

## **Transnational Capitalism, National Imaginary, and the Protest Theater in South Korea**

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### **Memories of Metropolis in the “Postcolonial” Space**

One morning in August 1991, I was waiting for a subway train at a small town near Seoul. The station resembles any of the satellite train stations outside Tokyo, complete with magazine stands that sell bottles of yakult (the salubrious lactic-acid fermented milk), newspapers, pornographic weekly magazines, and investment newsletters—all of which vye for the commuter’s pocket. Some of these magazines bear small English subtitles for the eye-catching bold Korean titles, resembling the style of fashionable Japanese magazine cover designs. This Korean pastiche, such as the all-pervasive T-shirts decorated with obscure, sometimes incomprehensible, English phrases, articulates not the message itself but the commercial longing to mimic Japanese mass culture, which in turn may play off the culture of America.

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A conversation between two women sharply pierced the membrane of my senses. These women, perhaps thirty years apart in age, were comparing their neatly folded parasols:

The younger woman: My mom gave this to me for a present. She said it was Japan-made (*ilje*).

The older woman: No-o-o, that can't be. Look at the way the handles are put together. Mine is Japan-made. Isn't Japan-made the best in the world? [A triumphant grin followed, showing her gold-crowned canine from an obsolete dental technique in the cities.]

These women, through their mild contest of displaying insignificant wealth and status in possessing a Japan-made parasol, seemed unable to comprehend the ironic reality of the world capitalistic system that has incorporated South Korea. That is, while middle-class Koreans' favored designer apparel, such as Liz Claiborne or Pierre Cardin, are manufactured in the dusty sweatshops all over South Korea by their lesser privileged sisters, Korean-made microwave ovens are sold in the United States at least 300 percent below the price that South Korean urban housewives would pay to display this middle-class status symbol. The two women, young and old, were captivated by the fetish of owning Japanese goods.

When I was growing up in South Korea, my father kept a wooden chest in his room. The chest contained the memorabilia from a colonized Korean's college years in metropolitan Japan. It was at once an icon of the metropolitan materiality that highlighted the relative depravity of colonial life and a portable shrine of modernity that traveled from Europe to Japan. When the chest was open, it produced an endless number of magical items—things of surreally superior quality, signs of progress and perseverance like the imperialism itself that these items represented. A Gillette razor set in the original cardboard box has endured several decades of my father's daily shaving. It was pleasurable to write in my father's Japan-made notebook, so fine that my crude pencil tips, which often tore my coarse notebook pages, leaving concentric ripples, gracefully glided on its face. A couple of boxes of Tombow pencils manufactured by the industrial giant, Mitsubishi Company, refused to break. Underneath all these museum pieces were photo albums preserving my father's college life in Japan. In one picture, he was feeding a deer in a park in Nara—or was it Kyoto?—one of those Japanese cities I never saw but remembered so well. From utterly tattered and denuded Korea, I remembered those cities with inherited nos-

talgia and longing. These serenely celestial places also commanded the authority of progress from afar. Their prestigious universities with imposing buildings dictated intellectual hierarchies among the privileged colonized—my father and his generation of intelligentsia—long after Japan receded beyond the Tsushima Strait. Even after my older cousins began making similar pilgrimages, this time to American universities, I was preparing for the college entrance exam in South Korea with English workbooks published in Japan. These workbooks identified the colleges that had issued each of the “problems.” The myth of the prestige rankings of Japanese universities measured the level of my English competence. Japan never left “postcolonial” Korea.

My father’s memorabilia were neatly packed away, as were the colonial memories of other Koreans. Like paraphernalia in a shaman’s shrine, those magical items invoked the spirit of the remote superior beings of worship. What fascinated me most of all in my father’s chest was his driver’s license. It bore a strange surname, “Starry Mountain,” with a metonymic link to “High Mountain,” the meaning of my father’s surname of Chinese origin. Although “High Mountain” bestowed on our primogenitor was itself a legacy of T’ang China’s suzerainty over Korea, the “Starry Mountain” must have been my father’s attenuated effort to maintain his Korean identity, a desperate form of resistance against the colonial assimilation policy: an order for Koreans to adopt Japanese surnames. I developed a certain fetishism toward the license. In the destitute reality of postwar Korea, where private ownership of an automobile was just as exotic as our remote neighbor, Japan, a driver’s license seemed to offer all the possibilities that might collapse and wrinkle the economic and cultural distance between the colony and the metropolis, the class distance between the colonized and the colonizer, the underdeveloped and the advanced. Years later, when I first obtained my driver’s license, my feeling was not that of freedom, which has become an American teenager’s cliché. Rather, I felt that I had finally earned the long-denied citizenship of the metropolis. That times had changed and automobiles were choking the streets of Seoul did not matter. My fetishism had been encapsulated in the colonial time. It stemmed from the desperate hope to reach what was not within reach, as was the fictionality of modernity imposed upon the colonial natives.

The onion-skin layers of colonial and neocolonial realities were shouting at me when I finally got on the train and into a tunnel of advertisement posters covering the dome of the train’s interior. The dizzying display of color and designs were appealing to the female desire for eternal beauty, for

wealth and a secure position, for everlasting love and life—all the impossibilities that life's transient moment disallows but that the magic of advanced and powerful countries seems to promise. These advertisements almost invariably claim metropolitan origins of the products, including cram school teachers, who were enticed from the Beautiful Country (*miguk*: the United States of America) and Japan to teach the “authentic” knowledge from the Ur-land (*pont'o*). Again, this tunnel of advertisements that blankets today's South Korean life signals an internalized metropolitan centrality.

The colonial subjects' longing for metropolis is inscribed even in everyday use of the Korean language. A few days before my departure to America, one of my friends at the People's Arts Council, a group engaged in the oppositional *minjung* culture movement, casually asked me, “When do you enter (*turo gada*: to go in) America?” I cringed at this ordinary question, although it was an everyday life expression. Enter? I was startled by the very unsuspecting ordinariness of the verb *to enter*, which defines the unequivocally stratified relationship between South Korea and the United States.<sup>1</sup> The verb *to enter*, while presupposing spatial contiguity, immediately draws a boundary that separates outside from inside and positions the speaking subject as an outsider. What was alarming to me, in my friend's question, was not just the obviously hierarchized spatio-political positioning of America in the inside (i.e., the center), and the othering of Korea at the outside (the margin) but the deep embeddedness of the psychology of the colonized in everyday Korean language. The very fact that the self-marginalization, or self-degradation, has been sedimented in the epistemology of the Koreans appears potently imposing on the life of the Koreans in the so-called postcolonial period. The experience of colonialism was, and is, an impossible weight on Korean consciousness.

Regarding an active role of a speaking subject in an intransitive verb, Roland Barthes argues, in his famous essay “To Write: An Intransitive Verb?”<sup>2</sup> that an intransitive verb, because of its intransitivity, the speaking subject, positions itself in the middle of the action. With an intransitive verb, the voice of the speaker is located within the action of the verb, not outside of it, as in the case of a transitive verb. In other words, the illocutor, by using the intransitive verb, not only acts on the world but also changes his/

1. The verb *to enter* is used exclusively for traveling to the United States. The verb *to go* is used for traveling to other countries.

2. Roland Barthes, “To Write: An Intransitive Verb?” in Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds., *The Structuralist Controversy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972).

her relationship to it. South Koreans, by way of using the intransitive verb *to go in* (or *to enter*), are tacitly locating themselves within the matrix of this asymmetrical relationship between Korea and America or are accepting the asymmetry itself. Furthermore, by virtue of entering, one steps into the realm of the “superior,” the center. The performative aspect of the word *enter* alludes to the speaking subject’s implied longing for the membership in the center and subjectivity assimilated to what it signifies.

The admitted inside/outside positioning of the United States and South Korea actually is derived from the memories of the Koreans under the Japanese rule that defined Korea as Japan’s naturalized exteriority. The colonizers referred to Japan itself as *naichi*, the innerland. Korea, however, was not conferred the privilege of being defined by a comparable cultural term but simply was referred to as a peninsula, an undefined other, specifiable only in terms of its natural geographical configuration. This signifier of metropolitan centrality had been internalized in the epistemology of the exteriorized people of the colony. When the U.S. military forces occupied Korea in 1945, America posed as the new *naichi* to enter.

“As the head of the allied armed forces, Charlton Heston, marched through the gate of Peking through the strewn bodies of the tattered and ugly-looking Chinese people, we all applauded excitedly. We had already become a white race.” So recalls a historian of his experience of watching Nicholas Ray’s 1963 film, *Fifty-Five Days at Peking*, while at college in South Korea in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> For many urban South Koreans, who grew up in the “postcolonial” era humming Nat King Cole’s “Too Young” (possessing only limited—i.e., mainstream—knowledge about African Americans and unaware of Cole’s ethnicity), memorizing biographies of James Dean and Liz Taylor (and Princess Michiko: who else, outside of Japan in the 1960s, would have taken a fancy to this tennis-playing commoner-turned-princess?), and mastering the awkwardly translated (often from Japanese translations) one hundred-volume set of world (i.e., Western canonical) literature (as well as Japanese popular novels such as *Kimino Nawa* or *Ningen no Joken*<sup>4</sup>) to demonstrate our cultural competence, the longing

3. Kim Chong-gi, “1882nyon Chomisuho T’ongsang Choyakgwa Ikkwonch’imt’al” (The 1882 Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Korea and the United States and the American exploitation), *Yoksa Pip’yong* 17 (Summer 1992):18.

4. The Korean translation of Kikuta Kazuo’s *Kimino Nawa* (Thy name?) in 1960 apparently was the only translation outside of Japan. But at least four Korean translations of Gomigawa Junpei’s *Ningen no Joken* (Human condition) appeared between 1959 and 1972. I am grateful to Edward Fowler for this information.

for the metropolis and metropolitan culture was so powerful that finding a Korean identity and Korean culture took a long, winding road. Korean cultural identity, in fact, had long been erased from the memories of Koreans. The readily available memories for us were those of the colonial metropolis reified in the much fetishized Western and Japanese commodities, the icons of the master culture. The “postcolonial” subjects were thus entrapped in a tormenting ambivalence of schizophrenic split loyalties and hybrid tastes marking borderline identities. In fact, commodity fetishism (or reified longing for metropolis?) sustains such a colonial relationship.

### Guns and Cornmeal

In South Korea, such a colonial relationship was reinforced by post-war American militarism. Gramsci has taught us that hegemony works through two phases: domination not only by consent but by the capacity to regenerate consent in the spaces of civil society. Park Wan-so reveals the workings of such duality of American hegemony and Korean reception in her short story, *Pasque Flower in That Day of Terror* (1977).<sup>5</sup> *Pasque Flower* narrates the disempowered and infantilized Korean nation from the female subject position situated in a critical moment of Korean history and illuminates processes in which the colonial subjectivity shifts its loyalty to the United States, the new master(?). In this short narrative space, Park Wan-so packs the simultaneity of the rape of a feminized nation and seduction of the materials in an episode set in a remote village during the Korean War (1950–1953). To escape rampant massacres by either side, all adult males vacate the village, leaving only suckling infants and the women who safeguard the “sacred” male line. One day, American troops occupy this village, and the soldiers demand *saxi* (literally, young woman). When the American soldiers discover that the identity of the young maiden sent to satiate them is a village matriarch in disguise, the soldiers acknowledge her cleverness and present her with crates of canned goods. These are valuable wartime items and, more importantly, emblems of alien exotica and generosity. At this, the village woman’s high tension and terror turn into an appreciation for the intruders. Caught between the absent (emasculated?) and infantilized Korean patriarchal authority<sup>6</sup> and the dangerous, but bountiful, materiality

5. This is my translation of the Korean title, *Ku Salborhaetton Narui Halmikkot*. Suh Ji-moon translates it as *Pasque Flower in That Bleak Day*, which appears in *The Rainy Spell: and Other Korean Stories* (London: Onyx Press, 1983).

6. In Ahn Jung-hyo’s novel, *The Silver Stallion* (New York: Soho Press, 1990), this theme

of America, the clever woman of this isolated hamlet chooses to negotiate for a new possibility. Upon her return with the prized goods, the old woman proudly declares, "It was thanks to their being Yankees that I returned alive and even received presents." She continues to hypothesize about how she might have been treated by the Japanese and the Russians, the ruthless invaders. Recalling Korean women's collective memory of differing methods of rape and violence of the foreign invaders—that is, differing techniques of forced subjugation—the old woman justifies her newly found alliance with the American military and the material rewards it may offer. She thus commits herself to the Mephistophelian pact that offers material comfort at the expense of autonomy. The *Pasque Flower*, therefore, anticipates American penetration into all aspects of South Korean life and, by extension, the colonization of consciousness.

In the Korean language, the pasque flower translates as the crone flower because of its stooped stem and white woolly fuzz that covers the red flower petals. In patriarchal Korean culture, a flower often signifies a young woman in service of a man's pleasure: a young female worker is often referred to as the flower of the (male-dominant) workplace, and the female prostitute is called the flower of the night. Narrating the genderized nation vis-à-vis superior military (hence, masculine?) power in a time of crisis, and appointing women as guardians of patrilineage and self-defending negotiators of interest, *Pasque Flower* disrupts the Confucian claim of masculinity and challenges the legitimacy of Confucian male authority to represent the nation. Furthermore, acknowledging the absence of the self-representing national body, *Pasque Flower* questions the validity of the patriarchal tradition, the foundation of the nationalist identity. What, then, could the pasque flower allude to in South Korean history?

One possible allegorical reading may be a critique of the America-dependent Rhee Syngman regime (1948–1960). Rhee Syngman, in collaboration with the American military government, which was ruling the

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is examined from a male subject position facing the rape of a village woman and the defenseless villagers. In one scene, Ahn Jung-hyo depicts the infantilization of Korean male authority without much mediation: the Confucian patriarch of the village, Old Hwang, leads an entourage of village dignitaries to express his welcome as a host to the "visiting" American troop. Before Old Hwang even has a chance to ask for the head of the "Texas Town," a young soldier, who is totally oblivious to the village head's honorable mission, offers Hwang a chocolate candy bar, a gesture that reduces Old Hwang to a childlike status and the recipient of a handout. Whose war was the Korean War, and who is the subject of Korean history?

southern half of Korea (1945–1948), conducted a separate “national” election in the South so as to be elected the first president of South Korea, thereby officializing the partitioning of Korea. Rhee, who received a Ph.D. from Princeton, was known for his rigid anti-Japanese and anticommunist line, and his regime was criticized for heavy dependency on America and on its economic aid. This economic, political, and, most of all, military dependency on the United States allowed for further American intervention into South Korean affairs and firmly situated the nation at the edges of the American empire. Is the author of *Pasque Flower* also alleging that the octogenarian president was a withering prostitute but perhaps with the understanding that American hegemony was far too formidable for the already disempowered and partitioned Korea to resist?

This was how the East was won: with guns and cans. As Americans remember the 1950s witch-hunt with horror, they would find the practice of American hegemony in Korea in the pre-Vietnam era to be equally horrifying. If we consider Bruce Cumings’s assessment that the Cold War was not in full development until well after the partition of Korea in 1946,<sup>7</sup> then the “red-hunt,” the massacres of the Cheju Islanders in 1948<sup>8</sup> under American military rule, and the massacre of the civilians in Koch’ang were not the direct products of Cold War ideology but rather represent the suppression of the social revolution in this Third World country that posed a challenge to American hegemony, the desire to dominate the world capitalistic system.<sup>9</sup>

7. Interview with Bruce Cumings, “Segyesa Sogui Hangukchonjaenggwa T’ongilhanguk” (The Korean War in the world history and the unification of Korea), *Ch’angjakgwa pip’yong* (Spring 1992):378.

8. This atrocious civilian massacre in the name of “red-hunting” was targeted for about two to three hundred underground guerrillas. According to Hyon Ki-yong, however, the military, in this cleansing mission, set the quota of a 1 to 100 ratio: eliminating one hundred civilians to catch one guerrilla. Almost all male members on this island between the ages of 17 and 40 were brutally murdered, along with countless women, children, and old people for being family members of the murdered. In order to drive out the hiding guerrillas, the villages from the mid-mountain and up were burned. See Hyon Ki-yong, “Metal and Flesh,” *Ch’angjakgwa Pip’yong* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1992):74–94. This history has been completely silenced until recently. I first learned of this in the mid-1980s through Hyon Ki-yong’s novella, *Suni Samch’on* (Aunt Suni), which is about an old woman who dies of guilt, especially for tilling the enriched soil of the family land, which was the killing field. This novel was first published in 1979 but was banned immediately.

9. Bruce Cumings’s description of the suppression of the insurgency focuses mainly on the brutality of the police, the constabulary, and the “extreme rightist,” such as Northwest Youth; therefore, the question of the role of the American military is somewhat obscured. See Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 250–59.

This politics of terror is where the U.S.-led capitalism and the South Korean dictatorship join hands. As the Cheju Island writer Hyon Ki-yong reports, the American military, which ordered the Korean police to burn the villages on this volcanic island and watched it from the surrounding ships that contained the islanders, later posed as a candy-giving benefactor. "The fire from the burning villages must have been spectacular from the distance," wrote Hyon Ki-yong.<sup>10</sup> The spectacle was the other's holocaust. This happened within three years of the liberation of the nation from colonial slavery.

The "postcolonial" South Korean children who have buried the humiliating memory of lining up in the schoolyard to receive a charity bag of cornmeal and powdered milk, which Koreans of a rice and nondairy culture did not know how to integrate into their diet except by boiling them together to make porridge and did not fathom U.S. economic interests then. That is, the United States was unloading its surplus agricultural products on South Korean territory in the name of aid. South Korean historians argue that shipping the surplus agricultural products overseas helped the United States control their domestic market price and gain leverage in shaping the economic policies of the recipients of such aid. This generous and charitable program, which professed to relieve South Koreans' hunger, bound them to American exhortation.<sup>11</sup> The Surplus Agricultural Product Agreement between Korea and the United States, signed in 1957, stipulated, unbeknownst to many South Koreans, that 90 percent of the sales revenues would be diverted to South Korea's military budget. The Rhee government was in dire need of capital to finance the military's dramatic expansion in the aftermath of the Korean War and thus eagerly oversaw the domestic sales of American agricultural products.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, American "charity" deepened the South Koreans' sense of indebtedness and colonial pathology of self-pity, which ensured the South Koreans' pledge of loyalty to America. The supply of American agricultural products, however, suppressed the demand for South Korea's domestic farm products and drove the farmers out

10. Hyon Ki-yong, "Metal and Flesh."

11. It is for this reason that those who experienced the humanitarian military intervention in the postwar period are now suspicious of U.S. military involvement in Somalia despite the want of an alternative plan. Reportedly, four U.S. petroleum companies were given concessions to explore and exploit nearly two-thirds of Somalia for oil and natural gas before the crisis there intensified. See Mark Feinman, "The Oil Stakes Factor in Somalia," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 Jan. 1993.

12. Kim Yang-hwa, "1950nyondaek Kyongje Hyopchong: Wonjowa Chongsogui Mekanjum" (The economic agreements of the 1950s: The mechanism of aids and dependency), *Yoksa Pip'yong* 17 (Summer 1992):47-60.

of their already meager business.<sup>13</sup> The dispossessed farming population then drifted into the cities, constituting a pool of cheap disposable labor for South Korea's export-oriented industrialization.

By 1967, the late poet Sin Tong-yop observed the disintegration of South Korean rural communities and the flow of unskilled migrant workers into the city. In *Fifth Chongno Street*, Sin Tong-yop paints a dismal urban landscape: near the midnight curfew, a day laborer standing on Fifth Chongno Street (perhaps looking for temporary lodging) is approached by a country boy, who asks for directions to the East Gate.<sup>14</sup> The laborer, who is carrying an empty lunch box, notices a sack of sweet potatoes (perhaps for a cash exchange) getting wet on the boy's back and a pair of new shoes preciously clutched to his chest, protected from the cold spring drizzle. Lost in the vast alien city, the two country folks are probably destined to walk the same path. In the poem, the country boy is alluded to the day laborer himself, who in turn imagines a sibling affinity with a prostitute at the edge of the city. By doing so, the laborer locates himself among thousands of other migrant workers who struggle to survive in the city and to save money to bring together their scattered families, who must also sell their cheap labor somewhere. South Korea's legendary labor-intensive industrialization fell heavily on the shoulders of this dispossessed population.

In exchange for military and economic aid, the United States claimed exclusive rights to supply finished and semifinished consumer goods to South Korea. Such goodwill resulted in chronic underdevelopment of industry in South Korea and in a dependency on American commodities.<sup>15</sup> The high demand for American goods has also found illegal conduits. The large black market dealing American goods, which shocked the U.S. television viewers during the Seoul Olympic Games, penetrated even the remote cor-

13. Pak Chin-do, "Hanguk Nongopmunjeui Chongae Kwajong" (The development of Korean agricultural problems), in Kim Chin-gyun and Cho Hui-yon, eds., *Hanguk Sahoe-ron* (Discourse on Korean society) (Seoul: Hanul, 1990). For a more detailed discussion, see Chang Chong-ik, "1950nyondae Miingyonongsanmul Wonjoga Hanguk Nongobe Mich'in Yonghyange Kwnhan Yongu" (A study on the impacts of the American surplus farm product aid on (South) Korean agriculture in the 1950s) (Unpublished Master's thesis, Yonsei University, 1988).

14. The East Gate is about a block from Fifth Chongno Street, but within sight. The fact that the boy does not recognize this famous landmark signals the boy's newness to the city.

15. Yi Pyong-ch'on, "Chonhu Hanguk Chabonjuui Paldalsa" (The development of post-war Korean capitalism), in Kim Chin-gyun and Cho Hui-yon, eds., *Hanguk Sahoe Yongu* (Seoul: Hanul, 1990).

ners of South Korea. A large number of American soldiers stationed in South Korea, regardless of their rank, often reached their purchase limits when they shopped at the base commissaries in order to supply Ritz Crackers to South Korean middle-class households and Sony stereo systems to the new rich. This legal and illegal supply of consumer goods gradually paved the way to colonization of the South Korean market. But what South Korea desperately needed was technology transfer and capital investment. The Park Chung Hee regime (1961–1979) achieved this under its aggressive economic development plans in order to earn the status of a Newly Industrialized Country (NIC), where peddlers still offer M&Ms and Chapstick, along with Korean-manufactured Kleenex at city bus stops.

Anthony Giddens predicts that in the age of advanced capitalism, globalization will introduce new forms of world interdependence, in which there are no “others,” and social movements will adopt what he calls “utopian realism,” which recognizes the inevitable intervention of the power of the privileged in order to realize goals of global concern, such as minimizing industrial hazards.<sup>16</sup> When we consider those *maquiladoras* that dot the length of the U.S.-Mexican border, or the relocation of hazardous industries offshore, this “utopian realism” may be another name for colonial exploitation, and what Giddens foresees as utopian realism may only be a utopian projection of the privileged. Such exploitation is thinly disguised as promises of utopia in the debate surrounding the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). NAFTA officials have been arguing that Asia is no longer the place to invest, because Asian workers spend only two or three cents per one U.S. dollar invested there. Meanwhile, they widely advertise to U.S. multinational corporations that the wages of Mexican workers will be the lowest in the entire Pacific Rim. Based on the logic of global Fordism, proponents of NAFTA argue that the Free Trade Agreement will benefit Mexican workers who will spend more money on American goods than their Asian counterparts, and it will, therefore, narrow the economic gap between Americans and Mexicans. Consequently, Mexicans would not infiltrate the U.S.-Mexican border and exacerbate the inner-city problems of the United States, as many in favor of NAFTA have argued. This utopian vision of NAFTA once again carries the banner of American (Fordist-Marshall Plan) heroism that would redeem Mexico from its Third World state, so that the United States can benefit.

16. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 151–78.

The reality of the Third World is that it is often caught between the archaic and the modern, or what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call the despotic power society and capitalistic economic society, in which a constant technological revolution takes place. Deleuze and Guattari argue that in the landscape of despotism, the patriarchal symbolic order is established with class divisions and hierarchy in the service of political power and social domination by the despot.<sup>17</sup> While the permanent revolution of production is expected to eliminate the power component in capitalistic society, capitalistic society is not power vacuous. It always accompanies an archaic (Oedipal) power component, which stems from, and allows for, the private appropriation of surplus value. Such appropriation often translates as the suppression of workers' wages.

In South Korea, in order to maximize profit, the mythologized state narrative of "the economic development of the nation" has repressed the workers' desires and demanded sacrifice of individual interests. In this process of state-controlled capitalistic development, private appropriation of surplus value has been tolerated, and the result has been the fattening of *chaebol*<sup>18</sup> who failed to invest in the research and development that would initiate technological revolution in production. Economic analysts observing the South Korean economy attribute its faltering growth in the 1990s to two factors: labor disputes and lagging technology. This is one of many diagnoses that acutely points to the very symptoms of the Third World condition: the suppression of the labor force by incumbent power and the appropriation of capital without reinvestment in technology. In South Korea, workers have long been forced to sacrifice their rights in order to maintain the company they work for in the world market.

The multinational corporations cash in on precisely these contradictions of the local political and economic culture. Furthermore, transnational capitalism is deterritorializing the nation-states, and its hegemonic market forces weaken the controlling power of an individual state. As Skocpol and others have acknowledged, state-controlled capitalism, especially that of the NICs, has "brought back" the authority of the state to the negotiating

17. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H. Lane (New York: Viking, 1977).

18. These are the patriarchal leaders of the large family-owned industrial and business conglomerates. Although its resemblance to Japan's prewar *zaibatsu* has often been suggested, no study has examined the aspect of South Korean *chaebol*'s colonial mimicry, the lack of creative industrialization, or the limitations of imagination. *Chaebol* is the Korean reading of *zaibatsu*.

table.<sup>19</sup> Powerful transnational capitalists, however, manage to package the country's much needed technology transfer and direct foreign investment together. Direct foreign investment bypasses the South Korean government's own agenda for targeted industry and control over the flow of foreign capital. This undeterred penetration of foreign investment into local market allows consumer-oriented market forces to prevail, weakening state control over its national economy.<sup>20</sup> To the workers, who are engaged in this international division of labor, what matters is not just the wage and purchasing power of the workers. In this postnational era, the experience of the workers on the low rung puts their self-identity, and by extension, national identity, into question.

The complicated manifestations of this new transnational experience in South Korea are cautiously examined in Yu Sun-ha's *A Story of a Flower* (1990). Paeng, an employee of a multinational electronic company, is tormented by his ambiguous multiple identity. Trapped by loyalty to his Koreanness, dismayed at a bureaucratic system subservient to capitalistic overlords (maybe even to the degree of a comprador bureaucracy), and disillusioned by his livelihood as a white-collar wage worker at a foreign firm, Paeng finally comes to view his marginalized and emasculated identity as a dust-covered wildflower on the roadside among a deluge of automobiles. The American representative of the company, Ingerham, in contrast, is portrayed as a product of multinational corporatism. He conforms to the profiles of the global managers whom anthropologist June Nash has studied: a man (it is assumed) who would want to live and work in any part of the world for any indefinite period, who would adapt to foreign cultures, and who would develop deft political skills and thus be able to deal with presidents of nations and leaders of guerrilla operations with equal finesse.<sup>21</sup> In this novel, Ingerham has lived in various locations in Asia for fifteen years and has acquired practical knowledge about the power structure of the countries in which he has worked. When in need of such knowledge, he aggressively, but privately, cultivates local allies who will educate him on such matters, so that he will effectively suppress any opposition and elimi-

19. For a diverse discussion, see Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

20. Eun Mee Kim, "Foreign Capital in Korea's Economic Development, 1960–1985," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 24, no. 4 (Winter 1989–1990):24–45.

21. June Nash, "Anthropology of the Multinational Corporation," in F. Huizer and Bruce Manheim, eds., *The Politics of Anthropology* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 425.

nate obstacles. This multinational corporate manager reminds one of the Althusserian apparatus or Gramscian organic intellectual-like apparatchiks in the international capitalistic empire.

Paeng's sense of defeat in his meek resistance to the demands of the American representative originates not from the power of capital that Ingerham represents. It stems from the realization of the power of knowledge, knowledge that penetrates national boundaries and their economic infrastructure. This is the power that segments the labor market into wage differentials, thereby fragmenting human relationships among the nation's people. Here, women fall into the least favorable wage segment.<sup>22</sup> The transnational manufacturing process deepens national and regional schisms at a structural level and widens social and cultural disjunctions.<sup>23</sup> Penetration by foreign elements into a body of the nation, fragmenting, exploiting, and controlling its economics and population, certainly resembles symptoms of colonialism.

The capitalistic penetration of a nation signals control of a body by a power external to the body. Under a patriarchal (Oedipal) domination, a body thus controlled is susceptible to being feminized and marginalized in the international class hierarchy. The feminine association of the penetrated, fragmented, and hierarchized body extends beyond politics to the level of technology. In the global manufacturing system, a product is no longer manufactured through a unified process, but parts and materials are shipped/imported from various locations to be assembled into a final product. In this sense, the decentralized manufacturing process resembles that of reproduction technologies. Not only does a foreign body, an implanted fetus, which was manufactured via various technologies, colonize a woman's body but the effect of such colonization fragments the identity of the colony. Advancement in reproductive technology, especially in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer, causes gradual deconstruction of motherhood as a unified biological process. Instead of "mother," there are genetic mothers, birth mothers, adoptive mothers, surrogate mothers, and other fragmented maternities.<sup>24</sup> With nation thus deconstructed and penetrated in this Gileadean system of production, the workers' status is, like that

22. For instance, see Maria Fernandez-Kelley, *For We Are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico's Frontier* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983).

23. June Nash, "Anthropology of the Multinational Corporation," 424.

24. Margarete Sandelowski, "Fault Lines: Infertility and Imperiled Sisterhood," *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 1 (1990):34.

of Margaret Atwood's fictional handmaids in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), dependent solely on their ability to (re)produce as part of the larger system.

### Contestatory Nationalism and the Protest Theater

From about the time that talk of the “humiliating” terms of the normalization of the diplomatic relationship between South Korea and Japan occupied dinner conversations, and student protesters were scurrying into the narrow alleyways of the neighborhood to escape the police, urban South Koreans already began to brighten their living rooms with the Matsushita’s “Nashonaru” (national) florescent lights. By the time my distant relatives were planning to purchase a shack near Seoul to set up a “factory” that would employ several village women to tie-dye silk *obis* (*kimono* sash) shipped from Japan, the neighborhood dressmakers were seducing high school graduates who had barely taken off their uniforms, attire they inherited from Japanese colonial time. The high school girls’ attire, the military tunic and *monpe* pants with straight hair one inch above the coat collar, was designed to discipline the body and to erase sexuality and individuality. Seamstresses would discreetly offer to these uniform-freed young women a special fabric that was “just unloaded” off a ship from Japan, and they would open up the latest issues of Japanese fashion magazines to help the women choose the most ladylike style. Transnational capitalism presupposes transnational consumerism. The Japanese fabric dress, covered with the labor-intensive *ppinttakku* (pin-tucks),<sup>25</sup> that enticed my friends into the bright spring of the freshman year, was a prelude to the colonization of the South Korean market by Japanese commodities and mass culture. Colonization of the market means colonization by consumerism of the capitalistic metropolis, which is a form of inscribing on other’s terrain. The products that roll off the local assembly lines are not only alien to the local culture but most of them are fetishized items that eventually come to dominate the consumer market. Transnational production affects the consumer market since much of the technology exported to the Third World serves to lock the recipients into patterns suitable to other cultures and forces them to live

25. Although Korean phonetics is capable of accommodating a greater number of Western phonetic sounds, Koreans continue to use words borrowed from the Japanese, words that are themselves often borrowed from Western languages. This phenomenon seems to be more pronounced when the words contain even a slight reference to technology, such as *spana* (spanner: wrench) or *nippa* (nipper: pliers).

by alien models.<sup>26</sup> The material environment challenges indigenous customs and cultural memories. It also controls and redistributes one's own resources. The people of Third World countries thus are culturally alienated within their own territorial boundaries, and the very grounds of their cultural identity is disrupted by materials that a transnational manufacturing system has imposed on them.

In the 1960s, many college students spent hundreds of hours in the dark corners of *tabangs* (literally, tea room, café) dazed in the aroma of Maxwell House coffee and the exotic herbs from Scarborough Fair. One day, they heard the sound of the hourglass drum that satirizes the *Five Bandits*<sup>27</sup> and that energizes the great leaping dance of the servant, Malttugi.<sup>28</sup> That day, the agonizing cry of the young factory worker, Chon T'ae-il, echoed throughout the college campuses. Chon committed self-immolation after he failed to organize a workers' union at the Peace Market's garment factory. This occurred in 1970. The sail of the populist *minjung* movement was picking up a great wind: "Down with Dictatorship, Up with Democracy!" "Workers Are Human Beings Too. Improve the Working Conditions!" "Out with the Evil Labor Law!" "Resist Cultural Invasion!"

By this time, a tall metallic tower had been erected in front of Seoul's city hall. The tower's electronic bulletin board ceaselessly blinked the dollar amount of export revenue and reminded people of the estimated annual export goal: \$100 million (U.S.). This blinking billboard hurried the South Koreans to the international market to auction off their wealth of cheap labor. Earning dollars was "a sacred patriotic mission!" South Korean workers were forced to sacrifice their lives under the oracle of the export tower that

26. June Nash, "Anthropology of the Multinational Corporation," 428.

27. Kim Chi-ha's narrative poetry, *Five Bandits* (1970), depicts five categories of South Korean nouveau riche as simian creatures who have accumulated enormous wealth and power: *chaebols*, assembly men, generals, cabinet members, and high-echelon officials. The "five bandits" also refer to the five officials who advocated Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. In this light, *Five Bandits* not only criticizes the capitalistic development under the despotic authoritarianism of South Korea but also alludes to the military government's collaboration with neocolonial forces. *Five Bandits* employs the style and format of the tale-singing genre, *P'ansori*, for which a drummer accompanies the solo singer of tales.

28. I am referring to the carnivalesque mask-dance drama, which was widely adopted by university students contending the military government. Malttugi, the antihero, is the central figure in the dance drama. See my "Minjung Culture Movement and the Construction of Popular Culture in South Korea," in Ken Wells, ed., *Korea's Minjung Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, forthcoming).

promised modernization of the nation and a plentiful life. The sacred “call of the nation” has reduced the South Korean work force to industrial corvée, the faceless “cheap labor.” The state’s official narrative of modernization and development denied workers acceptable working conditions, the right to unionize, and access to compensation. The factory workers, most of whom were unskilled young men and women without job security, were required to work extremely long hours. Even today, workers routinely consume chemical substances to stay awake through a long shift, but they have no medical insurance and do not earn enough to treat their abused bodies. Elder Sister (notice she does not have a name), a female character in a protest theater, *Factory Light*, works overtime—beyond already unbearably long working hours—because her husband lost his fingers while working on an unsafe assembly line. She reveals that her hearing is impaired and that she has developed tuberculosis while working in a poorly ventilated, dusty apparel factory. She sings:

The company president's puppy  
visits doctors in a Pony [a Hyundai car].  
I take Timing [an amphetamine] and  
wait for a better day.  
On payday  
I avoid the corner store  
with an empty envelope.<sup>29</sup>

Who wears the dress I make?  
Wife of the factory owner?  
Or the long-nosed blonde?  
Like a cake in a picture,  
We can try it on but can't wear it.  
Only a uniform is suitable for us.

The sentiment most pervasive in this song is the sense of being othered and the effects that are inscribed on this undefined alterity and discontinuity. This alterity, then, is marked by containing the workers in uniform, a sign of an emptied-out, and thus inscribable, individual. This very othering points not only to the othering subject and the centrality of that privileged subject, whether it is South Korean *chaebol* or multinational corporations, but also articulates the irrevocably widened class schism created

29. The workers' wages are handed out in an envelope, since Confucianism views money as ethically unclean.

from within and the further fragmentation of the already divided national body caused from without.

But any challenge to the official narrative of development or critique of the aggressive practices of multinational corporations was considered an act of antigovernment, which meant, in the language of the Cold War, a procommunism that threatened South Korea's national security. No one was allowed to doubt the advent of the New Village,<sup>30</sup> the capitalistic utopia. It was a time of silence. The South Korean government's suppression of the demands of its own people, however, masquerades its role of policing in defense of the interests of transnational capitalism. Contestation began to overcome this marginality and to eliminate the class-based contradictions.

Against this backdrop, the protest theater genre, *madang guk*, emerged as a rehearsal for the revolution.<sup>31</sup> In a way, it was an extension of the rising cultural nationalism pervasive among the university students in the early seventies: the revival of folk culture. The students' revival of folk culture, however, was itself counterhegemonic in that it protests the military state's archaeological excavation and museumization of folk culture, which was implemented as the military junta's strategy to nationalize the masses in the 1960s.<sup>32</sup> The students adopted the mask-dance drama as a carnivalesque heteroglossia contesting the military state's narrative of domination. Soon, the drama began to narrativize the problematic realities of the 1970s, thus energizing the people's struggle to achieve the state that Jean-Luc Nancy calls ecstasy, the ideal solidary community (*kongdongch'e*).<sup>33</sup> As

30. The New Village movement, initiated by the Park Chung Hee regime in 1972, was a nationwide community development plan modeled after the rural communities of the advanced Western industrialized countries. Of course, the idea of this utopia is earmarked with the degree of material possession, which has been the yardstick of development in the mainstream American social science, which the U.S.-trained South Korean social scientists directly applied to their economic development plans.

31. The *madang guk* theoreticians employ this concept developed by Augusto Boal in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1979). Boal distinguishes his poetics from that of Brecht in that the spectators of the theater of the oppressed do not delegate power to the character or actor but assume the protagonic role and shape the theater.

32. See my "Hegemony and Shamanism: The State, the Elite, and the Shamans," in Lewis Lancaster, ed., *Religion and Contemporary Korean Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

33. Nancy's call for rethinking the notion of community as an entity of a collective resistance against power external to the "community" is quite relevant in the notion of *kongdongch'e*, the solidary community, developed in the *minjung* discourse. Nancy sug-

such, *madang guk* has played an important role in the *minjung* movement, raising the social and historical consciousness of the people by critically examining South Korean realities under the military government's intense drive for industrialization and the hegemonic forces of neocolonial multinational capitalism. *Madang guk*, as underground theater, was produced not only by the *minjung* activists to mobilize masses but more importantly by the workers and farmers themselves, both as a means of collective resistance and as their discursive forum.<sup>34</sup>

Divorced from Western, staged theater, which has dominated the Korean theater scene since the Japanese colonial period, *madang guk* collapses the boundary between the stage and the spectators, and transgresses the spaces of drama and real-life stories. The protest theater rescues subaltern people at the edge of South Korean society who are lost in the myth of economic miracle. It reintroduces the marginalized to the center of the critical *minjung* discourse and historically contextualizes their struggles, thereby suggesting the anticipated revolution to overcome the contradictions. Technically and spiritually, the idea of the theater moves from *mimesis*, or representation of an action, to, borrowing the term developed by radical black aestheticians such as Amiri Baraka, *methexis*, or communal "helping out" of the action by all assembled.<sup>35</sup> It is a process that shifts theater from drama—the consumed spectacle—to ritual—the production of an event. This dissolves divisions between actor and spectator and, as one *madang guk* writer put it, between consumption and production.

*Madang* refers to an idealized prelapsarian space where the members of the agricultural communities collectively produced and shared goods prior to the advent of a capitalistic market economy. Imbued with romantic

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gests that the notion of ecstasy, pure collective totality, may be helpful in realizing this community. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990). Interestingly, the *minjung* intellectuals have employed the notion of ecstasy in quite the same sense as Nancy's, but their notion has developed from the radical rethinking of indigenous shamanism. See Paek Ki-wan, "Minjokkwa Kut" (Nation and [shamanic] ritual), in Minjok Kuthoe, ed., *Minjokkwa Kut* (Seoul: Hangmins, 1987). For a discussion of Paek's notion of ecstasy, see my "Minjung Culture Movement and the Construction of Popular Culture."

34. For a historical account of the development of this theater genre, see my "Minjung Nationalism and the Construction of Popular Culture," in Kenneth Wells, ed., *South Korea's Minjung Nationalism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, forthcoming).

35. See Kimberly Benston, "From Mimesis to Methexis," in Errol Hill, ed., *The Theater of Black Americans* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1980).

anticapitalism, *madang guk* signifies a form of resistance to the capitalistic mode of production that is governed by the international market and by the symbolic struggle of the people against the dehumanizing capitalistic force. *Madang guk*, however, carefully avoids nostalgia for the nation's past. Instead, it seeks to renegotiate the meaning of the past by recasting it in the contemporary political economic situation. The very first *madang guk*, *Sorigut Agu*, is a case in point. *Sorigut Agu* (*Agu*: a shamanic ritual of cry), which Kim Chi-ha wrote in 1974,<sup>36</sup> articulates the critique of transnational capitalism and its impact on South Korean life. In many ways, *Sorigut* set the ideological and aesthetic agenda for this genre of the protest theater for the next two decades. Kim Chi-ha lifts a scene from a traditional folk theater, a Pongsan mask-dance drama, and allegorizes the love triangle between an apostate monk, two shamanesses, and a servant as the capitalistic relationship between Korea, Japan, and the South Korean workers. In *Sorigut Agu*, the Buddhist monk is replaced by a Japanese businessman who seeks the services of Korean women. The two shamanesses are replaced by a college woman and a factory girl, both of whom are drawn to Japanese capital, which the businessman can offer them. This blind worship of the material, represented in the theater in an implicitly sexualized relationship between Japan and South Korea, critically questions the South Koreans' all-pervasive material fetishism spurred by recent capitalistic development (and maybe motivated by the deeply embedded desire to mimic the affluent metropolis). The seduction of the wealthy neighbor may be an obvious protest against the notorious *kisaeng* tourism, but, more critically, it interrogates the complicity of South Koreans with the hegemony of multinational capitalism. The servant in the mask-dance drama is replaced by a male factory worker, *Agu*, of rural origin, who defeats the Japanese businessman and reclaims the two Korean women, thus prophesying the victory of the Korean workers over the penetrating international capitalistic forces through their counterhegemonic struggle.

*Agu's* combat strategy is a curious one. Initially, he attempts to buy off the Japanese capitalist with a fifty-*hwan* coin, no more than seven U.S. cents. On the face of this coin is inscribed the turtle ship that defeated the Japanese naval fleet during Hideyoshi's invasion of Korea (1592–1598). The coin was issued by the anti-Japanese Rhee Syngman regime. Of course, *Agu's* strategy is not a capitalistic gesture for a multinational busi-

36. As the *madang guk* movement evolved, a variety of collective composition techniques were experimented with rather than relying on individual authorship.

ness merger. The battle that Agu suggests is a metaphoric one invoking Korea's precolonial history, which sustains Korean national identity, as a source of empowerment. Agu finds, however, that invocation of Korea's "glorious" victory in 1598 is not powerful enough to curb the capitalistic system of desire. At this point, Agu's carnivalesque (mask-)dance symbolically enacts the (war) cry (*sori*) of the people, the people's collective struggle, which leads to Agu's final victory. Clearly, *Sorigut* does not simply rely on an idealized past to forge collective resistance against neocolonialism. In fact, the theater reveals to us that the mere restoration of history is inadequate to unseat an imposing colonial power and warns of the danger of fetishized cultural nationalism, which may be mobilized by hegemonic colonialism just as effectively. Instead, it calls for a new source of empowerment: *minjung*, the people, and their collective resistance.

How to resist collectively? This question has energized heated debates on national solidarity against the danger of fragmentation and disintegration caused both by external powers and by internal divisions due to differential access to wealth. In this vein, a number of strategies of redistributing power and wealth were imagined: construction of an organic collective community based on the spirit of *Gemeinschaft*,<sup>37</sup> which may be achieved by way of regenerating ecstatic communal energy; or reconstruction of a precapitalistic form of community and a system of collective production (*ture*),<sup>38</sup> which invokes the idealized socialism of North Korea. It is in this context that the main character of another *madang guk*, *Nokttukkot*, the leader of a revolutionary new religion that alludes to the peasant war of 1894, promises a plentiful new world, where people at the edge of Korean society would become masters of their own destiny. Here, rice (*pap*), the communal agricultural product, not an abstract capital, is emblemized as the currency for all people to share.

The conflation of these Marxian ideals for an alternative social formulation and critical cultural nationalism led the *minjung* discourse in the 1980s to the issues of national unification. Occasioned by North Korea's conciliatory gesture of sending rice to the South Korean flood victims in 1984, rice gained another currency as a symbol of national unification.

37. Pak Hyon-ch'ae, "Kongdongch'ron, Kongdongch'e Undong" (Thesis on collective community, collective movement), *Kongdongch'e Munhwa* 2 (1984):40–63.

38. Chong Ch'ang-nyol et al., "Kongdongch'eui yoksa, Kyongjehakchok chonmanggwa munhwaundongui sigak" (A history of collective community, economic prospective, and perspectives of culture movement), *Kongdongch'e Munhwa* 1 (1983):9–42.

The protest theater *Unification Rice* (1988) illuminates the history of class struggle in Korea that has engaged three generations of a working-class family, the Changs. The senior Chang, who was imprisoned for his involvement in labor struggles during the Japanese colonial period, defected to the North upon experiencing the Rhee regime's reproduction of colonial repression of workers. Chang's son, Liberation (for being born in 1945), a disabled Vietnam veteran, and his wife are divided on the issues of family reunion. Liberation's wife fears that reunion with Liberation's father, who defected to the North, would cost a dear price, namely, a violent disruption of the status quo, such as a war. This fear reflects the South Korean government's position that opposes national unification. The theater interprets that this opposition stems not only from the Cold War policy of the United States, which governs South Korean politics, but also from the widened class division within South Korea. In *Unification Rice*, the ideologically divided family is further wedged apart by disparate class interest. Liberation's eldest son studies for the bar exam to become a judge, a position his younger brother regards as being a "handmaid" for the military government. The younger son, who was forced to sacrifice his education for his older brother's higher learning, leads a labor struggle at the factory where he works. In the end, the elite son joins his younger brother's battle, and their grandmother brings the two united brothers food that she has cooked with rice from North Korea. The rice, however, does not reach the brothers, because the riot police intervene. The theater that anticipates the national unification achieved by *minjung*, the people, remains a rehearsal as yet.

The oppositional intellectuals diagnose that the Korean national body has been fragmented and penetrated by the world capitalistic system and its militaristic articulation and contestation. The proponents of the *minjung* movement have concluded that the ultimate collective struggle emerges out of the liberation from these external forces that coerce the people of Korea. It is from this historical awareness that feminist sociologist Lee Hyo-chaе suggests geo-economic empowerment of the Korean people. She argues that the natural and human resources of North and South Korea are complementary. Therefore, national unification would economically and politically empower Korea and rescue (unified) Korea from its current marginality.<sup>39</sup> This discourse of national collectivity often invokes biological metaphors: for example, the divided nation is a wounded body inflicted by outsiders.

39. Lee Hyo-chaе, *Pundansidaеui Sahoehak* (Sociology in the era of national partition) (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1985).

The oppositional thinkers argue that such a wounded body cannot give birth to a new society. Subsequently, it is imagined, physical disorder causes distortion of the body parts and, equally, an ailing spirit, leading to social and cultural disorder. The *minjung* culture activists imagine that the curing of the wounded body needs a healing ritual, which would also purify the ailing culture (the radical intellectuals use the term cleansing [*sech'ok*]). In indigenous shamanic logic, this healing includes the exorcism of the etiologic agent, the foreign, or, as some students put it, the foreign ghosts (*soyang kwisin*: literally, Western ghost). For instance, in August 1987, or in what radical *minjung* activists call the forty-second year of Korea's Unification Wish, a *minjung* culture group invited Kim Kum-hwa, a noted shaman from Hwanghae Province (now in North Korea), to officiate a two-day ritual celebrating "the day that Korean people recovered light," the forty-second anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japan. The ritual was to propitiate the resentful spirits of those who had died in national tragedies during the past one hundred years, the period of rupture. These resentful spirits that the shaman invoked to console were the anonymous victims of the Tonghak Peasant War (1894–1895), the first successful peasant revolution; the March First Independence Movement (1919) against Japanese colonial rule; the Korean War (1950–1953); and the Kwangju Uprising (1980)<sup>40</sup>—all landmarks of the people's struggle to achieve autonomy from the authoritarian government and the equally dehumanizing forces of imperialism. This ritual of healing historical wounds concluded with a song of a newly interpreted Korean history, in which the people, not the state, created history of their own. In this ritual of redeeming history, hitherto silenced and thus alienated, the people's history was recuperated; and in this ritual moment of *communitas*, the narrative of national affliction energized the will to struggle collectively. Ironically, the shining romanticism was increasingly losing its radiance in South Korea as the new national borders were disrupting the map of the Soviet Union. The euphoria of a utopian moment seems to live in the memories of a collective struggle that is rich with heroic legends, waiting to be flashed again.

40. The massacre of the citizens of Kwangju became an important watershed in the development of the *minjung* movement in that it offered an opportunity for South Koreans to critically reexamine the political interest of the United States in South Korea above and beyond the humanitarian concern. See my "The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory in South Korea," *positions* 1, no. 1 (1993):77–102.

## Epilogue

I got off the train accidentally at a station located in the basement floor of a large department store owned by a Japanese multinational corporation,<sup>41</sup> only to find that I was lost in a maze of internationally known European apparel stores that originated in France or Italy and a number of other high-fashion shops. For a moment, I fancied that I was in Tokyo. The hybrid Japanese fashion that women and men at the station were sporting transported me to an alien "culturescape." In thirty minutes, I had traveled from the colonial fetishism of a Japanese parasol to the "postcolonial" mimicry of Japanese postmodernity. I quickly remembered, however, that across the river, where I was heading to watch a *madang guk*, was the squatters' town, which was occupied by day laborers and their equally unskilled families, who supply domestic assistance to the inhabitants on this side of the river. The river at once unites and divides the two classes.

The *madang guk* I participated in dealt with the problems of organizing a labor union: the company's ruthless intervention in collaboration with the police, and the individual worker's internal conflicts. Most of the spectators were students. One taxi driver, who was organizing a labor union himself, and a couple of unemployed laborers were the only exceptions. During the performance, the participants sang a few labor struggle songs together. But the revolutionary festivity that used to "boil the blood" of tens of thousands of workers during labor disputes in the late eighties was absent, and I remained a quiet spectator and consumer. Although it was an aesthetically refined debut piece for this group, who traveled all the way from the southern city, Taegu, I found the theater hackneyed and unstimulating. The theme has been played out, examined, and debated hundreds of times—around the summer of 1987, when the largest nationwide labor struggle erupted. I detected a depletion of the rehearsal of a revolution. Disappointed, but reluctantly—reluctant, because of my own nostalgic romanticism—I raised the question of *madang guk's* efficacy to an old associate of mine, who was an advisor to this theater group. I learned that he is now teaching Brechtian theater at Kyongbuk National University, and I felt deceived by time, for

41. Eun Mee Kim compares the different investment patterns of Japanese and U.S. multinational corporations (MNCs). She concludes that while American MNCs invest in South Korea's target industry sectors and thus are geared toward domestic Korean consumption, Japanese MNCs focus on service sectors, especially the hotel industry. See Eun Mee Kim, "The Investments of U.S. and Japanese Multinational Corporations in Korea: A Comparative Investigation," *Asian Affairs* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1992):214–27.

time had robbed all of us of life's energy in the name of anticommunist state nationalism, namely U.S.-led capitalism. I remember that I had to obtain my professor's written permission to enter the library's closed section to read Brecht's anthology, thereby inviting myself and my professor to the surveillance of omnipresent stool pigeons. Only a few years ago, a translation of a Brecht by one of my teachers was banned and confiscated from bookstores. The decline of socialism in Europe may have loosened the grip that was asphyxiating us, but the same force is depleting the revolutionary energy that has cost many lives and caused great pain in South Korea. *Madang guk* seemed also to be losing its momentum, and I asked the Brecht scholar if it was now becoming obsolete, and what their plans were for the future. The professor quite candidly replied, "Well, we are putting together a children's theater. That's where I think our future lies, to prepare and educate the next generation." A few days later, I asked a similar question to veteran *madang guk* actors and activists who had spent their entire adult life in *madang*. Yi Yong-mi, who was busy selling the "one-day coffee shop"<sup>42</sup> invitation to raise money to help her imprisoned husband, a fellow *madang guk* actor, Pak In-bae, reflected that the day of the *madang guk* as an agitprop might have passed. According to Yi Yong-mi,

Since the workers' critical consciousness has risen dramatically through their firsthand experiences of labor struggles, and their collective energy for reform is highly charged, they can be self-motivated without *madang guk*. It is a fact that we are not invited as frequently to the sites of the peoples' struggle. Occasional invitations to college campuses are our major source of income. We need to reorient ourselves. Yet, we resist going onto commercial stages for fear of [ideological] contamination. Right now, our major difficulty is to retain the trained culture activists in the theater space. Hunger has driven many of them away.

South Korean laborer-poet, Pak No-hae, confronts this depletion differently. Pak was arrested during my stay in Seoul on the charge that he violated the National Security Law (an anticommunist law) for organizing and operating the Socialist Workers Federation, the first indigenous socialist organization since the national partition. What was stunning was not just the Federation's lavish style of capitalistic operation, which the South Korean government readily alleged as "proof" of the well-funded

42. This is a popular fundraising method among South Korean college students.

espionage operation of North Korea. However, capitalistic operation of the Federation originates from the organization's (or Pak No-hae's personal) strategy to transform classic socialism into socialism with a capitalistic face, since, as Pak No-hae argues, "the North Korean brand of socialism has lost its power to persuade South Korean workers. South Korean workers have long been programmed into the system of desire under the capitalistic economy." The socialist laborer maintains that socialism should be packaged in order to market it to the South Korean workers. As a way of marketing socialism, the poet experimented with advertisement narratives, what he defines as "a quintessential genre of capitalistic culture that disseminates desire and fetishism." Pak even recited an "advertisement poem" during his trial, selling the idea of labor strike.

As I complete this essay, news reaches me from South Korea: a longtime oppositional leader, Kim Yong-sam, has been elected president of South Korea. Albeit Kim's tarnished reputation for having built a coalition with the ruling military government, the South Korean people have finally restored a civilian government after thirty years of relentless struggle to rid military rule. The militarization of South Korea, which began with the American military occupation in 1945, is finally (I hope) coming to an end. But this is only a beginning. Are South Korean workers adequately prepared to confront the ever more aggressive forces of transnational capitalism? The workers are angry and worried that they are losing jobs to the next tier of Asian NICs, or even to Mexico, and that employers often threaten the workers with offshore relocation possibilities. But the South Korean workers do not seem to be informed of the global transformation that is currently taking place—the transformation of industrial society to an information society, which calls for a new kind of service industry requiring advanced technology. When Jamaican travel agents make hotel reservations throughout the world for global hotel chains, when a Santa Monica-based consulting firm reroutes telephone lines so that its computer consultants in Ireland can supply on-line services to New York clients while the firm's Californian workers are tied up in the Los Angeles traffic,<sup>43</sup> and when Indonesian workers begin manufacturing Nike shoes at fifteen cents an hour, what can the South Korean workers look forward to?<sup>44</sup> While South Korean

43. See Brian O'Reilly, "Your New Global Work Force," *Fortune*, 14 Dec. 1992, 52–66. The list of offshore sites of the service industry includes India and Singapore, among others.

44. The fact that most of these new offshore service industry sites are former British colonies indicates the still powerful reign of the master language, English. This further

weekly magazines often feature Southeast Asians who hold (often expired) tourist visas and are working in South Korea, or Koreans visiting from Northern China who sell herbal medicine and handicraft on the streets of Seoul,<sup>45</sup> a South Korean writer already detects the highly skilled, but jobless, South Korean shoemakers who are illegally working as indentured laborers at the poorly equipped shops in the backwaters of Japan.<sup>46</sup>

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suggests the pervasiveness of the Anglophone cultures in (if not colonization of) these locales and the possible disenfranchisement of the non-English-speaking people in the global industry.

45. I am also told that Koreans from China are also working full-time for less than three hundred U.S. dollars a month at Korean-owned factories in Saipan or Guam. This wage is comparable to that of the average South Korean factory worker.

46. Yu Chae-hyon, "Yomch'on gyo," *Ch'angjakgwa pip'yong* (Winter 1992):173–201. Yomch'on gyo is a shoe-manufacturing district in Seoul.