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THE MILITARY AND
SOUTH KOREAN SOCIETY

edited by

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INTRODUCTION

KIRK W. LARSEN

The need for a common defense is one of the earliest and most universal motivations for social organization. Virtually every human society has made some arrangement to safeguard the physical security of the group and Korea is no exception. However, one legacy of the long-lived Chosôn Dynasty (1392-1910) has been an emphasis on Koreans as literate and literary scholar-officials rather than mighty warriors. It was left to nationalist historians such as Sin Ch'ae-ho (1880-1936) to discover—to his amazement—that Korea's past included not only Confucian gentlemen but also mighty warriors such as the 7th-century Koguryô general Ūlchimundôk whose wily tactics led to the decimation of a massive Chinese army that threatened the kingdom with extinction. Sin Ch'ae-ho's discoveries are now conventional wisdom; the military has played and continues to play a prominent role in not only defending Korea but also in influencing the trajectory of Korean politics and society. The 12th Hahn Moo-sook Colloquium in the Korean Humanities explores the Korean military, both past and present, and the role it has played in shaping Korean society.

Eugene Y. Park's "War and Peace in Pre-modern Korea: Institutional and Ideological Dimensions" offers a sweeping overview of the Korean military before the twentieth century. He observes how internal ideological and economic changes as well as transformations of the most pressing external threats have influenced the development, shape, and role of the military in Korean society. His discussion of the important phases of the Korean military's development—from the aristocratic armies of antiquity, through the professional and conscript armies of the Koryô period 935-1392, to the hybrid salaried-conscript army of the later Chosôn period (1392-1910)—demonstrates both that the Korean military has not always been subjugated to second-class status by scholar-bureaucrats, and that the military has often played a dynamic role in defending the country and influencing Korean society.

In contrast to the general perception of civilian-dominated Chosôn Korea, 20th-century Korea has seen a dramatic militarization. Thirty-five years of militaristic Japanese colonial rule have been followed by division, a devastating fratricidal war, and decades of military rule in both North and South Korea. The other two papers in the colloquium explore the role of the military in late 20th century South Korea. Seungsook Moon's "Gender, Conscription and Popular Culture in Contemporary Korea" explores the tension between the ideal of universal conscription and the reality in which many of the elite are successful in modifying or avoiding military obligations altogether. It is within the context of this class-based tension that a significant gendered dimension to military service emerges. A close analysis of a popular military-themed television program reveals several illuminating and often somewhat contradictory themes: Soldiers as filial sons, protecting their mothers and their nation; soldiers as heterosexual lovers, protecting their girlfriends; and, overseas Koreans serving in the military, symbolizing how ties of blood and culture transcend national borders.

"Good Brothers, Model Soldiers: South Korea's Blockbuster Films and the Post-Korean War Era," by Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Jiyul Kim, explores how, in an era of the military de-politicization and political de-militarization, South Korean blockbuster films have portrayed a new martial hero that transcends stubborn ideological divisions. Their analysis of extremely popular contemporary films such as *Joint Security Area (JSA)* and *T'aegukki* reveals a new idealization of the soldier and of martial virtues

such as courage, honor, and loyalty. At the same time, these films steadfastly refuse to engage in the demonization of the North Korean “other,” a sign that in the post-Cold War Korea, the military may serve as a symbol of pan-Korean brotherhood and unity.

Taken together, these papers present a fascinating and complex portrait of an institution that has been and will remain vitally important to Korean history and society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge and express our thanks to all those who helped facilitate both the colloquium and the subsequent publication of the papers. The 2005 HMS Colloquium received significant and invaluable support from a variety of individuals and institutions. These include Harvard University's Korea Institute, the Sigur Center for Asian Studies, the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, and the Korean Students Association at The George Washington University.

In addition, the staff at the Sigur Center, particularly Luke Johnson, has demonstrated what has by now become characteristic patience and professionalism in assisting with the publication of the 2005 papers.

Finally, the 2005 colloquium proved to be no exception to the tradition of audience participation, stimulating dialogue, provocative questions, and all the other hallmarks of a meaningful intellectual exchange. We are pleased to present the colloquium series to such a knowledgeable and engaged public.

The Editors
September 2006
Washington, D.C.

WAR AND PEACE IN PREMODERN KOREA: INSTITUTIONAL AND IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

EUGENE Y. PARK

While societies have espoused various understandings of war's place in human existence, two stand out among the well-known Western formulations. In the early nineteenth century, Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), the Prussian general and influential military thinker, saw war as an extension of politics. In contrast, Erich Ludendorff (1865-1937), German army strategist and chief-of-staff during World War I, viewed peace as a mere interval between wars. In Ludendorff's theory of "total war," politics serve the conduct of war, for which the nation's entire physical and moral forces should be mobilized.¹ These ideas represent extreme positions on war in the modern West, but both, as well as myriad positions in between, arose in an environment that idealized the individual of martial prowess through images such as a medieval knight.²

In East Asian societies warfare's role was traditionally even more limited than under Clausewitz's model. Robert L. O'Connell argues that war as we know it developed out of the varied patterns of interaction between the steppe nomads and sedentary agricultural peoples of Eurasia. In light of ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian patterns, he argues that the traditionally negative attitude toward war in premodern China was linked to the relatively late introduction of the violent methods of steppe warfare, which the Chinese continued to regard as an abnormal state of existence—one that disrupted their peaceful agricultural society of bygone days, particularly as extolled by Con-

fucians. The negative military ethos was solidified by Chinese sociopolitical practices that kept the male population focused on a more scholarly ethos. This was a rather unique phenomenon in the premodern world, as most societies instead emphasized the mutually reinforcing poles of war and religion by casting men into the roles of soldier and priest.³

Indeed, premodern East Asian societies shared common attitudes toward war. In both China and Korea, the expanding influence of Confucianism not only stressed morality over Legalism or militarism as the ruler's preferred means of governance⁴ but also acculturated the aristocracy to distance itself from martial virtue. Physical combat skills no longer constituted a defining element in the self-identity of the aristocracy. Of course, centuries of warfare in medieval Japan and its warrior elite, the samurai, make Japan seem like an anomaly in East Asia, but the Japanese warrior's code of conduct, the *bushidō*, came of age during the peaceful Tokugawa period when an idle, demoralized samurai class reflected on its calling.⁵ Moreover, official portraits of Tokugawa *shōgun* and their predecessors always depict them wearing court dress rather than armor, as if these supreme generals had to legitimize their positions as the emperor's chiefs-of-staff rather than as warriors.⁶ These practices put premodern Japan more in line with China or Korea than Europe, where even in modern times, rulers, aristocrats, and statesmen have donned military garb and carried a sword, even if not fan-

cying themselves knights.

When King Kojong (r. 1864-1907) of Korea took up the Prussian uniform and sword upon his assumption of imperial title in 1897, he was expressing an aspiration to make Korea as militarily strong as a modern Western nation. By then, the Korean military had undergone a millennium of transformation from that of effective armies of the Koguryō (37 BCE, trad.-668 CE) or Silla (57 BCE, trad.-935 CE) kingdoms to the Chosŏn dynasty's (1392-1910) barely functional fighting force. In attempting to explain this transition, Korea observers have investigated military organization, performance against foreign invaders, and even the seemingly intangible "national energy." In particular, pioneering studies on military organization have laid the foundation for a basic understanding of the Korean chain of command, details of personnel recruitment, and various military units' political and military functions in addition to more specific aspects of the pre-modern Korean military organization.⁷ All the same, existing works lack the kind of overarching framework utilized by many studies examining other societies' military traditions and practices.⁸

Meant to be not so much a detailed comprehensive study as a preliminary set of observations, this paper argues that several long-term forces reshaped Korea's military experience in premodern times. Above all, during the millennium separating the Three Kingdoms and the late Chosŏn periods, Korean society settled more firmly into a sedentary, agrarian mode of existence, while the main external source of security threat shifted from sedentary native Chinese states to nomadic, semi-nomadic, or maritime powers.⁹ Also, with the expanding influence of Confucianism, the relative importance of martial virtue as an essential part of aristocratic culture decreased, and the aristocracy relegated much of military activity to the realms of popular imagination. To be sure, the aristocracy continued to exercise real control

over the military organization, but military service became a vehicle for limited social mobility for the general population rather than a crucial identifier for elites. This paper traces these developments phase by phase, through the aristocratic armies of the ancient period, the early Koryŏ professional army, the conscript army of late Koryŏ-early Chosŏn periods, and the mixed salaried-conscript army of late Chosŏn.¹⁰

Aristocratic Armies of the Ancient Period

The aristocracy of the Three Kingdoms period played a leading role in martial activities. When the walled town states coalesced into confederated kingdoms that in turn grew into larger, more centralized kingdoms, aristocrats loyal to the king conducted warfare. Continuing the earlier practice of tribal armies who had trained and fought together, aristocrats not only commanded troops and served as officers during battle but also honed their martial skills even in times of peace. This system functioned well, as ancient Korean armies were—making good use of their logistical advantages—able to fight off numerically superior enemies such as the invading armies of Sui and Tang China. What follows is a more detailed look at some salient characteristics of ancient Korean warfare.

Reflecting earlier armies that fought under their tribal leaders, aristocrats played an integral role in the armies of ancient Korea, particularly at the commander and officer ranks. In the best-known cases from the Koguryŏ and Silla kingdoms, aristocratic families not only dominated court politics but also formed the backbone of each kingdom's army on the battlefield. Owing loyalty to the king, each aristocrat in turn counted on the loyalty of his kinsmen, retainers, and slaves. In 645 the Koguryŏ court fielded a mixed Koguryŏ-Mohe army of 150,000 commanded by two men bearing the royal surname to relieve a

Koguryō fortress under Tang siege.¹¹ Even if this figure were inflated and the Koguryō fighters numbered less than half this number, the troop strength at hand strongly suggests that ancient Korean states were capable of mobilizing a large segment of the general population for battle. Moreover, extant histories such as the *History of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk sagi*) and the *Memoabilia of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk yusa*) show that martial virtue was an important part of an aristocratic young man's education, if not to the image of an ideal man.¹²

Many Korea observers tend to interpret the ancient military organization's effectiveness as a manifestation of ancient Koreans' courage or strong national energy while overlooking the ancient states' adept use of the climate, terrain, and fortifications to their advantage. At the time, major invasions against Korea originated in China's Central Plain and generally relied on land routes as maritime travel straight across the Yellow Sea posed technological challenges.¹³ A land invasion, however, had to negotiate forbidding, densely forested areas during a brief, month-long period between the end of a long, bitter winter and the months of heavy summer rain.¹⁴ Although not shying away from frontal assaults against the Chinese,¹⁵ the Koguryō defenders relied on their more or less self-sufficient fortresses, being less dependent on agriculture than the Koreans would later become.¹⁶ Accordingly, a Chinese invasion force faced a dilemma: taking on the fortresses one by one prolonged the campaign, but bypassing resistant fortresses and heading straight to the capital, P'yōngyang, jeopardized the already overstretched supply line. The costly Sui Grand Canal extension project in 605-10 was a massive, furious effort to ameliorate this problem by providing safer and more efficient grain transport, but ultimately what enabled the Tang to defeat Koguryō in 668 was a strategic alliance with the latter's peninsular enemy, Silla.¹⁷

The Silla army, too, was quite effective before its disintegration in the ninth century. After destroying Koguryō and Paekche, the Silla and Tang forces fought each other over control of the newly gained territories, and Silla defeated the Tang in both land and sea battles before the latter's withdrawal.¹⁸ By the late seventh century, the Tang had come to terms with Silla and in 733 even launched a joint attack against Parhae (698-926), Koguryō's successor state.¹⁹ For the most part, though, Parhae, Silla, and the Tang maintained peaceful relations, and in the ninth century, the main security threat to Silla lay within. When the aristocracy of the Silla capital, Kyōngju, became mired in violent internal strife over the throne, the Silla state lost control over its outlying areas. Outside the capital, increasingly autonomous regional strongmen controlled their own castles, farming land, and armies of locally conscripted peasants. By the early tenth century, armies of the earlier era had weakened in Silla and Parhae, both of which succumbed to new foes; the semi-nomadic Khitans destroyed Parhae and Silla surrendered to a newly independent state in Korea, the Koryō dynasty (918-1392), founded by regional warlords who reunified the peninsula in 936.

The Early Koryō Professional Army

State-supported professional soldiers performing military duties on a hereditary basis were the mainstay of the early Koryō military organization. Along with military men from central aristocratic and local functionary families, hereditary professional soldiers could rise through the ranks and become military officials who, along with civil officials, constituted the so-called "two orders," or *yangban*. The military's role was essential for the early Koryō state. In addition to repelling invading Khitan armies, such military men came to wield enough power to mount a successful coup in 1170, beginning a military rule that

lasted a century. All the same, though invaders faced stiff Korean resistance—especially in siege warfare—the long period of peace lasting through the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the devastating Mongol invasions in the early thirteenth century destroyed what remained of early Koryŏ military organization.

The military's relatively strong performance record during the early Koryŏ period owed to the professional army system.²⁰ After reunifying the peninsula, the Koryŏ state consolidated its control of regional strongmen and their resources.²¹ Decades of warfare had turned the local warlords' peasant conscripts into professional fighters, and they now provided military service to the Koryŏ government on a hereditary basis. Receiving regular compensation from the state, soldier households formed the backbone of early Koryŏ military organization.²² As such, the Koryŏ army faced an external enemy radically different from the earlier Chinese armies in the semi-nomadic Khitan invaders that controlled Manchuria and were less constrained by the logistical problems that had limited the effectiveness of the native Chinese dynasties' military campaigns against Korea. Nonetheless, the Koryŏ army performed well during the wars against the Khitans and used the terrain, espionage, and their fortresses to their advantage. The crushing defeat the Korean defenders delivered to the Khitan invaders in 1019 not only earned Koryŏ relative peace and prosperity for the following hundred years but also enhanced its stature in East Asia.²³

Ironically, as the early Koryŏ professional military organization broke down during the two centuries following their victory over the Khitan and the Koreans had difficulty defending their borders against Jurchen raiders, the military's political stature increased.²⁴ Unlike the civil branch of central officialdom, which increasingly relied on the examination and protection appointment systems, the military branch continued to accept

those who had risen through the ranks as common soldiers or officers. Accordingly, the civil aristocracy held the military in low regard, but their success in fighting off the Khitans and factionalism among the aristocracy in the twelfth century enhanced the military's role as a political arbitrator. Tired of discriminatory treatment at the hands of civil officials, military leaders engineered a coup in 1170 that commenced a century-long military rule. After initial infighting within the military, political stability followed the establishment of what amounted to the Chŏe house shogunate (1196-1258). Under Chŏe military rule, the sociopolitical barriers that had previously separated civil and military families broke down, and what emerged was a *yangban* aristocracy producing officeholders in both branches of the government.²⁵

Could military rule have persisted, as it did in premodern Japan, had the Mongols not subjugated Korea in 1258? While it is not clear whether the fact that the military assumed power at roughly the same time in Korea and Japan reflects some similarities in both countries' pre-Confucian social practices vis-à-vis succession, inheritance, and marriage,²⁶ the Koryŏ military's record against nomadic Mongols was not bad. The Koryŏ army was one of the few that attempted an offensive against the Mongols who were more used to destroying defenders wherever they went.²⁷ In the long run, though, what proved to be more effective against the Mongols, an enemy that found their scorched earth policy less deadly against the Koreans than with the Chinese, was Korea's strengths in siege warfare. While the Mongols devastated the countryside and slaughtered the population that could not flee to fortresses or islands, Koryŏ forces put up a fierce resistance that made an aged Mongol officer note that, although he had seen many cities fall to Mongol might, he had never seen anything like the way a Koryŏ fortress held out.²⁸ The decisive factor that spurred

the Koryŏ court to accept Mongol suzerainty was court intrigue between the king and his civil aristocracy that decided to use the Mongol power to put an end to the military rule.

The Late Koryŏ-Early Chosŏn Conscript Army

Both the late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn periods saw the rise and fall of state armies based on the principle of universal military service. In rejecting Mongol suzerainty and fighting various foreign invaders in the latter half of the fourteenth century, the Koryŏ state relied on generals who commanded private armies of peasant conscript soldiers.²⁹ Yi Sŏng-gye (1335-1408), who toppled the Koryŏ and founded the Chosŏn dynasty in 1392, exemplified the costs of reliance on private military forces. Gaining fame and respect as a successful battlefield commander, Yi attracted a following of military men and more radical reformists among Confucian scholar-officials. After the dynastic change, the early Chosŏn state and statesmen brought such private armies under the government's control and by the mid-fifteenth century had established a centralized military organization where aristocrats and non-elites alike performed military duty. As such, the early Chosŏn army was effective in campaigns against foreign enemies, but decades of general peace starting in the late fifteenth century prompted the state to allow taxpayers to substitute military obligations with a military cloth tax that paid for the expenses of the smaller standing army. Although Chosŏn military commanders such as the famous Yi Sun-shin (1545-98) achieved one victory after another against numerically superior enemy forces, the sixteenth-century Chosŏn military organization did not fare as well.

The early Chosŏn period was a continuation of the late Koryŏ's private armies consisting primarily of peasant conscripts that provided the bulk of manpower. During the final decades of

Koryŏ, private armies led by politically powerful central officials were effective in fighting off foreign invaders, including the Red Turban, Jurchen, and wakŏ armies, as well as constituting a formidable invasion force of some 38,000 against Ming China.³⁰ Given the role private armies played in the fall of the Koryŏ, these private troops posed a serious threat to the new Chosŏn state pursuing centralization.³¹ Finally in 1400, the government brought all private armies under the government's control.³² While extolling the imagined Confucian ideal of ancient China where peasants served rotational defensive duties, by the mid-fifteenth century early Chosŏn policymakers had established a new army founded on the principle of universal military service.³³ Every taxpayer provided military service, with each active duty serviceman provisioned by two or three support taxpayers. Even the members of aristocracy ostensibly performed military service, often in special elite or ceremonial guard units.³⁴ Maintained along these lines, the early Chosŏn military organization was effective in dealing with its main enemies, the wakŏ and Jurchen raiders.

In a repeat of the earlier Koryŏ pattern, however, the long period of peace spanning the late fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century facilitated the dissolution of the early Chosŏn military organization. In the late fifteenth century, aristocratic men began avoiding military duty. Although I have yet to find a Chosŏn legal code stating that the *yangban* were exempt from military service, it seems that they came to view their avoidance as a part of their exemption from taxes in general—the prerogative which they rationalized in the context of their self-identity as scholar-officials. Their withdrawal from the military arena was also part of a general trend wherein most taxpayers stopped performing real military duties. Commoners drafted as infantrymen or marines actually used bolts of cloth, received from their support taxpayers, to get out of their active du-

ties by hiring substitutes. Usually a private slave or a vagabond, these substitutes increasingly performed corvée labor instead of military service.³⁵ In order to maintain a smaller, salaried military, the government imposed a military cloth tax on all adult males in 1537, but widespread corruption among the government agencies and middlemen involved in administering the levy led to deterioration in state finances in general and in the army's effectiveness in particular.

The breakdown of early Chosŏn military organization resulted in the generally poor battlefield performance records of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the late sixteenth century, mounting Jurchen military pressure in the north compelled the government to hold frequent large-scale military examinations and offer the previously excluded illegitimate sons and slaves conditional permission to compete. In principle geared toward selecting new potential military officials, the military examination became an expedient measure for soldiers manning border garrisons, since the standing army's overall troop strength had dwindled.³⁶ According to one estimate, the number of battleworthy soldiers available on the eve of the massive Japanese invasion in 1592 was less than one thousand.³⁷ While Yi Sun-shin's navy performed brilliantly and Kwŏn Yul (1537-99) provided diligent leadership for land troops, both commanders constantly struggled with manpower shortages and court factionalism throughout the Korean-Japanese war (1592-1598). Without reviewing the scholarship about these leaders in detail, Yi in particular is worthy in the sense that he made excellent use of prior preparation, terrain, surprise tactics, intelligence gathering, and even psychology vis-à-vis his own soldiers as well as his enemies. Unfortunately for Korea, he was more an exception than the norm; most of his military colleagues could not overcome their cultural condescension toward the Japanese and refused to take the enemy more se-

riously. The 1592 Japanese invasion proved a rude awakening.

The Mixed Salaried-Conscript Army of the Late Chosŏn

The late Chosŏn state maintained an army no bigger than what was dictated by internal security, and most personnel came from non-elite backgrounds.³⁸ During the Korean-Japanese war, however, the Chosŏn government began implementing measures to strengthen the military, which soon came to include more professional soldiers in addition to conscripts, although both were supported by the state's military cloth tax and other revenues. Besides maintaining a paid army of mostly commoner soldiers, another salient characteristic of the late Chosŏn military organization was the inclusion of formerly excluded slaves in the armed forces. This reflected, for the most part, the rigid social hierarchy in the sense that ascriptive status largely determined how far a soldier or an officer could advance. Nonetheless, military service enabled non-elites to enhance their social status to a limited degree and inspired popular imaginings of what someone with martial prowess could achieve in life. Thus, the late Chosŏn military organization was more about serving the internal needs of society than potentially fielding combat-ready troops against foreign forces.

In general, the late Chosŏn military organization was a byproduct of internal changes in the levy system and external stimuli in the form of Japanese and Manchu invasions. These incursions finally persuaded the generally conservative policymakers of the power of new technology, and a musket test and other changes were introduced to the military examination.³⁹ The government also set up the Military Training Administration (*Hullyŏn Togam*), in 1593, to train

the so-called “three skills army” (*samsubyöng*)—musketeers, bowmen, and close-combat “killers” (*salsu*: swordsmen, pikemen, and spearmen)—in accordance with the military strategies of Ming China’s Qi Jiguang (1528-88).⁴⁰ The subsequent establishment of four other special military units by 1682 created the so-called Five Military Divisions (*Ogunyöng*), which functioned as the capital army in late Chosön.⁴¹ Unlike the Military Training Administration soldiers who were professionals paid by the state, the rest remained rotating-duty conscripts provisioned by taxpayer support.⁴² In the provinces, the government set up the *sogo* (Ch. *shuwu*) army based, again, on Qi Jiguang’s strategies relying on small units. The *shuwu* was a hierarchical organization incorporating men trained in firearms into regular troops. Self-supported, the late *sogo* army drew heavily from non-elites. Whereas commoner recruits tended to be those who could not buy their way out of military obligation, illegitimate son and slave recruits received incentives. After their terms of service, illegitimate sons became eligible for the state examination, while public slaves received manumission. In contrast, private slaves were recruited by compensating their owners with ranks or substitute slaves, and the recruits themselves received no special reward.⁴³

As illustrated clearly by the military examination system, the late Chosön army was a faithful reflection of the existing social hierarchy, although it still allowed non-elites to enhance their social status to a degree as well as influencing expressions of status aspirations in popular culture.⁴⁴ In the late Chosön period, increasing domination of the civil branch of the central government by a small number of aristocratic families based in Seoul led to the political marginalization of other *yangban*. Through the military examination, some among the latter transformed themselves into a military aristocracy that functioned as a junior political partner of the civil aristocracy.

Some southern local *yangban* also chose military careers as they struggled to maintain a presence in the central political arena. Despite the differentiation process, however, the central civil official, central military official, and southern local *yangban* families continued to recognize one another as bona fide members of the aristocracy. Meanwhile, local elites of other regions, as well as non-elites, began to participate en masse in the military examinations. The degree satisfied their aspirations for higher social status and helped them win recognition in their social circles, but it did not lead to political power or membership in the aristocracy. The late Chosön military examination assumed the dual role of a political institution guaranteeing a place in the power structure for a segment of the aristocracy and a sociocultural medium releasing tensions engendered by the rigid status hierarchy.⁴⁵ Various cultural genres such as vernacular narrative fiction (*sosöl*), *pansori*, masked dance, and shaman rituals sustained a unique space where military men of even humble backgrounds achieved the status of popular heroes.

With its main roles confined to satisfying non-elites’ status aspirations in society and performing limited security functions for the state, the late Chosön military organization was poorly prepared to face the forces of imperialism in the late nineteenth century. This is evident in a famous work on military strategies compiled by Cho U-sök (1782-1863) in 1855—just eleven years before the 1866 French incursion. Hailing from the military aristocracy, Cho demonstrated his knowledge of military administration, weaponry, tactics, and diplomacy in his treatise, the *Mubi yoram* (Essential observations on military preparedness).⁴⁶ As he selected materials from Chinese military texts from the ancient Warring States period down to the late Ming period and diligently adopted them to suit Korea’s needs, his discussion of European weapons—cannon, for

example—was limited to facts known to the Chinese in the mid-seventeenth century. In fact, the “red barbarian cannons” (*hongip’o*) the Koreans used against the French invaders in 1866 and the Americans in 1871 dated from late Ming when the Dutch first manufactured them.⁴⁷ Overall, Cho did not address the inferiority of Korean weapons in comparison to contemporary Western firearms nor did he advocate a whole-scale conversion of archers and spearmen to musketeers, the refurbishment of weapons, copying or buying foreign weapons, or extending invitations to foreign military specialists.

Final Assessment

Although constituting just one among many sets of factors that conditioned Chosŏn Korea’s response to Western imperialism,⁴⁸ various theoretical and practical characteristics of the late Chosŏn military reflected several major changes since the ancient period. Outlined in this paper are: (1) increased dependence on agriculture over semi-nomadic or hunting activities; (2) external security threats issuing from nomadic, semi-nomadic, or maritime invaders instead of sedentary Chinese states; (3) the Confucian state and aristocracy’s relegation of military force to the least preferred means of governance; (4) transference of martial virtue and military activities from markers of the aristocratic way of life to aspects of non-elite soldiers’ military training regimes; and (5) the emergence of the military as a socio-cultural space where non-elites strive to enhance their status in both reality and fantasy.

These shifts had both positive and negative dimensions vis-à-vis Korea’s historical trajectory, if a historian can make value judgments. Seen positively, one could argue that premodern Korean and Chinese culture came to disdain human activities involving combat or killing and instead honored scholarship, education, and moral cul-

tivation to a degree unseen in the premodern West or Japan. In addition, Koreans historically implemented institutional safeguards for containing militarism through the bureaucracy.⁴⁹ In this light, we may interpret the recurring motif wherein after the ancient period, a military organization tended to break down during a long period of peace.

All the same, the shifts outlined above were also about an emerging aristocratic attitude that deemed military service—along with any other obligations not linked to scholarship or office holding—more appropriate for non-elites. This development certainly was helpful to Korea when it came under imperialist pressures, and the end-of-the-dynasty modernization program sought not only to build a Western-style military organization but also foster the Western notion of noble obligation. Derailed by Japanese colonization, the concept that elites should set a good example is only now beginning to gain strength in South Korea, although its current application seems limited to the public scrutiny of a politician’s family members’ military service record and citizenship status.⁵⁰

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Endnotes

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, fifteenth edition, s.v.

"Ludendorff, Erich."

² Frances Gies, *The Knight in History*, 1-6, 195-207.

³ See Robert L. O'Connell, *Ride of the Second Horseman: The Birth and Death of War*, 159-76. In effect, he highlights the Native Americans' stylized, ceremonial attitude toward war as proof that it was the Eurasian nomad's brutal and chillingly effective tactics that led to the paraphernalia of warfare with which we are so familiar: elites in chariots, peasant foot soldiers in mass formation, cavalry charges,

walled cities, siege engines, pillaging and sacking, slavery, and conquest. Many of these concepts were almost entirely absent in most Native American societies, according to O'Connell. *Ibid.*, 177-200.

⁴ John K. Fairbank, "Introduction: Varieties of the Chinese Military Experience," 6-9.

⁵ Harold Bolitho, "The Myth of the Samurai," 6.

⁶ Andrew Goble, "Visions of an Emperor," 119. The consensus now is that what was once regarded as a portrait of Ashikaga Takauji on horseback is the depiction of someone else.

⁷ Landmark studies of monographic length include: Yi Ki-baek (Kibaik Lee), *Koryŏ pyŏngjesa yŏn'gu*; Yukkun Sagwan Hakkyo Han'guk Kunsu Yŏngusil, ed., *Han'guk kunjesa: kŏnse-Chosŏn chŏn'gi p'yŏn*; Ch'a Mun-sŏp, *Chosŏn sidae kunje yŏn'gu*; Yukkun Sagwan Hakkyo Han'guk Kunsu Yŏngusil, ed., *Han'guk kunjesa: kŏndae-Chosŏn hugi p'yŏn*; and Yi T'ae-jin, *Chosŏn hugi ūi chŏngch'i wa kunyŏngje pyŏnchŏn*.

⁸ For example, Victor Davis Hanson analyzes relevant socioeconomic institutions and political cultures of ancient Greece in tracing the origins of Western military ethos. See Victor Davis Hanson, *The Wars of the Ancient Greeks: And Their Invention of Western Military Culture*, 17-27, 204-07. Other similar studies that I found helpful for this study are: Stanislav Andreski, *Military Organization and Society*, 7-160; Angeliki E. Laiou, "On Just War in Byzantium," 153-77; Fairbank, "Introduction," 1-26; Winston W. Lo, "The Self-Image of the Chinese Military in Historical Perspective," 1-24; and Bolitho, 2-9.

⁹ In a macroscopic account, Gari Ledyard identifies distinct phases and characteristics of each phase in the history of interactions among mainland Northeast Asian peoples. According to him, during the Koryŏ period, Inner Asians such as Khitans, Jurchens, and Mongols became dominant while the native Chinese states were on a defensive. See Gari Ledyard, "Yin and Yang in the China-Manchuria-Korea Triangle," 313-53.

¹⁰ This periodization is a modified version of that proposed by Yi Ki-baek. See Kibaik Lee, "Korea: The Military Tradition," 2-3.

¹¹ *Samguk sagi* 21:8b.

¹² Lee, 6-13; and Vladimir Tikhonov, "Hwarang Organization: Its Functions and Ethics," 311-35. In the case of famous Silla general, Kim Yu-sin (595-673), his biography, which is a sympathetic account of his life, stresses his sense of loyalty to the state, as well as great courage and martial prowess that he marshaled to that

end. See *Samguk sagi* 41:2b-3a.

¹³ Until the eighth century, Chinese water travel technology was concentrated in river and canal craft. As early as the sixth century, the Chinese were building some river and canal ships of up to five decks, but extant records suggest that through the seventh century, the Chinese relied on foreign ships for oceangoing transport. It was only between the ninth and twelfth centuries that the Chinese developed their own seagoing vessels. Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 4 Part III, 451-54, 460-61.

¹⁴ John C. Jamieson, "The *Samguk Sagi* and the Unification Wars," 32-34.

¹⁵ Attempting to aid a Koguryŏ fortress under Tang siege in 645, Ko Yŏn-su and Ko Hye-jin, both apparently Koguryŏ aristocrats if not royals, commanded a mixed Koguryŏ-Mohe army of 150,000 in a massive assault against Tang troops but suffered a disastrous defeat. *Samguk sagi* 21:8b-11a.

¹⁶ Koreans did not acquire various techniques for more intensive farming, such as multiple-cropping methods, until the late Koryŏ period, and even the rice paddies so naturally associated with the Korean rural landscape did not become more widespread until the late Chosŏn. Yi Tae-jin, *Han'guk sahoesa yŏn'gu: nongŏp kisul paltal kwa sahoe pyŏndong*, 92-106.

¹⁷ The Sui emperor may deliberately have postponed 612's massive campaign against Koguryŏ until the completion of a key phase of the Grand Canal project in 609—linking the heart of China to Beijing. Arthur F. Wright, "The Sui Dynasty (581-617)," 144.

¹⁸ For a detailed English-language study of the events of this period, see John C. Jamieson, "Collapse of the T'ang-Silla Alliance: Chinese and Korean Accounts Compared," 83-94.

¹⁹ *Samguk sagi* 8:16a.

²⁰ Some may object to my use of the arguably loaded term, "professional," to refer to an occupation group in a premodern society. Interestingly, though, the early Koryŏ army more or less satisfies all three conditions that a pioneering study identifies as requirements for a professional military system: (1) the control of war-making functions by a "reasonably powerful" and centralized state; (2) the standardization of war-making techniques; and (3) the existence of social groups self-consciously rendering military service to the state. See G. Gerke Teitler, *The Genesis of the Professional Officers' Corps*, 6-8.

²¹ John B. Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty*, 16-21, 37-38.

²² Lee, 14-20.

²³ This was especially true in the eyes of Song Chinese who had not been militarily successful against the Khitans and sought in vain to forge a military alliance with Koryŏ, which wisely stayed out of the Khitan-Song conflict.

²⁴ The following discussion of the mid-Koryŏ military personnel and the military rule is based on: Edward Shultz, *Generals and Scholars: Military Rule in Medieval Korea*, 9-23, 54-69.

²⁵ Duncan, 69-77, 116-18.

²⁶ For a brief comment on these similarities, see Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology*, 82.

²⁷ Koryŏ attacks against the Mongols tended to be of small scale and often relied on the Night Special Patrol (Yabyŏlchŏ), the elite troops serving the Chŏe house. For example, in the autumn of 1235, Yi Yu-jŏng, a Night Special Patrol junior officer, led 160 men to attack the Mongols in Haep'yŏng but were annihilated. See *Koryŏsa* 23:29b-30a. In the following winter, another Night Special Patrol unit carried out a night attack against the Mongols and killed or captured many enemy soldiers. *Ibid.* 30a-b. In the autumn of 1253, a junior officer, Tae Kŭm-ch'wi, and some 30 Night Special Patrol soldiers engaged the Mongols and killed many enemies as well as taking supply items. *Ibid.* 24:7a.

²⁸ *Koryŏsa* 103:25a-b.

²⁹ Once conscripted, such soldiers served under their commanders in a manner more akin to that of personal retainers than government draftees. For example, Kyŏng Pok-hŭng, who was an influential statesman active during the final decades of Koryŏ, mobilized his private army soldiers en masse during a hunting expedition. *Koryŏsa* 111:21b.

³⁰ Lee, 25-27.

³¹ Lee, 25-27.

³² *Chŏngjong sillok* 4:4a-5a.

³³ The mastermind with this vision for the new dynasty was Chŏng To-jŏn, who was one of Yi Sŏng-gye's most trusted advisors. Han Yŏng-u, *Chŏng To-jŏn sasang ūi yŏn'gu*, 103-24.

³⁴ Han Yŏng-u, *Tasi ch'annŭn uri yŏksa*, 250-51.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 289. For most farmers who had to find substitutes, the cost was a heavy financial burden and many ran away.

³⁶ Eugene Y. Park, "Military Examination Graduates in Sixteenth-Century Korea: Political Upheaval, Social

Change, and Security Crisis," 24-26.

³⁷ Han Yŏng-u, *Tasi ch'annŭn uri yŏksa*, 290.

³⁸ The army that the government was able to dispatch to Manchuria in 1618 to aid the Ming army against the Jurchens comprised 10,000 troops comprising 3,500 artillerymen, 3,500 archers, and 3,000 "killers" (*salsu*)—consisting of swordsmen, pikemen, and spearmen. *Kwanghaegun ilgi* 130:12b-13a. Although all the capital and provincial armies put together would certainly have been larger in size, the army actually mobilized for this campaign most likely represented the real troop strength of battleworthy active-duty men.

³⁹ Yi Sŏng-mu, *Han'guk ūi kwagŏ chedo*, 236. The *Supplement to the Great Code (Sok Taejŏn)*, promulgated in 1746, reflected the addition of a musket requirement. See *Sok Taejŏn* 4:26b-27a.

⁴⁰ He had earlier designed them to counter *wakŏ* raids in eastern China.

⁴¹ Ch'a Mun-sŏp, *Chosŏn sidae kunje yŏn'gu*, 179-431.

⁴² James B. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions*, 417-20; and James B. Palais, *Politics and Policy in Traditional Korea*, 322, n. 42.

⁴³ Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions*, 88-91.

⁴⁴ Eugene Y. Park, "Military Examinations in the Late Chosŏn, 1700-1863: Elite Substratification and Non-Elite Accommodation," 1-50.

⁴⁵ This is not to suggest, however, that the late Chosŏn military organization alleviated social frictions. According to Andreski, a conscript army of a society rigidly divided along class or ethnic lines tends to be less effective, especially if not exposed to warfare for any significant length of time. See Andreski, *Military Organization and Society*, 39-74.

⁴⁶ The *Mubi yoram* text I used is the 1982 Ilchogak edition with a preface by Yi Pyŏng-do. Genealogical information comes from: *P'yŏngyang Cho-ssi sebo*. 1:2a-6b, 14:1a-2a, 4a-5b, 20b; *Ssijok wŏllyu* 297-98 (modern reprint pagination); and *Mansŏng taedongbo* 2:82a-84b.

⁴⁷ During the Manchu invasion of 1637, Korean defenders were clearly terrified by the enemies' "red barbarian cannons." *Injo sillok* 34:13a. Apparently, it was not until the early eighteenth century when the Koreans finally were able to manufacture the cannon on their own, as suggested by a report to King Yŏngjo in 1731. *Yŏngjo sillok* 30:27a. The interval of nearly a century may be explained by the fact that the Qing carefully monitored the Chosŏn court after the latter capitulated in 1637. Most likely, then,

it was not so much the lag in technology as the watchful eyes of the Qing that prevented the Chosŏn government from acquiring and manufacturing its own red barbarian cannon for some time.

⁴⁸ As pointed out in Carter J. Eckert's comments on this paper, policy choices that Kojong made while struggling to negotiate modern imperialism largely determined the unfortunate outcome for Korea—colonization by Japan. This view attaches greater importance to causes that are more immediate in a temporal sense. The late Chosŏn period's cultural horizon has received much attention as a factor as well. According to JaHyun Kim Haboush, following the "barbarian" Manchu conquest of China, the late Chosŏn state and aristocracy regarded Korea as the only true civilization that guarded the Way. See JaHyun Kim Haboush, *A Heritage of Kings*, 23-24.

⁴⁹ The Chinese military underwent a development that roughly paralleled that discussed in this paper. See Fairbank, 6-9, 25.

⁵⁰ For recent expressions of this sentiment employing the term, "*noblesse oblige*," in the South Korean news media, see: Hŏ Hun, "Nobŭllesŭ obŭlliju," *Kyŏngnam ilbo*, 6 November 2005 (http://www.gnnews.co.kr/opinion.html?f_mod=VIEW&f_index=117771); Sŏ Chŏng-ja, "Kŏje-si Chawŏn Pongsa Hyŏbŭihoe nobŭllesŭ obŭlliju sŏyaksik," *Kŏje t'aimjŭ*, 20 October 2005 (<http://www.geojetimes.co.kr/news/read.php?idxno=10613&rsec=S1N6§ion=S1N6>); and Kim Mu-sŏng, "Kukchŏk pŏgi sarye kŭpchŭng," *Segye ilbo*, 17 May 2005 (<http://www.segye.com/Service5/ShellView.asp?TreeID=1052&DataID=200505171515002680>). Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Jiyul Kim's paper described my observation as positing "an increasingly [*sic*] narrowing of the historically based society-military gap due to a greater recognition in contemporary South Korea of the noblesse oblige of the people to contribute to the security of the nation-state." This characterization is misleading in that my paper did not recognize any separation between society and the military in premodern Korea. Instead, I stressed that between the Three Kingdoms and late Chosŏn periods, not only did the elite distance itself from martial pursuits but military service became an integral part of the general population's tax obligations (namely the military cloth tax). Jager and Kim then asserted that "while agreeing with Park that the gap is closing," it has narrowed "not due to any increased recognition of military service" but rather military culture and that military service have come to be "seen as instruments for a peaceful unification" in South

Korea. Aside from the issue of the gap that my paper did not imply, Jager and Kim's apparent suggestion that *only* their subject phenomenon is the valid explanation seems warranted neither by their own evidence nor mine.

GENDER, CONSCRIPTION, AND POPULAR CULTURE IN CONTEMPORARY KOREA

SEUNGSOOK MOON

Male citizens of the Republic of Korea, according to the Constitution and this law, ought to perform the duty of military service with sincerity, and females can volunteer for military service. (Article 3:1, Military Service Law of the R.O.K; author's translation)

...[I]t should always be easier for women than for men to detach themselves from the ideology of war since war does not challenge women to prove that they are women while war has been accepted as the great touchstone of manliness since time immemorial (Sybil Oldfield 1989, 237).

In many societies, soldiering has been commonly associated with the core of masculinity. The principle of universal male conscription proclaimed in the Military Service Law above indicates the institutionalization of such rhetoric of militarized masculinity—that it is men's work to serve in the military to defend a nation.¹ Indeed, the existence of a universal conscription system (*kungmingaebbyongje*) serves to normalize the link between masculinity and military service. Yet this apparent linkage tends to obscure the class-specific nature of militarized masculinity. In contrast to the civic republican ideal of military service as a citizenship duty borne equally among men, it has been predominantly lower-class men who performed compulsory military service as rank-and-file soldiers. Even in France, where the civic republican ideal of *levée en masse* was born, lower-class men disproportionately bore its burden (Flynn 1998).

The modern conscription system was introduced in South Korea with the enactment of the Military Service Law in 1949, but not until 1957

was it actually implemented as an essential tool for building and maintaining massive armed forces in post-war Korea. Until the political transition to (procedural) democracy in 1993, conscription had not posed a serious problem of political legitimacy because the society was ruled by authoritarian military regimes, prioritizing the nation's military security over social and, at times, economic issues. Despite the persistent problem of military service evasion and irregularities, the regime under Park Chung Hee (1961-79) managed to secure popular acceptance of conscription through an aggressive conscription policy and the indoctrination of the populace—through schools and mass media—with the idea that military security was paramount in the face of the threat from North Korea (S. Moon 2005, ch. 2). The apparent hegemony of conscription among South Koreans has, however, begun to unravel in the context of the socio-political changes within Korea and without throughout the 1990s. These changes have contributed not only to the decline in the popular acceptance of military service as

men's duty among educated and affluent groups of young men, but also to a growing intolerance for inequity in conscription. Two events in particular were instrumental in undermining popular acceptance of military service as men's duty: the mass media's exposure of military service evasion and irregularities among the wealthy and the powerful throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the Constitutional Court's 1999 elimination of the military service "extra points system" (*kunbongmugasanjömje*), which had granted veterans bonus points when they took some public employment tests.²

Against the backdrop of growing inequities in contemporary South Korea's compulsory military service, this paper examines the ways that gender shapes popular cultural mechanisms for coping with this problem. Particularly, it will focus on a weekly prime-time variety show designed by KBS 1, a state-owned television network, to entertain soldiers and general audiences. Through a critical reading of the contents of this show as a cultural text, I hope to illuminate the importance of men's conscription to the organization of the meanings and practices of masculinity and femininity in larger society—beyond the military proper—and to argue that the geopolitical reality justifying militarized national security and the existence of male conscription is embedded in the gendered interpretation of what is being threatened and what is to be protected.

Growing Conscription Inequity Problems

In the democratizing South Korea of the 1990s, the system of universal male conscription could be sustained only insofar as the military could convince prospective conscripts and their families of its fairness, particularly when the grassroots population tends to harbor ambivalent attitudes toward military service. Nevertheless, equity in universal conscription has suffered from

extremely convoluted practices of recruitment based on various categories of military service and its substitutes that have existed since the late 1960s. The system of universal male conscription (*kungmingaebbyöngje*) has, in practice, led to discrepancies in the length of service, the degree of physical difficulty, and remuneration. These inconsistencies were the persistent source of public contention over conscription throughout the 1990s. Why, then, did the Korean military devise complicated categories of military service that could subvert the universal conscription system? Why have these categories persisted under different names for the past three decades or so? To answer these questions it is necessary to discuss a common gap between the principle of universal conscription and the size of the manpower supply, as well as the nature of manpower demand in the military. First of all, it is very difficult for a society to achieve a perfect balance between the total number of able-bodied men and the optimum military manpower at a given moment. In principle, the military manpower's optimum size and the soldiers' length of training are determined by strategic calculations based on how military experts and political leaders imagine potential war and combat and remember their past occurrence. Second, once a desirable size and training program are set and achieved, the military cannot easily increase or decrease them. In contrast, the supply of military manpower fluctuates from time to time according to demographic change. When there is an oversupply of manpower, the universal conscription system faces the problem of surplus manpower. The size of the conscript cohort in South Korea grew throughout the 1970s and the 1980s (excepting the downturn after the upsurges of 1982 and 1983).³ The military designed and has maintained various categories of military service recruitment in order to absorb this extra manpower.

Although these categories have been modified

and remade over decades in response to growing popular discontent and criticism, they can be summarized in the following ways. First, there has been a secondary form of military service involving a lesser burden than regular military service. Between 1968 and 1994 conscripts performing this “supplementary service” were called “defense soldiers” (*pangwibyöng*). This group of conscripts commuted to local military units or government offices instead of living in remote military barracks. Their service was shorter (eighteen months rather than the standard 36 months), and their tasks usually involved office work. In 1995, this type of service was replaced with “commuting reservists” (*sangkün yebiyök*) and “public interest service members” (*kongikgünmuyowön*).⁴ Second, there have been other, wholly non-military substitutes for service since 1973, when the Park regime created the “military service special cases” (*pyöngyökt’üngye*) to deal not only with the oversupply of prospective conscripts but also with the undersupply of skilled labor in strategic heavy industries. After an initial period of basic military training, conscripts in this category are employed in these key industries in lieu of military service. The number of this program’s subcategories grew over decades to accommodate the interests of industrialization. Initial subcategories included under the military service special cases were: skilled industrial workers, researchers, and medical doctors serving in remote areas.⁵ Then, farmers with technical licenses to operate farming machines were added in 1993 to cope with a labor shortage in rural areas.⁶ Consequently, while some conscripts carry out military service in remote military barracks with little pay, others are paid by civilian firms and research centers designated by the Office of Military Manpower.

The existence of supplementary service and substitutes for military service allowed the upper classes to select less onerous forms of military service by using connections and money.⁷ In ad-

dition, the wealthy or powerful could use loopholes in the military service exemption based on physical and psychological criteria. Hence, these types of practices have fomented popular discontent over the fairness of mandatory military service, and public criticism became vociferous under Kim Young Sam’s civilian administration (1992-1997). During this period, the media-disseminated statistical information on the completion of military service by region and socioeconomic status, confirming the widespread public suspicion that the burden of military service has been unequally borne by sons of the masses. The release of such statistics on high government officials was particularly incendiary. For example, almost a third of ninety-six high government officials and a quarter of two hundred ninety male legislators were exempted from regular military service. Similarly, four out of nine presidential candidates for the 1997 election did not complete military service and only four of fifteen adult sons of these candidates have completed regular military service (Pak 1997, 24). More recently, all three candidates for the 2002 Seoul mayoral election had been exempted from military service, and 30.4 percent of forty-six candidates running for mayoral and gubernatorial elections in 2002 had received military service exemption (*Hangyöre Newspaper* June 13, 2002). According to the Fourteenth National Defense Committee debate, these rates of exemption are far above the national average of approximately 10 percent (Korean National Assembly 14 October 1994, 29).

One of the most controversial examples of the military service special cases was the practice of granting some graduate students, categorized as “prospective special professional members,” only six months of military service as officers upon the completion of graduate school. The discrepancy between this form of military service and the regular two-plus years of service as a private was significant enough to stir up a controversy.

Active between 1982 and 1990, this practice is popularly known as the Master Officers system (*söksajangkoyoje*). The criteria for their selection consisted of their G.P.A., recommendations from their schools' chancellor and dean, assessment of their potential contribution to their career fields, and a state-administered test. Each year, about two thousand graduate students were chosen (Korean National Assembly 1981, 116). Numerous male students attempted to take advantage of this system by going to graduate schools, rendering graduate school admissions highly competitive. Throughout the 1980s, the Master Officers system was plagued by the popular suspicion that it was contrived to release sons of political elites from military service. Indeed, its creation and abolition roughly coincided with the coming of age of those privileged sons (Sö 1995, 2:114; Kim 1993, 2: 83).

The following remarks by a former military officer convey a widespread popular resentment about inequality in military service:

....[D]uring my 15 years of military service, including three appointments as a field training commander, I've met many conscientious and patriotic privates in regular or supplementary service who come from poor families. They were not really healthy, had families to support, or were undereducated. Under these difficult circumstances, they worked hard. In contrast, when I was working in the Seoul area, I realized that most "defense soldiers" there got this easier form of military service with money and connections. Although they served in very comfortable settings, I was pressured not to give them hard work and give them a break. (Kim 1993, 2: 250-51)

Furthermore, there are several popular phrases that capture the reluctance lurking beneath the acquiescence to the system of male conscription. They have been circulating in the context of the political transition to civilian rule and the subse-

quent impetus for political democratization during the 1990s. Many of them satirically express a popular resentment of the gap between the principle of universal conscription and its actual practice. For example, one such phrase holds that those exempted from military service are sons of God, those who perform supplementary service are sons of generals, and those who perform regular service are sons of human beings (Pak 1997, 22). The last category is also called "children of darkness," to borrow the title of a famous novel by Hwang Sög-yöng (1980). Similarly, sarcastically referring to the apparent exemption from regular military service among the affluent or the powerful, another phrase expresses that having money gets one supplementary service and no money gets one regular service (Korean National Assembly 8 October 1993, 13).

Concerned about growing resentment among the grassroots population that could diminish popular willingness to perform military service, the military has tried to address the problem of uneven military service performance to a limited degree even before the explosion of mass media attention. For instance, it reduced the size of special cases in military service in the second half of the 1980s (Korea Institute of Defense Studies 1993). As discussed above, the military finally eliminated the category of supplementary service altogether at the end of 1994. In addition, the military announced that it would monitor service records of political, economic, and social elites (Ministry of Defense 1993, 179), and has done so in the midst of ongoing controversy on inequity in military service.

While these kinds of measures remain inadequate to eliminate the problem of inequity in mandatory military service, the military does not have any better choice but to vacillate among various categories of military service recruitment given its conservative outlook on the size of the armed forces and its conviction that conscrip-

tion is the “best” method of procurement (Kwön 1994). Paradoxically, the very efforts to preserve universal male conscription by designing different types of military service and its substitutes have helped to undermine the system. This contradiction also destabilizes the normalized link between masculinity and military service in South Korea. According to Korea Institute for Defense Studies (KIDS) researchers, slightly over a half of prospective conscripts perform regular military service.⁸ In the democratizing polity of the post-Cold War era, it would be difficult for the military or the state to convince a young man to assume the man’s duty when universal conscription in practice means that the physically fit and educated among the non-elite population are recruited for the regular military service, and a disproportionate number of the elite population enjoy exemption or supplementary service bearing whatever name the military adopts. The television variety show that I examine below is produced in this sociopolitical context charged with the popular discontent about military service inequity.

Cultural Politics of Gender in the Prime-time Variety Show *The Youth Report*

Since its first broadcast on May 25, 2003, *The Youth Report* (*chõngch’un singohamnida*), a primetime weekly variety show, has been the only regular television program focusing on conscripts (and sometimes cadets in military academies). This show has been on the air during primetime each Monday for over two years.⁹ Prior to *The Youth Report* two regular weekly television programs aired during the 1990s, *The Stage of Friendship* and *TV Barracks, We Report*, designed to promote new, positive images of the military among the public against the backdrop of the dark legacies of military authoritarian rule. *The Stage of Friendship* consisted of a weekly visit

to a military unit by popular singers and entertainers; *TV Barracks* was a program designed around a middle-aged celebrity and his old barracks mate, who visited the barracks where they had lived during their military service twenty to thirty years earlier, and their warm and comical interaction with current conscripts there. Broadcast between October 1998 and May 2003, *TV Barracks* was quite popular among middle-aged veterans (mostly former conscripts) but did not appeal to the younger generation of conscripts and conscripts-to-be, who have been exposed to the growing problem of equity in compulsory military service and the recent critical rethinking of the conscription system. The official definition of the North as “the archenemy” has become less and less persuasive to this group. For example, the 2000 summit meeting between North and South Korea generated a serious dilemma for the South Korean military concerning how to conduct the mental training of soldiers. Replacing *TV Barracks*, *The Youth Report* not only shifted the target audience to the new generation of current conscripts, but also extensively incorporated their own participation in the show, giving it the signature of the soldiers’ own program. While the use of television as a state ideological apparatus in the interest of the military is not novel in South Korea and elsewhere, what separates these regular programs from their earlier counterparts in Korea is their obvious entertainment value in addition to subtle propaganda.

The Youth Report is divided into four fixed segments: a talent contest in which an individual or a group of conscripts performs, a contest among several selected conscripts competing for a chance to meet their girlfriends, a contest to identify a real second-class soldier (the lowest-ranking private), and an emotionally charged meeting between a conscript and his mother.¹⁰ These segments are dotted with performances by popular singers, and the celebrities in attendance

also serve as judges for the contests, maintaining the show's entertaining quality throughout. The prize for winning these contests and a meeting with the mother is always a special leave, the most coveted award for conscripts anxious to leave their military barracks as soon as possible. Based on my own viewing of the 15 episodes of *The Youth Report* broadcast from late May to late August, 2003, I discerned three underlying themes concerning militarized masculinity and corresponding femininity from my close reading of this entertainment show for soldiers and general viewers who are very likely to have conscripts in their own families and their circle of friends: 1) soldiers are sons who protect their mothers, symbolizing both their families and the nation; 2) soldiers are protecting their girlfriends or fiancées, symbolizing the privatized realm of intimacy and pleasure, and implicitly their own future families; and 3) soldiers from overseas Korean communities are protecting the nation as a primordial community of blood and belonging among men beyond geographical divisions.

As Cynthia Enloe (1993) discusses, the cultural politics of militarized masculinity involves selective deployment of femininity in correspondence to militarized masculinity. For example, a version of militarized masculinity in the United States Army during World War II was characterized by its acceptance of the institutional authority of the military and by continuing emotional attachment to women. In contrast, its post-Vietnam version à la Rambo is distinguished by defiance of organizational authorities and by emotional distance from women. In the following section, I will discuss the three thematic points to demonstrate the cultural politics of gender in contemporary South Korea. Reflecting historically specific forms of Korean militarism organized around the male conscription system, the militarized masculinity of conscripts in contemporary Korea is accompanied by specific femininities of

mothers and lovers as the protected. Yet women as mothers or lovers become invisible in the primordial view of nation to which overseas Korean men return.

The Conscript as a Son Reciprocating his Mother's Love Through Military Service

In the face of growing inequities in conscription and the emergence of grassroots efforts to question military service in general, each episode of the weekly variety show amply displays the image of militarized masculinity coupled with filial piety. The confluence of the soldiers' own greetings and remarks to their mothers with the background music, voiceover, and the images of an emotional meeting between a selected conscript and his mother constructs conscripts as sons realizing their mothers' boundless love and sacrifice, repenting their own immature behavior prior to military service that pained their mothers, and desiring to comfort and care for them. While this gentle and loving image of militarized masculinity in relation to a soldier's own family members has parallels in other societies, the almost sole emphasis on the mother is rather peculiar to Korea as a deeply patrilineal society. As anthropologists have observed, the establishment of a mother-son bond ("the uterine family") was very crucial to a young woman's survival and access to social status in a society governed by patrilineal kinship. Exploiting the culturally powerful code of the mother-son bond, the weekly variety show conveys that soldiers are protecting their mothers in compulsory military service involving strenuous physical training and extreme hardship. The show often juxtaposes the caring image of militarized masculinity with images of conscripts involved in tough military training and in various tasks ranging from driving armored vehicles and performing sentry duty on a cold night to cooking and cleaning. Common greetings expressed

by these soldiers to their mothers also imply that through successful completion of military service without accident or disgrace, they are paying back a modicum of their mothers' infinite love and sacrifice.

Drawing on the old value of filial piety, also exploited by past authoritarian military regimes, the weekly variety show repackages it in a privatized (read: presumably free from the state's intervention) expression of a son's love for his mother. Almost all conscripts delivering their greetings to their mothers in the show end their remarks with "Mother, I love you." This public expression of private feeling is a practice that became popular in television programs of the past decade. It is rather ironic that the conscript's physical separation from his mother is represented not as a process of gaining independence from his parents, but as a process of intensifying his emotional bond to his mother.¹¹ Yet the lasting emotional and financial involvement between mother and adult son has been a common feature of family life in South Korea. Using this cultural practice, the variety show connects the absence of the mother in barracks life to the conscript's growing desire to see her and his subsequent realization of her love and sacrifice. The conscript's apparently innocent expression of love for his mother serves to conjure up modified reasons for military service in the numerous images of conscripts as sons in uniform. In the absence of an older, explicit rhetoric of patriotism as shown in explicit propaganda materials, military service is to protect beloved mothers and the completion of military service becomes a way to pay back a mother's infinite love and sacrifice.

The Youth Report also combines the privatization of filial piety with the sentimentalization of the mother-son bond. Consistently featuring mothers and sons of lower-class provincial families on stage amplifies the emotional effect of the mother-son bond—already a powerful cultural

trope—to justify compulsory military service in a period of growing challenge to conscription. On one hand, this representation can be read as a public recognition of the martial duty performed disproportionately by sons of less well-off families. This reflects the majority of conscripts performing regular service in military barracks. On the other hand, their stories of familial hardship and suffering, commonly including parental illness, deaths and disabilities, and financial difficulties, repeatedly turn the otherwise light and amusing tone of the variety show, filled with singing, dancing and acting under enchanting lights, into somber, teary moments.

It is noteworthy that the last segment of each show, featuring the privatized and sentimentalized meeting between a selected conscript and his mother in *hanbok*, the traditional Korean dress, did not exist in this form in the first episode. Instead, in the first episode, a conscript met both his mother and father and the mother wore a black pantsuit. This change seems to suggest conscious calculation on the part of the producers of this show, which is intended not only to entertain, but also to persuade general viewers and conscripts to see military service from a particular point of view. The representation of the mother in traditional garb has been a familiar trope to feminists examining the cultural politics of androcentric nationalism. Women in "traditional" garb tend to symbolize a nation or an ethnic community whose essentialized culture is to be preserved against change in its material life. There is a subtle but significant difference between the image of the mother wearing a black pantsuit and accompanied by her husband and the image of the mother in traditional garb without her husband. The first mother reminds viewers of a working—perhaps even professional—woman who is independent. Even if she is not, she has a husband whom she can rely on emotionally. The image of such a mother does not usually trigger intense sympathy

or an urgent protective response. In contrast, the second mother reminds viewers of the traditional mother who totally dedicates her life to her son who then has a moral obligation to pay back her infinite love and sacrifice by protecting her. Her appearance without the husband accentuates the conscripted son's image as the protector.

These images may be far removed from the real lives of these mothers, but in the reality mediated by television, appearance and images are everything. Interestingly, the second image of the traditionally garbed mother is the one that has stayed with the show, with few exceptions. In one episode, a female non-commissioned officer read her letter to her mother. In another, a female cadet in the Naval Academy met her father who raised three children alone after her mother passed away. Focusing on a female professional soldier and a female cadet training to be a commissioned officer, the weekly show treated these singular cases differently from those dominated by male conscripts. There was no dramatized meeting between the female officer and her mother and the daughter in uniform was not shown as the protector of her mother. While the female cadet met her father on stage, this meeting was not as sentimentalized as those between mothers and conscripted sons. With the female cadet, there was no crying and the host did not ask the conscript audience to call "Father!" (something he often did with the mothers). Nor did he note that the female cadet's father was like other conscripts' fathers, as he often did for an individual conscript's mother in traditional Korean dress, all of whom became the collective symbol of what the conscript is to protect: beloved mother, family, and nation.

The Conscript as a (Heterosexual) Lover Protecting his Romantic Partner

Another cultural trope that each episode of *The Youth Report* deployed to justify compulsory

military service is the notion of heterosexual romance, a particularly appealing concept for the younger generation. While the military tends to separate men as soldiers from women as civilians and from male civilians as the effeminate in its organizational practices and culture, the television show reconnects conscripts to their female romantic partners through narratives of personal attraction, conflict, and sharing of joy and hardship as couples. Each episode features several young women visiting military barracks in the hopes of winning a contest and meeting their conscripted boyfriends. To win, the young woman needs to show to other conscripts in her boyfriend's barracks the gift she specially prepared for him, and to explain to them why the couple most deserves the prize of meeting each other and spending time together during a special leave. Two of these young women are selected as finalists by their boyfriends' barracks mates; only one of them can finally meet her boyfriend face to face on stage. The young women shown on the program are almost always feminine in their appearance (sporting skirts and long hair), manner of speech, and body gestures. The girlfriends' overt femininity accentuated by contrast the masculine bodies of their male partners, firmed up by regular military training. The visible dichotomy of the slender and supple feminine body and the masculine body in military uniform represented in the winning couple's embrace confirms the stereotypical view of man-soldier-protector and woman (and child)-protected. The girlfriend and the mother in traditional Korean dress signifies what the conscript left behind—the family and the private world of intimacy and pleasure—and alludes to the reason for compulsory military service.

Yet the conscript as a (heterosexual) lover carries a different militarized masculinity than does the conscript as a son. While the militarized masculinity of a son is asexualized, gentle, even sensitive to the mother's suffering and pain, the

militarized masculinity of a lover is indeed sexualized and rather aggressive. As Anne Allison observed in her ethnographic study of a hostess club in Tokyo (1994), the emphasis on the female body in describing body parts among a group of men serves as a mechanism of male bonding, crucial to the sexualized construction of the Japanese salaryman's "corporate masculinity." It is noteworthy that the contest for meeting lovers in the weekly variety show displays the two female finalists behind a white screen, creating a silhouette of their bodies without recognizable faces. The hosts of the show ask a group of selected conscripts on stage to identify which silhouette they think belongs to their girlfriend, and to explain what makes them think so. In this format, conscripts are encouraged to describe the female bodies behind the screen and to relate them to the familiar bodies of their own girlfriends. The conscripts talk about the woman's neck, breasts, waist, hips, arms and legs, and overall bodyline, often in an entertaining way. For example, a conscript relates that the beautiful slender legs and the nice breast must belong to his girlfriend, or, getting laughs, he says that the woman with the angular shoulders must be his girlfriend. This specific form of interaction focusing on the female body and body parts is drastically different from the sentimentalized interaction between the conscript and his mother in traditional Korean dress.

Additionally, when conscripts on stage describe the female bodies behind the screen and identify them with their own lovers, they always use the soldierly manner of speech characterized by excessive shouting and the stiff posture of military attention. While the militarized masculinity of conscripts as heterosexual lovers conveys an underlying gentleness in their concern and longing for their romantic partners, as masculine lovers they publicize their (heterosexual) affection in the soldierly manner. While this can be read as an amusing parody of soldiers' training and ev-

eryday life in military barracks, it raises the question why this manner of speech is displayed vis-à-vis female lovers, but not displayed in conscripts' greetings toward their mothers. There are a few reasons for this. Firstly, the mother—especially in her traditional Korean dress—is the object of reverence and respect, as well as asexualized love. Secondly, the televised face-to-face interaction between the conscript and the mother almost always revolves around the mother's suffering and sacrifice and hardship in the family. Comical speech may not, therefore, be culturally appropriate. Thirdly, in contrast, the female romantic partner is not only the object of sexualized love, but she is also generally younger than her conscript boyfriend and thus can be talked down to and joked about. Finally, the normative construction of heterosexuality in Korean society encourages the man to be dominant in their sexualized relationship. As a result, it sounds not only amusing but also more virile for the conscript to talk about the female body and declare his affection for her in aggressively shouting tones.

The Youth Report is not a seamless cultural practice. Produced by political and economic interests, the show contains moments of contradiction and subversion, which disturb its latent function to persuade conscripts and general viewers to accept conscription as a necessity in South Korea. One such moment was the appearance of professional women soldiers and female cadets in military academies. While these women in uniform potentially challenge the dichotomy of the masculine protector and the feminine protected, this potential is usually contained by the specific manner of representation. One episode introduced the boyfriend of a female non-commissioned officer along with the girlfriends of male conscripts. He became one of the two finalists standing behind the white screen, but did not become the winner to meet his girlfriend, a professional woman soldier. So viewers did not

see the embrace of the woman in military uniform and her lover in civilian clothing. His appearance was primarily an oddity to enhance the show's entertaining quality without unsettling the normative dichotomy of militarized male protector and feminized object of protection. Another exception was the appearance of a mature and financially independent woman as the girlfriend of a conscript. She was eight years older than he was and owned a restaurant where he had worked as a chef prior to his military service. Yet she, too, failed to become one of the winners who would have the chance to embrace her conscripted partner on stage. She was not even included in the group of semi-finalists, despite her description of her yearning for parental recognition of their unconventional romance and acceptance by her boyfriend's parents. Consequently, the dominant images of the conscript as protector and his female partner as the protected remain undisturbed.

The Conscript as an Overseas Emigrant Protecting the Primordial Korean Nation

The Youth Report also features the curious case of conscripts from overseas Korean immigrant communities in the United States. This group of conscripts is curious because overseas Korean men are "exempted" from compulsory military service, except under the following conditions: 1) the potential conscript is the only member of his family with foreign permanent residence; 2) he stays in Korea more than a year and is under 35 years old; or 3) he stays in Korea more than sixty days for profit-making activities, as is the case with Korean-American singers and entertainers working in Korea. As recently as 2001 and 2002, there were over 2,000 immigrant Korean men exempted from martial duty annually. Yet the number of soldiers from Korean immigrant communities serving in the military voluntarily ranged from 110 to 141 per year between

1999 and 2001. Strictly speaking, these privates are not conscripts because they choose to join the military, but they are treated like other conscripts in their daily routine, tasks, and remuneration. Paradoxically, they volunteer to become conscripts. Despite their numerical insignificance, this group has drawn immense attention from the mass media because they appear to go against the widespread practice of avoiding military service at all cost, even resorting to deliberate bodily injury or emigration.

These emigrant conscripts returning to Korea to perform their martial duty as Korean men has become a refreshing example of patriotism to a public vexed by the problem of inequity in conscription, and thereby serves to rekindle the powerful myth of the primordial Korean nation that has existed from time immemorial and transcends the geographical location of one's permanent residence or the legal status of citizenship. This emotionally charged nationalist rhetoric of blood and belonging is also implied in the Korean military's attitude toward Korean emigrants. The notion that emigrant Korean men are "exempted" from military service connotes that they continue to be part of the Korean nation. (Martial duty is plainly not expected of foreigners, and there is therefore no question of "exempting" them from it.) In the context of growing intolerance to inequity in conscription, the Korean military adopted a symbolic change in August 1999, so that now even Koreans with foreign citizenship became potentially subject to conscription in that they were not "exempted" from military service but instead "deferred" their service.

The individual reasons articulated by some of the emigrant Korean men who returned to Korea for military service suggest the transnational politics of militarized masculinity. In an interview of five conscripts from immigrant Korean communities in the United States, Greece, Argentina, and Australia, these soldiers gave the follow-

ing reasons: an enduring sense of strong Korean identity after immigration; pride as the eldest son of a family and Korean national; rebirth as a genuine Korean man through difficult military training; the desire to live a dignified life as a Korean man; and a sense of duty to the nation. Although somewhat different from one another, all of these individual reasons highlight the strong sense of these men's Korean identity. While such individual rhetoric seems to indicate the internalization by these emigrant Korean men of the hegemonic rhetoric of militarized masculinity that has been challenged in South Korea proper, a close reading of these five conscripts' portrayals casts some more light on this convoluted outcome. It is noteworthy that all of these emigrants left Korea in their mid to late teens, the formative period of their identity as an individual, an age which often poses more challenges to adjustment in a new host society than does either early childhood or adulthood. The combination of racism and cultural differences can leave a male adolescent Korean living as an immigrant in another country with a stronger sense of marginalization relative to his female counterpart, because he had more social status and privilege in deeply patrilineal Korean society. This gendered sense of relative deprivation or cultural or racial marginalization, regardless of material success, can contribute to the fomenting of a strong sense of masculine ethnic nationalism.¹²

Conclusion

The weekly South Korean television variety show *The Youth Report* deploys a hybrid narrative of filial piety (especially toward the mother as the symbol of the Korean nation and the Korean family) and heterosexual romance to highlight what is being threatened and to be protected in Korea, against the backdrop of the growing problem of inequity in conscription. In this un-

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derlying narrative that combines the old cultural value of filial piety with the relatively new value of individual romance, soldiers are not only protectors of the nation, but also loyal sons who pay back their mother's unconditional love by serving in the military and protecting her; they are also young men acquiring adult masculinity for their female romantic partners. This dominant narrative is supplemented by stories of young men who are overseas immigrants but return to Korea for their martial duty as Korean men. Their presence reinforces the powerful notion of primordial nationalism, stressing blood and belonging beyond geographical place of upbringing and residence among Korean men. This cultural politics of militarized masculinity and corresponding femininity serves to justify the continued existence of conscription against the backdrop of simmering discontent over the inequity in compulsory military service.

This interpretation of the television show as the popular cultural text and practice does not mean that it is automatically successful in influencing general viewers and conscripts to continue to support compulsory military service. As audience theory has argued, viewers of the television show may interpret the show in multiple ways and selectively pay attention to aspects of the show that are relevant or meaningful to them. These viewers' interpretations, differing as they do from the program producers' intentions, can become significant if they lead to substantial change in the format and content of the show. Yet the privatized and sentimentalized narratives of filial piety and heterosexual romance in the show seem to strike the heartstrings of many viewers. The show has remained moderately popular and has been on air for more than three years without major change in its format. This is an unusually long lifetime for a variety show and can be attributed in part to the relative autonomy of the KBS1 network from commercial interests and view-

ing rates. At the same time, the online bulletin board for the program viewers (*sichöngja üigyön kegiṗan*),¹³ constructed in May, 2003, and hosting over 6,000 messages, suggests that the program has remained quite relevant to a diverse group of viewers, including prospective conscripts, current conscripts, former conscripts, and their mothers, lovers, siblings, and friends. Two themes are prominent in these messages. First, the show reminds individuals of their boyfriends, friends, sons, or their own experience as conscripts. Second, the viewers comment or ask questions about celebrities and conscripts who performed in the show. While there are some criticisms of the show posted in the board, one of the most critical messages voiced that the show featured only those conscripts serving in the main headquarters of his military unit and failed to “console and boost morale” of lesser soldiers serving in combat units. This former conscript was referring to a prevalent practice that sons of wealthy and well-connected families do not end up serving in combat units. This desire for recognition for military service (rather than a direct critique of its inequity) seems to be in line with the ideological function of the show. The apparent privatization, concealing underlying political interests behind seemingly apolitical personal stories and entertainment, is a far more sophisticated way of influencing the public than explicit propaganda, filled with grand narratives of the nation and sacrifice, would be.

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Endnotes

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² Elsewhere I discussed in detail the social controversy caused by the ruling that the extra points system is unconstitutional. See S. Moon (2002).

³ This is based on the statistics compiled by the Korea Institute for Defense Studies (KIDS), which are not published. Indeed, many statistics on military manpower are still categorized as “classified” under the Military Secrecy Law. In reading newspaper articles on military issues in the past decades, however, I realized that this classification is often inconsistent in that those articles contain statistical information deemed classified.

⁴ In its conscription system reform bill, the Ministry of National Defense announced that by 1998 the commuting reservists would be virtually reverted back to the general supplementary service except in name. See 6 May 1998, *Munhwa Daily*.

⁵ To be eligible for the military service special cases, prospective conscripts have to be already working for employers designated by the Office of Military Manpower. When they receive physical fitness test notification for military service, they can apply for the special cases.

⁶ As a consequence of rapid urbanization and industrialization, rural areas have suffered from depopulation and the feminization of labor. Exemption from military service is intended to be an incentive for young men to pursue primary industries in rural areas.

⁷ According to a survey of conscripts’ perceptions conducted in 1986, 62 percent of the respondents considered the special service deflating soldiers’ morale. Yet the higher the level of education is, the more likely for them to see otherwise. See Hong (1996, 271-72).

⁸ These interviews were conducted by the author in Seoul in December 1998.

⁹ Under the regular program revision for the fall season of 2005, its broadcast time moved from 7:30 pm on Monday

Gender, Conscription, & Popular Culture, *Seungsook Moon* to Friday as of October 28th, 2005. See the program’s website, <http://www.kbs.co.kr/1tv/sisa/youthsingo/intro/program.html>.

¹⁰ There was some modification in this basic format in May 2005. Since May 31st, 2005, the show program has incorporated a dating game between a group of conscripts and a group of young women on stage. See the website listed in Note 8 above. This seems to suggest that the program’s production team tries to manage its viewers with periodic change and emphasis on entertaining quality, which is a common practice in television business.

¹¹ This process of intensifying the emotional bond is quite different from the experience among Israeli conscripts of physical separation from parents. See Liebllich (1989).

¹² A similar dynamic of transnational ethnic nationalism tied to racial and cultural marginalization was observed among Korean American youth in Southern California. See Abelmann and Lie (1995).

¹³ See <http://www.kbs.co.kr/1tv/sisa/youthsingo/bbs/bbs.html>.

GOOD BROTHERS, MODEL SOLDIERS: SOUTH KOREA'S BLOCKBUSTER WAR FILMS IN THE POST-KOREAN WAR ERA

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At the risk of over simplification we offer the following contextualization of this paper in relation to the papers by Eugene Park and Seung-sook Moon regarding the general issue of relations between South Korean society and the military. Park posits a greater narrowing of the historically based society-military gap due to a greater recognition in contemporary South Korea of the people's obligation to contribute to the security of the nation-state. On the other hand, Moon observes that the gap will remain significant due to the shortcomings and hypocrisy of the top-down constructed realities of the legitimacy of conscription and military service that perpetuates the placement of an inequitable military service burden on society's lower strata. This paper agrees with Park that the gap is closing, but not due to any increased recognition of military service. Rather, it is because military culture and service are seen as instruments for a peaceful unification. Unlike Moon's view that the state's hegemonic control over the construction of legitimacy and equitability of conscription and military service results in a distorted acceptance by society, this paper argues that the acceptance is based on a growing societal belief that the military represents a real and a positive force for uni-

fication and the future of the Korean ethnic nation.

Introduction

Although the Korean War has not ended on the Korean peninsula, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the influence of a changing global order have had a profound impact on inter-Korea relations. The end of military rule, the dynamics of democratization, and the normalization of relations between South Korea and its neighboring Cold War enemies have prompted the South Korean government and public to rethink their brutal struggle with North Korea in light of the changing global and domestic climate of a new post-Cold War era.

The politics of transition have also fuelled a new and striking fascination with their country's wartime past as a new generation of South Koreans struggle to address a conflict that marked the beginning of Cold War antagonisms, but has not ended on the Korean peninsula even though the global Cold War is over. Various efforts to reexamine the Korean War in a new light were made in the mid-1980s and 1990s as a natural by-product of the democratization process and the

end of military rule in South Korea. Following the de-politicization of the South Korean military¹ that began under President Kim Young-sam (1993-1998), President Kim Dae Jung's (1998-2003) Sunshine Policy, and the recent efforts by President Roh Mu-hyun (2003-present) to extend an Engage-the-North Policy, various efforts to rewrite Korea's Cold War history and come to terms with Korea's violent colonial and military past have recently been undertaken in earnest.

The speed and scope of these political developments also appear to have created a society more fragmented than ever before. Rancorous debates over major policy issues, including the meaning and significance of Korea's colonial and military past, have led to deep ideological divisions and increasing polarization of Korean social values and attitudes.² The newly coined term "South-South Friction" (*nam-nam kaltüng*) arising from the controversial conciliatory policy toward North Korea, describes the deep disunity and divisions that exist within South Korean society.³ Contemporary South Korean politics is in disarray, marked by both the traditional factional and, more importantly, ideological struggles. Korean civil society has generated a range of competing ideas and the fault lines of this polarization have appeared largely along generational and ideological lines.

Films produced in South Korea at the turn of the millennium have been inspired by these political developments. These films are significant as cultural artifacts, because, in contrast to the New Korean Cinema of the 1980s and 1990s, they involve a clear intersection of elite and popular culture. Korean cinema has undergone a rebirth in the last five years producing a series of unprecedented box office successes. The release of *Swiri* in 1999 and *JSA* in 2000 marked the first profitable years for the Korean film business in decades.⁴ It is significant to note that the biggest audience draws were war and division films. An analysis of

these blockbuster war and division films throws fascinating light on how those seeking to rewrite South Korea's past have employed a mass cultural medium to fashion a new narrative of the war and novel perceptions of North Korea.

Yet, while these films break new ground in their treatment of the Korean War and the image of North Korea, their portrayal of virtuous martial masculinity and heroic manhood are remarkably similar to the stereotypical treatment of Korean War heroes that are contained in a number of important South Korean films of the 1960s.⁵ As such, they are strikingly different from the war films produced during the 1990s, which, as Kyung-hyun Kim has observed, "distinguished themselves by demythologizing the heroes."⁶ The return of virtuous and heroic manhood in South Korean films also point to the growing malaise in South Korean society over the current polarization and fragmentation of Korean politics and, in particular, the rancorous debates over North Korea policy, the U.S.-South Korean Security Alliance, Presidential Truth Commissions, and the repeal of the National Security Law.⁷

The return of the virtuous military hero in South Korean films, now largely stripped of political or ideological convictions, appears to be symptomatic of the longing for the restoration of order and patriarchal authority in a society that has become increasingly fragmented. It also points to the new esteem that the military now seems to hold in contemporary South Korean society. Separated from politics in the 1990s, the military's image has become more progressive.⁸ Indeed, nothing could better embody the new image of heroic military manhood than some of the main characters found in South Korea's contemporary blockbuster films. For instance, the main character of *T'aegükki* is a war hero in the South Korean army. His heroism, far from being ideologically motivated, is bound to his deep affection for his brother and family, rather than to the

particular politics of North or South Korea. The attractive and manly image of Sergeant O in the film *JSA* presents a memorable image of martial masculinity. The sergeant transcends the ideological divide between the two Koreas by way of his humanity, not his politics. In *Silmido*, good soldiers are betrayed by politicians who force them to turn against each other. *Silmido* represents the disavowal of politics by the heroic soldier.

Whereas 1990s film depictions of the war “ended up proliferating representations of men who had lost their virility and authority during the war,”⁹ the “new” martial heroes of South Korea’s contemporary films are characterized by their integrity, loyalty, discipline, strength, courage, and composure—all characteristics of virtuous model soldiers. The return of the martial hero and the strikingly positive portrayal of military men in general are some of the more remarkable features of these movies. They signal not only a new idealization of martial manhood, but also link the qualities associated with this manly ideal to ways of overcoming both the division of the Korean peninsula and divisive domestic politics.

This essay argues that even though these new films reveal a softer and more human image of North Korea that reflects this new political consciousness, they still project a nationalist agenda that imagines a powerful form of masculine identity and authority reminiscent of the 1960s. The key relationships in these films are between older and younger men, and women are featured as either intruders in that central relationship or completely marginal to it. Male bonding and brotherly relationship become the trope standing for the idealized unified nation. The yearning for national and familial reunion is thus portrayed in terms of the bonding between brothers or between symbolic fathers and sons. Underlying the repeated evocations of the manly hero is a pan-Korean nationalist agenda that imagines a salient form of virtuous martial masculinity that con-

fronts both the north-south division and divisive domestic politics thereby opening the possibility of alternatives. As such, these movies reflect, shape and express the buried dynamics of a new post-Cold War and post-Korean War political consciousness in contemporary South Korea.

JSA

JSA or *Joint Security Area* (2000) begins with a murder investigation. Two North Korean soldiers have been killed while a North Korean soldier, Sergeant O and a South Korean soldier, Sergeant Yi, have been wounded in a short and bloody firefight. O and Yi provide dramatically different testimonies of the incident. It is up to Major Sophie Jean, a Swiss officer, to uncover the truth.

The breakthrough happens when Jean realizes that a missing bullet at the crime scene suggested the presence of another soldier. Faced with this mounting evidence, Yi reveals the full story: when Yi was immobilized for hours by a mine in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), it was the North Korean Sergeant O who discovered him. This encounter sparked a surreptitious friendship between the two “enemies” who were officially forbidden from fraternizing. Yi and his subordinate Private Nam routinely cross over the “Bridge of No Return” at night to meet O and his subordinate Private Chöng. The four soon form a tight fraternal bond.

Yet the relationship among the four is hardly on equal terms. O, the older and more experienced soldier, clearly dominates the group. Yi in particular, admires O and looks up to him as an elder brother. Poised, confident, courageous, and principled, O personifies the ideal soldier. He proves his exemplary martial masculinity by rescuing Yi from the minefield. O’s words, actions and deeds exerts a powerful influence over Yi. The contrast between Yi’s naïve, innocent, impetuous, and imperfect martial virtuosity and O’s

quiet and admirable professionalism is conveyed in a scene where O graphically and vividly imparts his notion that the most important principle of being a great soldier is not how fast one can draw one's gun, but how graceful one is under pressure. When Yi attempts to show his North Korean friends how quick he is with the gun, he is severely rebuked by O who rhetorically asks, "Have you ever shot a man before?" while aiming his rifle at Yi's head. O answers his own question, "I have several times." Frightened, Yi asks him to put down his weapon to which O replies, "Hey, Sergeant Yi, what is important in battle is not speed. Battle skills? No such thing. The most important thing is carrying yourself with composure and bravery. That's everything."

O's rebuke, which is repeated almost verbatim by Yi in his first interview with Major Jean, serves to underline the unequal relationship between the two men. By repeating O's exact words as his own, Yi reveals his strong desire to embody the same traits of martial masculinity that his North Korean "elder brother" possesses. It is also during this scene that Private Chong reveals that O is one of the most highly decorated soldiers in North Korea. These stories merely serve to enhance O's masculine appeal in Yi's. Despite his reputation among his own compatriots as being a brave soldier, Yi is haunted by doubts about his masculinity. Yi's emulation of the elder "brother" O stems in large part from these doubts. His attempt to embody this ideal through the appropriation of O's own words betrays both his admiration for O and his secret misgivings about his own manhood.

By focusing on these four men's friendship, the imagined unification of Korea is presented by *JSA* as an allegory of brotherhood. The political usage of the brotherhood trope representing unification also points to another important aspect of Yi and O's relationship: the competition. While Yi desires to be like O, he is also simultane-

ously in competition with him. Yi tries to compensate for his self-perceived shortcomings—his martial lack—by giving his North Korean friends material gifts: Choco Pies, magazines and a cigarette lighter. These gift-giving scenes turn politically explosive, however, when Yi suggests to O that he defect to the South, "so that he can continue to eat his favorite Choco Pies." O freezes with anger, spits out his mouthful of Choco Pie, and admonishes Yi, saying that it is not his wish to defect to the South, but to see the day when North Korea makes the best Choco Pies on the Korean peninsula.

O's refusal to be lured by the material wealth of the South only heightens his masculine appeal. His resistance to Yi's indirect characterization of North Korea as poor and backward demonstrates a defiant masculinity that challenges Yi's own fragile subjectivity. The intensity of the fraternal feeling and of male bonding between Yi and O thus hides their intense competitiveness.

Despite their differences the relationship is not impaired by politics or ideology. Both men share a measure of common ground in that each view the continuing war as impelled by outside forces beyond their control. When Yi asks whether they would really shoot each other if war broke out, O responds, "If the Yankee bastards play their war games, we'll be obliterated. Zero. Three minutes into the war, both countries would be destroyed. A total wasteland..."

Yet, despite its political appeal, *JSA* is not a political film. No profound or probing political discussions take place between the four men. The film is surprisingly absent of any real or direct political content. Rather, the characters relate to each other more like innocent adolescent boys rather than politically aware and fully-grown adults. Their childish games, including make-believe-war, belie the utter seriousness of their very much grownup and political-military mission in the DMZ that they have seemingly forgotten.

Their idyllic get-togethers are abruptly ended with the intrusion of a strait-laced North Korean officer. Lieutenant Ch'oe, into their secret world. The intense and emotional brotherhood that overcame their reality of division is, in the end, undermined by political forces of the division represented by Lieutenant Ch'oe whose presence now creates an irreconcilable conflict between them. Prompted by Lieutenant Ch'oe, the friends are suddenly forced to confront each other as grown men and politically aware adults. But whereas O is able to make the necessary transition from boyhood to manhood as he attempts to mediate the explosive situation and restore peace, Yi falters and is unable to rise to the challenge.

During the mayhem Ch'oe and Ch'ong are killed. Yi is wounded in the leg while Sgt. O and Pvt. Nam are unwounded. It is O again who prevails in keeping a cool head to try to rectify the disaster. Before reinforcements arrive from both sides, O tells Yi to make up a story that he was kidnapped and tried to escape. To add credibility to his own role as the victim of a surprise attack, O tells Yi to wound him in the shoulder. In the meantime Pvt. Nam runs away making it appear that Yi was the only South Korean soldier at the scene.

When Major Jean finally pieces together the full story she tells Yi that, according to O's testimony, the bullet that killed Chong came from Yi's weapon. Unaware of the effect that this revelation would have upon Yi, who believed Nam had fired the fatal shot, she notes, almost dismissively, that it did not matter who fired their weapon first since everything had happened so quickly.

This critical piece of information has a devastating effect on Yi. Not only does he recognize that he was responsible for Ch'ong's death, he also realizes that he had failed to live up to the traits of martial masculinity as embodied by O that he had so desired. He had not been graceful under pressure and had drawn his weapon too fast. His

impaired manhood now exposed, O's return of Sgt. Yi's gift via Major Jean, the cigarette lighter, is now interpreted by him as a rebuke. Indeed, when Jean asks whether O had a last message for Yi, he responds with a whistle, evoking the minefield scene and his own "composure and bravery on the battlefield." And it is in this sense that the climax of the film, the shoot out, must be understood fundamentally as a contest between North and South Korean soldiers, a test of manhood in which Yi failed miserably. This also explains his suicide at the end of the film. At the moment Yi shoots himself, the audience also sees the scene of Ch'ong's death. The two deaths are thus merged into one. And it is at that moment that Major Jean arrives, with cigarette lighter in hand, a witness to Yi's violent end.

If it is Sgt. Yi's impaired masculinity that leads to Ch'ong's death, it is also his "male lack" that results in the potential outbreak of hostilities between the two Koreas. Yi's failure to remain "cool under pressure" leads to an all out shoot-out between North and South Korean soldiers at the DMZ. His suicide, therefore, must be interpreted as an attempt to rectify his shame, a recognition of his failure to live up to the ideal of martial manhood that he so desired to embody.

O is the sole survivor of the incident. Only O embodies the ideal traits of martial masculinity and survives the bloodbath created by the intrusion of the authoritarian male, Lieutenant Ch'oe, and the weak and ineffectual Yi. Indeed, it is O's superhuman acts of self-sacrificing heroism (in saving Yi from the minefield, for example), impeccable grace under pressure, and deep humanism and care for others that this "new" military hero enables the audience to imagine the coming together of the two Koreas in terms of a reunion between brothers. He alone among the male characters in the film is able to truly overcome the division between the two Koreas.

Thus, if O represents the new heroic figura-

tion of masculinity, courage, poise, discipline, and honor, as a symbol of deliverance from war and national division, the authoritarian Ch'oe, the emasculated Yi, and the other male characters in the film—both of whom are also too frail to exercise much power or authority—represent Korea's inability to challenge the continuing division or even imagine moving beyond it. Neither punishing nor sentimental, O thus represents a new ideal of reinvigorated masculinity that reconfigures preexisting forms of martial manhood portrayed in the films of the 1960s while imbuing it with new meaning. It is significant, for example, that it is a North Korean soldier, not a South Korean soldier, who enables his companions to imagine a world after the division, when the two Koreas can embrace each other as brothers. Motivated neither by political considerations or ideological impulses, O embraces his younger South Korean brother by way of his deep humanitarian values. Ultimately, however, O's humanism and idealism are not strong enough to overcome the political forces of the division, but he at least reveals the possibility that such a future exists.

Silmido

If the authoritarian and punishing male figure intrudes upon the brotherly bond between O and Yi, the same arbitrary political forces also intrude upon the relationship between brothers and between fathers and sons in both *Silmido* (2003) and *T'aegŭkki* (2004).¹⁰ While *JSA* locates the source of this intrusion in a person, Lieutenant Ch'oe, both *Silmido* and *T'aegŭkki* blame the arbitrary power of the state for the division of fraternal bonds. Both films investigate the political force of Korea's division that turn brothers against each other. These films recast the Korean War experience and the continuing division of the peninsula in terms of male bonding intruded upon by arbitrary and authoritarian political forces.

The main theme of *Silmido* and *T'aegŭkki* centers on the creation, severing, and mending of the relationship between brothers and between fathers and sons. In both films, the state betrays the main character, leading to conflict between brothers. This conflict finds resolution once the male hero recognizes this betrayal, challenges the state, and returns—symbolically or otherwise—to the original fraternal bond.

Silmido begins with two disparate events in 1968, the attempted assassination of South Korean President Park Chung-hee by a group of 31 North Korean commandos, and the attempted killing of a South Korean gang leader. The two incidents become intertwined as the arrested South Korean gang member, after being sentenced to death, is given a new lease on life by being offered the chance to serve his country by joining 30 other death-sentence convicts in a unit whose mission is to assassinate the North Korean leader Kim Il Sung as a revenge for the brazen North Korean attempt.

The prisoners are taken to the remote island of Silmido where they undergo a punishing training regime. Each prisoner is assigned a personal military trainer and soon Unit 684, as they are called, becomes a highly trained, disciplined, and loyal fighting force.

The theme of betrayal plays out on two main levels of the film. First, there is the personal betrayal of the protagonist, Kang In-chan. Betrayed by the communist father that abandoned Kang and his mother to go north when he was a teenager, Kang carries the stigma of his father's crime and is unable to lead a normal life. The political beliefs of the father led to the father's personal betrayal of the son. Kang's desire to become a member of Unit 684 and train for the mission "to cut the throat" of Kim Il Sung is not motivated by any political or ideological convictions. Rather, he seeks to enact revenge for his and his mother's suffering on the husband and father who aban-

doned them.

In this sense, despite its political content, *Silmido* is not a political film; the main characters, as in *JSA*, are “non-ideological.” The members of Unit 684 are motivated to fulfill their mission by personal not political reasons. They join up not because they are rabid anti-communists, but because they want to live and pursue their own private ambitions. While Kang’s desire to go North is motivated by his desire to enact revenge on his father, others simply want to better themselves, or start a new life again when they return. Private desires, not ideological convictions, motivate these soldiers’ actions.

The second level of betrayal plays out between the soldier and the state. During the long period of training and waiting, members of Unit 684 and their trainers have grown very close, forging fraternal, and in some cases, paternal bonds. The sudden thaw in North-South relations made the existence of Unit 684 unnecessary and the South Korean government (embodied nameless men in black suits) orders the dissolution of the unit.

When the head of the training camp, Major Ch’oe, is given the order by the state to kill the members of Unit 684, he protests vigorously. But when faced with the threat that he and his own soldiers would be killed along with the members of Unit 684 if he refuses the order, he surreptitiously lets Kang know of the unit’s impending destruction, thereby giving unit a chance to save themselves. In defiance of the political forces that have come between brothers (and in this case, between surrogate father and son), Ch’oe defies the state in his role as a loyal and honorable soldier. By refusing to betray Kang and the other unit members, Ch’oe stands in for the father that Kang never had. While politics threatens the bonds between father and son, the good soldier maintains his brotherly bonds. Although Ch’oe himself falls victim to the political division, his loyalty and manly strength reveal the possibility

of overcoming it. When Kang confronts Ch’oe at the end of the film and demands an explanation for why Ch’oe let Kang and his fellow inmates know of the order to annihilate them, putting the lives of Ch’oe’s own men at risk, the latter replies: “As soldiers, they may die carrying out their mission, but my sense of duty won’t let me break my promise to you.”

Silmido mirrors the dynamic of political confrontation between “brothers” featured in *JSA*. In each case, the bonding between brothers and between fathers and sons is made across political, ideological, and socio-economic lines. The politics of division intrudes upon this fundamental relationship by forcing brothers to turn against each other. *Silmido* symbolically reenacts the war and the human stories of betrayal caused by the division. It reveals how the unending Korean War intrudes upon personal relationships and disrupts them. It is the loyal and manly soldier in the person of both Ch’oe and his second-in command, the tough but deeply empathetic Cho, who ultimately resist the state by refusing to be swayed by politics. By remaining faithful to the brotherly bond, they alone emerge as the true, if tragic, heroes of the film.

Silmido celebrates the salient form of martial masculine identity marked by honor, integrity, loyalty, discipline, and competence that directly challenges both state bureaucrats and weak leaders behind the betrayal of good men. In sharp contrast to the films of the 1990s that characterized the nation’s crisis through the figuration of traumatic males, *Silmido* offers a new form of military masculinity reminiscent of the 1960s—the tough authoritarian male figure. While Major Ch’oe and the members of Unit 684 are ultimately defeated by the state and division politics, their refusal to be victimized by it emblemizes the possibility of confronting, and ultimately disavowing the forces that seek to break the bond between brothers. Far from surrendering to their fate, the heroes in

the film actively confront and challenge it. It is in this sense that their deaths must be construed as a form of protest; it is the manly man in the person of the heroic soldier who actively confronts division politics, and through his death, refuses to acquiesce or be victimized by it.

T'aegükki

The same disavowal of division politics by the martial hero is also the main theme of the Korean War blockbuster, *T'aegükki* (2004). A story of two brothers who are caught up in the ravages of war, *T'aegükki*, like *JSA* and *Silmido*, explores the relationship between brothers in light of the unending Korean War that both challenges their relationship and threatens to undermine it. Like *Silmido* and *JSA*, the main characters are apolitical; their actions are motivated not by their ideological outlook, but by personal loyalties.

Forcefully enlisted in the army during the outbreak of the war, the two brothers find themselves on the battlefield where they must suddenly confront the horrors of war. The elder brother, Chin-t'ae, who shines shoes for a living, has devoted his life to seeing his younger brother, Chin-sok, a bookish kid, make something out of his life. Obsessed with finding a way to send his younger brother home, he is promised by his commander that if he can earn the highest medal for bravery, Chin-sok will be released from his military duties and can return home. As a result, Chin-t'ae volunteers for the most risky operations and continually puts his life on the line in the hope of earning the award, all for the love of his brother.

Increasingly frustrated with Chin-t'ae's heroics, Chin-sok becomes resentful and interprets Chin-t'ae's actions as a quest for personal glory. As the war progresses, the relationship between the two brothers slowly deteriorates. The war also changes Chin-t'ae; in revenge for the massacre of a South Korean village, Chin-t'ae kills unarmed

North Korean prisoners. When Chin-t'ae finally earns his medal, his relationship with his younger brother has completely unraveled.

Much like *Silmido*, it is the act of betrayal that instigates the main character's "apolitical" awakening. In *T'aegükki*, this occurs with the execution of Chin t'ae's fiancée for alleged communist leanings by South Korean forces, and more significantly, when a South Korean officer orders the burning of a prison where Chin-sok has been locked up along with other suspected communist sympathizers. Believing that his brother died in the fire, Chin-t'ae defects to the North. Brotherly love, not patriotism, drove Chin-t'ae to become a South Korean war hero, and revenge, not politics, drove him to join the North. Like *Silmido* and *JSA*, *T'aegükki* is thus an apolitical film. While *T'aegükki* can be interpreted as a generic anti-war movie, the more significant message might be the repudiation of ideology and the rejection of politics that seek to divide families.

Like *JSA* and *Silmido*, *T'aegükki* also offers up a new image of martial masculinity that is both heroic and apolitical. These films re-mythologize the virtuous soldier who, now stripped of any ideological or political convictions, rises above division politics by declaring his loyalty to the fraternal and familial bonds. The protagonists refuse to be victims of the division and the wounds that they incur represent their active resistance to the traumas of division, not their passive submission to it. Like Major Ch'oe and the members of Unit 684 in *Silmido*, Chin-t'ae also sacrifices his life at the end of the film. Chin-t'ae's death is required to achieve a higher goal and purpose of brotherly love over politics and ideology. And just as Chin-t'ae dies in order to save his brother's life, Ch'oe kills himself to maintain his honor as a soldier and keep his promise to his men. In the same way, the final group suicide of the members of Unit 684 is an active response to the state's betrayal, not a passive submission to their tragic fate. These male

protagonists choose death voluntarily in order to awaken collective consciousness, thereby giving birth to a new political agency. In this sense, their deaths must be understood as a form of sacrifice, as well as protest against the war and the division that enhances their masculine authority rather than diminishing it.

Conclusion

South Korea's new war and division films imagine a nation guided by heroic soldiers who overcome competing ideologies by remaining loyal to fraternal bonds. By contemplating a way out of the nation's crisis through the idealization of these bonds, these films offer a paradigmatic version of martial manhood that confronts and ultimately resists the politics of the division by remaining staunchly anti-ideological. This anti-ideology is the most important feature of emergent pan-Korean nationalism. Pan-Korean nationalism, and the overcoming of political divisions—between the two Koreas and within South Korean society itself—are made through the idealization of the fraternal bond, including the virtuous soldier who remains faithful to that bond. The return of the authoritarian male figure in these films speaks both to the challenges of an emerging civil society threatened by its own social and political fragmentation, and the image of the military as a remedy to politics. By imagining pan-Korean unity in terms of the unity between brothers, these films propose a nation guided by the harmonious, traditional universe of Korea's prewar past when brothers were not pitted against brothers, and when fathers did not absent themselves from their sons. In this sense, they are reflective of the current political and generational divisions in South Korea over the unending Korean War and the rancorous public debates about how to finally bring the conflict to an end. By resurrecting the virtuous hero-soldier, now stripped

of political or ideological convictions, from South Korea's recent military past, these films offer up new versions of authoritative masculinity aimed to unify an increasingly fragmented South Korean society. These characters also confirm the agenda of the pan-Korean nation that must come together under the aegis of traditional familial values. Chin-t'ae's "pure" intentions and loyalty to the brotherly bond demonstrate the present-day hope for a new Korea in its search for national unity.

If the new figuration of virtuous heroic manhood speaks to the future of a new post-Korean War era, it does so through nostalgic references to an imagined patriarchal, harmonious, and idealized past. It is perhaps not unwarranted to conclude that the striking phenomenon of the virtuous soldier-hero in South Korea's blockbuster films may be because they dramatize their resistance to division politics, representing the need to move beyond the Korean War that is the source of both South Korea's fractured politics and international crisis. The poignant spectacle of brotherly love, soldierly virtues, and personal sacrifice in these films stands as an indictment, not simply against the forces of war and division that pit brothers against brothers, but a range of social conflicts within South Korean society itself.

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Notes

¹ The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

¹ David McCann noted that it might be more useful to think of the changes in terms of the demilitarization of politics. Either perspective would work as both point to the deliberate and significant separation of politics and military that began under Kim Young-sam.

² Jong-won Lee, "The South-South Conflict and Korean Residents in Japan," *Nautilus Institute Policy Forum Online 05-40A*, May 12, 2005, <http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0540AWon.html>; Sheila Miyoshi Jager, "Re-writing the Past, Reclaiming the Future: Nationalism and the Politics of Anti-Americanism in South Korea," *Japan Focus*, July 29, 2005, <http://japanfocus.org/article.asp?id=347>; Sheila Miyoshi Jager, "Korean Collaborators: South Korea's New Truth Committees and the Forging of a New Pan-Korean Nationalism," *Japan Focus*, June 6, 2005, <http://japanfocus.org/article.asp?id=301>; Byung-hoon Suh, "Kim Dae Jung's Engagement Policy and the South-South

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³ Since the liberation of Korea in 1945, the “Right-Left ideological divide, along with regionalism, has defined South Korean politics. The term “South-South conflict,” however, is different from previous political divisions in the past as its origins have to do with conflicts within South Korea society over policy toward North Korea. Generally speaking, the term came into usage as part of the media’s lexicon after the June 2000 inter-Korean summit. Thereafter, it gained widespread usage after the controversial incident involving South Koreans who visited North Korea in 2001 for the “National Unification Festival” in Pyongyang. As Jong-won Lee has pointed out, “the conflict emerged more accurately after the inauguration of Roh Mu-hyun’s government and the repeated disunity over policy approaches toward North Korea” (Lee, “The South-South Conflict”). These policy conflicts are linked to the disunity within South Korean society over South Korea’s traditional relationship to the United States. Growing resentment among younger South Koreans, exacerbated by the Bush administration’s hard line approach to North Korea, has led many of South Korea’s leaders to question the continuing logic of the U.S.-South Korean alliance. For example, the recent struggle over the meaning and significance of a bronze statue of Douglas MacArthur, which looks over South Korea’s bustling Inchon port, is a case in point. Once a reminder of the American general’s role in driving back North Korean forces in 1950, the statue has recently become a locus of intergenerational conflict between older generation Korean conservatives, many of them Korean War veterans, and younger Koreans pushing for reconciliation with North Korea. Riot police now patrol the area and daily rallies are held there to both protest and defend the statue. On the MacArthur statue issue see Barbara Demick, “MacArthur is Back in the Heat of Battle,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 2005.

These protests to underscore the increasingly negative image of the United States among younger South Koreans. For example, a joint poll conducted by the *JoongAng Daily* newspaper, CSIS and RAND in September, 2003, found that over one third of Koreans in their 20s chose the U.S. as the least favored country—24.4 percent—while only 4.1 percent of those polled chose North Korea. For a detailed analysis of these findings, see Sook-Jong Lee, “The Rise of

Korean Youth as a Political Force,” in Richard C. Bush, ed. *Brookings Northeast Asia Survey 2003-2004* (Washington, D.C: The Brookings Institute, 2004). For an overview of these political transformations, including rising anti-Americanism in South Korea, see Charles K. Armstrong, “South Korea and the United States Sixty Years On,” *Japan Focus*, May, 31, 2005, <http://japanfocus.org/article.asp?id=297>; Samuel Kim, “Korea’s Democratization in the Global-Local Nexus,” in Samuel Kim, ed. *Korea’s Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Seung-hwan Kim, “Anti-Americanism in Korea”; and Young-Whan Kihl, *Transforming Korean Politics: Democracy, Reform Culture* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2005).

⁴ Byong-chaе Min, “Han’guk taejung yonghwa e kwanhan chongch’i kyongjehakjok yongu—Kim Dae-jung chongbukigan sinario ui byonhyon hyangsang ul chungsim uro” (A Political-Economic Study of Korea Popular Films Focusing on the Changing trends of Film Scenarios During the Kim Dae Jung period), Ph.D. dissertation, Tongguk University, 2003; Kyong-ok Kim, *Bulrokbosut’o ui hwansang, han’guk yonghwa ui narusisum* (The Fantasy of Blockbusters, The Narcissism of Korean Cinema) (Seoul: Ch’aesaeang, 2002).

⁵ The heroic figuration of the South Korean soldier figures prominently in many Korean War films produced during the 1960s. During the film industry’s so-called “classical” period, which introduced the first significant sound film productions, a number of new genres began to appear, including a wide range of “war action” cinema that featured the heroic figuration of the loyal South Korean soldier as the film’s main protagonist. In response to a movie market dominated by foreign films, the Park administration instituted a number of obligatory quotas for locally produced features. The Korean Motion Picture Law of January 20, 1962, mandated that film studios must produce at least 15 films per year and that all films must be commercial by design. As a result, Korean audiences were exposed to a number of domestically produced films that competed with foreign, mostly American, movies. Movie attendance during the 1960s also witnessed rapid growth. It was in the rapidly industrializing urban areas before the advent of television that created the major audience for the booming cinema industry of the era. Movie attendance in Seoul was much higher than the national average. The average Seoulite in 1964 went to the movies 13.9 times per year, in contrast to just 3.8 times for the average Korean (Andrei Lankov, “The Dawn of Modern Korea: A Night

at the Cinema,” *The Korea Times*, August 4, 2005). Popular war films from this period include, *Oin ui haebyong* (Five Marines, dir. Kim Ki-dok, 1961); *Toraochi annun haebyong* (The Marine Who Won’t Come Home, dir. Yi Man-hee, 1963); *Sunkyoja* (The Martyr, dir. Yi Hyon-mok, 1965); *Ppalgan mahura* (Red Muffler, dir. Sin Sang-ok, 1964), *Namgwabuk* (South and North, dir. Kim Ki-dok, 1965), and *Kunbon opnun yongsa* (The Unknown Hero, dir. Yi Man-hee, 1966). For a more detailed analysis of 1960s Korean War films, see Han’guk yöngsang charyowön, ed, *Han’guk yönghwasa kongbu, 1960-1979* (History of Korean Film, 1960-1979) (Seoul: Yich’ae, 2004); So-in Hong, “Munye yöngwhaesö üi namsöngsöng yöngu: 1966-1969-nyön kkajiüi han’guk yönghwa rül chungsim üro” (A study of masculinity in art films: focusing on South Korean films from 1966 to 1969), Master’s thesis, Chung’ang University, 2003; and Byong-rok Min, “1970 nyondae yusin chëjeki ui han’guk yonghwa yongu” (A Study of Korean Cinema of the 1970s Yusin Era), Master’s Thesis, Tongguk University, 2003. For an excellent analysis of *Ppalgan mahura* (Red Muffler) in English see David Scott Diffrient, “Cinematic Spectacle and the Postwar Cultural Politics of Red Muffler,” in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005).

⁶ Kyung-hyun Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 200.

⁷ South Korea’s civil society is increasingly polarized even as democratization occurs. In particular, issues surrounding North Korea and policy toward the US are dividing Koreans along generational and ideological fault lines, leading to the creation of what Doh has called “critical democrats,” meaning those who broadly accept democratic principles but remain skeptical of the “daily performance of the government and suspicious of political institutions” (D. Shin Doh, *Mass Politics and Culture in Democratizing Korea* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999). One indication of this skepticism is the declining participation in elections. Participation in presidential elections has declined since 1987. In 1987, 89.2 percent of all registered voters participated in the presidential elections while 70.2 percent participated in the 2002 elections (Aurel Croissant, “Electoral Politics in South Korea,” in Aurel Croissant, ed. *Electoral Politics in Southeast and East Asia* (Bonn: Freidrich-Eibert-Stifung, 2003); Carl Baker, “Korea: Challenges for Democratic Consolidation,” in Jim Rolfe, ed. *The Asia-Pacific: A Region in Transition* (Hawaii: Asia Pacific Center for Security

Studies, 2004)).

⁸The increasingly positive image of the South Korean military since the Kim Young-sam administration is indicated by a comparison of public opinion polls between 1994 and 2004. A 1994 public opinion poll showed that 29.5 percent of citizens (intellectuals and societal leaders, who were separately polled, indicated a higher percentage of 34.4 percent) had a positive image about the military while 18.5 percent did not. The majority, 51.2 percent, expressed a neutral opinion, neither positive nor negative. A 2003 poll indicated that 74.7 percent believed that military service made a positive contribution to life. A Korea Gallup poll in May 2004 showed that 79.6 percent answered that the military contributed either “a lot” or “somewhat” to the development of the nation. The young (20s to 40s) and college students shared that positive view (66.2 percent of those in their 20s, 75.3 percent of those in their 30s, 87 percent of those in their 40s, and 72.2 percent of students). Despite the memory of the Kwangju Uprising and its brutal suppression by the military in 1980, 78.4 percent of the respondents from Cholla province also thought the military had made positive contributions to the nation’s development. Results from the 1994 poll from Kongbochö (South Korean agency for public information), *1994 nyöndo chöngbu yöron chosa charyojip* (Reference material for the 1994 government opinion poll), 68-9. Results from the 2003 poll from Kukbang taehakkyo anbo munje yönguso (Korean National Defense University Research Institute for National Security Affairs), *2003 põmkugmin anbo üisik yöron chosa* (2003 nationwide public opinion poll on national security), 74. The 2004 Korea Gallup poll results from http://gallup.chol.com/svcd/condition_content.asp?objSN=20040505006.

⁹ Kyung-hyun Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*, 79.

¹⁰ Following the success of *JSA* in 2000, the South Korean film industry was shaken again with the appearance of two blockbuster films that appeared within three months of each other. *Silmido* broke all records, bringing in 10.4 million people to the theatre when it opened in 2003 and making it the most watched film in Korea. In 2004, *T’aegükki* surpassed that record by selling almost 12 million tickets. Almost a third of the population have seen these films. See Korea Overseas Information Service (KOIS), “Silmido sets milestone in Korean Films,” Feb. 19, 2004.

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