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# Korea beyond and within the Armistice: Division and the Multiplicities of Time in Postwar Literature and Cinema

Susie Jie Young Kim

*The Korean Armistice Agreement has imposed a truce for a war that is not yet technically over and has prolonged the division of the Korean peninsula. Division consciousness, predicated on the present progressive mode of the Armistice, perpetrates a system of violence that is ongoing. One such violence has been in the form of individual voices and memories being disregarded and deemed superfluous. In South Korea, counter-memories—not in alignment with the hegemonic agenda derived from Cold War anticommunist ideology and a history adhering to a strict sense of temporal continuity—have been left hovering over a muddled temporal landscape. This article examines the division of the Korean peninsula, the Korean War, the Armistice, and the aftermath in Korean literature and film. It looks at how these articulations are negotiated through the complex temporal terrain of post-Armistice South Korean society. Literature and cinema have served as the repository for counter-memories of the Korean War and the postwar division era. Writers Pak Wansŏ and Ch'oe Yun and film director Kang Chegyu deal with notions of geography, time, memory, and history. Such texts speak to the concomitance of seemingly incongruent times and spaces, at certain moments neatly compartmentalized and others in disarray, as characters struggle to come to terms with the war and separation. Although these narratives take place decades after the cease-fire, the interminable aftereffects still linger, particularly as present time is filtered through the temporal prism of the war and division.*

In November 2010, South Korea hosted the G-20 Summit in Seoul. Within the same month, the artillery shelling of Yŏnpy'ŏng Island by North Korea followed. The 2010 G-20 Seoul Summit was one of the culminating points of Lee Myung-

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bak's (Yi Myōngbak) presidency, with the South Korean media featuring the event heavily through an endless array of background information, coverage of press conferences, and live feeds. Interviews by South Korean media with Korean volunteers—namely, scores of interpreters and on-site helpers for foreign dignitaries and international press—explained how some had returned to the nation's capital from abroad in order to be a part of this momentous occasion. Yet, if the G-20 Seoul summit was symbolic of how Korea—that is, *South Korea*—has emerged from the ashes of the Korean War since the July 27, 1953, Armistice, the shelling of Yōnpy'ōng Island was a reminder of how much the temporal trajectory of the Korean War and the Armistice shape South Korea's identity and where it stands today.

The aforementioned events of 2010 speak to the complex, schizophrenic temporal and spatial landscape that is Korea, or more precisely, the two Koreas. To be sure, when making a mindful distinction between the two nations, the artificially induced monikers of South Korea and North Korea serve as constant reminders of inherent spatio-temporal convolutions. This distinction necessarily and concomitantly testifies to the spatial disparity of division that still exists on the Korean peninsula sixty years after the cease-fire. On the one hand, "South" and "North" speak to the geographical separation, the different respective histories, and more significantly, to the divergent positionalities within the global system. On the other hand, a complex temporal configuration is endemic to the Korean peninsula. The temporal topography suggested in this article goes beyond a simple bifurcation differentiating North and South Korea. More specifically, the complexity has to do with the very circumstances of division.

No matter the analysis, it [the Korean War] was a horrific violent force that inflicted tremendous damage to both South and North: the immeasurable loss of life, immense property damage, vast number of separated families, and the congealing of division that still continues to have the peninsula fundamentally fettered.<sup>1</sup>

Literary scholar Kim Yunsik delineates division as an ongoing condition that restrains the peninsula, a state that Kim Tongch'un calls the "Armistice system." This continuing aspect involves the Armistice, which entails a truce but not a final end. The Armistice has meant a truce for a war that is not technically over and consequent substantiation for the divided status.

The Armistice served as a preamble for the proliferation of what I call "post-Armistice division consciousness," a division worldview that has saturated every aspect of Korean society under the aegis of a Cold War anticommunist agenda. Moreover, the tacit avowal granted by the Armistice for division to become solidified on the Korean peninsula has meant that the memories having to do with the partitioning of the nation, the Korean War, and the postwar division situation under a staunchly Cold War anticommunist agenda have gone largely ignored by authoritarian regimes preoccupied with securing power and ruling through sup-

pression and censorship. Not possessing the “added-value” for a system whose binary logic dispensed with dissent, much less ambivalence or nuance, these counter-memories were left disordered and disorganized, to be ultimately discounted in the official narrative of the war and its aftermath. As such, the full import of the Korean War has not completely crystallized even though so much time seems to have elapsed and extensive changes have seemingly taken place in the decades since the Armistice. There is a great deal that we still do not know, particularly as the official narrative of the war has been hijacked and fashioned under a repressive state agenda working under the anticommunist ideology that took hold over post-Armistice South Korea.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, South Korea faces the task of dealing with counter-memories of the Korean War that have yet to be properly organized, narrativized, and exorcised.

The Armistice “eventually consolidated the national division and the antagonism between the two Koreas” but did not bring closure.<sup>3</sup> In the period following the Armistice, Koreans were thus left in an equivocal limbo and a void amid an escalating, polarizing Cold War environment. The literary and cinematic articulations of the spatio-temporal terrain of post-July 27, 1953, speak to an overwhelming sense of loss, despair, and the inevitable desire for resolve, an intangible impressionistic reunification, and an alternate narrative and ending. This article examines the Korean War, post-Armistice division, and the aftermath as articulated in literature and film. It considers how time permeates these issues, as films and literary texts negotiate the divergent temporal lines endemic to the post-Armistice division state of Korean society vacillating somewhere between the war and the aforementioned events of 2010.

Pak Wansō’s “Ömma ūi malttuk 2” (Mother’s stake 2, 1981) deals with a woman who, like the writer, directly experienced the war and suffered terrible losses, but endeavors to assert herself exclusively in a present time. In “Kyōul nadūri” (Winter outing, 1976), also by Pak Wansō, a married woman suddenly takes an impulsive trip to get away from her North Korean refugee husband. Ch’oe Yun’s “Abōji kamsi” (Guarding father, 1990) focuses on a character who is born during the war and grows up not knowing his father, who defected to North Korea. Finally, I will examine Kang Je-gyu’s (Kang Chegyu) blockbuster film *T’aegŭkki hwinallimyō* (*Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War*, 2004), which renarrativizes the Korean War through a remembering process.

### LITERATURE AS THE REPOSITORY FOR MEMORY OF THE KOREAN WAR

Postwar film and literary texts speak to the simultaneity of disparate times and spaces and grapple with the Korean War and division as part of a broader memory grid. This amassing of memory, which may not necessarily be organized or controlled, can be found in texts such as Pak Wansō’s “Ömma ūi malttuk 2” and

“Kyōul nadūri,” and Ch’oe Yun’s “Abōji kamsi.” These texts speak to the concomitance of seemingly incongruent times and spaces, although at times neatly compartmentalized and at other times confused and in disarray. In describing Hong Kong on the eve of its handover to China, Ackbar Abbas writes, “These transformations have produced an open-ended situation that is still in the process of definition.”<sup>4</sup> To be sure, the situations of Hong Kong and Korea are in some ways quite different, but the notion of open-endedness likewise reigns over the post-Armistice divided peninsula. By virtue of its division, Korea is also in the process of definition: an ongoing status that has been fueled by the “pause,” an interval signaled by the Armistice rather than a definitive end.

Division necessarily entails a complex temporal terrain on the Korean peninsula. Time, as Henri Bergson famously formulated, functions not as a systematic linear progression toward infinity but rather an amassing, which speaks to the contiguous connection of past and present.<sup>5</sup> As articulated in South Korean literature and cinema, the complexity of time is further underscored on the Korean peninsula by division and the post-Armistice Cold War agenda. The post-Armistice division system’s promotion of a grand narrative of progress and linearity derived from history’s obdurate predilection for “temporal continuities” undermines the more intricate sense of time as an accumulation as well as the memories contained in them.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, characters struggle to keep up with expectations of successive time that has little room for unruly memories. As an unsympathetic South Korean state disregards their voices, the characters must negotiate past traumas on their own. However, the very open-endedness of division and its contradictions likewise engenders a landscape of temporal disorder that makes the pastness of the present more intrinsic, as the very notion of the past creates temporal contradictions. The “pause” designated by the Armistice inherently speaks to the paradox of division, as this suspension functions in the “present progressive tense.”<sup>7</sup> Although Kim Tongch’un uses the notion of the “present progressive tense” to emphasize the perpetual war frame of mind in a divided Korea, particularly in the violence that has been exacted on South Korean citizens, I approach the post-Armistice division system in terms of the convoluted temporal negotiations that characters face in postwar South Korean literature and film notably with regard to memory. At times, this is not simply about an interconnectedness of past and present, but also how the open-ended nature of division casts a shadow of the future time over the peninsula as well.

The Korean War and territorial division indelibly left their marks on the peninsula and have caused considerable damage in other ways, as Korean literature also suffered heavy casualties, not only through the war’s devastating destruction but also through the direct impact of territorial division. This came just after Korea had emerged from decades of Japanese colonialism, which had left its own dark imprint on literature. Japanese colonialism had wreaked significant violence on modern Korean literature in the form of censorship and the imprisonment of writers, the crushing of creative and political freedoms, and suppression

of the Korean language. But the war unleashed a whole other fury, with catastrophic consequences. To be sure, for writers, August 15, 1945, had been Janus-faced, “as the *liberation* of 1945 was not sovereign independence, there was no other recourse but to accept the imposition of division without any resistance, which subconsciously stifled the writer’s consciousness.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the very foundation of Korean literature also changed. As a migration took place on the national scale during the years surrounding the war’s outbreak, Korean literature experienced its own version of partition. Writers moved en masse to either side of the thirty-eighth parallel, some following their ideological convictions, such as the modernist visionary Pak T’aewŏn, while the North forcibly abducted others such as Yi Kwangsu and Kim Ŏk.<sup>9</sup> Korean literature, in this way, suffered its own form of the *isan kajok*, or separated family phenomenon, in which territorial division and the ensuing war ripped apart untold numbers of families post-1945. In the subsequent Cold War environment following the Armistice, literary historians had to redefine modern Korean literature along new parameters. Part of this has to do with the Armistice and its implication for Korean literature.

After getting through the abrupt twists and turns of our modern history—embracing August 15 with overflowing emotions, the uproarious chaos created in the space of liberation by leftist-rightist altercations, the establishment of separate governments of North and South, and the Korean War—the Armistice that was decided on July 27, 1953, formally raised the curtains on the tragic era of division. . . . The situation of division has an all-consuming meaning that goes beyond any individual death or wound, the subsequent suffering or destruction of one family, and the dimension of separation.<sup>10</sup>

The Armistice continues to extend division’s authority and to facilitate the dissemination of a partition consciousness that has engulfed postwar Korean society on both sides of the divide. In further sanctioning the original territorial division at the thirty-eighth parallel in 1945, the Armistice in 1953 solidified Korean division and marked the advent of the division’s era. This corroborates Kim Tongch’un’s notion of an “Armistice system,” in which division continues to define the Korean peninsula in historical, political, ideological, cultural, and temporal terms. The ensuing Cold War structure meant that literary history had to absorb the empty space left behind by the exodus of writers and intellectuals who ended up in the North after the cease-fire. These names were consequently purged from South Korean literary history, only to be reinstated decades later.<sup>11</sup> Writers remaining in the South took up the role of protesting against an increasingly authoritarian state. The South Korean government responded swiftly by imprisoning dissident writers such as Kim Chiha and Ko Un (Ko Ŭn), not unlike anticolonial writers during Japanese rule.

While Korean literature had to contend with having to redraw its parameters in the division era, it readdressed the role of literature in an oppressive society. A repressive anticommunist state, one that did not permit widespread historical

capital has meant that literature, and cinema for that matter, have been the repository for what Pierre Nora calls “reserves of memory,” untapped, unorganized, and having no place to go, being deemed unfit by official history.<sup>12</sup> Writers—including Pak Wansŏ, Kim Wŏnil, Cho Chŏngnae, Yi Ch’ŏngjun, and Yun Hŭnggil, among others—have dealt extensively with the Korean War and division from various angles.<sup>13</sup> Representative Korean War texts such as Yun Hŭnggil’s “Changma” (Rainy spell, 1973) and Cho Chŏngnae’s “Yuhyŏng ŭi ttang” (Land of exile, 1981) are predominantly the products of what Jin-kyung Lee calls a “masculinist remembrance project” of the Korean War.<sup>14</sup> Cho Chŏngnae’s “Yuhyŏng ŭi ttang” deals with class conflict as a dimension of the ideological struggle of this internecine war. Through promises of a better life, the unlikely protagonist Mansŏk, a hot-tempered commoner of peasant-farmer stock, aligns himself with Communist forces after enduring years of oppression by the members of the Ch’oe clan, the ruling landlord family in his village. Mansŏk’s violent acts of revenge during the war compel him to spend his life after the cease-fire wandering the nation, ostensibly banished from his hometown as *persona non grata*. Yun Hŭnggil’s “Changma” is told from the point of view of a young boy narrating the complex situation of his paternal and maternal grandmothers, whose respective sons become casualties fighting on opposite sides. Reconciliation is performed through shamanistic ritual, opening up the possibility of an indigenous resolution for division. Both texts offer up a humanist standpoint. “Yuhyŏng ŭi ttang” does this partly through a misleading narrative structure with the text starting with Mansŏk as a sick, frail old man about to leave his young son in an orphanage, while the portrayal of an ideologically blended family in “Changma” offers up a sympathetic account of family members and neighbors taking up arms against each other in the war, an all too painfully frequent occurrence. “Yuhyŏng ŭi ttang” performs a problematic erasure of the fine line between perpetrator and victim through its narrative construction. Both texts nonetheless attempt to humanize the painful wounds of ideological warfare.

Although the above-mentioned texts deal directly with a re-presentation of the Korean War, this article focuses on texts that deal with the residual vestiges and remnants of the war and the aftermath of the interplay with a more present temporality. Pak Wansŏ’s “Ōmma ŭi malttuk 2” and “Kyŏul nadŭri,” and Ch’oe Yun’s “Abŏji kamsi” deal with notions of geography, time, memory, and history, as characters struggle to come to terms with the war and division. It should be noted that these two female writers represent different generations vis-à-vis the Korean War. Pak Wansŏ was born in 1931 and lived through the Korean War, a war that affected her in a very painfully personal manner and which has served as a foundation for her writing. In contrast, Ch’oe Yun was born in 1953 and has no personal experience of the war.

Pak Wansŏ’s “Ōmma ŭi malttuk 2” and Ch’oe Yun’s “Abŏji kamsi” approach the Korean War and division through an intergenerational matrix by examining the conflict arising out of parents’ and children’s relationship to

the war and the realities of division in everyday life. These texts explore post-war Korea not as a juncture of recovery from the war marking the subsequent consecutive point on a linear trajectory, but rather as a space containing raw, lingering, and untreated memories; a space aggravated by the overarching force of division. Along with “Kyŏul nadŭri,” these texts speak to the simultaneity of pasts in the present. Time functions, not so much in terms of succession, with one moment following another in linear fashion, but rather as an accumulated past being coterminous to the present. Division, in particular, demands this comprehensive time, in which the specter of the past has been left to fester and circumnavigate the Korean peninsula. Although these texts take place decades after the Armistice, the characters wrestle with the interminable aftereffects, as they navigate present times through the temporal prism of the war and division.

### THE TIME(S) OF DIVISION IN PAK WANSŎ

The narrator in “Ŏmma ŭi malttuk 2,” the second in a three-part linked series of the same name, is an outgoing middle-aged *ajumma*, a married woman commonly delimited by her role as wife and mother. Although the *ajumma* figure in Korean society tends to be self-sacrificing, a woman who works tirelessly behind the scenes in support of her husband, children, and in-laws, Pak Wansŏ’s female characters break the mold. Pak offers up women with intricate inner lives, despite their status as wives and mothers, which has prompted scholars to regard Pak’s writing as definitively feminist.<sup>15</sup>

Pak Wansŏ recurrently depicts her female characters away from the home, at times fleeing the household and its attached responsibilities. “Ŏmma ŭi malttuk 2” begins with the narrator’s bold declaration: “It was my belief that each calamity, big or small, which has hitherto happened to my family has come to pass while I was away from home.”<sup>16</sup> The narrator’s forthright confession exposes her unconventional ways. Indeed, the beginning section of the text is replete with descriptions of how intrepidly the narrator has gone out on a regular basis circumventing the usual expectation of wives and mothers to “keep house.” Her audaciousness is further established by an account of how she had been late returning home to a newly weaned baby who also happens to be her first child, underscoring the narrator’s nonconforming nature even more. The explanation is far from the usual transportation or traffic related excuse, as she admits to having gotten caught up playing *hwat’u* (flower cards), a gambling game that inevitably raises eyebrows in polite circles, especially if played by women. The narrator divulges how thrilling the *hwat’u* game had been, ignoring her status not only as a mother of a toddler but also as a daughter-in-law living with her mother-in-law, a detail that prompts a gibe from a fellow *ajumma* about the narrator being out so late.

The narrator of “Ömma üi malttuk 2” seeks diversion outside the home with aplomb, as an escape but likewise for validation. This desire for validation possesses a temporal facet, which is similarly found in another Pak Wansö text, “Kyöul nadüri.” In “Kyöul nadüri,” an *ajumma*’s impulsive decision to go on a road trip has to do with a yearning to reiterate the present time by running away from the weight of a past temporal line. The narrator’s sudden urge to escape the domestic space is agitated by the division’s convoluted temporality when she inadvertently comes upon her artist husband painting a portrait of his daughter, her stepdaughter. This innocuous sight incites irrational feelings of jealousy toward her husband’s first wife, who had unwittingly been left behind in North Korea. “Even though I’m younger than that woman, I am getting unattractively older by his side while that woman is held in my husband’s heart in all her glorious youth and beauty.”<sup>17</sup> This seemingly mundane admission appears to be the confession of an insecure middle-aged housewife. However, the spatial-temporal mapping of the husband’s first wife and that of the narrator possesses complex implications. The ambivalence of division lies in its very paradox: the border appears to be absolute in the ideological and political sense, yet it is at once open-ended, particularly with regard to its future. A dialectic of permanence and impermanence hovers over division, fueled by the theoretical inevitability of reunification based on a pan-Korean nationalist desire “for restoring that lost ethnic unity.”<sup>18</sup> This unknowable ambivalence creates confounding circumstances for those subjected to its contradictions.

The uncertainty inherent in the division system propels the narrator’s enigmatic feelings of jealousy in “Kyöul nadüri.” The first wife is likely alive somewhere on the other side of the border, and technically (perhaps) still the legal wife. For what are the legal ramifications for marriage in cases of national division? Practical considerations aside, division generates a temporal vacuum that somehow contains the first wife in suspended pastness, her youth preserved in the interim. For the narrator, the cruel irony is that although division functions as a firm and even unyielding boundary that may prevent a reunion between her husband and his first wife, this is not guaranteed, for it does not have the unconditionality of death. However impassable the line of division may appear, the paradox is that it is, at once, indefinite.

Division’s veneer of permanence is undermined by its very unknowability, which gives it an impermanence that is reinforced by the interval represented by the Armistice, but concurrently by the lingering possibility of the peninsula being sutured at some unforeseeable future juncture. What is more, the narrator must compete with her husband’s longing for the North and the constant call of return, which Julia Kristeva perceives as being inevitable, as the alien is inexorably haunted by the origin.<sup>19</sup> The haunting is that much more trenchant, as division propagates within what I call a time of the “meanwhile,” the meanwhile being a period of decisively neither here nor there. Cultivated in the provisional pause of the Armistice, in an intermission with no foreseeable end, at least for now,

this indeterminacy inflames the narrator's anxiety in "Kyöul nadüri." Within the division context and the flustering effects of its temporal landscape, the narrator's anxiety is less about the irrational jealousy of a middle-aged woman, but rather, the broader anxiety of Koreans in post-Armistice Korea.

An anxiety parallel to the one delineated above is likewise asserted in "Ömma üi malttuk 2." As the narrator in "Kyöul nadüri" tries to cope with the burden of uncertainty and contingency in the Armistice system, in "Ömma üi malttuk 2," the temporal line of division invariably mixes with that of the narrator as well. In spite of the narrator's efforts in "Ömma üi malttuk 2" to throw herself unreservedly into the moment of the now, news of her mother's hospitalization swiftly triggers the narrator's own memories.

I recalled my brother who died during the Korean War. . . . When I broke the window of the neighborhood shop causing great financial havoc for Mother, he took me to the castle wall by Inwang Mountain and beat me as he cried. As if that beating was knocking me awake now, my stupor disappeared altogether and I felt him near me for the first time in a really long while. His tears from that day were still making me cry now.<sup>20</sup>

The narrator conjures up her brother, who was killed during the war by a People's Army officer. Scholars tend to read the mother and daughter in dichotomous temporalities of "past" and "present," with the mother being clinically "stuck" in the past.<sup>21</sup> However, the above recollection prompted by the mother's accident activates a sequence of remembering, as the narrator comes face to face with a past time. Unexpectedly, it is a rich tapestry of pastness that she has heretofore been eluding through her resolve to live her life in the present without restraint. Although her mother displays signs of a melancholic caught in a malicious cycle of bad remembering, temporality in this text is not as straightforwardly categorizable in such bifurcated terms. In the passage above, the narrator is not only intimately connected to a past time but the past is also able to stir and move her in the present. This is especially notable for a character so inclined to indulge herself in the present time of her quotidian life. The narrator's escape is accordingly fleeting, as she submits to a past time that is part and parcel of the ongoing present in which these notions of time are not divergent entities to be segregated.

The confusion produced by division manifests more pointedly when the narrator is made to confront it in a moment of unguarded candor. When her friend asks her about funeral preparations, explicitly a burial plot, the narrator responds without irony.

"But we have our ancestral burial ground in our hometown."

"And where is your hometown?"

"You ask like you don't know. It's by Kaesöng, in Kaep'ung-gun."

"What's the use of having an ancestral burial ground there?"<sup>22</sup>

The narrator's response comes automatically, without thinking. That the family has its burial ground back "home" is for all intents and purposes a factual declaration. However, the narrator neglects to take into account the glaringly obvious obstacle: Kaep'ung-gun is in North Korea, on the other side of the artificial border marked by the thirty-eighth parallel. Is the inevitability of reunification merely a matter of time for the narrator, with access to North Korea apparent in some nebulous yet foreseeable future? This seemingly momentary lapse also contains a temporal elusiveness. Whereas the friend's retort appears firmly grounded in the immediate present time of territorial division in its recognition of the unfeasible nature of professing to have a burial plot in North Korea while living in South Korea, the narrator's proclamation contains temporal ambiguities incongruous with the content of her statements. The narrator's assertion elides the very tricky technicalities of whether or not her family would still even have rights over that land and presumes that such claims would somehow be above the restrictions imposed by decades of partition. The use of the present tense suggests her claim to the land as continuous in the present time. However, does her use of the present tense simultaneously refer to the past—a time before the Armistice, before the Korean War, before the Allied Forces' partitioning of the nation—as well as the division's deferral to a future time—a future "when" not "if" reunification takes place? That is to say, is she summoning a broader sense of time—a time beyond division? The border may exist, but the narrator's hometown is forever located in Kaep'ung-gun.

The ambiguities underpinning the very notion of division speak to a paradox: division is a formidable foe, but, in spite of appearances to the contrary, it is neither absolute nor final. The narrator recalls the time when she and her mother travel to spread the ashes of her brother, her mother's precious, one and only son—another victim of the Korean War. They go to Kanghwa Island, the closest place legally accessible within sight of their hometown Kaep'ung-gun, in North Korea.

Mother was vigorous and fearless like a warrior about to enter into battle. With only a handful of dust against the wind, Mother was attempting to fight something too colossal. For Mother, the handful of dust and wind were not feeble, not in the least. Indeed, this was the sole means through which she could be defiant on her own against the incomprehensible monster called Division that trampled her and snatched everything away from her.<sup>23</sup>

The narrator's mother rejects the physical jurisdiction stipulated by the division by spreading her son's ashes near the border, in lieu of burying him in South Korea as expected. However, the narrator appreciates that this had not been a naive gesture on her mother's part nor simply a method of dealing with the *han*, the insurmountable grief and rancor of not being able to bury her son properly in the family burial ground. In contrast, this is her mother's tactic of facing division head-on. This is one woman's repudiation of division—not only of its physical borders but also an outright rejection of its all-encompassing authority—albeit in a seemingly quiet way.

The text ends powerfully and defiantly: “Mother is still fighting the illness.”<sup>24</sup> The term used here is *t’ubyōng*, referring to the mother’s status of being in the throes of recovery. Although on one level this is a medical process having to do with a physical ailment, on another level the illness more conspicuously deals with that of division. Division is ultimately the malady that the narrator’s mother is continuing to battle. It should be noted that the tense that is used here is the “ing” form, that is, the present progressive tense. Mother is *still* fighting “the monster,” as the monster of division continues to endure with what Paek Nakch’ōng views as unexpected, relentless pertinacity.<sup>25</sup> As articulated in the present progressive form, the division’s perseverance is that much more unlimited. This present progressive form speaks to how the war is still ongoing in post-Armistice Korea, but it goes past that to encompass the complete totality of division’s stronghold over the peninsula. However, just as division may persist, so too will the mother’s tactics. In effect, the mother bequeaths “that act” to her daughter. That is to say, the narrator is charged with doing the same with her mother’s ashes when the time comes. A trope common in Korean War and division literature, the resultant wounds are inherited as a family tragedy and further proliferated by the next generation.<sup>26</sup> “That act” goes beyond a mother’s burial wishes and passes down the stratagem of defiance against division. What is more, it is not merely about repetition, but performing an act of unequivocal renunciation. Division is the obstacle to be questioned and contested, the stake to be removed, in time. In spite of the narrator’s carefree escapism in search of a categorically present temporal existence, as epitomized in the first part of the text, in the end the mother appoints her daughter with this responsibility, thereby integrating this pastness as part of the narrator’s accumulating time. Consigned to the “dialectic of remembering and forgetting” the narrator is thrust into the complex temporal and historical dimensions of division.<sup>27</sup>

## POST-ARMISTICE DIVISION CONSCIOUSNESS IN “ABŎJI KAMSI”

Ch’oe Yun’s “Abŏji kamsi” likewise deals with an intergenerational negotiation of the Korean War and division, but through a father and son relationship. Ch’oe Yun frequently tackles sobering historical questions by excavating their enduring traces in lieu of simply re-presenting them. As with Pak Wansŏ, Ch’oe Yun’s texts explore the intermingling of temporal lines, at times documenting their violent collision. This violence partly stems from the ensuing rupture of the quiet and ordinary everyday, which is invariably turned upside down.<sup>28</sup> “Abŏji kamsi” deals with the labyrinthine effects of division, defector families, and their consequences on the notions of time, space, memory, and history. At the root of the narrative is the reunion between a son who has never seen his father and a father who crosses the border to North Korea for ideological reasons while leaving behind a pregnant wife and two sons. The father starts a new life with a new

family in North Korea, while his decision to go North has tragic consequences for the family left behind in the South.

The repressive South Korean state, dominated by what Namhee Lee describes as “hegemonic anticommunism”<sup>29</sup> deeply scars the son, Ch’angyŏn, along with the rest of the family left defenseless against the intensifying vortex of the Cold War. South Koreans’ own experiences of the violence meted out by North Korea during the Korean War bolstered the Cold War anticommunism in postwar South Korea, and thereby made them willing and docile subjects of the state’s anti-communist policies.<sup>30</sup> However, the atmosphere of fear cast suspicion on anyone appearing to be critical of the state, which kept vigilant surveillance and exacted punishment on such individuals. The state extended its authority further by keeping a watchful eye over families of *wŏlbukcha*, or “those who have gone to the North” like the father in “Abŏji kamsi.” Part of the ruling regime’s efforts required family members of individuals presumed to have gone North to register with local authorities. Indeed, Ch’angyŏn alludes to the family’s hardships following their placement on a surveillance list of “defectors’ families” during an era in which “defector” was synonymous with “communist,” inviting constant visits by police detectives. Along with the rest of his family, Ch’angyŏn suffers through years of surveillance, questioning, and harassment under South Korea’s Cold War anticommunist policies due to his father’s choice.

The reunion between father and son does not happen on the Korean peninsula but in the comparatively neutral space of Paris where Ch’angyŏn, who also serves as a first-person narrator, elects to relocate. Although he travels abroad to study, Ch’angyŏn does not allege to have enjoyed any of the cultural capital associated with foreign study. His choice of France over the pedestrian destination of America, with its deeply embedded Cold War geopolitical implications—namely, its role in the partitioning of Korea, the Korean War, and its neocolonial ties to the Korean peninsula—is especially salient, as his specialty is botany and not a subject exclusive to France. However, his career path has not been easy. Particularly in descriptions having to do with his own life, the narrator’s language is infused with anger and bitterness. He states that it has taken him “twice as long as other people” to acquire his doctorate degree and confesses to finishing only “after much struggle.”<sup>31</sup> This is not false humility. His tendency to underscore the wrong that has been done to him derives from Ch’angyŏn’s primary identity marker: that of victim. His innate sense of victimhood provokes him to choose this path, as this elusive degree is less about career ambition or passion for his chosen subject and more precisely a means of breaking out of the prison of living in an ideologically charged, divided nation as a defector’s son: “[I told father that] I decided to leave the country for a vagabond’s life because I had suffered so terribly for so long due to the label of a *wŏlbukcha*’s son.”<sup>32</sup> Notwithstanding his escape to more politically neutral ground, there is little evidence that he has found solace in his adopted nation or emancipation from the Cold War shackles of his life in Korea. Far from a researcher showing any promise, he knowingly

“faces the prospect of rotting his life away in an insignificant research institute” as a substitute life to the one bestowed upon him by his father.<sup>33</sup> He is a self-professed middle-aged bachelor and remains unwanted and extraneous, much like the weeds that he studies.

Despite uprooting himself to a foreign country, Ch’angyŏn has little success shedding his deeply entrenched sense of victimhood molded out of decades in a Cold War authoritarian environment. Ch’angyŏn is chained to the grand history of a divided Korea, as his very identity is synonymous with and defined by it. Although he has opted for the extreme alternative of emigrating out of Korea, he has been unable to leave behind the very language of Cold War ideology from which he claims his victimhood status. Indeed, Ch’angyŏn betrays himself to be a flawless product of the ideological state apparatuses functioning to keep Koreans in check in the name of national security through a constant bombardment of anticommunist rhetoric at all levels of society. The state wielded anticommunism in the name of “national security and public safety since the 1960s, making it a deeply and thoroughly internalized experience for many rather than just a state-imposed doctrine or policy.”<sup>34</sup> Ch’angyŏn’s own subject position cleaves the seemingly contradictory sides of being the victim of a ruthless repressive state, and whose suffering was intensified due to his father’s decision to go North, with that of an acquiescent subject of the very ideological state apparatuses that Ch’angyŏn means to overcome. In effect, the language that Ch’angyŏn uses as narrator is stridently ensconced in Cold War ideology: “Although it had been barely one week since father arrived from the PRC I was already mentally and physically exhausted.”<sup>35</sup> Here, the narrator uses the word *Chunggong*, an abbreviation of *Chunghwa Inmin Konghwaguk* (the People’s Republic of China) in lieu of the more ubiquitous term *Chungguk* (China). Akin to using “the PRC” (People’s Republic of China) in English versus the more comparatively generic term China, the word choice emphasizes the “Red” aspect of this communist bastion. The narrator thereby specifically situates China within the old Cold War paradigm of his youth by reinforcing China’s communist identity. Although news of the crumbling Eastern bloc and the fall of Romania is constantly blaring in the background as a counterpoint to the father-son reunion, this term punctuates the text throughout, accentuating the ideological tempest that is at its crux.

The primordial authority of blood ties stemming from the biological bond between father and son is nullified here, instead giving way to a more substantive confrontation. Ch’angyŏn faces his father—who has fled North Korea but has relocated to the neighboring communist nation of China—as a South Korean subject systematically inculcated in the Cold War ideology of post-Armistice South Korea. Ch’angyŏn’s physical removal from this space predicated on the post-Armistice division system has done little to erode his internalization of the postwar anticommunism of his upbringing, as he has been unable to free himself from the very hegemonic Cold War ideology that has damaged him so. The title adumbrates the fundamental conflict in the text: *kamsi* denotes “guarding” or

“watching over” but it also implies “surveillance.” Contrary to the conventional sentimentality of a reunion between a son and his long-lost father, the title suggests something sinister, something beyond a son simply observing or keeping watch over his father. As the subject-positions of father and son principally dictate the reunion, at least in the mind of the Ch’angyŏn, the title has the implication of a South Korean guarding his North Korean—communist father. Furthermore, the very notion of *kamsi* speaks to Ch’angyŏn’s own experiences of being watched over by the state as a defector’s son. Ch’angyŏn confronts his father not as a son, but as a South Korean subject overpoweringly indoctrinated in the anticommunist education system of the era. Although this is complicated by Ch’angyŏn having suffered under the state’s oppressive policies, he often resorts to the same dichotomous Cold War worldview, even reproducing the South Korean Cold War hegemonic ideology against his father.

While the daughter tries to keep the past at bay in “Ömma ŭi malttuk 2,” in “Abŏji kamsi,” it is the son who appears wedged in the past and unable to get past seeing his father through Cold War eyes. His inability to overcome an anachronistic Cold War paradigm inherently handicaps the reunion, in spite of his father’s quiet pronouncements that he now considers himself a simple country farmer. Nonetheless, Ch’angyŏn is indefatigable in his resolve to verify his father’s ideological identity: “Father, why did you flee to China where it can’t be easy? Why didn’t you cut a path some place far away like Japan or America?”<sup>36</sup> The two alternatives that Ch’angyŏn proposes happen to be two über-capitalist nations, the United States and Japan, versus the communist mainstay, China. This does not simply stem from a son’s concern that his aging father might have an easier time in these places, which just happen to be capitalist societies. Ch’angyŏn fixates on obtaining proof of his father’s ideological conversion. To a South Korean raised on anticommunist propaganda, a North Korean Communist is the ultimate, absolute Other. In a moment of remembering, Ch’angyŏn describes the time when he and his friends came across a group of North Koreans in Paris: “instead of being delighted by the sound of hearing our mother tongue in an unexpected place each of us automatically drew in our outstretched legs without realizing it.”<sup>37</sup> Even though spatially thousands of miles away from Korea, the South Koreans revert back to habits honed by years of anticommunist indoctrination. The narrator initially catalogs the group visually as “three Asians” but then quickly recategorizes them as being “like strange animals” as soon as the unmistakable sound of a North Korean accent is heard. Not only does the presence of these North Koreans have a programmed physical effect on the South Koreans’ bodies, as each tenses up as if standing at attention; the shock of seeing North Koreans up close for the first time also simultaneously immobilizes their speech. For Ch’angyŏn, his father in a similar way resembles an alien creature that stirs up deep anxieties. Ultimately, the father has the wrong credentials for a son who is a product of post-Armistice South Korea. Ch’angyŏn is steeped in the ideological propaganda such that the meeting is invariably mediated by his

“South” Korean positionality and his father’s “North” Korean defector identity. Hence, insofar as the relationship is contained within the bifurcation of the post-Armistice Cold War division system, meeting his own father—a North Korean Other and Communist enemy—is invariably wrought with tension and mistrust.

Although “Abōji kamsi” takes place some four decades after the Armistice amid the backdrop of the collapsing Cold War structure, Ch’angyōn struggles with moving beyond a post-Armistice division consciousness when face-to-face with his long-lost father. Not only does Ch’angyōn have difficulty coming to terms with his post-Armistice subject-position even in a post-Cold War world, the post-Armistice division consciousness predetermines the reunion even before it takes place. What is more, Ch’angyōn is tethered to a past time that he did not even directly experience. Although the painful memories of growing up as a defector’s son are his, the memories of the war and his father, whom Ch’angyōn has never known, are those that have been borrowed mainly from his mother—namely, through the “mythical image” that she repeatedly drilled into him as a child. While the “Ömma ūi malttuk 2” narrator directly witnesses her family’s tragedy from the war, Ch’angyōn’s position is one rung removed from the war itself. This speaks to the cycle of violence, an ongoing mentality of an interminable war permeating post-Armistice Korea, as the ūr-tragedy is passed on from generation to generation.<sup>38</sup> If Ch’angyōn appears haunted by the specter of the past, his father dissociates from it by excising the past almost to a point of rebuffing its usefulness. The father has no apologies to offer, only a desire to “show you myself exactly as I am.”<sup>39</sup> In effect, the sterile present time averred by Ch’angyōn’s father runs parallel to the notion of time that Ch’angyōn adamantly upholds and their respective temporalities come to a crossroads. Although the two characters’ relationship to time and memory encumbers the encounter, the reunion takes a turn once they enter a more holistic time. It is worth noting that this takes place in Père-Lachaise cemetery, where his father requests to visit the “Wall of Communards” commemorating the heroes of the French Revolution. It is here at the site of history, death, and the stark reminder of mortality where Ch’angyōn may finally be able to view his father as an old man and himself as his father’s son, rather than a South Korean confronting a North Korean Communist.

### REMEMBERING THE KOREAN WAR IN RECENT KOREAN CINEMA

While the Golden Age of Korean Cinema saw the release of Korean War classics such as *P’iagol* (*Piagol*, Yi Kangch’ōn, 1955) and Lee Man-hee (Yi Manhŭi)’s *Toraorianŭn haebŏng* (*The Marines Who Did Not Return*, 1963),<sup>40</sup> the war and the issue of division have more recently become a hallmark of the so-called Korean Blockbuster.<sup>41</sup> This phenomenon can be seen in the recent resurgence of films such as *T’aegŭkki hwinallimyo* (*Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War*,

directed by Kang Je-gyu [Kang Chegyu, 2004], *Welk'ŏm t'u Tongmakkol* (Welcome to Dongmakgol, directed by Pak Kwanghyŏn, 2005), *P'ohwa sokŭro* (71 Into the fire, directed by John H. Lee, 2010), *Chŏk kwa ūi tongch'im* (Sleeping with the enemy, directed by Pak Kŏnyong, 2011), and *Kojijŏn* (The front line, directed by Chang Hun, 2011). Through this recent resurgence, the Korean War has been reintroduced to a whole new generation of theater audiences in blockbuster form. *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyo* follows two brothers who become separated during the war and end up fighting on opposite sides of the war, precariously and accidentally postured as “North” and “South.” A generational issue is at play in *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyo*, as the main audience comprises a younger generation that no longer has a direct, lived connection to the war, much less its Cold War provenance. Although Korean films from the 1950s and 1960s such as *Toraorianŭn haebyoŋ* and *P'iagol* played to actual victims and survivors upon their release, more recently released films are increasingly geared toward an audience whose relationship to the Korean War, and division for that matter, is much more distant.<sup>42</sup> Films like *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyo* no longer play to an audience with direct experience of the war, but to an audience that is once removed.

*T'aegŭkki hwinallimyo* takes a didactic approach to the Korean War and moves away from the more multivalent mode used in the texts by Pak Wansŏ and Ch'oe Yun discussed previously. The film announces its reverence toward the subject of the Korean War even before the first frame, as somber non-diegetic sound accompanies the title credits, which dissolves to a black screen. The first shot comprises the camera looking out from the dark. The camera actually looks up from below, as beams of light fill the screen amid the diegetic sound of digging and brushing—resulting in a disorientating opening sequence. This scene cuts to a quick succession of close-ups focusing on careful brush strokes, the serious demeanor of a man's face, and shots of disembodied arms and white-gloved hands handling presumably precious artifacts. The camera eventually cuts to shots of a helmet and guns, until it finally pulls back to an establishing shot, that of hundreds of people as part of a massive expedition—including military personnel—intent on this activity. Wearing identical black vests, on the backs of which are printed the familiar sign 6.25—the term used in Korea to refer to the Korean War—and the words *yuhae palgul* (excavation of remains), these individuals appear to be carrying out an important task.<sup>43</sup> What is more, the camera uses close-ups through a respectful gaze to capture various objects, showing each item being carefully placed on beds of pristine white cotton, as if each were an invaluable Silla or Parhae tomb artifact.

These objects, however, serve a different purpose, as a meticulous cataloging takes place for every single piece, with each spoon and canteen labeled for posterity. The camera then zooms in on white chrysanthemums, the flower of remembrance. The flowers adorn the precious objects while the film cuts to coffins, containing entombed skeletal remains, draped with South Korean flags. The sequence ends with a shot of the excavation team paying their respects through a

full formal bow made in unison, as the first proper long shot provides a view of a makeshift tribute to the excavated remains, the “6.25 *Chönsaja punhyangso*” (memorial for the deceased souls of the Korean War).

The above-mentioned first shot in *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyŏ* situates the camera inside as it looks up through the dirt from below, rather than from the outside looking in. This perspective prompts the viewer to identify with the buried artifacts, rather than view these objects as an outside observer looking in. Alternatively, the film unearths and exposes the narrative of the Korean War to the audience, which they may know only as a distant history of “facts” and dates for a school exam or through stories from their families’ histories diluted and condensed over time. Moreover, the juxtaposition of a quick succession of shots confounds a viewer expecting the conventional start of a blockbuster war film. The extended sequence of repeated acts and ritualistic displays of respect and reverence “trains” the audience’s eyes, in order that the audience may approach the film in an appropriate manner. The deferential procedure with which team members handle salvaged objects and participate in the makeshift memorial honoring the dead prompts the viewer to think about the lasting impact of the Korean War, and how this film should ultimately be treated.

What is more, the film embeds itself in the act of exhuming the past, as it begins with the aforementioned documentary-like prologue of a Korean War battleground excavation site. Alongside digging up relics of the war from this sacred ground, the 6.25 *Ch'amjön yongsa yuhae palgul saöptan* (Operation for recovering the remains of Korean War Veterans team) workers retrieve skeletal remains, the treatment of which undermines the current divided situation of North and South. In spite of this being a battleground where Korean soldiers from both sides fought, either under the direction of the Republic of Korea’s Army or the People’s Army, the team places all of the recovered bodies in coffins draped with a South Korean flag. This act of respect and remembering erases the political complexities and shifts the focus on memorializing a tragedy that befell one nation, not a divided one.

Reflective of a period after more nuanced histories of the Korean War had emerged, *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyŏ* strives toward a more balanced approach than earlier anticommunist films, and condemns both sides for committing atrocities—including right-wing extremists. There are several scenes of extremists and soldiers murdering innocent civilians. A point-of-view shot conspicuously shows the brothers Chint’ae (Jang Dong-gun [Chang Tonggöŋ]) and Chinsöök (Won Bin [Wön Pin]) spying bodies hanging high above from gallows—including women in traditional *hanbok* attire. In another scene, rightist fanatics round up for execution the older brother Chint’ae’s fiancée Yöngsin (played by Lee Eun Ju [Yi Ünju]), as part of the rampage. Although Chint’ae and Chinsöök respectively arrive in melodramatic fashion in the “nick of time,” this quickly dissolves into an instance of being “too late.” Rightist thugs murder Yöngsin even while Chint’ae and Chinsöök, both in the Republic’s army uniforms—with the former

being a decorated officer—make desperate attempts to protest her innocence and assert a voice of reason amid a gruesome landscape, to no avail. With Yöngsin dying tragically in Chint'ae's arms, Chint'ae and Chinsök become unwitting witnesses to the violence meted out by the Republic's army on its own people.

The misfortunes experienced by Chinsök and his family in *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyö* originate expressly with the South Korean Army, which repeatedly inflicts violence on the family. One of the more striking sequences in the film has to do with the forced enlistment of the two brothers, Chint'ae and Chinsök. When South Korean soldiers drag away Chinsök, who is barely of age and has a heart condition, amid the futile protestations of their feeble mute mother, the older brother Chint'ae goes looking for his brother and eventually ends up in a brawl with military police on a train loaded with recruits. An establishing shot of a marching band playing in formation providing a patriotic send off for nationalist volunteers ensues, while inside the train South Korean soldiers forcibly separate the brothers and pummel Chint'ae under the orders of a callous officer. As the train starts to pull away, the camera cuts back and forth between interior shots of Chint'ae's frantic attempts to get his younger brother released; shots of the cacophonous platform as people wave flags to salute the recruits on board; and shots of their mother and Yöngsin desperately trying to find the two brothers. The scene ends with a point of view shot from the train, capturing a long shot of Yöngsin trying to hold back the brothers' distraught mother. As depicted in this frenetic sequence, one of the initial instances of violence in this war film deals with the fracturing of a family even before the first battle scene takes place. In effect, it is the Republic of Korea Army that fundamentally tears this family apart, which sets off a succession of events that will split up the brothers and result in Chint'ae's dehumanization, with Chint'ae eventually fighting for the People's Army (North Korea). Although vilification of the North tends to be the conventional norm in previous Korean War films, *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyö* outlines intra-South Korean violence in the forced separation of family by the Republic's Army as well as ensuing sequences of other military atrocities against civilians.

In spite of its efforts to put forward a more nuanced representation of the war, *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyö* demands a nationalist reading by its contrivance of spurious memories for a new generation of spectators, for whom the Korean War is something far removed and only encountered in textbooks. Although the main narrative deals with the tragedy of two brothers who end up fighting on opposite sides, the film presents this within a layered temporality encompassing the present as well as the past. The film begins in the present and invariably implicates the audience in the very process of remembering. The prologue, in effect, sets up the film as a remembering act, with the audience gaining entry into the Korean War memory apparatus by borrowing the memories of Chinsök as an old man. The camera leads the viewer to Chinsök's personal memorial shrine composed of his relics, painstakingly curated over five decades since the Armistice

between the two sides. Among the items included are newspaper clippings of the separated families' reunions, which are part of the South Korean audience's own memory mapping, particularly following the historic, and very moving, meetings of families from North and South Korea that have been taking place regularly since 2000. The film's premise of searching for a lost brother that fought for the other (North Korean) side reminds the South Korean audience that as long as the nation is still divided, these memories are not something from a remote past nor will they collect dust in the archives. Rather, these memories also have to do with the audience as well. This contrived remembering underscores the notion that these memories are relevant in South Korean viewers' own lives, for these are the nation's memories and hence also their own.

As in other Korean War and division texts, *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyo* posits the interconnectivity of the historical past with the present. Alongside immensely popular contemporary screen stars Jang Dong-gun and Won Bin, who serve as a cultural bridge for audience members who do not have a direct experience of the war, Chinsŏk's granddaughter (Cho Yunhŭi) functions as a surrogate with whom the younger generation may identify. When the excavation team contacts Chinsŏk, the camera captures his granddaughter standing in the background. She continues to occupy the screen space with Chinsŏk, as he processes the news and sets out to visit the excavation site, thereby sharing in the latest development in her grandfather's quest. In effect, Chinsŏk's search for his older brother has been a fixture in their family life. Prepared to play her role by accompanying him to the excavation site, the granddaughter reassures Chinsŏk that she has all the proper identification required for entering the restricted zone, as if she is used to these excursions. The mission is not his alone, but one to be shared by his granddaughter; for Chinsŏk this temporal pastness correlates to his present, but this is also the case for his granddaughter, in whom this link to the past has been instilled.

A visual marker further connects the audience with Chinsŏk's mission. The camera dwells on a specific feature in the living room by providing a prominent shot of the large family portrait on display, showing Chinsŏk flanked by his son's family. This is followed by a shot of Chinsŏk standing in front of other photographs that ostensibly chart the history of South Korea from around the time of the war and since the Armistice. The camera focuses on a well-worn image of an emotional reunion between separated families and finally on a sepia-tinted photograph, encased in a cracked frame, of Chinsŏk in his student uniform with his mother and older brother. Chinsŏk represents the aging Korean War generation, one still haunted by those memories, as well as one of the many separated families plagued by this past today. However, not only is Chinsŏk's narrative a narrative of the divided nation, but it is also a universal family narrative familiar to all Koreans. For this household, even while the family home exudes the financial prosperity corresponding to South Korea's current global standing in the world, the war is still very much present in their lives and not relegated to the annals of history.

*T'aegŭkki hwinallimyo* in the end deviates from a more contemplative rumination to reinforce the narrative of present-day South Korea. Although the film appears to follow Chinsŏk's search for his older brother, it does not conclude with a moving scene of Chinsŏk finally learning what happened to Chint'ae. In the presence of his brother's body, Chinsŏk breaks down at last and makes an emotional speech about how long his search has lasted. Chinsŏk elucidates the prolonged process of waiting for over fifty years, encompassing decades of not knowing his brother's fate. In spite of all the violence suffered by his family, there is no reparation, only the cruel knowledge that Chint'ae died on the battlefield at the site of the brothers' final separation among a series of forced separations. However, *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyo* does not leave room to ponder the complex questions for which it does not have answers. Fifty years since the Armistice, at the time of this film's release—now sixty—have merely functioned as a delayed confirmation of Chinsŏk's tragedy as part of the broader ongoing tragedy that is the Korean War. The camera cuts to a shot of Chinsŏk's granddaughter being an uneasy witness to Chinsŏk's additional anguish of finding that his brother (her great uncle) is dead—that her grandfather's fifty-year-old search has been in vain. In lieu of ending with Chinsŏk's emotional breakdown, however, the film abandons this difficult moment and shifts the focus to an epilogue taking place in the past for an ending that is more identifiable to the audience represented by Chinsŏk's granddaughter.

*T'aegŭkki hwinallimyo* interfuses the viewer into further temporal inter-leaves. Although Chinsŏk's quest for his older brother lies at the focal point, the film does not conclude with the discovery of his brother's body. *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyo* does not end with an emotional scene of Chinsŏk finally submitting to his brother's fate but instead moves past the emotional dénouement and makes a temporal jump back to the moment of the cease-fire. Chinsŏk's heartrending breakdown over his brother's remains dissolves to a flashback of another sorrowful moment soon after the separation from his brother on the battlefield. This scene shows young Chinsŏk discovering his brother's handmade shoes, the very same pristine shoes prominently introduced in a close-up at the beginning of the film among the memory relics of Chinsŏk as an old man. While the shot of the shoes serves as a visual bridge between past and present, the film cuts to a shot of two girls reading. As the camera pans across, it becomes apparent that the girls are earnestly studying at improvised desks even as a war-torn Seoul surrounds them in ruins. The camera pans to other children cheerfully carrying buckets of water, as if playing some game and not performing an arduous chore. The juxtaposition of these shots of children who have just undergone this brutal war, but more significantly somehow thriving and sanguine despite the utter devastation all around them, re-inscribes the film within a nationalist reading. This incontrovertible expectation placed in the fortitude of these children to rebuild the nation appears to undercut Chinsŏk's earlier speech by his brother's remains in which he deplores the senselessness of what happened to them, being torn asunder for

a pointless war into which both brothers were forced to participate. The film does not offer any further insight into this present time line of thought, however, retreating instead to this moment in the past.

The film essentially ends not in the present time of Chinsök as an old man, but in the past, in the time of the Armistice. The ending sequence shows young Chinsök returning home from the war to the joyful welcoming voices of the children, orphaned siblings of Chint'ae's fiancée, Yöngsin. His mute mother somehow survives with the children in tow and manages to reclaim her place in a makeshift market stall selling noodles. Back in his true place, among family, things will be all right again. However, how can things be all right again after this war? The camera pulls back from the family reunion to reveal how destructive the war's desolation has been for the nation. The extreme long shot comprising the final shot of the film is, in point of fact, reminiscent of a shot from the beginning of the film. This reconstituted shot consists of an aerial perspective showing a panorama of Seoul decimated by the war. Invariably unrecognizable, it echoes an earlier shot in the film, which establishes 1950 Seoul as a city preoccupied with the task of moving forward after being free from Japanese colonial rule only five years earlier. Reproductions of streetcars and storefronts constitute the *mise-en-scène* of an energetic cityscape. This creates a mood of utopic sensibility against the diegetic sound of an upbeat song blaring on the radio and attests to a nation busy with the reconstruction process, oblivious to the fact that a war is about to happen. This sequence of hopeful optimism glosses over crucial details—namely, that the Allies at the end of World War II had partitioned Korea just as Japan's defeat signified the end of colonial rule. The buoyant atmosphere delineated in this scene disregards the reality of a divided Korea and the consequent establishment of the respective governments of North and South.

The long shot discussed above contrasts with the final shot of the film, which returns to Seoul after the cease-fire. This rearticulated shot, which concludes the film, is not so much about the hardship awaiting the characters in the process of rebuilding the (divided) nation. Although the film returns to the moment of the Armistice as if to suggest the interconnectedness of its various historical points as temporal nodes inherent in the post-Armistice division condition, it does not delve into the complexity of this history. In fact, the viewer knows what happens after this long shot, for this narrative of the so-called Miracle on the Han has already been played out. Within the diegesis of the film, we see the older Chinsök as the head of his upper-middle-class family having benefited from the economic development of South Korea, with no details of how this came to be. Although films like Yu Hyönmok's *Obalt'an* (Aimless bullet, 1961) recount the grim reality of postwar recovery by highlighting the destitution, disenfranchised war veterans with their broken bodies, and the overall crisis of the family, *T'aegükki hwinallimyö* evades this. Instead, the film ends with the visual image of Seoul filled with rubble, lacking identifiable markers of its current future as a global city. This long shot visually encapsulates the angst

of Chinsŏk, and others on the Korean peninsula for that matter, for whom the Korean War and consequent Armistice have exacted much sacrifice and continue to inflict damage. However, a voice-over intercepts this image and triggers an equivocal disconnect between what the film delineates visually on the screen and the accompanying dialogue. The voice-over is of Yŏngsin's siblings, ebullient children seemingly unscathed by the war that they have just endured and talking excitedly about their plans to go back to school. This extreme long shot dissolves to black, as one of the children asks Chinsŏk whether he would also be going back to school. Chinsŏk's disembodied voice provides a cheery confirmation and upholds the narrative of post-Armistice economic development familiar to the audience. Thus, the intermingling of past and present that is posited in *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyŏ* is very much invested in South Korea's current positionality. As a blockbuster that has helped to propel South Korea's economy on the global stage, it is complicit in this master narrative. However, *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyŏ* does not fully embody the potential as a definitively "Korean Blockbuster" that "de-Westernizes" the Hollywood blockbuster.<sup>44</sup> As such, this film does not systematically explore such possibilities for an open-endedness that informs the complex spatio-temporal terrain of the post-Armistice era, as in the texts by Pak Wansŏ and Ch'oe Yun discussed above.

Rather than confront the conundrum of the Korean War and the Armistice and the residual effects that are still ongoing and lingering by reflecting upon the complex post-Armistice spatio-temporal memoryscape, as outlined in the Pak Wansŏ and Ch'oe Yun texts, *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyŏ* ultimately offers up something more prosaic. The visual attestation of the war's annihilative effects accompanied by the voice-over touting the importance of education affirms South Korea's present standing as an economic power securely positioned in the current global arena. The remembering that is contrived in *T'aegŭkki hwinallimyŏ* consequently serves to confirm the present rather than uncover something new about the past, much less allow for a fuller contemplation of the present-pastness endemic in post-Armistice consciousness. While it endeavors to recuperate lost voices and the counter-memories of an atrocious war, particularly the violence perpetrated by the South Korean side against civilians, the film functions as validation for the "success story" of South Korea after the Armistice. The final voice-over endorsing the merits of education corroborates a narrative that the audience already knows—through education and hard work, this is how far we have come—but one that elides over the decades of post-Armistice Cold War oppression and authoritarian regimes.

### BEYOND THE ARMISTICE?

In the sixty years since the Armistice, the Korean peninsula remains divided and the two sides remain in a state of conflict, as evidenced by North Korea's

relentless saber rattling, which has now become routine. The Armistice suspended the fighting but did not end the war. On the contrary, the Korean War has been a costly attempt at national unity gone terribly wrong: millions of lives lost, separation of families, and a prolonged state of division. The Armistice has functioned as a delay to an end; not only delaying an end to the war but a resolution of a divided Korea. The unending nature of the war is a phenomenon that is still in process—and in progress, as encapsulated in the present progressive tense—a fact most tragically embodied in the continued physical division of the two sides.

The drawn-out caesura of the Armistice reverberates throughout the unfulfilled sense of longing, regret, and desire for national unity inundating South Korean literature and cinema. In post-Armistice division Korea, the past is very much part and parcel of the present, and likewise informs its future as long as the Armistice system is in place. The often muddled nature of this further obfuscates the complex negotiation of time and Korea's historical past and in the articulation of its identity. Indeed, the election of Park Geun Hye (Pak Kŭnhye), the daughter of military dictator Park Chung Hee (Pak Chŏnghŭi) and who served as *de facto* First Lady after her mother's death, is a testament to the hazards of selective, deficient remembering, which may induce a certain amnesia and forgetfulness about the past. What is more, the Armistice system has perpetrated a fractured memoryscape by expunging, silencing, and overlooking vast swaths not fitting with its agenda and thereby inflicting a violence of memory upon Korea. Refugee memories, left over and cast aside in the post-Armistice era as discards, float in temporal limbo above the artificially partitioned space of the divided Korean peninsula.

In South Korean film and literature, the Korean War and division constitute an ongoing conversation of a myriad of loose ends as texts continue to catalog and articulate stray stands of such discarded memories. This speaks to the countless marginalized and disused memories, not only from the Korean War but also those accumulated since the post-Armistice division era began. However, memory is firmly rooted “in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects,” and its excavation and invocation interposes the linear insistence of “temporal continuities” for a heterogeneous history derived on counter-memories.<sup>45</sup> Counter-memories possess the resilience to contradict the hegemonic meaning of the past through their very articulation.

## NOTES

1. Kim Yunsik and Chŏng Houng, *Han'guk sosŏlsa*, 315.
2. Kim Tongch'un writes critically about the ongoing violence and terror of the war due to the Cold War and the continuing status of division. He argues that this environment continues to hinder a comprehensive understanding of the Korean War. For more, see Kim Tongch'un, *Chŏnjaeng kwa sahoe*.
3. Dong Choon Kim, “Beneath the Tip of the Iceberg,” 65.

4. Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong*, 22.
5. For more on the coexistence of the past and present for a totality of memories, see Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*.
6. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History," 9.
7. Kim Tongch'un, *Chŏnjaeng kwa sahoe*, 5.
8. Kim Yunsik and Kim Hyŏn, *Han'guk munhaksa*, 230. Italics added.
9. For more on the *wŏllam* writers who relocated to the South, see Yu Tonggyu, *Chŏnhu wŏllam chakka wa chaa chŏngch'esŏng sŏsa*.
10. Kim Yunsik and Chŏng Houn, *Han'guk sosŏlsa*, 429.
11. The post-Armistice situation forced a reframing of the boundaries of modern Korean literature, compelling the question: What does modern Korean literature or its literary history mean in a divided nation? Paek Nakch'ŏng writes extensively on this issue. His *minjok munhangnon* (national literature theory) attempts to address this by taking into account the specific conditions of the Korean peninsula—namely, the division system. He has since revised his notion of "national literature" as including South Korean literature but also the "literature of the entire nation," that is to say, encompassing a "literature of one national language." Paek Nakch'ŏng, *T'ongil sidae*, 194.
12. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History," 7.
13. For more on division literature in particular, see Kim Myŏngjun, *Han'guk ūi pun-dan sosŏl*.
14. For a discussion of Korean War narratives, see Jin-kyung Lee, "National History and Domestic Spaces."
15. Much has been written about the feminist aspect of Pak Wansŏ's writing. See Yim Okhŭi, "Iyagikkun Pak Wansŏ ūi salm ūi chip'yŏng nŏlphigi"; Yi Sanggyŏng, *Han'guk kŭndae yŏsŏng munhak saron*; Kim Hyŏnju, "Parŏn ūi chŏngsin kwa seroun munhwa todŏk ūi hyŏngsŏng"; and Ch'oe Kyŏnghŭi, "Pak Wansŏ munhak kwa chendŏ."
16. All translations are mine. Pak Wansŏ, "Ōmma ūi malttuk 2," 322.
17. Pak Wansŏ, "Kyŏul nadŭri," 334.
18. Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 164.
19. For an examination of the paradoxical pull for the foreigner in an alien land, see Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*.
20. Pak Wansŏ, "Ōmma ūi malttuk 2," 334.
21. Hwang Chŏngghyŏn talks about how, for the narrator, the brother's death is "locked up" in the past and "has nothing to do with the present, but for the mother it is an eternal present." Hwang Chŏngghyŏn, "80-nyŏndae sosŏlron," 357. Ch'oe Kyŏnghŭi also describes how the mother and the daughter (narrator) are in "entirely different time zones," specifically in relation to the climactic hallucination scene. Ch'oe Kyŏnghŭi, "Pak Wansŏ munhak kwa chendŏ," 194.
22. Pak Wansŏ, "Ōmma ūi malttuk 2," 371.
23. *Ibid.*, 374.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Paek Nakch'ŏng, *Minjok munhak kwa segye munhak I; Minjok munhak kwa segye munhak II*; and *Minjok munhak ūi sae tangye*.
26. Sŏ Ŭnju, "1980 nyŏndae sosŏl," 475.
27. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History," 8.
28. Yi T'aedong, *Namok ūi kkum*, 402.

29. Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 80.
30. "The appropriation of collective memory of the Korean War granted South Korea 'membership in the imaginary community called the Free World,' as Kim Tongch'un put it, and this illusory notion provided the state with a powerful grip on society." Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 81.
31. Ch'oe Yun, "Aböji kamsi," 90.
32. Ibid., 93.
33. Ibid., 90.
34. Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 71.
35. Ch'oe Yun, "Aböji kamsi," 89.
36. Ibid., 113.
37. Ibid., 119.
38. Kim Tongch'un, *Chönjaeng kwa sahoe*, 289.
39. Ch'oe Yun, "Aböji kamsi," 111.
40. Relative to the sensitive subject of Japanese colonialism, which Korean filmmakers have tended to overlook, Korean cinema frequently deals with the Korean War. For a discussion of Korean War films from South Korean cinema's "Golden Age" of the 1960s see David Diffrient, "'Military Enlightenment' for the Masses."
41. *Swiri (Shiri)* and *Kongdong kyöngbi kuyöck JSA (JSA: Joint Security Area)* have been seminal in reshaping the division issue in South Korean cinema. For a discussion of these two films with regard to the Korean Blockbuster phenomenon, see chapter 9 "Each Man Kills the Thing He Loves" in Kyung Hyun Kim's *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*.
42. For instance, *Toraorianün haebuyöng* had a domestic audience of 230,000. David Diffrient, "'Military Enlightenment' for the Masses," 28.
43. 6.25 is the term used in South Korea for denoting the Korean War. 6.25 refers to June 25, 1950, when North Korea attacked South Korea, signaling the official start of the Korean War.
44. Chris Berry and others have posited the possibilities of the Korean Blockbuster as being able to challenge Hollywood's hegemony by offering up indigenous alternatives and engaging with local issues in a consequential manner. For more, see Chris Berry, "What's Big about the Big Film?"
45. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History," 9.

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- Obalt'an* [Aimless bullet]. Directed by Yu Hyönmok. Taehan Yönghwasa, South Korea, 1961.

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