

**Directing Koreanness:
Directors and Playwrights under the National Flag, 1970-2000**

by

Gang-Im Lee

BS, Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea, 1989

MFA, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1997

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This dissertation was presented

by

Gang-Im Lee

It was defended on

November 17, 2008

and approved by

Dr. Bruce A. McConachie

Dr. J. Thomas Rimer

Dr. Kathleen E. George

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Attilio Favorini

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Gang-Im Lee, PhD

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In this dissertation, I venture to explicate the socio-political significance of the Korean nationalist theatre performance called *minjokgŭk*, some of which is heavily based on elements of “indigenous” culture. *Minjokgŭk* utilizes elements of “indigenous” cultures and searches for “the Korean ethnic (arche)type” as “the ideal Korean type” or “genuine Korean-ness” for the reconstruction of “the Korean ethnic community.” In this context, this dissertation thematically approaches rethinking the issue of rhetorical representation.

As a methodological tool, I adopt feminist deconstruction to unfold the epistemological contradictions of the essentialist idea embedded in the notion of “the Korean (arche)type,” problematizing the ethnocentric and phallogocentric nature of the representation. This dissertation interrogates the major task of *minjokgŭk*, which ideologically promulgates the idea of ethnocentric patriarchy supported by the traditional (mainly Confucianist) notion of “community” — inquiring if this type of theatre can provide useful and practical prospects for imagining a more democratic and plural civilian society in Korea today, when the interaction of globalization, nationalism, regionalism, and localism simultaneously impact our everyday life and cultural identification.

In this dissertation, I explore genealogical trajectories of *minjokgŭk* contesting with other theatrical performances for nation building, cultural identification, and national unity. Paying close attention to changing socio-political situations and conditions, I trace the routes, not roots, of *minjokgŭk*, and observe how its theorists and the practitioners were (un)able to come to terms with shifting situations and conditions. I have selected works mainly from the 1970s to the 1990s since the works provide grounding images, symbols, metaphors, and allegories pertinent to discussing how “the Korean ethnic community” has been narrativized through the performances of *minjokgŭk* during the turbulent epoch.

Reflecting on the limits, accomplishments, and insights of the preceding researchers, I hope that this dissertation presents *minjokgŭk* with fully contoured critical views and ideas. This dissertation takes a small step towards a genealogy of *minjokgŭk*, and hopes to opens up a space for a dialogue among troubled artists and activists confronting globalization as a shared issue.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS: GLOBALIZATION AND GENDER

On October 3, 2005, a dance performance commemorating Korea's National Election Day was televised. The dance theatre was performed by "the Guk Su-ho Dance Troupe" nationally recognized as one of the leading (traditional) dance companies.¹ Equipped with fantastic lights, costumes, props and music, the performance evoked the celestial time and space of *Tangun*, a national figure responsible for *Kochosŏn* ("Korea's origin").² Guk Su-ho,³ in symbolic white traditional attire, impersonated divine *Tangun* on stage. His male dancers metonymically represented the Korean race, visually echoing the theatrical action of worshipping him. The grace and elegance of this founding moment was substantiated by the male performers' traditional dance movements. Strong and soft, straight and curved, high and low, their motions kinetically traced the history of Korea's origin. The effect was enthralling, even for those who were not in the performance locale, "the Sejong Cultural Center," but watching on television. Enchanted by this spectacle, people watching at

¹ I use the McCune-Reischauer system of romanization for Korean except that there is a history of usage for a specific word or a name.

² *Kochosŏn* existed during B.C. 2333- AD 108.

³ I put the last name first for all the Korean names appearing in this dissertation according to the Korean custom, and try to use their full name since many Koreans have the same last name.

home enjoyed a virtual voyage to the mythic community built by us, the “Korean race,” selected by a celestial god as his legitimate inheritors in the origin myth.

The enticing commemorative ritual conjured up the image of sacred land, recalling archaic “national” memory through the traditional dance performance. But more significantly, it evoked Korean ethnic community. In the land of origin, there were no foreign invasions or domestic struggles and “the Korean ethnic community” was grand and strong. One could see the image of a sacred land providing an underlying structure of feeling to unite “us,” the Korean people. It was an expression of nationalism, providing foundational principles (images) and sentiments structured through performance and stimulating people’s identification as Koreans.⁴ This social ethos is a practical force with which Korean people voluntarily participate in social/political fields when called by their nation.

Conspicuously, this nationalist performance inculcates the idea of an ethnic bond of unity hinging upon one bloodline, the celestial patriarchal line, of the sacred community. In this performance, however, the memory of *Wungnyŏ* (in the myth of Korea’s origin, a bear which after a sacrificial rite of passage became a human and gave birth to *Tangun*) was omitted. *Wungnyŏ* has been glorified as “the ethnic archetype of a sacrificial mother.” But, she disappeared in the Korean myth and history after she completed her role of “the ethnic womb” from which “our Korean race” was evolved. Where have “the mother of the nation” and her female offspring gone?

Through the various social means and outlets, individuals and groups in society, by summoning past tradition and history, perform social identification which results in

⁴ Following Stuart Hall, I use the notion of “identification” replacing “identity” when I emphasize the process of constructive formation the notion “identification” connotes (1996: 6).

the shaping of their present social structure. The aim of this performance of (social) identification based on the past is not only to surmount present problems and conflicts but also to suggest future prospects. Particularly when a nation is in an initial stage of development or has faced crisis, narratives about its origin and heroes allude to the glorious golden age, endowing its members with a symbolic strength to endure painful present situations and dream of a better future. As Chŏng Hyŏn-paek asserts, post-colonial countries like Korea in particular set the task of establishing cultural identification as a lofty national mission. (2003: 34). Anthony Smith contends that symbolic sources such as national myth and oral tradition as well as history are no less crucial than territorial/political sovereignty in nation building (1999: 58). This analysis provides insightful socio-political contexts for elucidating the characteristics and meanings of nationalist theatre performances like Korean *minjokgŭk* (“the Korean ethnic theatre”). The field of performance, particularly theatre, as Loren Kruger claims, is a neglected area of study and attention in considering memories, politics, economics, cultural identification, and nation building, and at the same time the most contested area in which the past memories and present interests violently clash (1992: 6).

Since the 1970s, South Korean critics and scholars in the field of performance have studied the pursuits of artists and activists who persistently borrow elements from “indigenous” myth, tradition, and history in order to craft modern performance. Their approach to the subject focused on the formalistic features and signification of individual works without reference to historical contingencies against which the socio-political dynamics of the individual works could be clarified. Although they endeavored to view individual performances within socio-political frames, the dynamic relations between the

socio-political situations, conditions and cultural contexts of the performances were omitted. No attempt has been made to link this chasm and lend a contrapuntal vision on the subject. This dissertation, based on a more historical theory-driven reflection on the subject under scrutiny, will venture to explicate the socio-political significance of the Korean nationalist theatre performance called *minjokgŭk*, some of which is heavily based on elements of “indigenous” culture.

Minjokgŭk utilizes elements of “indigenous” cultures and searches for “the Korean ethnic (arche)type” as “the ideal Korean type” or “genuine Korean-ness” for the reconstruction of “the Korean ethnic community.” In this context, this dissertation thematically approaches rethinking the issue of rhetorical representation. I adopt feminist deconstruction as a methodological approach to unfold the epistemological contradictions of the essentialist idea embedded in the notion of “the Korean (arche)type,” problematizing the ethnocentric and phallogocentric nature of the representation and the intriguing fascist ethos it likely evokes. Even though *minjokgŭk*, as a type of Korean modern theatre, diverges on matters of political goals, approaches, and attitudes, regardless of political orientation, whether its producers are politically right, middle, or left, it depends on the traditional culture’s expression of patriarchal ideas and sentiments. This dissertation interrogates the major task of *minjokgŭk*, which ideologically promulgates the idea of ethnocentric patriarchy supported by the traditional (mainly Confucianist) notion of “community” — inquiring if this type of theatre can provide useful and practical prospects for imagining a more democratic and plural civilian society in Korea today, when the interaction of globalization, nationalism, regionalism, and localism simultaneously integrates and disintegrates “our globe,”

plunging us into the cultural conundrum of identity (unity) and difference (fragmentation).

1.2 DEFINITION: WHAT IS *MINJOKGŬK*?

In this dissertation, I deal with *minjokgŭk* as a historical and technical concept. *Minjokgŭk* literally denotes “the ethnic theatre” of Korea. Some Korean scholars and practitioners view *minjokgŭk* beyond the historical frame of modernity and trace its origin as far back as to the beginning of the nation. Their view is rooted in a historical assumption that the national founder, *Tangun*, was both a chief shaman and a political leader. Therefore, they regard the shamanistic ritual, *gut*, as the archetype of Korean ethnic theatre. In this respect, the Confucianist cultural tradition is rejected as being both elitist and foreign. This kind of argument, bolstered by the purist sense of the notion of “culture,” however, engenders a problematic division of the self and the other in cultural identification. Incidentally, religion in South Korea is very culturally syncretic. Cultural traditions and products have been fashioned out of the intercultural mixture of shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and later Christianity. Furthermore, even though the popular folk culture based on shamanism remained relatively separated from elite *yangban* culture,⁵ as sociologist Chŏng Jae-sik informs us, “the values and norms of neo-Confucian orthodoxy at the center, maintained by the *yangban* elite, had far-

⁵ *Yangban* refers to the highest social rank during the *Chosŏn* dynasty. “Ideally the *yangban* represented a ruling class whose power was institutionalized in an agrarian, Confucian bureaucracy; to which entrance was based upon both ascription and merit. Moreover, this social elite included degree holding and land ownership as well” (Dennis Hart 2003: 31).

reaching effects as they filtered down to large numbers of ordinary people, inducing them to follow neo-Confucian principles in regard to family structures, rituals, and social relations” (1995: 62).

Meanwhile, most *minjokgŭk* theorists and practitioners assume that *kamyŏngŭk* (the traditional Korean mask dance drama), which formed around the seventeenth century during the *Chosŏn* dynasty,⁶ is the prototype of *minjokgŭk*.⁷ Historically, Yu Ch'i-jin who coined the term, *minjokgŭk*, in the 1940s regarded *minjokgŭk* in that context. As I pointed out, during the *Chosŏn* dynasty, shamanism and Buddhism were subsumed by the dominant Confucian ideologies, but the influence was reciprocal. Viewed from this complicated cultural interaction, it is understandable that the practitioners of *minjokgŭk*, dependent on traditional cultures, were caught up in a contradictory situation in which their performances displayed, to some degree, the Confucian ideologies they severely disparaged. Moreover, when practitioners describe *minjokgŭk*'s roots, they fall into a historiographical fallacy of presentism. Notions such

⁶ The *Chosŏn* dynasty ruled Korea from 1392 to 1910.

⁷ *Kamyŏngŭk* has a long genealogical continuity and variety. In its extant form, *kamyŏngŭk* was formed around the middle of the 17th century. It has broad regional variations but they share similar principles, historical backgrounds, dramaturgies, narrative structures, presentational styles, dance forms, music, and masks. Performance elements common to all local variations include masking, dance, singing, music, pantomime, improvisation, and dialogue. Among those elements, dancing, singing, and music were specifically emphasized. Rather than being built around a central plot, *kamyŏngŭk* is made up of independent episodes called “*kwajang*” loosely connected by a common theme – satire of defrocked monks, of corrupt aristocrats, and of insensitive officials. Before industrialization and modernization in Korea, it was mainly performed as a part of village festivals through which all kinds of social aspects (artistic, entertaining, religious, and political) could provide outlets for the explosive energy of the plebian culture. The performers were mostly local farmers and outcasts but toward the end of 18th century, with the development of cities (and markets), petty town officials and merchants actively engaged in the performance; consequently, two different types of *kamyŏngŭk* – a village style (closely linked to village festivals) and a city style (inclined more to entertainment side) – evolved. But, regardless of diverse types and variations, performances of *kamyŏngŭk* revealed plebian aggressive intentions and emotions toward the aristocrats. But, it is worth to note here that *kamyŏngŭk* had been an exclusively male culture until the early twentieth century. All the players and producers were men and they usually performed it for male spectators. Even the city type and the commercial type, which was performed by traveling entertainment troupes like *sadangp'ae* in market places, did not reflect the change in the gender formation of spectators.

as nation based on ethnicity and nationalism are the products of modernity. Accordingly, *minjokgŭk* refers to an intercultural type of modern Korean theatre hybridizing the “foreign” theatrical elements with the “indigenous” cultural texts.

Nevertheless, within narrow theatrical circles, it has been wholly identified with its leftist amateur wing evolving from the 1970s socio-cultural movement. This kind of leftist *minjokgŭk*, *minjung minjokgŭk*, was derided by critics and the scholars for not displaying a level of aesthetic sophistication beyond political propaganda. In response to their accusation, Yim Jin-t’aek, one of the principal practitioners and theorists of *minjokgŭk*, has approached the notion of *minjokgŭk* from a leftist position and defined it as a progressive political theatre emerging during the *minjung* (grassroot) culture movement in the 1970s. The disconnection on both sides can be attributed to the fact that they held different views of “theatre.” Whereas right wing institutional theatre practitioners associated it with a more refined elite product, the leftist activists presumed aesthetics more grounded in the life and labor of common people. In my experience, since the 1970s, *minjokgŭk* has been a dominant type of Korean theatre both in and out of theatrical institutions.

As the pronounced difference in political positions indicates, *minjokgŭk* has historically been a political theatre. To adopt Eric Bentley’s definition of “political theatre,” *minjokgŭk* manifests a rhetorical nature of persuading people in order to preserve, reform, or revolutionize the *status quo* (1988: 1). Furthermore, it is a political theatre in that its primary concern lies in making its political intention and cognizance deliberately (un)clear. Defined from a broad socio-political context, *minjokgŭk* does not simply index a specific style or a form. Stylistically, *minjokgŭk* is not homogeneous; but

what the *minjokgŭk* practitioners and theorists share in light of its stylistic (dis)orientation is that they associate realism (as a style, which has often been synonymous with naturalism) with the “Western” imperialistic theatre. Apart from, specifically, psychological realism, they have searched for alternative theatres by mining the theatrical sources from such various theatrical styles as Korean traditional performances, modernist theatre, experimental theatre, epic theatre, “the theatre of the oppressed” of “the Third World,” socialist realism, etc. Their concurrent forms merge on the mission statement that *minjokgŭk* decolonize the Korean stage. It is remarkable that the formalistic structures of *minjokgŭk* range broadly from socialist realistic drama to, what Richard Schechner calls, “direct theatre” of the street (social rituals and political rallies and demonstrations),⁸ which contests the government-sponsored national stage. They have been amalgamated out of sources of traditional *gut* performance, *kamyŏngŭk* play, history play, “Living Newspaper,” agit-prop, musical, and documentary drama (1993: 88-9).

Among the leftist practitioners, more often than not, the notions of *minjunggŭk* (Korean people’s theatre) and *madanggŭk* (Korean open-air theatre)⁹ had been used

⁸ As a pioneering field of performance studies, Schechner’s “direct theatre” is very applicable to explore theatrically framed political events. The “direct theatre” of people, according to Schechner, can be aptly analyzed through the interpretive frame of carnival. But recognizing the fact that carnival was a culture-specific manifestation of European-Christian tradition, adoption of Schechner’s methodological tool would complicitly and erroneously assert the universality of the diverse cultural structures. The political circumstances, interests, and conflicts from whose contexts the theatres are meaningful cannot be unified under the common fabric of carnival.

⁹ Lee Young Me notes that “but not all *madanggŭk* theatre is ‘open-air,’ nor can all open-air theatre be called *madanggŭk*.” “Rather it is in itself a separate theatrical style, like realist or epic drama, for example” (1997: 41). “Given this historical background, it is no wonder that *madanggŭk*, the only contemporary heir to Korean traditional theatre in terms of style, is so little known outside Korea. Ironically, *madanggŭk* is now acquiring interest around the world as a kind of progressive Third World theatre but the fact that it is the direct successor of Korean traditional theatre is still little understood” (1997:40).

interchangeably with *minjokgŭk* until the end of the 1980s. Forged in the 1970s by the leftist theatre wing practitioners, the concept of *minjunggŭk* literally meant “grassroots theatre” or “people’s theatre.” As a matter of fact, the term, *minjokgŭk* was used officially from the late 1980s by a proposal of Yim Jin-t’aek in order to integrate the various approaches of the leftist *minjokgŭk* movement, when the first “*Minjokgŭk Hanmadang* (the Great Korean Ethnic Theatre Festival)” was held in 1988. Before that time, Yim preferred *madanggŭk* to *minjokgŭk*, but he realized that there had been leftist theatre activities not dependent on traditional sources and the original conception of *madanggŭk* was unable to contain the divergent styles and forms of theatrical performances generated from the end of 1970s. *Madanggŭk* named the dominant style of ethnic theatre until the notion was officially replaced by *minjokgŭk*. In fact, the term, *madanggŭk*, was invented anonymously in the 1960s. Even though the right wing theatre practitioner, Hŏ Kyu, used the notion of *madanggŭk* since the 1970s, the notion of it has been passionately appropriated by the leftist theatre practitioners. Needless to say, Hŏ Kyu’s theory of *minjokgŭk* is that of *madanggŭk*. As a style, *madanggŭk*, a kind of *minjokgŭk*, should refer to *minjokgŭk* exclusively based on such traditional performances as *kamyŏngŭk* (the Korean traditional mask dance drama), *p’ansori* (Korean traditional oral tale-singing, one person Opera), and *kkoktugaksinolŭm* (Korean traditional puppet theatre). As a contemporary surrogate of *kamyŏngŭk*, *madanggŭk*, literally denoting open-air theatre, however, does not simply indicate an outdoor theatre performance. To understand the *madanggŭk*, the geological and historical formations of *kamyŏngŭk* have to be taken into consideration.

Kamyŏngŭk was set in a context of a festive ritual during holidays in villages during the *Chosŏn* dynasty. As cities developed, merchants, petty officials, and ruined aristocrats called *hanryang* displaced farmer participants in the city-type *kamyŏngŭk* from the middle of the eighteenth century. As a consequence, rebellious personae such as *Maldukyi* and *Ch'uibalyi* appeared in *kamyŏngŭk* episodes. They are sanguine young male servants who symbolically crush their oppressors, the elite *yangban*, by means of sarcastic parodies and sexual vigor, reflecting popular male imagination of the oppressed. Similarly, in village-style *kamyŏngŭk*, which later added *Maldukyi* and *Ch'uibalyi* episodes, “*Miyal kwajang*” was a main episode in which “the old man” and “the granny *Miyal*” are social abstractions of ordinary farmers. In both city and village type *kamyŏngŭk*, after the temporary liberation from the oppressive *status quo* during the holiday, the participants of *kamyŏngŭk* returned to their ordinary lives — where real disruptions and disorders could have provided potential for social transformation.

Regarding the traditional form, it was the possibility for social change through communal festival that leftist practitioners of *madanggŭk* questioned. According to the leftist *madanggŭk* practitioners, “*madang*” implies not only the openness of a material space but also the openness of player-spectator relationship, which is indiscriminately applied to an indoor performance as well. Borrowing Augusto Boal’s “spec-actor,” the leftist *madanggŭk* practitioners have been more concerned with manipulating the borders between the players and the spectators than *kamyŏngŭk* players might have been, attempting to open a social space for dialogue. As in *kamyŏngŭk*, *Maldukyi* and

Ch'uibalyi are frequently summoned as “the Korean ethnic type” in *madanggŭk*.¹⁰ Boal's concept of “theatre” as “rehearsals of revolution” applies to *madanggŭk* performances, which are regarded as rehearsals for democratization and building a “Korean ethnic community.”

Among theatre theorists, the ideas of *minjokgŭk* and *madanggŭk* had also been utilized. As early as in the 1930s, during the Japanese colonization of *Chosŏn*, Yu Ch'i-jin called for national recognition of the importance of *kamyŏngŭk* tradition in inventing a new modern Korean theatre called “*shingŭk*” (literally denoting “a new theatre,” whose idea of newness was influenced by Japanese modern theatre, *shingeki*). Although in the 1920s and 1930s a popular musical genre called “*ch'anggŭk*” (literally meaning “a musical drama”)¹¹ was labeled *shingŭk* in opposition to *p'ansori*, most *shingŭk* referred to “Western” style theatre. At the end of 1940s, Yu Ch'i-jin advocated “*minjokgŭkron*” (a theory of Korean ethnic theatre) as part of a modern cultural development plan that was conceived in order to remedy people's ignorance of their own cultural heritage. But, in retrospect, it is evident that his advocacy was intended to conceal his collaboration with Japanese imperialism. At the end of the 1950s, after he traveled to America and several countries in Europe, he embraced his earlier conviction and proclaimed that “modernization of (*kamyŏngŭk*) tradition” was the sublime task of the theatre artists of the nation. In the 1970s, Hŏ Kyu's performances and theoretical discourses on *minjokgŭk* and *madanggŭk* evoke the ideas of Yu. The underlying similarity between Hŏ

¹⁰ Exceptionally, Ch'ae Hui-wan sheds light on Miyal, the old woman in “Miyal *kwajang*,” as “the Korean ethnic type of the oppressed,” but he still regards Maldukyi and Ch'uibalyi as the symbols of imagination and resistance of the oppressed. I will discuss this gender division as one of the main topics.

¹¹ *Ch'anggŭk* inherited *p'ansori* (one person opera) and adopted modern theatrical techniques. But, the initial idea of multiple characters singing their own parts came from “Chinese Opera” (Yu Min-yŏng 2002: 35-6).

Kyu and Yu Ch'i-jin resides in the fact that both probed the possibility of establishing *minjokgŭk* by emphasizing the expressive aspects of traditional performance as uniquely characteristic of the nation's cultural heritage. While theorists and practitioners involved in both the *minjung* culture movement and in established theatres paid attention to folk tradition like *kamyŏngŭk*, they emphasized different things. They selected elements from the past in accordance to their present interests, problems, conflicts, and visions. The activists aspired to find ways to empower people for social transformation toward liberation and democratization enabling "us" to keep "our own," whereas the theatre practitioners searched for aesthetic, formalistic perfection and ideals to preserve "our own culture" and liberate the stage from "their" cultural encroachment.

In conclusion, *minjokgŭk* is an umbrella term, which encompasses various styles, forms, and political attitudes. In the broad sense of the word, *minjokgŭk* refers to a Korean modern theatre that is conceived by Korean people in Korean language and deals with Korea's past, present, and future. Crucially, *minjokgŭk* asserts that homogeneity exists in the underlying nationalist ideas and sentiments envisaging the grand and strong "Korean ethnic community."

1.3 THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The issue of "establishing *minjokgŭk*" is indisputably related to discourses of globalization, nationalism, and democratization in South Korea. Hence, this dissertation covers the historical period from the 1960s to the 1990s when the processes of

democratization intersected with the problematic global flows of capitalism in South Korea. In this dissertation, I explore genealogical trajectories of *minjokgŭk* contesting with other theatrical performances for nation building, cultural identification, and national unity. Paying close attention to changing socio-political situations and conditions, I trace the routes, not roots, of *minjokgŭk*, and observe how its theorists and the practitioners were (un)able to come to terms with shifting situations and conditions.

I have selected works mainly from the 1970s to the 1990s since *minjokgŭk* as a movement gained momentum in the 1970s, but waned in the 1990s. The works are written or conceived by mostly male writer-directors except for three collective works, but all are directed by men. I chose the works not because they “represent” *minjokgŭk* in their socio-aesthetical accomplishment, but because they provide grounding images, symbols, metaphors, and allegories pertinent to discussing how “the Korean ethnic community” has been narrativized through the performances of *minjokgŭk* during the turbulent epoch. Overall, I am concerned with how *minjokgŭk*’s kernel representation of the Korean ethnic (arche)type resonates with the fascist nationalist ideal of national savior or hero and complicitly oppresses performative social dialogues about pluralistic visions of the community and its members, during a time when currents of globalization brought steep change to the country’s demographic landscape, strongly impacting social conditions in the nation. In 2007, 1,000,000 foreigners comprised 1/40 of the formerly homogeneous nation’s populations.

I can only note in passing the changes globalization brought to North Korea and how North Korea comes to terms with the strong flows of globalization. The discourses of tradition, once abolished in North Korea, began to change the face of

hyŏkmyŏnggagŭk (revolutionary music drama). Is the emerging type of North Korean ethnic theatre, *minjokgagŭk* (the ethnic music drama), a ground for national unification, as *minjokgŭk* in South Korea posited a homogeneous national culture for a unified ethnic community and the future of liberated nation? Or is it a mere political gesture, wherein the new vision of “Korean Economic Ethnic Community” among politicians and administrators, is replacing the old cultural paradigm of unification with capitalism? The idea of “Korean Economic Co-prosperity” is concretized in industrial complexes like the one in Kaesŏng, North Korea where South Korean male capitalists and administrators and North Korean laborers, mostly women, comprise the landscape of transnational capitalism. The female laborers’ bodies are the actual sites of the low-end of the international division of labor. What if the unification means another internal colonization of the underprivileged women of subalternity?

After the triumph of democratization at the end of 1980s, the *minjokgŭk* movement, as a theatrically-framed socio-political engagement, rapidly dwindled, and consequently, heated debate around the issues of *minjokgŭk* subsided. Yet, it was in the subsequent years that *minjokgŭkron* (the theory of *minjokgŭk*) expanded its cognitive horizons and theoretical sophistication. In other words, through the period of the social *minjokgŭk* movement *minjokgŭkron* was struggling for a discursive hegemony, and after the fervent years it achieved a “discursive formation” (Foucault 2002: 34). Today, being sustained by the nationalist “interpretative community” of Korean theatre, *minjokgŭkron* dominates other critical and theoretical issues, nearly silencing them (Kim Yŏng-su: 45). It is this very suspicious tranquility that I attempt to interrogate from historical and theoretical perspectives in this dissertation.

In Chapter 1, I briefly outline historical processes of globalization and democratization from the 1960s to the 1990s in relation to the responses from and the effects on the *minjokgŭk* movement and other contesting theatrical institutions and groups. Then, along with the topic of globalization, I explicate the political and theatrical significance of *minjokgŭk(ron)*, through the frameworks of “community-based theatre” (mainly those from Attilio Favorini and Bruce McConachie), since in the *minjokgŭk* movement the “quintessential” part of social dialogue was advanced in the area of “community building” as a stronghold against (inter)national powers impinging on the life of local people. Whether *minjokgŭk* is based on communities bonded with the same interests, or communities bound within a locality, *minjokgŭk* performances emboss the holistic image of nation and history in the minds of spectators and participants, creating nation as not so much a bounded territory but as a spiritual entity.

As this dissertation limits its scope to *minjokgŭk* that relies on the fundamental sources of cultural heritage, thematically it attends “the politics of the past.” I investigate the socio-political meanings of the politics of the past in *minjokgŭk*, as distinct from broader theoretical concerns and issues. As Karl Marx insightfully observes, we do not simply use the past in a way in which it pleases us; there exist the complex interrelations of given circumstances, interests, problems, and conflicts surrounding the past under scrutiny. Throughout this dissertation, my discussion of the politics of the past, therefore, attempts to describe the complexity of the contesting ideas and actions among different theatre groups and institutions struggling for the ownership, authority, and identification over the past in tradition and history. In particular, I look into the performative repercussion of *minjokgŭk* in the minds of participants and spectators, as

the theorists and practitioners of *minjokgŭk* assiduously accentuate the role of genuinely Korean sentiments in the formation of native sensibility. Viewing “*han*” (deep-seated grief or resentment) and “*shinmyŏng*” (divine exhilaration) as uniquely Korean socio-psychological phenomena, they explain the aesthetic experience of the participants and the spectators in the performance of *kamyŏngŭk* and *madanggŭk*.

Like the phenomenological experience of traditional shamanist ritual, *gut*, the aesthetic experience of *kamyŏngŭk* and *madanggŭk* culminates in the state of festive frenzy, as Cho Dong-il observes, during which the participants and spectators “praise the victory attained in the performance, but they do not try to overturn the high-low or the superior-inferior, nor do they ridicule or torment the losers.” In a festive setting, “it is evident that the fight ends in reconciliation and the conquest leads to rebirth” (1997: 74). In rethinking the socio-political significance of *kamyŏngŭk* in the frames of ritual and festival, these claims of “reconciliation” and “rebirth” run up against the negative appraisal of “safety-valve theory” or “opium policy.” Some scholars maintain that “Korean folklore plays were a device with which the ruling class meant to exercise easier control over the ruled, and that the latter were therefore deceived by the former in this way” (Kim Mun-whan 1970: 38). This is a theoretical conundrum for theorists and practitioners of *madanggŭk* with a revolutionary objective: the assertion of reconciliation and rebirth appears to reinforce the *status quo*. Nevertheless, this negative assessment is partly refuted by the historical manifestation of *kamyŏngŭk* performances. It was due to the subversive nature of *kamyŏngŭk* that the Japanese imperialists suppressed such performances when they detected grassroots empowerment “through” the performance of *kamyŏngŭk*.

The issue of memory permeates the politics of the past. Whose memory of history do we deal with? For this reason, commemoration can be either a deliberately manipulating strategy for keeping the *status quo* if controlled by the state, or a solemn “feast” of resistance when held by revolutionary groups. When *minjokgŭk* summons an historical personage as “the ideal Korean type” in specific social contexts and settings, the performance serves as a commemorative ritual. The memory and eulogy dedicated to the historical figures, in return, unite the participants and spectators of the performance. This might explain why the Korean National Drama Company was manipulated to serve as the advocate of the repressive regime during the 1970s, and we find an abundance of history plays during the period. By contrast, when the performance of *minjokgŭk*, in a frame of national *gut*, aimed to alleviate the *han* of the deceased who died for democratization, more often than not it led to a revolutionary feast.¹²

Who are these people memorialized in the performances of *minjokgŭk*? The deliberation of politics of the past is followed by “the politics of identity and gender,” since in *minjokgŭk* the past is constructed as “the past” from ethnocentric and phallogocentric foundations. Particularly, supported by Gayatri Spivak’s conceptions, I render materialist feminism’s discourses on gender, identity, and nation, laying out methodological foundations for a feminist deconstruction. As a theoretical tool, Roland Barthes’ notion of “myth as inflection” is as insightful as Spivak’s feminist deconstruction, through which I scrutinize the liaison between (bourgeois) nationalism

¹² Refer to Lee Dong-il’s essay “Contemporary *Madanggŭk* of South Korea” included in *Performing Democracy*.

and the Oedipal myth discovered in many performances of *minjokgŭk*.¹³ According to Barthes, “myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession; it is an inflection” (1972: 129).¹⁴ Deconstruction aims to problematize this mythic construction of social discourse. Spivak observes, deconstruction “simply questions the privileging of identity so that someone is believed have the truth. It is not the exposure of error. It is constantly and persistently looking into how truths are produced” (1996: 27-28). “The idea of womb as a place of production is avoided both in Marx and in Freud” (Spivak 1996: 58) Through the methodological tools of feminist deconstruction, I will show how *minjokguk* has attended the historical construction of an ethno-phallogentric myth of the womb.

1.4 GENEALOGIES OF *MINJOKGŬK*

In Chapter 2, 3 and 4, I depart from more theoretical issues to chart genealogical courses of *minjokgŭk* and situate the works that I have selected for the sketched topography of *minjokgŭk*. Joseph Roach’s notion of the “surrogate” is highly useful to draw the genealogical path of *minjokgŭk* based on traditions insofar as the concept does not designate the historical (dis)continuity as the linear progression of “the fitter”

¹³ Spivak remarks, “My attitude toward Freud today involves a broader critique of his entire project. It is a critique not only of Freud’s masculism but of nuclear-familial psychoanalytical theories of the constitution of the sexed subject. Such a critique extends to alternative scenarios to Freud that keep to the nuclear parent-child model; as it does to the offer of Greek mythical alternatives to Oedipus as the regulative type-case of the model itself” (1996: 59).

¹⁴ Refer to Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* (1972: 109-158).

(1996: 28).¹⁵ Reminiscent of Michel Foucault's concept of "similarity" that includes both identity and difference, the term "surrogate," rather concerns the issues of difference, dissidence, and ruptures in writing historical (dis)continuity (Foucault 1977: 146). When *minjokgŭk* theorists and practitioners identify *minjokgŭk* as "our native theatre," they presume that it is the authentically Korean (ethnic) spirits and methods which create the amalgamation of "foreign" sources (in terms of theatrical ideas, techniques, styles, forms, norms, and customs) and "our" traditions. This indigenization and syncretism has been called "the modernization of tradition."¹⁶ In the larger socio-political and cultural frames of a country like South Korea, where modernization was imbued with power from outside and above, it had multiple meanings in different directions, orientations and approaches. *Minjokgŭk* theorists and practitioners discredit both blind appropriation or westernization and conservative traditionalism. The third path taken by *minjokgŭk* theorists and practitioners is a schizophrenic split between "spiritual East (the self)/ technical West (the other)." But, considering that the conceptual frame originated from the imperialist, orientalist cognitive map, when *minjokgŭk's* identity is purportedly founded on the spirituality of the indigenous cultures, its split identity is nonetheless constructed through the otherness of the "West," that is to say, against a mirror of how the "West" sees itself. In my observation, however, the identity of *minjokgŭk* is actually more based on "foreign" cultures and traditions, in regards to the spirituality of its performance, than it might acknowledge. *Minjokgŭk* theorists selectively forget the fact that it is hard to separate ideological and spiritual aspects from the technical sides of a cultural product. In this respect, *minjokgŭk* serves as a surrogate of "ethnic" traditions

¹⁵ As I mentioned earlier, not all of *minjokgŭk* are surrogates of traditional performances.

¹⁶ Yu Ch'i-jin coined this term.

intervened by other cultural traditions. As Stuart Hall contends, the field of cultural identity is the locus of difference in which the cultural exponents engage in the process of identification — struggling, clashing, assimilating, negotiating, and so forth (1996: 6). Incorporating the notion of Roach’s “surrogate” with Hall’s “identification,” we may catch hold of ever shifting cultural dynamics in the performances of *minjokgŭk*. Amidst this dynamic, “the Korean ethnic (arche)type” as the medium of “national (ethnic) spirit” is supposedly envisioned in the minds of spectators.

Sketching the genealogical trajectories in chronological order, in Chapter 2 I examine preliminary discourses on *minjokgŭk* before the 1970s, followed by *minjokgŭk* performances during the 1970s including Kim Chiha’s *Chinoguigut* (*A Shamanistic Ritual for the Dead*, 1973) and *Sorigut Agu* (*Agu’s Musical Shamanistic Ritual*, 1974), Oh T’ae-sŏk’s *T’ae* (*Lifecord*, 1974) and *Ch’unp’ungŭi Ch’ŏ* (*The Wife of Ch’unp’ung*, 1976). In Chapter 3, I look at Yim Jin-t’aek’s *Noktukkot* (*Mung-bean Flower*, 1980), Ch’ae Hui-wan’s *Kangjangidarijangi* (*Bridge-building Game*, 1984), and Park In-pae’s *Kŭmsugangsan Bilryŏjuko Mŏsŭmsali Wenmalinya* (*It’s Absurd That We Are Slaves Now Even Though We Rent Our Beautiful Land*, 1989), and Yi Yun-t’aek’s *Ogu* (*A Shamanistic Ritual for the Deceased*, 1989). In Chapter 4, I deal with four plays: Oh T’ae-sŏk’s *Paekmagang Talbame* (*Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*, 1993) and *Toraji* (*The Root of a Broad Bellflower*, 1994), Yi Yun-t’aek’s *Pabogaksi* (*The Dummy Bride*, 1994) and *Munjejŏk Ingan Yŏnsan* (*Yŏnsan, the Problematic Human Being*, 1995). In the last chapter, by reflecting on the achievements and limits of *minjokgŭk(ron)*, I epitomize *minjokgŭk*’s politics of the past from the perspective of feminist deconstruction. Also, as an epilogue, I briefly discuss directions, topographies,

and prospects of *minjokgŭk* in changing historical situations and conditions in South Korea today.

In English-speaking countries, it is rare to find published books and articles discussing Korean theatre in comparison with other Asian examples. Introductory writing about Korean traditional theatre appears in several world theatre history books and encyclopedias. As for a full-length book on traditional Korean theatres, Cho Oh-kon's *Traditional Korean Theatre* includes several regional versions of *kamyŏngŭk* translated into English as one of a series in "Korean Religions and Culture" published by Asian Humanities Press. Cho also published a book on *Kkocktugaksinolŭm, Korean Puppet Theatre*, through East Lansing Asian Studies Center. Kim Ah-jeong and R. B. Graves' *The Metacultural Theatre of Oh T'ae-sŏk* is a meaningful accomplishment in that it is the first published book dealing with the contemporary Korean theatre. With a comprehensible introduction, the authors and translators publish several works of Oh T'ae-sŏk. But, the authors mistake the contemporary *madanggŭk* as *kamyŏngŭk*, the traditional Korean mask drama. Recently, the plays of Yu Ch'i-jin, Ch'ae Man-sik, and Yi Yun-t'aek were translated into English: *Three Plays by Chi-Jin Yoo* translated by Jang Won-Jae, *Korean Drama Under Japanese Occupation: Plays by Ch'i-jin Yu and Man-sik Ch'ae* translated by Jinhee Kim, and *Four Contemporary Korean Plays* translated by Kim Dongwook and Richard Nicholas.

From a different perspective, Eugène van Erven's *Playful Revolution*, in the section on "Resistance Theatre in South Korea," speculates on the socio-political significance for *madanggŭk* in praxis, though with limited scope. Erven renders a cogent argument on *madanggŭk* when he locates *madanggŭk* among other (Asian)

contemporary theatres of liberation. Choi Chungmoo, in an essay titled “The Minjung Culture Movement and the Construction of Popular Culture in Korea” included in *South Korea’s Minjung Movement: the Culture and Politics of Dissidence*, gives *madanggŭk* its full credit as a theatre of dissidence, though her aim in the article is to investigate the *minjung* culture movement rather than the theatre. Choi Chungmoo further advances discussion of the issue of nationalism and gender in “Korean Nationalism and Sexism” in *Dangerous Women*, and briefly mentions Kim Chiha’s *madanggŭk Sorigut Agu* with other works from the various social practices. Despite the lack of historical contexts and her tendency to generalize, Choi Chungmoo’s argument is eloquent enough to arouse academic attention to the areas of taboo and nationalism from a feminist perspective. Regarding the topic of the *minjung* culture movement and *madanggŭk*, Lee Namhee’s recent book, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and Politics of Representation in South Korea*, offers a good supplement to Choi Chungmoo’s. Lee Dong-il introduces *madanggŭk* by briefly reviewing its historical contexts and characteristics in an article, “Performance Study of Contemporary *Madang* Theatre in South Korea,” published in *Asian Theatre Journal*. In *Performing Democracy*, in his essay titled “Contemporary *Madanggŭk* of South Korea,” Lee Dong-il examines interesting aspects of *madanggŭk* as a community-based theatre, but notwithstanding his highly descriptive summation of a specific *madanggŭk* performance, he does not fully advance the discussion in relation to community building and its significance.

Reflecting on the limits, accomplishments, and insights of the preceding researchers, I hope that this dissertation presents Korean contemporary theatre (*minjokgŭk*) with fully contoured critical views and ideas. Within the academic field of the

Korean contemporary theatre in South Korea, no attempt has been made to study and write about *minjokgŭk* within the conceptual frames of globalization and genealogy. In the vital debates on *minjokgŭk* within South Korea, there are too many names and works to list. This dissertation takes a small step towards a genealogy of *minjokgŭk*, and hopes to opens up a space for a dialogue among troubled artists and activists confronting globalization as a shared issue.

2.0 MINJOKGŬK, GLOBALIZATION, AND COMMUNITY-BASED THEATRE

2.1 GLOBALIZATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION AND MINJOKGŬK

The establishment of *minjokgŭk* is closely related to discourses of globalization and democracy in Korea. Hence, this dissertation covers the historical period from the 1960s to the 1990s when democratization intersected with the global flow of capitalism in Korea. It is worth noting that the democracy movement was led by nationalist groups opposing dictatorship, but the ideologies varied. At least two different nationalisms can be identified: bourgeois nationalism and *minjung* (grassroots or people) nationalism. In the 1960s, the pioneers of *minjung minjokgŭk* undertook a project of “inventing tradition” as they witnessed the revival of folk-related cultures in every area of Korean society. The discipline of ethnography led the folk revival movement conceptually. This project was initiated from university communities as “the movement of *t'alch'um* renaissance.”¹⁷ But, the cultural frame of the movement was already fashioned out of a governmental campaign called “*minjokmunhwa ch'atki* (Searching for Our Ethnic Culture),” which was

¹⁷ *T'alch'um* is *kamyŏngŭk*'s different name when it indicates the predominant elements of dance in *kamyŏngŭk*. *T'alch'um* literally means “mask dance.” But it also refers to a specific regional style of *kamyŏngŭk*, for example, Pongsan *t'alch'um* (Pongsan is now a city in North Korea). The reason why the movement was called “*t'alch'um* renaissance” was related to a historical fact that the first *kamyŏngŭk* revived from near discontinuation of the tradition was Pongsan *t'alch'um* in the 1950s. Therefore, Pongsan *t'alch'um* was well known to the public through the aid of mass media in comparison with other regional kinds of *kamyŏngŭk*.

a part of the strategic policy to implement “Korean style democracy” advocated by Park Jung Hee’s military regime. The campaign was deliberately designed to produce national consent since there were persistent disputes on the legitimacy of Park Jung Hee’s administration, which attained power through *coup d’état* in 1961. In the era of the Vietnam War, the grassroots socio-cultural movement in the 1960s was a reaction against the tripartite political realities of American military superpower, the Japanese government’s economic interest, and the Korean dictatorial administration’s power struggle. The South Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty of 1964 provided momentum from which South Korea developed into part of the Cold War political economy. While Japan regarded this new relationship as a great opportunity for gaining a profitable international market, the Korean government saw opportunity to resolve the financial need for economic growth, which at that time was considered the best way to quell dissent over the legitimacy of its regime. South Korea became one of the global hotspots where multinational corporations spurred by nomadic capitalism found super-cheap labor. In the end of 1970s, 58% of the working population were laborers (Park In-pae 2006: 132). Park Jung Hee’s regime could enact full-scale “industrialization” in the 1970s, which was regarded as “Modernization” at that time. But, in retrospect, the industrialization project was a systemized mobilization plan whose processes turned the workers into machines in a labor-intensive export industry.¹⁸ The workers were praised and called “pillars of industry,” but they didn’t actually benefit. In 1970, a laborer, Chön

¹⁸ In 1970s, rural economy was collapsing since the farmers and the young people evacuated from their villages to find jobs in the cities. As a consequence, municipal ghettos became a vast social issue. *Minjung madanggŭk* practitioners were considerably concerned with the problem of municipal ghettos and made it a political issue through *madanggŭk* productions like *Töksangol Yiyagi* (*The Story of Töksan Village*, 1978).

T'ae-il immolated himself, crying out “we are not machines” (Kang Chun-man 2002: 97). His death awakened national consciousness of the need for democracy. For its part, the Park Jung Hee regime through the venue of the National Drama Company staged mega-scale history plays which commemorated heroic personages (mostly generals) who rescued the nation from its plights.

Behind this scene of industrialization, the global (Cold War) flow of the “Green Revolution” had a deadly impact on the rural economy of South Korea. Planned by the United States to resolve the problems of increased population and hunger which were becoming major sources of socio-economical instability in “the developing countries,” it was, on the one hand, an agenda to insulate “Third World” countries from communist subversion. And the other hand, it was recognized as a beneficial opportunity for the revival of the US economy. Coordinated between the advanced fields of science and technology, large foundations and government, and transnational corporations, the Green Revolution forever transformed the landscapes of the farming lands in the liberalist block of Cold War political economies. “The Green Revolution is, in other words, capital intensive, even more so because the chemicals required can only be obtained from Western chemical companies with hard Western currency. As a result, only large-scale plantations run by big landowners or Western multinationals benefit fully from the Green Revolution.” Since “small farmers have to make the required technological and chemical investments with money borrowed at usurious rates from loan sharks, they frequently lose their small plots of land when unfavorable conditions force them to default on their loans. Those who are evicted from their lands then either have to resort to underpaid farm labor jobs or the ranks of the underemployment in the

city” (Erven 1992: 3). In addition, the comparably cheap food price in the urban cities resulting from the Green Revolution, induced farmers to migrate into the cities, and they filled the factories as laborers. Basically, the Green Revolution was a product of globalization, by which international agricultural research centers, backed by transnational funding groups, created new markets for seed and chemical corporations, many based in the US with distributors in the Philippines.

From the inauguration of its regime, the Park Jung Hee administration declared “fight against poverty” as the administration’s national (ethnic) mission when it garnered majority consent from the population, 60% of which were farmers in the early 1960s. The government launched a project for establishing “a resource-rich nation.” In 1971, Korean scientists supported by the Park regime succeeded in developing a new variety of rice by importing samples of “miracle rice” from “the International Rice Research and Development Center” based in the Philippines. However, the government’s resource-based nationalism faced setbacks with the global oil crises in the 1970s (in 1973 and later 1978) and the resulting economic depression. Throughout, Park Jung Hee’s administration desperately strived to maintain the image of “Korean style democracy,” while concealing fascist nationalism.

The full-fledged discourses on *minjokgŭk* were framed by the socio-political dynamics of the *minjung* culture movement, concomitant with the democratization movement of the 1970’s and its counter-hegemonic resistance to the Korean style democracy of the Park Jung Hee administration. The *minjung* culture movement, as Choi Chungmoo clarifies, was armed with socialist democratic ideas of *minjung* nationalism (1995: 106). Under Park Jung Hee’s repressive *Yusin* Regime, modeled on

Japan's *Meiji* Restoration, intellectuals and college students (later workers and farmers) united to construct a counter-hegemonic community, whereas some theater practitioners collaborated with the regime by propagandizing governmental ideas and projects concerning "national community" through the National Drama Company established in 1950.

Minjung minjokgŭk (people's national theatre) was discussed in a larger framework of *minjok munhakron* (theory of national literature) in the 1970s and the 1980s. The key points in the theory of national literature centered on the construction of "the Korean ethnic community." From the post-colonial perspectives of "the Third World," intellectuals and activists of the *minjung* culture movement regarded Western mass consumerist cultures transplanted via the strong influence of Western mass media as the most baleful invention of "the West," which seemed to exalt individualism and debilitate the traditional sense of belonging to community. They held that the resuscitation of traditional cultures based on communities in which face-to-face interaction is the dominant mode of human relationship would be an alternative to Western mass culture.

In the 1980s, Chun Tu-whan's military regime gained power through a *coup d'état*, its brutal coercion culminating in the Kwangju massacre, occurring during the "Kwanju Peoples' Struggle" in 1980. Chun Tu-whan's government attracted foreign capital and businesses to financially back its power. In 1985, the World Trade Organization's Uruguay Round, impelled by GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), forced South Korea to open more markets and clear barriers to free trade. Without national consensus from the people, Chun Tu-whan's administration laid the

foundation for the neo-liberalist ideas of free market and deregulation policy. Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, the population of workers rapidly increased, and in the 1980s there began to appear distinctive class differentiation and ostensible “class consciousness” among laborers and farmers. During the 1980s, the *minjung* culture movement was more tightly allied with the labor movement than in previous years. In 1987, Nho Tae-wu, the successor of Chun Tu-whan, proclaimed “the Democracy Declaration,” but it was incomplete in that it was mainly about democratic procedure and omitted any discussion about subalternity (including labor). In spite of the exhilaration of securing democracy for ordinary civilians, activists and the laborers soberly recognized the shortcomings of their triumph and followed 1987’s Democracy Declaration with “the Workers’ Great Struggle”.

From the end of 1970s, activists and practitioners of *minjung minjokgŭk* (people’s ethnic theatre) questioned how they could empower people who were marginalized from the capitalist myth of development. Small-scale (working) communities began to be established in night schools, unions, and farmers’ associations. Some activists (artists) infiltrated firms as menial workers to mobilize laborers by concealing their educated backgrounds. Practitioners of *minjung minjokgŭt* worked with the democratic union members through such organizations as “*t’alch’um* circle” and “drama club” established within the democratic unions opposed to the corporation-patronized unions in the same factories. The artists of the *minjung* culture movement viewed the small working communities as grassroots foundations from which “the Korean ethnic community” could emerge.

“Although Franz Fanon is not the only source of inspiration to the movement,” as Choi Chungmoo notes, “his emphasis on the necessity of reconstructing national culture for the postcolonial nations has left a deep impression on the discourse of the *minjung* culture movement.” According to Fanon’s proposal of “a reinvigorated indigenous culture,” “the reconstruction of national culture will not only awaken national consciousness but also provide a breeding ground for native sensibility” (1995: 107). As Fanon found this breeding ground in Africa’s collective life and in rural communities before the “Western” imperialist encroachment, the activists and the artists of the *minjokgŭk* movement based their ideas of the living-working-art community on “*ture*”, a local agrarian working community and performance group which performed *kamyŏngŭk* in the *Chosŏn* dynasty during holidays.

Nevertheless, their ideas were rejected not only by the government but also by the activist’s circle itself. In South Korea, from the beginning of nation building, “the Anti-communist Law” was regarded as a fundamental line of national policy. The Chun Tu-whan government was suspicious about “the community movement” since the notion, “community,” in its connotations resembled the concept of “communism.” Meanwhile, the younger activists of the *minjung* culture movement, most of whom were better acquainted with Marxist socialist ideologies, pointed out the feudal, agrarian, and romantic sentiments inherent in the community movement. Notably, “the living-community movement” had been remarkably successful among the radical Christian (Catholic) farmers’ groups, as their churches through organizations like “City Missionaries for Workers” and “Catholic Farmers’ Association” had actively participated in the social (democracy) movement from the early 1970s. But, in spite of this

condescending Marxist assessment, the community movement of the *minjung* culture movement persistently evoked the holistic image of “the Korean ethnic community” indispensable for “the national (people’s) spirit” to fight the neo-colonial cultural invasion and successive antidemocratic regimes.

During the 1980s, the activists of the *minjung* culture movement were responsive to the deep political unrest as well as to the democratic developments occurring especially in Latin America and the Philippines. The practitioners of *minjung minjokgŭk* deliberated on the ways to promote theoretical and practical interchanges with the activists and the artists of “the Third World.” From the 1980s, this necessity for solidarity among the artists of people belonging to “the Third World” became substantial and generated a great deal of fruitful results in published books on third world politics and theatres (including books on Augusto Boal’s “the theatre of the oppressed”) and the virtually global *minjung* theatre networks, which PETA (the Philippine Educational Theatre Association) played a major role in establishing in third world Asian art communities. One of the activists and artists of the *minjokgŭk* movement, Park In-pae participated in a PETA workshop in 1989 and introduced to the public the methods of the educational theatre he learned from it. As Boal’s methods and theories permeated PETA’s workshop programs after 1984, it’s reasonable to assume that PETA was the primary source for importing his ideas.¹⁹ Needless to say, *minjokgŭk* along with other people’s theatres of the 1970s, embraced Brecht’s epic theatre, even though Brecht’s

¹⁹ Boal’s “theatre of the oppressed” was introduced with the work of Paulo Frier’s “pedagogy of the oppressed” as early as the end of the 1970s. The Field Theatre Company, established by Park In-pae in 1988, hosts Boal workshops today, and after Boal’s workshop in South Korea in 1997, the Theatre Company *Hae* was created. *Hae* is the first theatre company which is exclusively dependent on Boal’s methods.

works and theories were only officially performed and discussed in the theatre and in academe from 1990 after the collapse of the socialist block.²⁰

The international connection to the realm of “the Third World” theatre, however, was initiated through participation in “the Third World Theatre Festival” held by PETA in the Philippines in 1971. It is interesting to note that the networking of third world theatre was structured within the larger frame of “the International Theatre Institute.” Within ITI, there is a subdivision called “the Third World committee,” and countries like the Philippines and South Korea are members. PETA became the head office of the ITI branch in the Philippines in 1971 and held “the 1st Third World Festival.” South Korea’s full-scale involvement, especially in the Asian artists’ circles, took place in the course of “the 11th Third World Theatre Festival” held in Seoul in 1981, and continued with the establishment of the “BeSeTo (Beijing-Seoul-Tokyo) Theatre Festival” organized by three Asian countries (China, South Korea, Japan) of the ITI in 1994.²¹ Fully sponsored by the Chun Tu-whan government, “the 11th Third World Theatre Festival” was organized and executed by institutional theatre artists, and the theme, “modernization of tradition,” occupied the minds of the executive committee of the Festival. Appropriately, many of the entries were traditional performances or ones based on indigenous traditions mostly from Asian countries.

²⁰ In 1987, as a part of the abolition of pre-censorship system, the Korean government removed a ban on Brecht’s works right before the Seoul Olympic Games and the establishment of new diplomatic relations with the former communist countries. Before that time, a Korean amateur theatre group called “Freie Buhne,” comprised of German literature major students, has performed Brecht’s plays, mostly in Germany, sponsored by the German Culture Center (Goethe Institute) in South Korea (Kim Ch’ang-hwa 1998: 5-10). In 1988, the professional theatre company *Minjung* staged Brecht’s *Three Penny Opera* in the Hoam Art Hall. Regarding the history of Brechtian performance in South Korea, refer to Kim Mi-hye’s essay on the subject, “Bürehitü Duramaüi Kuknaeesöüi Yöñch’ulkwa Silje.”

²¹ In 1995, the Busan theatre company “*Saebyöck* (Dawn)” hosted the first “ Festival for Asian Theatre Artists.

Meanwhile, under the bifocal cultural policy of the Chun Tu-whan administration (rigorous censorship and financial patronage), the National Drama Company, which defined its purpose as “the establishment of *minjokgŭk*,” privileged artists’ works based on “modernization of tradition.” Brimming with confidence after experiencing an international commitment through “the Third World Theatre Festival,” the government and the artists involved fervently sought the means to hold grander global scale festivals through which Korea’s status in the world could be reassessed. The Asian Olympic Cultural Festival in 1986 and the Seoul Olympics opening and closing ceremonies in 1988 were the culmination of their endeavor. The supposedly “indigenous” traditions of Korea, regardless of period and class, were used to support present interests. The two international festivals were also planned to marginalize any dissidents, especially those associated with the labor-based democracy movement, opposed to the government’s “World (Asia) Co-Prosperity” campaign, which hauntingly recalled the “Asian Co-Prosperity” doctrine of Japanese imperialists during the colonial period.

Describing the interactions between global and national influences on developing sites of theatre is no less complicated. Moreover, from the 1980s on the emergence of Asianism based on “the miracle of economical growth” in Asian countries adds another layer of complexity to the topic. Asianism was mostly debated among scholars in academic circles, both in Asian countries and “the West” as they considered the apparent relationship between rapid economic growth and Confucianism in Asian countries. The scholars who favored Asianism affirmed that the leitmotif of economic growth in Asian countries could be identified in such shared Asiatic (mostly Confucian) values as rigorous ethical determination, collective (familial) cohesion, and spirituality,

which were previously denounced as causes of cultural and economic stagnation in Asian countries. Yet, today's Asianism in South Korea is mainly discussed among progressive scholars and intellectuals. As Shin Gi-Wook notes, "some are activists who seek to promote Asian solidarity among transnational civic social movement groups and NGOs [Non-governmental Organizations]. Their main motivation appears quite nationalist in the sense that their ultimate goal is to contain or tame America-led globalization and unilateralism by building solidarity in what they understand as East Asian civil society" (2006: 219).

Is regionalism antithetical to globalization? The principal theorist of national literature, Paek Nak-ch'öng emphasizes that the determining factor of Asianism and the economic growth in Asian countries is "the strategy of transnational capitalism." According to him, if China had not become a communist country, the four dragons of Asia would not be possible (1990: 293). More recent Asianism, Shin Gi-Wook asserts, "largely reflects the rise of China as well as Korea's discomfort with U.S.-dominated globalization" (2006: 217). Furthermore, Leo Ching contends in "Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capitalism," that "regionalism is an essential constituent of globalization rather than a systemic effect" (2001: 283). It is not, therefore, accidental that at the end of 1980s the construction of regional blocs steeply increased and "coincided with the collapse of the preceding regional division of capitalist and socialist alliances that followed the Russian Revolution." Ching, quoting Karatani Kojin, notes that understanding the relationship between transnational capitalism and regionalism consists in the notion of "border." Transnational capitalism is 'borderless,' but precisely because of its borderlessness, it

produces other kinds of borders. In this context, Asianism obliterates the borders within, but it draws new borders without in relation to other regional entities (2001:286). In 1989, collaborating with Australia, South Korea played a major role in creating APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), and subsequently became a member nation of an interregional organization between Asia and Europe, ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) in 1994. The next year, South Korea subscribed to the World Trade Organization, which was inaugurated for monitoring free market policy reaffirmed by the Uruguay Round. In 1996, South Korea became one of the 30 affiliated countries of OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development).

By contrast, through the experience of his workshop in the PETA, as a project of the *Minjokgŭk* Movement Confederation, Park In-pae strived to implement the practical ways of cultural exchange cultures among people's theatres in the world. Ultimately, it resulted in the establishment of the "Asian *Minjung* Theatre Networks" in 2005. Eugène Erven, in *Playful Revolution: Theatre and Liberation in Asia*, claimed that "Western political theatre practitioners had failed to incorporate two life-saving ingredients into their work: international networking and the emphasis on theatre as a socio-political and creative process rather than as an aesthetic product" (1992: xii). According to him, the main strength of Asia's people's theatre lies "in its grassroots workshops." (1992: 238). In 1984, the first Asian people's theatre workshop was executed in New Delhi, India, and as a result, the Asian Council for People's Culture (ACPC) was formed in 1985 in the Philippines following the workshop. In his essay "On the Road to Muticulturalism," Al Santos, the director of the ACPC, observes, "We were looking for visions across nations which parallel our own, new inspirations, familiar tones playing an unfamiliar symphony.

We were daring to cross borders in search of a common ground for Asian artists to come and work together” (www.ourownvoice.com/essays/essay/2002b-2.shtml).

The ACPC held its first workshops in 1989 and the workshops culminated in a play, *Cry of Asia 1*. In the next 8 years, *Cry of Asia 2*, 3 and 4 were subsequently produced. As he reflects upon his experience of commonality and difference during the project of *Cry of Asia*, Santos notes that “the experience of *Cry of Asia* taught us why and how culture plays an important role in the lives of Asian people“ (www.ourownvoice.com/essays/essay/2002b-2.shtml). In 1989, Kim Myöng Kon of the Arirang Theatre in Seoul participated in the *Cry of Asia 1*, which tried to unite fifteen people’s theatres from twelve Asia-Pacific countries to tour Europe and Asia “in the form of a cultural caravan” (Erven 1992: 235). In 1995, Chang So-ik of the Hankang Theatre Company attended the *Cry of Asia 2* as a representative of the Korean *Minjokgŭk* Movement Confederation. The artists from ten Asia-Pacific countries gathered in the Philippines to create a collective work, and they performed the play in the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (Chang So-ik 1996: 77-96). Meanwhile, in 1997, aspiring the global solidarity among international people’s theatres, the Korean *Minjokgŭk* Movement Confederation allied with the Korean Theatre Association held “the International *Madanggŭk* Festival” and theatre workshops including Augusto Boal’s “Rainbow of Desire” (Chang So-ik 1997: 41-61).

As we grow interdependent through globalization, the advent of computer technology in the digital age links us through global (inter)networks as well. It isn’t easy to disconnect from these global flows. After the collapse of the existent socialist alliances, nomadic capitalism ever increasingly circulates in the global networks of

capital and displays new phases of monopolistic monetary capitalism. This current blurs the previously distinctive international division of labor between the North (countries) and the South (countries) in the earlier periods, creating new transnational blocs of the rich and the poor, even though the nations of the North are the major initiators of the global transaction. In 1997, during the reign of the first civilian government of Kim Young-sam (*Muninjǒngbu*), the national bankruptcy of South Korea was prevented by an IMF bailout, but it was more aptly described as an IMF disturbance and devastated the economy of South Korea. Requested by the IMF, corresponding procedures of new structuring and formation in industry in accordance with the standardization of the North produced massive new outcast groups in South Korea: homeless people, unemployed people, bankrupted civilians, stock market addicts, indentured laborers, etc. It is a historical irony that Kim Young-sam declared the year 1992 as “the beginning of globalization (internationalization)” in South Korea, but during his presidency the national economy bottomed out because of the dystopian aspect of the globalization which he had ardently championed. “The Kim Dae Jung [Kim Dae-jung] government came to power right after the 1997 economic crisis. Although it denounced the previous government for its failure to prevent the crisis, it accelerated the globalization processes already at work in the country” (Shin Gi-Wook 2006: 213). But, the chief approach taken by the successive “People’s Administration” of Kim Dae-jung was anything but to appeal to “national spirit” to overcome the national plight. For “a bigger national profit,” however, the poor were forced to accept unemployment and economic injustice more severely.

1997's "IMF Disturbance," however, was anticipated, as the economy was declining when the favorable environments for (foreign) corporations (cheap labor, cheap oil price, and cheap-Korean money value) ended with the 1980s. Foreign and Korean multinational corporations, some of which fraudulently abolished their business, began to transfer their factories to countries where there were cheaper labor forces, no troubling labor organizations, and governmental deregulation policies. After 1989, certainly, the proponents of economism filled the ideological vacuum with ideas of "marketability." As long as the newly established diplomatic relationships with the former communist countries were driven by economic interest, these countries were considered the lands of opportunity for business people. And the people from those countries and Southeast Asian countries arrived in South Korea also to pursue the Korean economic dream. When economism pervaded every aspect of Korean society, the fields of performance and art could not ignore the trends of globalization, whether positive or negative. Easy access to information created a "netizen community" in cyber space, strongly influencing people's opinions, especially in small countries like South Korea, where internet networking can encompass an entire nation. In the age of information, the "netizen community" exerts its power over the cultural products, replacing the previous positions of critics and art connoisseurs from a traditional perspective.

Although many of the activists of social movements mediated between the positive and negative possibilities of internet networks as the means of mobilizing people, the political theatres including *minjokgŭk* movements were rapidly weakened in the computer-dominated age. At the same time, mega-scale-big-budget musicals began

to emerge from the culture industry of South Korea. The idea of a “culture industry” obviously combined culture with economism, and became a flash point of social debate in South Korea. Soon, governmental efforts to boost the economy were concentrated on culture-related realms and tourism, which received active national patronage and financial aid. As a product of the postmodern phase of capitalism searching for “marketable difference” in every corner of the globe, the culture industry seized upon traditional local cultures as the logical “national brands” of Korean culture industry at this time. The idea of marketing local traditions and cultures coincided with the completion of a self-governing system in the local governments of South Korea. Localism, negotiating or contesting with globalization processes, significantly transformed Korean ideas about local life and production.

Globalization is a twofold (or multifold) process of global domination and dissemination. As Stuart Hall observes, “global and local are the two faces of the same movement from one epoch of globalization” (1997:27). As Ann Cvetkovich and Douglas Kellner note, “the proliferation of difference and the shift to more local discourses and practices define the contemporary scene,” but “dichotomies, such as those between the global and the local, express contradictions and tensions between crucial constitutive forces of the present moment” (1997: 1-2). Hence, they contend, we need “to rethink the relationship between the global and the local by observing how global forces influence and even structure ever more local situations and ever more strikingly. One should also see how local forces and situations mediate the global, inflecting global forces to diverse ends and conditions and producing unique configurations for thought and action in the contemporary world” (1997: 1-2).

In South Korea, localism, as one of the ambiguous terms in socio-cultural discourse, has a historically bad reputation for being easily associated with factionalism among Confucian elites during the *Chosŏn* dynasty and with provincial divisions in supporting specific political parties in modern Korea. Nationalist historiographers like Shin Ch'ae-ho²² condemned and counted the Confucian factionalism as the main reason for the fall of *Chosŏn* into colonization. Nowadays, many politicians and scholars advise that provincialism masked with localism has to be subjugated to a new vision of a more democratic society. But, as Cvetkovich and Kellner assert, it is mistake to reckon in a totalizing fashion whether globalization and localism are good or bad. In some pejorative and leveling sense, the global is masked “as purely negative and oppressive,” though “globalizing forces such as human rights can be progressive in some local contexts.” In opposition to the negative universalizing globalization, localism is viewed as a more heterogeneous force, but “indeed the local has been the site of the most oppressive, patriarchal, and backward forms of domination against which more global and universalizing forces have progressive effects eroding domination and oppression” (1997: 13).

In South Korea, where local governments are still partially controlled by and financially rely on the central government, the local cultures based in local communities can easily embrace the national policy of economism, becoming sites of “the culture industry.” It is not uncommon for several big cities throughout the nation to hold international theatre festivals to promote the sense of belonging to community —

²² Shin Ch'ae-ho is regarded as the first intellectual who imported nationalism during Japanese colonization. He viewed the history of Korea as the antinomy of the self (*Chosŏn*) and the other (mainly Japan).

ironically, to win the national and global recognition of their existence. At the same time, the international theatre festivals allow the municipal administrators and congressmen to flamboyantly showcase the achievements of the local governments. For this purpose, the municipal administrations developed plans for massive cultural centers in their locales modeled on the “National Theatre”, “*Sejong Cultural Center*,” and “Cathedral of Arts” in Seoul. But the local art centers showcased revival performances whose popularity had already been tested in the box offices of theatres in Seoul. Contradictory to their original purpose, they contributed to distributing the dominant “Seoul culture” usually synonymous with “national culture.” Synthesizing the seemingly schizophrenic mindset of the period and the tension between internationalization and aboriginalization, “the National Drama Company,” at the heart of national culture, staged “Western masterpieces series” in a larger scale theatre and Korean works embodying the “modernization of tradition” in a small-sized theatre (Kim Söng-hŭi 2000: 290-295).

During the 1990s, invigorated local cultures and industries and the rise of the middle class benefiting from the economic growth of the previous decades accelerated the formation of the civilian society. New types of civic movement centering on the activities of NGOs became powerful social forces, but it should be noted that the quickly developing NGOs were not so much a Korean phenomenon as an epochal, global affair. Activists of the NGOs faced fissures and differences in determining the goals, agencies, and approaches to social transformation, diverging from the social movements of the preceding decades. In time, the formation of NGOs influenced and changed the course of the *minjung* culture movement.²³ The activists and the artists of

²³ Actually, the *Minjokgŭk* Movement Confederation is a NGO.

the *minjung* culture movement began to voice their messages in a more moderate tone to a broader audience, eschewing overtly ideological propaganda. From this period on, these radical-moderate factions contest and more often than not clash with each other, but they share the same goal of rehearsing democracy and liberating ordinary people from any forces imposing power on them. The activists and the artists of these two social movements participate in solidarity, appearing at political rallies and demonstrations for abolishing “the National Security Law,” nullifying FTA negotiations, objecting to the dispatch of troops to Iraq, nuclear testing, and in the cultural sites of theatre festivals organized by municipal or civic organizations for multicultural families, migrant laborers, and local people.

It is not an easy task to map out the complicated web of trajectories and interactions of globalization, nationalism, regionalism, and localism transpiring around the contested sites of theatre performances in community building in South Korea. I have tried to catch the shifts, entanglements, contradictions, and dynamics in the moving topography to establish a point of departure for discussing the ideological and theoretical implications of issues of identity (unity) and difference (fragmentation). As I mentioned earlier, the theory of *minjokgŭk* is framed in the larger discourse of *minjok munhakron* (the theory of national literature). In the 1990s, Paek Nak-ch’öng, the chief theorist and critic of national literature, advocated rethinking the previous discourses of national literature in light of globalization. In his essay, “National Literature in the Age of Globalization,” he sets the task for artists of national literature as creating works that are “people-oriented, international, and class-conscious,” asserting that not only was it necessary for them to come to terms with globalization but to manifest “the dialectical

capacity by which they think globally and act locally” (1993:97). For him, the “local” is synonymous with “nation”: “‘ethnicity’ or ‘nation’ is the most important level of the local in that the invention of the modern nation based on ethnicity is tantamount to the Greek *polis*” (1993: 96). He positions Korean national literature as an intermediate type of literature progressing toward what Marx dreamed of as “the World Literature.” Paek Nak-ch’öng remarks, in another article, “Nations and Literature in the age of Globalization,” recording his interviews with Frederic Jameson, “Those of us working for a Korean national literature believe that the notion of national literature can be compatible with internationalism and we are engaged precisely in this creative experiment for a praxis adequate to the global age, and for the preservation and enhancement of world literature as well” (1990: 295). Jameson wholeheartedly supports the idea of “national literature” in the age of globalization, positing “the internationalism of national situations.” He contends that “it is possible today to think that the affirmation of the establishment of strong national culture did not mean the renunciation of international circumstances but rather an international action” (1990: 296). For both of them, it is obvious that globalization from above is so problematic that nationalism is the adequate counter-force to undercut its current and thwart its power.²⁴

Jameson’s notion of “internationalism” seems to recuperate Karl Marx’s idea of “proletarian internationalism.” But his postulation of the “internationalism of national situations” is illusory, I contend, when we probe the world history in which Marx’s ideal of “proletarian internationalism, embodied as “the First International Commune” was

²⁴ For both of them, Lukács’ realism theorizing the possibility of representation of totality (of history and the world) is the base of internationalism of national literature (1990: 283).

shattered by the resurgence of nationalism, which resulted in World War I. As Arjune Apadurai notes, the idea of globalization from below is rooted in the notion of Marx's "proletarian internationalism" through the solidarity of the proletarian class worldwide.²⁵ Apadurai asserts that "the idea of an international civil society will have no future outside of the success of these efforts to globalization from below." In this respect, he proposes academic research that, if honored, might make its deliberations more consequential for the poorer 80 percent of the population of the world (now totaling 6 billion) who are socially and fiscally at risk" (2001: 3). "The many existing forms of Marxist critique are a valuable starting point, but they too must be willing to suspend their inner certainty about understanding world histories in advance" (2001: 19). For example, as Gayatri Spivak points out, the classical Marxism on which both Paek Nak-ch'ong and Frederic Jameson rely is not gender-sensitive, and moreover "hardcore Marxism at best dismisses and at worst patronizes the importance of women's struggle" (1985: 18). If the globalization from below is to be one of the tactics to girdle the rampant power of the globalization from above, we should recognize that the empowerment of people and groups will depend upon a sense of solidarity or union among the underprivileged beyond the borders of nation, rejecting the inclusive community of the purist bloodline as the determinant of identity and difference. As the world is plural, unity without plurality does not seem to make any sense. Sensitive to the socio-political ingredients of race, gender, sexual preference, orientation, class, and

²⁵ Appadurai observes, NGOs "sometimes have historical links to the socialist internationalism of an earlier era. Some of these NGOs are self-consciously global in their concerns and their strategies" (2001: 17).

generation, we need to reconfigure the shared political ideas of peace, justice, equality, and distribution of wealth suggested to us by the globalization from below.

Since the myth of one ethnic bloodline was propagated for a long time and functioned as a fulcrum of Korean nationalism, *minjokgŭk* responded to the underlying feelings of nationalism in strongly displaying the holistic unity of the nation. It is perilous to challenge the affirmed unity *minjokgŭk* performances endorse. For instance, if a critic remarked, “this *minjokgŭk* performance is problematic since, even though in it the nation is symbolized as ‘the motherland,’ the mother land, as a mere symbol, contradictorily excludes women from its nation building,” s/he might be labeled as an “anti-ethnic (anti-national) fractionalist” or a “femi” (the contemptuous term for feminists in South Korea) who subverts the “truthfulness” of the holistic national unity. Taken on faith throughout the (neo)colonial historical past, nationalism repelled any criticism to its ideological and ethical attitudes and became a national imperative.

As literary critic Kim Myŏng-in deplors, “the vulnerability of *minjok munhakron* (the theory of national literature) has brought a critical conundrum in that a “good” literature would mean *minjok munhak* (national literature) and vice-versa” (1998:216). Likewise, *minjokgŭk* performances were viewed as ideologically and morally “good,” if not always esthetically so. Being reinforced by “the interpretative community” of Korean theatre, *minjokgŭkron* (the theory of *minjokgŭk*) has escaped any sincere assessment and reflection upon it. The limitation of *minjokgŭkron*, therefore, rests on its hegemonic positionality in which it pronounces on the production of all works including non-*minjokgŭk* performances today through its nationalist value-ridden criteria of criticism. In this respect, for the theorists and critics of theatre performance, it is time to rethink

minjokgŭkron (the theory of national theatre) in the changing socio-political context of Korea today, in which the flow of migrating laborers (approximately 1 million foreigners, 1/40 of the nation population) and “multicultural families” are hugely transforming the demographic landscape in South Korea more than ever before. Korea can no longer be imagined as a coherent ethnic community in which the internalization of the myth of “one blood and one nation” is the pass for securing membership. I argue that the theorists and the practitioners of theatre performance in South Korea should listen to the plural voices of the nation and the world, and register the polyphonic narratives they enunciate. Nationalism’s grand monologue on the people and history of nation has to be rewritten for a more democratic, plural, and centrifugal vision of community building. It must be stressed that unity (identity) has to be based on plurality (differences).²⁶

2.2 MINJOKGŬK AND COMMUNITY-BASED THEATRE

Jameson, in “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” contends that all literatures in the Third World contain “the ethnic allegory” which formulates discourse about the destiny of its community (1986: 69). Although I do not agree with his totalizing propensity, his statement is at least true to *minjokgŭk*. When

²⁶ Ideologically, homogenizing and totalizing powers circumvent the issue of identity and difference in that they forge all socio-political ingredients and people into a unity and at the same time divide the unity into fragments to rule. Thus, multiculturalism’s claim of affirmed plurality might be used to discriminate and reinforce the *status quo* in its inequality. From a theoretical perspective, the antinomical relationship between identity and difference is intrinsically false since the two concepts are already each other’s constituent. In other words, identity only can be defined by difference and the difference only can be delineated by identity.

the theorists and practitioners of *minjokgŭk* consider that “indigenous” traditions and history were co-opted by Western modernization from above, it makes sense that they mine shared images from traditional and historical sources for their communication about current situations, conditions, problems, and prospects of their community (nation). Against the historical backgrounds I detailed above, I will examine *minjokgŭk* through the framework of the theory of community-based theatre, since it can illuminate the historical and theoretical significance of *minjokgŭk* performances in relation to the issues of globalization and localism and social transformation through democratization. By attending to the theory of the community theatre, I will engage the topics of gender, memory, history, identity politics, and community (nation) building that intersect with it. In this section of the chapter, I will deal with these topics more theoretically and apply them practically to the discussion of *minjokgŭk* performances in subsequent chapters.

In the introduction of *Performing Democracy: International Perspectives on Urban Community-Based Performance*, Tobin Nellhaus and Susan C. Haedicke well summarize the democratic nature and ideas of community-based theatre and write that “as it questions itself, it has found ever-deeper ways to integrate a democratic agenda into its processes and products and so to promote social change at more and more levels.” “That desire for social transformation,” Nellhaus and Haedicke stress, “is what keeps community-based performance alive and keeps it searching for new ways to stay alive” (2001: 21). Whether they are based in communities bonded with the same interests, or communities bound by locality, *minjokgŭk* performances emboss the holistic image of nation and history in the minds of the spectators and the participants, “creating” nation not so much as bounded territory as what Benedict Anderson calls

“imagined community” (2005: 49-50). As a matter of fact, *minjok kongtongch’eron* (the theory of Korean ethnic community) has been the focal point of *minjokgŭkron* (the theory of Korean ethnic theatre). Within this focus, Ch’ae Hui-wan’s *minjok mihakron* (the aesthetics of Korean ethnic theatre) and Sŏ Yŏn-ho’s *minjokgŭkron* (the theory of Korean ethnic theatre) are theoretically better grounded in comparison to Yu Ch’i-jin’s and Hŏ Kyu’s *minjokgŭkron*. While Yu Ch’i-jin and Hŏ Kyu advocate their *minjokgŭkron* (the theory of Korean ethnic theatre) from more sentimental bases, Ch’ae Hui-wan and Sŏ Yŏn-ho build their theories on more philosophical (epistemological) foundations. Additionally, the two theories are constructed from such different political standpoints that they illustrate the ideological spectrum inside the circle of *minjokgŭkron* (the theory of the Korean ethnic theatre).

Ch’ae Hui-wan is both a theorist and a practitioner of *minjung minjokgŭk* (the Korean people’s ethnic theatre). In his theory of the aesthetics of Korean ethnic theatre, he combines George Lukács’ concepts of “totality,” “type” and “the worldly individual” with the theories of traditional *kamyŏngŭk* (the Korean traditional mask dance drama), incorporating theories of “the Korean ethnic community” and “the Korean ethnic type.” By contrast, a representative critic of the mainstream Korean theatre institution, Sŏ Yŏn-ho bases his *minjokgŭkron* on liberalist humanism. His theory assumes the transcendental nature of history and people, and is more focused on refining the aesthetics of the bourgeois theatre stage. Yet, for both of them, “*hanminjok kongtongch’e* (the Han ethnic community)” is not a mere imaginative construction but rather a substantial entity.

Also common to their theories is the shared notion of community that is considerably informed by shamanistic and Confucian worldviews. As a religious practice, a traditional shamanist *gut* aims to expel the malign spirits of the dead haunting this world of living. Through the performance of *gut*, the resentful spirits are called and consoled, and then sent to their due place, the world of the dead. Also, the spirits of evil deities are exorcised. According to shamanism's worldview, the illness and mishaps of individuals and the community are explained by the animosity of the dead and the evil spirits. Hence, it is often pointed out that the performance of *gut* is actually not for the dead but for the living present. Confucian ancestral worship can be explained in the same context. In Confucian thought, the prescribed hierarchies among the people are regarded as the ideal conditions of equilibrium in the community, and they are regulated by the underlying Confucian principles and disciplines in human relations.

Bruce McConachie, both a theorist and a practitioner of the community-based theatre, notes that "the underlying structures of feeling" in a community-based theatre are composed of shared images among the community members for and by whom the theatrical performance is presented. As he explains his adoption of the conceptual frameworks from cognitive science, he remarks, "Lakoff and Johnson understand these image schemata as patterns of perception, but for my purposes they can provide a rough grammar of primal images that link audience experience directly with performance activity and provide the structure of feeling for a performance" (2001: 41). Raymond Williams' notion of "the underlying structure of feeling"²⁷ is one of the crucial

²⁷ Williams, in his essay "Film and the Dramatic Tradition" published in 1954, uses the term to explain the relation between the dramatic conventions of any given period and social structures. For him, the notion is "more accurate" than "*ideas or general life*" (33).

tools for McConachie to describe shared ideas, feelings, and ideologies as the generative processes for the emerging sense of community in community-based theatres. Applying McConachie's insights into the exploration of *minjokgŭk* performances, they can be seen as rhetorically structured by the shared image of "the motherland." This image of the motherland, for instance, is metaphorically represented as a womb entangled with an umbilical cord in Oh T'ae-Sök's *Lifecord* (1974). From the neo-colonial perspective of Kim Chiha's *Agu's Musical Shamanist Ritual* (1974), the nation is imagined as a wounded, raped womb. In case of Yim Jin-t'aek's *Mung-bean Flower* (1980), the nation is emblemized as a rotten womb from which the birth of the savior is anticipated. The issue of the savior/protector is repeated in Park In-pae's *It is Absurd* (1989) and Yi Yun-t'aek's *The Dummy Bride* (1993). In *It is Absurd*, an aborted baby is symbolized as the spirit of a protector, and in *The Dummy Bride*, the raped womb is split for the rebirth of a savior. In Yi Yun-t'aek's *Yönsan, the Problematic Human being*, the hero, Prince Yönsan, returns to the womb.

The womb is primarily an image of containment in Korean nationalism, founded on the idea of a single bloodline. This shared image of the same womb is the underlying structure of feeling of *minjokgŭk* and it functions as a Manichean principle of dichotomy between "us" who are inside and "them" who are outside. Indeed, not only metaphorically but also technically and esthetically, most *madanggŭk* performances utilize the concept of *madang* as a theatrical space, which is always contoured as an enclosed circle of containment. Within, there is no clear division between the stage and the audience. To be sure, this convention is contrary to the layout of the proscenium stage demarcating the stage from the audience. According to McConachie, mediating

between the audience perception and the performance, in addition to the primal image of containment, the shared images in the community-based theatre encompass such images as “the image of protection,” “the image of conflict,” and “the situational images reflecting community life” (2001: 42).²⁸ Through his practical work, in consideration of these images, he expresses complexity and rejects the presentation of a single conflict.

Metaphorical presentations are salient in *minjokgŭk* performances. As they are structured by the primal image of a womb, when the conflict occurs both inside and outside the womb, it is always a male offspring who protects it. Thus, “the Korean ethnic type” who inhabits the “the Korean ethnic community” is presented in accordance with the patriarchal gender division of “the protecting Korean man”/“the sacrificed (enduring) Korean woman.” In modern Korean history, specifically, the sublime value of sacrifice in women is consolidated through the Park’s government modernization project called “Searching for the Root of the Korean Ethnic Culture.” As historian Chŏng Hyŏn-paek points out, the project was intended to reinforce the values of traditional patriarchy by which “it was inculcated tacitly that women could be sacrificed for a bigger national goal” (2003: 38-39).

By contrast, basing his theory on the Jungian notion of “archetype,” Sŏ Yŏn-ho locates the archetypal image of the Korean ethnic woman in literature and the origin myth of Korea, remarking that “as an archetypal figure, Talrae in Ch’oi In-hun’s *Pomiomyŏn Sane Tŭle* (*When Spring Comes, Mountains and Fields*) accomplishes the

²⁸ “Community-based theatre can evoke images of protection.” “It can sharpen perception of conflict within the community.” “Grassroots theatre can celebrate or problematize location.” “It can provide images that reveal or block realities below the surface of community life.” and “moves spectators and actors to experience smaller and larger images of contained communities, from neighborhood to nation to (perhaps) world” (McConachie 2001: 42).

act of love through her self-sacrifice. Moving further back in the past we meet Ch'unhyang in *Ch'unhayng Chŏn (The Story of Ch'unhyang)*, another woman who protects herself and her love through self-sacrifice. Then, if we go as far back as to our nation's beginning, we meet our nation's mother, Wungnyŏ" (Yi Yun-t'aek and Kim So-hi 2003: 21). By tracking down Wungnyŏ, the original womb, Sŏ Yŏn-ho seems to naturalize the value of sacrifice in Korean women. As I briefly suggested in the introduction, Wungnyŏ disappeared in the narratives of myths and histories after she gave birth to Tangun, our nation's (grand)father in the origin myth of Korea. Wungnyŏ, originally a bear, became a complete woman, meaning a wife and a mother, only after she passed a harsh trial in which she had to eat just garlic and mugwort for 100 days in a dark cave alone. She is the haunting image of the mother of sacrifice living in "us (Korean women)" today.

In its psychoanalytic base, Sŏ Yŏn-ho's Korean mother archetype supports Yi Yun-t'aek's *minjokgŭkron* (the theory of the Korean ethnic theatre). Firmly anchored in the psychoanalytic subject formation, Yi Yun-t'aek's *minjokgŭk* performances most vividly embody the Freudian scene of sexual division based on the somatic disparity between the phallus and the womb, subscribing the authority of the male protectors in the locus of the phallus. Though he positions *minjokgŭk* in the "universal" ground of psychoanalysis and humanism, his notion of the ethnic community is also envisaged in the larger esthetic map of the global community. Yi Yun-t'aek observes, "In my performance I try not to be bound with exclusive traditionalism in which our myth and collective consciousness is not connected with other cultures. This is what is misunderstood in many discourses of *minjokgŭk*. I assert that the Korean tradition

should be reconstructed with the common theatrical languages of the world, that is, common codes of not integration but synthesis” (1995: 21). Thus, his “internationalist” *minjokgŭk* performances exhibit the postmodern pastiche of the global cultural products mainly through the bodily images of the characters. For instance, in his *minjokgŭk Ogu* (*A Shamanist Ritual for the Deceased*), the bodily images of the three messengers from the Underworld are the composite of Hong Tongji of the Korean traditional puppet theatre and the character types of ancient Greek Comedy.

As McConachie articulates, the images of the structures of feeling are embodied mostly through the agencies of actors’ bodies which are perceived “between corporeality and signification” (2001: 41). Ch’ae Hui-wan’s theory of “the Korean ethnic type” delves into the realm “between corporeality and signification.” Sŏ Yŏn-ho, on the surface, admires the sacrifice of a woman (a mother), but by mythologizing women, he ultimately advocates the sacrifice of woman for a collective life of the community. Ch’ae Hui-wan’s theory of the Korean ethnic type is subtler than Sŏ Yŏn-ho’s in light of the issue of gender and the body. Ch’ae Hui-wan proposes his theory of the Korean ethnic type in relation to the issue of the resuscitation of healthy community. According to him, modern Korea is ill because “before the liquidation of the colonial legacy, surging foreign cultures of degenerated consumerist capitalism destroyed our nation’s established morals and customs and the collective heritage, then resulted in producing all the wastes of modernity named insincerity, obscenity, extravagance, sheer imitation, extreme individualism, sensual pleasure, carnal lust, grotesque, and so on ” (1985:

211). He diagnoses the cause of illness and prescribes for it “the revival of community building”²⁹ (Kim Mun-whan and Ch’ae Hui-wan 2000: 606).

Ch’ae Hui-wan’s *minjokgŭkron* emerged from the *minjung* culture movement, which was the core of “the cultural practice of *minjung* nationalism.” The *minjung* culture movement, as Ch’oi Chungmoo contends, aspired “to heal the nation’s wounded history by reconstructing a popular culture common to all” (1995: 107). For the activists and the artists of the *minjung* culture movement, “cultural unity should precede national unity and that, indeed, the spiritual realm of national unity cannot be achieved without it” (1995: 108). For the revitalization of the national cultural unity, the ethnic community, imagined as dying, has to be healed. In Ch’ae Hui-wan’s theory of the ethnic community, the images of the conditions of community life, illness and death, are allegorically attributed to a woman he alludes to as the “Miyal” of *kamyŏngŭk*, who is in pain and dies at the end. He reinterprets the traditional *kamyŏngŭk* and sheds light on the figure of “the old granny Miyal.” Whereas most *kamyŏngŭk* and *minjokgŭk* theorists and practitioners focus on such male figures as Maldukyi and Ch’uibalyi, Ch’ae Hui-wan highlights the meaning of the death of Miyal as the pivotal point of the narratives of *kamyŏngŭk*. He seems to deliberately manipulate both *kamyŏngŭk* and *minjokgŭk* to redeem them from being gender-blind and sexist. His solution proposes a division of the Korean ethnic type into two distinct types: on the one hand, Maldukyi and Ch’uibalyi as “the Korean ethnic type of imagination and will to social transformation” and on the other Miyal as “a symbol of the ill fate of the community.” He ponders the philosophical and

²⁹ Ch’ae Hui-wan remarks, “it does not mean that we should return to the feudal *Chosŏn* society as the purpose of performing *kamyŏngŭk* of *Chosŏn* times is not to imitate it as it was” (Kim Mun-whan and Ch’ae Hui-wan 2000: 606).

political significance of the death of Miyal at the end and the birth of the son of Maldukyi in the beginning of *kamyŏngŭk*, elevating Miyal into a national womb where the progressive agencies of social transformation like “Ch’uibalyi and Maldukyi can be reborn at the cost of the deaths of ordinary, unnamable people like Miyal” (1992: 87).

In this way, the body of Miyal becomes the site of redemption of the Korean ethnic community. Ch’ae Hui-wan tactfully maneuvers the thorny issue of the gendered body in *kamyŏngŭk* and *minjokgŭk*, but his theory once more reinforces the patriarchal myth of motherhood, in which woman’s womb is not the site of production but that of reproduction. Women represented as a mythic woman (as the metonymic image of a womb) cannot be historical and political agents, or even the subjects of their own desires and hopes. The life and death of Miyal can only achieve historical significance when she reproduces Ch’uibalyi and Maldukyi. Only as a medium, her body engages in the metamorphosis of community life, which is diagnosed as severely ill under a repressive regime and corrupt foreign cultures.

For all that, what Ch’ae Hui-wan overlooks is the meaning of the pain the nameless wife of Yangban goes through. She does not appear in the episode between Maldukyi and Yangban in *kamyŏngŭk* performance. It is Maldukyi who reports that he sexually assaulted the wife of Yangban. The triumph of Maldukyi over his oppressive ruler, Yangban, is secured and sealed unquestionably by the act of violence. Ch’ae Hui-wan, in privileging the class conflict over the gender matter, champions the violent chastisement, remarking, “the victory of Maldukyi is completed when he reveals that he sexually violated the wife of Yangban who is the symbolic fort of the medieval world order, and at this point the noblemen realize that they are utterly defeated. This is the

dramatic blow that bodily crushes the ethical code of the *status quo*" (1992: 80). In this respect, the body of the wife of Yangban signifies a territory over which the oppositional masculine forces violently clash. For Maldukyi, her body is the realm of envy and resentment in fantasy, and not represented on stage. During the morally rigorous Confucian reign of the *Chosŏn* dynasty, when it was rare for male servants (or commoners) to see the bodies of women of aristocracy, on the one hand, the all male performers of *kamyŏngŭk* had no easy access to ways to "represent" the wife of Yangban, but the other hand, it is probable that the male servants like Maldukyi did not regard their mistresses as rulers of authority.

For Ch'ae Hui-wan, from his people-oriented perspective, the signification of the body of Somu is far more important than the wife of Yangban. In *kamyŏngŭk* performance, Ch'uibalyi and Nojang (the Old Buddhist Monk) fight for a young woman, Somu, and Ch'uibalyi, the symbol of sexual potency, eventually gets Somu. Due to his carnal lust, Nojang is ridiculed and bested by the virility of the young male servant, Ch'uibalyi. In *kamyŏngŭk*, Somu has no words so that her mask does not have the open mouthpart through which a performer can deliver lines. Inversely positioning cause and effect, Ch'ae Hui-wan insists that "even though the fight between Ch'uibalyi and Nojang is the focal point of the comedic conflict in *mŏkjunkwajang* (the episode of a Buddhist Monk) and the victory of Ch'uibalyi is that of ordinary people, their conflict cannot achieve any meaning without Somu." He continues, "the key is in Somu, which implies that the recovery of women's right is the restoration of the right order of the world" (1992: 89). Ch'ae Hui-wan maintains that it is the free choice of Somu to determine whom she will marry. According to him, since she made a right choice of marrying

Ch'uibalyi and giving birth to his son, she could prevent the future conflict disturbing the life of community. Nevertheless, he overstates the role of Somu in *kamyŏngŭk* in that she is not represented as the subject of her own will and desire but the object of masculine desire. The significance of the body of Somu is only acquired by conjugal unison with Ch'uibalyi. This traditional image of an instrument is repeated in the desired role of a young woman as "a good wife" in the contemporary Korean ethnic community.

In effect, completely excluding the possibility of the body of a woman from being an independent revolutionary agent, Ch'ae Hui-wan repeats the myth of "a good wife and a good mother." On the surface, his recognition of the restoration of the women's right appears to accentuate the subjectivity of women, but his ideal community, local and global, of matriarchy is, indeed, the mirror image of patriarchy. This becomes more obvious when reading Ch'ae Hui-wan in light of Kim Chiha's theory of community and life philosophy. Ch'ae Hui-wan's view of community is philosophically grounded in Kim Chiha's *minjung* life philosophy, of which the key concept is "the return to the womb (femininity)." This manifesto of Kim Chiha marks the resonating conjunction of the Jungian "mother archetype" and Laozi's *yin* in the cosmic dual forces of *yin* and *yang*. Kim's life philosophy claims that the restoration of the principle of femininity/motherhood is the only way to thwart violent masculine "Western" civilization. His life philosophy, which is based on "Eastern" philosophical and religious traditions, appears to me an aggrandized version of patriarchy masquerading as matriarchy. Crucial is his inscription of the myth of motherhood in *minjung* life philosophy. His utopian world community and universe are imagined as "the mother's tender breast" and "the womb of euphoria" (1988: 50-51).

The grassroots nationalism of Kim Chiha's *minjung* thought acutely recognizes Fanon's castigation of "bourgeoisie nationalism" of the imperialist "West" and "with the most enlightened sector of the new state, thus actively transmitting and reproducing the colonial legacy" (Ch'oi Chungmoo 1995: 106). Like Fanon, Kim Chiha emphasizes the vitality of "indigenous" culture as "the breeding ground" for the reconstruction of the ethnic community. Even so, Kim Chiha later disavows the masculine paradigm of violence embedded in Fanon's conceptualization of revolution. In an essay titled "Life is a Key to Human Liberation," Kim Chiha remarks that "in the writings of Frantz Fanon, particularly, in *The Wretched of the Earth* and *White Mask, Black Skin*, Fanon proposes a creative idea about Africa's vitality based on its own soil, but he does not further advance to the principal of life that embraces all" (1985: 36).³⁰ It is of importance to note that Kim Chiha's change from a dissident artist to a thinker of life philosophy reflects his political trajectories. Allegorizing his personal wound as that of nation, he asserts that as a foundation of life matriarchal femininity is and should be the principle of the universe, since it is the only means to cure the illness of the community. It seems that his personal experience of long imprisonment and torture left the conspicuous mark of trauma (*han*) that might be healed by the embrace of a mother's tender breast.³¹ According to his *minjung* life philosophy, *minjung's* archetypal *han* (deep-seated grief or resentment), as well as his personal one, can be released through the dance of

³⁰ But, I argue, on the one hand, when the cultural identification is rested on the vitality of "indigenous" culture which is presumed as earthly and primitive, it produces reverse ethnocentrism mirroring the "Western" imperialist dichotomous division between "the advanced West and the primitive East (Third World)." "The self of the Third World" is redefined by "the other of the West." Being otherness to the self of West, it transmits the colonial legacy.

³¹ I will discuss Kim Chiha's *minjokgŭk* in regard to his political trajectories in detail in Chapter 2.

shinmyŏng (divine exaltation), which is the psycho-aesthetic basis of *kamyŏngŭk* and *madanggŭk*.³²

Understanding the notions of *han* and *shinmyŏng* is crucial to examine the socio-psychological aspects of the community-based *minjokgŭk* performances.³³ *Han* is the core sentiment of (*minjung*) nationalism, and for the practitioners of *minjung minjokgŭk* it is regarded as what should be liberated through the performance of a community-based theatre. According to them, from the experience of *shinmyŏng* during the performance, people can gain a sense of belonging, and in return, through this collective unity, they can afford to revitalize their community. As it is associated with *han*, *shinmyŏng* is said to be aroused when the image of conflict is distinctively set in community-based theatre. In the case of *kamyŏngŭk* performance, Cho Dong-il observes, “It is natural that the unjust side loses and the righteous side wins in a fight between hostile characters, and the judgment of who is right and who is wrong depends on who the audience supports. So the play’s progress depends on the audience’s *shinmyŏng*, and in this way its meaning is concretized” (1997: 70). Interestingly, Cho Dong-il articulates *shinmyŏng* in comparison with *catharsis*, remarking, “the *shinmyŏng p’uri* of theatre of Korea deals with the issue of hostile relationship, as does the *catharsis* theatre of Greece. But it differs not only in its desirable ending, but also in that losers do not suffer. Nojang, the yangban, and the old man suffer defeat, but they also become winners.” He continues, “They win not only because they participate in the happiness associated with the

³² Kim Chiha observes, “*Shinmyŏng* is the theme and foundation of work and dance. Without it work is slave labor and dance is a feigned dance. Work and dance is an activity of one life” (1984: 96).

³³ *Han* is a sociological term indicating suffering, grief, or resentment of common people caused by the long history of oppression. As people of the colonies are feminized by the colonial authority, their sentiments are also feminized. In return, the feminized sentiment *han* reflects the Japanese colonialist’s rhetorical feminization of the whole nation and its history.

rejection of falseness and the rediscovery of truth, but also because they denounce division and fighting as false. This results in the formation of an equal and harmonious relationship free from distinction. The group dance following the mask play is the point where the renunciation of fighting as the greatest victory is clarified” (1997: 74).

Rendering a more comprehensive elucidation for the notion of *shinmyŏng*, Lee Young Me states that “we identify the concept of *catharsis* as an aesthetic experience in which we feel we are liberated from what we repress through our participation in an art work, but unlike *catharsis*, which is individual and psychological, *shinmyŏng* is outward, voluntary, and communal. Since it emanates from the corporeal ground, *shinmyŏng* is well observed among workers and subalterns whose labors are more manual” (1997: 99-100). From this socio-psychological ground, *madanggŭk* practitioners count audience participation as of primary importance, and consequently, they adduce the principles of acting and directing in *madanggŭk* from their understanding of *han* and *shinmyŏng*.

As the major theorists of acting and directing of *madanggŭk*, Ch’ae Hui-wan and Yim Jin-t’aek identify the “essence” of *madanggŭk* in the phenomenon of *shinmyŏng*, asserting that “what is fundamental in folk plays is *shinmyŏng* since *shinmyŏng* is the aesthetic foundation of *minjung*’s life expressions. *Shinmyŏng* is stirred by the internal dynamic of the spirit of playing. This spirit of playing is the ground for *minjung*’s aesthetic consciousness and the spiritual content of folk performing arts . . . *shinmyŏng* brings in all the conflicting elements and synthesizes them into more elevated state of mind, then *han* dissolves” (1987: 225). According to Ch’ae Hui-wan, in *kamyŏngŭk* performance, as the audience identify with the typical figures of *minjung*, Maldukyi and

Chuibalyi, through their actions, the audience can be provided with *shinmyŏng* (1992: 81). For him, “the truthful player is the one who is full of *shinmyŏng* (1992: 82).

As *shinmyŏng* is exclusively related to *kamyŏngŭk* tradition, in their theories of *minjokgŭk*, both Sŏ Yŏn-ho and Ch’ae Hui-wan search for “the ideal Korean (arch)type” mostly in the sources of performing traditions, and pay little attention to memories and histories in living communities and community-based theatre. Relying on Hegelian notions of “historical consciousness” and “historical will,” Sŏ Yŏn-ho attempts to define the “history play,” observing that “briefly speaking, historical drama, as a theatrical medium of social engagement, expresses the author’s historical consciousness and will to reach to the universal view of history through the construction of narratives based on historical facts” (1983: 2). Ch’ae Hui-wan, even though he authored a *madanggŭk* performance, *K’alnoraē K’alch’um* (*The Song and Dance of the Sword*, 1994) that dealt with Chŏn Pong-jun (General Mung-bean), a legendary leader of the *Tonghak* Farmers’ War during the *Chosŏn* dynasty, did not critically engage the uses of the past. I consider the issues of history and memory to be weighty topics in community-based theatre. The *minjokgŭk* performances that take the form of history plays are contested sites where the discourses of communal (national) identity, community building, histories, and memories intersect. Especially, as Yim Jin-t’aek’s history play *Mung-bean Flower* exemplifies, when the actual historical personages are summoned from the past, the emotional and cognitive engagements of the participants and the audience are heightened.

In rethinking these issues in community-based theatre, Attilio Favorini offers insightful ideas and reflections for the theorists and the practitioners of the community-

based theatre. “Indeed,” Favorini remarks, “perhaps under the influence of postmodernism and contemporary historiography, playwrights have increasingly been drawn to staging openhandedly the encounter between history and memory as a way to revise majoritarian versions of the past, to put a human face on history, and to reconsider the capacity of the theatre to make veridical truth claims” (2001:188). The issue of truthfulness and authority over the past (histories and events) is central in the discipline of historiography. But, Favorini, as he explores the genealogy of documentary theatre in its historical varieties, cautions us by observing that “truthfulness is not the universal claim shared by all kinds of documentary drama” (1994: 40).

In consideration of the pervasiveness of the discourse of history in South Korea, Jahyun Kim Haboush notes that “the discourse of history is not limited to the academy or the intellectual community but is carried out in many venues, including television drama and popular novels, and has become a focal point of national discourse.” The reason for the persistent popularity of historical fictions, she contends, consists in the ways in which “each text selects popular images of its protagonists and well-known events, supplements them with fictitious or legendary elements, and reassembles these elements to manifest structures of feeling of the time during which each text was produced and consumed” (2001:197-8). Adopting Lukács’ views, she identifies “a high degree of political engagement with its nation of subjects” in historical fiction (2001:196). Yet, even though she insightfully illuminates the politically charged components of the structures of feeling as the mediating agencies between the text and the audience in historical fiction, she does not discuss one of the crucial issues of historiographical

writing revolving around the seemingly incompatible combination of historical accuracy and dramatic fictitiousness.

In order to investigate the topic of “truthfulness” in history play, it is necessary to bring forth Lukács theory of the history play on which Kim Haboush’s ideas rest. Resorting to both Hegelian conceptualization of history and Marxist materialist historicism, Lukács presents a theory of historical fiction and drama. According to him, “the history play catches the representative conflicts in epochal events, and creates a historical type of figure as a protagonist in whom all the conflicts are immanent and out of whom typical actions are taken” (1987: 114). Justifying the inevitable distortion of historical “facts (constructed as facts)” in history play, he attempts reconciliation between accuracy and artistic signification and suggests the notion of “necessary anachronism.” (1987: 204-211). This notion can be applied to *minjokgŭk* framed as history plays in that it allows the constructive nature of *minjokgŭk* in view of the ideological and socio-political engagement of the present time.

As Favorini clarifies, editorial construction is what constitutes history plays with a documentary intention. Engaging such historiographical concerns as selection, interpretation, and construction, Favorini shifts our attention to the multiplicity of memories and voices potentially in historiographical works. Borrowing Michael de Certeau’s notion of “historical citations as the form of dialogue or a collage, which defies the singularity of the historical discourse,” Favorini contends that in making a community theatre dealing with a community’s past it is imperative to give “voice to the voiceless” and to preserve “the plurality” (2001: 185). As a practitioner of community-based theatre, Favorini reflects upon his work in collaborative performance and concludes that

“our differing orientations fostered the multivocality that lends the most successful documentaries historical credibility” (2001: 189). I believe that his ideas of “plurality” and “dialogue” provide fruitful insights to examine community-based *minjokgŭk* performances which take the form of the historical (documentary) play.

Among *minjokgŭk* performances that I deal with in this dissertation, such community-based theatre events as *Bridge-building Game* and *It is Absurd* are conceived in documentary fashion to give “voice to the voiceless.” They display, however, the ambiguity between the plural voices (memories) and the national (class) unity existing as centrifugal and centripetal forces of the performances. Needless to say, privileging communal unity over individual historical agency has been a distinguishing feature in the political makeup and social psyche in South Korea, as the historical effect of long colonial and fascist regimes. Against the concept of “community,” both in fascist and in democratic imagination, individualism is reckoned as a vicious modern invention of the “West.” Thus, whether it is fascist, bourgeoisie, or grassroots, the underlying structure of feeling of nationalism nullifies differences and multivocality among individuals. No attempt is made to define the relation between individuals and their community, and no political languages are constructed for that. When the communal aspects are excessively emphasized to the extent that individual agencies disappear, the supposed plural voices in the community-based *Bridge-building Game* and *It is Absurd* begin to sing a monotonous theme song of national and class unity. Thus, McConachie pinpoints, “there is much in communitarianism that would trouble many advocates of grassroots theatre. In short, there is no guarantee that community-based theatre will produce progressive community politics” (2001: 43). In other words, if the

multivocality of memories and histories in community-based performance are encapsulated into a single historical consciousness, the performance contradicts its own progressive idea of democratic social transformation.

Seen from the perspectives of feminist deconstruction, it is noticeable that both Sŏ Yŏn-ho and Ch'ae Hui-wan view their community's history from the basis of the Hegelian notion of history. While Sŏ Yŏn-ho's views of history are more loaded with transcendental liberal-humanist sentiments and ideas, those of Ch'ae Hui-wan are rather informed by Marxist materialist notions of historical class consciousness. Regardless of their different ideological standpoints, however, this presumption of a single class consciousness progressing into the development of history is problematic in community-based theatre, since it sweeps out the plural memories voicing plural narratives about communities past and present. Consequently, it engenders a monologic version of history. Furthermore, it mythologizes people, and in contrast to its proper intention, it undermines the real dynamics of transformative forces existing in a community. This conceptualization of a single consciousness is intrinsically embedded in Korean national historiography. Whose consciousness and history is this?

Historically, Korean nationalist historiography has been developed in reaction to Japanese colonial historiography, but ironically it resembles the Japanese imperialist view in its mirroring of the Western imperialist dichotomy between the self and the other. Japanese colonial historiography narrates its historical justification of colonization of Asian countries as bliss to the people of those colonies, in the sense that Japan's role as leader of Asia was protecting "us" Asians from "their" Western imperialism. Korean nationalist historiography reflects the image of the imperialist historiography, and in it

the history is imagined as a single conflict between the invader and the protector and the oppressor and the oppressed. Shin Ch'ae-ho, who is regarded as the first nationalist historian (and the first nationalist who imported nationalism), records Korean history as a nation's grand narratives about struggling to repel the foreign invaders. In this nationalist historiography, Korean national history is constructed as a myth in which the male protagonists, who are usually generals and heroes, give up their individual interests and fight for national deliverance. Few women were elevated into national heroes, and only when they engaged in protecting the nation. In Korean national history, women and subaltern people have been marginalized, and their voices are buried under the weight of nationalism.³⁴

As Spivak well elucidates, although (Indian) subaltern historiography is people-oriented, even in it, the history is narrated from the territory of masculine power and authority, and “the figure of woman is pervasively instrumental” (1988: 215). Likewise, Korean *minjung* historiography, on which *minjung minjokgŭk* relies heavily, places priority on the communal mode of power, and by that, the figure of woman is represented as a copulative medium. The figure of woman, Spivak asserts, “as daughter/sister and wife/mother, syntaxes patriarchal continuity even as she is drained of proper identity.” Spivak’s notion of the instrumentality of the woman is useful in investigating how “the continuity of community or history” is constructed “on the repeated emptying of her meaning as instrument” in *minjokgŭk* performances (1988: 220).

³⁴ In history class, we -male and female- were taught to call Yu Kwan-sun our *nuna* in the same way as men call their sisters. In Korea, a woman normally calls her older sister *ŏnni*.

It is also a fact that few feminist critics have engaged in the discourses and criticism of the history play and historiography in South Korea. Similarly, it is interesting to note that “despite the many achievements of twentieth-century feminist Shakespeare criticism, feminists have devoted much less attention to the history plays than to Shakespeare’s comedies, in which women have prominent roles, or to the tragedies” (Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin 1997: 21). Howard and Rackin examine Shakespeare’s history plays as the site of nationhood and gender, demonstrating that nationhood in Shakespeare’s plays is determined by masculinity — as is the case in the history plays of *minjokgŭk*. It is oddly logical, for example, that Oh T’ae-sŏk has devoted his creative energy to writing history plays informed by nationalist historiography after he dropped the subject of the redemption of the nation by motherhood. All the theoretical agendas presented here in relation to community-based theatre — the interwoven topics of globalization, nation (community) building, identity (gender) politics, traditions, and histories (memories) — will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

3.0 *MINJOKGŬK* IN THE 1970S

3.1 KIM CHIHA'S *MINJOKGŬK* IN THE 1970S

Kim Chiha's involvement in theatre began with his participation in a student drama club affiliated with the college of humanities of Seoul National University. Through his engagement in *Hangt'oŭisik Ch'ohongŭt* (*Provincial Shamanist Gut for the Dead*) in the 1960s, he was closely associated with the precursory stage of *madanggŭk*. But, in the 1960s, his activities were more focused on the politically charged student movement. He enrolled in the Aesthetics Department in 1959, and when he was sophomore, in 1960, he joined students and intellectuals attempting to overthrow the corrupt Rhee Seung-man regime ("the 4/19 Democratic Uprising"). In 1961, he was appointed as South Korea's student representative to "Student Conference between South Korea and North Korea." In 1964, he was arrested and imprisoned due to his political activities related to a student organization inaugurated for the "impediment of the Japan-South Korea Normalization Treaty." After his graduation in 1968, he actively participated in the student drama club as a visiting director. His career shifted from a student activist to dissident artist from this period (Park Yŏng-jŏng 2003: 238-9).

In the 1960s, university communities had been a solid ground for the socio-political movement. In 1972, the Park Jung Hee regime declared the more repressive

and regulative *Yushin* Constitution. In the meantime, the regime's abduction of Kim Dae-jung, the oppositional party leader, provoked people and resulted in the expanded democratic movement for the abolition of the dictatorial regime of the *Yushin* Constitution. With these shifting situations and conditions, the student political movement was invigorated again by being associated with other social movements such as the Christian democratization movement. The student activists attempted to launch a political organization ("Democratic Youth-Student Coalition") through which they could organize anti-governmental demonstrations and rallies throughout the nation.

Also, in the 1970s, university communities had been a breeding ground for the *minjung* culture movement. While theatre departments in the universities during this period were more concerned with "foreign" theatre traditions and contemporary works, university drama clubs turned their attention to original creations dealing with Korean culture and people. One student newspaper article summed up the atmosphere of the period when Kim Chiha worked as a theatre practitioner in the student drama club as follows; "In every level and field of our society, Western cultures deeply infiltrated to the extent of threatening our own traditional cultures with vanishing. Recognizing this situation as a cultural crisis, in order to preserve our own cultures, we should create only original works. We should expel 'the buttered' smell (style) and 'tongue-twisting' foreign names from our stage" ("Seoul University Newspaper Publisher," 1972, Oct. 2. 8.).

Kim Chiha's theatrical career was based in the period between 1968 and 1974 before he was arrested and sentenced as a prime mover of "the Democratic Youth-Student Coalition" for violating "the Emergency Presidential Decree No. 4" in 1974. The

government announced that the “Youth-Student Coalition” was a vanguard of the People’s Revolutionary Party. Kim Chiha was falsely accused of being a communist, as he was seen as a sympathizer of People’s Revolutionary Party, which was regarded as a communist party by the Park Jung Hee regime.³⁵ The government impounded his notes and cited his drafts of two poems as the proof of his being a communist — one being *Chang Il-dam* and the other *Maldukyi*.³⁶

It was not long after Kim Chiha was freed from the imprisonment related to his publication of *Ojök (Five Thieves, 1970)*. This long *tamsi* (a talk poem) was based on the narrative style of *p’ansori* (Korean traditional tale-telling solo singing), with a bitter parody of the Park Jung Hee’s regime, high officials, and plutocrats. This work was regarded as the first artistic counter-move against the oppressive Park Jung Hee regime. It was shocking in its boldness and welcomed among intellectuals, students and common people, who searched for a niche from which they could voice their political opinions and ideas and take action. Like many intellectuals in academia and religious sectors, Kim was inspired by the death of Chŏn T’ae-il in 1970, a worker in a sewing factory who committed suicide by burning himself in protest of the government. Along with the social repercussion of Chŏn T’ae-il’s death, Kim Chiha’s *Ojök (Five Thieves)* functioned as a catalyst by which people began to fight for democratization. When *Ojök (Five Thieves)* was first published, it merely irritated Park Jung Hee, but when it was put

³⁵ As the violators of the Anticommunist Law, eight people involved in the case of “People’s Revolutionary Party” were sentenced to death, and in less than a month, without proper legal procedures, they were executed. Later, it became known that the case itself was fabricated by the Park Jung Hee regime.

³⁶ They are unfinished works. They were in the process of creation. Kim Chiha just outlined the characters and the narratives in the composition note. Yim Jin-t’aek’s *Mung-bean Flower* is based on the figure, Chang Il-dam, in the incomplete *Chang Il-dam*. The fictitious figure, Chang Il-dam, is appraised as the aboriginalization of Jesus Christ. I will deal with the issue of aboriginalization of Jesus Christ in detail in the discussion of Yim Jin-t’aek’s *Mung-bean Flower*.

in the journal of the oppositional party (*Sinmindang*), the situation unexpectedly changed. “The Government threw him in jail on the absurd grounds that he had violated the ban against anti-communist activity” (Chan J. Wu 2001: 277).

Consequently, it was the dictator who made Kim Chiha an international poet of dissidence. Under the Cold War political scheme, “the Anti-communist Law” was a tool by which any political activities tinged with anti-governmental motives could be regulated. Under this situation, many of Kim Chiha’s works could not be published in South Korea, and most of his works were published in Japan where he first obtained international recognition as a dissident poet. When he was sentenced to death in 1974, international efforts to save Kim Chiha started in Japan. In its naked accusation of the regime, Kim’s “Declaration of Conscience,” which was secretly written inside the prison and was smuggled out, shocked the whole nation. Moreover, as it was translated into five languages and distributed worldwide by the proponents of democracy, the Park Jung Hee regime could not avoid the international charges of human rights abuse. Such prominent international figures as German Prime Minister Willy Brandt and French writer Jean-Paul Sartre participated in pleading clemency for Kim Chiha. Later, ironically, Kim Chiha made a confession of conscience that the “Declaration of Conscience” was not his own creation. It was revealed that Cho Young-rae, his attorney, mostly wrote the Declaration to position Kim as a symbolic figure of the democracy movement. Today, the Declaration of Conscience is regarded as the collage work among Kim Chiha, Cho Young-rae, and other activists (Kang Chun-man 2002: 208-209).

“The Asian and African Writers Conference,” which was held in Moscow on June 1975 awarded Kim Chiha the Lotus Prize, generally regarded as the “Third World’s” Nobel Prize. The Committee of the Prize also sent Park Jung Hee a letter of petition to release Kim. Furthermore, “around that time Kim was put forth as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize as well as Nobel Prize for Literature by writers and intellectuals from Japan, the United States and Europe” (Chan J. Wu 2001:278). In an acceptance speech for the Lotus Prize, Kim also thanked the Bruno Chrisky Human Rights Prize Committee for nominating him the Bruno Chrisky Human Rights laureate, stating that “We have survived ‘the Old Age’ of human civilization in which *yin* and *yang* discord with each other since *yang* dominates the world. It was the epoch of male dominating patriarchy, and the time of European civilization in which rancor and antipathy ruled over the world.” He continues, “in ‘the New Age’ *yin* and *yang* are in harmony, and the principle of *yin* directs the world. Matriarchy is in the center of culture, and it is the time of liberation and togetherness, the time of feminine tenderness, magnanimous tolerance, smiling patience, universal esteem and love for human life” (1984: 13).

Even though Kim Chiha did not produce *minjokgŭk* performances after 1974, it is significant to trace his development, since his thoughts and ideas persistently influenced the works of practitioners of *minjokgŭk*, particularly, those of Yim Jin-t’aek and Ch’ae Hui-wan. His religious views and personal philosophy are important to understand his worldview and creations. His change in perspective on nation, world and universe concurs with his religious conversion from Catholicism to *Tonghak* (Eastern Learning). His mother was a faithful Catholic, and he grew up with a religious atmosphere in Wonju of Kangwon Province where there was one of the biggest parish churches in the nation.

Born in Mokpo of Chŏnla Province, he spent most of his youth in Wonju before he attended college in Seoul. His encounter with Bishop Chi Hak-sun deeply affected his idea of incorporating revolution and religion. During the 1970s and 1980s, a great deal of Christian (Catholic) churches and organizations stood up for democratization in their affinities with farmers and laborers. As I mentioned before, Chŏn T'ae-il's death provoked inquiry about the social roles of Christian churches in the time of great political turmoil. In addition, radical priests and ministers recognized the importance of the socio-political engagement of the Christian churches in Latin America. *Minjung* theology at this time was fashioned under the influence of liberation theology from Latin America. Myŏngdong Cathedral in Seoul became the symbol and the shelter for the revolutionaries and people of conscience during the course of democratization. His first *madanggŭk*, *Chinoguigut (A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead, 1973)*, was conceived for propagandizing the importance of cooperation among poor farmers when he participated in the Catholic farmers' movement supported by Bishop Chi Hak-sun.

Nevertheless, after his release from the long imprisonment in 1980, Kim disconnected himself from Christian beliefs and activities. Even though he attributed his conversion to his dislike of the "hierarchical structure of the Christian church," it seemed that his personal experience of religious mystery during his imprisonment transformed him (Kim Chiha 1984: 229). Kim confessed that he met the spirits of Korean ancestors and was spiritually awakened through the synthesis of his own spirit and the spirits of the dead. The ancestors were Choi Su-un (Choi Jae-wu) and Choi Hae-wŏl (Choi Shi-

hyŏng), the founders of *Tonghak*.³⁷ “Kim Chiha thought that he eventually found the answer for the unification of the disparate elements between human soul and corporality, the sacred and the profane, and human beings and the universe (nature)” (Kang Yong-ki 2000: 65). *Tonghak* became the basis for his life philosophy.

As I mentioned before, Kim Chiha’s life philosophy claims the restoration of the principal of femininity (the principal of mothering) as the only way to thwart violent, masculine, “Western” civilization. Quoting Laozi’s *Book of Morals*, Kim Chiha remarks, “the deity in the valley does not die, and it is called ‘a female.’ The opening fissure of the body of a female is the foundation of the universe. It is not tired of (re)producing all the elements of the universe persistently” (1988: 46). “In contrast to the Eastern philosophical traditions, in which such ideas as ‘the negative,’ ‘the mother as the spring of life,’ and ‘the idea of a female (femininity)’ are universal,” affirms Kim Chiha, “in the ‘Western’ philosophical tradition, as a focal center, the father image is constructed as ‘light’ or ‘logos’” (1988: 47). Emphasizing the idea of “the return to the womb,” Kim Chiha writes, “all the great philosophers reclaimed the return to the beginning of world history, and the community of matriarchy . . . Erich Neumann belonged to the psychoanalytic school of Freud and Jung, but beyond them, like Bachofen, he sheds light on the matriarchal societies in world history” (1988: 47-48).³⁸ Kim maintains that “the image of mother” is the great symbol” and the images of mother’s “warm chest” and

³⁷ Choi Jae-wu invented *Tonghak* by incorporating the exponents of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in the eighteenth century in the *Chosŏn* dynasty when the foreign (Japan) forces began to enforce *Chosŏn* to open trade. *Tonghak* at that time was mainly practiced among poor peasants and slaves, and it became the pivot of the *Tonghak* Farmers’ War in 1894. The *Tonghak* Farmers’ War is the main historical event of Yim Jin-t’aek’s *Mung-bean Flower*.

³⁸ Johann Jacob Bachofen was a Swiss anthropologist and sociologist. He is famous for his theory of matriarchy and for his research on the role of women in the ancient times. His book, *Das Mutterrecht* (*Mother Right*), which was written in 1861, was considerably influential to the development of modern anthropology and sociology.

“a plateau” will cure the illness of the world today (1988: 50-51). The ideal world community, what he later calls, “the city of god,” is envisioned as the image of the “tender breast” and the “cozy womb.”

Searching for the ideal ethnic community and its life, Kim Chiha was more and more drawn to “indigenous” cultures and histories. In the process of modernization in Korea, people pursued spirituality in “the East” and science and technology in “the West.” Nonetheless, in his later career, Kim Chiha suggests that “also the seed of science should be found in Eastern philosophical thoughts, particularly in Korean philosophical thoughts” in order to establish “a philosophy and science that seriously count for the value of human life” (Kang Yong-ki 2000: 58). In the 1990s when the resurgence of nationalism and fundamentalism were salient fixtures of the world of globalization, his turn to exclusive “Eastern” (Korean) traditions of religions and thoughts led to his involvement in the rectification of Korean (archaic) history and the movement centered around *Tangunron* (the theory on *Tangun*, the founder of Korea). His *Tangunron* is closely related to his theory of utopian community. His quest for an ideal human community is traced back to the “Magosöng” erected in Central Asia fourteen thousand years ago and to the “Shinsi (god city)” in *Tangun Chosön*.

Kim asserts that “his interest in archaic history does not come out of ultra-nationalist thought but from a serious concern for reviving an archetypal community for building ‘a city of god’ for mankind in the future” (qtd. in Yun Ch’öl-ho 1999: 15). He aligns theoretical and strategic discourses with such civic organizations as *Hanmunyöñ* (the Korean Culture Research Center) and *Minjokjögshinhoebok Siminundongyöñhap* (Civic Movement Associations for Resuscitation of Korean Ethnic Spirit). Based on such

affiliations, many scholars and historians warn of the danger of his propensity to ultra-nationalism. Yi Ki-paek, a prominent historian, denounces Kim Chiha's view on Korean history, remarking, "even though we, historians, do not regard *Tangun* myth as a mere fabrication, one should not exaggerate the myth without positive evidence" and "it is problematic that Kim Chiha finds a spiritual fulcrum in the world of myth" (qtd. in Yun Ch'öl-ho 1999: 21). Drawing a comparison with Japanese *shinto*, historian Han Young-wu also points out that "it is naïve for people to think that if they worship *Tangun* they become patriots and therefore they revitalize the Korean ethnic spirit." Stressing the similar historical points, Han young-wu cautions us, "we have to remember that during the Japanese colonization, a chauvinist who worshipped *Tangun* and asserted ultra-nationalist culture was caught up with self-contradiction of his theory and advocated Japanese imperialist *shinto* worship." He resolutely concludes that "we do not have to go in direction to ultra-nationalism and militarism following Japanese cases" (qtd. in Yun Ch'öl-ho 1999: 21).

Against these historical discourses, I will examine Kim Chiha's two *madanggŭk*, *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead* and *Agu's Musical Shamanist Ritual*. Stylistically different from his *madanggŭk*, his early plays, *Napoleon Cognac* (1970), *Copper Statue of General Yi Sun-sin* (1971), and *Jesus Christ Garlanded with a Gold Crown* (1972) were basically composed according to realistic dramaturgy and for a proscenium stage. Kim Sök-man identifies the features of realism in Kim Chiha's early plays as follows: "the dramatic structures calculated with the points of revelation and recognition, the progression of events through dialogue, and methods employing dialogue as the means to inform characters' ideas and the dramatic events." Kim Sök-man assesses that witty

dialogue and poignant parody seemed to influence many theatrical groups in universities and factory unions, which utilized the style of short skits” (1991: 246). What seems unchanged in his *madanggŭk* is this spirit of parody and satire.

To some extent, *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead* bears a resemblance to *Wongŭi Madangsoi* (*Grudge Spirit Madangsoi*, 1963) performed as the second part of *Hyangt’oŭisik Ch’ohongut* (*Provincial Shamanist Gut for the Dead*, 1963). Similar to *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead*, *Grudge Spirit Madangsoi* deals with the devastated rural economy caused by the government’s low-price rice policy and the imports of cheap agricultural products consequent to the Green Revolution. “In *Grudge Spirit Madangsoi*, Pyŏn Hak-do, as a social type of the rich, and Maldukyi as a representative of a farmer come out of their tombs and fight each other. Maldukyi narrates his chagrined stories to the audience” (Park Young-jŏng 2003: 238). *Grudge Spirit Madangsoi* was performed for farmers invited to the campus of Seoul National University, and the student performers and the farmers completed the performance with the group dance at the *dŭitpulyi* (after-main-performance) stage. Designed to awaken the farmers’ recognition of reality, *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead* calls for dead spirits from the past, and Maldukyi of *kamyŏngŭk* is portrayed as the social type of an optimistic young farmer.

Jesus Garlanded with a Gold Crown is a preliminary work proceeding *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead* in terms of borrowing the (dance) elements from the *kamyŏngŭk* tradition. In 1972, Catholic churches declared “the Year of Justice and Peace,” and *Jesus Garlanded with a Gold Crown* was performed as a touring program of the Christian cultural movement. Even though many artists collectively participated in converting Kim Chiha’s original play *Copper Statue General Yi Sun-sin* into *Jesus*

Garlanded With a Gold Crown, it was Kim Chiha who completed the play. In *Jesus Garlanded With a Gold Crown*, at the end, there appears a leper as a representative of *minjung* (people or subalterns). The leper expresses his agony, that of the people, with a leper dance from *okwangdae* (a regional version of *kamyōngŭk* performed in the areas of Kyōngsang Province). The leper urges the university student equipped with theories of social transformation to take action, but the student avoids this confrontation. Left alone, he cries out, "I cannot stand it anymore." With his miserable dance, his last enunciation symbolizes the will to change for the part of *minjung* (Kim Chiha 1984: 142).

Kim Sōk-man relates an important event in regard to the formative stages of the first *madangŭk*, *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead*.³⁹ As one of the participants of the performance, he recalls "Our team was surprised with Kara Juro's performance, [*Tales of Two Cities*].⁴⁰ For people like us who thought the indoor stage with lighting equipment separated from the auditorium was the only theatre, the Situation Theatre Company's dynamic performance effectively utilizing the elements of environments was shocking.⁴¹ Later, we came to know that the Japanese theatre company was influenced by Julian Beck's Living Theatre and Richard Schechner's Environmental Theatre which led the American experimental theatre in the 1960s." Kim Sōk-man notes, "We realized the importance of the experiments in performance style regarding the issue of performance

³⁹ While a few Korean scholars assert that *Grudge Spirit Madangsoe* (1963) is the first work that adopts the *manangŭk* style, most Korean scholars agree with the opinion that Kim Chiha's *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead* (1973) is the first *madangŭk*. *Grudge Spirit Madangsoe* was written by Cho Dong-il. It was performed only once for a specific event, and the script was lost.

⁴⁰ Kara Juro is a prominent avant-garde playwright/ director of Japan. He founded the Situation Theatre in 1967. His red tent theatre led the post-*shingeki* (the new modern theatre of Japan) movement in the 1960s. Refer to David Goodman's *The Return of the Gods: Japanese Drama and Culture in the 1960s*.

⁴¹ In 1972 Kim Chiha's *Jesus Garland With a Gold Crown* and Kara Juro's *Tales of Two Cities* were performed in the Outdoor Court in the Sōgang University in South Korea (Kim Sōk-man 1991: 250).

space. From this momentous experience, *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead* was brought to existence” (1991: 252).

3.1.1 *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead: The First Madanggŭk*

A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead (1973) was written and directed by Kim Chiha, but it could not be staged in Wŏnju since the farmers’ cooperation program, as part of which the production of *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead* was planned, was cancelled. Later, Yim Jin-t’aek and Ch’ae Hui-wan presented the play with a different title, *Ch’ŏngsanpyŏlgok* (*Beautiful Land*, 1974), as part of the performance of the college student drama club belonging to Cheil Church in Seoul. It might seem contradictory that the play was performed in a church in spite of its “pagan” element of shamanistic spirits of the dead. But it was far less problematic, specifically, during the *minjung* culture movement. Even in the earlier periods, Protestant churches tried to popularize Christianity through the syncretic inclusion of the “indigenous” cultures, since they realized that the residual “indigenous” cultures had a far-reaching impact on people that was impossible to ignore.

Minjung Christianity began in the 1960s as an expression of the concern of Korean Protestants with the plight of the dispossessed in South Korea. As a widespread phenomenon around the world, in the 1960s Christian churches began to reformulate their roles in relation to the poor and the politics. Particularly, in the *minjung* movement (*minjung* nationalism), religious communities are an important part of the movement. Many Protestant ministers strived to establish uniquely Korean style Christian worship

by incorporating folk music and songs and folk (*kamyŏngŭk*) dances. Donald Clark aptly draws the connection between Christianity and the “indigenous” sensibility, remarking, “in the messages of *han* [deep-seated grief or resentment] and liberation which well up in the performance of the mask dance, one does discern the message of the Christian gospel, and in the acting-out of roles in the theatre, the *minjung* celebrate their community and rehearse the performance of God’s will” (1995: 96).

In the 1970s, with the emergence of *minjung* theology similar to Latin American liberation theology, two major elements made *minjung* churches deeply engaged in the politics. On the one hand, prominent Catholic laymen, the opposition-presidential candidate Kim Dae-jung and the poet Kim Chiha became involved in the democratization movement. “Both of them suffered greatly and even came close to losing their lives during this time, and the church responded by creating networks of support for their families, in the process of which their fate became an issue of church concern” (Donald Clark 1995: 87-9). Also, their fate became an international issue, and global networks of activism helped to restrain the Park Jung Hee regime’s terrible abuse of human rights. On the other hand, more direct influence came from the death of the dispossessed Chŏn T’ae-il, who committed self-immolation by burning himself and crying out for the improvement of labor conditions and the freedom to organize labor unions.

When the farmers co-op unions established by the Park Jung Hee government from the 1960s become regulative, the *minjung* activists associated with Christian community movement came up with the idea of autonomous farmers’ cooperation system to improve the quality of life of rural communities. The governmental farmers’ cooperative unions provided subsidies and educated the farmers on how to use

imported chemical fertilizers, but most of the small farmers were in trouble because of the import of foreign grains and the expensive costs for chemicals and machines, as well. Instead of ironing out their difficulties, the government undertook the task of advocating to people of the whole nation how good the imported grains were for their health. As a matter of fact, in 1970, the Park Jung Hee government inaugurated the “New Village Movement” as the foundation of modernization and Korean style democratization. Park Jung Hee’s administration attempted a face-lift of the environment of the nation’s rural communities and attempted to rectify the “lazy” spirits of Korean farmers. People were excited with the changes in appearance of the community with new roofs on their houses and public infrastructures like paved roads, banks and dams. But, the movement masked the governmental intention of labor regulation. By organizing the regulative grassroots units, the government controlled individual lives and consolidated the fascist ruling system.

In *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead*, Kim Chiha reveals the impure intentions of the governmental campaign. Combining the shamanist ritual frame with other theatrical conventions such as *kamyŏngŭk*, *pansori*, realistic portrayal of scenes, Brechtian epic theatre, and agit-prop, in *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead*, Kim Chiha presents the cause of the misfortune of the rural communities at that time and vividly dramatizes the image of conflict fashioned to ignite the farmers’ will to change.⁴² In the construction of the conflict, characters can be divided into two groups, the demonic spirits and the village farmers. The performance calls for three evil ghosts: a small farmer, foreign

⁴² Also, “*Beautiful Land* [produced by Yim Jin-t’aek and Ch’ae Hui-wan] was structured in the dichotomous conflict between good farmers and the evil spirits (particularly the spirit of foreign agriculture), and it inspired the ‘ethnic awakening and spirit’ of the farmers” (Park Myŏng-jin 2000: 8).

agriculture, and flood. The young activists and farmers must confront them for the health of their community. Between them, the narrator mediates the two different worlds, and his primary mission is to educate the audience. In the first scene, the narrator appears and tells the audience that he saw three ghosts around a tomb dance and sing. The narrator indicates the three ghosts are the real causes of the predicaments of the village.

The next scene shows how the three ghosts invoked a curse upon the whole village. In the stage direction, Kim Chiha writes, “The evil spirit that incites the farmers to stick to their small farm lands and hinder them in doing cooperative works with other farmers wears the ghost mask of *kamyǒngŭk* and a big sack whose front and back have drawings from Korean playing cards (‘flower cards’). It carries the crooked staff and dances a leper dance of *kamyǒngŭk*. The wicked spirit of foreign grain has also the ghost mask from *kamyǒngŭk* and a big wheat flour bag on which the American flag is drawn. It carries a bundle of coins and dances a dance of the police chief in *kamyǒngŭk*. The vicious spirit of flood wears the ghost mask with a white beard and a cloak made of rice straw. It holds the goblin’s stick with many lumps. It dances the dance of *yangban* in *kamyǒngŭk*” (1985: 76). The turmoil of the village is depicted with the raving dances of the three ghosts, the image of chaos. The narrator addresses the audience directly, saying, “Did you pay attention well? Did you see what made you farmers poor and vexed? Did you see why you farmers were starving, disregarded and got the cold shoulder? Didn’t you witness the evil deeds of the ghosts?” (Kim Chiha 1985: 89).

The rest of the scenes are structured to show how the young farmers accomplish their mission through the hardships they encounter. Kaedoch'i is the leader of the rural enlightenment drive, and he is the social type of an intellectual. He displays the capacity of cogent argument and a strong will, but in praxis he is weak and easily falls in despair. Ttaettae is a common type of a young farmer. He cooperates with the other young farmers, but he has such a fragile mind that he is nearly bribed by the rich farmer, Mangmaktaegol. Ttaettae is also a schemer who sometimes outwits the intellectual Kaedoch'i. It is Maldukyi that steadily supports the plan and acts to carry out the task, even though the pungent parody is not his foremost weapon, unlike Maldukyi of *kamyŏngŭk*. When Kaedoch'i is in despair, Maldukyi encourages him, saying, "We can do it. Let's do it again" (Kim Chiha 1985: 119). Mangmaktaegol is a type of a rich farmer who obstructs the implementation of the cooperation program in the beginning but is embraced by the villagers at the end. Mangmaktaegol accuses the young farmers of being "communists" and constantly threatens them by saying that "I will report to the authorities" (Kim Chiha 1985: 101). His statement reflects the negative social reception on the cooperation program at that time, since its nearly socialist (democratic) ideas were reviewed as those of the communist collective farm — even though the aim of the cooperation plan did not consist in abolishing the right of private ownership.

In *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead*, Punyi is the only female character. She is the daughter of the rich farmer, Mangmaktaegol and the lover of Kaedoch'i. Punyi is a positive character who persuades her father to participate in the cooperation plan and always supports the young male farmers. Her positionality is the emblem of the locus of women in the *minjung* movement as the helpers of the male revolutionaries. She is not

portrayed as a woman of will and action, but rather a victim of a feudal rural community. Her father, Mangmaktaegol, dominates her, placing her in the private realm of home, in the kitchen. Kim Chiha gives Punyi the opportunity to express her *han* (bottled-up resentment or deep-seated sorrow) and she laments her fate as a woman in a feudalistic system. Punyi deplores, “why am I born as a woman. Why ain’t I given birth to as a man like them? If I were born as a man, I could be courageous to help my villagers. I could work and participate in conferences for my village. I could be strong enough to change my own fate.” After the long monologue of Punyi, the audience hears “a voice singing woman’s *han*.” With this song touching one’s heartstrings, she cries out, “a woman, a Korean woman, a village woman, when can she be treated equal as a human being?” (Kim Chiha 1985: 107).

Kim Chiha looks at her suffering with a great deal of compassion, but ironically, by naturalizing the situation of Punyi as a fate and by fixing women as incapable victims of the repressive system he precludes the possibility of women as historical agents. Class issues clearly take precedence over women’s predicaments. This is obviously discernible at the moment of the determination of Kaedoch’i. As Punyi is compulsively taken by her father from the company of the young farmers, Kaedoch’i resolutely utters that “I have no time to lose to think about a woman because we have to rise up again” (Kim Chiha 1985: 97).

As Kim Chiha represents the plight of the farmers in the allegorical situations of *minjung*, the audiences identify with them and channel their energy into social transformation. The future hope lies in the optimism of Maldukyi and the solidarity of the young farmers. Punyi is the ethnic type of *minjung* in its *han* and the male farmers are

the ethnic type of *minjung* in its imagination and will. For *madanggŭk* practitioners like Kim Chiha, liberating power, *shinmyŏng* (collective ecstasy), is always derived from *han*. The community in trouble is feminized as a community of *han* so that it always necessitates the galvanizing masculine energy, that is, *shinmyŏng* to ameliorate *han*. This process is enabled through the ritual exorcism of a shamanist ritual. Like the shaman's delirious dances, *shinmyŏng* arises from the frenzied dances of the audience.⁴³ At the end of the play, the narrator incites the audience to participate in their exorcising ritual by dancing together; "Everybody, please come up and dance together. Let's participate together in our exorcizing ritual. Let's kick out the ghosts and unmask them. Please come out! Let's drink, sing and dance! Let's play!" Then, "*All the performers and the audience together dance a group dance*" (Kim Chiha 1985: 129). The theatre and the ritual meet to empower people toward liberation.

3.1.2 *Agu's Musical Shamanist Ritual*

Although Maldukyi in *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead* (1974) is based on Maldukyi of the traditional *kamyŏngŭk*, the realistic characterization makes him look much different from Agu whose portrayal is also dependent on Maldukyi of *kamyŏngŭk*. Agu in *Agu's Musical Shamanist Ritual* is considered to be close to the original depiction of Maldukyi in *kamyŏngŭk* performance. *Agu's Musical Shamanist Ritual* was performed

⁴³ According to Kim Chiha, "*Shinmyŏng* is the theme and foundation of work and dance . . . without *shinmyŏng* work is slave labor . . . without it dance is a feigned dance . . . work and dance is an activity of one life (*shinmyŏng*)" (1984: 96).

in 1974 when Kim Chiha escaped arrest by the KCIA (Korean Central Intelligence Agency) for violation of the National Emergency Decree. According to Kim Sök-man, “Kim Min-ki brought forth an initial idea for this work, and Kim Chiha wrote the play within several hours” (1991: 253).

The members of the players’ troupe, “*Hanture*,” were involved in producing the performance of *Agu’s Musical Shamanist Ritual*. In 1974, initially, “*Handure*” was founded as a joint circle of folk research among the students of the Seoul National University and the Ewha Women’s University. Led by Chae Hui-wan, Yim Jin-t’aek, Kim Min-ki, Kim Sök-man, Yi Ae-ju, Yi Chong-ku, and Kim Young-dong made a players’ troupe for this performance. The group, “*Handure*,” was named after *kamyöngŭk* players’ group, *ture*, and *Han* is the name for Korean ethnic community. Thus “*Handure*” denotes “our Korean ethnic players’ troupe.” “Musical Shamanist Ritual” in the title is an odd composition, but it was designed to mask the political material in the play. Kim Sök-man notes, “Since they could not find an appropriate performance place, they inserted this work as a part of “Composer Yi Chong-ku’s Music Presentation in the Little Theatre of National Theatre” (1991: 253). According to Yim Jin-t’aek’s report, the reason was “due to the so-called ‘seditiousness’ of the author” so that they presented “this *madanggŭk* production as a stage music drama” (1980: 107).

Interestingly, for that reason, *Agu’s Musical Shamanist Ritual* became the precursory work of “the little theatre musical” in the 1990s. Kim Min-ki composed all the songs in the play, and from this work, he later developed a new genre called “song drama for workers,” which was a kind of a small-scale musical loaded with social criticism and political agendas. As the originator of the *minjung* musical, Kim Min-ki has

adapted Korean pop songs through which *minjung* can easily express their emotions and ideas. As a composer and an occasional actor, he participated in many *madanggŭk* productions. During the peak of the labor movement, he distributed his song dramas through cheap cassette tapes, which laborers could enjoy while they worked. Also, he has been a prominent recording artist, and his songs are still heard in the locations of political rallies and demonstrations today. In the 1990s, he established his own theatre (musical) company, “*Hakjön*,” and his rock version little theatre musical *Chihach’ul Illhosŏn* (*The Subway Route No. 1*) became the model of a “good” low-budget musical, garnering both critical acclaim and popularity (Noh Young-hae 2000: 77-79).

With its mixture of contemporary pop and traditional tunes, *Agu’s Musical Shamanist Ritual* was the full-fledged experiment in which the creators of the production probed the possibility of transforming *kamyŏngŭk* into a ritually-framed artistic medium. Adopting the ritual frame of exorcism of *kamyŏngŭk*, Agu repels the enemy of the ethnic community, Marades, a representative of Japanese capitalists. Nevertheless, Kim Chiha could not fully participate in producing the play since he was wanted by the police for violating the Emergency Presidential Decree No. 4. Thus, he secretly joined the production meetings during a couple of short visits, and right after the performance he was arrested in Hŭksan island in Chŏnla Province. Later, Yim Jin-t’aek assessed the achievements and problems of *Agu’s Musical Shamanist Ritual* as *madanggŭk*,⁴⁴ writing, “even though the production had important meanings in light of adapting

⁴⁴ It is reported that Yim Jin-t’aek and Kim Sŏk-man played the roles of Marades and Agu in the premier production. Since the roles of Yŏkong (a female worker) and Yŏdaesaeng (a female college student) had no lines, it seemed that they demanded actor’s ability to sing and dance. The dancer-actor, Yi Ae-ju, played the part of Yŏkong and Ch’ae Hui-wan whose expertise was in Miyal role performed the part of Yŏdaesaeng. Refer to the pamphlet of the premier production of *Agu’s Musical Shamanist Ritual* posted on the website, [www. art. go. kr](http://www.art.go.kr).

traditional drama to criticize the present social problems, it also weakened the vital aspects of *madanggŭk*" (1980: 107). For Yim Jin-t'aek, the vitality of *madanggŭk* consisted in the crucial relationship between the players and the audience, and the premiere production of *Agu's Musical Shamanist Ritual* did not resolve this critical issue, which had been the important since *Jesus Garlanded with a Gold Crown*. In consideration of the class material and the representation of *minjung* characters in *Agu's Musical Shamanist Ritual*, Ch'ae Hui-wan also pointed out the limitation of stereotypical characterizations in the play. According to Ch'ae Hui-wan, the premiere production as a whole was excessively ideal in its mythic approaches and failed to articulate the class material and the connection to reality (Kim Hyŏn-min 1993: 49).⁴⁵ Examining the representation of the ethnic types and the ethnic community, I will discuss the limitation of the play from feminist perspectives.

Agu's Musical Shamanist Ritual has a very simple plot; Agu drives out the evil force, Marades (the Japanese capitalist), and rescues Yŏgong and Yŏdaesaeng (the Korean prostitutes) at the end. It borrows an episode from *kamyŏngŭk*, "*nojangkwajang* (Episode of an Old Buddhist Monk), and Agu is the modernized version of "Ch'uibalyi." Adopting the *p'ansori* narrative style, through the sarcastic parodies and satires of Agu, the play severely criticizes the misconduct of the Park Jung Hee regime, focusing on the volatile social issue of the sex industry and the encroachment of Japanese capitalism at that time. After the Normalization Treaty between South Korea and Japan in 1964,

⁴⁵ According to Ch'ae Hui-wan, he danced a seductive Somu dance of *kamyŏngŭk* for the character of Yŏdaesaeng (a female collage student) and Yi Ae-ju showed the decent dances which mark the social status of the female laborer, Yŏgong (Kim Hyŏn-min 1993: 54). It seems that the matter of gender was compounded by the class matter. While Yŏgong as a social type of *minjung* was simultaneously criticized and sympathized with, Yŏdaesaeng as a social type of a bourgeois was severely reprimanded.

South Korea became a major international market for Japanese capital. “The development of nation-leading monopolistic capitalism in South Korea was enabled by a financial loan from the United States and the inflow of Japanese capital as well.” (Yi Jinkyöng 1993: 55).

As Japanese businessmen and tourists surged into South Korea, in order to earn money to fill the deficit from foreign trade, the Park Jung Hee administration instigated a sex industry. “At that time, Taiwan was the major destination for the Japanese brothel tour, but as Japan normalized the diplomatic relations with China and severed those with Taiwan in 1972, the tourist destination shifted from Taiwan to South Korea” (Kang Chun-man 2006: 57). South Korea tourists companies sold a package called “*gisaengkwanwang* (brothel tour)” to Japanese businessmen and male tourists, and “even the Korean administrators called the prostitutes participating in the brothel tour “pillars of the tourist industry” and “patriots” (Yi Hyo-jae 1989: 182). Moreover, the government undertook the moral education for the prostitutes, uplifting them for their services for the nation. “The contents of the governmental education were much similar to the encouragement speech recited to the sex slaves of the Japanese colonization” (Min Chöng-ja 1999: 245).⁴⁶ “*Gisaengkwanwang*” became such a heated social issue during that time that not only women’s organizations but also all sorts of democratic social movement groups carried out demonstrations and rallies to impeach the government for its maladministration. People regarded this governmental policy as an anti-ethnic action in that the “nation’s daughters” were sold to the Japanese imperialists

⁴⁶ In 1961, during the Park Jung Hee’s administration, the Prostitution Prohibition Law was established, but it was impractical. Through the Japanese colonization and the American occupation, a lot of red light districts were formed nationwide. Park Jung Hee government rather managed prostitutes and keepers of brothels for hygiene and education.

(capitalists) like “sex slaves (comfort women)” during the Japanese colonization. Also, in Japan, the demonstrators of Japanese feminist organizations protested both the Korean government and the Japanese administration, and their picketed demonstrations became international news.

Later, “the Theatre Company Nest” dealt with the same topic of the brothel tour in *Gisaengpuri (The Grief of Prostitutes, 1984)*⁴⁷ in relation to the issue of Korean “sex slaves” during the colonial period. The theatre company was affiliated with the Christian Academy, and the members were all middle-aged women. In comparison with *Agu’s Musical Shamanist Ritual*, *The Grief of Prostitutes* problematizes the masculine perspectives, focusing on how the women prostitutes voice and narrate their own predicaments in relation to the international market for Korean women’s sexuality. Not only the creative change of the (gendered) subjects but also the gendered formation of the audience transformed approaches to the issue under discussion in theatrical representation. When *Agu’s Musical Shamanist Ritual* was staged in a large lecture room in Ewha Women’s University, since the majority of the audience was composed of female college students, the production team was concerned with the overtly optimistic ending by the heroic act of Maldukyi in the premiere production. They decided to change the last part, so that in the Ewha Women’s University’s production, Maldukyi was crushed down by the Japanese capitalist. (Park Myöng-jin 2005: 5). The problem of the lack of realism which concerned them, however, did not simply consist in its unrealistic resolution, but rather in the fact that the whole play emblemized a mythic space. In *Agu’s Musical Shamanist Ritual*, the transcendental conflict between good

⁴⁷ *The Grief of Prostitutes* is the revised version of the original play, *The Grief of Prostitutes*, produced by the Drama Club of the College of Education of Ewha Women’s University in 1984.

(Korean) people and bad (Japanese) people also allegorized the situation of the Korean ethnic community. As I will show, the mythologizing of evil Japanese may “work” for audiences, but the division into good and evil solves no social problems.

Kim Min-ki’s songs were deliberately placed to secure critical distance, and the marked difference in styles of the songs contributed to consolidate the oppositional division of the two forces. The languages of Agu were based on the traditional verse music drama, *p’ansori*, and his songs on the traditional folk song, *t’aryŏng*. Kim Min-ki also incorporated the well-known popular music genre called “*trot*” into the traditional *p’ansori* style narration of the performance. The song of Marades (the Japanese businessman) was composed as a “*trot*” style. According to critic Lee Young Mee, when the performer, Yim Jin-t’aek, sang the song in a way in which he imitated Japanese pronunciation of Korean words, the character, Marades became a comic caricature and produced strong laughter from the audience (1991: 126). Identifying with Agu, the audience also participated in ridiculing the Japanese capitalist. But, the constructed opposition between the good Korean people and the evil Japanese people was paralleled and compounded by the division between the good Korean women and the bad Korean women. In this mythic world, Agu was the only one who could escape the charge of immorality and judge other people. In contrast to Agu’s expressive inclination to “indigenous” cultural heritage, Yŏgong (the female worker) and Yŏdaesaeng (the female college student) present their ideas and emotions through a *trot* style song. Despite the considerable popularity of *trot* song in South Korea, due to the origin of *trot* song in Japanese *enka*, this genre is still debated among (pop) critics. In the song titled “If you want, I will strip myself,” Yŏgong and Yŏdaesaeng express their desperate need

to earn money by selling their bodies and souls to the Japanese capitalist. With altered lyrics, this song was turned into the well-known popular *trot* song, “If you want, I will forget you.” Kim Min-ki, by associating this Japanese genre with Yŏgong and Yŏdaeshang, symbolizes the colonization of their souls and bodies. In *Agu’s Musical Shamanist Ritual*, as the nation was envisioned as a raped woman’s body in the male imagination, women’s bodies are the territories of male invasion and protection.

In a spirit of protective resistance, Kim Chiha appropriates the vulgar and witty remarks prevalent in *kamyŏngŭk* and *p’ansori*. For instance, by utilizing curses associated with sexuality and corporeality, he represents Marades as a rutting, sexually excited dog and a swine. When Marades attempts to buy Yŏgong and Yŏdaesaeng and even to bribe Agu, Agu responds with a cynical twist, “You are doing good. You can try it again.” And Marades says, “Wait a minute (*chotto mate*)” in Japanese. Agu intentionally misunderstands his words as “sexual intercourse (contact).” The sound of “*cho*” in *chotto* is equivalent to penis in indecent Korean. Agu asks, “What do you contact?” Marades answers again that “shortly (*chotto*).” Agu calls him “you son of a bitch” (Kim Chiha 1985: 57-8). In another case, Kim Chiha makes use of a wordplay that is one of the characteristics of *kamyŏngŭk*. The appearance of Chaebi is one of the conventions of the performance borrowed from the traditional *kamyŏngŭk*. As in *kamyŏngŭk*, Chaebi is both an observing musician and a character. Chaebi transgresses the border between the performance and the audience and mediates the world of play and the reality of the audience. Most of Agu’s wordplay occurs in the dialogue with Chaebi. As Chaebi points to a man flirting with two women and tells Agu that the man is *chokpalyi* (a Jap, a scornful term for a Japanese), although Agu already

saw that he was a Japanese man, Agu slyly answers back to Chaebi, “What? *Chokpal* [a hog leg] good for *soju* [a cheap Korean alcohol]?” The sound of *chokpalyi* is similar to a hog leg so that *chokpal* is a pun for *chokpalyi*. (Kim Chiha 1985: 55). In addition to that, problematically, Agu describes the whole Japanese people based on the animal-like corporeal stereotype, as he says, “Japs come swarming about, Japs who are short, pigeon-toed and have duck feet, rat eyes, and pig nose” (Kim Chiha 1985: 59). In contrast to that, Agu is described as tall and sturdy, and like Cu’ibalyi in *kamyōngŭk*, Agu is the symbol of sexual vigor.⁴⁸

For Kim Chiha, the situation in which Japanese capitalists flowed into Korea reminded him of the Japanese colonization, and it looked dangerous and threatening to the health of Korean politics and economy. The Korean ethnic community was under crisis. Agu accuses Yōgong and Yōdaesaeng, who are blinded with money (Japanese capital), of infidelity. Agu pokes fun at the Korean prostitutes, saying that “these peerlessly audacious damned wenches give me a bewitching smile and say ‘*sayonara*’ as they mistake me for a Jap businessman.” Kim Chiha articulates the Japanese common greeting word “*sayonara*” into “*sayo/nara*” and plays with the words. As the audience also knows that “*sayo*” means “buy” in Korean and “*nara*” and “*na*” denotes “nation” and “I” in Korean respectively, they are informed and cautioned that “we” Koreans are situated in neocolonial circumstances. Agu deplores, “*sayo nara sayo nara sayo*, they want me to buy something? Buy me? Buy our nation? They are bitches who sell anything to make money!” (Kim Chiha 1985: 52). Agu expresses the insult to and humiliation of young Korean men when he witnesses the sexual transaction between

⁴⁸ In *kamyōngŭk* performance, the performer playing the role of Ch’uibalyi put on a huge mask that exaggerates his manly appearance as a symbol of sexual vigor.

the young Korean women and the old Japanese capitalist. Even though Agu briefly mentions that “this is not just their fault,” Agu cannot see the complicated situations of the women who cannot help selling their bodies to the Japanese businessman (Kim Chiha 1985: 61).

In *Agu’s Musical Shamanist Ritual*, Yöggong and Yödaesaeng do not have their voices except when they sing “if you want, I will strip myself.” They appear in mime and dance like “Somu” in *kamyöngŭk*. They are represented as passive receptacles of male sexuality with no recognition of reality and no capacity and will to change their ill-fate. They are just a wound in the community for men like Agu. To heal the wound, Agu beseeches strength and power from the ancestral generals and Buddhist monk soldiers who also became the deities of shamanism. Adopting the shaman’s *binary* (solicitation) song, Agu implores, “general, general, General Mung-bean (Chön Pong-jun),⁴⁹ General Choi Young, General Yi Sun-sin,⁵⁰ General Kang Kam-ch’an, Saint Sösan, and Saint Samyöng, I cannot stand it anymore, I want to live happily as I snatch my women back, generals, please give me strength, please?” (Kim Chiha 1985: 58-9).

The confrontation and victory of Agu, in the next scene, are symbolically expressed in vehement dances of Agu based on the traditional *kamyöngŭk*-style dances. The two women join the dance, and Agu hits Marades with a heavy bundle of bills. As the Japanese businessman runs away, the danger and evil of Japanese sexuality is completely exorcized, and the nation recovers its vitality. Agu checks out the restored health of the nation in its bodily examples and says that “you women have

⁴⁹ Yim Jin-t’aek’s *Mung-bean Flower* is based on General Mung-bean, Chön Pong-jun.

⁵⁰ Kim Chiha’s *Copper Statue General Yi Sun-sin* criticizes the fascist usage of the historical figure, General Yi Sun-sin.

rounded bottom and pelvis, slim neck, straight legs, large feet and you can have 15 babies at once!” (Kim Chiha 1985: 60). Agu rebukes Yöggong and Yödaesaeng, saying, “You bitches, why did you enjoy with the Jap instead of all our Korean farmers, workers, and intellectuals?” Agu says to the women, “I do not hate you. Since the Jap has gone and you are left, let’s dance together” (Kim Chiha 1985: 61). As critic Kim Ok-ran clarifies, in *Agu’s Musical Shamanist Ritual* “the matter of the ‘brothel tour’ is discussed not for illuminating the dire straits of the prostitutes but for expressing the sense of masculine humiliation experienced from the submissive diplomatic relations with Japan” (2004: 160). In fact, when Yöggong and Yödaesaeng are typified as “our nations daughters,” the nation is imagined as the wounded (restored) womb, and femininity here is ideologically equated with nationalism.

3.2 OH T’AE-SÖK’S MINJOKGŬK IN THE 1970S

In the 1960s, many new theatrical companies rose above the horizon of the “little theatre movement” in South Korea. Characteristically, the newly founded theatre groups adopted a “coterie system,” and their major members were from the various university drama clubs. Distancing themselves from commercial theatre and stressing the social role of theatre, they embodied the spirit of the 4/19 generation toward social transformation.⁵¹ “Breaking away from the rigorous anti-communist dramaturgy and

⁵¹ In 1960, Rhee Seung-man’s corrupted regime was overthrown by “4/19 Democratic Uprising,” but Park Jung Hee’s military regime seized power through *coup d’état* in 1961.

realistic stylization from the 1950s, they sought alternative ways to overcome the dominant realism” (Park Myöng-jin 2001:143). Against this Korean theatre scene, in 1967, Oh T’ae-sök debuted with his first play, *Wheding Türes (Wedding Dress)*. Oh majored in philosophy while he attended Yeonsei University, and the University’s drama club, “Yeonsei Dramatic Arts Research Society,” became his artistic outlet.⁵² The play, *Wedding Dress*, was written based on the style of “the Theatre of Absurd,” which was received with warm approval from the younger generation of theatre artists at that time. For young artists like Oh T’ae-sök, it was the strong theatrical weapon with which they critiqued “absurd” national situations and conditions, in which the dictatorial military regime colluded with foreign powers and “Westernized” individualism and materialism loomed.

Oh T’ae-sök’s repugnance toward “Western” realism turned into his search for “uniquely Korean theatre,” as he began to mine the indigenous cultural reservoirs. As a matter of fact, Yu Ch’i-jin’s advocacy of “modernization of tradition” was concretized by Oh T’ae-sök’s intercultural projects. In 1972, Oh T’ae-sök’s *Soidukyi Nori (Soidukyi Play)*,⁵³ adapted from *Les Fourberies de Scapin (Scapin’s Deceits, 1667)* by Molière, was performed as a part of “Molière Festival” at the Drama Center. The festival was designed for celebrating the 350th anniversary of the birth of Molière in honor of Korea-France diplomatic relations. As the founder of the Drama Center⁵⁴ and the affiliated

⁵² Oh T’ae-sök met Yu Tök-hyöng, Yu Ch’i-jin’s son, in the University’s drama club, and he was naturally introduced to Yu Ch’i-jin.

⁵³ *Soidukyi* is the regional version of *Maldukyi*.

⁵⁴ In 1962, Drama Center was completed with the subsidies from the Rockefeller Foundation and Asian Society in the US. The municipal government in Seoul donated lands and five domestic banks provided loans. A lot of grand people including Park Jung Hee, the Chairman of the Supreme Council at that time, had appreciated its opening performance *Hamlet*. Yet, the center couldn’t draw enough spectators because many stage actors and actress shifted to TV. It became more like a rental playhouse where

Tongrang Repertory Theatre Company,⁵⁵ Yu Ch'i-jin commissioned Oh T'ae-sök to adapt Molière's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* based on Korean *kamyöngŭk*.⁵⁶ Oh T'ae-sök also realized that "the pervasive influence of the Italian commedia dell'arte in the play could successfully be rendered by transposing this seventeenth-century French comedy into the framework of the traditional form of theatre" (Ah-jeong Kim and R. B. Graves 1999: 2). According to Oh, Sim Wu-söng provided him with all the source materials (Sö Yöñ-ho and Oh T'ae-sök 2002: 55). It is worth noting that ethnographer Sim Wu-söng was one of the leading members of the Society for the Research of Native Culture, which was a folk culture study group in the college of Humanities in Seoul National University. Cho Dong-il and Kim Chiha were the active members of this group as well. As the first *madanggŭk* style stage production, *Soidukyi Play* gave a fresh jolt to the members of the university *t'alch'um* (masked dance) club of Seoul National University as the production tapped the possibility of their slogan, "invention of tradition."⁵⁷ According to Oh T'ae-sök's report, "For the production of *Soidukyi Play*, a human treasure of *kamyöngŭk* was invited from Taejön" (1978: 84).

Although *Soidukyi Play* was the first work of "modernization of tradition," it does not belong to the category of *minjokgŭk* by definition, since it was the adaptation of a

American realistic dramas of Eugene O'Neil, Arthur Miller and others were introduced (Park Myöng-jin 2001:154-5). Drama Center was the result of Yu Ch'i-jin's foreign travel in 1959. He traveled America and several countries in Europe. After his foreign trip, Yu Ch'i-jin confirmed "the establishment of *minjokgŭk*" as the imperative of Korean theatre artists (Park Yöng-jöng 1997: 230).

⁵⁵ It can be said that "Tongrang Repertory Theatre Company" was one of the birthplaces of *minjokgŭk*. In the Theatre Company, Yu Tök-hyöng (Yu Ch'i-jin's son), An Min-su (Yu Ch'i-jin's son-in-law), and Oh T'ae-sök experimented with the project of "modernization of tradition."

⁵⁶ As I mentioned earlier, Yu Ch'i-jin also asserted that *minjokgŭk* should be rooted on folk traditions like *kamyöngŭk*.

⁵⁷ According to poet Kim Chöngwhan's report, as the members of *t'alch'um* circle in SNU, he and some of his colleagues went to see *Soidukyi Play*, but they were kicked out of the theatre by the police. It was because the policeman misunderstood their behaviors based on the conventions of spectatorship in *kamyöngŭk*. They brought soju (Korean liquor) and added the amusement to actors' acting on stage by making a racket.

foreign work. It can be said that Oh T'ae-sök's serious experiment on "modernization of tradition" embarked with *Ch'unp'ungŭi Ch'ö* (*The Wife of Ch'unp'ung*) in 1976. Regarding this work, Oh T'ae-sök states, "in *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung*, I weaved the pieces of theatrical imagination that I saved in my mind while I was directing *Soidukyi Play*" (Sö Yön-ho and Oh T'ae-sök 2002: 80-81). As to another formative influence of his *minjokgŭk*, Oh mentions travel to America (New York) in 1979.⁵⁸ He explains that his trip was a turning point in his life in the sense that through his experience in America he confirmed that "all the prototypes of Korean theater were in Korean traditional theaters" (Sö Yön-ho and Oh T'ae-sök 2002: 95). Among the productions he saw during his stay in New York, he counts the work of Tadeusz Kantor, *Dead Class* (1975), and other works of Eastern European theater artists as inspirational (Sö Yön-ho and Oh T'ae-sök 2002: 96). I believe that in addition to the structural affinity of Kantor's *Dead Class* with *kamyöngŭk* in terms of the shared history of foreign occupation and war, Oh Tae-sök might have found in Kantor's work the same themes of death, war, memory,

⁵⁸ Oh T'ae-sök's *Ch'obun* (*Grass Tomb*, 1973), with the English title *Order*, was presented by the director Yu Tök-hyöng in La MaMa in 1974 (Paek Hyön-mi 2005: 156). In 1977, An Min-su, with the members of Tongrang Repertory Theater, traveled the Netherlands, France, and America, and there he directed *Hamyöl T'aeja* (*Prince Hamyöl*) and *T'ae* (*Lifecord*). The American productions of *Hamyöl Prince* and *Lifecord* were performed in La MaMa. In 1979, directed by Oh T'ae-sök, *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung*, directed by Oh T'ae sök, was presented in the Wonder Horse Theatre in New York. Strictly speaking, the American production of *Grass Tomb* is recorded as the first Korean contemporary work produced in foreign lands. "Peter Brook, who attended both workshop and the performance, concluded that 'it successfully showed a direction for which new theatre was looking'" (Ah-jeong Kim and R. B. Graves 1999: 2-3). But, the first Korean theatre work performed in foreign countries is *Sichipkanŭnnal* (*The Wedding Day*, 1943). Based on a Korean classic, the play was written by Oh Young-jin. Critic Sö Yön-ho regards the play as the precursory work of "modernization of tradition" (2003: 19). In 1971, *The Wedding Day* was performed in "the First Third World Theatre Festival in Philippines directed by Hö kyu (Paek Hyön-mi 2005: 156).

nation and history he was wrestling with.⁵⁹ Regarding the themes, Oh T'ae-sök has produced numerous works including *Sansuyu* (*Sansuyu*, 1980), *Hanmansön* (*Hanman Railroad*, 1982), *Chajönkö* (*The Bicycle*, 1983), *Unsangak* (*An Arbor Over the Clouds*, 1989), *Paekmagang Talbame* (*Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*, 1993), *Toraji* (*The Root of a Broad Bellflower*, 1994), *Yöwuwa Sarangül* (*Love with a Fox*, 1997), *Ch'önnnyöñüi Suin* (*A Prisoner for One Thousand*, 1998), *Manpasikjök* (*The Magic Flute*, 2005), *Yonghosangbak* (*A Titanic Struggle*, 2006).

3.2.1 Lifecord

“What we see in the history of Korea is a series of deaths of people like An Chung-gun and Yun Pong-gil [leaders of the independence movement killed during Japanese rule]. I thought that this world grows by eating up its youth” (Ah-jeong Kim and R. B. Graves 1999: 7).⁶⁰ Oh Tae-sök's statement about history just quoted reveals how he perceives history mythically. It reminds me of the Greek myth of Tantalus who kills his own son and feeds other gods with his son's body parts. When history evolves from two oppositional forces and the old generation commits a crime, the new generation cannot avoid victimization. In Oh T'ae-sök's early history plays, not surprisingly, Oedipal resistance is not the issue under investigation. Interestingly, we can notice that the Oedipal resistance shapes his later history plays in which his

⁵⁹ Interestingly, Kantor's envisioning of the history of nation as a wounded womb is pertinent to the allegorical representation of nation and history in *minjokgŭk* productions.

⁶⁰ Ah-jeong Kim and R. B. Graves records this remark spoken during a discussion at the 1991 International Theatre Forum in Seoul.

masculine tone dominates. Oh T'ae-sök's mythic view of history, however, is closely bound to his autobiographical experiences with death and victimization. He survived the Korean War at the age of 10, but according to the guilt-by-association system, because of the "crime" committed in his father's generation, he was victimized. Because his father was abducted to North Korea, Oh had to live as the son of a "Communist." He once confessed that he could not reveal himself under the repressive law so that he masked himself for a long time (Sö Yön-ho and Oh T'ae-sök 2002: 21).⁶¹

His own history of victimization was imaginatively expanded to the history of the nation and the world. In his mythic imagination, the Korean ethnic community is under crisis due to the generational conflict. Hence, in his history plays, the themes of death and victimization are prevailing, and he has searched for the "essence" of history that is life preserving. As for the motivation of writing *Lifecord* (1974), Oh T'ae-sök notes that primarily it came out of his response to the life-destroying, savage regime of Park Jung Hee. According to his recollection, he heard the news about the arrests of medical students of Yeonsei University for their demonstrations regarding the abolition of the repressive *Yushin* regime, and found out that the young students were about to be sentenced to death since their actions retroactively violated martial law declared under the Park Jung Hee's *Yushin* regime. In fact, the absurd retroactive martial law was initiated to punish such political figures as Paek Ki-wan and Chang Chun-ha who were

⁶¹ According to Oh T'ae-sök, his father was a lawyer and served for Rhee Seung-man's government. During the Korean War, his father was abducted and went to North Korea. But, Oh does not disclose why his father was kidnapped. He does not mention if his father was associated with any communist organizations. In my opinion, he does not know the detailed background, since he was very young at the time. Only, he witnessed the scene of his father's abduction, and it left an unforgettable impression in his mind. Oh had suffered owing to the consequence of his father's affair. In South Korea, regardless of reasons, without governmental permission, going to North Korea has been illegal, and it was counted as a communist act.

the principal leaders of the dissident democratization movement. The young students seemed to be the sacrificial victims of their elders. As an alumnus of Yeonsei University, Oh T'ae-sök felt compelled to do something for the young victims. Melding this political incident with his own personal case, he dramatized the historical analogy of youth sacrifice in *Tanjongaesa (The Sad History of King Tanjong)* included in *Chosŏn Wangjo Silrok (The True Record of the Chosŏn Dynasty)* (Sŏ Yŏn-ho and Oh T'ae-sök 2002: 69-71).

According to *The True Record of the Chosŏn Dynasty*, Tanjong, the sixth king of the *Chosŏn* dynasty, became a king when he was 6 years old. His uncle, prince Suyang killed his own nephew to hold sway. In the bloodthirsty course of the event, six royal subjects (scholars) were murdered while they tried to protect the legitimate young king. Not only were the royal subjects themselves killed but also all family members who belonged to three generations. Even the corpses of the dead related to the royal subjects were excavated and their heads were cut off. This was the most extreme case in the Confucian punishment system of the *Chosŏn* dynasty. The main idea of this horrible regulation was driven by the “essence” of Confucian sense of history. The preservation of the family line was regarded as a crucial task of the living for the dead ancestors who gave them life. The books recording clan pedigree were family treasures, and they were transmitted from generation to generation until today in South Korea.⁶²

Based upon his view of history, he reconfigures the historical source materials he finds. As to his editorial construction in *Lifecord*, he writes, “In my head, the episode of

⁶² During the *Chosŏn* dynasty, the clan registers recorded the patriarchal lines, and there were no names for daughters. Women’s names could be put in the books as only somebody’s wife and mother.

the atrocious deaths of three generations of the six royal subjects was haunting. At that time, I found an interesting unofficial history about Park P'aeng-nyön⁶³ in *Sasangdaekye* (*Great Book of Thoughts*) that I possessed at home. From the story, I came to learn that at the time Park P'aeng-nyön's daughter-in-law gave birth to her son, a slave woman also gave birth a son. The babies were switched so that the Park P'aeng-nyön clan could avoid the discontinuation of family line" (1986: 33). In *Lifecord*, Oh T'ae-sök uses this as a major motive, but his interpretation of the story reveals a contradiction, in that his theme of life that is great and grand to all overlooks the termination of the family line of the slave woman.⁶⁴

As critic Kim Hyön-ch'öl notes, "Oh T'ae-sök quotes past histories in his plays, but he does not simply depend on the historical facts. He strives to extract an archetype that transcends the history" (2003: 345). What is the "archetype" of Korean history or world history? In *Lifecord*, Oh T'ae-sök depicts the "archetypal" principles of history, power and the life force. For him, the principle of life only can confront the death-bringing violence of power. From the humanist-nationalist ground, he suggests that "we" are equal regardless of our social positions, and we all came from the same ethnic womb. Oh T'ae-sök observes, "As I saw the oppositional conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, I thought about how we got here. Didn't we arrive here through tons of *wombs* (italics mine)? If we could realize how hard we continued our lives from wombs to wombs [from generation to generation], how can we completely ignore and trample down each other?" (1986: 33). For him, the nation is imagined as a huge womb in which "we" Koreans are interconnected with the same umbilical cord.

⁶³ He is the one of the six royal subjects.

⁶⁴ I discuss this issue of class matter in the main portion of the play analysis.

In an interview with Sŏ Yŏn-ho, Oh T'ae-sŏk mentions the audience reception of the performance of *Lifecord* in Japan and attributes the impressive reaction of Japanese women spectators to the play's universal appeal. "Suzuki Tadashi performed *Trojan Women* in the Asian Game Cultural Festival in the Hall of Literature and Art in 1986, and as a return courtesy, *Lifecord* was invited to the 1st Mitsui Festival in 1987" (Sŏ Yŏn-ho and Oh T'ae-sŏk 2002: 74). Oh T'ae-sŏk tells us, "When *Lifecord* was performed in Japan, Japanese women spectators cried a lot. They saw me in the lobby and embraced me. I do not know how they recognized me as the playwright/director of the performance. I thought that they must have been emotionally touched by the theme of awe for life and motherhood. They seemed to receive the play's message well. Isn't the universe that women encompass and the will to continue life much bigger than the world run by men?" (2002: 74). Certainly, what Oh-T'ae-sŏk expresses as the universe women encompass that is bigger than the world refers to the womb as the symbol of life. As critic Lee Sang-ran suggested, even though the play included politically "hazardous" scenes, this universal theme of life and death in a history-play setting functioned like a mask and allegory so that the performance could avoid the harsh censorship (2007: 272).

In 1974, *Lifecord* premiered during the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of Korean *shingŭk* (new modern drama) in the Myŏngdong Art Theatre. An Min-su directed the production, and at that time, the KCIA (Korean Central Intelligence Agency) attempted to put a stop to the performance since in one scene the oppressed were swept away by the oppressor using a machine gun. In the event, however, the KCIA agents recognized only a mere history play dealing with the well-known stories about

the dead six royal subjects they learned about in an elementary history class. The production went on, because the agents could not see through the allegories masking the thorny political issues.

By contrast, Oh T'ae-sök's 1977 production stressed the aesthetic aspects of the play. For instance, Oh forged a spectacular scene in which he used costumes made of traditional Korean papers, and he utilized the paper costumes as a canvas. When the six royal subjects were given poison by King Sejo, the actors playing them held Chinese ink in their mouths. As the six royal subjects spat blood and died, the Chinese ink was spattered onto the paper costumes, creating the effect of a Korean painting (Sö Yön-ho and Oh T'ae-sök 2002: 73-4). *Lifecord* continued to be frequently performed, due to its mixture of nationalist sentiments and "universal" claims. This may explain why *Lifecord* was selected as a representative of Korean theatre in the '86 Asian Game Cultural Festival and was aggrandized as a "national brand performance" in the twenty-first century.⁶⁵

I will explore the phallogentric ground of the nationalist-humanist-universalist claim in *Lifecord* by scrutinizing the images, metaphors, and symbols in the history play. Almost empty, the whole stage is imaginatively constructed as a womb. There is just a moving folding screen and the theatrical space is not further demarcated into clear divisions. But one can identify the topography of social class and gender structures in it. The most discernable contrast in space usage is found in two oppositional forces, that is, between people who kill and people who preserve life. The palace of King Sejo takes

⁶⁵ Refer to Korean National Theatre Internet Homepage (<http://www.ntok.go.kr/>). In 2006, Oh T'ae-sök became the artistic director of the National Drama Company affiliated to the National Theatre.

up the central stage, and a woman slave of Park P'aeng-nyŏn (one of the six royal subjects) wanders around the periphery of the stage, as if it was a wild field. In between, there is a place of exile of the young king, Tanjong and a house of Park P'aeng-nyŏn. Most of the characters belong to aristocrats of the *Chosŏn* dynasty and the rest of the characters are their slaves. There are no commoners in the play and most of the characters are male. The wives of the six royal subjects are just overheard through their crying in the scene where their husbands are executed. They appear just once to take the dead bodies of their husbands with them. There are two important female characters in relation to the themes of life and motherhood. One is the daughter-in-law of Park P'aeng-nyŏn and the other is the woman slave of Park P'aeng-nyŏn's clan.⁶⁶

It is worth noting that in *Lifecord* the issue of fidelity and nationhood is an undercurrent which becomes the main theme of his later history plays. In *Lifecord*, Oh T'ae-sŏk shows the audience two types of royal subjects: the keeper of a noble cause like Sŏng Sam-mun and the political realist like Shin Suk-ju. Sŏng Sam-mun is one of the six royal subjects who die for the young legitimate King, Tanjong. As King Sejo favors him as a brilliant scholar, he asks in anguish, "why do you betray me?" Sŏng Sam-mun answers resolutely that "No one will call it betrayal. I merely restored the rightful king to the throne. Everyone in this kingdom knows my position. Each of us has his own master to serve, One cannot serve two kings; it is unnatural as two suns in the sky" (Oh T'ae-sŏk 1999: 104).⁶⁷

⁶⁶ This description of stage is based on my own view of the production mounted on the Hall of Literature and Art in 1986 as a part of Asian Game Cultural Festival.

⁶⁷ I use Ah-jeong Kim and R. B. Graves' translated version of *Lifecord* for quotation.

In its political implication, this scene is provocative in that it euphemizes acid reprobation toward the Park Jung Hee's illegitimate military junta. Meanwhile, later called as one of "*saengyukshin* (the living six royal subjects)," Shin Suk-ju is the one whose philosophy and politics are firmly grounded in utilitarian values. Shin Suk-ju is the representative of the prime producers of dominant discourses whose logic and principle rely on pragmatic perceptions of polity. Oh T'ae-sök portrays him as an intrepid and moderate political figure who does not care about "frivolous things." His cool-headed polemic provides a rationale for sacrificing the lives of a few for the social stabilization of the majority. It is evident that his views on nation and people are congruous with those of the conservative political leaders of the Park Jung Hee regime, who only promoted Cold War ideology, national security, and economic development for the prosperity of the Korean ethnic community.

In a newspaper article in the "Fellow Soldier Gazette," a military officer observes, "[in *Lifecord*] in contrast to our traditional norm of the upright spirit of a Confucian classical scholar, the author [Oh T'ae-sök] insists obstinately that negotiating with the political reality [for the majority] is a truthful humanist effort and no less a courageous act than straightforward political fidelity" (qtd in Lee Sang-ran 1990: 274). The officer identifies with Shin Suk-ju, reckoning him as true "*sanaedajangbu*" (Korean expression for a manly man), a notion based on the Confucian ideal man. Nevertheless, what I saw in a 1986 production of *Lifecord* was Oh T'ae-sök's conscious balance between the aristocratic characters and the woman slave. According to critic Lee Sang-ran, in the earlier productions of *Lifecord*, even though dramaturgically the position of the woman slave was important, her presence had been low-key; later Oh T'ae-sök supplemented

the emotionally heightened images of her (1990: 260). In the 1986 production of *Lifecord*, the agony of the slave woman elicited a great deal of compassion, and her motherly pain and love were the focal point of the humanist message the author conveys. Obviously, the officer identified with the political position of Shin Suk-ju and praised Oh T'ae-sök for being an advocate of a humanist spirit. This case demonstrates, I contend, how easily humanist discourses can be inflected towards the dominant power, as they are not sensitive to such differential social components as class, gender, and race.

Contradictory to his initial indication, Oh T'ae-sök ends up representing the life-killing oppressor King Sejo as a man of a great humanist spirit and a tragic hero. I will examine how this contradiction is generated through the progression of the narrative. In the beginning, Oh T'ae-sök highlights the political persona of King Sejo, but as the narrative advances, he endows King Sejo with more qualities and dimensions of an individual person. When Shin Suk-ju drastically insists that King Tanjong has to be destroyed to spare many lives, King Sejo is reluctant to kill his own nephew in exile. The assertion of Shin Suk-ju is based on inverse logic; so long as Tanjong is alive, many people would try to reinstall his royal authority and by that action they will be killed. Shin Suk-ju tells King Sejo, "I am simply worried that many of your subjects may turn traitor if you permit Tanjong to survive. Their attempts to restore Tanjong will undermine your government and the kingdom. How many courtiers can you send to the execution field?" He persuades King Sejo to "save these living souls" (Oh T'ae-sök 1999:112). In dealing with opposing political opinions in the play, Oh T'ae-sök is intentionally ambiguous. His

concern does not lie in determining who is good and who is evil, but in focusing on the dissimilarity in the respective political positions.

Oh T'ae-sök's move toward the suspension of moral judgment on political deeds is more conspicuous in the case of King Sejo. We do not know that the historical figure, King Sejo, was profoundly agonized as he commanded to kill his own nephew. Nevertheless, for his purposes, Oh T'ae-sök bestows King Sejo with human dignity, and he reconfigures King Sejo as a man of conflict. Furthermore, Oh "distorts" the historical fact that King Sejo gave order to kill Tanjong. In the play, Tanjong is poisoned by one of his retainers in a place of exile. In *Lifecord*, reminiscent of Macbeth, King Sejo is a cold-hearted man of power but at the same time he is a man of fragile mind. It is the deep-seated humanity that elevates King Sejo as a tragic hero. The tragedy of Korean history, what Oh T'ae-sök expresses as "eating up its youth," transpires through King Sejo, in other words, through the antagonistic conflict between power and humanity.

Even though King Sejo tries to justify his deed of killing the six royal subjects as his concern for the prosperity of a collective polity, he is in agony for committing the crime of infanticide, since this deed is against the higher order of humanity and Confucian morality as well. This is what really drives Oh T'ae-sök's subjective interpretation of history and editorial construction in *Lifecord*. King Sejo impeded the continuation of his family line, and this is the "essence" of his formidable crime. King Sejo laments over the death of his own nephew, crying out, "What sorrow, what sorrow! I killed him in the end. How can I ever join the line of my ancestors? I cannot face them now. Perhaps I shall not even be able to die" (Oh T'ae-sök 1999: 118). How can King Sejo realize the sublimity of the life principle? Oh T'ae-sök searches for a liminal space

for change and finds the “essential” motive of the transformation of the brutal King inside his mind. Interestingly, it is the spirits of the dead six royal subjects who can agitate the callous mind of King Sejo and make him reach for the moment of recognition. It seems that for Oh T’ae-sök the dead six royal subjects are the real agents of the life principle, since they died for the continuation of a new life. In a Confucian sense, the dead are the spirits of our ancestors who gave us life.

The scene in which the ghosts of the six royal subjects aid the childbirth of Lady Park (Park Paeng-nyön’s daughter-in-law) shows the coexistence of life and death on a continuum. With conical bamboo rain-hats (which indicate that they are the ghosts), the ghosts unfold a huge blanket to receive the baby in the manner of a sacred ritual. Since the dead spirits are projected from the mind of King Sejo, the play *Lifecord* is expressionistic in this context. The spirits of the dead are only shown to King Sejo and the audience. In another scene, during the debate between King Sejo and Shin Suk-ju, the King is stupefied with the hallucinating spectacle in which the ghosts of the six royal subjects and Lady Park dance together while holding a baby’s blanket colored with blood, which was used for her childbirth. Toward the end, King Sejo goes insane. Reminiscent of the ending part of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* or Kurosawa Akira’s *Ran*, the last image of *Lifecord* is punctuated with the King’s return to the wilderness. With his hair disheveled, King Sejo stands in a bleak wild field. As he holds the grandson of Park Paeng-nyön, in awe, he looks at the baby who survived his own barbaric massacre. King Sejo utters, “He came into this world against my orders. He is beyond my power.” He orders him named “One Coral” and “let him succeed to the line of Park, family of the hall of shining wisdom” (Oh T’ae-sök 1999: 119). In this, the author captures the

triumphant momentum in which life principle outlasts the transience of power. This last scene is saturated with the ambivalent cathartic sentiments of horror and compassion.

This resolution, however, sends very disturbing signals to the audience in that their perception of the oppressor in the beginning shifts to that of the victim at the end. Looking at King Sejo with tremendous sympathy, the audience find themselves almost identifying with the oppressor. The last scene conveys the message that King Sejo is not solely responsible for his crime and is the mere instrument of historical contingencies. It seems that the author substitutes the modern mechanism of power for the tragic destiny and treats desire for power as the hero's *hamartia*. In a sense, the humanist mask of the King conceals the naked evil face of power. Remembering that King Sejo and Shin Suk-ju were allegorical figures of the Park Jung Hee regime that ate up its youth, Oh T'ae-sök's humanist-nationalist views are complicitly congruent to Park Jung Hee's historical justification of his *coup d'état*. Park Jung Hee proclaimed that it was his ethnic mission to terminate the chaos of fragmentation and integrate the nation for a strong and grand Korean ethnic community. His "noble" cause justified the sacrifice of a few for the lives of the majority. In a sense, Oh T'ae-sök's humanist-nationalist stance, to some extent, excuses the blatant misrule of oppressors like Park Jung Hee.

Oh T'ae-sök's humanist-nationalist core value of the life principle is also expressed through two female characters from different social classes. He dramatizes the loftiness of motherhood through Lady Park and the Woman Slave. Even though in reality that Lady Park could not enter into direct negotiation with King Sejo, in the play, she beseeches King Sejo to allow her to give birth. She assures the King that he can

murder her baby thereafter. As far as the life of the fetus is concerned, in order to make the King believe her, she kills her grandfather-in-law in front of the King, saying “My Lord, I swear by the blood on my hands that as soon as my baby is born, I will kill it just as I have done here” (Oh T’ae-sök 1999:109).

Actually, Lady Park is instrumentalized as the medium of the life principle in the sense that her deed is the outcome of internalization of the prescribed Confucian ideology based on tenacity to family line. As family line means a patriarchal continuation, the “essence” of the life principle is not the womb, but the seed. King Sejo responds to her, “Go away, then! If it is a boy, kill him and bring him to me; but if it is a girl, you may live together” (Oh T’ae-sök 1999: 110). Her motherly act of keeping her baby is only achieved by killing her grandfather-in-law, Park Chung-lim, who is behind the scheme. She wails over the dead body of Park Chung-lim and cries out, “you shall have a great-grandson. It was your plan. He will carry on our family line” (Oh T’ae-sök 1999: 110). It is thus the noble deed of Park Chung-lim that enables the continuation of his clan line. Like the dead six royal subjects, Park is the heroic subject who preserves life. As in Confucian patriarchy the head of the family has both authority and responsibility, his sacrifice is the outcome of his paternal responsibility.⁶⁸ Consequently, Oh T’ae-sök beautifies the sublime conduct of the Confucian patriarch.

Nevertheless, Oh T’ae-sök allegorizes the last cry of the son of the Woman Slave as the symbol of the oppressed. Indeed, the baby is the real sacrifice of the Confucian ideology Oh T’ae-sök supports. Oh here puts forth a confusing message; he celebrates the continuation of life in one family (of higher order) which is based on the sacrifice of

⁶⁸ Historically, Park Chung-lim was slaughtered because he was the head of the family of an insurgent (his son, Park P’aeng-nyön). In the play, Park Chung-lim was supposed to be killed by the King.

another family (of low social status). Lady Park kills herself after giving birth to her son, and the Woman Slave goes insane after losing her son. In contrast to the ideologically determined motherhood of Lady Park, the image of motherhood in the woman slave is projected as maternal instinct. With both her hands bound to a frame carrier, indicating her debasement, the woman slave is violently squirming to keep the life of her son and, like a mother animal, she moves the body of her baby with her mouth. As she is deprived of her baby, she goes mad and cries out her baby's name "Ch'angji" (literally meaning my body part or my intestine) and wanders about a wild field. In the last scene, she cries out, "My flesh, my blood. Give me back my flesh. Give him back! My own flesh" (Oh T'ae-sök 1999: 120). In the long skirt of the actress playing the woman slave hangs a huge spiral shaped pipe hose, emblematic of the umbilical cord that connects all Koreans.

As I mentioned before, in *Lifecord*, the space is not conceived in the conventions of realism. In his deliberate directorial blocking, Oh T'ae-sök makes the Woman Slave cross the stage diagonally and pass through the palace of King Sejo. This transgression is a powerful action, which symbolically catches the moment when the principle of life infiltrates into the brutal realm of power. At the end, King Sejo and the Woman Slave encounter each other in the wilderness. The juxtaposed images of King Sejo and the Woman Slave convey the main idea of the play that life is the most sublime value of all.

In *Lifecord*, Oh T'ae-sök fabricates a humanist myth in which life is extolled as a transcendental principle. All human beings are born and die. But, since the son of the woman slave is sacrificed for the son of *yangban* (aristocrats), life is not free from the historical restraints of the dominant powers and ideologies. In *Lifecord*, his humanist

views on history and nation essentialize and simplify the complicated reality as the dichotomous conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed and overly idealize reconciliation between them. Also, as Oh T'ae-sök considers life as the seed of a man and the receptacle of a woman, his humanist views consolidate the mythic image of woman in Confucian patriarchy.

3.2.2 *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung*

After *Lifecord*, Oh T'ae-sök consistently pursued the theme of the life principle until the early 1990s. But, his concerns on motherhood and the life principle had been expressed before *Lifecord* was produced in 1974. In 1972, he was commissioned to write a play based on a Korean classic, *Yi Ch'unp'ung Chŏn* (*The Story of Yi Ch'unp'ung*). At the suggestion of their professor, Yi Öryöng, students of Korean Literature Department of Ewha Women's University asked Oh T'ae-sök to conceive a modernized classic for their college production. It is likely that the students selected the Korean classic due to one of its characters, the Wife of Ch'unp'ung. The Wife of Ch'unp'ung is regarded as a rare woman character whose image of positive spirit is contrasted to other women characters of the Korean classics written during the same period, around the 18th century.

Not only did Oh T'ae-sök write the play, *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung*, but also he directed the production. The following year, he produced another college production of *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung*, this time with his students of the Seoul Art Institute.⁶⁹ In 1976,

⁶⁹ Yu Ch'i-jin is the founder of the Institute.

Oh T'ae-sök presented *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung* to the public in the Samillo Garage Theatre (Sö Yön-ho and Oh T'ae-sök 2002: 78-9). Critic Sö Yön-ho counts *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung* as “the representative work of *madanggŭk*,” and asserts that “if there is an artistic principle of *madanggŭk*, this valuable work contains all the characteristics of it” (2002: 82).⁷⁰ In *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung*, Oh T'ae-sök borrows elements from a variety of traditional genres: the Korean classic *The Story of Yi Ch'unp'ung*, *kamyŏngŭk* (the traditional Korean mask dance drama), *kkoktugaksinolŭm* (the traditional Korean puppet theatre), *p'ansori* (the traditional Korean tale-singing), ancient songs, and folk dance. As in these genres where the narratives do not progress in a logical fashion, the narratives of *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung* frequently jump by allusions and associations to these source materials. If the audience is not familiar with the source materials he relies on, it is hard to follow the stories in the play. In addition, Oh T'ae-sök's aesthetic techniques of condensation, repetition, and omission attribute to his “crabbed style.”

Interestingly, this complicated play was given a favorable reception abroad. In 1979, while he stayed in New York for research study supported by the Korean Organization of Revival of Literature and Art, he produced the play in the Wonder Horse Theatre and met with public approval due to its “uniquely Korean style” that could be differentiated from “Japanese and Chinese styles” (Sö Yön-ho and Oh T'ae-sök 2002: 85). Although his frequent visits to Japan and work there have contributed to the controversy around his stylization (termed *whaesæk*, which is a pejorative term for

⁷⁰ Sö Yön-ho's appraisal seemed to be made against the appropriation of the *madanggŭk* style *minjokgŭk* from the *minjung* culture movement. Criticizing the overtly ideological implications and the lack of aesthetic accomplishment of *minjung madanggŭk*, the mainstream critics like Sö Yön-ho strived to postulate the practice of “the modernization of tradition” advocated by Yu Ch'i-jin as the rightful inheritor of the *kamyŏngŭk* tradition.

“Japanese style”), Oh T’ae-sök is the representative Korean playwright/director whose productions are best known to Japanese audience and critics. *The Wife of Ch’unp’ung* was invited to the Toga Art Festival in 1987 and the Tokyo Alice Festival in 1990.

Before I discuss the themes of the play, it is necessary to introduce briefly Oh T’ae-sök’s dramaturgy and stylization based on the conventions of the Korean traditional performing arts. His principal technique in scene-making can be identified as juxtaposition, which is also the principle of such traditional performances as *kamyöngŭk* and *kkoktugaksinolŭm*. As seemingly irrelevant scenes are juxtaposed and similar scenes are repeated, narrative elements are emphasized for the theme of the play. Certainly, this episodic structure is not based on cause-effect relationship between the scenes. For instance, when the Wife of Ch’unp’ung falls in one scene and rises up in the next scene like Gaksi in *kkoktugaksinolŭm*, she is presumed to be alive again. If the audience knows the theatrical conventions of *kkoktugaksinolŭm*, it is not strange that she dies several times during the play. The Wife meets two mysterious characters (creatures), Yichi and Tök-jung while she takes a journey to Pyöngyang, a big city now belonging to North Korea, to search for her husband. One of her companions, Tök-jung uses head butting several times in the play, and this butting is a convention for fighting or killing in *kkoktugaksinolŭm*. “The head butting in the traditional Korean puppet theatre is the most clear way to show the conflict and resolution in relation to the simple movements of the puppets characteristic of a puppet theatre” (Kim Hyön-ch’öl 2003: 322). When Ch’unp’ung hears that their three sons are dead, he angrily hits his wife with his long sleeves and she falls like a puppet and almost dies. This scene comes from the episode of Miyal. If the audience knows that episode and the conventions of

kamyŏngŭk, they would not worry if the Wife dies or not because of her husband. They would rather expect the next comic scene, in which a blind doctor appears from nowhere and deals with her husband on the matter of how much money he can pay to revive his wife. Furthermore, the audience would anticipate the character Father playing the role of the blind doctor when Tŏk-jung punishes him with his head butting and he goes blind.

Oh T'ae-sŏk reconfigures the original Korean classic, *The Story of Ch'unp'ung*, by inserting the episodes and conventions of *kamyŏngŭk* and *kkoktugaksinolŭm*. The image of motherhood in the Wife of Ch'unp'ung is the collage of three female characters from traditional sources: the Wife of Ch'unp'ung, Gaksi, and Miyal. It is hardly overstating that from *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung* Oh T'ae-sŏk intensely searched for "the Korean symbol of mother archetype." In an interview with Sŏ Yŏn-ho, Oh T'ae-sŏk explains how he associated the Wife of Ch'unp'ung" with what he calls a "Korean Mother Courage." He remarks, "Among the classic stories transmitted to us, 'the Wife of Ch'unp'ung' shows a rare case in which a woman is active enough to scold a man and teach him a lesson. I wanted to tell the story of this woman to the next generation. When I was young, in my village, I knew several women (mothers and grandmothers) who were said to be as bold as men and as grand as men in action. People said that if they were given birth as men they would be something." He continues, "I think that they are desirable types of Korean women. We live in a small country, but whenever we participated in the big international Olympic Games, we won many gold medals. I consider that we could have done that because of *this solid womb*, *this active womb* [italics mine]. With *the passive womb* [italics mine], we could not have accomplished it."

Sŏ Yŏn-ho responds and asks, “May it be considered that you wrote a feminist drama for women spectators? That wasn’t its only purpose?” Oh T’ae-sŏk avoids answering whether it is a feminist drama or not, remarking that “I myself hated a crying woman . . . I believe in the virtues of our mothers and grandmothers. But, the fact is that the Korean classics barely tell about them. I wanted for people to realize that all of us in our ethnic community are not passive and incapable like the women characters of the Korean classics” (2002: 88).

More often than not, Oh T’ae-sŏk’s plays are misunderstood as feminist dramas because in many of his plays women characters appear as the protagonists. It is interesting to note that his representations of women, however, are different from genre to genre. Usually, positive women appear in comedic genres, for instance, the wife of Ch’unp’ung. In serious dramas, when a woman functions as a shaman, she has an important role to perform. Sundan and Halmŏm in *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River* belong to this type of “great mother of the nation.” Conversely, in tragedy, women are portrayed as victims. In *Lifecord*, Lady Park and the Woman Slave are the examples. In his history plays, either women have no significant parts, or they are depicted as evil personifications with a repugnant, if not misogynistic touch. In *Toraji*, Oh T’ae-sŏk portrays the last Empress of *Chosŏn* dynasty, Empress Myŏngsŏng, as a “wench” based on putative public gossip of the time, even though historical interpretations of Empress Myŏngsŏng range from “a mother of a nation” to “a malicious traitor.”

Is Oh T’ae-sŏk’s view on the Korean ethnic community feminist as he allegorizes the problems and situations of the private home of Yi Ch’unp’ung as those of the nation? As critic Kim Pang-ok aptly points out, Oh T’ae-sŏk finds the determining factor

of the misfortune of the Korean ethnic community in men's faults (1997: 131-136). He considers that men were either absent in places of significance or they did not fully carry out their duties. What are the duties of men in South Korea that Oh T'ae-sök takes into account? In order to understand this, one must consider how he defines a truly manly man. We can find this in the Confucian notion of "*sanaedaejangpu*" (manly man), which connotes "a man of boldness and vastness in action."⁷¹ Oh T'ae-sök regards the chief problem of the Korean ethnic community as the lack of this ideal man. This ideal man, "*sanaedaejangpu*," is what he is seriously pursuing in his later history plays. In contrast to that, Yi Ch'unp'ung can be categorized as "*hanrayang*" in a Confucian sense, since he is not concerned with national affairs but just seeks hedonistic pleasure in life.

According to the original classic, Yi Ch'unp'ung leaves his home in Hanyang (the capital city of *Chosŏn*) for business. But, as he meets Ch'u-wol, a famous *gisaeng* (both an artistic entertainer and a courtesan like Japanese *geisha*) in Pyöngyang, he quests for carnal pleasure. The Wife hears the rumor that Yi Ch'unp'ung went bankrupt, and he works as a servant in the drinking house where Ch'u-wol serves. With money to rescue him, she leaves for Pyöngyang where her husband resides. The play, *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung*, starts from here. Robbed of her money by a thief, she meets her companions and aides, Yichi and Tök-jung. In fact, they are not persons but aquatic creatures. They had arrived on land to seek a magical medicine to cure their aging mother. These creatures are from another Korean classic, *Pyölichubujön* (*The Story of the Turtle*). In order to get money for the medicine, Yichi and Tök-jung undertake the

⁷¹ As I discussed in *Lifecord*, King Sejo and Shin Suk-ju are portrayed as "*sanaedaejangpu*."

task of escorting two criminals, Father and Son. In this way, the encounters among the five characters occur by chance.

Considering the social conditions of the time, the Wife is bold to search for her husband by herself. According to Oh T'ae-sök, the Wife is "*yöjanpu*" (manly woman), a woman of boldness and magnitude in action. In this respect, then, it is clear that Oh T'ae-sök's ideal type of "Korean Mother Courage" is grounded in the Confucian idea of "*sanaedaejangpu*" (manly man). The Wife is the very image of the mother of the Confucian "womb family." In a Confucian patriarchal system, sociologist Cho-Han Hye-jöng notes, as a woman becomes the mother of a family, she is able to exercise power over her nuclear family. In the absence of a patriarch, the mother functioned as a proxy, for even in the absence of a father, through her he symbolically exists as the stronghold of a family (1999: 89). It is explicit that the Wife internalizes the ideologies of Confucian patriarchy. In a play-within-a play scene where she plays the role of a judge in the case of father-son conspiracy, the Wife reproaches the Father as the principal offender because "according to the law, when there's more than one crook in a family, you punish the head of the house. The father is the brain, not the son" (Oh T'ae-sök 1999: 83). As the prime law regulating gender politics, this system of "the headship of the family" from the *Chosön* dynasty had existed until recently in South Korea. Therefore, the abolition of this law in the 2000s is regarded as one of the principal accomplishments in the history of the Korean women's movement.

Oh T'ae-sök's ideal matriarchy is a reverse patriarchy defined from a masculine perspective. In this system, however, a woman cannot properly function as a patriarch due to her lack of phallus as the source of masculine authority. Naturally, this explains

why the Wife must transform into a man when circumstances demand her official power to save her troubled husband. Entrapped by the false accusation of his former mistress, Yi Ch'unp'ung has been arrested and charged with embezzling government money. According to the advice of Yichi, the Wife sleeps with Tök-jung's nephew who has an important government position and gives birth to a son to him. As a reward, she secures a governmental judicial post. In the courtyard, before her husband's case, the Wife ruthlessly punishes a man with a mistress, saying "I hate him for having a mistress." As her husband's case approaches, the Wife is confused because she has to give her own husband a different judgment. She speaks out, "But, how can I give completely different verdicts — saying 'bust up his face' one time and 'crush that bitch's face' the next — when it's really the same case?" With a stinging satire on the judicial system at that time (and present day), Tök-jung utters, "As long as you hold this post you can say anything you like. At a time like this, why worry about such things as your reputation or whether your job means anything or not? Don't get so philosophical" (Oh T'ae-sök 1999: 92).

It is significant that while in *The Story of Yi Ch'unp'ung* the Wife vehemently scolds her husband, in Oh T'ae-sök's *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung* this scene is omitted. Instead, Oh T'ae-sök incorporates the encounter scene between Miyal and Yöngkam (the husband of Miyal who has a mistress, too) of *kamyöngŭk*, in which as soon as they see each other they have sexual intercourse. As an ideal type of "a good wife and a good mother," the Wife has to display proper "virtues of our mothers and grandmothers" in patience, sacrifice, and generosity to rehabilitate the derailed husband. When the Wife meets the former mistress of her husband, Ch'u-wol, in the courtyard, she cannot help acknowledging the fact that the mistress is far more sexually attractive than herself.

The Wife is said to be ugly and is a little bit disabled. She has six fingers in one hand like Miyal in *kamyöngŭk*, although Miyal is worse in that she has pockmarks all over her face. The Wife feels envy of the feminine rival to which her husband is irresistibly drawn.

When the mistress sings a song about her fertility in traditional *p'ansori* mode, the Wife asks her, "Are you saying you'll give birth to twelve babies a year?" Ch'u-wol responds proudly, "When there's a leap month, I can have thirteen babies a year." "*The Wife runs headlong into Ch'u-wol, striking her forehead. But it is the Wife who falls backwards hurt; Ch'u-wol is perfectly fine*" (Oh T'ae-sök 1999: 94). As the Wife is nearly dead from a fight with the mistress, she asks for Yichi and Tök-jung to cover her body with the mistress' long skirt. Ch'unp'ung mistakes his wife covered with the skirt for his mistress, which motivates the sex he has with her. This sexual intercourse is expressed with *kamyöngŭk* dances like those of Miyal and Yöngkam; "*They start dancing together in a seductive manner. With her body clinging to Ch'unp'ung's, the Wife makes overt sexual advances to him, Ch'unp'ung falls down on his back and the Wife crawls over his head.*" Dancing with crawling over the head conventionally means a childbirth in *kamyöngŭk*. She then says, "I'm glad that I bore a son," and dies (Oh T'ae-sök 1999: 99). Her dead spirit enters into the body of Ch'u-wol, and Ch'u-wol as a shaman prays for her "safe journey to paradise" (Oh T'ae-sök 1999: 100).

In *The Story of Ch'unp'ung*, Ch'unp'ung and his wife happily come back home together, after the Wife of Ch'unp'ung teaches her husband a lesson. The last scene of *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung* cannot be logically explained; it is nonsense that the wife "gives birth" to her husband as her "son." The scene alludes to the episode of Miyal in *kamyöngŭk* in which Miyal makes a joke that she bore her husband as her son. Miyal

dies during the fight with Tölmöri, the mistress of her husband in *kamyöngŭk*. Metaphorically speaking, the scene signifies that as she dies, her husband is reborn as her son. That is, her womb secures the space of revival for a weakened patriarch. The author seems to imply that a good wife should dismiss the faults of her husband as a good mother forgives her prodigal son because life has to be continued, anyway.

The play is thus not feminist at all. Furthermore, through the play, Oh T'ae-sök inculcates the Confucian ideal type of wife, *yölnyö* (a virtuous woman). In his book of essay, *Pukyi Wulrida (When the Drum Sounds)*,⁷² he reveals the Confucian idea structuring his play, *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung*, observing, "She dies three times in the play, in the previous life, this world, and the other world. She suffers and dies three times for her husband. She is certainly a *yölnyö* (a virtuous woman)" (1978: 70).

I saw the production of *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung* in 1990 staged in the Ch'ungdol (Clash) Theatre. In 1984, Oh T'ae-sök had established his theatre company "Mokwha," and in 1990 *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung* was presented as the celebratory performance of the opening of its own theatre, the Ch'ungdol. An Suk-sön was cast as the Wife of Ch'unp'ung for this special performance. An Suk-sön is a noted singer of *p'ansori* and a *prima donna* of National *Ch'anggŭk* Company.⁷³ For Oh T'ae-sök who has sought the Korean archetype in bodily gesture, dance style, manner of speech, and sentiments through traditional cultural artifacts, she was ideal for the role of the Wife, since she was equipped with all the talents demanded for playing the role and she had been trained in traditional *p'ansori* and *ch'anggŭk*. Her acting and singing, however, seemed at odds

⁷² This is his one and only prose book. Mostly, his ideas have been expressed through his directorial notes on the program pamphlets and the interviews conducted by the theatre critics.

⁷³ As I noted in the introduction, *ch'anggŭk* is a modernized *p'ansori*.

with the modernist look of the stage with dazzling lights, a huge black plastic rug covering the whole floor, and curtain-like white cloths hanging around the rear stage for entrances and exits. The stage design evoked the image of a bleak land and toned down the comedic lightness of the dramatic action of the play. The texture and color of the plastic rug certainly evoked a barrenness symbolizing the Korean ethnic community with no ideal sons.

As critic Song Hye-suk remarked, An Suk-sŏn expressed “the archetypal disposition and sentiment of Korean women” (1990: 229). What is the archetypal disposition and sentiment of Korean women the female critic enunciates? An Suk-sŏn, in an interview, answers: “I tried to portray Korean women who are strong and active. They are women in skirts, but they are bold like men. They seek love and belief and endeavor to secure them for a long time. In patience, they are strong enough to overcome their predicaments” (1990: 231). Her view on “the ideal Korean woman” is consistent with those of the male author and the female critic of the production. This ideal Korean woman whose virtues are anchored in Confucian principles and morals is exactly the same as “the type of our ethnic daughter,” which was politically promulgated to enlist young women laborers for the export-driven modernization by the Park Jung Hee regime. As David Steinberg characterized the mechanism of Korean modernization: “Korean society operates through both Western hardware and Confucian software” (1997: 75).

The Wife of Ch’ungp’ung is not only a mother of her own offspring but also a great mother of the nation. In the later plays of Oh T’ae-sŏk, she appears as a great shaman who appeases the painful souls of the living and the rancorous spirits of the

dead, as well. In *The Wife of Ch'unp'ung*, however, the image of a shaman as a great mother, is distributed into two women in the play. One, Ch'u-wol the mistress performs *chinoguigut* (a shamanist ritual for the dead). In the 1990 production, when the Wife has sexual intercourse with her husband, the image of their conjugation evoked the scene of a female shaman who dances on the long knife in a trance ritual of *gut*. As most deities of shamanism are male, female shamans' possession in ritual is often metaphorically expressed as a sexual intercourse with their *momju* (the deities which reside in their body). This is why there are no male *kangshinmu* (who become the shaman through the ritual of possession), and male shamans are *sesŭpmu* (they become shaman by inheriting their family profession).⁷⁴ This theme of a great mother of the nation as a shaman is fully evolved in Oh T'ae-sŏk's *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River* (1993). Through the play, Oh T'ae-sŏk imagines the oneness of the nation through the ritual of reconciliation and forgiveness, as the shamanist *gut* intends. The great mother of the nation is the medium (a shaman) through which the present traumas of the living are healed. I will discuss this play in detail in Chapter 4.

⁷⁴ In Korea, a female shaman is called "*mudang*," but a male shaman is called "*paksumudang*." Thus, "*paksumudang*" is really rare today.

4.0 MINJOKGŬK IN THE 1980S

4.1 YIM JIN-T'AEK'S MINJOKGŬK: MUNG-BEAN FLOWER

Discussing Yim Jin-t'aek's *minjokgŭk* discourse and practices, it is instructive to view his relationship to Kim Chiha. In an essay written in the early 1990s, Yim Jin-t'aek overviews the processes, accomplishments, and limitations of the *minjung* (grassroots) *minjokgŭk* during the previous periods. In it, he does not hesitate to give Kim Chiha full credit for the inspiration of Yim's artistic (political) careers and of the grassroots *minjokgŭk* movement itself. He writes, "The encounter with the poet, Kim Chiha, was the turning point in my life. The poet was conversant with a wide range of literature, theatre, fine arts, cinema, folk arts, so on and so forth. My task was to create *madanggŭk* performances based on his ideas about theatre and to present *p'ansori* performances by adopting his political *tamsi*."⁷⁵ Yim Jin-t'aek pays homage to the poet, observing, "it was my good fortune that I encountered his 'life philosophy' again ten years later, after I met him for the first time, even though his thoughts on life are given a cold reception nowadays" (1990: 3).

⁷⁵ It is notable that Yim Jin-t'aek received a private lesson from a prominent *p'ansori* singer, Chŏng Chinkwon. From this professional training in the traditional genre, he created new *p'ansori* works based on several works of Kim Chiha's *tamsi* (a long modern *p'ansori*-style poem).

In 1970, when he was a sophomore, Yim Jin-t'aek met Kim Chiha. In 1971, they worked together for the production of Kim Chiha's *Copper Statue of General Yi Sun-sin* and *Napoleon Cognac*. Yim Jin-t'aek was a student representative of the Drama Club of the Humanities of the Seoul National University, and Kim Chiha was commissioned to direct his own plays as a senior of the Drama Club (Kim Yöng-jöng 2006: 327). In an interview, Yim Jin-t'aek relates that in 1973 he was suspended from the University for the performance of a politically "disturbing" play. That year, he visited Kim Chiha in Wönju, and as a performer, participated in the provincial tours of *Jesus Garlanded with a Gold Crown*. He was also engaged in the rehearsals of *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead* under Kim's direction, but the production was cancelled. In the last month of 1973, in Cheil Church in Seoul, Yim directed the play with a different title *Beautiful Land*, and he played the parts of the Narrator and Ttaettae.⁷⁶

In 1974, Yim Jin-t'aek was briefly imprisoned for violation of the Emergency Presidential Decree (for providing a hiding place for a wanted political activist). In the same year, he performed the role of Marades, the Japanese businessman, in *Agu's Musical Shamanist Ritual* (Kim Hyön-min 1992: 36). After the six years of work as a staff member of an airline company and a producer of a commercial broadcasting company, in 1980, he made his debut as a professional director. His first professional directing work was *T'osönsaeng Chön (The Story of Sir Rabbit)*, which was produced to celebrate the opening of The Cecil Theatre Company. *Mung-bean Flower* was produced on the campus of the Seoul National University during "the 1980 Spring of

⁷⁶ Ch'ae Hui-wan was a choreographer, and Kim Min-ki was a mask designer for the Cheil Church production.

Democratization.”⁷⁷ In 1981, he directed Hwang Sökyöng’s *Changsaüiggum* (*The Dream of the Man of Great Strength*) in the Yönu Stage.⁷⁸ Established in 1979, during the 1980s, the Yönu Stage provided an artistic venue for *minjung madanggük* practitioners like Yim Jin-t’aek, Kim Myöngkon, and Park In-pae (Chöng Yön-su 1986: 170).⁷⁹

Yim’s *madanggük*, *Naüisaldön Kohayangün* (*My Hometown*, 1984), is recorded as the first theatrical production that tackled the political aspects of the environmental problems in South Korea and the first production that was banned from public performance for that reason. In the 1980s, under the Chun Tu-whan regime, although it was a non-governmental organization, the Public Performance Ethics Committee functioned as a regulative system of censorship. The Committee inspected all scripts for public performance.⁸⁰ The first case brought up was the prohibition of Yim Jin-t’aek’s *My Hometown*. For that, the Yönu Theatre Company was suspended for six months. *My Hometown* had passed the script inspection and was presented at the Drama Center in July, but a matter of the discrepancy between the contents of the original script and those of performance came to the fore. The Committee withdrew the initial permission for performance in August. As a result, the Company’s next work *Hanssi*

⁷⁷ This refers to a short period of democratization between the assassination of Park Jung Hee in December 1979 and the Kwangju Democratization Uprising in May 1980.

⁷⁸ Hwang Sökyöng is a notable novelist, but he was actively engaged in *madanggük* movement through the Yönu Theatre Company. His novels were adapted into *madanggük* plays, and he himself wrote *madanggük* plays.

⁷⁹ The former members of the Drama Club of the Humanities of the Seoul National University, Chung Han-ryong and Oh Sangwu founded the Yönu Theatre Company, and Kim Sök-man joined the Company later. So, underground *madanggük* practitioners like Yim Jin-t’aek who was the former member of the Drama Club could find the stage for *madanggük* performance in the institutional theatre site.

⁸⁰ The pre-censorship system was abolished in 1988.

Yöndaegi (*The Chronicle of Mr. Han*),⁸¹ planned for the National Theatre Festival of Korea in September was excluded from the entry (Kim Ok-ran 2006: 200-1). A series of these incidents became the direct cause for *minjung madanggŭk* practitioners to leave the Company. Thereafter, Yim Jin-t'aek founded his own performance group, “*Yönhikwangdaep’ae*” (Yönhi Players’ Troupe) in 1985, Kim Myöngkon “The Arirang Theatre Company” in 1986, and Park In-pae “Field Theatre Company” in 1988, respectively.⁸²

In response to the public ban of *My Hometown*, the mainstream theatre critics voiced hostile opinions toward *minjung madanggŭk* productions as a whole. In a newspaper review, critic Han Sang-ch’öl called the production “a theatre of political purport” or “a propagandistic play” (Korean Daily Newspaper, 1984. 7/11. 7). Responding vehemently to his criticism, Park In-pae, as the managing director of the Yönu Theatre Company, counterattacked the critic by saying that “Han ignores a social function of theatre and as a faithful devotee of artistic purism, he regards theories of art for art sake from Europe and America as inviolable laws” (Korean Daily Newspaper 1984. 7/25. 7). Later, the director of the production, Yim Jin-t'aek, exposed the political significance of the critic’s apolitical attitude, writing, “critic Han Sang-ch’öl is a conservative defender of the *status quo* insofar as he cannot recognize how serious the air pollution problem would have been had the Korean Peninsula become a nuclear power” (1990: 109). Certainly, the controversy over *My Hometown* between the

⁸¹ The play was written by Hwang Sökyöng and directed by Kim Sök-man.

⁸² After the historical incidents around Yim Jin-t'aek’s *My Hometown* in 1984, the Yönu Theatre Company isolated its theatrical activities from *minjung madanggŭk* and searched for its own artistic/political coloration. The Company has held on to the idea of original creation of Korean theatre and has rejected the production of translated foreign plays. Based on Brechtian epic theatre and documentary theatre, the Company has produced works loaded with socio-political commentary to the present day.

mainstream critics and the *minjung madanggŭk* practitioners revealed their mutual antagonism and distrust.

In 1985, Yim Jin-t'aek produced *Pap (Meal)* based on Kim Chiha's essay *Pap (Meal)* for the opening of his own theatre group, Yŏnhi Players' Troupe. Nevertheless, the performance of *Meal* was interdicted by governmental censorship during its provincial tour. Consequently, *Meal* was permitted only on the campuses of the universities, and became one of the best-known *madanggŭk* performances among college students, before the production was revived in a commercial venue (the Mirinae Theatre) in 1987 after the Declaration of Democracy (Lee Young Me 1987: 180). In *Meal*, dealing with the matter of food resources as the basis for life, Yim Jin-t'aek indicted political injustice in relation to the distribution of wealth.⁸³

During the 1980s, Yim Jin-t'aek had been interested in politics, community-building, global peace, and life philosophy.⁸⁴ All his major *madanggŭk* performances, *Mung-bean Flower*, *My Hometown*, and *Meal* are concerned with these issues. Regarding Kim Chiha's life philosophy, Yim Jin-t'aek has strived to counter the misunderstandings of cynical domestic scholars, activists, and the international academic circles. In his report on the international conference held as a part of 85' Horizonte in Berlin, Germany, he addressed his disagreeable experience as follows; "As soon as I finished reading my paper titled "For the Practice of Performance Based on

⁸³ Yim Jin-t'aek is also a singer of the modernized *p'ansori*, creating such *p'ansori* works as *Ojŏk (Five Thieves)* and *Ttongpada (The Story of Shit)* based on Kim Chiha's *tamsi* (*p'ansori* style long talk poem). With Paek Nak-ch'ŏng, he was one of the organizers of the Korean People's Artist Federation. He participated in establishing *Minjokgŭk* Movement Confederation affiliated to the Artist Federation 1988. In 1994, he became the president of *Minjokgŭk* Movement Confederation and the artistic director of The Guide Theatre Company. In 2006, Yim Jin-t'aek became the vice president of the Korean People's Artist Federation.

⁸⁴ Yim Jin-t'aek majored in politics and diplomacy.

the Life Philosophy Worldview,” Luise Rinser commented on it and inquired, “Are you meaning that we should reject our modern industrial society and return to the past feudal (agricultural) world insofar as you insist on the revival of *gut*?” (1990: 340). Next day, in the German newspaper, *Tagesspiegel*, he found a column complaining, “it is irrational and conservative for them to assert the resuscitation of the culture of agricultural traditions” (1990: 342). Yim Jin-t’aek rejects “Western” intellectuals’ rationality and ascribes their inhospitality toward Kim Chiha’s life philosophy to their ignorance and arrogance about and toward “the Third World.” He insists that the rejection of Western values in Kim’s life philosophy is imperative to the global peace movement focused on the issues of nuclear armaments and environmental destruction.⁸⁵

From his postcolonial perspective, as Yim Jin-t’aek addresses the necessary collaboration between “the First World” and “the Third World,” he censures the dominant position of “the First World” in the global peace movement. He notes, “When Japan’s anti-pollution movement is advanced within the neo-colonial world structure, it results in the export of domestic pollution to the South-East Asian countries. If one nation’s antinuclear movement is bounded only by the problem of stationing nuclear ordinance within its own territory, aren’t we impeded in reaching global peace by the presence of global hegemony?” (1990: 343). Certainly, he exposes the complexity of global power dynamics in regard to vital and environmental concerns. But his postulation of neo-colonial antagonism between “the First World” and “the Third World” illustrates the

⁸⁵ According to Kim Chiha’s life philosophy, the patriarchal Western civilization has been dominated by *yang* principle of the universe so that there have been constant wars, global and local. Through his life philosophy, Kim Chiha asserts that the principle of *yin*, directing the matriarchal Eastern civilization, can bring peace and liberation.

propensity of totalization intrinsic in “the Third World” postcolonialism. Yim Jin-t’aek’s argument is based in an assumption that only “Eastern” life-styles and philosophy can cure the global malaise, since the problems threatening global peace have been caused by the “Western” life-styles and ideas. Therefore, even though he disavows the return to the past feudal society, he bases his ideal life style and philosophy on the traditional agricultural cultures that were “intact” and apart from the violent “Western” cultures.

Aptly, cultural critic Kim Ch’ang-nam positions Yim Jin-t’aek’s critical frame within the discourses of cultural imperialism of “the Third World.” As he indicates the errors of epistemological postulation in cultural imperialism through Yim Jin-t’aek’s case, the critic contends that “the cultural imperialism of ‘the Third World’ obscures the differences and divisions among people and presumes that ‘the Third World’ is a cohesively homogeneous block” (1992: 209). Kim pinpoints the essentialist logic in the discourses of cultural imperialism in “the Third World,” mirroring the imperialist binary system of thought. In Yim Jin-t’aek’s totalizing logic, all the people in “the First World” are aggressors, and the underprivileged people of “the Third World” are their victims. Obviously, his worldview is expressed through the Manichean system of categorization: the evil vs. the good. Regardless of ethical commitments, the marginalized of “the Third World” are viewed as “good” people.

It is not overstating to say that this system of thought is the typical epistemological foundation of *minjung* (grassroots) nationalism in South Korea. According to Yim Jin-t’aek, *minjung* is the collective agent of history and life. But specifically, who are these *minjung* essentialized as the agents of the monolithic historical consciousness and progress? Through the examination of *Mung-bean Flower*,

I will elucidate the manifested ethnocentric and phallogocentric epistemic violence lurking in *minjung* nationalism in regard to the representation of the Korean ethnic type.⁸⁶

In September 1980, as a visiting director, Yim Jin-t'aek produced *Mung-bean Flower* on the campus of the Seoul National University with the students of the Drama Club of the Seoul National University. In his directorial note, Yim Jin-t'aek describes the situations and conditions in which he devised the collective work with the students in the university community. According to his explanation, in the preliminary meetings with the students in 1979, he decided to produce an adaptation of the famous eighteenth-century Korean classic, *Ch'unhyang Chŏn* (*The Story of Ch'unhyang*), with a different ending in which the peasants of the village rescue Ch'unhyang who suffers because of her defiant act toward the oppressor. In the original story, Ch'unhyang is the daughter of a *gisaeng* (courtesan) and she is forced to sleep with the governor, Pyŏn Hakto. When she refuses, she is imprisoned. Her aristocratic lover, Yi Mong-ryong, punishes the evil governor and rescues her from her plight. According to Yim Jin-t'aek, even though he was reluctant to adapt a romance, it was the best choice because politically "seditious" *madanggŭk* performances were hardly allowed in the university campuses at that time. While they were preparing the adaptation, an historic event occurred; Park Jung Hee was assassinated by his staff in December 1979. The students then changed their plan and decided to produce a more politically provocative *madanggŭk* performance about General Mung-bean (Chŏn Pong-jun), the revolutionary leader of the "Tonghak Farmers' War" in 1894. Regarding his selection of the specific historical event, Yim Jin-t'aek notes, "the War was the culmination of the revolutionary accomplishment of

⁸⁶ *Mung-bean Flower* was created collectively and directed by Yim Jin-t'aek. Yim Jin-t'aek published the play in *Minjung Theatre in Korea*. My quotations are from the script included in the book.

minjung, resulting in their liberation after thousands of years of Korean history.” Therefore, “we did not aim to draw a biography of the hero, but rather to recall the many anonymous peasants who died in the War” (1990: 61).

In considering the historical background and thematic concerns of *Mung-bean Flower*, it is necessary to elucidate the connective thread of Kim Chiha’s life philosophy to *Tonghak* religion. After his conversion from Catholicism, Kim Chiha sought the union of political revolution and religious liberation in *Tonghak*, which literally signifies “Eastern Learning.” In opposition to *Seohak* (Western scholarship originating from Christianity), *Tonghak* bases its religious system of thought on the traditional reservoirs of “Eastern” religions. Following Kim Chiha, Yim Jin-t’aek had been a participant in the Catholic social (democratic) movement, but under the influence of his mentor, he embraced *Tonghak* as the ethnic religion. Against this religious background, Yim Jin-t’aek notes, “*Mung-bean Flower* is not only a history play and political theatre but also a missionary work” (1985: 403). As Kim Chiha dreamed of the conjugation of revolution and religion, Yim Jin-t’aek attempted to establish a religiously-formatted performance genre, *madanggut* (ritually-framed Korean modern theatre or theatrically-framed ritual) with the production of *Mung-bean Flower*. Since then, Yim Jin-t’aek prefers the notion of *madanggut* to that of *madanggŭk* (modern Korean open-air theatre).

In his article titled “*Madanggŭk to Madanggut*,” Yim Jin-t’aek asserts, the ultimate mission of the practitioners of *madanggut* is “to secure the sense of ethnic solidarity and to build the Korean ethnic (*minjung*) community” (1990: 83). In consideration of the topic of community building, it is appropriate to briefly review the situations and conditions of the *Tonghak* Farmers’ War, in that Yim Jin-t’aek makes a connection between them and

the present capitalist neo-colonialism and dictatorship. Historically, the establishment of *Tonghak* is closely related to the propagation of Christianity in the eighteenth century of the *Chosŏn* dynasty. Initially, Christianity was received as scholarship through Christian scholarly books passed on by missionary priests. Thus, the Christian scholarship called *Seohak* was accepted mostly by the scholars of *yangban* (*Chosŏn* aristocrats) who belonged to the *Silhak* school (one of the Confucian factions diverging from the dogmatic neo-Confucianism). Later, *Sŏhak* was developed as a religious belief through the action and dedication of the missionaries, and as a form of religion it penetrated into the lives of common people.

Yet, the successive royal courts of the *Chosŏn* dynasty suppressed the dissemination of Christianity among common people out of their fear of the strong political empowerment of people by Christianity. After a long period of struggle and martyrdom, around the 1870s, Christianity was permitted as an official religion in Korea, and the diplomatic treaty between *Chosŏn* and France provided the basis for it.

Nevertheless, not only the royal courts but also many people from a broad range of social status felt a sense of crisis from the encroachment of things “Western,” including Christianity. From the middle of the nineteenth century, such “Western” countries as France and America sought commercial trade, and Japan was also taking the opportunity to open a commercial trade with the *Chosŏn* dynasty, which had still been under the influence of the *Chŏng* dynasty ruling China at that time. In 1876, the *Chosŏn* dynasty opened its doors to Japan through the momentum of the *Kwanghwado* Treaty, which was the first modern international treaty in Korean history. Meanwhile, domestically, the corrupt royal court of King Kojong encountered resistance both from

the intellectuals and the peasants, and there were many small-scale peasant rebellions. In 1884, the Enlightenment Party led by Kim Ok-kyun attempted the subversion of the Royal Court with the aid of Japanese forces. Later, this failed revolution was known as the *Kapshin Military Coup d'état*.⁸⁷ In the vortex of the political turbulence, *Tonghak* was founded by Choi Jae-wu, who was formerly a ruined *yangban* and became a religious practitioner, by combining Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Through these “Eastern” religions, Choi Jae-wu aspired to revive the ethnic spirit and rescue the grassroots (peasants) of *Chosŏn*.

Because the founder was sympathetic with the plight of the underprivileged peasants, *Tonghak* was ardently received by them. As Christianity had been oppressed by the royal authorities due to the political implications of the empowerment of people, so was *Tonghak*. The anxiety of the royal court of King Kojong rose again in 1894, ten years after the Enlightenment Party attempted a military *coup d'état* in 1884. Based in *Tonghak* organizations and directed by the movement's leaders, the *Tonghak* Farmers' War transpired as the first grassroots revolt in the history of Korea. King Kojong requested the dispatch of troops from China to handle the farmers' rebellion, and the allied military powers of the royal court and China quelled the revolt. The Japanese government also sent troops, in line with the treaty with China signed in the aftermath of the *Kapshin Military Coup D'état*. Subsequently, the military powers of Japan and China clashed on the soil of *Chosŏn* Korea and war broke out. When Japan won the war, it established a pro-Japanese cabinet and forced King Kojong to initiate modern systems of nationhood. In 1894, King Kojong proclaimed the *Kabo* Reformation, whose major

⁸⁷ This historical incident is the main motive of Oh T'ae-sŏk's *Toraji*. I will discuss the history play in Chapter 4 where I deal with Oh T'ae-sŏk's *minjokgŭk* in the 1990s.

intent was the abolishment of the feudal system regarded as the principal obstacle to the development of a capitalist modern nation.

During the course of the farmers' war, Chŏn Pong-jun, the head of one of the regional subdivisions of *Tonghak* in Kobu in Chŏnla Province, displayed outstanding leadership and bravery. Like many other leaders of *Tonghak*, he came from a defunct *yangban* clan. People called him "General Mung-bean" because he was very short and sturdy like a mung-bean. According to an unofficial history, he insisted on fighting to the end, and died a heroic death. The title of the play originated from a folk song, "Mung-bean Flower," which was handed down orally to memorialize the hero's death. In *Mung-bean Flower*, I argue, what is commemorated is the collective will to social transformation, well-coordinated under inspired leadership. Strictly speaking, the production evokes the ideal Korean ethnic type of political leader in the image of a religious savior for the spiritually revolutionized ethnic community. Regardless of its status as a student production, the weighty political signification of the production was manifested in the fact that Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung, the political leaders of oppositional parties and proponents of democratization, wrote congratulatory messages in the playbill.⁸⁸

Mung-bean Flower is divided into three scenes. In the first scene (*madang*), Yu Tal-su and Pae Tal-ho, the disciples of Chin P'ung-wun, an allegorical representation of Choi Jae-wu, endeavor to convert common people of the imaginary nation of the play to *Haedongbaekmikyŏ*, the allegorical representation of *Tonghak*. The imaginary nation is

⁸⁸ Considering that it was a rare case that the political leaders demonstrated their interests and concerns to a student production, the incident corroborates how important the student (political) movement was at that time and how *minjung madanggŭk* functioned as the vanguard of the democratization movement. As to the pamphlet, refer to the internet website, <http://www.art.go.kr>.

the allegorical representation of *Chosŏn* Korea, but it also alludes to the present nation. Yu Tal-su and Pae Tal-ho are the allegorical representation of Choi Shi-hyŏng, the actual successor of Choi Jae-wu. Yim Jin-t'aek has a negative understanding of him. It is said that unlike Chŏn Pong-jun, Choi Shi-hyŏng insisted on peaceful negotiation with the royal court during the course of the *Tonghak* Farmers' War. Yim Jin-taek regards Chŏn Pong-jun as the legitimate heir of Choi Jae-wu. Pretending that the spectators are the common people of the imaginary nation of the play who gathered for the event, the actor playing Yu Tal-su directly addresses the audience, saying, "if you did not enter our religion yet, please submit the application right now. While our deacons walk about among you, please hand in the application form and the membership fee (*we may accept some money from the actual spectators as the membership fee*) (Yim Jin-t'aek 1985: 407).⁸⁹ Pae Tal-ho introduces the founder, stating, "Born beside a kitchen range. . . the founder of our religion went into a cave where he only ate green onions and garlic for 40 days and there he was spiritually awakened and established the creeds of *Haedongbaekmikyo*." "*Resembling a sage with humble attire*," Chin P'ung-wun appears (Yim Jin-t'aek 1985: 408-9). Indicating the affliction and plight of the collective *minjung*, in the play, the common people are represented as disabled and deformed: a hunchback peasant, paralyzed laborer, a man who has a protruding head (an intellectual), and a woman who has excessively developed hips (a whore). They come before Chin P'ung-wun one by one to receive grace from him, and they beg, "please redeem my sick body" (Yim Jin-t'aek 1985: 410).

⁸⁹ For my discussion, I use the script included in *Korean Minjunggŭk*. It was arranged by Yim Jin-t'aek after the performance.

In the production, in a manner of improvisation, the performers who play the roles of Yu Tal-su and Pae Tal-ho “*approach the spectators and listen to their pains and difficulties.*” In the stage directions, Yim Chin-t’aek writes, “*it can be advanced either as an event of collective confession or as a group discussion about the present political problems*” (Yim Jin-t’aek 1985: 410-12). Then, Chin P’ung-wun preaches, “The end of the world is approaching and there will come a new age. In the new world, there will be no discrimination or hierarchies and we will share our meals with others. Praise the new world. The truthful words from heaven will be spread throughout the entire world. Our meal (rice) is the god!” (Yim Jin-t’aek 1985: 412).⁹⁰ But, eventually, Chin P’ung-wun is arrested by the government army and imprisoned at the end of the first scene.

The second scene is divided into three parts. The first part tells the stories of the prisoners including Chin P’ung-wun, and the second part is a play within a play. It shows the make-believe trial of Chin P’ung-wun by the prisoners. One of the prisoners, T’aengkü, suggests the trial as a way to kill time. This part adapts a college mock trial practiced by the students of law at that time, and the presentation aimed to satirize the irrationality and absurdity of the judicial systems of the regimes of the dictators, Park Jung Hee and Chun Tu-whan. In the manner of Brecht, pungent parody of the injustice of the judicial system under dictatorship is suggested. Ko Mak-pong, the allegorical representation of Chön Pong-jun, plays the role of a witness. One of the criminals reveals his low birth, “born between a butcher and a whore” (Yim Jin-t’aek 1985: 423). Ko Mak-pong stands by Chin P’ung-wun, stating, “I cannot understand why Saint P’ung-wun should be imprisoned and have a trial like this. He just tried to teach unenlightened

⁹⁰ “Meal is the god” is one of the core mottos of Kim Chiha’s life philosophy.

people like us and to lead us to the world of god of heaven where love and belief overflow. Even though rich people might laugh at his preach that meal is the god, for poor people like us, Saint P'ung-wun is our real savior" (1985: 423). In the end of the trial, the criminal playing the role of judge delivers a verdict to Chin P'ung-wun, saying, "you are sentenced to death with no reason" (Yim Jin-t'aek 1985: 424). As if in a real trial, Chin P'ung-wun delivers his last statement, remarking, "I will take care all of you as I stand at the crossroad of eternity" (Yim Jin-t'aek 1985: 425). As he predicts his impending death, Chin P'ung-wun gives a last final sermon. The prisoners are awakened by his preaching, but as soon as his last speech is given, Chin P'ung-wun is drawn out the prison cell toward the execution ground (Yim Jin-t'aek 1985: 425). Among the prisoners, Ko Mak-pong repents his sin and receives the praise of Chin P'ung-wun from the bottom of his heart.

In the third part, Ko Mak-pong schemes a prison break with other criminals to spread the word from heaven conveyed through the preaching of Chin P'ung-wun. In his directorial notes, Yim Jin-t'aek writes, "for the scene of the jailbreak, we adopted the exercises of the military drills mandated for male college [high school] students" by the Park Jung Hee and Chun Tu-whan regimes (1990: 64). By the reverse usage of the student military training within schools, Yim Jin-t'aek poignantly underscores the militarism of the dictators. According to him, this scene provoked the most laughter from the student spectators. Also, in the prison scene of roll-calling, the performers playing the prisoners used the numbers of public buses that the students of the Seoul National University ride to attend school. He states that "this shared experience and recognition

and the common underlying situations are closely related to the establishment of the sense of the collective solidarity” (1990: 64).

The last part of the second scene is reminiscent of passion of Jesus Christ: “As if Ko Mak-pong were saddled with all the pains of *minjung*, his body becoming disfigured and festered.” As the police chase him away, he is smuggled into a brothel. “The prostitutes of the brothel hide and rescue him. As they caress the feet of Ko Mak-pong and pray for his resurrection, he is awakened” (Yim Jin-t’aek 1985: 428). In return, he kisses the feet of one of the prostitutes, heroically exclaiming, “Oh, you my mother! And the origin of my mother! You gave birth to me with your ill body and you revived my afflicted body again with your life. For that reason, my body is yours . . . your bodies belong to the god of heaven. The god is in your rotten womb. Our god is down here with us. I will devote myself to you. You people rise up. Burn out your *han* [deep-seated grief]. Rise up, you underdogs! Ascend! Blaze up!” (Yim Jin-t’aek 1985: 429). Through the speech of Ko Mak-pong, Yim Jin-t’aek suggests the slippage of the higher orders in the hierarchical system of thought, the sacred blending with the secular, the spiritual and the material, and the ideal and the real; our being defines our existence, not the reverse.

The third scene is the representation of the *Tonghak* Farmers’ War. In this part, the contrast between Ko Mak-pong and the other disciples is highlighted. Yu Tal-su and Pae Tal-ho report that they attempted to save their religion through official venues. They entreated the king for official permission of *Haedongbaemikyo* and performed a sacrificial ritual. Revealing the unjust administration of the royal court, Yu Tal-su states, “even though the royal court permitted Cross Religion [Christianity] 100 years ago, it

suppresses our religion. Moreover, far from giving us freedom to propagate, the royal court destroys our living field” (Yim Jin-t’aek 1985: 433-4). While the sermons of Yu Tal-su and Pae Tal-ho on mysticism, the gospel and the future life merely prolong the people’s starvation, Ko Mak-pong breaks into the repository of the rich and steals a large quantity of rice. He distributes it to the poor, according to him, the original owners (Yim Jin-t’aek 1985: 435-6).⁹¹ Yu Tal-su and Pae Tal-ho argue that they are the legitimate successors of Chin P’ung-wun, and show a pair of chopsticks which were given by Chin P’ung-wun in acknowledgement. Meanwhile, Chin P’ung-wun gave a spoon to Ko Mak-pong, but Ko Mak-pong protests, “this spoon belongs neither to me nor to you. This belongs to all the poor people. This is the deep intention of our founder as he gave me the spoon” (Yim Jin-t’aek 1985: 437).

As the rebellious deed of Ko Mak-pong is reported to the government, a special envoy is sent off to disband the followers of Ko Mak-pong. The envoy suggests a negotiation by giving them corn and flour imported from foreign countries, *Chuwǒlguk* and *Hwanyǒguk*, which are the allegorical representations of Japan and America. Ko Mak-pong resists the easy reconciliation, saying that “the government begged for the corn and flour from *Chuwǒlguk* and *Hwanyǒguk*, who took away all our rice raised with our own hands.” Enmity toward the foreign countries is pervasive, and all the people of those countries are totalized as aggressors. Meanwhile, Yu Tal-su and Pae Tal-ho insist on negotiation, and even deceive and betray Ko Mak-pong like Judas did to Jesus. Allied with the foreign armies of *Chuwǒlguk* and *Hwanyǒguk*, the government counterattacks the members of *Haedongbaekmikyo*. In the last scene of the production,

⁹¹ This Robin Hood motive is similar to the story of “a good thief Hong Kildong” in the Korean classic, *Hong klidong Chǒn* (*The Story of Hong Kildong*).

Yim Jin-t'aek devised a spectacular scene in which he metaphorically demonstrates *minjung*'s collective will and consciousness. The performers and the spectators all participate, and dance with *shinmyŏng* (divine exaltation). "The last scene of *Mung-bean Flower* is comprised with dance of a wagon wheel. From the four corners of the playing area, the farmers, the laborers, the intellectuals, and the wandering people begin to push the long bamboo spears as they bring their own spears into contact at the center . . . When the formed large circle rotates, the spectators rise and they join the pushing of the wheel of history. As they march together to regain their lost meal, they participate in the establishment of the new world" (Yim Jin-t'aek 1990: 67).

In examining the issue of the nature of *minjung* in the production, *Mung-bean Flower*, first of all, I will interrogate the ideological foundations of *minjung* in relation to the topic of political leadership and collectivism. The concept *minjung* is one of the most ambiguous sociological terms, as it refers to people or subalterns. As Choi Chungmoo articulates, the *minjung* culture movement during the 1970s and 1980s had been driven by socialist democratic ideas (1995:106). It can be said that Marxist collective class consciousness is the core constituent of *minjung* nationalism.⁹² Hence, *minjung madanggŭk* performances ideologically express the socialist democratic ideas on people, polity, and history. Nevertheless, this socialist collective consciousness and will,

⁹² In *Mung-bean Flower*, Yim Jin-t'aek allegorizes the *Tonghak* Farmers' War as a fable of class struggle and anti-imperialism, a precursor of the modern *minjung* revolution. But the historians like Park No-ja contends that *Tonghak* Farmers' War cannot be interpreted as a class struggle in a modern sense. He insists that the war was certainly anti-feudal in that the farmers resisted the corrupt *yangban*, but the leaders and the participants of the war did not question the existing social system itself. Historically, the abolishment of the hierarchical social class came with *Kabo* Reformation carried out by the royal court of King Kojong even though the war became the catalyst to bring about the Reformation. Yim Jin-t'aek's *Mung-bean Flower* is based in this selective interpretation of the history. Refer to Park No-ja's books, *Wusŭngyŏlp'aeŭi Shinhwa* (*The Myth of the Survival of the Fittest*, 2005) and *Wuriga Molrattŏn Tongasia* (*East Asia that We Didn't Know of*, 2007).

I contend, does not fully explain the peculiar type of *minjung* collectivism, which is firmly based on loyalty to individual political leaders. As Korean specialist David Steinberg makes clear, in Korea, collectivism is expressed “by the strong, often unquestioned, leadership at the top with subordinate groups bent on implementing top decisions rather than formulating them.”⁹³ Steinberg appropriately locates the foundation of this specific type of collectivism in “the strong emphasis in Confucianism on the family as the intellectual and ideological analogy for state governance and the institution of primary loyalty.” According to Steinberg, individuals were protected by their family and clan, but the result has been “the submerging of individual identity within the familial context.”⁹⁴ As syntax of Korean culture, “this collectivity is a pervasive phenomenon and is illustrated linguistically by the use of the Korean ‘we,’ when the American would normally say ‘I’ (‘our house,’ ‘our country,’ even ‘our wife’)” (1989: 99-100).

In the production of *Mung-bean Flower*, the revolutionary political leader, Chŏn Pong-jun, is allegorically represented as Ko Mak-pong, who was a criminal but became a political leader of *minjung* as he was spiritually awakened by *Haedongbaekmikyŏ* (*Tonghak*). Ko Mak-pong is portrayed as the legitimate heir of the founder of *Haedongbaekmikyŏ*, Chin P’ung-wun (Choi Jae-wu), and as a man of action rightly practicing the ideas of his life philosophy. Although Yim Jin-t’aek asserted that the production was conceived as a missionary work for propagating *Tonghak*, to my close observation, Christian imagery was strikingly overlapped with the images of the

⁹³This might explain the fact that worshipping individual political leaders was most successfully advanced in North Korea among the socialist countries.

⁹⁴ It is interesting to note that the important male political leaders were rhetorically presented as the fathers of the nation in Korea. *Tangun*, the originator, is called “our grandfather of the nation.” In addition to that, the familial rhetoric is widespread in patriarchal cultures.

revolutionaries, Choi Jae-wu (Chin P'ung-wun) and Chŏn Pong-jun (Ko Mak-pong). Furthermore, the production expressed antagonism toward Christianity. Where does this contradiction originate?

As I mentioned briefly in discussing Kim Chiha's *madanggŭk* productions, *Mung-bean Flower* is loosely based on Kim Chiha's incomplete epic poem *Chang Iltam*, which was conceived in the prison in 1974. In his explanatory note, Kim Chiha sketched Chang Iltam as a revolutionary and a savior, and Kim was charged as a communist based on his ideas expressed through the character. A socialist *minjung* theologian, Kim Kyu-hang contends that "Chang Iltam' is the Korean incarnation of Jesus Christ," an invention of Kim Chiha's engagement with *minjung* theology (2005: 203).⁹⁵ In *Mung-bean Flower*, Yim Jin-t'aek drew on both Kim Chiha's *minjung* Christian thought and *Tonghak*-based life philosophy without attempting to reconcile them. For all that, the image of a political leader/savior of *minjung* and the topic of union of revolution and rice (meal) were common to both of them, weaving the thematic threads of the production.

Though the participating students of the production, both the creators and the spectators, were would-be political leaders and intellectuals, the *minjung* represented in the production were idealized and mystified as the faithful followers of the political leader; they have no names. In this respect, the performance can be viewed as the rehearsal of leadership and its relation to *minjung*. Seen from the perspectives of

⁹⁵ Kim Sŏk-pŏm's statement about Kim Chiha's *minjung* thought is also suggestive in this regard. Prescribing Kim Chiha's *minjung* thought as the dialectical affirmation of god's love and violent chastisement, Kim Sŏk-pŏm claims that Kim Chiha's poetic violence resorts to god's will for the liberation of *minjung*'s *han* (resentment or deep seated grief), and it is powerful in that "his poetic violence is not only 'the violence of love' like the whip of Jesus Christ which struck the heads of the traders defiling the Temple but also 'the violence of love' through which also the oppressors can be reborn" (1984: 189). As I mentioned before, during the *minjung* culture movement of the 1970s and 1980s, being influenced from the Latin American liberation theology, many Korean Christian theologians (mostly ministers of Protestant churches) developed *minjung* theology that tried to unite God and revolution.

feminist deconstruction, the production relies on the metaphorical imagination of gender division between the masculine political leader and the feminized *minjung*. In the production, “the rotten womb” of a whore is presented as the metaphor of the sacred site where the revolutionaries can be reborn to renew the afflicted ethnic community (Yim Jin-t’aek 1985: 429). The female *minjung* is instrumentalized as the vehicle of masculine revolution. It echoes Kim Chiha’s manifesto of life philosophy, “returning to the womb.”

4.2 CH’AE HUI-WAN’S MINJOKŬK: BRIDGE-BUILDING GAME

In the introduction, I elucidated how Ch’ae Hui-wan formulated “the Korean ethnic type” by combining Lukács’ notion of “type” with the characterization array of *kamyŏngŭk*. As both a theorist and a practitioner of *kamyŏngŭk*, Ch’ae Hui-wan’s initial theatrical career was closely related to the *kamyŏngŭk* (*t’alch’um*) renaissance. He founded a *t’alch’um* circle called *Minsok Kamyŏngŭk Yŏnguhoi* (Folk *Kamyŏngŭk* Research Society) in the Seoul National University in 1971, and this historical event brought forth the revival of *kamyŏngŭk* among college students. After the first *t’alch’um* circle, successively, most major universities witnessed the establishment of *t’alch’um* clubs within their communities. Also, historically, Ch’ae Hui-wan was the one who forged the encounter between modern theatre and *kamyŏngŭk* in the *minjung madanggŭk* movement. When he was commissioned to choreograph the scene of the three ghosts in Kim Chiha’s *A Shamanist Ritual for the Dead* in 1973, he created a kind of the prototype of “newly invented *t’alch’um*” based on traditional *kamyŏngŭk* dances

and masks. Thereafter, for Ch'ae Hui-wan, Kim Chiha's thoughts and ideas have been the well of inspiration.

In 1974, he organized a folk culture study group called *Hanguk Minsok Munhwa Yŏnguhoi* (Korean Folk Culture Research Society), and the members of the group formed the players' troupe called *Hanture*. In 1974, *Hanture* members performed Kim Chiha's *Agu's Musical Shamanist Ritual* in the Little Theatre of the National Theatre. Since that production, he has participated in many *madanggŭk* performances through the collective works of *Hanture*. Besides *Bridge-building Game*, he directed *K'alnorae K'alch'um* (*The Song and Dance of Sword*, 1994) based on the historical events of *Tonghak* Farmers' War. Ch'ae Hui-wan wrote a thesis on *kamyŏngŭk* for the completion of his graduate studies (Aesthetic Department) in the Seoul National University, and held a teaching position in Chŏngju University. He now teaches in the Department of Dance at the Pusan University. With Yim Jin-t'aek, he played an important role in establishing "Minjokgŭk Movement Confederation" in 1988 and in holding "the Great Minjokgŭk Festival" as the first project of the Confederation in 1988.⁹⁶

Since I fully examined his theory of *minjokgŭk* in the introduction, I will here consider his discourse on "Third World" cultural imperialism and the function of art in relation to the issue of community building as a departing point for the discussion of the production, *Bridge-building Game*. In an interview with critic Kim Mun-whan, Ch'ae Hui-wan articulates art as propaganda in that "it is an outlet for the communication of specific ideas and emotions." According to him, "the arts of the Third World today

⁹⁶ He became the first chairman of *Minjokgŭk* Movement Confederation in 1988. When the Confederation was changed into *Minjokgŭk* Movement Association in 2002, he became the first chairman of the Association.

attempt to break away from the implemental universality of ‘the West’ and search for the uniqueness of their own cultures . . . The artists of ‘the Third World’ strive for an international solidarity to bring back the balance with ‘the First and the Second World’ and they endeavor to reconfigure their own cultural heritage and to find meaning in it. Our nation’s artists are situated in the same condition” (Kim Mun-whan 2000: 590-591).

Ch’ae Hui-wan locates the particularity of “our” culture in the tradition of festivity. Differentiating it from a frivolous diversion, he clarifies the “essence” of festivity as the revival of the sense of belonging to the community. He asserts, “the rebellious spirit of people finds its matrix in festivals through which they try to renew their gloomy reality and to amplify their everyday lives.” In the interview with Ch’ae Hui-wan, critic Kim Mun-whan makes an important comment on the salient phenomenon of recontextualization of festivity in modern Korea, and he acknowledges the foreign influences from such celebrated works as Harvey Cox’ *A Feast of Fools* and Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnival theory (Kim Mun-whan 2000: 606).

When Ch’ae Hui-wan examines *kamyŏngŭk* from the context of a village festival, he recalls that like many classic *kamyŏngŭk* performances mainly performed in indoor stages today, *madangguk* performances have been disconnected from the spirit of *shinmyŏng*.⁹⁷ Village festivals, he notes, used to be conducted for several days during which *kamyŏngŭk* performance was a part of a festival process: from the preliminary stage of the village ritual to the street parade of the masked players to the performance

⁹⁷ Like Yim Jin-t’aek’s aspiration of the conjugation of revolution and ritual in his *madanggut* performances including *Mung-bean Flower*, Ch’ae Hui-wan’s recontextualization of festivity in the present scene of Korean theatre is manifested in his festival-like *madanggut* performances. In their essay, “*Madanggŭk to Madanggut*,” Yim Jin-t’aek and Chae Hui-wan insist that the practitioners of *madanggŭk* should alter their production-centered approaches to *madanggŭk* and create a thorough process of a festive ritual, that is, *madanggut* (1987: 224-226).

in an open (market) place of the village to the after-performance frenzied dance of all performers and the spectators at the end. He considers the last dance performance among the players and the spectators, called *tuip'ulyi*, to be the pivotal point of the entire festival process, since this collective performance of dance was designed for a space in which people can liberate their *han* through their *shinmyŏng*. As the participants socially and emotionally feel the sense of solidarity, they were recharged with life energy to survive the harsh situations and conditions of their reality.⁹⁸

According to Ch'ae, *kamyŏngŭk* does not aim to enlighten people through complicated narrative constructions, since people already know where the contradictions come from. When the class conflict is blatantly obvious, he asserts, the role of art does not consist in illumination of the contradictions of the reality, but rather in symbolic dissolution of them by providing people with proper grounds for rehearsal of social transformation through the performance. By contrast, he identifies the Brechtian epic theatre as “the theatre of recognition” and *kamyŏngŭk* as “the theatre of dissolution” (1992: 98). From this context, he deduces all the principals of directing and acting techniques of *madanggŭk*. Therefore, his main concern lies in the interaction between the performers and the spectators.⁹⁹ But, if the conflict is obvious and the resolution is evident in his *madanggŭk*, where is the space for a social dialogue evolving through the course of the performance? Whose ideas are communicated? In fact, the obvious conflict presumes homogeneity of the people participating in the performance.

⁹⁸ All the five *minjung madanggŭk* performances that I deal with in this dissertation utilize this convention.

⁹⁹ Ch'ae Hui-wan asserts that in *madanggŭk*, the performers become the spectators and the spectators become the actors. From his *minjung* perspective, in *madanggŭk* even the spectators are the masters (1987: 225). This type of ideal relationship between the players and the audience reminds me of Boal's notion of “spect-actor.” But, in *madanggŭk*, unlike Boal's “forum theatre,” the spectators are not allowed to transform the course of the performance.

In this respect, the communication between the performers and the spectators in his *madanggŭk* signifies the reconfirmation of the prime conflict presumably shared by people of a homogeneous group.

A single political class conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed subsumes conflicts of other social realms and furthermore trivializes them for the urgent matter under consideration. This monolithic frame of social analysis shared by the theorists and practitioners of *minjung madanggŭk* during the *minjung* culture movement, I argue, is the internal weakness of *minjung* nationalism, which was not effectively able to come to terms with the shifting global and domestic dynamics brought on by the ideological vacuum after the collapse of the socialist block at the end of 1980s. Since 1988, when *minjung madanggŭk* had to deal with more heterogeneous audiences through the institutionalized “Great *Madanggŭk* Festival,” it could not eschew the scathing denunciation of being lopsided propaganda. As I mentioned in the introduction, Ch’ae Hui-wan has been conscious about gender matters as he brought “Miyal *kwajang*” (the Episode of Miyal) of *kamyŏngŭk* into relief.¹⁰⁰ I will discuss his *Bridge-building Game* regarding the issue of class unity and plural gender matters, and I will explicate how he resorts to reinforcing the patriarchal system for national unity.

Since *Bridge-building Game* adopts the personae and narrative structures of “the Episode of Miyal” in *kamyŏngŭk*, it is necessary to examine how Ch’ae Hui-wan interprets the episode for a modern setting. In his book, *T’alch’um (The Korean Mask Dance Drama)* he writes, “*T’alch’um*’s modern worldview is manifest not only in its criticism of ideal morality and social privilege of high rank but also in its reproof of the

¹⁰⁰ Although the script is apparently not existent today, it is reported that Ch’ae Hui-wan created a *madanggŭk* called *Miyal Chŏn (The Story of Miyal)* in 1979 (Yim Jin-t’aek 1990: 28).

male violence toward women” (1992: 87). First of all, his statement, I contend, goes too far in affirming the impact of modern thought on the ideology of *kamyŏngŭk*. He suggests that *kamyŏngŭk* exemplifies modern class and gender struggle. In historical context, however, during the early years *kamyŏngŭk*, *yangban* (the aristocrats) sponsored *kamyŏngŭk* performances. As the feudal system of the *Chosŏn* dynasty weakened, the resistive character of *kamyŏngŭk* became evident. But this does not mean that *kamyŏngŭk* was a dissident anti-feudal art form. Not a single character in *kamyŏngŭk* problematizes the feudal system itself.

Secondly, it is clear that Ch’ae Hui-wan interprets the political signification of *kamyŏngŭk* from the present interests and concerns. To bring forth *kamyŏngŭk* conventions as an important issue, Ch’ae Hui-wan does not seem to consider the historical context of its being a masculine cultural product. Obviously, as Ch’ae himself points out, the episode of Miyal in *kamyŏngŭk* presents male violence toward women. But, I argue, unlike Ch’ae’s view of the Miyal episode in *kamyŏngŭk* as the modern criticism of male violence toward women, the episode in *kamyŏngŭk* justifies male violence toward women. Moreover, the Miyal episode in *kamyŏngŭk* seems to reveal misogyny. In *kamyŏngŭk*, Yŏngkam (Old Man), the husband of Miyal, exerts his patriarchal authority over his wife, by beating her and controlling her sexuality, although he has no qualms about having his own mistress. The violence, however, is not treated as seriously as Ch’ae Hui-wan regards it. In a comic mood, being performed by a male player mainly for male spectators, Miyal is rather ridiculed for having excessive sexual appetite despite her old age. Her dance features exaggerated hip movements and elicits much laughter from the spectators. In the episode, as soon as Miyal meets

Yŏngkam after a long period of separation due to a war, Miyal is impatient to have sex with her husband. Miyal physically overrides her husband during the sexual intercourse. In addition to that, after sex, she insults her husband by saying that “I’ve given birth to a baby boy at the age of seventy” (Cho Oh-kon 1988: 285).

In *kamyŏngŭk*, in a towering rage, Yŏngkam laments his sad plight of having a wild wife like Miyal. He directly addresses the spectators as if to excite sympathy and a response from them. Furthermore, he reveals her secret predilections by using the most graphic words, and in this scene, the spectators are usually expected to laugh scornfully at her improper sexual vigor: “As long as we’re going to separate, there’s no reason for me to keep your immoral behavior a secret. [To the audience.] Hello! Ladies and gentlemen! Listen to how this bitch venerated her husband. . . when she started to piss with her beehive-like vagina, and she was farting “*t’ung t’ung*,” Tolp’ungi, who lived in front of us, rushed to our house with a hoe, thinking the river bank was broken and a flood was running wildly. Imagine! What a shameful humiliation!” (Cho Oh-kon 1988: 290).¹⁰¹

When Yŏngkam hears the news from his wife that their three sons died in accidents, he beats her and demands a divorce as he judges their deaths incurred by the negligence of Miyal, a bad mother. Simply speaking, old Miyal in *kamyŏngŭk* is not permitted to be a good wife and a good mother. In a Confucian sense, she is not a “womanly woman.” According to the Confucian standards of the three fundamental principals and five moral disciplines in human relations, Miyal is not a virtuous woman of *samjongjido*, the three paths of women, who obeys and follows three men during her life

¹⁰¹ This speech of Yŏngkam is from the *kamyŏngŭk* original.

time: a father, a husband, and a son. During the reign of the *Chosŏn* dynasty, the customary Confucian law called “*ch’igŏjjiak*” (the seven valid causes for divorce, literally meaning the seven most important sins)” applied only to women, when demanded by a husband. That Yŏngkam demands a divorce for having no offspring, his three sons having died in accidents, sounds absurd today, but at that time, if there was no child between a couple, husbands could have a second wife or demand a divorce and marry again. The wife was absolutely blamed for having no offspring to continue the family line, and it was the most important reason among the seven valid causes for divorce. The second important sin in *ch’igŏjjiak* is disobedience to the husband. Miyal in *kamyŏngŭk* commits at least two such sins as a married woman.

In the end of the episode of *kamyŏngŭk*, Miyal dies during the fight with Tŏlmori, the young mistress of her husband. The villagers perform *chinoguigut*, a shamanist ritual for the dead, for her. Ch’ae Hui-wan comments on the death of Miyal and observes, “in the way in which the death of Miyal is mourned by people during the performance of *chinoguigut*, Miyal is redeemed in a better world” (1992: 71). From his philosophical interpretation of her death, she becomes the symbol of “the old” or “the winter,” which has to perish in accordance to the cycle of nature (Ch’ae Hui-wan 1992: 92).¹⁰² At the end of the *kamyŏngŭk* performance, the players bring in a table for a shamanist ritual, and a shaman prays for paradise for Miyal. In *kamyŏngŭk* at the Pongsan area (Pongsan *T’alch’um*), all the players participate in the *gut* performance

¹⁰² Ch’ae Hui-wan’s interpretation of *kamyŏngŭk* is much informed by ethnographer Cho Dong-il.

for her, and they throw their masks into the bonfire lit up for night performance to ward off the evil spirits; as a whole, *kamyŏngŭk* performance is framed as a sacrificial ritual.¹⁰³

Considering that Miyal is actually a shaman, it is interesting to note that she can be both a shaman and a sacrifice. As Ch'ae Hui-wan points out, in *kamyŏngŭk* framed as a village ritual, Miyal is the symbol of sacrifice offered to a deity for the renewal and rebirth of the village. But, in a sociological sense, she is both a defiant woman and a victim of the Confucian patriarchy. Ch'ae Hui-wan only sheds light on her as a victim, and he interprets the meaning of her death as “the ethnic (*minjung*) type of victimization.” In spite of his attempt to bestow a progressive meaning on the episode of Miyal, his interpretation rather reinforces the Confucian ideas of patriarchy. By connecting the death of Miyal with the birth of the son of Ch'uibalyi, Ch'ae Hui-wan sacrifices Miyal for the son of Ch'uibalyi, who is the one “qualified” to fight the oppressors. The implicit gender hierarchy is deliberately subsumed into class consciousness. In *T'alch'um*, Ch'ae Hui-wan remarks, “The path of the feminine is that of fertility. The path is open to the world of great reconciliation and symbiosis and by that reason this is the expression of the *minjung* worldview” (1992: 91). His *minjung* worldview is congruent with the patriarchal myth of motherhood that represents a woman as an instrument of reproduction. In Ch'ae's affirmation of Kim Chiha's life philosophy, Miyal becomes the womb for the revolutionary *minjung* who will renew the ethnic community. In what follows, I will discuss how Ch'ae Hui-wan's *minjung* worldview takes masculine expression in *Bridge-building Game*.

¹⁰³ One of the meanings in Korean for mask (*tal*) is a bad spirit. In *The Dummy Bride*, Yi Yun-t'aek utilizes this convention of *kamyŏngŭk*.

On the surface, *Bridge-building Game* was performed as a part of a political rally against the incompetence of the government response to the damage that occurred during the catastrophic flood of Ch'angnyŏng in Kyŏngnam Province in 1984. Directed by Ch'ae Hui-wan, *Bridge-building Game* was collectively conceived by the members of *Hanture*. The production was based on interviews with the people of Yŏngsan village. It was presented in the Village Hall as a part of the villagers' damage repayment movement. As a director, Ch'ae Hui-wan viewed the incident as a representative case of the plight of *minjung* under the repressive Chun Tu-whan regime. Seizing hegemony through the Kwangju massacre in 1980, the Chun Tu-whan regime began to regulate the lives of not only political dissidents but also common people in the name of "the Creation of New Nation." From 1980 to 1983, the Chun Tu-whan regime set up the "Samch'ŏng Discipline Camp" and executed an iron-fisted ruling system. Ordinary civilians who committed such misdemeanors as throwing a cigarette stub into the street and spitting on the road were arrested and sent to the Camp. During this period, *madanggŭk* performances were hardly performed either in or outside of the universities.

In 1981, the Chun Tu-whan government held the "81' *Gukp'ung* Festival," a national-scale festival for university students and common civilians. A folk contest was designed as the highlight of the festival, but the *t'alch'um* (*kamyŏngŭk*) clubs in the universities boycotted it because the students detected the hidden agenda of the festival. According to Yim Jin-t'aek, he was commissioned as the chief artistic director of the festival, but he rejected the position because he knew that the festival was intended to undermine the nation-wide organization of the university *t'alch'um* clubs as the base of the student democratization movement. At that time, secret police agents resided

habitually in the universities, and political dissidents were under surveillance. For all that, the democratization movement was never discouraged. Facing strong opposition to the establishment of “Samch’öng Discipline Camp, ” the Chun Tu-whan regime closed the Camp in 1983. After 1984, the Chun Tu-whan administration conducted an appeasement policy, trying to soften the rough image of his regime. But the activists of the *minjung* culture movement like Ch’ae Hui-wan took it as deception and did not relax their vigilance. *Bridge-building Game* was performed during this placation period. The script I use for examination was recorded by Kim Sön-yöng, one of the members of *Hanture*. The script is based on the performance at the Kwangju YMCA in 1984, which is slightly different from the original production performed in the Village Hall of Yöngsan (Ch’ae Hui-wan 1985: 323).

When the mass media was strongly controlled under the Chun Tu-whan regime, *madanggŭk* performances like *Bridge-building Game* played the role of a living newspaper. Through the performances nationwide, the members of *Hanture* reported undisclosed news and publicized prohibited social issues. According to Kim Kwang-ok’s report, in the first production in Yöngsan village, there was more direct denunciation of the Chun Tu-whan government. In later versions, allegorical indirection was deployed so that even some spectators did not notice the serious political meaning of the production. His record of a dialogue between two students who watched the production of *Bridge-building Game* exemplifies the case in which the allegorical meaning of the production is constructed through the reception of the audience: One of the students did not grasp the political intent of the production expressed yet worried about the secret

police agents who would recognize his face later, after he was informed about the allegorical meaning of the production (1989: 18-19).

In *Bridge-building Game*, “the Korean ethnic community” was allegorically represented as a nation afflicted with a catastrophic flood. The title originated from a children’s game in which one group of children build a bridge with small pebbles and wood branches and the other group from the opposite side build a bank made of sand beside the stream. Victory or defeat is determined by the consequence of whether the bridge would be destroyed or not as the bank is artificially broken. “Metaphorically speaking,” Ch’ae Hui-wan notes, “the terrible flood that swept away the nation in 1984 was the big bridge-building-destroying game between the government and the civilian people” (1985: 323). Utilizing the dance movements of *kamyŏngŭk* and *obukch’um* (dances of five drums) and *p’ansori* style narrative, Ch’ae Hui-wan created a new genre called “narrative dance.” As dance had been the crucial medium of expression for the common people at *kamyŏngŭk* performances, Ch’ae Hui-wan appropriated dance as an art form belonging to *minjung* (1985: 323).

For the productions of Ch’ae Hui-wan’s *Hanture* performance group, Kim Pong-jun created the masks. He was one of the principal activists of the *minjung* fine arts circles. *Minjung madanggŭk* performances became the exhibition sites of *minjung* fine arts, in that woodcut prints on flags and banners were the main elements of scene design for *minjung madanggŭk* performances. This cheap print art was regarded as the art form for *minjung*, and the flags and the banners were always the eye-catching scenic components of the political demonstrations and rallies since the start of the *minjung* culture movement. Furthermore, *Bridge-building Game* adopts the three stages of

kamyŏngŭk performance: *kilnori*, street parade including the opening ceremony, *madang p'an*, the main performance, and *tuip'ulyi*, the dance frenzy after the performance.

As for its dramaturgical structure, it displays the “typical” pattern of dialectical progression of the narratives in *madanggŭk* performances: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. In the first *madang* (scene or episode) titled “*Madang* of Narrative Dance,” similar to the function of a narrator in epic theatre, an actor playing the role of *P'ansori* Singer appears and conveys the development of the event under consideration in a *p'ansori* narrative style. In this part, the narrator first reports the news that could not be transmitted to people due to the mass media control of the Chun Tu-whan regime. According to his song, under the direction of the central government, the Ch'angnyŏng county administration “erected a monument in honor of the ancestor of some important political figure living in Seoul based on the forged accomplishments and contributions of the ancestor to the community . . . As the villagers reproach the foundation of the false monument, the administration set out to build a levee to sooth the rage of the villagers” (Kim Sŏn-yŏng 1985: 326). Certainly, the “some important political figure” allegorically refers to Chun Tu-whan. The narrator induces audience participation to dramatize the scene of the levee construction at that time. The spectators are guided to sing a short segment from a labor song following the lead of the *P'ansori* Singer. With a *p'ansori* style song, the narrator describes how the levee collapsed in the flood and people suffered the pains of losing families, houses, and their livelihoods. At the end of the song, the narrator introduces Miyal and Yŏngkam as the representatives of the flood

victims. In this way, the conflict of the play is conspicuously identified in the first part of the play.

In the second *madang*, through the episode of Miyal, the pains and afflictions of the sufferers are presented. The victims point their accusing fingers at the shoddy and false construction of the levee by their county administration. Through their words, the production severely criticizes the malfunction of the Chun Tu-whan government. The production adopts the actual dialect of the village and colloquial dialogue to enhance the sense of reality.¹⁰⁴ In this scene, in depicting response to the catastrophe, “trivial” struggles among the villagers (*minjung*) are presented. Nevertheless, Ch’ae Hui-wan’s intention here is not to reflect the differences in opinions and desires among *minjung*, but how they eventually cooperate for the collective interests and concerns. As the head figure of the village, Yōngkam settles the disputes among the villagers, and incites cooperative actions. With the speech style of Maldukyi, Yōngkam representatively voices the opinions of the collective *minjung*, speaking plainly, “We are not satisfied with the makeshift like *ramen*¹⁰⁵ and levee. Restore to the original state” (Kim Sōn-yōng 1985: 337). As a symbolic gesture for the will to fight, he raises his right arm, and the rest of people follow his action. Absent other sources of authority, his leadership is based on Confucian principles of *changyuyusō* (the younger should give precedence to the elder) and *namnyōyubyōl* (there are discriminating elements between man and woman). But, in the production, Yōngkam was not depicted as a heroic political leader.

¹⁰⁴ If seen from the perspectives of realism, the choice seems at odds with the formalized masks, songs, and the dance movements. But, in that the spectators are familiar with the conventions of *kamyōngŭk*, it rather looks natural. In *kamyōngŭk*, the players used a wide range of speech styles from everyday language (dialects) to old sayings and proverbs to *p’ansori* narrative styles to archaic words of *yangban*.

¹⁰⁵ Korean instant noodle.

To the contrary, he was portrayed as a man of defects. Evidently, Ch'ae Hui-wan realized the limitation of stereotypical characterization of the collective *minjung*, whether tilted toward idealization or victimization.¹⁰⁶

As I mentioned before, Ch'ae Hui-wan's "ethnic type" is based on Lukács' notion of "type," which is the dialectical synthesis of the individual and the universal. Incorporating Lukács' realist spirit, Ch'ae Hui-wan tried to create an individual through whom the universality of collective *minjung* could be manifested.¹⁰⁷ Borrowing Kang Yǒng-hŭi's notion of "the type of positive figure with minor flaws," the *minjung* figures in the production (Miyal, Youngkam, and their neighbors, Ch'unjane and Widow) belong to this type of characterization. According to Kang Yǒng-hŭi, a "positive flaw" can be contrasted with "tragic *hamartia*" in that the notion opposes the tragic fatal flaw which becomes the cause of hero's distorted destiny. It refers to "a dialectical synthesis of the individual characters and the collective *minjung's* dispositions" (1989: 180). Yǒngkam and Miyal have individual defects in the sense that they are reluctant to cooperate in signing the petition for the damage repayment movement in the beginning, since they are concerned about their own familial matters (e. g. their son having a good job in Seoul). Ch'unjane is predisposed to the governmental counterplan, through which her

¹⁰⁶ Vulgar stereotypical characterization in *minjung minjokgŭk* was the main complaint from the critics of the mainstream theatre institution.

¹⁰⁷ In consideration of characterization (representation) of *minjung* figures in *Bridge-building Games*, Ch'ae Hui-wan takes the attitude of a realist. Recalling that the players wore masks, however, it is hard to imagine the realistic acting styles in the production. A leading *madanggŭk* theorist, Lee Young Me, notes that the principles of *madanggŭk* acting are derived from the masked acting of traditional *kamyǒnggŭk* performance in the light of the articulated (dance) movements. In comparison with the Brechtian *gestus*, she contends, the masked *madanggŭk* acting does not try to construct characters "with psychological depths but to create characters with social gestures that show the socio-political positions of them." Being conscious of frequent stereotypes in *madanggŭk* performances, Lee Young Me asserts that *madanggŭk* acting achieves reality "in a way Brechtian *gestus* formalizes the aspects of reality without being stereotypical" (2001: 250). Interestingly, in *madanggŭk* acting, Ch'ae Hui-wan recognizes both Stanislavskian immersion and Brechtian alienation (1994: 122). It is worth noting that Brecht acknowledged the Stanislavskian methods only in the stages of analysis and rehearsals.

urgent material needs can be satisfied. Widow is active enough to aid the repayment movement, but she keeps flirting with Yöngkam because she feels lonely. Yöngkam controls the sexuality of his wife, although he overtly desires Widow. But, at the same time, he is portrayed as a man of abstinence in the face of the urgent matter unfolding.

In a sense, in the play, Miyal is a faithful follower of *samjongjido*.¹⁰⁸ In spite of her husband's disregard, she easily aligns herself to her husband's decision and does not seem to have her own opinions. She is merely a helper and a supporter. Besides her husband, her son's decisions become her reference. As Yöngkam decides to engage in the repayment movement against the will of his son, Miyal cries out, "You will destroy our son's career" (Kim Sön-yöng 1985: 335). Unlike Miyal in *kamyöngŭk*, Miyal in the production is obedient, but in the matter of her husband's affair, she is active enough to keep her husband. Although Ch'ae Hui-wan changed the original episode to make Miyal more active in the triangular relationship between Miyal, Yöngkam, and Widow (Tölmöri in *kamyöngŭk*), he incorporates the sexism embedded in *kamyöngŭk*. Miyal in the production shares with Miyal in *kamyöngŭk* dances exaggerating the movements of hips. Like in *kamyöngŭk*, in *Bridge-building Game*, Yöngkam's sexual appetite is treated as being natural, but Miyal's expression of sexual desire is ridiculed and regarded as improper. Even though it was the pivotal point of conflict in *kamyöngŭk*, in the play, the triangular relationship is merely suggested with no significance. As the dissimilar social gestures among them are totalized as those of *minjung*, class matters were given precedence over gender matters.

¹⁰⁸ As I mentioned before, according to Confucian principals, women are supposed to follow three men during her lifetime: the father, the husband, the son.

In the third *madang*, in contrast to the *minjung* figures, a group of evil oppressors are represented without any humane side. The magistrate of the county and the representative of the village are depicted as incapable administrators. They are busy offering lame excuses, saying, “the collapse of the levee is brought by inevitable natural calamity” (Km Sŏn-yŏng 1985: 339). The secretary of a congressman and the wealthy woman, Pokpuin,¹⁰⁹ are depicted as hypocrites: the secretary behaves as if he served the villagers but his intention lies in winning a vote, and Pokpuin donates a large amount of food and blankets, but she cannot hide her contemptuous attitude toward the poor villagers. In comparison with the second part, this scene is constructed as a caricature satirizing their hypocritical charitable contributions.

In the fourth and last *madang*, Ch’ae Hui-wan creates the image of *minjung* spirit. In order to emphasize the *minjung* spirit in its class struggle, Ch’ae Hui-wan adopts a folk game which resembles a mock cavalry battle: “*The performers playing the villagers come out with the colorful flags in hand. They swiftly sweep over the entire circular performing area as they show their will to fight. They scream ‘Whoa’ with their arms upright and dash into the center. They again retreat to the periphery, repeating this several times. They make a mock horse and one player rides the horse. The people who have red and blue flags position themselves beside the horse, the golden flag is handed to the horseman and the rest of the people go to the rear of the mock horse. The entire arrangement begins to advance with singing a marching song.*” As a part of the *tuip’ulyi*, after performance dance, “*the spectators join the procession, and all the people cry out ‘Let’s go.’ They dance together*” (Kim Sŏn-yŏng 1985: 344-5).

¹⁰⁹ This social type refers to Korean housewives who make a big profit from real estate.

Utilizing the folk game familiar to the village, the spectacle effectively incites the will to struggle in the villagers. In this respect, symbolically, the villagers rehearse the battle with the repressive government. Yet, as the folk game is that of men, the production presents the image of masculine war for the renewal of the ethnic community. War and violence, I submit, are concealed parts of Ch'ae Hui-wan's *minjung* worldview even though it champions the feminine life principle. I will thus conclude my discussion by deconstructing the *minjung* worldview that *Bridge-building Game* embodies.

Like Ch'ae Hui-wan, female critic Lee Young Me is conscious of the gender problems in *minjung minjokgŭk* performances. What they have in common is an essentialist view of "the ethnic type" expressed as the binary division of revolutionary *Maldukyi* and victimized, subsidiary *Miyal*. From the perspective of *minjung* worldview, for them, the "essence" of *madanggŭk* performances is to clarify the *minjung* class conflict and class consciousness. When she reviews the *madanggŭk* performances produced by the "Women Laborer Society," Lee Young Me asserts that for the urgent matter of the class problem, secondary matters like gender conflict have to be subsumed, because the feminist propensity for gender conflict among the collective *minjung* will cause the disintegration of the united *minjung* (1991: 334). Difference is simply impermissible.

4.3 PARK IN-PAE'S MINJOKGŬK: IT IS ABSURD

Park In-pae is one of the leading practitioners of *madanggŭk* among “the second generation” *minjung minjokgŭk*. Entering the Seoul National University in 1972 as a physics major, like “the first generation” of *minjung minjokgŭk* such as Kim Chiha and Yim Jin-t’aek, he encountered the theatre world through the Drama Club of the University. As a student activist of the democratization movement, he was repeatedly expelled from and reinstated to the University and was imprisoned for two years. In the early 1980s, he entered the labor movement through “the theatre for workers.” He played the role of a facilitator in a theatre group of laborers in the area of Pup’yŏng Industrial Complex in Kyŏnggi Province and in one of the workers’ culture clubs in the industrial complex in Seoul. In the early 1980s, he participated in the works of “Yŏnwu Stage,” but parted from the company during the controversy over *My Hometown*. He was one of the organizers of the *Minjung Culture Movement Confederation*, and the *League of Seoul Workers’ Arts Organizations*, and the *Korean Ethnic Artists Association*, which were all established during the 1980s.

In 1988, he founded a theatre group for workers, the *Field Theatre Company*, and he directed *Hwaetpŭl (The Torch)* performed in the *First Great Minjokgŭk Festival* in the *Mirinae Little Theatre*. His numerous directing works in the Company include *Nodongŭi Saepyŏk (The Dawn of the Laborer, 1988)*, *Noraegut Kkottaji (Musical Gut Kkottaji 1-6, 1989-1994)*, *Mŏtchin Tongji (Wonderful Comrades, 1989)*, *Chintcha Nodongja (The True Worker, 1990)*, *Nodongŭi Saepyŏk 2 (The Dawn of the Laborer 2, 1994)*, *Tŭlggot Tosi (The City of Wild Flowers, 1997)*, *Noraegut Kkottaji 7 (Musical Gut Kkottaji 7, 1999)*, *Toraon Ch’uibalyi (Ch’uibalyi Returned, 2003)*, and so forth. He is the

artistic director of the Field Theatre Company and the chairman of the *Minjokgŭk* Movement Association now.

At the end of the 1970s, enthusiastically supporting the theory and the praxis of “the community-based theatre” of the first generation of the *minjung* culture movement, Park In-pae strove to invigorate the living-art communities among the democratic labor unions. From the postcolonial perspective of “the Third World,” Park In-pae diagnosed the illness of the Korean ethnic community that derived from the “Western” popular cultures, remarking that “right after the Korean War through the stationing of American troops, the consumerist culture surged in our nation. These foreign popular cultures destroyed our nation’s indigenous public decency based in the solidarity of the community and disseminated the ideas of frivolity, lasciviousness, luxury, copying, extreme individualism, sensual pleasures, and the grotesque, which abetted the delinquency and moral degeneration of our culture.” Like other practitioners of the living-art community movement, he believed that — as the healthy roots of the ethnic community — these small-scale *minjung* organizations would invigorate the dying national culture. Also, he urged the self awakening of the *minjung* of “the Third World” and “the necessary solidarity among the nations of “the Third World” “in order to establish the correct notion of *minjung* as the historical agent” to fight against the “Western” imperialist cultural invasion (1984: 201).

In fact, in 1989, Park In-pae attended “the PETA Workshop for Asian-Pacific Leaders of Culture Movement.” In an article titled “The Educational Theatre and the Culture Movement in Philippines,” he notes, “the participation in the workshop enabled me to understand the actual circumstances of the culture movements among the

nations of 'the Third World,' to which I had only had access through published books" (1989: 291). From the experience of this workshop, he began to implement the practical ways of cultural exchange among the nations of "the Third World." Ultimately, it resulted in the establishment of the East Asia People's Theatre Network (2006) managed by his theatre company.¹¹⁰ As he describes the interactions and influences among the *minjung* theatre practitioners of "the Third World," he suggests that one of the PETA directors (Al Santos) was said to be influenced by a *madanggŭk* performance in creating his work that was presented as part of a political rally in a rural village in South Korea (1989: 292). Park asserts the practical application of "indigenous" ethnic traditions in the community works of the PETA as a connective link among the artists of "the Third World" (1989: 291).

Appropriately, he affirms the importance of the inheritance of the "indigenous" traditions for a healthy community in *minjokgŭk*. He defines "tradition" as "preserved essence," and maintains that "the creative continuation of tradition is what should be conducted for ethnic autonomy and homogeneity" (1984: 202). While other *madanggŭk* practitioners supposed that all the "indigenous" traditions were good, Park In-Pae asserted, "such negative traditions as 'filial piety' and 'fidelity' have to be completely

¹¹⁰ The East Asia People's Theatre Network (EAPTN) was initially formed in 2006 as a result of a theatre workshop executed in Yŏngdong, South Korea. Theatre practitioners from five East Asian countries — China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea — participated in the theatre workshop and performed their works through the 2006 Asian Players' *Madang* and the Great *Minjokgŭk* Festival. The artists presented monodramas about the lives of common people in their own countries inflicted by the flows of globalization. In 2006, the EAPTN held a conference for standing organization of their initial meeting. With Park In-pae, Dan Chumley, the director of the San Francisco Mime Troup, attended the conference and presented his paper on the prospects of cultural exchanges among East Asian grassroots artists. In 2005, Chumley directed a collective play, called *P'alch'il Chŏn (The Story of '87)*, with the Korean theatre company "*Il't'ŏ*" (Labor Field). The play dealt with Korean laborers' experiences of the '87 Great Workers' Struggle, which is the main motif of Park In-pae's *madanggŭk, It is Absurd That We Are Slaves Now Even Though We Rent Our Beautiful Land* (1989).

denied” (1984: 202). In any case, the issue of the inheritance of “indigenous” traditions was at the center of his discourse on community-based theatre. Crucially, he felt the traditional techniques of the dance and acting of *kamyŏngŭk* were secondary to its spirit. Regarding the foundational principle of living-art community theatre, Park In-pae observes, “living-art community refers to a collective group comprised of people who are not professional artists but people who work in the actual fields of production. In this community, they are encouraged to discover their expressive desires from the heart-felt living experiences associated with their own labors. In an ideal society, the labor and the playing are congruous with each other. In other words, art creation, living, and the playing are one” (1984: 208). Clearly, the model of the ideal living-art community Park In-pae envisioned is “*ture*.” As *kamyŏngŭk* authority Ch’ae Hui-wan informs us, *ture* was a collective agricultural community during the *Chosŏn* dynasty, which was organized for cooperation in farming during the period of production and the execution of village ritual, including the *kamyŏngŭk* performance, during leisure time (1987: 188-191). Park In-pae claims the modern transfiguration of *ture* in the living-art communities of the night schools and theatre circles and the *t’alch’um* clubs organized within the democratic labor unions.¹¹¹

As Park In-pae recognized the importance of self-representation and self-expression of the laborers, he laid stress on the dialogic matrix in the creation of “the

¹¹¹ In an interview with Eugène Van Erven, Hwang Sŏkyŏng notes, “one of the first sustained activist organization started was the People’s Night School, based on Paulo Frier’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Augusto Boal’s theatre techniques” (1992: 104).

theatre for the workers.”¹¹² Later, as a director, he reconfirmed the significance of the dialogue with the workers after his participation of the PETA workshop. He states, “when we, the participating artists, visited the real living fields, we were strongly encouraged to observe people there and dialogue with them . . . in order to catch the reality beneath the phenomenal appearance” (1989: 293). According to him, early on, the activists of the *minjung* culture movement unilaterally attempted to teach *kamyŏngŭk* dances to workers. The *t'alch'um* circles of Wonp'ung Mobang and the Korea Control Data were two examples of them in the 1970s (Yi Young Me 1997: 122-3). Acknowledging the errors of the activists in their privileged positions in the beginning stage of the living-art community movement, Park In-pae suggested the notion of “facilitator” for the leading activists.

As the movement progressed, the activists realized that, unlike college students to whom they taught *kamyŏngŭk* dances, the workers were not good at learning the techniques of the traditional dances. Moreover, unlike the college students, they did not enthusiastically receive the traditional dances (Kim Sŏng-jin 1983: 138-139). What the activists discovered was that the workers were searching for artistic outlets for expressing their own life stories with simple means (Park In-pae 1987: 173). Hence, the activists developed the workshops using *p'ungmul* (Korean traditional percussion instruments), mask playing, and short skits for enhancing their self-expression. For specific occasions like a rally to strengthen the solidarity of their union, the production derived from the composition of the short skits and games the workers developed

¹¹² The ideas on dialogue in Paulo Frier's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Augusto Boal's “the Theatre of the Oppressed” were strongly influential.

through the workshop process. In so doing, they rejected the performance-centered idea of theatre (Park In-pae 1987: 139-140).

As dialogue is the principle of democracy, the dialogic mode of creation allowed the facilitators to reconfigure the relationship between the leader and the members. They challenged the conventional model of the director/leader of the (theatre) community. Normally, in the Korean modern theatre scene, the process of production-making has exclusively relied on the leadership of the single charismatic director, whose image is close to that of a dictator. Even though some mainstream directors presented productions about democratization, contradictorily, they were the most dictatorial directors.¹¹³ The directors envisioned a democratic nation in their productions, yet their own art community was far from democratic. Artistic decisions were made top/down rather than being formulated from below. Conversely, Park In-pae and other practitioners of *minjung madanggŭk* associated with the labor movement instanced “the theatre for the workers” as the practical model for the rehearsal of democracy (Lee Young Me 1997: 139-140).

As an example of the theatre for workers, initially, *It Is Absurd* was produced by the *t'alch'um* club set up in the democratic labor union of a multinational corporation, Korea Control Data,¹¹⁴ in 1984. But the production was cancelled, as the players were arrested by the police right before the performance. Toward the end of 1970s, democratic unions began to spread, but in the beginning of the 1980s the Chun Tu-

¹¹³ Oh T'ae-sŏk and Yi Yun-t'aek are the exemplary cases. Furthermore, they were highly acclaimed for that reason. For instance, Richard Nicholas, the translator of Yi Yun-t'aek's plays in English writes, “Iconoclastic and charismatic, Yi Yun-t'aek is an artist whose each creative endeavor is awaited eagerly then debated heatedly by critics (2007: 9).

¹¹⁴ Korea Control Data was established in 1967.

whan regime endeavored to destroy them. The Democratic Union of Korea Control Data was one of them. The players of the initial performance were the former members of the *t'alch'um* club who were fired unjustly by the Company due to their involvement in the union strike in 1982.¹¹⁵ The members collectively conceived and directed the play and planned to stage it in the Lecture Hall of Hūngsadan. The performance of *It Is Absurd* was designed as a protest to let people know the exorbitant management of the multinational company and the allied oppression of the Chun Tu-whan administration (*Minjokgŭk* Research Society 1991: 29).¹¹⁶ Even though the original play contains idealized and abstracted representation of labor,¹¹⁷ basically, the main narrative constructs the experience and emotions of the actual events of strike and discharge in documentary fashion.

In 1989, *It Is Absurd* was eventually presented by Park In-pae's Field Theatre Company as an official entry of the 2nd Great *Minjokgŭk* Festival in the Hanmadang Art Theatre.¹¹⁸ There is no record of the involvement of the *minjung* activists, although it is well known that activists (practitioners) like Park In-pae had participated in the living-art communities in democratic unions. No one was willing to reveal his/her name under the

¹¹⁵ Spivak well sums up the event dealt with in *It is Absurd*, remarking, "In Seoul, South Korea, in March 1982, 237 women workers in a factory owned by Control Data, a Minnesota-based multinational corporation, struck over a demand for a wage raise. Six union leaders were dismissed and imprisoned. In July, the women took hostage two visiting U. S. vice presidents, demanding reinstatement of the union leaders. Control Data's main office was willing to release the women; the Korean government was reluctant. On July 16, the Korean male workers at the factory beat up the female workers and ended the dispute. Many of the women were injured; two suffered miscarriages" (1999: 68).

¹¹⁶ The *Minjokgŭk* Research Society was founded by such critics as Lee Young Me and Kang Yŏng-hŭi. The Society published a series of collected plays of *minjung minjokgŭk* titled *Anthology of Minjokgŭk* in 1991. All the plays in the Anthology are collective works. The anthology was comprised with four books. The original version of *It is Absurd* is included in the third book of the anthology.

¹¹⁷ *Maldukyi of kamyŏngŭk* appears as the ghost of the deceased laborers (ChŏnT'ae-il and Kim Kyŏng-suk) (*Minjokgŭk* Research Society 1991: 32).

¹¹⁸ The theatre was exclusively used for the production of *minjung minjokgŭk*.

repressive conditions, in which labor activists were regarded as communists. It is my suspicion that some members of the Korea Control Data *t'alch'um* club later joined the Field Theatre Company. Or, someone involved in the original production handed the script to Park In-pae. Somehow, *It is Absurd* became one of the notable successes of the Field Theatre Company, being performed since then on the numerous occasions of labor strikes and for the education of laborers in democratic unions nation-wide.

Being directed by Park In-pae, *It is Absurd* was revised collectively by the members of the Field Theatre Company, and went through many changes. It is noticeable that the later version reflected upon the experiences of the laborers from “the Great Workers Struggle” developed after “the 1987 Democracy Declaration.” Besides that, the parliamentary hearing set up for the investigation of the corrupt Chun Tu-whan regime was added as a crucial socio-political event. As the title indicates, Park In-pae imagines the Korean ethnic community has fallen into the state of a slave country, invaded by the nomadic transnational capitalism. Borrowing Park In-pae’s notion of “*jŏnghyŏng*” (sample or mold), *It is Absurd* is a *jŏnghyŏng* of “the theatre for the workers” in light of the themes of oppression and struggle.

It is important to distinguish his concept of “*jŏnghyŏng*” from the notion of “*jŏnhyŏng*” (type) in understanding the “the Korean ethnic type” in community-based dramas like *It Is Absurd* in the 1980s. Park In-pae defines *jŏnghyŏng* as “a good creative work that can be a sample” (1993: 75). In my observation, however, Park In-pae’s concept of *jŏnghyŏng* is closer to the notion of “mold” than “sample.” Whereas “sample” more logically refers to an individual product or an individual, “mold” or “seed” indicates the part or essence of a thing. Also Park In-pae prefers *jŏnghyŏng* to *jŏnhyŏng*

(type) in order to avoid the charge of idealization and abstraction of social types in the *madanggŭk* characters.

For Park In-pae, what does constitute the “essence” of *minjung* expressible in *madanggŭk* (*minjokgŭk*)? In order to answer the question, it seems necessary to deal with the issue of realism in the theory of *minjokgŭk* in the 1980s. As Park In-pae reflects upon the limitation of the theory of *minjung minjok munhak* (national people’s literature), he remarks, “for the praxis of *minjung*’s concrete life, it has to be deepened by the theory of realism. During the 1970s, ‘the literature for *minjung*’ was advocated, but it was not created by *minjung* or appreciated by *minjung*” (1984: 201). Needless to say, the theory of realism Park In-pae espouses is not realism as a style but as a spirit. In the circles of Korean national literature, led by Paek Nak-ch’ŏng, Lukács’ theory of realism was favorably received because Lukács did not limit it to the style manifested during a specific epoch. Lukács traced the history of realism as far back as to the Greeks. If the notion of realism is not limited to style, it can be said that *kamyŏngŭk* embodies the spirit of realism in the sense that it embodies the reality of collective *minjung*. In this respect, proposing a theory of ethnic realism, critic Kang Yŏng-hŭi contends that “through the dialectical encounter with the indigenous traditions the *madanggŭk* movement achieved the spirit of realism with the reality of *minjung*.” He adduces *madanggŭk* realism in the realist representation in the theatre for the workers (1987: 9).

As a practitioner of the theatre for workers, Park In-pae regarded tradition as “preserved essence” because he assumed that through folk traditions like *kamyŏngŭk* the “true” experiences of collective *minjung* were typified. Furthermore, for him, they

were created by *minjung* themselves for their own community. Grounding “theatre for the workers” in the collective spirit of folk traditions, Park In-pae advocated theatre for *minjung*, by the *minjung*, and of the *minjung*. He disavowed the idealized and abstracted representation of *minjung* and its consumption. Certainly, Park made an issue of (self)representation itself in regard to artistic production and reception. I will examine how Park In-pae represents the “reality” of *minjung* as the “essence” of *minjung minjokgŭk* in *It is Absurd*, and how he creates the “*jŏnghyŏng*” of “true Korean workers” and their single class consciousness — but at the cost of effacement of differences in ideas, feelings, and desires among laborers.¹¹⁹ Critic Kim Mi-do, in her brief mention of the 1989 *It is absurd* in her review of the “the 2nd Great *Minjokgŭk* Festival,” writes that “the production presents the stereotypical characters and matters of workers, and it does not deal with the structural problems behind them” (1989: 140). Even though I did not see the production, based on the script, I believe that the 1989 version is very concerned with the structural matter of the international division of labor consequent to transcapitalism.¹²⁰ But, in the 1989 version, in spite of characterizing individual workers, the gender conflict among workers distinct in the original play was deliberately weakened for the purpose of propagandizing the class unity of *minjung*. As the 1984 version directly represented the experiences of the female workers who engaged in the strike of 1982 and were fired as a result, the women characters in the play manifest the complications of the united struggle among the laborers. I contend, however, both the

¹¹⁹ As even more evident in his later work, *The True Worker*, the imputation of “truthfulness” lies in the workers’ “solidarity and will to fight” (Field 1990: 2). I used the 1989 script put in the website of the Field Theatre Company (<http://www.realmadang.com>).

¹²⁰ My discussion of the earlier version is based on the script contained in *Korean Minjunggŭk* edited by Yim Jin-t’aek and Ch’ae Hui-wan and for the 1989 version it is based on the script provided by the website of the Field Theatre Company.

original and the 1989 version of *It is Absurd* display the limit of the phallogocentric myth of a nation (the dichotomy of the sacrificed woman/ the protecting man) embedded in *minjokgŭk*. I will examine the 1989 version in detail.

In the first *madang*, “when the sound of *p’ungmul* (farmers’ musical instruments used for *nongak*)¹²¹ signals the opening of the performance, all the players dance to incite mirth among the spectators, as *kamyŏngŭk* players typically do before the beginning of the main performance. “*They may dance the dance of the disabled in kamyŏngŭk*” (Field 1989: 1). In the second *madang*, the Narrator recalls the events of the labor strike that happened in 1982. Similar to a Brechtian narrator or a *kamyŏngŭk chaebi* (musician), the role of the Narrator is to have the spectators keep critical distance from the past events saturated with emotional intensity. When the narrator introduces the representatives of the company and the union, Mr. Paek and Jŏng-sŏn, the conflict is obviously set.

Whereas the Ghost of Maldukyi was the protagonist in the 1984 original version, Jŏng-sŏn, the union representative, is introduced as the protagonist by the narrator in the 1989 version.¹²² The following scenes short skits show the development of the

¹²¹ *Nongak* literally means farmers’ music.

¹²² The most conspicuous change in 1989 version is that the characters appear as real people with personal names instead of anonymous social types. In the 1984 version, in the second *madang*, the Ghost of Maldukyi appears and says that “I am the grudging spirit of Chŏn T’ae-il and Kim Kyŏng-suk” (*Minjoguk* Research Society 1991: 32). As I mentioned previously, in 1970, Chŏn T’ae-il burned himself in demonstration demanding the better life of the factory workers. In 1979, Kim Kyŏng-suk died during the YH women laborers’ occupation of the office of Kim Young-sam, the president of the oppositional party (*Shinmindang* Party). The women factory workers visited Kim Young-sam to protest the governmental intervention in their discharge from their company. During the violent subjugation of the riot police, Kim Kyŏng-suk fell from the rooftop of the party building (Kim Jŏng-nam 2002: 48). In the 1984 original version, the women workers are represented as the Union Members 1 through 5 and the Laborer with Disability in Eyes, the Laborer with Disability in Nose, and the Laborer with Disability in Ears because of the unfavorable working conditions. In the original version, the Ghost of Maldukyi plays an important function in satirizing the oppressors of the workers; the Yankee Ghost, the Government Ghost, and the Company Ghost. The American multinational capitalist, the Yankee Ghost, is a caricature drawn with xenophobic

strike, and the scenes are constructed with the mixture of the traditional rhythms, dances and colloquial dialogue. In the scene titled “the General Meeting,” the members of the union accuse the company in a light satirical mood. Right after this scene, through a short dialogue between Jöng-sön and other workers, her will to fight is highlighted. The next scene tells how the negotiation process between the company and the union disappointingly came to an end. The union members demand a wage raise of 49% which the Korean manager rejects. His excuse is that there is no wage guideline from the head office in America, and governmental policy does not allow more than a 12% wage increase. One of the union members, Yöng-ok, says, “the American laborers receive wages as much as ten times more than we get for the same hours of work” (Field 1989: 5). She also complains about the intimidating attitude of the head office with frequent threats of the reduction of personnel. When Yöng-ok and T’ae-sön propose extreme reactions, such as deliberate manufacture of defective products and total work stoppage, Jöng-sön points out their unreasonable approaches and suggests a reasonable way of resolution, proposing slowdown. Following her idea, the union members determine to decrease the amount of the productions by controlling their work speed. They are eventually fired because “they caused mammoth damage to the process of export” (Field 1989: 6).¹²³

sentiments. The Government Ghost is severely condemned and the Company Ghost is stereotypically portrayed as an opportunist. In 1989 version, however, Maldukyi does not appear at all, but the Yankee Ghost, the Governmental Ghost, and the Company Ghost are replaced respectively by Roger Miller (the vice president of Control Data) Mr. Paek (the manager of Korea Control Data), and Mr. Lee (the Minister of Labor).

¹²³ Ironically, the Chun Tu-whan regime counted the labor movement as one of the targeted object in the governmental campaign of “the Abolishment of the Three Social Disorders.”

Jǒng-sǒn instigates the members to stage a sit-down strike. In the next strike scene, the director of the bureau of labor administration appears and threatens them. Yǒng-ok, Myǒng-hŭi, and T'ae-sǒn discuss the process of the strike directly with the audience. From the auditorium, an actor who plays the role of the husband of Jǒng-sǒn stands and represents the moment of meeting with his wife during the strike. The Husband says that he worries about Jǒng-sǒn because she is 3 months pregnant and the weather is very cold. He implores her to stop the strike. But, Jǒng-sǒn insists that she will continue the strike until all of them are reinstated. The results of the negotiation drive them to despair. The company only approves a wage increase of about 20% and rejects the reinstatement of the strikers. Jǒng-sǒn quits the sit-in strike, but she later returns as she finds out the harsh action of the company, which tries to bribe her. Her husband shows her settlements received from the company. When he cannot hide the fact that he is pleased with the large amount of money, she is also disappointed with him, because he does not understand the significance of her struggle.

These scenes, which reconstruct the conflict between the union members and their families, are typical structural elements of “the theatre of the strike,” reflecting the actual fact that the government and the company strategically used their families to weaken their will. One former member of a democratic union recalls, “we later came to know that the policemen in charge visited our homes and told our family members that ‘you should rescue your daughter who was captive to a den of communists and was likely to be starved to death’” (Sǒk Jǒng-nam 1984: 120). Under the powerful National Security Law, the laborers on strike at that time were treated like dissidents attempting to overthrow the government at the instigation of the communists (from North Korea).

Meanwhile, Roger Miller, the vice president of the head office, visits Korea to resolve the problem of their rehiring, and explains that the head office would like to but the Korean government (the Ministry of Labor) recommends him to take legal action. As they come to know that the vice president will leave soon without resolving the matter, they visit his office to converse with him. They insist that the head office has responsibility for firing them. Thus, they claim that it is not the Korean government but the head office which can permit their return. The American vice president persuades them that he will contact the president and call the staff in the head office. But it is disclosed that he lied, he reported that he was confined by “the rioters.” Eventually, the Korean police break into the office and arrest the strikers. The narrator reports that the factory was closed, because the company left South Korea. Consequently, all of the workers lost their jobs and three of the union members were imprisoned. The narrator ends the second *madang* with his last comment; “Everyone from the small factory to a great industrial conglomerate says that we cannot survive without export, however it is absurd that we rent out our beautiful land for export but are slaves of export now” (Field 1989: 14). In comparison with the original version of the play, the vice president of the head office is portrayed as at least a human being, if a sly fox. In the original version, he is represented as the stereotypical evil Yankee, the Yankee Ghost.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ In the original 1984 version, the Ghost of Maldukyi hurls words of thunder to the Yankee Ghost, saying that “you have greedy blue eyes with one hand holding an atomic weapon and the other a dollar. You belittle our people because we live in a country as small as the tail of rabbit. You pay our workers only by one fourteenth of your laborers. You insult us by saying that we are like rats. Recently, you sell sick cows to us and reproach us for violating the Dumping Code. You should be punished” (*He beat the Yankee Ghost with a duster.*) (*Minjokgŭk* Research Society 1991: 41-2). Right After the Kwangju Democracy Uprising, in an interview with the New York Times in Oct 1980, John Adams Wickam, Jr. Commander of the United States Forces in Korea, said, “Koreans are like field mice, they just follow whoever becomes their leader. Democracy is not an adequate system for Koreans.” This remark evolved into to a diplomatic controversy. Even though it is a fact that based on blind collectivism, there have been some politicians

The third *madang* shifts to the present time and it is framed as a hearing set up for the investigation of the violence that occurred during the suppression of the strike of 1982. The performers playing the laborers including the members of the union in the second *madang* “dance a symbolic dance indicating the excitement of ‘the 1987 Great Workers’ Struggle’” (Field 1989: 14).¹²⁵ The Korean manager, Mr. Paek, and the members of “*kusadae*” (Corps of Company Saviors) are summoned as testifiers who are responsible for the violence conducted toward the members of the union in strike in 1982. In the play, Mr. Paek denies his responsibility, saying “I do not remember” (Field 1989: 15). This scene is conspicuously the parody of the hearing set up to consider Chun Tu-whan’s responsibility for the Kwangju massacre of 1980. Driven by the people’s complaint that history had been rewritten, Noh T’ae-wu’s Sixth Republic implemented a parliamentary hearing in order to interrogate the principal architects of the 1980 Kwangju massacre and the misconduct of Chun Tu-whan’s Fifth Republic. The hearing took place in the National Assembly Hall in 1988 right after the Seoul Olympics.

and civilians who follow their political leaders, his remark reveals racist sentiment in that he totalizes the whole Korean people as field mice. This scene is reminiscent of the scene between Agu and Marades (the Japanese businessman) in *Au’s Musical Shamanist Ritual*. In the original play, the Ghost of Malduki also beats the Government Ghost for being the collaborator of the Yankee Ghost and destroying the land by inducting the polluting industry and the Company Ghost for making a black list of the laborers and driving them to the streets (*Minjokgŭk* Research Society 1991: 41-42).

¹²⁵ The 1987 Great Workers’ Struggle occurred right after the Declaration of Democracy when the laborers were dissatisfied by the contents of it. The Workers’ Struggle was the momentous social event in which the democratization movement and the labor movement intersected. During the 1970s and the early 1980s, democratic unions began to be established in such textile and assembly factories as Wonp’ung Mobang, Tongil Pangjik, and Korea Control Data, in which most of the workers were women. In the 1980s, the democratic unions were founded in heavy industries like the steel industry. The 1987 Great Workers’ Struggle was led by male union members of the heavy industries.

In a sense, Chun Tu-whan was brought to people's court. Being the first hearing since the establishment of the nation, it created the most theatrical spectacle of political drama. During the hearing processes, everyday, all day long, the major T.V. broadcasts aired all the sessions and speeches of people involved. This political drama made people angry and cry when the slaughterer refused to acknowledge his horrible deeds and responsibility. His phrase of excuse, "I do not remember," paradoxically, became the most unforgettable line of the theatre. After the hearing, Chun was banished to a Buddhist temple in the mountains (Paektam Temple) and was forced to lead a secluded life for a year and a half. As a matter of fact, it was not the end of punishment because many people wanted an intensive chastisement. In 1995, under the catchphrase of *yŏksa paro chapki* (rectification of history) of Kim Young Sam's government, both Chun Tu-whan and Noh T'ae-wu were convicted of their illegal profiteering. They were sentenced to life imprisonment and 17 years imprisonment, respectively, but pardoned in 1997.

Indeed, both Chun Tu-whan and Noh T'ae-wu were very hostile not only to the political dissidents but also to the labor movement, and during their reigns, labor strikes were regarded as one of the "Three Societal Disorders." To understand the role of gender matters in the labor movement in South Korea, the phenomenon of *kusadae* must be noted. As the labor movement was at its peak from the end of 1970s to the end of 1980s, in most factories, *kusadae* were organized within them. They were organizations of male workers of the factories, while most of the workers of the factories on strike were (unmarried) women, especially in the 1970s. Being persuaded by the company, the male workers of *kusadae* believed that they could save the company and

themselves by preventing labor strikes which would interrupt business. In the original 1984 play, with the memory of the strike vivid, the participants-players clearly dramatized the gender conflict between the male workers of “*kusadae*” and them. Union Member 3 narrates that “as the male workers were getting violent we tied every door with our stockings, set up a barricade, and slept curled up every night since we feared them breaking into our place.” In the next scene, a voice heard from one of the male workers yelling, “You bitches, I will kill you if you make the company close. They say that they will discontinue business because of you. If you marry later, you will leave the company. But, what about us?” (*Minjokgŭk* Research Society 1991: 40).

The worst case was when companies asked for aid from the government and the police dispatched a group of criminal toughs disguised as members of *kusadae*. Historically, the criminals were presented by the government as patriots who defeated the communists. In the original 1984 play, the criminals, who had been imprisoned in the “Samch’öng Discipline Camp” are presented as members of *kusadae*. In a realistic scene, it is shown that the representatives of the criminals, Yi Kkangp’ae and Chöng Yö-wu, violently beat the union members on strike. Even “*the agitated Yi Kkangp’ae and Chöng Yö-wu rush into the auditorium and beat anyone caught in their sight. A pregnant woman is battered.*” Yi Kkangp’ae and Chöng Yö-wu yell to the Pregnant Woman, “You bitch, you are trying to ruin our company. Thus, you should be killed with my own hands. I do not care even though you are pregnant. You should be beaten to death” (*Minjongŭk* Research Society 1991: 49).

In fact, in many cases, such a scene was part of union strikes at that time. One of the former members of the labor union recalls, “We were beaten like dogs. We came to

realize that our enemies are everywhere. The most heart-breaking case was that we found our enemy in our company's male workers" (Han Jöm-sun 1984: 11-13). In the 1989 version, however, the *kusadae* interruption is "told" by the *kusadae* members as the testifiers of the hearing set for the 1982 strike. One of the performers playing Kusadae 1 says directly to the audience that "we just retell the scene of violence at that time, therefore, don't throw things like papers at us in spite of your being displeased by our statements" (Field 1989: 18). The approach and the attitude to the gender conflict are totally different. The 1989 production obviously downplays the gender conflict. The director, Park In-pae, and the participants of the production were intentionally oblivious to a part of the historical memory of the union leaders, lest these memories undermine the idea of unity among laborers.

As historian Kang Chun-man claims, "The activists of the labor movement from the progressive camp may complicity preserve or reinforce the system of the sexual discrimination when they view gender matters and class matters as completely separated and give priority to the class matters over the gender matters" (2002: 153). In her article "Feminism and Critical Theatre," Spivak views the labor strike of the democratic union of Korea Control Data in 1982 as the case in which the class struggle, gender conflict, and neocolonialism all intersect each other. Spivak contends, "to grasp this narrative's overdeterminations (the many telescoped lines — sometimes noncoherent, often contradictory, perhaps discontinuous — that allow us to determine the reference point of a single 'event' or clusters of 'events') would require a complicated analysis" (1999: 68). Spivak criticizes the brutality of transcapitalism showcased in the strike of Korean Control Data in 1982, observing "Socialized capital

kills by remote control. In this case, too, the American managers watched while the South Korean men decimated their women. The managers denied charges. One remark made by a member of Control Data management, as reported in *Multinational Monitor* seemed symptomatic in its self-protective cruelty: ‘Although it’s true Ch’ae lost her baby, this is not the first miscarriage she’s had. She’s had two before this’ (1999: 69).

Both the original and the 1989 version of *It is Absurd* display the limit of the pahllocentric myth of a nation, the dichotomy of the sacrificed woman/ the protecting man, embedded in *minjokgŭk*. In the original 1984 play, The Pregnant Woman loses her baby and in the 1989 version Jöng-sön does. Jöng-sön talks to her aborted baby, “Oh, my baby! I let you go like this. When I think of you wandering about in my belly for 7 days after your death, I am disgusted with the deception of my enemy. Where have you gone? Aren’t you in the place where you are disdained just because you are “*kongsunyi*,”¹²⁶ where someone is fired just because s/he claims her/his right, and where human life is treated like a fly, are you? (*She dances salp’uri to chastise her enemy*).¹²⁷ Oh, my baby! Do not take *han* [deep-seated grief or resentment] with you and please become a spirit of General Baby and protect the laborers” (Field 1989: 19). In the fourth and last *madang*, all the players march and agitate in a political rally for the amendment of the bad labor law, recalling the spirit of “the Great Workers’ Struggle.” Park In-pae suggests “Jöng-sün” as a “*jöngghöng*” (sample or mold) of a Korean laborer, but in his conception she cannot be a protector. The image of “General Baby” evokes a male protector. We can take this one of two ways: Korean women workers have to wait for their male savior or they have to give birth to a male protector.

¹²⁶ This is a pejorative term for a female worker.

¹²⁷ *Salp’uri* is a traditional exorcizing dance.

4.4 YI YUN-T'AEK'S MINJOKGŬK: OGU

Yi Yun-t'aek has been recognized as one of the leading Korean directors in spite of controversies and debates over his productions. In 1973 he debuted in the Civic Hall in Pusan, his home city, directing Moliere's *Le Médecin malgré lui* (*The Doctor in Spite of Himself*), but it proved unsuccessful. It took 13 years for him to return to the Korean theatre world when he founded the Yŏnhŭi Street Theatre Troupe in 1986 and found his niche in Kamagol Theatre in Pusan. As the opening performance, inspired by Tadeusz Kantor, he wrote and directed *P'uga* (*Fuga*) in 1986. In fact, his involvement with theatre had started when he entered the Seoul Theatre Institute in 1972, but dropped out in that same year due to his financial destitution. For Yi Yun-t'aek, school was nonetheless formative in the sense that he met Oh T'ae-sŏk there. While he went through such various careers as a post-office clerk, factory worker, and poet, he was enrolled at the Korean National Open University, graduating in 1979 with a degree in elementary education. He joined the *Pusan Ilbo* (Pusan Daily News), as an editorial journalist, remaining until 1986, and sharpening his command of Korean language. His autobiographical experiences at that time were reflected in *Simin K* (*Citizen K*, 1989), whose 1989 production was his first work in Seoul at the Tongsung Art Center and was highly acclaimed both by theatre critics and theatre goers. After this, he shifted his base from Pusan to Seoul.

Based on his own categorization, his theatrical career spanning more than 20 years can be divided into three periods: “the situational theatre” during the 1980s, “*minjokgŭk*” period from the end of the 1980s until the mid 1990s, and “the populist theatre” after 1995. For the period of “the situational theatre,” Yi Yun-t’aek counts Kantor as the most influential figure. As he acknowledges, Oh T’ae-sŏk’s works have been the models, especially for his *minjokgŭk*. After *Yŏnsan*, as he read the changes in the Korean and international theatre business, he dropped the subject of *minjokgŭk*, and created successively works of “the populist theatre” mostly during the 1990s: *Sarange Sokko Tone Ulgo* (*Deceived by Love and Cried for Money*, 1995), *Ŏmŏni* (*Mother*, 1996), and *Nunmulŭi Yŏwang* (*The Queen of Tears*, 1998). In making his work more accessible, he adopted the forms, styles, and narratives of sentimental *shinp’agŭk*, the Korean adaptation of the Japanese mix of modern and *kabuki* styles introduced in the 1920s and 1930s. Because of its origin, his “populist theatre” has been hotly debated among theatre critics. But, it is interesting to note that “in a survey of professional theatre people by Tong-A Daily Newspaper in 2003, Yi Yun-t’aek topped the most popular director’s chart and took the third place in the most experimental director section at the same time” (Kim Mi-do 2005: 231). Besides his original creations, Yi Yun-t’aek adapted and reconstructed many “Western” classics and (Heiner Müller’s) postmodern works in Korean style.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ *Ch’ŏngbu* (*The Mission*, 1990), *Maekpedŭ* (*Macbeth*, 1992), *Riŏwang* (*King Lear*, 1994), *Ch’ŏngbajirŭ Ipŭn P’awusŭtŭ* (*Faust in Jeans*, 1995), *Haemrit* (*Hamlet*, 1996), *P’awusŭtŭ* (*Faust*, 1997), *Oidip’ŭsŭ* (*Oedipus*, 2002), *Temp’esŭtŭ* (*Tempest*, 2002), *Penisŭi Sangin* (*The Merchant of Venice*, 2003), and *Ŏkch’k Ŏmŏm* (*Mother Courage*, 2006). Yi Yun-t’aek became the artistic director of National Drama Company in 2004, and held the position until 2006. He is also a poet, a television writer, a screenplay writer, and a film director.

Yi Yun-t'aek's advocacy of *minjokgŭk* was advanced against the changing national and international situations and conditions derived from the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989. The weakening of the socialist ideas in the "Third World" block brought forth the resurgence of ultra-nationalism and religious fundamentalism. After the abolition of successive dictatorial regimes, the performative function of the political theatre was diminished. As *minjung minjokgŭk* extended its field to the institutionalized theatre stages for a heterogeneous constituency, audiences demanded artistic sophistication. Yi asserted the continuance of the progressive spirit of previous decades, but differentiated his *minjokgŭk* from *minjung minjokgŭk*. If the theorists and the practitioners of *minjung minjokgŭk* stress the speciality of Korean culture within the "Third World," counter-hegemonic to the claim of universality of the "Western" culture, Yi Yun-t'aek champions the universal quality of his *minjokgŭk* "in the age of globalization." According to him, Korean *minjokgŭk* should contain "the shared cords" in the context of the international theatre scene (1995: 78). Considering the universal-specific nature of *minjokgŭk*, Yi Yun-t'aek regards *minjokgŭk* as "unique theatre types of each race (culture) of the world that are based on the modernization of such archetypal theatres as Chinese Opera, Japanese *noh* and *kabuki*, Korean *kamyŏngŭk*, Indonesian shadow theatre, and Vietnamese underwater puppet theatre" (1993: 419).

How can this seemingly contradictory postulation of the universal *minjokgŭk* (the Korean ethnic theatre) be comprehended? It is necessary to shift our attention to the concept of "totality" by which he captures both notions of idiosyncrasy and variety. As he fashions the formula of *minjokgŭk*, he asserts that "in *minjokgŭk* the uniquely Korean perceptions, feelings, modes of expression, rhythms, and images have to be applied to

the various universal styles, and from that the peculiar character of *minjokgŭk* should be created.” “These concepts of idiosyncrasy and variety,” Yi Yun-t’aek contends, “should be the criteria by which Korean theatre coexists with other world theatres.” According to him, (Korean) *minjokgŭk* should secure “universality” and “totality” through which it can be comprehended by any people of race (culture).” In this respect, he regards “Oh T’ae-sŏk’s *minjokgŭk* as the canonical work in its acquisition of totality,” and among Oh’s *minjokgŭk*, specifically, Yi Yun-t’aek counts *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River* as the best model (2002: 62).

Yi Yun-t’aek exemplifies “the aesthetics of totality” in *Paekma River* “in the manifested mixture of intercultural texts and images between the East and the West: the juxtaposition and clash between reality and illusion, everyday life and extraordinary life, words and images, individuals and history” (2002: 44). Yi Yun-t’aek’s idea of “totality” is thus not based on “synthesis” because his notion of *minjokgŭk* distinguishes the “foreign” elements from the “indigenous” traditions by which the nationality of *minjokgŭk* can be guaranteed. Conclusively, according to Yi’s simple formula, *minjokgŭk* can obtain both nationality and internationality in that there are “total” cultural elements of the world. In this respect, his notion of “shared cords” signifies a variety of world cultures with the marked signature of Korean ethnic culture. Hence, he is convinced that *minjokgŭk* can be understood by people of any culture since it transcends its locality and can appeal universally to the people of the entire world. I submit, however, that his idea of “totality” does not ensure the universality claim of *minjokgŭk*. Yi Yun-t’aek’s simple math considers that “the East” plus “the West” equals the entire world. But, to follow his logic, Korean *minjokgŭk* cannot communicate with African people (races)

since they belong neither to “the East” nor to “the West.” Therefore, his thesis that *minjokgŭk* is universal is strained. As this counterevidence dismantles the dichotomous ground of *minjokgŭk*, inversely, it illuminates how his formulation of *minjokgŭk* corresponds with the alleged “spiritual East and technical West.”

I think “the shared cords” of his *minjokgŭk*, and his claim of the universal-specific production of theatre reflects the notion of commercial postmodernism, while his themes centered in *minjokgŭk* are firmly anchored in modernist worldviews and myths. Parasitic on utopian postmodernism in its emphasis on the notion of difference and plurality, commercial postmodernism quests for the “marketable” difference and uniqueness in the world-wide “indigenous” traditions. Responding to the epochal trend of globalization, Yi Yun-t’aek proposes that Korean theatre practitioners should produce uniquely Korean performances that can appeal to the international audience, aligning himself with the motto of globalization; “The things Korean can gain the most international recognition.”¹²⁹ This might explain why his *minjokgŭk* performances have been the top-selling products in the international theatre festivals around the world.¹³⁰ Displaying

¹²⁹ The Korean venue for the modern Olympic Games is an exemplary case of the political and commercial usage of the past traditions. Even though they were invented as a global festival commemorating the ancient Greek spirit of sportsmanship in present day, the games are mainly conceived as a form of global competition of nationalism and corporatism. Many Koreans now view the '88 Seoul Olympics as a deliberately coordinated ritual served for international celebration of the dictators of the successive military regimes, Chun Tu-whan and Noh T’ae-wu. Hosting the Olympic Games certainly was the best choice in terms of the political and economical effects. The Noh T’ae-wu government attempted to integrate the domestic dissidents and factions through the spectacular display of the glorious past. Especially, the Olympic Games were strategically used as a momentum to weaken the united force of the laborers, which was in the high peak through the 1987 Great Workers’ Struggle. Regardless of periods, styles, and class issues, the opening and closing ceremonies of the Seoul Olympic Games were punctuated with the mixed traditional performances, Confucian court music, *p’ansori* (one person opera), shamanistic rituals, mask dances, and farmer’s dances, concealing the problems, conflicts, and struggles among different groups of people in Korea.

¹³⁰ In 1990, *Ogu* was performed in the Tokyo International Theatre Festival, and successively in 1991 it was presented in German International Theatre Festival in Essen. *The Dummy Bride* was shown in many

shared cords, his *minjokgŭk* productions exhibit departmental arrays of various cultural styles and forms, but they are enwrapping his central idea of the humanist-nationalist spirit. I will scrutinize how his humanist-nationalist myth is grounded in the phallogocentric imagination as implicit in his acclaimed *Ogu*.

Richard Nicholas, the translator of his plays in English, writes, “The cultural specificity in *O-Gu* [*Ogu*]¹³¹ may require that it be staged only by someone deeply steeped in Korean culture, much as a *noh* or *kabuki* performed in English requires considerable knowledge of Japanese culture. However, there is much in *O-Gu* [*Ogu*] for the Western reader to enjoy” (2007: 52). *O-Gu* [*Ogu*] is “the humane and human play.” He continues, “The play has great heart, great warmth. Characters never preach in the play and Lee [Yi] lets the readers (audience members) take from the play what they will” (Nicholas 2007: 52).¹³² What Nicholas catches is a “glimpse into Lee Yun-t’aek’s [Yi Yun-t’aek’s] humanist imagination and the portrayal of universal truths not limited by geographic boundaries” (2007: 12). I will example his claim of universal truth from the foundational myths in his *minjokgŭk*.

In his directorial note for the production of *Ogu* (*A Shamanist Ritual for the Deceased*, 1989), Yi Yun-t’aek expresses his nationalist sentiment, stating, “What can be the unchangeable belief in this world of topsy-turvy? That is the fact that we are the

international theatre festivals: 1993 Fukuoka Universiade, 1993 Tokyo Alice Festival, and 1999 Kŏch’ang International Theatre Festival.

¹³¹ I use the McCune Reishauer system of romanization for Korean, but Nicholas uses the system of romanization for Korean suggested by the Korean Culture Ministry. But neither of them can romanize Korean perfectly.

¹³² According to Nicholas’ report, “It was in 1997, when the popular ‘grandmotherly’ soap opera actress, Kang Bu-Ja, joined the cast that audiences flocked to performances. Now, an estimated 2.7 million have seen the various incarnations of the play, but the Western reader will recognize the cheapskate older son, the conniving younger son, the unhappy daughter-in-law, the sexy widow, botched rituals, inept beings from the Other World, cheating at cards and other human foibles and universal truths that surpass cultural boundaries” (Nicholas 2007: 49).

same race and we still live here in our nation” (1993: 110). In another article written in response to critic Yi Sang-il who severely criticized *Ogu* as “the exclusive and exotic taste in ourselves,”¹³³ Yi Yun-t’aek raises a question in return, “Shouldn’t we protest against the American cultural imperialism by holding a signboard of *minjokgŭk* like a shaman shakes *shindae*¹³⁴?” (1993:191).¹³⁵ His total disavowal of American culture contrasts with his favorable approach to European cultures, of which specifically those of Germany and France are the important reference points. In the same article, as he clarifies his political position, he explains that “my *minjokgŭk* differs from the notion of *minjokgŭk* that circulates in “the Great *Minjokgŭk*. Festival,” but we all should strive to establish *minjokgŭk*.” (1993: 191-2). As a core concept of his *minjokgŭk* theory, he suggests “the ethnic archetype,” which derives from the Jungian paradigm of archetype.¹³⁶ Naturally, for him, myths provide a great deal of theatrical material in his *minjokgŭk*. In his directorial note for *Hong Tong-jinŭn Salŏitta* (*Hong Tong-ji Is Alive*, 1993) with a subtitle of “*Wuriŭ Yŏngŭksŏngŭn Ŏdisŏ Ch’atŭl Su Itŭlkka*” (Where Should We Find Our Theatricality? – Recovery of Storytelling), he writes, “Myth is neither an unrealistic fantasy nor a daydream. It is the best imagination created by the collective unconscious of human beings. Because myth is the most cultural and national moral of reality, our Korean theatre has to be based on our ethnic myths” (1999: 426).

¹³³ The critic insisted that “ritual is only a ritual, not a theatrical art.” Meanwhile, some critics like Kim Pang-ok acclaimed *Ogu* as “an outstanding work opening widely the repository of our traditional culture” (1990: 224).

¹³⁴ A long bamboo stem through which the deities are presumed to descend to the body of a shaman.

¹³⁵ In his writing titled “*Gutkwa Yŏngŭkekwahan Insikŭi Chaegorŭl Wihayŏ*” (For the Transfiguration of the Relation between *Gut* and Theatre), Yi Yun-t’aek responded to the critic that “*gut* was the archetype of our ethnic theatre” (1990: 65).

¹³⁶ For Jung, as a universal ground of human (un)consciousness is revealed through cultural symbols and art works (1969: 75-110).

For Yi Yun-t'aek, *Ogu* is a pivotal production in his quest for *minjokgŭk*. Since *Ogu*, he has tapped the possibility of the establishment of *minjokgŭk* grounded in “indigenous” traditions.¹³⁷ In his directorial note for the production *Hong Tong-ji is Alive*, Yi Yun-t'aek expands on the issue, remarking, “*Minjokgŭk*. as the unique style of our culture cannot help but resort to our indigenous traditions that contain the archetype of our ethnic theatre” (1993: 426).¹³⁸ In this context, he asserts that *gut* is the archetype of our ethnic theatre. In *Ogu*, he experiments with the theatricalization of *gut*, and probes the ethnic (shamanistic) myth of life and death.

Ogu has a simple narrative structure, and the play itself is about *ogugut*, the shamanist ritual for the dead. In the beginning, The Old Mother in the play requests *sanogugut* (a shamanist ritual for the living) from the Eldest Son, because she has recurrent dreams in which she is taken away by the three messengers dispatched by the King of the Underworld. The Eldest Son rejects her solicitation because he is concerned with the cost of the *gut* he has to pay. Moreover, he tells his mother, “I’d be ashamed to be seen in the village if I held a *kut* [*gut*] performance for you” when “they beat gongs and drums, and dance with knives” (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006:18). Although the Old Mother knows the reason of his rejection, the Old Mother never relents. In order to gain sympathy from her son, she protests that she had a hard time raising two sons as a young widow. Accordingly, she claims her right to receive the expensive *gut*, and she

¹³⁷ *Ogu* was written by Yi Yun-t'aek in 1989, and it was presented in “the Seoul International Theatre Festival” in the same year. The premiere production was directed by Ch'ae Yun-il, the director of the Cecil Theatre Company. In the same year, for his writing *Ogu*, Yi won “the Best Artist Award” given by the Association of Korean Critics. In 1990, Yi Yun-t'aek directed and produced the play in the Kamagol Theatre in Pusan and in the Little Theatre of Hall of Literature and Art.

¹³⁸ Following critic Kim Yŏng-su, Yi Yun-t'aek avows the imperative thesis of Korean modern theatre constructed by “the interpretive community” in which “the traditional means the Korean and the root of Koreanness lies in *kamyŏngŭk* and *gut*” (2006: 40).

repeats the litany of her life story; with a rice cake business she earned a lot of money and bought the house in which she and the family of the first son live. She insists that she wants to be sent to the Land of Happiness after her death. But, actually, the Old Mother wants to be consoled through the performance of *sanogugut* in that the *gut* has a therapeutic effect, as the life story of the host/ sponsor comprises the content of the *gut*. The Eldest Son invites Sök-ch'ul,¹³⁹ a famous male shaman in the village, and his assistant female shaman. But, unexpectedly, during the *sanokugut*, a shamanist ritual for the living, the Old Mother actually dies, and the *gut* becomes the real *ogugut*, a shamanist ritual for the dead. In the second part, one scene is entirely assigned to depict the detailed processes of the washing and shrouding of her dead body in accordance with the proper traditional shamanist ritual.

In the next part, Yi Yun-t'aek juxtaposes the world of the living and the world of the dead by introducing the three messengers from the Underworld. The village people and the relatives of the family make a call of condolence to the house in mourning, and the messengers of the King of the Underworld visit to take the soul of the Old Mother. Unlike the typical frightful images of some creatures from the Underworld, their appearances are highlighted with comic and burlesque make-up and costumes. In the production staged in the Little Theatre of the Hall of Literature and Art in 1989, the actors playing the three messengers from the Underworld wore the same tight padded upper garments and short pants in front of which big sham phalluses were attached.¹⁴⁰ From the reservoirs of tradition, the image of a naked man with a big phallus can be

¹³⁹ This character is based on the notable male shaman Kim Sök-ch'ul whose records about *ogugut* are the basic sources of the play. According to Yi Yun-t'aek, another reference for the play is Hō kyu's *minjokgŭk* production, *Tasiraegi* in which Hō kyu attempted the theatricalization of *gut* (1990: 67).

¹⁴⁰ I had the chance to see the production.

located in the persona of Hong Tong-ji in *kkoktugaksinolŭm* (the Korean traditional puppet theatre),¹⁴¹ but it is also reminiscent of the imagery of the Greek Old Comedy.

Interestingly, the three messengers are depicted in a worldly fashion. The First Messenger of the Underworld indulges in gambling and playing cards (“flower cards”) with human beings in the house in mourning, and the Second Messenger has sex with a widow of the village, a neighbor of the family in mourning. The Second Messenger is sexually attracted to the Widow who “swings her hips voluptuously” as she comes and goes among men to serve them in the house in mourning (Yi Yun-t’aek 2006: 40). And the Third Messenger makes friends with the daughter of the Eldest Son. Dramaturgically, all these incidents serve for the thematic construction of the play, that is, the coexistence of life and death.

Traditionally in Korea, although the origin is unknown, among common people, the boisterous mood of playing cards in a house in mourning is believed to mitigate the grief of the family of the dead. This idea seems to come from the shamanist principle of the reality of this material world. Even though it is claimed that *ogugut* is performed for the dead, in a real sense, it is performed for the living. By sending the resentful spirits of the dead to the Underworld, the people can live safely in this world. In the last scene of *Ogu* titled “For the Sake of the Living,” metaphorically, the revitalization of this world of the living is effected through spiritual possession incited by the shaman. As Sök-ch’ul discovers the Second Messenger standing in front of the room where the Widow sleeps,

¹⁴¹ Yi Yun-t’aek directed Kim Kwang-lim’s *Hong Tong-ji Is Alive* in 1993. The production is based on the traditional puppet theatre, *kkoktugaksinolŭm*. In the puppet theatre, the small-scale hand puppets have been used. As his surname “Hong” in Chinese character denotes “red color,” the Hong Tong-ji puppet is colored red, symbolizing his sexual vigor. Hong Tong-ji appears naked with a big penis attached on the center of his body part. The images of the three messengers in *Ogu* seem to be partly relied on this “Hong Tong-ji” image.

Sök-ch'ul asks him to possess her because Sök-ch'ul read a premonitory sign of her destiny as a shaman. Then, "*In rhythm with the drum sound of Sök-ch'ul the mourners cheer the sexual intercourse between the Widow and the Second Messenger*" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 56). In Yi Yun-t'aek's phallogocentric imagination, the spiritual possession is presented as copulation, and the liveliness of this world is grounded on the sexual vigor of the phallus, even of the dead.

In *Ogu* the house in mourning is an allegorical representation of the Korean ethnic community contaminated by the material cupidity for which Yi Yun-t'aek condemns the American consumerist culture. Though even the three messengers are naïve creatures, Yi is chiefly interested in sketching the greedy people of this world. The Second Messenger expresses his thoughts on the familial fight over the bequest, and deplores that "The human world is as jumbled as the world of dogs" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 49). The Eldest Son and the Second Son fight over property and a bank account left by their mother. As the dead mother in her coffin listens to their quarrel, she suddenly stands up and slaps the cheeks of both sons. She gives her lesson to the sons through mime, and the three messengers translate her gestures to her sons. The dead mother admonishes her two sons not to sell her house for speculation. She utters through the mouth of the Second Messenger that "I constructed the house as our nest in which the head [the eldest son] of our family protected us and our family line continued from generation to generation" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 52). In the last scene, she leaves for the Underworld with the three messengers. Yi Yun-t'aek satirizes the speculative investment in real estate, which remains one of the biggest economic issues in South Korea up to the present. Yet, notwithstanding his affirmation of the shamanist stance

aloof from this world and indifferent to gain, his imagined ideal nation is a peaceful nest completely founded on the Confucian principles of headship and perdurance of family line.

As I mentioned, *Ogu* was mired in critical debate on the issue of theatricalization of *gut*. Specifically, the scene of the house in mourning was severely criticized due to its seeming insincerity. Certainly, Yi Yun-t'aek challenges our taboo toward death and the dead body by incorporating the shamanist affirmation of death. As critic Kim Yong-su aptly points out, the playful atmosphere of the house in mourning in *Ogu* was enabled in part by the introduction of the shamanist tradition inherited by the profession of the male shamans like Sök-ch'ul in *Ogu* (2006: 65).¹⁴²

As a male shaman, Sök-ch'ul is the principal medium of the dead and the living. But, other elements are “alien” to the shamanist thought and worldview in the production of *Ogu*, specifically, the images of the three messengers of the Underworld with big sham phalluses conspicuously protruding from their waistlines. Where do these images come from?

In the last scene, where the Third Messenger and the daughter of the Eldest Son make friends, she asks, “Where are you from?” “He pokes her chest with his finger, saying, “I was born out of your mind. Human thoughts created me. We are the same mind and the body” (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 58). The metaphysical conjugality of the living and the dead metaphorically represented as the sexual intercourse in the play recalls

¹⁴² Traditionally, in Korea, female shamans become shamans through a ritual of divine possession, and male shamans inherit the job of a shaman through the training of shamanist singing and dancing from his shaman parents. Thus, in comparison, the *gut* performed by a female shaman is more serious than the *gut* practiced by a male shaman. In other words, the male shaman's *gut* performance contains more entertaining components such as jokes.

the carnivalesque imagery of “the pregnant death” to mind. The German reviewer, Ralf Shtiprel, who saw the production of *Ogu* presented in the German international Theatre Festival in Essen in 1991, writes, “Being accompanied by the intense drum sounds, the shamanist ritual for the dead began with *Carnival* [italics mine].” He describes the three messengers of the Underworld as “*devils* [italics mine] with grotesque make-up.” He writes, “they had such huge penises that they looked indecent. But, they felt like cute babies.” As to the scene of the shamanist preparation of the dead body which was treated comically, he notes, “The scene looked similar to the gestures of a *classical buffoon* [italics mine]” (1993: 198-9). As the German reviewer saw the production of *Ogu* through the lens of Carnival, the production incorporates “Western” cultural texts transferable to European audiences. When the production excessively emphasizes the “primitive,” native sensibility that is assumed lost in the advanced European cultures, I contend, the danger of reverse Orientalism cannot be avoided. In *Ogu*, the image of the phallus of the three messengers from the Underworld reminds the spectators of a primitive totem. In this respect, the main idea of *Ogu*, the metaphysics of death, seems neither uniquely Korean nor universal. The universality manifested through the production of *Ogu* is no more than the universality claim of humanism; all human beings are born and die and have sex. If the notion of universality is loosely defined as something “widespread” to the various cultures in the world, *Ogu* embodies the “universal” phallogocentric myth of patriarchy grounded on the somatic sexual differentiation of the phallus and the womb as the symbols of “a desiring man and a desired woman.” In *Ogu*, the vital energy of life is metonymically represented as the

phallus (penis) of the Second Messenger and the receptacle as the hip (womb) of the Widower.

5.0 MINJOKGŬK IN THE 1990S

5.1 OH T'AE-SŎK'S MINJOKGŬK IN THE 1990S

Key to Oh T'ae-sŏk's *minjokgŭk* written after the inauguration of the civilian government in 1992 is the issue of the *yŏksa paro chapki* (rectification of history). The governmental project was established in the epochal spirit of a nation newly born after the abolition of 50 years of dictatorial regimes. Under Kim Young-sam's "Civilian Administration," in 1995, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Korean independence from Japan, the *yŏksa paro chapki* project was engaged symbolically in demolishing the remnant of the colonial legacy. On August 15, the dome of the National Museum building in Seoul was dismantled as a part of the commemoration ritual. The museum building was perceived as the symbol of Japanese imperialism, since it had once been occupied by the Japanese Government-General of *Chosŏn*. Its historical significance was theatrically amplified, being accompanied by fireworks, balloons, patriotic music, and solemn speeches. Fifty thousand spectators waving the national flag was the most spectacular part of the scene. The ritual's emotional intensity seemed to arise from the socially symbolic cleansing, through which the shame and guilt from colonial memories could slide into amnesia.

In the sense that nationalist spirit always selectively remembers a golden age, it looked to be a necessary process. But, behind this encouragement of the recuperation of the national spirit, the event was politically motivated. After a succession of dictatorships in South Korea, Kim Young-sam became the first president whose power was not dependent on the military. In order to distinguish his "Civilian Administration," his government deliberately used this cleansing ritual to signify a break from the undesirable past (colonialism and dictatorship), heralding the opening of a "new era of hope." Ironically, "it was not long after this that Kim Young Sam [Kim Young-sam] himself suffered disgrace, with his son convicted of embezzlement and jailed. The president was blamed for the corruption and incompetence of his family as well as his regime. The economic crisis that required an IMF bailout in 1997 and 1998 sealed his reputation and the fate of his party, which lost the presidential election of 1997 to Kim Dae-jung, the leader of the opposition and the former leader of the democracy movement" (Kim Haboush JaHyun 2001: 209). Since the end of the 1980s, beginning with the parliamentary hearing set up for Chun Tu-whan, the issue of rejecting the constructed history rose up as the dominant socio-political discourse.

5.1.1 *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*

As the Kim Young-sam regime embraced "globalization" as nomadic transcapitalism in the spirit of new hope and declared 1992 as the initiating year of globalization in South Korea, Oh T'ae-sök articulated its drawbacks and claimed the stronger nationalist spirit. *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River* concretized his vision of

national unity. In his directorial notes for the premiere, he observes, “It is said that the whole world is getting conglomerated today. In such a situation, our self-identity should be more emphasized. For that reason, our traditional beauty, color, sound, and movement, which are the fruits of our long history, should be refined for theatrical presentation to enhance the sense of pride for our culture among audiences”(qtd. in Kim Mun-whan 1993: 22). Thus inspired, in 1993, *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River* premiered in commemoration of the occasion of the opening of “The Cathedral of Arts,” which was intended to celebrate the initiation of the civilian government as “the administration of culture.”¹⁴³

In the production, Oh T’ae-sök caught the epochal drive of *yŏksa paro chapki* from a quietly different angle. In pursuit of national unity, his humanist worldview affirms not only chastisement but also forgiveness and reconciliation. In an interview with critic Sŏ Yŏn-ho, Oh T’ae-sök states, “since the end of the *Chosŏn* dynasty for more than a century we had lived a dismal life . . . Don’t we have to perform a national rite? If we perform a national rite for our ancestors who died and became the wandering ghosts . . . couldn’t their spirits, in return, pray blessing for the well-being of our nation? (2005: 230-1). He continues, “I consider that the chief of the wandering ghosts should be the ghost of the king of the nation, for instance, King Ŭija who was captured and taken hostage by the Chinese general, So Chŏng Pang” (2005: 231). In the same interview, Oh T’ae-sök agrees with “the historical opinion that Confuciansm ruined the *Paekche* dynasty around the tenth century.” And, he is convinced that “to some extent, we still suffer from the historical misstep, when Confucianism made our people weak.” He

¹⁴³ In 1993, *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River* won the Paeksang Grand Award for the “Best Play”, and in 1994, it won the Korean Critics Association Award for the “Best Production.”

contends, “Because it neglected the importance of practical science we were defeated by Japan.” (Oh T’ae-sök and Sö Yön-ho 2005: 233).¹⁴⁴ But, as we will see, ironically, through *Under the Paekma River*, Oh T’ae-sök inculcates the ideas of filial piety and fidelity to nation “essential” to Confucian ideology.

Oh T’ae-sök asserts that the ancestors who sacrificed the lives of their people by adhering to Confucian ideology have to be indicted and judged first. In *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*, they are Söngch’ung, General Kaebaek, and King Ŭija of the *Paekche* dynasty.¹⁴⁵ Söngch’ung was a leading Confucianist scholar and was praised as a royal subject, but Oh T’ae-sök regards him as an incapable scholar in that he took a passive action to save his country; he just wrote a letter informing King Ŭija of the critical situation of the nation. Even though General Kaebaek was admired for his valor, Oh T’ae-sök considers him to be inhumane, since he killed his own family before he went to the front according to the Confucianist honor code. Oh T’ae-sök assesses King Ŭija as thoroughly incompetent as a political leader and the very man who made his nation collapse; he was deceived by Kümhwa, a beautiful mistress who turned out to be engaged in espionage planned by Kim Yu Shin of the enemy country, *Shila*.¹⁴⁶ Due to his political maladministration the young people of his nation were sacrificed in the war with *Shila*.

In *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*, Oh T’ae-sök contextualizes this ancient history as symbolic punishment and reconciliation in the contemporary project of the

¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the ancestral worship for the dead on behalf of the living of the present is at the core of Confucian religious thought. Also, in the shamanist theology, the dead ancestors who are usually important historical personages are worshiped as protecting deities.

¹⁴⁵ The *Paekche* dynasty existed during 260- 660.

¹⁴⁶ Allied with *Tang* (China at that time), *Shila* unified the divided Three States by defeating *Paekche* and *Koguryö* successively.

rectification of history. In doing this, he deploys a spiritualistic medium to summon the historical figures in order to rebuke their historical faults first and attempt to reconcile with them. As a medium of the dead and the living, a shaman, the great mother¹⁴⁷ of the nation, is called for this task. In *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*, a young female shaman, Sundan, takes a journey to the Underworld to encounter the historical figures. Oh's persistent theme of the feminine life principle is dramatized through the spiritual quest of the great mother of the nation. I will show how symbolically Oh T'ae-sök instrumentalizes the womb of Sundan as the locus of the rebirth of the nation.

Under the Moonlight of Paekma River is one of the most complicated plays of Oh T'ae-sök in light of its borrowings from and allusions to many source materials. Moreover, the space and time of the narratives cross over from the present to the tenth century, from this world to the Underworld, and from dream to sober reality. Complexity lies not only in the intercultural narrative texts but also in hybrid forms and styles. Critic Kim Pang-ok comments on the acting style of the premiere production, which oscillates "between the extremes of hyper-realism and Grotowskian expressive acting style." She points out that in Oh T'ae-sök's productions the salient feature of the lateral arrangement of actors on stage is reminiscent of *kabuki* acting even though the director denies it. (1994: 27). Indeed, Oh T'ae-sök insists that the lateral arrangement came from "our" way of speech in which two people in dialogue did not look in each other's eyes. According to him, for instance, Korean farmers in old times sat laterally on the levee of a rice paddy and talked without looking each other. He articulates this dialogue pattern as the alternative to the "Western living room theatre." As well, his spectacular

¹⁴⁷ In Korea, a female shaman is called "the great mother."

scene construction and “object fetishism” contribute to the *whaesae* (Japanese style, especially *kabuki* style) controversy around his productions (Kim Pang-ok 1993: 28). In the premiere production of *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*, a wild creature (Söngch’ung”), a huge spider (General Kyebaek”), scarecrows (King Ŭija and his three sons), and Yöngdök in a Pierrot costume provided spectacle. The stage was covered by black vinyl and there were gates to the Underworld, colored red and green. Also, Oh T’ae-sök is well known for the use of the hybrid music from pop to “Western” classics. In the production, he used “Western” music like “A Hymn Dedicated to Apollo” and Forte’s “Peace in the World” and the Korean *trot* song “Under the Moonlight of Paekma River” (Chu Yöng-mi 1993: 209).

As a whole, the play is framed with the *ŭnsanbyölsHINGUT*. *ŬnsanbyölsHINGUT* is a *gut* reserved for the special deities who were the perished *Paekche* soldiers during the war between *Paekche* and *Shila*. (*Ŭnsan* in Ch’unghnam Province today belonged to *Paekche* during the period of the Three States.) It is likely that Oh T’ae-sök was familiar with the *gut* since his hometown, Arungguji of Söch’ön in Ch’unghnam Province, is close to *Ŭnsan*.¹⁴⁸ The historical events and the characters of the play come from the two major history books recording the history of the Three States, *Samguksagi* (*A Chronicle of the Three States*) and *Samgukyusa* (*History of the Three States*) both of which were written around the thirteenth century during the *Koryö* dynasty.¹⁴⁹ In these two sources, histories are mixed with myths and legends.¹⁵⁰ Oh T’ae-sök also adopts the stories in the origin myth of *ŭnsanbyölsHINGUT* and the episodes of the shamanist myth of

¹⁴⁸ In an interview with Sö Yön-ho Oh T’ae-sök told that he saw the performance of *ŭnsanbyölsHINGUT* (2005: 227).

¹⁴⁹ United *Shila* was succeeded by *Koryö*, and *Koryö* was succeeded by *Chosön*.

¹⁵⁰ It is *Samgukyusa* (*History of the Three States*) that records the origin myth of *Tangun*.

Paridegi, who became the original deity of Korean shamanism. But, under close examination, the play appears to rely on more than “indigenous” traditions and histories. The play alludes to the myths of Oedipus, to the tales of heroes, and to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.

The play is set in a village called “Sŏnamri” somewhere in Ch’ungch’ŏng Province in contemporary Korea. It can be argued that the fate of Sŏnamri is a metaphorical image of the Korean ethnic community. In the first scene, Halmŏm is shown as a devoted shaman. She offers sacred foods to the deities, Ch’ŏnshin (god of heaven) and Sanshin (god of mountain), who protect the village. Traditionally, she prays for the well-being of the village. Being struck by her constant devotion, Ch’ŏnshin and Sanshin give her an oracle through a dream. In it, she sees herself and Sundan, her foster daughter, in their previous incarnations. Framed as a play within a play, the dream of Halmŏm unfolds in front of the eyes of the audience. Ch’ŏnshin and Sanshin appear and direct her dream. Sanshin explains that her dream/play begins with “the historical situation where King Ŭija and his three sons sought refuge” during the war with *Shila* (Oh T’ae sŏk 2005: 84).

The dream/play soon shifts to the royal court of King Ŭija during peacetime. Ch’ŏnshin and Sanshin also play the roles of royal subjects of the King. As Ch’ŏnshin reports about a prophecy regarding the future of the *Paekche* dynasty, King Ŭija commands to summon a shaman. Ch’ŏnshin tells Halmŏm that “you are supposed to appear as the shaman here” (Oh T’ae-sŏk 2005: 84-5). Halmŏm confronts the King and his mistress, Kŭmhwa. As the same actress playing Sundan impersonates Kŭmhwa, the

audience come to know that Kūmhwa is the previous incarnation of Sundan.¹⁵¹ Halmöm is asked about the prophecy, which foretells that the fate of the *Paekche* dynasty is like that of the full Moon. This episode about the prophecy regarding the fate of the *Pakche* dynasty comes from *History of the Three States*. Halmöm argues with Kūmhwa over the disparate interpretations of the future of the *Paekche* dynasty. While Halmöm interprets the meaning of “the full Moon” as the preliminary stage of the wane (decline) and cautions about the danger of enemy attack, Kūmhwa asserts that the full Moon is the symbol of prosperity and accuses Halmöm of lying. We see that Kūmhwa as a spy of *Shila* deliberately draws King Ŭija’s political attention away so that *Shila* can have time to prepare for a war with *Pakche*. King Ŭija believes in Kūmhwa and he stabs Halmöm in her side. When Halmöm gets a closer look at Kūmhwa, she utters, “She is Sundan for sure.” Ch’ōnshin confirms her recognition, responding, “Kūmhwa is the previous existence of Sundan” (Oh T’ae-sök 2005: 85).

The scene of the dream/play returns to wartime. In the scene, King Ŭija is portrayed metaphorically as a puppet (a scarecrow). He is an incompetent king only displaying easy-going attitudes and a peace-at-any-price principle. The King relies on Chinese forces, but he is betrayed and captured by the Chinese General, So Chōng Pang. In the end of the scene, when *Kūmhwa* is asked to accompany the King in refuge, she “*stabs King Ŭija in his back.*” After witnessing Kūmhwa’s crime, Halmöm is so astounded that she breaks down.

As soon as Halmöm awakes from her dream, she feels that something has to be done for both Sundan and the village. Through her dream, Halmöm comes to know that

¹⁵¹ The idea of incarnation is the fulcrum of Buddhist (actually Hindu) thought, but it has been well woven into shamanist and Confucianist religious systems.

in her previous life Sundan committed a crime against King Ŭija. Interpreting her dream as a divine revelation that the dead spirit of King Ŭija will visit the village soon, Halmŏm plans to perform a village *gut* for King Ŭija. As Sundan knows that Halmŏm alternately performs the village *gut* for King Ŭija and General Kyebaek, she wonders why Halmŏm changes the order of the *gut*. With a dubious look, she inquires, “Isn’t General Kyebaek supposed to be served this year?” Eventually, Halmŏm tells Sundan that “You are Kŭmhwa in your previous life.” Sundan asks in return, “I am what?” (Oh T’ae-sŏk 2005: 87).

Halmŏm feels a premonition of misfortune of the village, and her ominous foreboding immediately plays out. As in the origin myth of *ŭnsanbyŏlshingut*, the next scene begins with news that a pile of dead bodies, inferred as those of *Paekche* period, is discovered. Following this news, inauspicious presages and events beset the community. Chihwan, one of the villagers, has a bad dream in which the whole village died from a rampant epidemic caused by eating a big fish. Some villagers report that they saw a ghost crying at every road in their village. In reality, a critical situation occurs in the home of one of the villagers, Hansandaek. Her baby is dying with unidentifiable convulsions. Feeling misgivings, the villagers flock to the house of Halmŏm. According to the origin myth of *ŭnsanbyŏlshingut*, young people in Ŭnsan one by one died of an unnamable plague. One day, the ghost of the *Paekche* general appeared and entreated village people to appease his animosity. Guided by his spirit, the villagers found great numbers of the dead bodies of *Paekche* soldiers buried during the war.

The rest of the scenes show how Sundan transforms into the great mother of the village and performs the village *gut*. When Halmŏm becomes ill for no apparent reason,

Sundan comes forward to perform the village *gut* for the sake of her foster mother as an expression of filial piety. But, at this stage, Sundan is not yet a proper spiritualistic medium, since her capacity is untested. Although she is trained in the singing and dancing necessary for a shaman, she is an ordinary young woman who is a kindergarten teacher majoring in child education. Skeptical about her capability as a spiritualistic shaman, the villagers call for Yöngdök, a competent *paksumudang* (a male shaman) who performs only large and expensive *guts*, for a *gut* for King Ŭija. Also, Halmöm does not want Sundan to perform the *gut*. Halmöm regards it as too risky because Sundan in her previous existence is the very enemy of King Ŭija.

If we look at how Sundan transforms into the spiritualistic medium, we will notice how Oh T'ae-sök conceives the task of the great mother of the nation. Crucially, it is not through her human will, but the divine possession. In spite of the warning of Halmöm, Sundan is drawn to the preparatory process of the *gut*. In the play, Oh T'ae-sök emphasizes the supernatural powers surrounding Sundan. While Yönsun, an aide of Yöngdök, dances with a shaman's knife, the spirit of General Kyebaek appears and jumbles up Sundan's thoughts. As the *gut* reserved for him is cancelled, the spirit of the General attempts to interrupt the village *gut* for King Ŭija. Yönsun drops the knife and the edge of the knife slaps the back of the hand of Sundan who holds a washbasin full of water. Sundan looks at her blood smeared in the water and nonchalantly says that "I need to change the water." Watching this scene, as he walks by Sundan, Yöngdök feels the visit of the spirit of Kümhwa and the impending spiritual possession of Sundan. He exclaims, "Kümhwa, here came Kümhwa" "to search for King Ŭija." "*The spirits of Kyebaek and Kümhwa dance with leaping strides*" and as Yöngdök hits Sundan with a

big shaman's fan "*Sundan dances with bouncing strides like Kūmhwa*", which signifies that Sundan is possessed by the spirit of Kūmhwa. Yōngdök calls Sundan Kūmhwa, and one of the villagers, Töksang speaks out, "She is possessed by the spirit of Kūmhwa" (Oh T'ae-sök 2005: 102-104).¹⁵²

In Korea, traditionally female shamans become shamans through a passage of a rite called "*shinnaerim*," which literally means "descending god." In a state of trance, a female shaman dances on the edge of a long knife called "*chaktu*" in order to prove her supernatural power. Through this initiating rite, the female shaman marries her *momju* (the descended god to her body). This scene dramatizes this rite of passage. By contrast, male shamans like Yōngdök become shamans through inheriting the family profession. There is no such initiating rite for the male shamans.

Kūmhwa/Sundan encounters the spirit of King Ŭija. She utters, "I came to reconcile with you. My life depends on you. If you want, kill me" (Oh T'ae-sök 2005: 104). The spirit of King Ŭija refuses to kill her, responding, "With a sword of a king, how can I cut off woman's body" (Oh T'ae-sök 2005: 104). As the spirit of King Ŭija leaves, Kūmhwa/Sundan ventures to search for him in the Underworld. Sundan accompanies Yōngdök, and she is aided by Ch'önshin and Sanshin through the course of this dangerous journey. Kūmhwa/Sundan and Yōngdök travel to the Underworld three times, meeting Sōngch'ung, General Kyebaek, and King Ŭija, who are suffering harsh punishments. Sōngch'ung is changed into a dreadful wild animal and he cannot eat because he died during fasting. General Kyebaek is transformed into a huge spider catching his son (a butterfly) and attempting to eat him. King Ŭija is a scarecrow

¹⁵² The script is included in the series of *Anthology of Oh T'ae-sök's Plays*. The Anthology is comprised with 10 books, and *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River* appears in vol. 10.

relentlessly stabbed by three hundred knives. Kūmhwa/Sundan reprimands Sōngch'ung and yells at him, "you are the very man who strangled people with a snare of Confucianism." As the voice of the author, she severely criticizes the three fundamental principles and the five moral disciplines in human relations of Confucianism; "When your husband is angry, you have to smile. When he is worried about you, you should be humble. Don't express a disgraceful attitude. Do not talk back to the elder. Do not laugh in front of the elder. Don't do something. You should not do something. Get humble. Be respectful. Be devoted. You live under someone's thumb. By these ways, you made people of the nation imbeciles. You turned humble and aspiring people into the offspring of slaves who study another's face and cannot express their own opinions" (Oh T'ae-sök 2005: 109). After Sōngch'ung acknowledges his faults, he bows to Kūmhwa/Sundan.

In the play, the leitmotif of the journey to the Underworld is borrowed from the myth of Paridegi, who is the originator of Korean shamanism. Born as the seventh daughter of a king, Paridegi was abandoned by her parents who wished to have a son. But, when her father was dying, it was Paridegi who dared to travel to the Underworld to get a magical medicine to cure him. The shamanist myth displays the combination of shamanism and Confucianism, as it is also grounded on the core Confucian moral of filial piety. Even though Oh T'ae-sök criticizes Confucianism and he pays a great deal of attention to other religious traditions such as shamanism and Buddhism in *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*, as all these systems of thoughts are syncretically combined, he ironically propagandizes the Confucian ideas of filial piety for one's parents like in Paridegi myth. Furthermore, the Paridegi myth is also the product of

Confucian ideology of motherhood. In the Underworld, Paridegi could get the magical medicine on the condition that she gave birth to seven sons of the King of the Underworld.

Like Paridegi, Kūmhwa/Sundan passes through three hardships. “In the myth of Paridegi handed down in the Seoul region, there are episodes in which Paridegi draws water from a well with a bucket, cuts wood, and burns wood for three years respectively” (Kim Nam-sök 2003: 107). Alluding to Paridegi’s rite of passage, Oh T’ae-sök makes Kūmhwa/Sundan rescue the souls of Söngch’ung, General Kyebaek, and King Ŭija out of the Hell at the cost of her hardships, by drawing water from a well for three years, cutting wood for three years, and working bellows in her own repentance for causing the destruction of the *Paekche* dynasty. In the meantime, King Ŭija himself practices his self-punishment by taking water with a water-carrying yoke for three years.

As I mentioned above, even though Oh T’ae-sök borrows the stories and episodes from the cultural reservoirs of the “indigenous” traditions, his image-making and dramaturgy rely on “Western” sources as well. Like in the myth of Oedipus, the village (community) is under threat, since someone alien to the community but residing in the community committed a formidable crime in the past. Through an oracle, we learn that Kūmhwa, the enemy spy, is the previous incarnation of Sundan. The village people suffer because of her crime in her previous life. Like Oedipus, Kūmhwa/Sundan punishes herself for the sake of community. As to different ways of self-punishment, whereas Oedipus travels to his own past and eventually makes himself blind, Kūmhwa/Sundan takes the dangerous journey to the Underworld and for three years with King Ŭija she takes iron out of the water of the Paekma River and makes swords.

According to the original (hi)story, Kŭmwha incited King Ŭija to have the people of *Paekche* throw things that were made of iron into the Paekma River. She convinced King Ŭija that only in this way could the coming misfortune of the *Paekche* dynasty be prevented. True to her expectation, her scheme incurred horrendous consequences for the people of the *Paekche* dynasty. When *Shila* waged war, *Paekche* had no proper weapons to fight with. It is a well-known historical incident that three thousand court ladies of King Ŭija threw themselves into the Paekma River. The play's title, *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*, came from a titular popular song in the 1960s which sings of the grief of loss evoked from the death of the three thousands court ladies.

As Oh T'ae-sŏk acknowledges, another source is Dante's *Divine Comedy*. When he reflects upon his task as the inheritor of "indigenous" traditions, he states, regretfully, "my imagination was a little bit naïve in portraying the world of the Underworld. I feel that something is lacking. I honestly confess that it was the Western Underworld brought from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. I do not know about our Underworld, but the images of the Underworld in the play did not dovetail with our sensibility at all" (1994: 332). In the play, Ch'ŏnshin (god of heaven) has both Yŏngtŏk and Kŭmhwa/Sundan put on a hat and tells them, "It is requested that when you go back you should not tell anything you saw in the Underworld. If you do that, you will be punished (and die)." In the stage direction, Oh T'ae-sŏk writes, "*When they put on their hats, a sailing ship appears from the rear stage. Four people keep stroke in rowing. . . . When Ch'ŏnshin takes off their hats, they all disappear and Yŏngtŏk and Sundan arrive at the road of the*

village where the table for the sacrificial rite is set (Oh T'ae-sök 2005: 110)”¹⁵³ On their arrival in this world, one of the villagers, Töksang, welcomes them and says, “You had a hard time to go that far. Did you see a ghost? Did you talk to any ghost?” (Oh T'ae-sök 2005: 110). As we shall see, Yöngtök, in response, describes what he saw in the Underworld differently from Kümhwa/Sundan. For instance, when he is asked to describe his journey, he tells the villagers, “Led by three turtles, a sailing ship arrived for us. We had a fabulous party on the ship. I was delighted with the sweet smell of flowers and clean air that surrounded us.” As Kümhwa/Sundan is stunned by his story, she says, “What are you talking about? What smell of flowers and a sailing ship in the underground? Söngch'ung wasn't even a human being. The Underworld was like a pigpen” (Oh T'ae-sök 2005: 110-111). Why does Oh T'ae-sök insert such a scene? What is the rhetorical function of the hat? In shamanism, it is only a shaman who can be the medium of this world, and the other world and the living people are prohibited to enter the other world. From this context, the hat, I assume, is the symbol of memory.

The memory of the Underworld is key to determine who is the “true” spiritual medium of history. Yöngtök is confused or he intentionally invents false stories (memories) about the Underworld because he is afraid of being punished. In contrast, Sundan reports what she saw and did in the Underworld to the villagers. Nothing dreadful happens to her in spite of her telling. What does Oh T'ae-sök want to say here? Yöngtök as *paksumudang*, a professional male shaman, shows his limit as an ordinary human being. He is a grand and professional shaman whose village *gut* costs a fair amount of money. He sets out on his task at the request of the villagers. Yet, it is

¹⁵³ In the performance of *nökgut* (a dispatching ritual for the dead), a shaman uses a small paper sailing boat to send the soul of the dead to the Underworld.

Kūmhwa/Sundan who can report the “truth” about the Underworld, in its allegorical representation of the Korean history. For that reason, only Kūmhwa/Sundan is a truthful medium through which the wrong history can be rectified. The adventure of Kūmhwa/Sundan is that of the hero of a fairy tale and a myth, in which usually the male protagonist is abandoned, but when he is chosen and given an important task, through overcoming hardships (usually three obstacles), he is reborn as a hero. Likewise, Kūmhwa/Sundan is given rebirth as the great mother of the village (nation). As the great mother, she exorcises the “wrong” past and she gives birth to a new village (nation).

It is not accidental that the moment of the completion of her task is coincident with the death of Halmöm, and the restored baby of Hansandaek. As Hansandaek acknowledges Halmöm by saying that “Thank you Halmöm, thanks to you, my baby becomes alive,” Sundan tells the villagers, “The baby is Halmöm. Halmöm is incarnated as the baby” (Oh T’ae-sök 2005: 125). At the end of the play, magically, “*King Ŭija, his three sons, and Söngch’ung pass by the villagers riding bicycles*” (Oh T’ae-sök 2005: 126). As the bicycle is the metaphor of historical memory for Oh T’ae-sök,¹⁵⁴ the history is thus meant to be rectified by the symbolic ritual processes of chastisement, forgiveness, and reconciliation in *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*.

By extension, for Oh T’ae-sök, the rebirth of Sundan is the symbolic dramatic action for the role of today’s young generation in South Korea. It is suggestive that the

¹⁵⁴ Intra-textually, Oh T’ae-sök utilizes the image of the bicycle as the metaphor of memory and history in many of his plays. Specifically, in his play, *Bicycle* (1983), through the image of bicycle, he recollects the horrible memories (stories) of the Korean War. It is marked that Kwangju massacre in 1980 strongly influenced his focused theme on the war and death in the 1980s. His major three war plays, *Sansuyu* (1980), *Bicycle* (1983), and *The Arbor Over the Clouds* (1990), were written during this period. According to Oh T’ae-sök, the slaughter of people by the same race in Korean War and Kwangju massacre reminded him his autobiographical experience of death during the Korean War in which people killed their own race, families and relatives (Sö Yön-ho and Oh T’ae-sök 2002: 116-117).

premiere production was performed at the commemoration of the birth of the civilian government proclaiming the age of new hope. As an ideal model of the divine accomplishment, the task of Sundan is related to the spiritual quest of the young generation of South Korea today. As Oh T'ae-sök comments on the image of Sundan, with a patriotic tone, he expresses his wish for the young generation. In the interview with critic Sö Yön-ho, he remarks, "in *ŭnsanbyölsingut* a shaman adopts a deserted girl who, it is hoped, will inherit her role. But, if the girl says that I cannot do it because I will be scorned by people due to my profession, the tradition will be discontinued. One of the big frames of our culture will be relinquished. It would be unfortunate that we lost the tradition of shamanist ritual through which we can meet whoever we want to see us from this world to the other world. Without it, our life will be colorless, strained, and cramped. My biggest wish is that [through the performance of *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*] the young generation come to recognize the importance of their task in continuing the tradition" (2005: 230). For the premiere production of the play, Oh aptly cast Kim Söng-nyö for the role of Sundan, an actress practiced in traditional singing (*p'ansori*) and a *prima donna* of *madangnori*.¹⁵⁵

Critic Lee Sang-ran writes that as the great mother of the nation Sundan acts as a historical agent (2007:31). But, I believe, to some extent, Lee overestimates the subjectivity of Sundan for there is no room for human volition in the stage of spiritual possession *Kümhwa/Sundan* indicates. Conversely, although she does not fully

¹⁵⁵ *Madangnori* is a commercial style of *madanggük*. Son Jin-ch'aek, the husband of Kim Söng-nyö, is the originator of this genre. In 1974, Son Jin-ch'aek created a *madanggük* style play, *Seoul Maldukyi*, when he was a member of Hö Kyu's *Minye* (Ethnic Art) Theatre Company. In 1986, Son founded the *Mich'u* (Beauty and Ugliness) Theatre Company. Since 1981, until the partnership was severed in 2001, *Mich'u's madangnori* had been sponsored by the MBC (Munhwa Broadcasting Company) for more than 20 years. The MBC aired Son's *madangnori* performance, which had been staged at such huge gymnasiums as the Munhwa Sports Hall and the Changch'ung Indoor Stadium.

understand the meaning of divine spiritualism in the production, critic Kim Pang-ok states that “it feels wrong that human and moral dimensions of Sundan should have been added to her role as a spiritualistic medium” (1993: 31). With his stress on the Confucian idea of fidelity for the nation, Oh T’ae-sök seems to say that the fate of the nation depends on the accomplishment of a chosen and possessed individual hero. Only one of the villagers, disabled Hŭisun, is depicted as a very active person; otherwise the villagers are onlookers to history, as they are the spectators of the village *gut*. In a sense, Oh T’ae-sök’s views on history and people in the nation are coincident with those of bourgeoisie nationalism, which is firmly grounded in the liberalist-humanist idea of an individual hero (elite) who fights against the repressive system (the wrong history).

5.1.2 *Toraji*

In an interview with critic Sö Yön-ho in 2002, Oh T’ae-sök implies a change in direction in relation to his dramaturgy. He remarks, “I am not going to write stories about the ghost anymore” and “I will try to observe ourselves closely under a microscope and create narratives about an individual through which we can have synthetic views on our history” (311-12). As a matter of fact, he has pursued this kind of work since the early 1990s, and *Toraji* (1994) is the first example. Unlike his history plays of the earlier period in which the ancient dynasties were the chief sources of the narratives, from this period, Oh T’ae-sök deals exclusively with the Korean modern history. Characteristically, his later history plays feature his metahistorical reflection on the

history of modern Korea. From this period, Oh T'ae-sök fully pursues the task of *yöksa paro chapki*, rectification of history, in his theatrical undertakings.

Oh T'ae-sök's later history plays like *Toraji* conspicuously respond to the changing geopolitical dynamics surrounding the Far Eastern Asian countries brought about by the altered global situations and conditions after the collapse of the socialist block. As a historical event, in 1992, South Korea broke off diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and normalized the diplomatic relations with China. Since then, the transit of products and people between the two countries increased considerably. As expected, the existence of *chosŏnjok* (people of *Chosŏn*) living in Northeastern China as ethnic minorities became a concern for both nations.¹⁵⁶ *Chosŏnjok* people live in one of the autonomous regions in China where they maintain the Korean language and culture. Under the idea of a multi-ethnic nation, the Chinese government admits the autonomy of ethnic minorities, while increasingly reinforcing the united national identity as Chinese. *Chosŏnjok* people are mostly offspring of *Chosŏn* people who were moved to Northeastern China when Japan implemented labor mobilization for its puppet government in Manchuria. In addition to that, throughout the long history, Manchuria has been the border territory in which numerous ethnic groups lived and established nations together. In a sense, historically, China and Korea have a shared history in that area.

With the resurgence of nationalism in Far Eastern countries as part of global transition, the ownership and truthfulness of history became a political and diplomatic

¹⁵⁶ Oh T'ae-sök deals with *chosŏnjok* people who entered Korea as migrant laborers from his nationalist-humanist perspectives in *Yŏnpyŏn Popcorn* (1993). In the play, he indicts dishonest native Koreans for treating their race badly.

matter. The debates about the history of *Koguryŏ*¹⁵⁷ between Chinese and Korean scholars and diplomats became volatile, as the Korean scholars took note of a Chinese governmental history project called “*tongbukkongjŏng*” in the early 1990s.¹⁵⁸ Korean scholars and diplomats mounted a similar governmental project in order to rescue the Korean history (memory) from Chinese expropriation. In the mean time, in this period, Korean people were deeply concerned with the issue of “distortion” in Japanese history text books; the diplomatic dispute around the territory of Tokto island between Korea and Japan; the matters of sex slaves (“Comfort Women”) during the WW II and the relevant official apology and the indemnities of the Japanese government; Japan’s inclination to militarism; and so forth.¹⁵⁹

Accordingly, all these incidents seemed alarming to the nationalists of those nations and their reactions were more often than not violent. These historical incidents reminded nationalists like Oh T’ae-sŏk of the past history in which *Chosŏn* was contested between world powers and ultimately colonized. I will briefly sum up the domestic and international situations and conditions that Oh T’ae-sŏk examines in *Toraji*. At the end of the nineteenth century, *Chosŏn* was caught up in imperialism and complicated domestic power struggles. Taewŏngun, the father of King Kojong, seized power, and he implemented a policy of isolationism, but after the signing of the 1876

¹⁵⁷ *Koguryŏ* was one of the Three States. The *Koguryŏ* dynasty ruled the northern part of the Korean Peninsula belonging to the present North Korea. The dynasty existed during 194-668, and it was united with *Shilla*. Between the Three States and the *Koryŏ* dynasty is called “United *Shilla*.”

¹⁵⁸ “*Tongbukkongjŏng*” literally means “Research Project on the Area of Northeastern China.” It is noted that the history of “*tongbukkongjŏng*” began much earlier than the 1990s, but the scale of the project got bigger in terms of the numbers of the scholars involved and financial resources from the government. (Chŏn Pyŏng-kon 2006: 361-374).

¹⁵⁹ In *Manp’asikjŏk* (*The Magic Flute*, 2005), Oh T’ae-sŏk adopts an ancient legend about a magic flute, which is said to defeat foreign forces from the sea. In the play, the protagonist takes a journey to find the legendary magic flute to resolve such problems as the recent China-Korea history debate and Japanese “distortion” of history.

Kwanghwa Treaty with Japan, it became impractical. *Chosŏn* society was deeply distraught as incoming foreigners, mostly Japanese, were violating Korean customs and offending their sense of propriety. The Chinese in Korea evinced a strong sense of political superiority. Considerable information about Westernization had filtered into Korean court circles from China and Japan. Some scholarly *yangbans* (aristocrats) were considering modernizations, but the truly pressing issues were how to deal with the policies and ambitions of Russia, China, and Japan.

Specifically, China and Japan hastened to take advantage of Korea's weakness. Through the Kwanghwa treaty asserting Korea's independence, Japan rejected the younger brother relationship of Korea with China. But, Queen Myŏngsŏng and her clan followers dreaded the continental ambitions of Japan and encouraged Kojong's pro-Chinese sentiments. Two international powers thus clashed on the soil of *Chosŏn*, spurred on by the riot of *Chosŏn* soldiers in 1882. After the rioting that led to the restoration of Taewŏngun (the father of King Kojong), the Chinese government sent four thousand troops into Korea. Japan in response, sent in a military contingent of seven hundred Japanese to investigate conditions. They captured Taewŏngun and sent him into exile in China. King Kojong resumed the royal authority. Meanwhile, a revolutionary thinker and a leader of the Enlightenment party, Kim Ok-kyun, who is the protagonist of *Toraji*, returned to Korea from Japan, where he had gone to study Meiji Westernization reforms.

At that time, in King Kojong's court, pro-Chinese Paul Georg von Moellendorff served as an employee of the Customs Bureau sponsored by the faction of Queen Myŏngsŏng, but his reforms were undermined with little political support from the

faction, as its leaders clung stubbornly to conservative traditions. The pro-Japanese liberals, led by Kim Ok-kyun, favored many of Moellendorff's initiatives but resented both his pro-Russianism and his political influence. With Japanese backing, the members of the Enlightenment Party led by Kim Ok-kyun organized a *coup* to place themselves in power. In December 1884, at a dinner celebrating the opening of a new postal system, they captured King Kojong in a *coup d'état*. For three brief days they ruled, proclaiming radical reform in the name of the king. Promptly, Chinese troops led by Yuan Shikai attacked the new government, killing those who (unlike Kim Ok-kyun) did not manage to escape to Japan. In 1893, however, at the instigation of the court of King Kojong, Kim Ok-kyun was assassinated by Hong Chong-wu during his exile to Shanghai. But, as Japan seized power again after the *Tonghak* Farmers' War in 1894, several political exiles of the Enlightenment Party later returned to take prominent positions in the pro-Japanese cabinet during the *Kabo* reforms executed by the King Kojong's court in 1894. Through the *Kabo* reformation, Japan paved the road to the annexation of *Chosŏn*.

In *Toraji*, Oh T'ae-sŏk inquires why the Korean nation became the colony of Japan and what could be done to avoid the recurrence of such situations. As I mentioned before, his views of the nation are based on the patriarchal family in which the head has authority and responsibility. In his plays, nation is imagined as an extended nuclear family. As is the case with *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*, in Oh T'ae-sŏk's later history plays, the political leaders as the heads of the nation are solely responsible for the present dismal situation of the country. His encounter with modern Korean history begins with the imaginative postulation: if political leaders in

certain periods had (not) done “X”, we could have had a better nation, without the history of colonization and division.¹⁶⁰ His historical views thus appear to be consistent, irrespective of the period he considers.

In *Toraji*, Oh T’ae-sök deals with the “wrong” history of the *Chosŏn* dynasty embodied in King Kojong and the aborted chance for its rectification by the revolutionary, Kim Ok-kyun. In the play, King Kojong is severely criticized as the father of the nation who was responsible for colonization. King Kojong was the last king of the *Chosŏn* dynasty, and became the Emperor of the Korean Empire, which existed only thirteen years before the annexation by Japan in 1910. Oh T’ae-sök persistently maintains that, since we had an incompetent or repressive father of the nation our youth have been unjustly sacrificed. King Kojong in *Toraji* is ridiculed to the extent that he is portrayed as an immature child and a blockhead. To put it simply, for Oh T’ae-sök, King Kojong is not *sanaedaejangbu* (manly man).

In an interview with Oh T’ae-sök, critic Kim Mi-do comments on the characterization of King Kojong, and states, “There are contradictory interpretations about King Kojong and Queen Myöngsöng. You portray Kojong as an incompetent, even psychotic man.” And she asks, “Why did you impersonate him in that way?” Oh T’ae-sök answers, “King Kojong in my play is not just the historical figure, Kojong, but he is the symbol of the kings and the presidents whom we had. He is the allegory of president Rhee Seung-man, Park Jung Hee, Chun Tu-whan, so on and so forth. It does not matter whether King Kojong was brilliant or not and what he accomplished

¹⁶⁰ Regarding the issue of unification, in *A Prisoner for One Thousand Years* (1998), Oh T’ae-sök proposes his historical postulation: if Kim Ku, the president of the Korean Provisional Government in Shanghai had not been assassinated by An Tu-hüi in 1949, we could have avoided the division of our nation.

politically. The King is the conglomerate concept of the sovereigns (the presidents) whom I knew in my life” (1994: 49).

In *Toraji*, Oh T’ae-sök’s intention is not just exhibiting the ridiculous monarch, but portraying the real *sanaedaejangbu* (manly man), Kim Ok-kyun, who died for the nation. As opposed to the incapable parents of the nation, two great sons are presented in *Toraji*: Kim Ok-kyun and Hong Chong-wu. In *Toraji*, Oh T’ae-sök throws light on the life of Kim Ok-kyun who was the prime leader of the *kapshinjöngbyön* in 1884 — the first modern, military revolution on the soil of Korea. In *Toraji*, Kim Ok-kyun is portrayed as the “true” revolutionary; he is the Korean type of a patriotic young man and *sanaedaejangbu*, who really loves his nation even as he is sacrificed for it. Even at the moment of death, worried about the future of the nation, he requests that Hong Chong-wu, his assassin, convey his last word to King Kojong: “Use wisely the powers of China and Russia, but be careful about Japan” (Oh T’ae-sök 1994: 32). Controversially, Oh T’ae-sök postulates that if Kim Ok-kyun had succeeded with the revolution, Koreans would not have suffered the painful history of colonization.¹⁶¹ Instrumentally, Oh fabricates the fiction that Hong Chong-wu killed King Kojong, which is historically counter-factual.¹⁶²

The image of the victimized son in Oh’s earlier history play *Lifecord* (1974) is transfigured as the resistive, parricidal son in *Toraji*, where Oh T’ae-sök abandons the possibility of reconciliation through the feminine principle of life. While in *Lifecord*, King

¹⁶¹ Conversely, some Korean historians suppose that if Kim Ok-kyun had succeeded with the revolution, the Japanese colonization of *Chosön* would have been expedited in that the *coup d’état* was backed by the Japanese military forces. Historically, the fiasco of the *coup* was caused by the lack of the proper military forces from Japan. I consider that Oh’s historical postulation expresses his desire for a stronger nation.

¹⁶² In the play, Hong Chong-wu kills both Kim Ok-kyun and King Kojong.

Sejo is the very image of Tantalus, in *Toraji*, Kim Ok-kyun recalls both the sacrificial and the resistive son, Oedipus. That is, he is eaten up by the father of the nation due to his defiant acts. In the play, the conduct of Kim Ok-kyun is beatified as the determinate gesture for the salvation of the nation. Similarly, Hong Chong-wu is also depicted as a patriotic young man. Through his case, Oh T'ae-sök shows the divergent road taken, as Hong symbolically carries out the task of rectification of history: counterfactually, Oh T'ae-sök has Hong kill the King.

Since *Toraji*, Oh T'ae-sök has used historical allegory to teach a lesson and persuade the young generation to follow the paths taken by the national heroes. He remarks, "I want to compare the youth like An Chung-kun and Yun Pong-kil,¹⁶³ who muddled through bitter times, when the nation was under crisis, with the young generation of the present who live in the post-industrial capitalistic society. . . . An Chung-kun and Yun Pong-kil were the righteous men who died for a noble cause. But, the youth today just live in idleness, devise some expedient, and lead a corrupt life" (2002: 111). In an interview with critic Kim Mi-do, regarding the revolutionaries like Kim Ok-kyun, he observes, "By presenting the overwhelming deaths of people who strived to transform the nation under the incapable sovereigns, we need to rethink the significance of their deaths and ask ourselves how we are going to live" (1994: 48). From this context, it is understandable why he subtitles *Toraji* "A Fable for Adults" despite its being a history play. As Lukács insists, "the necessary anachronism" is inevitable in historical fiction, but it does not signify that excessive subjective interpretation in history

¹⁶³They are young patriots who assassinated important Japanese figures for national independence. An Chung-kun killed Ito Hirobumi, the first Governor-general of *Chosŏn* in Harbin in 1909, and Yun Pong-kil killed Sirakawa Yosinora, a commanding officer, and Kawabata Daiji, an executive officer, in Shanghai in 1932. Oh counts An Chun-kun and Yun Pong-kil as real *sanaedaejangbu* (manly man).

plays can be justified for an artistically better dramatic construction. Through the examination of the play in detail, I will discuss how Oh T'ae-sök's editorial reconstruction attends his thematic concerns.

In 1992, *Toraji* was initially shown in "Tokyo Art Theatre," but the production only dealt with Kim Ok-kyun and his Japanese follower, Wada, during his 10 years exile in Japan. In 1994, the full version of *Toraji* was premiered in the Little Theatre of the Cathedral of Arts, and it was performed as a part of "the Oh T'ae-sök Theatre Festival," which is the first theatre festival dedicated to a living playwright in South Korea. In the festival, he directed *Toraji* and *Why Did Shimch'öng Drown Herself Twice?*, and three other young directors presented his works (Kim Mi-do 1994: 42)¹⁶⁴ The play begins with a dumb show through which King Kojong and the Queen Myöngsöng are suggested as sexually deranged monarchs: "*from the bedroom of the Queen, a young chamberlain (a young boy) goes out as he pulls up his trousers. The Queen appears. She proceeds to the bedroom of the King. She executes the court lady who slept with the King*" (Oh T'ae-sök 1994: 9). According to the report of critic Kim Mi-do, Oh T'ae-sök devised a spectacle for this scene of execution which conspicuously reveals the Queen Myöngsöng as a wicked woman (1994: 49).

The next scene shows the King, the Queen, and Kim Ok-kyun in the King's Royal Office. When Kim Ok-kyun discusses the urgent political and diplomatic matters and affairs with the King, he parrots what the Queen says. Through this scene, Oh T'ae-sök suggests that the Queen is the practical power in the royal court. In the scene, the King is depicted as an imbecile, though this does not imply that the Queen is any better. King

¹⁶⁴ In the Festival, Yi Yun-t'aek directed Oh T'ae-sök's *The Vinyl House*. He changed the ending part and Oh T'ae-sök did not like his interpretation of the play (Kim Mi-do 1994: 45).

Kojong appears on the stage wearing a huge blanket around his whole body; the image of the King is like that of a baby who is tucked in a blanket. This mama's boy image refers to the popular opinion that the King was controlled by the Queen. Queen Myöngsöng also wears a blanket. This image reflects the historical judgment that the Queen was the puppet of the Min clan. By showing the images of the father and the mother of the nation in this way, Oh T'ae-sök deprives them of royal authority and dignity. Yet, in the play, even though Queen Myöngsöng is presented as a witch-like woman who overrides her husband, she is also presented as a victim. In Oh T'ae-sök's interpretation, the Queen experiences a horrible death from Japanese assassins because she has a powerless husband like King Kojong who cannot protect her after all.

The play is divided into twenty-four scenes, which include events about the fiasco of the *kapshin coup d'état* of Kim Ok-kyun, his exile in Japan for 10 years, his assassination by Hong Chong-wu, episodes that tell how the body of Kim Ok-kyun was dismembered and scattered throughout the nation and how his head was kept in a shrine by Japanese followers, and accounts of Kim Ok-kyun as the spirit of the dead. Through these panoramic views, the audience is induced to follow the paths of the revolutionary and to commemorate his political martyrdom. Specifically, in the scene of his exile to a Japanese island, emotional intensity is at its peak when Kim Ok-kyun recites a famous *kasa* (an old form of Korean verse) by Chöng Ch'öl. The verse titled *samiingok* (*The Song Dedicated to My Lover*) is known as a verse in which the author expresses his fidelity to his ruler with the allegory of romantic love. Interestingly, Oh T'ae-sök contrasts Kim's recitation with the playful work songs and dances of Japanese

women divers around him, highlighting Kim Ok-kyun's sincere patriotic intent. After the recitation, as if he saw the King in front of him, he steps forth and speaks out, "Your Highness, please consider the future of the nation. In so doing, you can prevent the advancement of evil forces so that the 500 years history of the *Chosŏn* dynasty can be continued" (Oh T'ae-sŏk 1994: 25).

In other scenes, Oh T'ae-sŏk uses this technique of contrast effectively again. Through the juxtaposition of the deaths of Kim Ok-kyun and Queen Myŏngsŏng, he emphasizes the intense political significance of the death of Kim Ok-kyun. Historically, after his assassination in China, the body of Kim Ok-kyun was brought into *Chosŏn*, and his body was dismembered as he was treated as a traitor. In the play, the scene of dismemberment catches the cruelty of the spectacle, as it is played grotesquely. As he cuts the body of Kim Ok-kyun, the executioner dances with the long sword, and sings as follows: "his two arms to Pyŏngyan Province and Hamkyŏng Province, his rib to Kyŏngki Province, his stomach to Ch'ungch'ŏng Province, his two legs to Hwanghae Province and Kangwŏn Province, and leave his head in Hanyang [Capital of *Chosŏn*]" (Oh T'ae-sŏk 1994: 33).

After this scene, the scene of the assassination of the Queen is shown in a very different manner.¹⁶⁵ As the scene of dismemberment of the body of Kim Ok-kyun is intended to elicit horror and sympathy toward a political martyr, the assassination scene of the Queen is rather focused on the brutality of Japanese assassins. Screams and blood fill the scene. Far from inducing compassion for the historical fact of the Queen's assassination, however, emotional apathy toward the Queen dominates the scene.

¹⁶⁵ Queen Myŏngsŏng was actually murdered by Japanese assassins.

Moreover, Oh T'ae-sök forges a spectacle, in which the dead queen is portrayed as a witch at the stake. The stage direction for the scene goes as follow; "*The court ladies whose white long under skirts are dyed with blood surround the dead Queen Min [Queen Myönsöng] and they dance. This looks as if the Queen was being burned*" (Oh T'ae-sök 1994: 34). In the premiere production of *Toraji*, the costume designer, Yi Söng-mu, put the large pattern of flame on the costumes of the court ladies and the lighting designer, Aikawa Masahaki, vivified the scene with the impressive lights (Kim Mi-do 1994: 51). In this scene, Oh T'ae-sök conducts a symbolic chastisement of the already dead Queen for her wrongdoing to history, as Oh does with King Kojong by having Hong Chong-wu strangle the King.

In many of Oh T'ae-sök's productions, besides the costume and lighting designs, objects and props have significant meanings. The stage is almost empty, and the frequent changes in time and locale are completed with the use of such stage objects as a signpost, a rug, a tube, miniatures (Ch'oi Chun-ho 1995: 214).¹⁶⁶ There are two significant objects that bear the symbolic meaning of the play. One is a radish and the other is *toraji*, the root of a broad bellflower from which the title of the play comes. In one scene, Oh T'ae-sök shows Hong Chong-wu in Japan eating a large radish from *Chosön*. This radish metaphorically indicates the body of the nation (*Chosön*). (Ch'oi Chun-ho 1995: 210). Later, the audience come to know that this object is the symbol of the body of Kim Ok-kyun. As his Japanese follower Wada puts a large radish in the center of the scattered body parts of Kim Ok-kyun, who appears as the ghost in the last scene, a famous folk song about the root of a broad bellflower is heard. The song says

¹⁶⁶ The account is based on the premiere production.

that the root is everywhere in the nation, as Kim's dismembered body parts are scattered through the nation. Likewise, the roots of the plant symbolize the historical figures who died for the nation. Oh T'ae-sök metaphorically constructs the meaning that Kim Ok-kyun and the patriots are the bodies, arms, and legs of the nation. He conveys his message that even though they died already they are still protecting us.

In the play, the political trajectory of Hong Chong-wu is paired with that of Kim Ok-kyun. Hong Chong-wu was the actual assassin of Kim Ok-kyun. Historically, he was the first Korean who studied in France and translated the Korean classics, *The Story of Shimch'öng* and *The Story of Ch'unhyang* into French. Despite the historical interpretation of him as a conservative pro-Japanese political figure, Oh T'ae-sök portrays him as a decent man of royalty. In a scene, before he leaves for *Chosŏn*, he makes a deep bow in front of a picture. His colleague, a French researcher, asks, "Is he your father?" Hong Chong-wu responds, "He is my King" (Oh T'ae-sök 1994: 23). In the premiere production, Oh T'ae-sök created a moment when the shadows of Kim Ok-kyun and Hong Chong-wu overlap, signifying Hong will be victimized by the King like Kim Ok-kyun (Kim Mi-do 1994: 48-49). As he returns to *Chosŏn*, he is given an important mission to kill Kim Ok-kun by King Kojong. But, he is subsequently betrayed by the King, who denies his scheme; "Hong Chong-wu? I do not know the person" (Oh T'ae-sök 1994: 40).

Initially, Hong Chong-wu regards obedience to the King as the task of a patriotic man. He accepts his mission of assassination as loyalty to his nation. But he is disgusted by the King when he successively witnesses the King's unpatriotic deeds. Hong Chong-wu murders the King when he confirms the King's conspiracy with Lee

Wan-yong. Historically, Lee Wan-yong is regarded as the prime traitor who “sold” *Chosŏn* to Japan. In the play, right after Hong watches the King receive a gift from the Japanese Resident-General delivered by Lee, he counterfactually strangles the King. He realizes that Kim Ok-kyun was a real patriot in that he was really concerned about the fate of the nation. In this respect, Oh T’ae-sŏk endorses the historical interpretation that King Kojong was only concerned with his sovereignty and used the international powers for that purpose.

Oh Knows it is not historically accurate that “Hong Chong-wu strangles the King Kojong” (Oh T’ae-sŏk 1994: 41). But, in the play, boldly enough, Hong Chong-wu hangs his sovereign, the father of the nation. Why does Oh T’ae-sŏk create this violent scene, even if not realistically presented but symbolically suggested? Like the scene of Queen Myŏngsŏng’s burning at the stake, I believe that this scene reflects violent feelings of Oh’s own period. When Chun Tu-whan appeared at the congressional hearing in 1988, many people called for the death sentence to be delivered to the dictator. But he just retreated to a temple in a mountain for about a year and a half. Like Oh T’ae-sŏk, they would have liked to have killed him in their imagination.

In *Toraji*, as his masculine tone dominates, Oh T’ae-sŏk’s recurring theme of reconciliation between the oppressor and the oppressed diminishes. Nevertheless, in the play, Oh finds the ground for the possibility of diplomatic reconciliation with Japan in the inter-relationship of Kim Ok-kyun and Wada. Wada is the Japanese follower who adopts his revolutionary ideas. Historically, the Japanese followers of Kim Ok-kyun are said to perform a commemorative ritual for him. In the play, Wada takes his head and puts it in a shrine in Japan. Their relationship is beautifully represented in a scene

where Kim Ok-kyun teaches Wada how to dance *pukch'ōngsajanori* (the traditional masked lion dance), and they dance together. In the play, many scenes occur in Japan, allowing Oh-T'ae-sōk to show elements of Japanese culture on stage: the public bath, the song of Japanese woman divers, a popular Japanese song, etc. As I mentioned before, Oh T'ae-sōk was frequently accused of adopting Japanese styles by many critics, and *Toraji* was the first Korean production that mounted scenes of realistically-portrayed Japanese culture in a Korean play. But, as Kim Mi-do indicates, except for Wada, the Japanese in the play are caricatured and mildly ridiculed, and in contrast the Korean culture and things Korean look superior. Kim Mi-do remarks, "Against the background of the Japanese culture, our Korean culture looked beautifully noted." As Oh T'ae-sōk is conscious about the accusation, he jokes that "the more I mounted Japanese culture as it is, the more purely Korean my production looked" and he adds that "the caricature of the Japanese people has not been done with bad intentions" (1994: 49).

As for his characterization of Wada, Oh T'ae-sōk observes, "Ultimately, relationship is the encounter between human beings. Unlike other Japanese people in the play who are drawn from their politics, Wada shows a Japanese person who is just a human being" (Kim Mi-do 1994: 50). In this context, the human relationship between Kim Ok-kyun and Wada projects reconciliation between Korea and Japan. Oh T'ae-sōk's humanist solution, however, is blind to complicated socio-political components existing in human relationships. The interrelationship between Kim Ok-kyun and Wada itself was enabled not on humanist grounds but by the shared political ideas of revolution and fidelity to nation. How can one reconcile with a Japanese imperialist

because s/he is “just a human being”? I think his humanism is intended as a warning of the danger of Korean ultra-nationalism which is inclined to totalize Japanese people as evil and leaves no room for the establishment of a new relationship.

I will end my discussion by commenting on the contradictions of Oh T’ae-sök’s historical interpretations in *Toraji*. I do not judge whether his historical interpretation is “truthful” or not. But, it appears to me that Oh T’ae-sök justifies the use of violent militarism since he interprets Kim Ok-kyun’s ambition and fidelity to nation as the highest patriotic duty. He believes that Kim Ok-kyun’s choice was necessary to modernize *Chosŏn* within a short period of time and swiftly rescue the people from the corrupt royal family. In a sense, his interpretation is consonant with the Japanese and Korean historians, who wrote colonial history from the perspectives of the colonizers. They asserted that *Chosŏn* was colonized due to an incompetent monarch, and that through Japan’s advancement of modernization in the Korean peninsula, *Chosŏn* was rescued from primitivism. These colonial views of history definitely echo the imperialist views of enlightenment and modernization. Certainly, King Kojong was partly responsible for the colonization, but there were more complicated conditions of power dynamics, internal and external. Oh T’ae-sök simplifies the complexity of the socio-political contexts of historical contingencies, and he naturalizes modernization from above and outside as the due course of Korean history.

Secondly, Oh T’ae-sök’s affirmation of Kim Ok-kyun’s military *coup d’état* paradoxically endorses the recent military *coups d’état* of Park Jung Hee and Chun Tu-whan, whom he regards as the successors of King Kojong in light of their incompetence as the heads of the nation. As historian Park No-ja points out, Kim Ok-kun’s idea of

revolution was truly modern in the sense that it was grounded in the spirit of the violence of modernity.¹⁶⁷ Park Jung Hee and Chun Tu-whan also justified their *coups d'état* as decisive determinations for the nation. Oh T'ae-sök imagines that Kim Ok-kyun could have been an ideal political leader, if his party's hegemony had not been terminated within three days by the intervention of interruption of the *Chǒng* dynasty (China at that time). To some extent, his bourgeois nationalism shares a political belief with fascist nationalism in that (male) elites like Kim Ok-kyun who can die for the nation are the "true" Korean type. Contradictorily, grassroots nationalism reckons Kim Ok-kyun as a pro-Japanese intellectual, since he relied exclusively on Japanese forces. Many common people regarded his Enlightenment Party as a Japanese party at that time. It reported that the more he envied the Japanese "advanced" modernization, the more he displayed a contemptuous attitude toward the common people of the "primitive" *Chosŏn*.

As the historical interpretations of King Kojong diverge, so do those of Queen Myōngsōng. As the historian Kong Im-sun notes, "Before Queen Myōngsōng was commemorated as the ethnic symbol of Korea, she was regarded as a real devil of a woman. As a wife of a family and a puppet of the Min clan, the Queen was the haven of illegality and immorality" (2005: 202). Oh T'ae-sök's dramatic construction of the Queen rests on selected sources about her. By contrast, the musical *Myōngsōng Hwanghwu: The Last Empress* (1995), directed by Yun Ho-jin is based on the historical interpretation of the Empress as the mother of the nation and even a nationalist patriot. After the American premiere in New York at Lincoln Center in 1997, *Myōngsōng Hwanghwu: The Last Empress* became the representative national brand of the Korean

¹⁶⁷ Refer to his books written in 2005 and 2007, *Wusŭngyŏlpaeŭi Sinhwa (The Myth of the Survival of the Fittest)* and *Wuriga Molrattŏn Tongasia (East Asia That We Did Not Know)*.

musical. But, Oh T'ae-sök portrays the Queen as an evil wench whose image derives from public gossip of the time that the Queen was not a desirable wife. In the play, even though the Queen is in the center of the political sphere, her official conduct is not taken seriously. The gender difference operates in his interpretation of historical figures. In the play, Oh T'ae-sök interprets male characters based on their public performance and achievement, but his interpretation of Queen Myöngsöng relies exclusively on familial terms: The Queen was not a villainess, but, at the same time, she was victimized owing to her incompetent husband.

5.2 YI YUN-T'AEK'S *MINJOKGŬK* IN THE 1990S

Like many intellectuals and activists of the democratization movement, Yi Yun-t'aek was suspicious about Noh T'ae-wu's Declaration of Democracy in 1987. Since the Declaration called for direct presidential election by the people, it was thought that the change of the regime into a civilian government could become a reality soon. Kim Young-sam, the oppositional political leader and fighter for democratization seemed to take the most advantageous position for a presidential candidacy. But when Kim Dae-jung, also an oppositional political leader and fighter for democratization, was pardoned from the charge of insurgency as the prime mover of the Kwangju Democratization Uprising,¹⁶⁸ he resumed his political activities and became the presidential candidate for

¹⁶⁸ Chun Tu-whan military regime accused Kwangju Democratization Uprising of being the communist insurgency.

the 1987 presidential election. Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung were the leaders of powerful political fractions based in constituencies of Kyöngsang and Chönlä Provinces respectively. When the voters of the anti-government forces split between them, Noh T'ae-wu, the former military general and the successor of Chun Tu-whan, became the president. In 1990, Noh T'ae-wu, Kim Young-sam, and Kim Chong-p'il declared the merger of their three political parties, and they established the Free Democratic Party without consensus from the people. This political event shocked many, and in this context the 1990s were called "the age of illicit coalition." Kim Young-sam justified his ambition in the name of the "truthful" integration and reconciliation of the nation. The former opposition party leader, Kim Young-sam, thus became the presidential candidate of the governing party, and successively became the president in 1992.

Accordingly, many people questioned the legitimacy of the first civilian government. In order to eliminate the legitimacy problem, the Kim Young-sam regime set out the Reformation Plan in 1993. Kim Young-sam declared his civilian administration to be the legitimate inheritor of the Provisional Government established in Shanghai, China during the colonization period from 1919 to 1945. The *yöksa paro chapki*, rectification of history, was launched, and, as a symbolic project, the government immediately relocated the graves of the leading figures of the Provisional Government into the nation. In 1995, creating a grander scene for the claim of historical legitimacy, the Kim Young-sam administration demolished the dome of the *Chungangch'öng* building used as the headquarters during Japanese colonial rule. Also, the year 1992 was proclaimed by the Kim Young-sam administration as the initiating year of *saegyehwa* (globalization).

For many people like Yi Yun-t'aek, the 1990s was the period of betrayal and contradiction. Distanced from the conspicuously leftist orientation of the previous decades, the underlying structure of feeling of the 1990s in South Korea was expressed in the dominant rhetoric of “stability,” “prosperity,” and “opulence.” The progressive *minjung* of the previous decades were transformed into consumers of the pervasive mass culture. As the liberalization of overseas travel was regarded as the epochal event for the advent of a truly free nation, the idea of “liberty” was put to a more economical use. In the name of liberty, the age of limitless competition eclipsed the previous socialist democratic ideas of equality and distribution, bringing about consumer capitalism rife with materialist fetishism. For most people, the early 1990s were the era of a new hope, but for Yi Yun-t'aek “Korean society in this period was considered a decentered society in which all the situations and conditions of politics and the economy evince the corrupted ‘spirit’” (Yi Hye-kyŏng 1997: 40).

Richard Nicholas, in the introduction to Yi Yun-t'aek's *The Dummy Bride* (1993) writes, “*The Dummy Bride* remains an apt parable of a materialistic modern society adrift without core values as the 1990s approached, indicting a society that — in Lee's [Yi's] writings — honored false religious and political prophets” (2007: 125).¹⁶⁹ It was nationalist spirit that Yi Yun-t'aek sought as the spiritual center of the derailed Korean society. As critic Shin Ah-young comments, Yi endeavored through the discourses of tradition to connect his nationalist search for “the archetypal ethnic mentality with the

¹⁶⁹ I use both Yi Yun-t'aek's original play and its translated version by Kim Dongwook and Richard Nicholas. The original play is included in *The Anthology of Yi Yun-t'aek's Plays* published in 2006. His four plays were translated in English and contained in *Four Contemporary Korean Plays* published in 2007.

epochal spirit of the 1980s, and he attempted to tap the possibility of redemption for the disintegrated and disordered Korean society” (2002: 33).

5.2.1 *The Dummy Bride*

In *Ogu* (1989), mining the shared images from the shamanist mythology, Yi Yun-t'aek had suggested the shamanist, carnivalesque congruity of life and death as the archetypal mentality of the Korean ethnic community. In *The Dummy Bride* (1993), Yi Yun-t'aek adopts a Buddhist fable of *pabogakshi*, literally meaning a foolish bride, who sacrifices herself with a merciful heart. Yi Yun-t'aek takes his main images and stories from the tale of *Maitreyabodhisattva*.¹⁷⁰ According to the tale, from nowhere a woman comes to a village, where she performs an act of benevolence to men in the village who are in need of sexual gratification. She sleeps with a leper, a disabled man, and a poor man, and so forth. For all that, she is accused of an offense against public decency and is expelled from the village. In her place, the villagers find a stone Buddha (*Maitreyabodhisattva*) statue, and they come to realize that she was the avatar of *Maitreyabodhisattva* and gave her body as alms to the men. Through the reconstruction of this Buddhist myth, Yi Yun-t'aek presents the spirit of sacrifice and redemption as “the archetypal mentality” necessary for Korean ethnic community to integrate the disunited nation. In his directorial note for *The Dummy Bride*, Yi Yun-t'aek writes, “in *The Dummy Bride*, through the application of the double constructive matrixes of the

¹⁷⁰ In an interview, he explains that he was inspired by the tale written on the stone Buddha statue that he saw during mountain climbing (Park Chöng-won 2008: 5).

reality motive and the mythic motive, I attempt to delve into the meaning of love that can be extended to the state of the whole society and become the ethnic [national] myth beyond the limitation of individual possession and attachment” (1993: 270). But, as we shall see, in *The Dummy Bride*, Yi Yun-taek’s postulation of sacrifice and redemption as core values of national spirit eschews political analysis for fable and religiosity. Thus, his sharp political comments in the first part of the play merely serve this religious spirituality.

For Yi Yun-t’aek, the sublime significance of love can be found in the sacrifice of a woman in the sense that the true *Maitreyabodhisattva* (messiah) can resurrect society through becoming a mother. In *Ogu*, Yi Yun-t’aek crafted the image of the sacrificial mother through the Old Mother. Since *Ogu*, the sacrificial mother has become the central theme of his plays.¹⁷¹ But, in *The Dummy Bride*, this image is the site of conflicting Buddhist and Confucian ideologies. It is recognized that in Buddhist thought and practices personal relationships like family are rarely treated, since in Buddhism any kind of possession and attachment is an object of distraction. Likewise, shamanism does not provide principles and morals for human relationships, either. If we read the play carefully, it is not difficult to find the interpolation of the Confucian myth of motherhood inserted in the Buddhist fable. When the Blind Singer urges the dummy bride to leave this world that “has no center,” the Dummy Bride insists, “I will live here anyway. I will produce a baby, who will grow as it should be in nature. I will put my hope

¹⁷¹ In an interview, as Yi Yun-t’aek explains about his play, *Mother* (1996), he discloses that he will continue to work with “the myth of Korean Mother Courage”(Ryu Suk-ryöl 1999: 76). Indeed, in what he calls “populist theatre,” he consistently deals with the theme. In 2006, he adapted Brecht’s *Mother Courage* to the Korean War and produced it to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Brecht’s death.

in my baby” (Yi Yun-t’aek 2006: 82). In what follows, I will examine how Yi Yun-t’aek changed the traditional sources and inserted the phallogocentric Confucian myth of the womb.

The narrative progression of *The Dummy Bride* is fairly straightforward. The time and place is set in present Shindorim district, which is a fringe area of metropolitan city of Seoul. The stage is virtually empty.¹⁷² There is only the covered food carriage of the dummy bride, and beside it there is a signboard for the entrance of the Shindorim subway station. The first scene is titled “Waiting for the People of Beautiful Minds.” The production begins with the mechanical voice notifying the arrival of the train from the subway station; “Attention, please. The train is arriving soon to the station. Please take one step back to the line for your own safety” (Yi Yun-t’aek 2006: 63). After that, his name reminiscent of a Christian angel, Michael, a young beggar, appears with his father, the Blind Singer. Michael tells his father his dream about the dummy bride of the legend. He says, “The Dummy Bride riding in a white sailboat is coming across that dark sky” every night in my dream. His father firmly tells his son, “she won’t come here where we live” because “she cannot find people who have beautiful minds here anymore” (Yi Yun-t’aek 2006: 64). Michael asserts that his father went blind due to his bleak views.

As the Blind Singer sings of one searching for people who have beautiful minds, he lights a lamp, and the Dummy Bride enters pulling her food wagon. She waits for customers under a lamp, against the dark sky. In a sense, deliberately, the dream of the young beggar is brought to life, but in contrast to his belief in goodness and beauty, this

¹⁷² The stage description is based on my viewing of the 1993 production in the Sanwulrim Little Theatre in Seoul. It was premiered in 1993 in the Hall of Culture in Pusan. It was shown in many international theatre festivals: 1993 Fukuoka Universiade, 1993 Tokyo Alice Festival, and 1999 Köch’ang International Theatre Festival.

dream turns out to be nightmarish. Centered around the food carriage of the dummy bride, the denizens of Shindorim crowd into the plaza of the Shindorim subway station. Yi Yun-t'aek presents characters from various socio-political backgrounds, but they can be roughly divided into two groups according to their social status: the Drunk, the Patriotic Young Man, the Jobless Young Man, and the Police Sergeant as the representatives of the petit bourgeoisie and the Head of the Pseudo-Christian Religion, Little Beggar, the Blind Singer, Michael (a young beggar), and the Hooker are the portraits of the outcasts of Korean society.¹⁷³ There are few female characters except the Hooker. In the production that I saw in 1993, the dummy bride was performed by an actress with a (traditional style) puppet attached to her front.¹⁷⁴

Through the portrayals of the Drunk, the Patriotic Young Man, and the Jobless Young Man, Yi Yun-t'aek expresses the sentiments of renunciation, frustration, and nihilism pervasive among young people in the early 1990s as they witnessed the illicit connection between the existing power elite and the revolutionary democratic forces of the previous decades. For them, the trauma of the Kwangju massacre was not healed yet, and the chastisement of the dictator (Chun Tu-whan) not complete. The frustrated patriotic young man declares that people's political awareness is benumbed by the phony reconciliation. As he distributes leaflets, he speaks with quiet eloquence, "Please read this leaflet in the manner of the petit bourgeoisie. It's quite all right for you to see this leaflet as an undemocratic viewpoint . . . We are in the midst of disaster during

¹⁷³ As an artist and an intellectual, Yi Yun-t'aek positions himself in the social scale of petit bourgeoisie so that his plays are crowded with people of this social rank. Similar to Oh T'ae-sök's plays, the laborers and the farmers are not the frequent characters. From his acknowledged social position, he views petit bourgeoisie, especially, the intellectuals, with sympathy and criticism.

¹⁷⁴ In addition to that, Yi Yun-t'aek utilizes traditional *kamŏngŭk* masks and dances, foot masks, and *jeongka* (the traditional vocal music sung among elite *yangban*) from the reservoirs of tradition.

these so-called 'great 90's.' The labors of patriotic young men have become meaningless. Who was it who sent the tyrant to the Paektam temple? Weren't we the very men who had the university's president's head shaved? For whom are our patriotic taxes used?" At last, he shouts, "Let's declare war on unjust distribution. Awake, ladies and gentlemen! You're becoming unconscious! . . . It is the sarcasm of the petit bourgeoisie like you that we should guard against" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2007:135-136). A sense of sham wells up from the sardonic drunk. When the Drunk pulls on the leg of the Hooker, she calls him an animal, and the Drunk responds, "I am animal indeed when May comes. Once upon a time, in May, since I was not in Kwangju, I am an animal. That we are still alive is a shame. I would like to be reborn as an animal, this life of shame purified as an animal (Yi Yun-t'aek 2007: 136).

Deliberately, Yi Yun-t'aek juxtaposes the political vision of the Young Patriotic Man with the religious prophecy of the sham messiah (the Head of the pseudo-Christian religion). The Patriotic Young Man pleads, "Give us one more chance, please. Only we can save this world. We will do it. Let's go! Up to the Baegdu Mountain. From Halla Mountain to Baekdu Mountain." In the mean time, the sham messiah preaches, "The end is coming from the air. Since I do not want my beloved enemies living in sin on this soil any longer, I will cross the 38th Parallel myself, leading a large formation of Phantom bombers. I will blow up the atomic factory in Youngbyeon first, sending our northern brothers and sisters to heaven. Then you survivors, do not lose your chance before Heaven's Gate is closed" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2007: 137). The Police Sergeant calls him a human trafficker, and tries to arrest him. The sham messiah gives the sergeant some cash, and the sergeant happily disappears with it. The scene is a bitter satire of

the alleged political accommodation behind the phony reconciliation, which the Patriotic Young Man indicts as spiritual corruption. The Police Sergeant is the faithful follower of the reality principle. He asserts, “The world is changed. Let’s get over the mutual reconciling and forgiveness and leave the past to the judgment of history.” He derides the Patriotic Young Man, saying, “It’s no good now, you know, to chant slogans, practice resistance and dismantle the Establishment” (Yi Yun-t’aek 2007: 138).

In the second scene titled “Mask Playing in the Age of No Prospects,” the appearance of singing and dancing puppet music box adds mirth to the scene. To the popular songs from the music box, in a state of hallucination, the denizens slowly dance. In this scene, Yi Yun-t’aek deliberately evokes “the spectacle of Sodom” (Yi Yun-t’aek 2007: 139). After they have all gone, the Patriotic Young Man in despair commits suicide. Later, like the Patriotic Young Man who promised to save the world but could not save himself, the sham messiah cannot find relief, hanging himself. For the Patriotic Young Man, the dummy bride sings a funeral song tuned with a traditional melody, *jeongka*. *Jeongka* is a traditional court song of the aristocrats of the *Chosŏn* dynasty. By contrasting this solemn music to the popular songs from the music box, Yi Yun-t’aek marks the sacredness of the dummy bride.

At night, wearing traditional style masks, the Drunk, the Jobless Young Man, and the Police Sergeant come to the food wagon of the dummy bride. It is worth mentioning here that Yi Yun-t’aek plays with the multiple meanings of “*t’al*” (traditional mask) in the usage of Korean language.¹⁷⁵ Traditionally, “*t’al*” in Korean refers to both sacred things and evil things (mishap, trouble, illness, fault, etc.). Hence, anciently, in *kamyŏngŭk*

¹⁷⁵ Also, in the play, the masks can be interpreted as Jungian social personas concealing the “true” characters.

performance the masks were treated as divine objects, but at the end of the performance, they were thrown into the bonfire lit up for the night performance to ward off evil. In an associative connection, in the last scene, the denizen customers of the dummy bride take off their masks and throw them into the sailing boat for the cleansing of their sins. With the grotesque masks, their bestial desires at night are highlighted. When they dance, the Dummy Bride joins in, and at the peak of the dance, it turns into “body *poshi* or sexual almsgiving.” But, according to the (male) critic Kim Yun-ch’öl, reviewing the 1993 production, “in the scene the relationship between the dummy bride and the denizen customers was established neither necessarily nor sufficiently, so that the meaning of the sacrificial love of the dummy bride was not properly conveyed.” “Consequently,” asserts Kim Yun-ch’öl, “the scene merely portrayed a singular incident of a miserable woman who was sacrificed to the collective violence of men” (1993: 319).

“*Poshi*” expresses the Buddhist spirit of generous and unconditional giving, but in the scene, the “body *poshi*” of the dummy bride is manifested as a gang rape. In the stage direction, Yi Yun-t’aek writes, “*the Bride painfully accepts her own lot as she bodily copulates with the reality*” (2006: 84). It seems that Yi Yun-t’aek attributes divinity to ordinary human women who can (for)give men unconditionally. Reviewing a 1999 production of *The Dummy Bride*, Chi Hye, in her essay published in the feminist journal *If*, denounces “the poetic beautification of violence (the gang rape) through the traditional performing art.” According to her report, the act of gang rape was artistically symbolized as the scene of “body *poshi*” when the nightclub of the police sergeant is thrust into the womb of the dummy bride lying down in the center of the stage. The woman reviewer expresses her strong resistance to the masculine gaze regulating the

scene of “body *poshi*.” Like her, as a female audience-member, I was totally alienated from the spectacle. The woman reviewer observes, “The traditional still means the feminine; if so, should women continually sing a song of *han* as both victims of men and mothers who will rescue them?” (1999: 180). Whereas the male critic presumes the woman’s sacrifice as the basis for unconditional love, the woman reviewer problematizes the mythic basis itself. The act of love of the dummy bride elevated into the ethnic myth in the production of *The Dummy Bride* means sacrifice to one gender and redemption to the other gender. The masculine conceptualization of sacrifice and redemption is reinforced in the last scene where the Hooker, the only female (human) character except the “dummy” bride, does not appear in the company of the sinners whose sins are cleansed by the resurrected dummy bride.

In the last scene titled “Nobody Accepts New Hope,” the three men deny the baby resulting from the “body *poshi*,” who is the metaphorical representation of the existence of hope for the corrupted father generation. The Dummy Bride bemoans her lot, lamenting, “I left my hometown close to heaven and came here, since I believed that living like a beggar here was better than leading a secluded life in the mountains. But, is no man willing to accept my hope [baby]?” The Police Sergeant responds coldly, “You are not a common woman. You are saying that you want to live with all of us, with three husbands?” The Dummy Bride clutches the Police Sergeant, saying, “I did not mean it. I don’t care about myself. I can raise this baby, do anything in this world. But, please have my baby’s name entered in your family register so that my baby can live with a name [legally]” (Yi Yun-t’aek 2006: 90). As I mentioned earlier, until recently, the modern Korean family register system had been based on the Confucian notion of

patriarchal headship.¹⁷⁶ A child without a name admitted by her/his head of the family is at worst legally a non-person. Even though the image of the Dummy Bride is mainly derived from a Buddhist myth, the Dummy Bride is portrayed as a Confucian type of a mother in that the Buddhist myth does not offer any archetype of motherhood. Visually, she is portrayed as a type of traditional Korean mother. In a traditional garment and a hairstyle during the *Chosŏn* dynasty, she is symbolized as the haven of Confucian morals appropriate to a virtuous woman: quiet, patient, obedient, and sacrificial.

Lamenting over their denial and betrayal of the three men, the dummy bride commits suicide. As Nicholas points out, “The use of dummies, most especially when the Dummy Bride hangs herself, also creates a grotesque beauty and theatricalism not possible with a living actor, as the dummy lies truly lifeless yet vibrant with artistic possibilities” (2007: 7). The three men hear a baby’s crying from the dead bride, but they bury the dead body of the bride with the baby under the subway station. It is the Blind Singer and Michael who dig up the bride and the baby when a baby’s crying is heard. The bride and the baby are revealed, taking their place in a sailboat made from the food wagon of the bride. At the end, the same announcement from the speakers of the subway station is heard through the voice of the dummy bride as her food wagon is transformed into a white sailboat heading for heaven. When the sailboat launches, the area denizens throw their masks to the bride, thus cleansing their sins.

Acutely, Nicholas identifies the Christian mythology embedded in the play, remarking, “The concluding scenes in the play constitute a ‘passion play.’ The Messiah drags in a crucifix, hangs himself after conducting ‘the last Mass on this planet’ and

¹⁷⁶ This legal system has been abolished in the 2000s.

ascends to Heaven. The Christian imagery is not misplaced” (2007: 128). Nevertheless, what he overlooks is the complicated weaving of traditional and Christian mythologies and imagery in the play. Failing to mention the original source material of the Buddhist fable, the translators of *The Dummy Bride*, Kim Dongwook and Richard Nichols, shed light only on Christian mythology, ignoring the rebirth of *Maitreyabodhisattva* at the end of the play. In the original Korean play published in 2006, Yi Yun-t’aek writes, “*Under the sail, the bride with mourning garments takes her seat, and holds the living Maitreya with open eyes*” (97). In the English version, the stage direction is translated as follows: “*Under the sail, the bride, wearing mourning cloth, takes her seat, and, in her arms, she holds a statue of a child with open eyes*” (2007: 151). (In the 1993 production that I saw, the actress held the statue of a young boy monk.)

To be sure, there are confusing semiotic signals between the Christian mythology and the Buddhist mythology in the play. The contrast between darkness and light (black and white) and the topography of Hell (underground subway station), Earth (station plaza) and Heaven (sky) is clearly from the Christian mythology. The name, Michael, the city of Sodom, and the imagery of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ come from the Bible. In Buddhism, self-awakening (self-enlightenment) is the way to Nirvana (salvation), and human beings are not described as sinners. The life itself is the “sea of trouble” (Yi Yun-t’aek 2006: 97). On top of it, the image of the white sailboat originates from the shamanist ritual for a dead soul, which Oh T’ae-sök uses in his play *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River* when Sundan travels to the Underworld.

Nicholas asks an important question, “Why is the Blind Singer, ‘with a helping hand from Michael,’ now the owner of the white sailboat, and what are we to make of

the play's ending in which all those who earlier had succumbed to bestiality are saved and the blameless Little Beggar, who cannot touch the Bride, is left alone, *unsaved*, and in despair?" (2007: 129). First of all, to his first question, there is no indication that the Blind Singer is the owner of the white sailboat; "The Blind Singer leads the procession and Michael pulls the sailboat" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 97). I think that Yi Yun-t'aek portrays them as the sole believers of new hope and the helpers of the bride and the baby. As to his second question, I would say that the underlying mentality of the play is manifested through the complex weaving of the Christian, the Buddhist, and the humanist worldviews. "The three masked men shed tears, take off their masks, and throw them onto the sailboat only when they see the *Maitreya* in the arms of the bride" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 97). The savior (*Maitreya*), who awakens the sinners, is reborn through the womb of the dummy bride, but "the white sailboat launches a new journey into the another sea of trouble" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 97). In his directorial note for *The Dummy Bride*, Yi Yun-t'aek writes, "through the mythic narratives of the sacrificial love of the dummy bride I try to search for the meaning of this world in which human beings can be human beings" (1993: 271). In *The Dummy Bride*, Yi Yun-t'aek expresses his aspiration to spiritual redemption imperative for the chaotic ethnic community. In the dehumanized materialistic community symbolized by the music box, the God or *Maitreya* is meant to serve as the spiritual center for the world in which human beings can live humanely.

5.2.2 *Yönsan, the Problematic Human Being*

It is frequently discovered in Yi Yun-t'aek's works that human beings' spiritual union is metaphorically presented as the sexual copulation. In *Ogu*, the unison of life

and death is shaped as sexual copulation between the messenger from the Underworld and the widow. In *The Dummy Bride*, the motif of Buddhist “body *poshi*” is presented as the ground for the spiritual redemption. In *Yönsan* (1995), Yi Yun-t’aek draws the narrative of a son who desires oneness with his mother in some incestuous sense. Like the other two works, in *Yönsan* the mother-son relationship is the master thread in the narrative construction, and this Oedipal myth is fully translated into a spiritual voyage and “return to the womb.”

As a matter of fact, the ethnic archetype, which Yi Yun-t’aek so earnestly seeks in his *minjokgŭk*, is founded on a combination of the nationalist ideas and the psychoanalytic model. Thus, in his *minjokgŭk*, similar to Oh T’ae-sök’s *minjokgŭk*, the three components of the Oedipal triangle are the constant narrative constituents: the corrupted (absent) father, the sacrificial mother, and the resisting son. This Oedipal triangle, I contend, undermines his putative affirmation of “the spiritual East/the technical West” in his *minjokgŭk* composition. He asserts that in his *minjokgŭk* he uses “Western” dramaturgy and “our” traditional sources containing “our” spirit. But, in that the ethnic (arche)type of the resisting son is hard to be located in any of the traditional sources containing “our” spirits (thoughts and ideologies), his claim of balancing “the spiritual East and the technical West” has no justifiable ground. In what follows, I argue that the case of Prince Yönsan’s resistance is not typical but extraordinary, and “Western” dramaturgy informs far more of Yi’s spiritual sources than he might think. In *Yönsan*, the spirit of resistance of the young generation comprises the main theme, and generational conflict is dominant in the play. Yi Yun-t’aek draws the tragic hero, Prince Yönsan, as an ethnic archetype of resisting intellectual who is inflamed with the

revolutionary zeal and in agony and despair without any opportunity for compromise. In a sense, *Yönsan* in the play is the self-portrait of the author who yearns for complete, true social transformation and disavows “the phony reconciliation” of the so-called “great 90s.”

As Yi Yun-t'aek positions himself as a progressive intellectual, the subject of revolution and the role of (male) intellectual is pervasive in his plays. Thematically, Heiner Müller's works on the same topic are his major sources of inspiration. As early as 1990, Yi Yun-t'aek reconstructed Müller's *The Mission*, (1979) and directed the production in the Theatre of Hyundai Theatre Company. Müller's influence, maybe especially his collage of Artaud's theatre of cruelty and Brecht's epic theatre, left a signature of “postmodern” on Yi Yun-t'aek's works so that many critics label his works “postmodern” or “deconstructive.” For instance, the critic Yi Hye-kyöng calls Yi Yun-t'aek “a postmodern modernist” and *Yönsan* “a postmodern modernist play.” Yi Hye-kyöng's contention is not completely wrong in that, dramaturgically, his narrative is based on loose episodic structure and his technique relies on pastiche, both characteristic features of postmodernism. For all that, I consider that Yi Yun-t'aek's *Yönsan* is not a postmodernist work in several key points. Though, his works display postmodern phenomena via the logic of post-industrial capitalism, for example, in the case of *The Dummy Bride*, he does not affirm such dominant postmodern ideas as difference, fragmentation, disintegration, and dispersion.

Certainly, his notion of “shared cords” claims the universal ground in the international communication of cultural texts. Embracing the multiculturalist concept of variety, he resists a world without core values. As critic Kim Mi-do judges, *Yönsan*

exhibits the “the most harmonious and encounter between *the East and the West and the primitive and the modern* [italics mine]” (Kim Mi-do 2006: 229).¹⁷⁷ In *Yönsan*, Yi Yun-t’aek borrows the variety of sources from the Greek chorus, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Artaud’s idea of theatre as ritual,¹⁷⁸ the alienation effects of Brecht’s epic theatre, shamanist *gut*, and the Confucian religious ceremonies of the *Chosön* royal court (2006: 229). Out of these “shared cords,” Yi Yun-t’aek forges the imagery of discomfiting split on the part of a son who is searching for everlasting euphoria centered in mother’s womb.

In an interview with a reviewer, Yi Yun-t’aek asserts that the criticism of Confucian rationalism in *Yönsan* can be contextualized as his tryout of postmodernism. (Yi Tök-ju 1995: 27). But, anti-rationalism has been a modernist motif of modernism, and in any case Yi’s views on human beings are firmly based on the modernist concept of “character” that is integrated and has depth of mind or spirit. Above all, his worldview is founded on a world associated with the notion of “certainty.” In the sense that Müller problematizes certainty and the integration of the world and the human being, Yi Yun-t’ae’s “postmodern” attempt diverges from Muller’s postmodern direction.

According to Yi Yun-t’aek, *Yönsan* is “a modernized history play” that is composed of “Western dramaturgy” and “our history (spirit)” (Yi Hye-kyöng 1997: 55). In terms of “Western” dramaturgy, I can identify two mixed signals from two sources: Shakespeare’s original play *Hamlet* read through the interpretive grid of Freudian

¹⁷⁷ This remark is the sampling case of the “Korean interpretive community” of *minjokgŭk* whose views are grounded in the problematic dichotomy of “the primitive East and the modern West” (Kim Yong-su 2006: 40).

¹⁷⁸ Many critics identify Artaud’s theatre of cruelty in Yi Yun-t’aek’ and Oh T’ae-sök’s works. But, I would like to point out that such cruel and violent theatrical expression as the eradication of a tongue from the dead body in *Yönsan* is not the element of the theatre of cruelty. Instead, Yi Yun-t’aek utilizes Artaud’s idea of theatre as a ritual in *Yönsan*.

(Lacanian) psychoanalysis and Müller's deconstructive work on it, *Hamlet Machine*.¹⁷⁹ In contrast to Müller's deconstruction of the Oedipal Hamlet, Yi Yun-t'aek's liberal-humanist portrayal of the intellectual Yönsan-Hamlet presents him as the tragic son, Oedipus, who fights against the repressive society of his father's generation and dies due to his tragic *hamartia* (madness). Yönsan dreams of his return to his mother's womb and at the end, in a sense, he returns to "Mother Earth." But, Yi Yun-t'aek overlooks Müller's deconstructive direction toward the self-criticism and self-negation of his own gender identity as a male intellectual.

What is pertinent in his works is the image of the womb as the locus of sex and death. As a matter of fact, in his 1996 reconstructive work of *Hamlet*, Yi Yun-t'aek inserted an actual scene of incest in which Hamlet sexually violates his mother. In *Yönan*, these Freudian "innate human desires" of incest and parenticide comprise the main narrative strands. Also, in *Yönsan*, Jungian "mother archetype" and "son (father) archetype" are symbolized metonymically as the womb and the phallus, which are represented into the scenic images of "the pond," "the long skirt," "the pillar," and "the *shindae* (the divine post)." My discussion of the play, however, does not consist in analyzing *Yönsan* through the frame of the Oedipal complex, but rather in problematizing the essentialist foundation of the psychoanalytical paradigm on which Yi Yun-t'aek's *Yönsan* relies. By doing so, I can reveal the phallogocentric myth in *Yönsan*, which inflects the complex gender relations and produces the mythic man and woman: the dichotomous gender division between "the desiring man and the desired woman."

¹⁷⁹ Regarding the theme of incestuous desire and power as the existential conditions of human beings, *Yönsan* reminds me of Albert Camus' *Caligula*. In part, like *Caligula*, Yönsan is portrayed as a nihilistic/peerless tyrant.

Through semiological reading of the images in the play, I will scrutinize in what way the authority claim of the phallic man (Yönsan) rests on the somatic (non)existence of penis, and how the woman (mother) is instrumentalized and reduced as the receptacle (the womb).

In *Yönsan*, seizing the epochal mentality of *yöksa poro chapki* (rectification of history), Yi Yun-t'aek reconsiders the political significance of the past history of the revolutions, including military *coups d'état*, and reformations. He alludes as far back as to Yi Söng-gye's military *coup d'état*,¹⁸⁰ to Park Jung Hee's and Chun Tu-whan's *coups d'état*, and to Kim Young-sam administration's reformation. Based on actual historical figures and events, *Yönsan* can be categorized as a history play. Prince Yönsan of the *Chosön* dynasty is the protagonist of the play. Historically, Prince Yönsan has been appraised as a peerless tyrant among the kings of the *Chosön* dynasty, and he has been so represented like that in theatre, film, and T.V. dramas. Yi Yun-t'aek interprets him from the different perspectives and angles and endows the character Yönsan with the depth of individual human qualities as the title suggests.

According to "*The Diary of Yönsan*," which is part of *Chosön Wangjo Shilrok* (*The True Record of the Chosön Dynasty*), Yönsan's mother was deposed for her misdeeds as a queen and eventually murdered. His father, King Söngjong, gave the order to kill the queen. The reason was that the queen was too jealous and did harm to the other royal concubines. According to Confucian *ch'ilgöjjaek*, the seven valid causes for divorce, her conduct might have been a cause for divorce, but not a justification for death. Complicated political and royal familial matters were entangled in her death. During the

¹⁸⁰ Yi Söng-gye is the founder of the *Chosön* dynasty.

Chosŏn dynasty, the nation's polity relied heavily on the powerful *yangban* clans, and during the rein of King Sŏnjong, the polity was divided into two factions of *yangban* clans: *noron* and *sonon*. The Queen was not from a powerful *yangban* clan, and there were people who consistently tried to eliminate her. The King's mother, who came from a distinguished *yangban* family, also opposed her. The real problem occurred when Prince Yŏnsan came to know how his mother died after he became the King: his mother's *jŏgori*, the short coat women wear during the *Chosŏn* dynasty, stained with blood was handed to Yŏnsan. The *jŏgori* was the proof showing that his mother was poisoned to death. This incident, also, was manipulated politically by one of the elite *yangban* factions, which attempted to seize power.

During the *Chosŏn* dynasty, *The True Record of the Chosŏn Dynasty* was recorded by professional historiographers working in the royal court and was written in the form of a diary in a highly detailed fashion. Since the historiographers were supposed to record "truthful" facts that happened in the royal court, the present King was not allowed to see the source materials for compilation of *The True Record* for the reign of his predecessor. Yŏnsan violated this royal regulation. Based on the records, Yŏnsan ferreted out all the people who were involved in the death of his mother, twice bringing about a terrible purge of the Confucian factions. These events caused a military *coup d'état*, and Yŏnsan was dethroned. After the death of Yŏnsan, *The True Record* memorialized him as a tyrant prince of violent disposition.¹⁸¹

Yŏnsan premiered in 1995 at the Tongsung Art Center as the commemorative performance of the foundation of the Theatre Company Yu. Yi Yun-t'aek is known to be

¹⁸¹ Because he was deposed, he is not called King but Prince.

disposed to cast well known popular entertainers, and this fact contributes to his popularity among ordinary theatre goers. In the premiere production, as Yönsan and Noksu, his concubine, he cast Yu In-ch'on¹⁸² and Yi Hye-yöng¹⁸³ who were very famous performers in Korea. The premiere performance was acclaimed for the grand stage designs done by the notable scene designer, Shin Sön-hüi.¹⁸⁴ In the production, Yu In-ch'on portrayed Yönsan as a revolutionary intellectual who is anguished and sarcastic, and Yi Hye-yöng depicted the double image of the voluptuous and motherly concubine.¹⁸⁵ The premiere production swept the Tong-A Theatre Awards that year for "the Best Production," "the Best Play," "the Best Actor," and "the Best Scene Designer."¹⁸⁶

Through the portrayal of Yönsan, Yi Yun-t'aek criticizes outworn Confucian propositions. Yönsan resists the old Confucian world order and dreams of revolution. His repugnance toward the Confucian elitism and rationalism is well expressed in the dance of the Confucian literati titled "the Dance of Books" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 83). Yi Yun-t'aek utilizes the expressionist technique of projection in the dance; the ministers of the royal court bring the overwhelmingly big Confucian scriptures and dance weirdly

¹⁸² He was the former professor of the Theatre Arts Department of Chung-Ang University and the founder of "The Theatre Company Yu." He became the head of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Yi Myögpak administration in 2008. His popular image was inscribed in the minds of the masses as a decent son through the very popular T. V. drama, *Chönwönilgi* (The Diary of a Farmer), which aired for 20 years.

¹⁸³ Yi Hye-young is a talented actress who has a wide field of acting activity in theatre, film, T.V., and musical. She is often said to be a sex symbol.

¹⁸⁴ In 2006, the National Theatre solicited the public application for the position of the president, and Yim Jin-t'aek, Park In-pae, and Shin Sön-hüi applied for it. As a result, Shin Sön-hüi became the president of the National Theatre. Yi Yun-t'aek was the artistic director of the National Drama Company affiliated with the National Theatre from 2004 to 2006. Now, Oh T'ae-sök holds the post of the artistic director of the National Drama Company since 2006.

¹⁸⁵ The appraisal is based on my review of the recorded performance aired through the educational public television (EBS).

¹⁸⁶ *Yönsan* also won "the Taesan Literature Prize" for "the Best Play" and "the Paeksang Grand Art Award" for "the Best Production."

with them. Evoking sentiments of grotesque and sarcasm, the actors playing the ministers danced very slowly, accompanied by solemn court music. They were in oversized official garments and holding books as big as a half of their height.¹⁸⁷ In the production, the palace of Yönsan is falling into ruins, which is the metaphorical representation of the critical situation of the Korean ethnic community caused by the corrupted Confucian ruling class. The pillars of the palace are tottering and the roofs are almost collapsing. Also, the metaphor of pillar frequently appears in the dialogue, for instance, when Yönsan implores, “even though I try hard to rule over the nation wisely, I do not have pillars to support me.” One of his chamberlains, Sung-jae, responds, “the existing pillars are distorted and rotten so that they should be cut and replaced with new ones” (Yi Yun-t’aek 2006: 104).

In the rear stage, there is a creepy bamboo grove. Traditionally, in Korea, bamboo trees are related to the dead spirits. In the shamanist system of belief, the grudging spirits of the dead are said to haunt at a bamboo grove. The dead mother of Yönsan visits her son from this world of the dead. As the narrative progresses, the stage is haunted by dead people from the past. Also, in shamanist ritual (*gut*), the bamboo tree is often used as *shindae*, a receptacle of the deities and the dead spirits, by the shamans. In one scene, Yönsan uses one of the bamboo trees to perform a shamanist ritual for his dead mother. In this respect, the stage contains both the world of living that is dying and the world of the dead that is alive.

¹⁸⁷ This scene description is based on my viewing of the recorded performance aired through the educational public television (EBS).

Like Hamlet, as a prince and a revolutionary intellectual, Yönsan confronts the task of whether he will saddle himself with these rotten pillars and die beneath them for his revolution. It is evident that Yi Yun-t'aek bases this imagery of the debilitating pillar on the phallogocentric rhetorical imagery of the decline of the male sexual energy.¹⁸⁸ In an interview with Ryu Suk-ryöl, one of the editors of the feminist journal *If*, Yi Yun-t'aek declares that he is a defender of patriarchy, and he outspokenly expresses that the nation's well-being is based on the healthy functioning of the genital capacity of Korean males (1999: 72). Interestingly, Yi Yun-t'aek introduces the popular gossip about Prince Yönsan's homosexual orientation, although there is no evidence for it. When Yönsan punishes one of his oppositional forces, he outrageously speaks out, "You dirty slanderer, did you say that I was a homo making love with my chamberlains [eunuchs]?" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 117). Yi Yun-t'aek rejects the gossip, however. His heterosexual perspective considers Prince Yönsan's alleged homosexuality improper as for the model of a patriarchal hero.

In the play, Yönsan" is portrayed as *sanaedaejangbu*, a manly man, in contrast to his eunuchs. He frequently alludes to their lack of phallus (penis) making them being incomplete (weak) males close to women (children). For example, in one scene, he discovers that the castrated chamberlains were punished by the court officials for performing a forbidden shamanist *gut* for his dead mother. As a reward, like a father expressing his love to his sons, Yönsan embraces them and pats their heads, saying, "It is only you without dicks who really understand my feelings" (Yi Yun-t'ak 2006: 90). It

¹⁸⁸ The rise, the erection, and the fall of the pillar as metaphorical of civilization seems widespread.

seems certain that the author treats the castrated man as a gender inferior to a woman. Noksu persistently teases them as “things without dicks” (Yi Yun-t’aek 2006: 89). In this context, as a firm patriarch, the gender identity and authority of Yönsan are established against the backdrop of the other genders, which “lack” the male genital.

Based on Artaud’s idea of theatre as ritual, the play is framed as a royal memorial service held at the grave. For this purpose, Yi Yun-t’aek adopts *chongmyojaeryeak*, the music used for the Confucian memorial service in the royal court. The musicians host the memorial service (the play), and through this ritual-theatre frame, the audience encounters the dead spirits of the past. The play begins with the motif of the ghost in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Every night, led by a voice calling his child-name (Yung), Yönsan wanders about the palace like a sleep-walker. Waking from his nightmare, like a baby he calls to his mother, and his concubine Noksu embraces him like a mother and thereafter makes love with him. Seen through Lacan’s conceptualization of a pre-oedipal stage as “the World of Imagination,” their sex is playful like a children’s game. Yönsan moves in and out of her long and wide skirt, as if a boy playing a hide and seek. This scene embodies the phallogocentric postulation of a mythic woman, in that for Yönsan a woman is only a whore and/or a mother.

It is only the shamanist *gut* through which Yönsan can freely summon his dead mother as his wellspring of “the World of Imagination,” where there is no separation and fragmentation. As I mentioned above, the royal eunuchs, Sung-jae, Ch’ö-sön, and Chae-wön, secretly perform a shamanist *gut* for the dead mother of their King, because they suppose that his somnambulism is caused by the grudging spirit of his dead mother. They are punished for that. But, when Yönsan is later informed about their

illegal ritual, instead of rebuking them, on the contrary, Yönsan himself performs the shamanist *gut* for his dead mother. In the scene, Yi Yun-t'aek presents *Tangun*, the founder of the nation, as the great shaman who is the spiritual pillar of the ethnic community, and he depicts the nation's origin as the ideal polity in which spirituality and politics were one. In this way, the author suggests shamanist spirituality as the counterforce of Confucian ideology. As Ch'ö-sön" discourages Yönsan from performing the shamanist *gut*, on the ground of the King's social rank, Yönsan shouts out, "this world became depraved as the governing intellectuals and the military men, who blocked energy from heaven and the other world, fought and betrayed each other. I am the great shaman and *Maitreya*. Chae-wön, take out a green bamboo tree from the bamboo grove" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 90).¹⁸⁹ Yönsan holds the bamboo tree as *shindae*, and shakes madly when he dances with Noksu and the royal chamberlains, accompanied by the traditional percussion instruments. In the premiere production, the scene was reminiscent of a sexual orgy. Yönsan orders "Noksu to put on the costume of Paridegi, the originator of Korean shamanism."¹⁹⁰

During the shamanist ritual, the spirit of his dead mother enters into the body of Noksu. Through her mouth, the deposed queen tells stories about how she suffered due to the extreme hostility of her mother-in-law and two royal concubines toward her. Her stories are dramatized as a play within a play. Through his mother's stories, Yönsan learns that the two royal concubines attempted to kill both him and his mother, and that

¹⁸⁹ A King's performance of a shamanist *gut* in a palace is Yi's pure invention. During the *Chosön* dynasty, which severely suppressed shamanism as a superstition, shamans were outcasts.

¹⁹⁰ I mentioned Paridegi myth in Oh T'ae-sök's *Under the Moonlight of Paekma River*. There, as here, shamanist fable of Paridegi is intermingled with the Confucian ideologies of filial piety and sacrificial motherhood. This might explain why *minjokgŭk* writers like Yi Yun-t'aek encounter Confucian ideal models although they search for the ethnic archetypes in the shamanist (Buddhist) worlds.

his grandmother hated his mother. After that, unlike Hamlet, Yönsan does not hesitate to take revenge. Immediately, he kills the two royal concubines. Being shocked at the news of the murder committed by Yönsan, his grandmother (the Queen Dowager) falls and eventually dies. In the scene of the royal funeral ceremony for his grandmother, Yi Yun-t'aek dismisses sham Confucian decorum.

In the next scene, Noksu walks into the bamboo grove led by a voice calling her name. This scene unfolds as her dream. In the dream, she meets the dead spirit of the mother of Yönsan. The deposed queen lets Noksu put on her *jögori*, the traditional short coat stained with blood. As she awakes, Noksu tells Yönsan about the blooded *jögori*. As Sung-jae already knows about it, he searches inside the chest given by the maternal grandmother of Yönsan. In the chest, Yönsan finds his mother's *jögori*. His real theatre of revenge starts at this point. When Yönsan encounters resistance in seeing *The True Record of the Chosön Dynasty* to find out who played parts in his mother's death, he threatens the royal subjects, saying, "I just want to rectify the wrong history and establish the center of the world" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 113).¹⁹¹ Subsequently, he puts all the responsible people on trial and executes them. The trial scene recalls the congressional hearing of Chun Tu-whan charged for the Kwangju massacre. One of the royal ministers says, "Your Royal Highness, I do not remember at all because it happened ten years ago." Yönsan orders poison from a hot pot to be put in his mouth "to revive his memory" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 115).

In the play, through the depiction of Yönsan's insane violence, Yi Yun-t'aek presents the irrational aspect of revolutionary zeal. As a counter-thread to the violent

¹⁹¹ In Chapter 4, I explained *yöksa paro chapki* (rectification of history) in two places where I analyze Oh's *Under the Moonlight* and I describe the socio-historical backgrounds of Yi's *minjokgük* in the 1990s.

revolution, one of his royal chamberlains, Ch'ŏ-sŏn" seems to be the only sober person. He reproaches Yŏnsan for his insane vengeance: "Has the world been changed in this way? In the name of revolution and reformation, people kill people. What has been left, Your Highness?" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 119). In his irrational state of mind, Yŏnsan eventually kills Ch'ŏ-sŏn." He becomes angered, and distances himself from Noksu, since he thinks that all the events were precipitated by her (her dream). Meanwhile, Sung-jae takes a *gisaeng* (courtesan), Wansanwŏl, to the palace to comfort his King because her appearance resembles his dead mother. When Noksu keeps Yŏnsan from sleeping with Wansanwŏl," he says, Noksu, please do not hold me anymore, I want to be reborn. We all have to be reborn. We should not be confined in this dirty and filthy past" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 134). As Noksu goes insane with jealousy, she cuts off one of Wansanwŏl's wrists and puts it in the soup of Yŏnsan. Through this scene, Yi Yun-t'aek suggests the incestuous desire of Yŏnsan for a return to his mother's womb.

Eventually, toward the end of the play, Yŏnsan confronts the counter-revolution of the young military forces connected to the existing power of the Confucian elites. As an allegory, through these young revolutionary forces that serve the existing power, the author severely criticizes the illicit connection of the faction of the former democratization forces (what the author calls "new middle class") with the hegemonic power that occurred at the end of the 1980s, which became the matrix of the polity of the 1990s in South Korea (Yi Tŏk-ju 1995: 27). He voices his despair through the last speech of Yŏnsan. With a tone of self-mockery, in despair, he declares, "the world is controlled by your pens, and I was the mad puppet played by you" (Yi Yun-t'aek 2006: 138). Ultimately, Yŏnsan throws himself into a pond full of blood and then emerges from

it. He walks into the bamboo grove. At the end, “while [the dead] *Yönsan* plays in the pond, he hears his mother’s voice calling his child name, repressing his tears, he goes down to the bottom of the pond” (Yi Yun-t’aek 2006: 139). Noksu, Sung-jae, and Chae-wön all die, and with all the dead in the bamboo grove, they form a huge graveyard. As a host of the memorial service, one of the musicians comes up to the stage and ends the service by burning the paper on which a memorial address is written.

On the surface, *Yönsan* seems to deal with the similar topics of the critical recognition of history and reality with which Müller wrestles in *Hamlet Machine* (1977). Whereas Yi Yun-t’aek sought the rebirth of the masculine history with a new hope in *Yönsan*, Müller indicts the masculine violence in the history of revolution and draws the impasse of the phallogentric history in *Hamlet Machine*. In *Yönsan*, *Yönsan* is in anguish to rectify the “wrong” (corrupt) history of the elder generation. In *Hamlet Machine*, the character, the male actor playing Hamlet, utters, “I want to be a machine. Arms for grabbing Legs to walk on, no pain no thoughts.” Eventually, he confesses that “I want to be a woman” (Heiner Müller 1984: 57). This self-criticism of the male intellectual comes from Müller’s view of history that is regarded as being full of masculine violence. As an integrated character, if Noksu in *Yönsan* is the portrait of Ophelia who is betrayed by *Yönsan*-Hamlet, Ophelia in *Hamlet Machine* is the collage of Inge Müller (Müller’s wife) and Electra. Through his wife who committed suicide Müller presents the image of a woman who was sacrificed by masculine history and through Electra he presents the image of a subjective woman. In the last part of *Hamlet Machine*, suggesting the gloomy situation of feminist liberation in the present, Ophelia is

swathed in bandage. Nevertheless, Müller holds open the possibility of Ophelia as the subject of her own will and desire.

In *Hamlet Machine*, Müller mines the buried (suppressed) myth of the subjective woman, but in *Yönsan* Yi Yun-t'aek searches for the archetypes of the resisting son and the sacrificial mother through the myth of Oedipus that perpetuates patriarchal regime. In *Yönsan*, the image of Yönsan is visualized as a sleep-walker, who is driven by Freudian “innate human desires” of incest and parenticide. I will end my feminist-deconstructive reading of the play *Yönsan* with Jill Scott’s comment on the Elektra model suggested by Müller. As Scott contends, “His Elektra is a fresh alternative to the masculine model of modernity. Unlike Oedipus, who wanders like a sleep-walker into his fate and commits his acts unknowingly, this Elektra is conscious of her task and goes about murder with a will” (2005: 6).

6.0 EPILOGUE: THE POLITICS OF THE PAST AND *MINJOKGŬK*

Transmission of societal traditions seems to prove that the past and the present are not separate conceptual frames since the notion itself is possible only when we locate the past and the present on a continuum. We, as mnemonic social beings, rely on knowledge and experiences of the past in order to shape present social structures. Past memories, sometimes forgotten but not completely gone, prompt the present through silent performance. More often than not, some claims of complete breakaway from the past manifest their contradiction in the way in which they resort to the resuscitation of the archaic past in order to deny the recent problematic past they are confronting. Moreover, ironically, despite modernity's claim of renovation and break from a traditional society, one way to characterize it might consist of a self-reflexive appropriation of the past, resulting in an abundance of newly invented traditions and artificial historical (memorial) sites.

Acknowledging that the "the past" is something reconstructed, our relationship to it is shaped by how we perceive, interpret, exploit, or use it. Some scholars assert that our engaged activities of perception and interpretation of the past events and incidents are "neutral." Nevertheless, especially when the past is summoned for present usage, this seems impossible. The past of a society, Maurice Halbwachs contends, can only be reconstructed through socially contextualized collective memory; even though

individuals are the agents of collective memory, not groups or institutions, these individuals always draw on a specific social context to remember the past (1992: 38-51). Sociologically speaking, memory is society's capacity to repeat the "invariant" aspects of itself, but the consequence is "the changing same" due to its selective performativity. Regarding this nature of alterity, William Raymond notes, selective tradition is highly ideological. Tradition is not just the residual part of the past, but the constructive forces "still active in the cultural process." By selective tradition, the past is interpreted in a specific way to serve the concerns and the interests of the present social groups (1977: 122). Michael Schudson's concept of memory as "distortion" highlights this constructive nature of social memory. In a sense, memory is inevitably "distortional" in that it is invariably selective. All the activities involved in social recall and historical writing about it – selection, interpretation, and distortion – are socially conditioned. The way of remembering, Schudson aptly points out, is the way of forgetting (1995: 346-347). Seen through this memory lens, the past and its usage is a socio-political issue constituent of the politics of the past.

In the body of this dissertation, by tracing genealogical trajectories, I have scrutinized how *minjokgŭk* practitioners have strategically adopted the politics of the past to create narratives about the Korean ethnic community for the communication of its imperative renewal. I believe that living traditions should be transmitted not because they are ours (Korean) but because they contribute to the people of the present both practically and symbolically. But, regardless of their ideological standpoints, the *minjokgŭk* theorists and practitioners resort to the "indigenous" traditions without inquiring why they should be summoned for some specific context. Their nationalist

thoughts are grounded on such a weak foundation that the “indigenous” traditions are good because they are part of “our” cultural spectrum. In this regard, *minjung* (grassroots) *minjokgŭk* theorists and practitioners articulate their ideological selection of folk traditions in terms of the present concerns with the spirit of criticism and resistance. But, as I strived to demonstrate, even their “class consciousness” is not sensitive to gender and race matters. In fact, the ethnocentric patriarchal myths *minjokgŭk* creates may complicitly contribute to the repression of some social groups in a manner contradictory to *minjokgŭk*’s claim of liberation. In *minjokgŭk*, its selective memory silences (forgets) the plural voices marginalized from the patriarchal construction of the ethnic community.

Also, I argue, the living traditions invented in other cultural realms have to be reconsidered as the crucial sources for shaping the present. In illustrating the contradictions and ironies of *minjokgŭkron* (the theory of *minjokgŭk*), I have contended that *minjokgŭk* relied far more on non-indigenous traditions than the theorists might have thought it did. In this dissertation, I have examined how *minjokgŭk*, as an invented tradition, has struggled to achieve its dominance over other theatrical discourses supported by the “interpretive community” of Korean theatre scholars and critics. Hence, modern Korean theatre history is outlined as the linear progression of *minjokgŭk* as the fittest of modern Korean theatres. *Minjokgŭk* theorists and practitioners have struggled to revive the national spirit by mining the native traditional sources to protect the nation from “Western” cultural encroachment. But, I do not consider “Western” modernization solely responsible for the dark history of modern Korea. Needless to say, modernity has various faces and stages of evolution during the course of history. As the *minjokgŭk*

theorists and practitioners point out, the dominance of “Western” technology and reason should be severely criticized as dangerous to tradition, but it should also be noted that in “our” modernity critical reason has already become “our” living tradition. In an important sense, “our” cultural identification is constructed as the collage of different cultures. In this respect, *minjokgŭk* theorists and the practitioners should reconsider the ethnocentric nationalist myth that divides the world into the good “us” and evil “them.”

Regarding the recent global phenomenon of the resurgence of nationalism, I looked at *minjokgŭk*'s use of symbolic resources from the past for imaginative communal bonding as a nation. But, the claimed homogeneity of the national past by means of “nation conflation” of different social groups is an illusionary conceptualization, and the national historiography silences memories of the marginalized groups and denies their histories. I demonstrated how Oh T'ae-sŏk's later history plays postulated masculine elitist views of history and effaced the plural memories of social beings by suggesting the ideal Korean type of male protector. With the strong masculine tone of an elite intellectual, he has continued to produce such history plays as *Ch'ŏnnyŏnŭi Suin* (*A Prisoner for One Thousand Years*, 1998) and *Manp'ashikjŏk* (*The Magical Flute*, 2005). In both, Oh deals with historical issues ranging from the Kwangju massacre to Chinese and Japanese distortions of Korean history. In 2007, *Toraji* was performed in Japan by the Korean-Japanese theatre company, “*Shinjuk'uyangsanbak*.”

In the case of *Yŏnsan, the Problematic Human Being*, Yi Yun-t'aek offers an interesting comment on the issue of history and memory on behalf of male progressive intellectuals (elites) through the allegory of Prince Yŏnsan. In one scene, “Yŏnsan” demands the court historiographer show him the record of national history, calling out

“The wrong record of history continues for thousand years. If you had recorded my mother as an evil woman, my dead mother’s rancorous spirit would hover over this world for a hundred thousand years. Open the door of Ch’unch’ukwan.¹⁹² I just want to confirm that the history was properly recorded.” Primarily, his revolution challenges the authority of “National History,” and he proclaims that he will rectify the “distorted” memory. Yönsan punishes people involved in the wrong history because the world suffered due to people like them who forget the “truth” of history. Though Yönsan outrageously condemns them as “quack fiction writers,” strictly speaking, “history” is a constructed fiction in terms of its ideologically selective nature (Yi Yun-t’aek 2006: 113-116).

For Yi Yun-t’aek, like Yönsan, the subversive reformation of the corrupt world begins with correcting the inverted historical view, but his idea of revolution appears doomed to failure. His “deconstruction” of the dominant history presumes the dichotomous world structure of the oppressor and the oppressed, and he assumes that the displacement of dominance at the center is deconstruction. If this simplified view of history cannot be abolished, revolution must be reckoned as the work of Sisyphus. In this context, my feminist deconstruction problematizes the matriarchal principle as counter-hegemonic resistance in the sense that deconstruction must direct any assertion away from the centered position.

Throughout this dissertation, I tried to illuminate the essentialist foundation of the ethnocentric and phallocentric myth of *minjokgŭk* expressed as the gender division of the ethnic (arche)type: “the protecting phallus/the sacrificial womb.” If deconstruction

¹⁹² It refers to the place where the preliminary historiographical source materials were kept before compilation.

does not aim to reconstruct the reversed center, what comes after the deconstruction of the essentialist worldview of *minjokgŭk*? What comes after the collapse of the gender division? If we remove the mythic essentialization in “History,” we encounter the world of plurality full of histories and herstories. My task of feminist deconstruction of the phallogocentric essentialism of *minjokgŭk* is bifocal; on the one hand, it undertakes the preparation of the practical ground for the claim of subjectivity of the social beings who are on the margins of the dominant patriarchs, when it encourages the recognition of their own names, voices, experiences, desires, and dreams. On the other hand, in its aspiration of liberation, it also engages the matter of the sense of responsibility and pathos that the Korean patriarchs have felt from the weight of the colonial history.

It is certain that in Korea nationalism has historically performed an important function during the colonization and democratization period. Nevertheless, it cannot be overlooked that as a representative of “the Korean ethnic community,” “the protecting man/the sacrificial woman” is contradictory to the plural and lateral thinking of participatory democracy in community-building. The concept of “the ethnic type” ideologically contributes to shaping a uniformly collective social ethos, containing the potential danger of discouraging individuals’ various performances of their own identification. It is time to think about a new political language that relates individuals to the community and nation. “The ethnic type” cannot *represent* the whole nation and the members of the nation should be the *examples* of the community they belong to for a more democratic society.

As the theorists and the practitioners of *minjokgŭk* caution us, the globalization from above driven by neo-liberalist transcapitalism should be warded off, but the

globalization from below in such social movements as human rights, environment, labor, gay and lesbian, and women's liberation can be suggested as the vision of global peace. The limitation of *minjokgŭk* is its ethnocentric tenacity to one bloodline that can easily transfer to racist violence and hinder global solidarity. On the matter of racism, most Korean people regarded themselves as the victims of racism consequent to the history of (neo)colonialism. With changing global flows and international division of labor, however, the Korean demographic landscape has rapidly changed, and the issue of racism became a volatile social issue.

Today, in South Korea, ultra-nationalism manifests the racist epistemic violence toward foreign migrant laborers; especially, the bodies of migrant workers and brides mostly from the South-East Asia became the sites of appropriation for sexuality and reproduction. It is not rare to find banners of international marriage companies that contain such slogans as "no running away brides," "100% guarantee of virginity," "free delivery," and "refund policy" that are reminiscent of a commodity slave trade. Specifically, Vietnamese brides are favored due to their similarity to Korean women in appearance and Confucian customs, proving that nationalist sentiments never abandon the illusionary idea of cultural unity and assimilation.

Recently, in South Korea, the idea of assimilation gives support to the multiculturalist idea of nation-building in the public realm. The discourses of multiculturalism have been suggested as alternative social visions that can replace exclusive nationalism, but I often find both pros and cons to multiculturalism in the discourses and in the practical projects. More often than not, discourses of multiculturalism coexist with discourses of nationalism. In its positive aspect,

multiculturalism abandons the myth of one bloodline and shows tolerance toward foreigners and migrant laborers, but, as a negative fact, it also presumes the hegemony of Korean ethnicity by naturalizing their positions as those of the marginalized. The basic idea of multiculturalist policy seems to be societal integration. For this purpose, local self-governing bodies and non-governmental organizations have held public forums and festivals for the migrant laborers and “multicultural” families.

Through the performance outlets of local festivals, Park In-pae’s Field Theatre Company has seriously worked with the communities of migrant workers in their consistent pursuit of “theatre for the workers,” with such productions as *Ilgopsaekkal Mujigae (Rainbow of Seven Colors, 2005)* and *Ilgop Chogak Tetris (Seven Pieces of Tetris, 2007)*.¹⁹³ These productions adopt the *madanggŭk* structure (pre-performance, main performance, and after-performance), but they are mostly composed of realistic characters and dialogue-dominated scenes. In *Rainbow of Seven Colors*, the story of Juen (an unhappy Vietnamese bride) is included as one of the multicultural components of Korean culture today. Yet, the image of Juen is portrayed as the type of a victimized minority in South Korean society. In *Seven Pieces of Tetris*, the Company deals with the problems and hopes of a family of migrant laborers.

In the mean time, through the venue of the National Theatre, the Company also created the productions like *Toraon Ch’uibalyi (Ch’uibalyi Returned, 2003)*, which betrays the ethnocentric and phallogocentric nationalist underlying structure of feeling. In an interview, Park In-pae remarks, “Even though it is problematically received,

¹⁹³ Regarding the issue of multiculturalism and nationalism in community-based theatre, the Field Theatre Company demonstrates very interesting works. My investigation is in the beginning stage and this topic will be pursued in my next work.

capitalism is the dominant logic of our world. I conceived the production for today's audience because I wanted to make them feel what is truthfully needed in their lives through the narratives of young Ch'uibalyi whose zest and decency of living defeats capitalist greed and obtains his love" (Munhwa Daily Newspaper 2003. 7/14. 11). In *Ch'uibalyi Returned*, a female character equivalent to Somu helps Ch'uibalyi by leading a male capitalist (equivalent to Nojang) into temptation. The production repeats the essentialist idea of the Korean ethnic type divided into "protecting man/helping (sacrificial) woman."

With its revival in 2007, the production became one of the main offerings of the Company, being shown in many performance venues including international festivals. *Ch'uibalyi Returned* is the exemplary case which illustrates the masculine politics of the past in *minjokgŭk* into the 2000s. Borrowing Foucault's view on genealogy, in this dissertation, my genealogical historiography of *minjokgŭk* has aimed to revive "the forgotten things" of this masculine politics of the past (1977: 146). It is high time to recall the past of *minjokgŭk* for locating forgotten memories and voices and positioning them in the rightful place in the history of modern Korean theatre.

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