain-drama in Korea in 1919—has suggested the painful possibility that the Japanese used Korea as a dumping ground for a form that had already been discarded as pre-modern, or *impure* in Japan, and that Koreans for their part mistook the demoted form for cutting-edge modernity. Kim Mi-hyeon (2006, 28) implies such a conviction by emphasizing that within Japan chain-drama was considered to lack all cinematic value before discussing the development of chain-drama in Korea. Kim Su-nam (2011, 49) also observes that the Japanese economic subjugation of Korea facilitated the influx of Japanese chain-drama into Korea, noting that Japanese chain-drama practitioners could have circumvented the prohibition by reestablishing themselves on the Korean peninsula. In this fashion, Korean historians express their discomfort toward colonial history in their historical narratives about chain-drama, and criticize it for being *impure* in both its aesthetics and politics.

Starting in the 2000s, however, historians have proposed new perspectives on the supposed *impurity* of chain-drama. For instance, film historian Chun Pyong Kuk published in 2004 an article in which he argues that the Korean audience of the 1920s would not have perceived chain-drama as an anomaly considering that indoor theatres of the early twentieth-century Korea presented hybrid spectacles across genres from Korean traditional performances, dance, music, puppet theatre, and motion pictures, all in a one-day program. In observing a series of performances of various genres simultaneously, Chun posits that Korean audiences would have received them without strict generic distinctions, and instead, enjoyed being in a theatre space itself. After all, theatre was one of the first public spheres where Koreans developed a communal consciousness (Chun 2004, 463-98). Theatre historian Woo Su-jin also published a monograph in which she interprets chain-drama not as a passive mimesis but rather as an active "mimicry" of the Japanese chain-drama, and calls attention to its contribution to the development of modern theatre in Korea. She argues that the filmed part in chain-drama productions appealed to the

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Korean audience's growing desire to see realistic representation, and accordingly contributed to the development of realistic mise-en-scène on the Korean stage (Woo 2011, 275-99).

Building on the scholarship that demands less tendentious and more serious attention to chain-drama than it has previously received, I call attention to the under-appreciated fact that the practice of combining motion picture with staged performance occurred globally in the early twentieth century. Among the best-known cases are productions by Erwin Piscator in 1920s' Germany. Piscator developed his montage aesthetics by blending films and stage performances in works such as *Hoppla, We're Alive!* (1927), *Rasputin* (1927), and *The Good Soldier Schweik* (1928). Even before Piscator, film had been used in operatic performances in Germany dating back to 1911. An example of such work was a revue production in Hamburg that projected a film showing actors running through the streets of Hamburg up to the main entrance of the theatre, and then began the live performance with actors who jumped out of the orchestra pit onto the stage (Willett 1978, 113). In France, as well, similar explorations were made before World War I. For instance, French filmmaker Georges Méliès produced several film inserts for the Victor Darlay and Victor de Cottens' fairy pantomime, *The Merry Frolics of Satan*, which opened at the Théâtre Municipal du Châtelet in 1905. Méliès' film inserts, according to Gwendolyn Waltz, served a twofold role of facilitating scene-change and providing continuity with staged performance scenes (Waltz 1991, 120-21).

Given the prevalence of chain-drama-like performances in early twentieth-century Europe, it is not improbable that Korean artists were aware of and able to draw from European practices, even if they had not experienced European works in live performance. Moreover, this possibility of a wider scope of reference suggests that Korean artists could believe that their cultural debt was less to the specific Japanese chain-drama and more to *universal* modernity. *Compatriots*, as a Korean chain-drama published outside of the sphere of direct Japanese influence, could also reinforce such belief. *The New Korea*, which published the play, was widely and surreptitiously circulated on the peninsula.[7]

7. Andre Schmid identifies *The New Korea* as a "transnational" newspaper because of its global circulation. For instance, in 1908, *The New Korea* distributed five hundred copies in the U.S., one hundred copies in Hawai'i, and three thousand copies on the Korean peninsula. Concerning its tremendous influence on the peninsula, the Japanese

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Hence, one can speculate that *Compatriots* impacted Koreans' perception of the form, even though it is difficult, if not impossible, to prove that Korean artists who engaged in the production of chain-dramas inside of the peninsula actually read the printed play and drew inspiration from *Compatriots* for their own practice. In the next section, I propose that Hong Earn's envisioned incorporation of motion picture into his chain-drama play *Compatriots* was influenced, if not directly shaped, by American popular theatrical and cinematic productions. For this purpose, I first clarify Hong's highly ambitious vision in filming scenes as well as his keen interest in Western histories and arts, and then introduce circumstantially undeniable American references for the chain-drama format as well as the filmed scenes of *Compatriots*.

Hong Earn's Ambitious Vision, and Circumstantially Undeniable American References

As noted earlier, Hong Earn immigrated to Hawai'i in 1904. Specifically, he arrived in Honolulu on September 16, 1904, under the name Hong Chong Pio, at the age of 24 (Murabashi 2001, 54).[8] Taking into account that early Korean immigrants first traveled to Nagasaki to take a steamship to Honolulu, and that it took approximately ten days from Japan to Hawai'i, Hong would have been in Japan in late August or early September of 1904 (Patterson 1998, 49-50). Therefore, he could have heard about, if not seen, the aforementioned early Japanese chain-drama practice including motion picture in a theatrical war drama. Nevertheless, had Hong been inspired to compose a chain-drama from this early Japanese practice, he would not have needed to delay the composition of *Compatriots* until 1917. More critically, the early Japanese practice of briefly airing pre-filmed war footage during a theatre performance cannot fully explain

Governor-General enacted a press law to censor Korean newspapers in 1907 and expanded the law to apply to all overseas Korean media, including *The New Korea,* in 1908. Nonetheless, the numbers of copies collected by the Japanese throughout the colonial period indicate how ineffectively this law worked for weakening the influence of diaspora newspapers (Schmid 2002, 246-52; Cha et al. 2001, 126).

8. In 2001, Duk Hee Lee Murabashi published a compiled list of Korean passengers arriving in Honolulu between 1903 and 1905 based on microfilmed copies of passenger manifests held by the National Archives and Records Administration.

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Hong's ambitious vision. I clarify the characteristics of Hong's envisioned filmed scenes by providing a summary of his detailed description below, although I will analyze the play in detail in the next section.

Hong divides the film segment in *Compatriots* into two subparts by changing acts in-between the two: a spectacular naval battle in Tokyo Bay and a panoramic view of war-torn city of Tokyo (Act 1); and a surrender of the Japanese emperor in Tokyo Imperial Palace and Koreans' welcoming ceremony for their army in Seoul (Act 2). The first part mainly captures spectacular panoramas, as the stage direction describes:

> As a projector begins to beam a film onto a screen, a vast expanse of the ocean appears slightly heaving under the full moon....Therein, hundreds of warships with Korean national flag are surrounding three sides of Tokyo Bay....The ocean then soon becomes covered with black smoke fumed from both Korean and Japanese warships. Among the cloud of smoke, only bright flames raise as if lighting flashes....As the Korean warships fiercely fire cannons, the Japanese warships begin to make an attempt to steam away, but only end up sinking one by one, leaving a trail of bubbles. (Cho 1999, 1112-15)

After such a "stunning" scene of the naval battle, the film presents a panoramic view of war-torn Tokyo.

> The Korean national flag hung in the tall flagpole standing at the center of the city is waving in the breeze in a late morning....Tokyo is bathed in sunshine, and filled with Korean armies....However, no sign of people can be found in parks and theatres as they are firmly closed with their badges dropping to the shade of dead Japanese soldiers. (Cho 1999, 1116-17)

The first part ends with the projecting of a Korean independence army commander's letter to the Japanese emperor urging him to surrender.

While the film in Act 1 is required to present spectacular panoramic views of the war and its aftermath, it also includes close-up scenes of people; Hong provides detailed descriptions of characters' subtle bodily and facial motions in Act 2's filmed scene. After projecting the letter, the film presents the Korean army commander and the Korean acting prime minister entering Tokyo Imperial Palace to see the Japanese emperor, who has already come out to the

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main gate. Hong describes: "Tears come into the Japanese emperor's eyes, and the Korean commander expresses his sympathy on his face." Inside the Palace, the Japanese emperor and the Korean acting prime minister then discuss treaty clauses following Korea's annexation of Japan. The Japanese emperor begs to allow him to keep his title, while "grasping the Korean's hands" in tears, and the Korean "shakes off the Japanese's grip." The setting is then changed to Seoul, where a welcoming ceremony is held for the Korean army. A number of people gather to welcome the returning army around a temporary-built triumphal arch. In the midst of the crowds, people discuss their lost children and the future of Korea until the Korean army arrives. That is, Hong includes a dialogue among adoring onlookers in this crowded scene (Cho 1999, 1119-28). In short, Hong's description presumes a capacity to adeptly use various film technologies such as varied camera angels and close-ups. The filmed scenes envisioned by Hong, after all, appear much more ambitious than the modestly projected short motion picture footage, which he could have experienced in his short stay in Japan while waiting for the ship transfer, or later learnt from Japanese or Korean news reports about Japanese chain-drama practices.

It should also be noted that Hong Earn revealed his keen interest in Western histories and the arts in his writings. For instance, Hong loosely based all of his novels published in *The New Korea* in European historical contexts.[9] In 1924, moreover, thirteen Koreans, including Hong, founded an organization named "Yimunhoe" in San Francisco. They identified themselves as Koreans enjoying literature and the arts in the U.S., and proclaimed their aim to be that of contributing to Korean communities in the U.S. by promoting Koreans' appreciation of literature and the arts (Choi 2012, 26-27). It is thus highly likely that Hong sought to stay current with American literature and the arts, especially forms of culture with exceptional fame or popularity across the U.S., but particularly in San Francisco, where Hong resided from 1911 through

9. Hong Earn's novels include *A Beauty's Mind* (*Miyinsim,* January 15, 1912-June 18, 1914) about a Polish woman committing suicide after discovering that her lover has been engaging in pro-Russian activities during the Polish-Russian War; *Blood-and-Iron Lovebirds* (*Cheolhyeol wonang,* May 4, 1916-April 19, 1917) about a Serbian couple who marry after a series of struggles during the First Balkan War of 1912-1913; and *Scent of Chinese Magnolia* (*Okranhyang,* May 16, 1918-July 3, 1918) about a British intelligent agent rescuing a British woman from a disguised Italian spy and winning her heart in England (Cho 1999, 4:108-36; 4:229-383; 5:441-70).

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1919. As a result, it is highly probable that his exposure to American cultural expressions motivated him to develop his ambitious vision of filming part of a play with highly advanced film technologies and projecting the filmed part in-between live performance. Hence, in what follows, I examine American theatrical and cinematic popular cultural productions available in mid-1910s' San Francisco.

According to Gwendolyn Waltz (2012, 373), a practice integrating motion pictures into stage plays appeared in the U.S. almost immediately after the introduction of motion pictures, and such "multimedia productions increased in number, and in alternation format hybrids" in the 1910s. While Waltz provides multiple examples with the term "half real-half reel format," *Ramona* (1916) was particularly popular and toured throughout the U.S. Originally written as a romance novel about Spanish settlers and Mission Indians in Southern California, *Ramona* was first made into a staged version in 1905, and later made into films. The 1916 production that I discuss, however, was neither film nor staged performance, but rather, a combination of the two: "a cinema-theatrical entertainment," as a *Los Angeles Times*' ad called it (February 25, 1916). Produced by William Clune and directed by Donald Crisp, this chain-drama-formed production premiered in Los Angeles on February 7, 1916. A week before the opening date, Grace Kingsley—the first film editor at the *Los Angeles Times*—wrote a preview, indicating that each act of Clune's *Ramona* would begin as a stage play and smoothly transition into a film (January 30, 1916). The day after the premiere, drama critic and film scenario writer Henry Christeen Warnack also commented on its chain-drama-like format, favorably stating that "[For *Ramona*] the term 'motion picture' is too small. It is photoplay, drama, and opera all in one" (February 8, 1916). The excitement about the novelty of the format, reflected in Warnack's review, drew audiences as well. *Ramona* achieved great commercial success and toured subsequently in New York, Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia, in addition to sustaining three concurrent touring companies in Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco (Waltz 1991, 111).

In San Francisco, *Ramona* was staged at the Cort Theatre for six weeks from March to April in 1916. The *San Francisco Chronicle* published a series of reviews attesting to its immediate, tremendous success. For instance, the newspaper hailed *Ramona* as "the most ambitious effort yet put forth in the field of cinema production" with a specific comment on its unique format "partaking

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of a triple [operatic, theatrical, and cinematic] nature" (March 24, 1916). A week later, the newspaper also praised it as "living up to its advanced reputation" as the leading-edge production in the history of American popular arts. Furthermore, this latter newspaper report included a paragraph highlighting the show's *educational* value by stating that "*Ramona* is not only an admirable entertainment, but it has interested the foremost educators of the state on account of its historical and educational features" (March 30, 1916). Given that Hong had a keen interest in Western histories and arts, it is highly likely that *Ramona* caught his attention. Furthermore, the Cort Theatre was not far away from where he lived and where he worked. The theatre was located in 64 Ellis St.—a six minute walk from the Korean National Association's office where *The New Korea* resided (995 Market St.) and a ten minute walk from where Hong lived (794 Howard St.), based on information provided in his United States World War I Draft Registration Card drafted on September 12, 1918.[10] Together, the high popularity of *Ramona*, the American reception highlighting its educational value, and Hong's geographical proximity to the theatre space all suggest that Hong was highly likely exposed to *Ramona* and therefore, the American practice of "cinema-theatrical entertainment."

Another American popular cultural production that was highly popular in San Francisco in the mid-1910s, and thus likely known to Hong was *The Birth of a Nation* (1915)—D.W. Griffith's popular and notorious film credited for signaling the birth of American cinema as well as criticized for providing an extremely racist representation of nineteenth-century American history. Based on the novel and play *Clansman* by Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Birth of a Nation* premiered as *Clansman* in Los Angeles on February 8, 1915, and was released throughout the U.S. under the title *The Birth of a Nation*. In San Francisco, it first opened on March 1, 1915 at the Alcazar Theater on O'Farrell Street—located not far from the spaces Hong frequented. The film was subsequently exhibited at the Savoy Theater, and then occasionally at the Cort Theater

10. All males in the U.S. between the ages of 18 and 45 were required by law to register for the World War I Draft between 1917 and 1918. In this record, Hong Earn documented his full name, date and place of birth, citizenship, occupation as well as his home and place of employment addresses. World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, preserved by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington, D.C., are electronically searchable on the subscription website Ancestry.com.

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(where *Ramona* was staged), through the fall of 1916. As in other regions of the U.S., the film became an issue in and outside of the theatre in San Francisco; it received tremendous commercial and critical success, and simultaneously led to heated debates about its historical accuracy and educational value (Ellis 1979, 60; Jacobs 1968, 171; Rogin 1985, 157).

On the film's opening night in San Francisco, the *San Francisco Chronicle* exclaimed that Griffith "has made the history-drama live, move, seethe, thrill, and palpitate in a swift succession of shadows on a blank surface" (March 2, 1915). A week later, the newspaper also evaluated the film as "artistically, historically, and morally a step forward—ahead of the greatest that has ever been taken before in this new art" (March 7, 1915). In so doing, the newspaper represented mainly White admirers' interpretation of the film as "the sweep of American history incarnate" (Andrews 2008, 145-46). Certainly, the *San Francisco Chronicle* was not alone in praising the film for its alleged historical accuracy. Notably, *The Birth of a Nation* was the first movie ever shown at the White House, and President Woodrow Wilson—a former historian—purportedly remarked after watching the film that "it is like writing history with lightning, and my only regret is that it is all so terribly true" (Rogin 1985, 151). Allegedly echoing the President's approval, the *San Francisco Examiner* highlighted the film's distinctive power in educating about history by hailing the film as "an educative message that no written history can rival" (April 20, 1915). Such remarks highlighting the film's historical accuracy and educational value—regardless of their validity—led the film to exert strong influence on the public well beyond the walls of the theatre.

The controversy surrounding the film indeed produced civil unrest in 1916, when Mayor James Rolph ordered the city to cease showing the film in response to San Francisco's African American population; to Black San Franciscans, *The Birth of a Nation* certainly represented "not real history but true blasphemy," and they united in their denunciation of the film. In an immediate opposition to the mayor's order, however, the major newspapers condemned censorship as "unprogressive, undemocratic, and un-American," while framing the controversy surrounding the film as an issue of the sanctities of free speech. Though such criticism on censorship, as Matthew Philip Andrews interprets, was derived from White Americans' unswerving dedication to Griffith's message comforting their racial superiority, their frame led to the elevation of cinema's position in American society. Moreover, the controversy surrounding the film

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ultimately brought about the entire abolishment of the Board of Censors in San Francisco in September of 1916 (Andrews 2008, 141-64). In the end, *The Birth of a Nation* served as a catalyst for subsequent changes in a broader societal realm beyond the boundary of cinema, entertainment, and the arts. Thus, exposure to the film and its controversy would have introduced Hong to unprecedentedly advanced film technologies as well as the position of cinematic arts elevating as one of the most critical social agencies in the modern world, as it did for Hong's American contemporaries.

As demonstrated in this section, it is circumstantially undeniable that Hong Earn was exposed to American popular cultural productions, including *Ramona* and *The Birth of a Nation*. The tremendous popularity of these two cultural productions, both of which were based on histories relevant to the nation's present, would have been compelling to Hong. The study of *Ramona*, as performed by combining theatre and motion picture, certainly should have convinced him that the chain-drama form was not exclusively Japanese, but clearly global, and thus *universally* modern. *The Birth of a Nation*, most likely, motivated him to envision more advanced uses of motion picture in chain-drama productions. Equally important, the controversy surrounding *The Birth of a Nation* most likely clarified for Hong that cinematic arts have the potential to dissolve the boundary between theatre and reality. Given the strong probability that he had knowledge of both hybrid and purely cinematic productions, however, it is questionable why Hong envisioned *Compatriots* as a chain-drama. In the next section, I analyze the play, and posit that Hong designed and presented the filmed independence war scenes to be realized at the very moment of performance with the audience's participation, and in so doing invited the audience to be supporters of the play as well as of the independence war depicted in the play. Namely, *Compatriots* is written to take advantage of the chain-drama format that affectively and effectively facilitates the connection of the confined, fictional world of a play with the wider, actual world.

An Invitation to Participate in the Realization of Impure Art and Pure Nation

The play *Compatriots*, as previously noted, consists of the following three parts: live performance staging a war planning meeting, a motion picture projecting

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the war, and live performance presenting a reunion of the war planners. As the play begins, Koreans from diverse backgrounds—a clergyman, a gentleman, a college student, laborers, a young girl, and her old grandfather—as well as Chinese, Japanese, and American characters gather to discuss the viability of a war against Japan. Such international composition of the meeting committee arguably reveals Hong's understanding that Korea's independence was not a local issue that impacted only the colonizer Japan and the colonized Korea, but rather, a global phenomenon involving multiple foreign powers. At the same time though, the foreign characters are utilized to demonstrate Koreans' distinctiveness, which Hong notably defines as reformed ethnic identity. Specifically, Hong emphasizes Korean characters' higher degree of adaption to Western modernity—specifically Western education and Protestantism—than the foreign characters. At first, the Chinese character appears engrossed in past glory and blind to its decline. The Japanese character is described as worshiping the Sun God—a religious affiliation, in the playwright's description, derived from poor, barbaric living conditions. Then, the American character is depicted as having no college education, in contrast to a Korean student character described as having recently graduated from Yale University. In caricaturing foreign figures as delusional, flawed, and pathetic, in the end Hong posits as inevitable that Korea will one day achieve independence and rise above outdated China, pagan Japan, and even ignorant America.

Korean characters all uniformly promote the prospects of independence and frame some of those prospects in world-historical terms. They assert, for example, that Koreans should recover stolen national artifacts as "Julius Caesar did after his conquest of Turkey" and that Koreans should send Christian missionaries to Japan just as "Columbus arrived at North America, only with the cross" (Cho 1999, 1100-04). With such a flawed understanding of imperial history, Hong projects Korean independence as following the same path to civilization once taken by Western nations. In sum, the beginning part of the play, entitled "We Are Compatriots All Alike," calls upon all Koreans irrespective of age and sex by casting Korean characters with diverse backgrounds and distinguishing them from foreign characters. With such opening, Hong invites Korean audiences and readers to the world of the play, and then persuades them to believe that they—as Koreans—are distinctive from and even more modernized than any other ethnic groups.

After promoting audiences and readers' self-confidence in their advance

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toward Western modernity, Hong begins the film segment with an excerpt from *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven* (*Yongbieocheonga*), the first lyric poetry written in the Korean alphabet in 1447. The selection is the poem's 59th movement narrating the first king of the Joseon Dynasty, Yi Seong-gye, annihilating Japanese pirates. As if repackaging this nationalist history in a new genre for the modern audience, the motion picture begins. The screen is lowered, and, in the playwright's words, "a marvel in which a daydream becomes a truth in a moment will happen" (Cho 1999, 1112). That is, Hong was aware that filming the aforementioned series of scenes would be as challenging as creating a marvel. Nonetheless, Hong explicitly declares that the filmed part would, or should be produced. After the filmed scenes, Hong appears as the playwright and gives a lengthy speech, which I cite in part below:

> The motion picture is adopted to present a huge scale of independence war, which cannot be presented on stage. Readers would probably argue that this is implausible. Still, your inmost heart would wish this happen. Then, why do you say that this is implausible?...I can assert that everyone wants to regain the lost nation. Then, who can say that it is unreasonable to write about the invasion of Tokyo?...If you want the independence and believe that it would certainly happen, [my vision of filming] the invasion of Tokyo should not look unreasonable at all. (Cho 1999, 1127-28)

Though it may sound esoteric, Hong's explanation adroitly rationalizes the presentation of the independence war and the use of motion picture altogether. More precisely, he blocks any accusation of unreasonableness by building a logical chain between his proposed use of the motion picture and the independence war, and then appealing to the audience to suspend their disbelief. As the appeal unfolds, it emerges that Hong's call for the suspension of disbelief is not just aesthetic but also political. If the audience can accept the plausibility of what this new, risky medium can deliver, they might just as easily embrace the possibility of achieving independence, or the other way around.

As noted in the previous section, the last part of the filmed scene presents a welcoming ceremony for the returning army around a hastily built temporary triumphal arch in Seoul. After the short scene, the play returns to a staged performance. The stage direction describes that as projecting filmed scenes ends, the stage curtain rises to show a post-war Seoul; and an arch commemorating independence is being built in the center of the stage (Cho 1999, 1131). The

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arch is therefore both thematically and scenically significant. First, the play ends with those who led the initial war-planning meeting at the beginning of the play discussing legislation regarding this arch. Furthermore, this prop effectively connects the filmed scenes to the stage, as the arch symbolizing independence appears in both filmed and staged scenes of the play. The transformation from the temporary-built arch in the filmed scene to a solid one in the staged scene, moreover, gives the impression that the independence symbolized by the arch becomes concrete and tangible. With the arch literally and figuratively at the center of the stage, the filmed scenes in the end become connected to the here-and-now world of theatre.

My point is that Hong calls for Korean audiences and readers as "compatriots all alike" to believe in and participate in the realization of the independence war not only on stage but also in reality. Hong defines the audience's belief as the major driving force for the realization of his aesthetically *impure* play as well as the building of the *pure* modern, independent nation. In so doing, the chain-drama form, I contend, ultimately served as a platform with which Hong could effectively promote the audience's belief and participation in Koreans' advancement toward modern independent nation building. *Compatriots* as an alternative Korean chain-drama, if not produced, would have thus contributed to the modern nation building by intertwining Korea's independence with the Western modern art form, and promoting Koreans' aspiration for both.

Conclusion

This essay examined a previously overlooked, chain-drama-formed play written by a Korean writer who resided in the U.S. during the period when his homeland was under Japanese colonial rule. I argue that the playwright Hong Earn was likely exposed to American theatrical and cinematic popular cultural productions that enjoyed high commercial and critical acclaim, and played enormous societal effects well beyond the walls of theatre in mid-1910s' San Francisco. Whatever the extent of influence of the American productions I have discussed on Hong's vision, it appears that he attempted to produce an alternative chain-drama production, which includes filmed scenes using highly advanced film technologies and aesthetics, and in so doing, invites the audience

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to accept fiction as reality. The first part of the play, envisioned as enacted on stage, demonstrates that Koreans of the time—allegedly including the audience and reader—were reformed enough to lead the nation to the path once taken by Western civilization. His explanation as to his choice for using motion picture, furthermore, affectively promotes Korean audience's belief in their degree of adaption to Western technologies and modern aesthetics that the motion picture represented. By ending the play with a staged performance, Hong also declares that the future of Korea envisioned in the motion picture would be directly linked to the here-and-now time-space, that is, reality. In so doing, the chain-drama *Compatriots* constructed Korea as an independent modern nation somewhere in-between theatre and reality, fiction and truth.

Nevertheless, the *pure* modern Korea that *Compatriots* constructed could not be but a fragile fantasy. More fundamentally, the Korean diaspora's wish to build a *pure* modern Korea in the U.S.—that being completely exempt from colonial/imperial traces—could not be feasible, considering how imperialistic the U.S. was in the early part of the twentieth-century. However, Korean immigrants' self-promotion as "custodians of the nation," and peninsular Koreans' affirmative response to it explicitly reveal early modern Koreans' idealized view on, if not misreading of, American modernity, and modernity in general (Schmid 2002, 246). Though early modern Koreans' epistemology on dynamics between modernity and colonialism was immensely complicated, a notable point to mention is that Korea, as a nation not colonized by Western powers, did not solely and consistently produce discourses equating modernity and colonialism—unlike many other European and American colonies. Early modern Koreans, particularly Western-educated, Christian elites, and Korean immigrants in the U.S., approached Western cultural elements as tools to lead the nation to "civilization and enlightenment," which represented modernity at large based upon Western definitions and claims to the universality of these notions (Schmid 2002, 9). In the case of the U.S., its consistent self-portrayal as a world power armed with righteousness and civilization since the Korea-U.S. Treaty of 1882, and the American Protestant missionaries' rapid expansion reinforced the belief in the U.S. and its modernity—at least until the March First Movement ended in failure with no expected support from the U.S. in 1919 (Yang 2006, 209-57).

Given that the U.S. was neither cooperative nor responsive to Koreans' appeal for their independence from Japanese colonial rule, such an idealized

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view should have been thoroughly disputed by the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910, or soon thereafter. Furthermore, as Timothy Mitchell (2000, 24) insightfully puts it, modernity in and of itself entailed imperialistic characteristics. Modernity could not realize its grand mission of universality, as its mission of producing the unified, global history required a series of multiple imitations and representations, if not via direct colonization. That is, the imperialistic dynamics with which the modern was staged positioned the dream of a pure modernization to be unfeasible. Nevertheless, Koreans, particularly Korean immigrants in the U.S., needed to believe in the possibility of building a *pure* modern Korea, as it underlaid their authority in the landscape of nationalist movements. In this context, I suggest that theatrical performances, such as *Compatriots*, facilitated a suspension of disbelief in envisioning a *pure* modern Korea by providing tangible embodiments, which thereby rendered the vision as realistic as well as theatrical.

Though merely being illusive in need of virtual embodiments, the concept of *purity* is significant to review, as it has served as a focal point in Korean historiography—not only of chain-drama and performing arts but also of a nation. In other words, I interpret that Korean historiography that has denounced chain-drama as aesthetically and politically *impure* relates to Koreans' understanding of the nation and its arts, which developed under a colonial context. Thus, I conclude this article by briefly articulating how views on chain-drama, arts, and the nation are connected within Korean historiography. Chun Pyong Kuk (2004, 464) states that Korean theatre and film historians have treated chain-drama as if it were "an illegitimate child" in their attempt to make a theatre or film history narrative as a "pure" genealogy. While Chun merely implies, I strongly contend that the Korean nationalist theatre and film historiography framed with the illusive concept of *aesthetic purity* represents Koreans' understanding of the nation, *minjok*, which developed in early modern Korea. As noted earlier, the Korean diaspora, particularly those residing in the U.S., could emerge as "custodians of nation," expectedly leading the suggestion of the *pure* version of modern Korea, because the Korean peninsula was regarded as tainted by Japanese colonial rule. More significantly, such expectation to the diaspora was buttressed by a uniquely Korean understanding of the nation as well. Different from that of Western Europeans' understanding normally based on common civic and political elements, Koreans' understanding of what makes individuals members of a nation developed in the colonial context, based on

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ethic commonality. Accordingly, Korean ethnic nationalism was produced to affect everyone figuratively being Dangun's (the legendary founder of Korea) descendant and thus supposedly belonging to the homogenous bloodline without regard to age, gender, status distinctions, and places of residence: what became known as *minjok* in Korean (Shin 2006, 117). Such nationalist epistemology with the premise of ethnic *purity* accordingly has influenced the way of narrating histories of the nation, including its theatre and film.

Theatre historiography was indeed developed to privilege *purely artistic modern drama* over *hybrid commercial entertainment*. Though based on the merely illusive concept of *purity*, such a tendentious attitude toward hybrid commercial entertainment was reinforced by Japanese colonial censorship and its legacy on post-colonial Korea. Given that Japanese colonial censorship applied critically to productions that supposedly served socio-political purposes, it left Korean artists no other option than to aestheticize or commercialize their creation to the extreme. In this context, those who attempted to accomplish artistic achievements, as highly educated elites, promoted their projects as *purifying* Korean theatre, although their promotion of aestheticism resulted in making Korean theatre artists internalize censorship by attributing *purely artistic theatre* not projecting any socio-political ideology to *high art*. Despite its complex role in colonial Korea, the *purely artistic modern drama* has come to occupy a central place in a simplified Korean theatre historiography; elite supporters of aestheticism emerged as leaders in post-colonial Korea, claiming their authentic lineage that passes through modern Korea. Korean theatre historiography has been, in the end, constructed under a historically situated, but ultimately, false dichotomy that premised a singular genealogy supposedly encompassing Korean history in its entirety, as it did in the concept of *minjok* (Yi 2011, 531-39; Woo 2011, 277-79).

Korean theatre and film historiography, as one of the remnants of the colonial period, should be reexamined, if not completely denounced. In this context, an examination of previously overlooked performing arts productions practiced and produced by the Korean diaspora—such as *Compatriots*—certainly provides a new perspective. As this article demonstrated, the diaspora's cultural activities during the Japanese colonial period challenge not only the performing arts historiography, but also the nationalist historiography assessing the modernization of Korea as a consequence of the presumed exclusive interplay between Japan and Korea on the peninsula. Moreover, this new focus

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forces one to question what kinds of revised understandings historians will gain when revisiting history beyond the enclosure of disciplinary historiography based upon the present perspective on nation-states being geographically bound. This question could enrich studies on colonial Korea, as early modern Koreans, particularly cultural reformists as well as the Korean diaspora, adopted such global perspective to construct modern Korea. I hope that this article—as interdisciplinary research drawing from theatre studies, cinema studies, Asian American studies, as well as Korean studies—contributes to discourses in Korean studies by providing an impetus for further research dealing with, engaging in, and promoting border-crossing in terms of national, artistic, as well as disciplinary boundaries.

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Abstract

This essay examines the play *Compatriots* (*Dongpo*), published in the San Francisco-based Korean newspaper, *The New Korea* (*Sinhan minbo*), in 1917. This play illustrates an imagined process of Korean independence from Japanese colonization through the form of chain-drama (*yeonswae-geuk*), i.e., a hybrid form combining both theatrical and cinematic elements. In introducing this little-known play, I challenge the prevalent Korean theatre and film historiography that denounces chain-drama merely as a colonialist hybridity as well as the nationalist historiography that frames the history of colonial Korea as a binary struggle between Japan and Korea. Specifically, I demonstrate that chain-drama was a globally practiced popular art form, and suggest that the playwright Hong Earn was likely inspired by American popular theatrical and cinematic productions, including their hybridity of 1910s San Francisco. By developing an alternative chain-drama format, Hong affectively promotes the audience's belief and participation in Koreans' advancement towards a modern independent nation building, and successfully embodies *pure* modern Korea through the *impure* form. My discussion of *Compatriots* will ultimately reveal the fragility of a fantasy of the *purity* concept that developed in the colonial context to define the nation and its arts.

Keywords: chain-drama, *Compatriots*, Korean immigrants in the U.S., nationalist historiography, *The New Korea*

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