

COLLABORATION AND RESISTANCE: REPRESENTATIONS OF COLONIAL KOREA

JON GLADE, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

The first half of the 20th century is a critical period in Korean history that continues to be researched and debated heavily today. Popular subjects include modernization, colonialism, and the development of a “national” literature. Whatever the specific topic, it is nearly impossible to discuss Korea during this period without including Japan in the discussion. Japan’s position in relation to Korea during the first half of the 20th century as colonizer and later, after liberation, as a defeated enemy is undisputable and common knowledge to anyone at all familiar with the subject. However, the actual details of the interactions between Korean and Japanese people between the years 1900-1950 are not nearly as well-defined. What did “Japan” mean to the everyday life of Koreans during the colonial period? In what ways did Japanese and Korean people interact with each other from 1900-1950?¹ How were Japanese viewed post-liberation?

The conventional answer to these questions is that Japan repressed Koreans throughout the colonial period, making it necessary for Koreans to fight against this repression, which led to a continual hatred towards the Japanese that, for some, has lasted even to the present day.² In fact, much of the discourse on Korean-Japanese relations is devoted to illustrating the “eternal loathing” found between these nations. As Stewart Lone has observed, “Korean history appeared to be littered with Japanese aggression whether from *wako* pirates over the middle centuries, Hideyoshi in the sixteenth or more recently the gunboat diplomacy of the Kanhwa treaty (1876).”³ Viewed as a whole, Japan appears as a constant aggressor. However, the *wako* pirates (“Japanese” pirates who continuously attacked and pillaged the Korean peninsula from the 13th to 16th centuries) were not “official” representatives of Japan. Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598), who followed Oda Nobunaga as the leader of the movement to unify Japan under one ruling, was one of the few Japanese leaders to lead an official attack on the Korean peninsula, first in 1592 and then in 1597. The Kanhwa treaty occurred in the late nineteenth century after Japan deployed its navy to the Korean peninsula to force open trade with Korea. It is easy to see that these incidents are sporadic with long periods of peaceful relations between the two countries; yet, as Lone notes, it is these periods of aggression that are emphasized.

The dominant view of Japan as the oppressor does not mean that discussion of cases that do not fit within this colonial discourse of Japan as repressor and Korea as resistor do not exist. Such subjects as collaborators, positive economic development initiated by the Japanese, and divisions within Korea have been treated thoroughly by historians. However these exceptions are often treated as secondary. The subject of collaboration has been thoroughly addressed in recent discussions. Contemporary historiography often treats collaborators as “non-Korean” in contrast with the “majority” of Koreans who supposedly resisted Japanese colonialism (It should be noted that this paper will focus on South Korean historiography and not North Korean historiography, which presents some major differences). In *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, authors Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson note that, “Koreans who were successful in the colonial polity, economy, or society collaborated and became non-Koreans, and their constructions of wealth or cultural property are labeled ‘anti-national’”⁴ Therefore, although those Koreans who were not loyal to the nation,

¹ The years between 1900 and 1950 are selected because it is important to acknowledge that Japan’s colonization of Korea began before 1910 and post-colonial vestiges lingered after 1945. It is also helpful to look at images of the Japanese directly following liberation.

² In other words, according to “state-sponsored” history. Obviously there has been an extensive debate in Korea over the colonial period amongst scholars. However, this paper will focus on the traditional view of history sponsored by the South Korean state that is found in school textbooks.

³ Stewart Lone, “The Japanese Annexation of Korea 1910: The Failure of East Asian Co-Prosperity,” *Modern Asian Studies* 25 (Feb. 1991): 152.

⁴ Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson, “Rethinking Colonial Korea,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 13.

particularly the wealthy, are recognized as collaborators, collaboration is not seen as having been widespread amongst the general populace.

Political divisions that existed among Koreans during the colonial period are also often dismissed as unimportant in comparison to the Japan/Korea binary. Lone again observed, “[A]lthough there were serious political and regional divisions within Korea, these were subordinated to broad-hostility towards Japan.”⁵

The topics most commonly thought of as being symbolic of the colonial period are the March First movement and the period from 1937 to 1945 when Japan’s cultural assimilation policies, such as the name change policy and Japanese-only language policy were enacted. The March First movement was a widespread independence movement that took place in Korea on March 1, 1919. It was sparked by leaders of the Korean uprising who demanded independence for the Japanese colonizers. After Japan’s large-scale invasion of mainland China in 1937, Japanese colonial policies in Korea, demanding complete loyalty and assimilation to the Imperial Japan, became more and more oppressive including such policies as the mandatory name change (from Korean to Japanese) and the mandatory use of Japanese in all public places (i.e. the use of Korean was banned). Although examples Japanese repression are abundant throughout the colonial period, these two periods—March First movement and developments between 1937 and 1945—illustrate and emphasize the Japan repression/Korea resistance binary more than any other.

Shin and Robinson establish the Japan repression/Korea resistance binary as the “nationalist paradigm” and point out its effect on the prevailing interpretation. They note that “in this view, Korean ‘nationalism’ is always a “progressive” force deployed first against the corrupt ancient regime and later against “repressive” Japanese imperialism.” Moreover, they stress that “a simplistic Korea-Japan binary overlays all such narratives.”⁶

Therefore, although Japan’s harsh military rule over Korea and the resistance and protest of this rule by the Koreans are integral parts of the colonial period, the emphasis on this binary division between patriots and collaborators excludes and subordinates activities and events that did not fit within the binary nationalist paradigm. Carter J. Eckert refers to this perception in his postscript to *Colonial Modernity in Korea* :

Thus have valorizations been bestowed, condemnations been meted out, and heroes, traitors, victims, and perpetrators designated. It is a narrow and unforgiving gate through which the facts of history, as well as the historian must pass. Any interpretation that lies outside the nationalist framework, let alone one that dares to challenge the relevance or validity of the framework itself, is often ignored as unimportant or castigated as morally deficient, regardless of the evidence.⁷

In other words, those parts of colonial Korean history that do not fit within the “nationalist framework” or “nationalist paradigm” are often overlooked or ignored.

Even though many historians have attempted to omit or elements that lie outside the nationalist framework, it is impossible to deny that certain events took place or exclude their importance. For example, 70 out of 76 Koreans accepted titles of nobility that were offered to them by the Japanese at the beginning of Japan’s colonial rule of Korea in 1910. Only six refused such offers. The fact that such acceptance of Japanese titles is generally omitted from Korean histories illustrates how historians have tried to downplay collaboration with the Japanese. According to Eugene Kim and

⁵ Lone, “The Japanese Annexation of Korea,” 143.

⁶ Shin and Robinson, “Rethinking Colonial Korea,” 13.

⁷ Carter J. Eckert, “Exorcising Hegel’s Ghosts: Toward a Postnationalist Historiography of Korea,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 366.

Han-kyo Kim, writing in the 1950s, “Perhaps a great majority of those who accepted [the titles] did not welcome Japan’s rule but were willing to accept compensation for their acquiescence.”⁸ The authors attempt to place this “acquiescence” to colonial rule into the “nationalist framework” by using such words as “perhaps” and speculate that the Koreans who accepted the titles of nobility actually opposed Japan’s rule.⁹ Although it is very possible that the authors’ statement is true, this example of supposition without factual evidence illustrates very clearly how the nationalist framework is often emphasized while other elements are dismissed or interpreted in a way that conforms to the nationalist paradigm.

Even in their attempts to discuss the nationalist movement during the colonial period, many historians inadvertently point out the actual existence of non-nationalist sentiment or illustrate the lack of interest in the nationalist movement. In his book, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism*, Chong-shik Lee quotes three nationalists who were “all expounding on injustice and the need for students to take the leadership in bringing about changes in Korea.”¹⁰ However, when Lee quotes the following passage from a speech by Chang Tok-su, in which Chang remarked, “Under the present conditions in our society, people will ridicule a man who carries out a great enterprise for the nation, sacrificing his life,”¹¹ Lee fails to acknowledge that the quote actually points out how some Koreans ridiculed those who attempted to participate in the nationalist movement. While Chang’s intention was to motivate Koreans to participate in the nationalist cause and Lee’s reason for quoting him is to show an example of a nationalist’s speech, an examination of the remark shows that Korean sentiment during the colonial period was by no means uniform and many Koreans actually ridiculed “patriots” who died for their country.

While this tendency to place everything within the nationalist paradigm is present in the majority of the history written about the colonial period, it is important to note that many scholars, especially those in the present, have tried to look beyond this paradigm. Michael Robinson seeks to complicate notions of a simple Japan oppressor/Korea resistor in his discussion of the broadcasting industry during the colonial period, “The story of Korean radio was more than one of a single Korean culture resisting Japanese assimilation.”¹² After the March First movement, Korean-language radio broadcasts run by Koreans were allowed by the Japanese, illustrating a way in which collaboration—privilege bestowed by the Japanese—and resistance—the promotion of a Korean identity—intersect.

Gi-wook Shin and Do-hyun Han also highlight the complicated nature of Japan’s rule in colonial Korea and complicity by Koreans to it, “Although the Japanese used coercion and repression extensively throughout the entire colonial period and Koreans in turn continuously offered resistance to colonial rule... colonial authorities also designed noncoercive measures to cultivate consent for their rule.”¹³ Another area in which Japanese and Koreans combined forces was in the area of

⁸ C. I. Eugene Kim and Han-kyo Kim, *Korea and the Politics of Imperialism 1876 -1910*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 217.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Chong-sik Lee, *The Politics of Korean Nationalism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 99.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Michael Robinson, “Broadcasting, Cultural Hegemony, and Colonial Modernity in Korea, 1924-1945,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 69.

¹³ Gi-wook Shin and Do-Hyun Han, “Colonial Corporatism: The Rural Revitalization Campaign, 1932-1940,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 94.

business. While the colonial relationship is often viewed as one where the colonizers use the colonies as a place to procure natural resources and sell manufactured products, there are numerous examples of Koreans and Japanese working together. One such example is the participation by Korean business leaders in joint ventures with the Japanese.¹⁴

Despite such efforts by revisionist historians to examine the empirical evidence and illustrate the actual interactions that occurred during the first half of the twentieth century between Koreans and Japanese, the overwhelming tendency by South Korean historians has been to force everything into the nationalist framework still exists today. One current issue that illustrates the continuing dominance of the nationalist paradigm is the textbook controversies that often appear in the news. Although Japan's colonial rule of Korea ended with their defeat in World War II on August 15, 1945, the actual events that occurred during the colonization of Korea (1910-1945) are still widely disputed between the Japanese and Koreans. The South Korean government and South Korean historians keep a close eye on the content of Japanese high school and junior high school textbooks, and often criticize the Japanese government for the "inaccurate" portrayal of the colonial period in the textbooks. The Japanese government is often criticized for not acknowledging Japan's misdeeds during its colonial rule over Korea and other areas of East Asia. As recently as 2001, the Japanese government approved textbooks for use in Japanese schools that omitted certain historical facts about Imperial Japan. These omissions sparked widespread protest throughout South Korea.¹⁵

South Korea has persistently opposed Japan's light treatment of the colonial period, which coincides with the nationalist framework used in official South Korean school textbooks and histories that places Japan as the repressor. However, when it comes to events or people that do not fit within the nationalist reading of their own history, South Korea has a textbook controversy of its own. As reported in the *Chicago Tribune* in August 2001, South Korean textbooks often downplay the roles of Korean collaborators during the colonial period. In this article, author Mark Magnier, noted that, "South Korea's middle school textbook avoids any mention of Koreans' role in the occupation, while its high school counterpart devotes two paragraphs, explaining that a 1945 move to punish Japanese collaborators was quickly dropped after the government failed to support it."¹⁶

These contemporary examples of how the colonial period continues to be historicized in South Korea, such as the lack of references about collaborators in history textbooks and the constant protest of Japan's lack of recognition of colonial misdeeds, reinforce the common acceptance of the nationalist framework in South Korea. While re-examining historical records and establishing different historical readings are very important in any attempt to try to clarify the relationship between Korean and Japan during the colonial period, which many historians have and continue to do, another invaluable resource exists in literature.

An examination of literature written during the colonial period and post-liberation literature written about the colonial period provides numerous examples of images of the Japanese colonizers and interactions between Japanese and Koreans. In attempt to use this approach to gain a better understanding of how Koreans and Japanese interacted during the colonial period and its immediate aftermath, I will examine three texts: *Peace Under Heaven* by Ch'ae Man-sik, written during the colonial period in 1938, Chon Kwangyong's short story "Kapitan Ri," which details the transition from Japanese rule to the Soviet/U.S. domination of the post-World War II era, and *The Descendants of Cain* by Hwang Sun-won which, set in post-colonial Korea, provides valuable examples of images of Japanese people in the post-colonial period.

Peace Under Heaven was serialized in Korea in 1938. The narrative of the novel is set in September 1937, just as Japan was beginning its military offensive in China. The setting provides a contemporaneous look at late colonial-period Korea, where Japan's presence has almost become an

¹⁴Dennis McNamara, "The Keisho and the Korean Business Elite," *Journal of Asian Studies* 48 (May, 1989): 310-323. Carter J. Eckert, *Offspring of Empire: The Koch'ang Kims and the Colonial Origins of Korean Capitalism*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

¹⁵ "Opposition in Seoul to block Koizumi's visit," *Mainichi Daily News*, 13 October 2001.

¹⁶ Mark Magnier, "South Korean Textbooks Draw Criticism," *Chicago Tribune*, 30 August 2001.

accepted part of everyday life. The narrative is particularly interesting because the main character, Master Yun, represents an aspect of Korean society that benefited from the colonization by the Japanese. While it is important to note that there is no valorization of Yun's ability to cooperate with and gain from the Japanese and that the whole novel is based on a satirical criticism of Yun's attitude and actions, the narrative depicts everyday life in 1930s colonial Korea. As depicted by Ch'ae, Korea then was not a society characterized by overt Japanese repression and constant Korean resistance. In fact, Master Yun remarks on numerous occasions how grateful he is for Japan's protection, "Don't ever forget to thank your lucky stars we live in this wonderful world, where the Japanese have mobilized a huge army, hundreds of thousands of soldiers, to protect us Koreans! It's a world of peace where we can keep what is ours and live in comfort! Peace under heaven, that's what it is!"¹⁷

Master Yun's belief that he is living in peace under heaven with protection from the Japanese seems preposterous, and the author intended to be satirical, but the fact that Yun is an absentee-landlord who has gained from the stability provided by the Japanese army and Japan's suppression of the socialist party, puts his belief within the realm of possibility. While it is obvious that Master Yun does not symbolize the average Korean of the colonial period, this character does provide an example of how some Koreans may have used the colonial system for personal gain, even if it affected their fellow Koreans adversely. In other words, the character of Master Yun is symbolic of the typical "collaborationist" image of an upper-class man throwing away the "nation" for his own personal gain.

However, as Carter J. Eckert states in the introduction to the English translation of the book, "It is not that Yun is necessarily anti-nationalist or pro-Japanese . . . His only concern is self-interest."¹⁸ In other words, Yun's character suggests that, in the author's imagination, colonial Korea was not divided neatly into nationalist versus pro-Japanese camps but that there were people who focused on their personal interests without getting caught up in the nationalist anti-Japan campaigns.

Another revealing part of the narrative is a conversation, between Master Yun and one of his employees Tadpole, about Japan's war with China. The characters are very supportive of Japan and ridicule China's efforts at resistance. In Tadpole's words, "Japan has stepped in to shake China back to her senses."¹⁹ Not only do their statements show support for Japan, they also valorize Japan's wartime conduct as in this remark by Yun, "There's no pillage and plunder in this war, you say, and it's not at all like an ordinary war?"²⁰ Anyone familiar with the Japan's attacks on China in late 1937 will probably laugh out loud (or scream with anger) at the outrageousness of Yun's statement, which was most likely the author's intention. However, characters like Yun demonstrate the possibility that many Koreans bought into Japan's propaganda and ignored the signs of cruel repression that were occurring, not only in China, but within the borders of their own country also.

The one actual interaction in the book between Yun and Japanese occurs when Yun goes to a Japanese jewelry store to buy a ring for his young "girlfriend" in an attempt to win her over. The narrator's description of Master Yun as he walks through the Japanese district is very interesting, "Master Yun compelled the Japanese to recognize that there was nobility in the Koreans, too. He had, in fact, unwittingly conducted a silent protest on behalf of the Korean people, though such was far indeed from what he was of a mind to accomplish."²¹ Once again the narrator is being critical of Yun in a satirical manner. The narrator's statement shows that if anyone should protest the Japanese it is Yun who has the money and power to carry out a meaningful protest, yet this is the farthest thing from his mind.

Another character whose relationship with Japan is worthy of note is Master Yun's grandson

¹⁷ Ch'ae Man-sik, *Peace Under Heaven*, trans. Chun Kyung-Ja (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 1993), 240.

¹⁸ Carter J. Eckert, "Introduction," in Ch'ae Man-sik, *Peace Under Heaven*, trans. Chun Kyung-Ja (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 1993), XV.

¹⁹ Ch'ae, *Peace Under Heaven* 110.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

Chonghak, who is studying in Japan. Much to his grandfather's disappointment, Chonghak is arrested in Japan for his involvement in socialism.²² While the narrator says very little about Chonghak, this incident shows that out of all the characters in the book, only one, Chonghak, is actually involved in a nationalist cause. In other words the author suggests, in a very clear manner, that one of the groups most involved in the resistance of Japan were the Korean students studying in Japan--not those living in Korea--and the disinterested well-to-do Koreans who prospered under Japanese rule like Master Yun did not resist.

"Kapitan Ri," written by Chon Kwangyong, was published in 1962, 17 years after the end of the colonial period. The narrative of this short story follows the main character Yi Inguk, a doctor, from the colonial period, to the Soviet occupation of the North, and finally to his "escape" to the U. S.-occupied South. The actual setting of the story is in post-liberation South Korea. Yi Inguk looks back, in this story, on his experiences during the colonial period and the entry of the U. S. and Soviet Union after the end of World War II. Thus, both the narrator's and author's commentary on the colonial period are retrospective in contrast with the contemporaneous writing and narration of *Peace Under Heaven*.

Yi Inguk's remembrances of interactions with the Japanese during the colonial period, once again, provide a different perspective from that of the nationalist paradigm. Yi Inguk is most definitely a "collaborator." During the colonial period "his clientele had been mostly Japanese."²³ Not only did Yi Inguk cater to the Japanese, but he actually turned away Koreans who resisted the Japanese like the character Ch'unsok. "Not only did it seem improper for him . . . to admit this political criminal [Ch'unsok] to a clinic patronized by leading Japanese officials; but he also feared that the monument of his good works, for which he was officially recognized as a model citizen of the Empire, could come crashing down overnight."²⁴ Yi Inguk's attitude towards Ch'unsok is the exact opposite of the image of Koreans established by the nationalist paradigm. Not only does Yi Inguk support the empire, he labels his fellow Koreans who oppose it as "political criminals" and worries more about his image as a "model citizen of the Empire" than the condition of his nation Korea.

Yi Inguk took particular pride in the National Language Family award that he received for his efforts to use the "national language" or Japanese. "Not only had he always spoken the national language in the clinic and throughout his social life, but he had also insisted on using Japanese exclusively at home, too. So unfamiliar had he become with Korean that he had found it awkward to express himself in it after the Liberation."²⁵ Since a large part of his clientele was Japanese and there was a great amount of pressure to speak Japanese in public places, his use of Japanese in his clinic and social settings is understandable, but his insistence on using Japanese at home shows a desire to conform to Japanese law. In addition to his desire to conform to the Japanese laws, his loss of much of his fluency in Korean show that he had dismissed the idea of Korea as his nation and that he had no desire to resist Japan as a member of the Korean nation.

There are many other examples in the text of Yi Inguk's devotion to Imperial Japan. His most prized possession, a pocket watch that he received upon graduation from "the Imperial University," is a symbol of the Japanese Empire itself.²⁶ Also, he named his daughter Namiko, a typical Japanese name.²⁷

Like Master Yun in *Peace Under Heaven*, the narrator by no means treats the character of Yi Inguk positively, but rather uses him to make a satirical criticism of Koreans who collaborated with the Japanese or conformed to the laws of colonial Japan without even thinking about resisting. While

²² Ibid., 239.

²³ Chon Kwangyong, "Kapitan Ri," in *Land of Exile: Contemporary Korean Fiction*, trans. and ed. Marshall R. Pihl, Bruce Fulton, and Ju-chan Fulton (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 60.

²⁴ Ibid., Chon, 67.

²⁵ Ibid., 68.

²⁶ Ibid., 61.

²⁷ Ibid., 61.

both Master Yun and Yi Inguk are wealthy and far from being “normal” Korean characters, the fact that the authors took the time to write about such characters shows that Koreans who did not focus on supporting the Korean nation and resisting Japanese colonialism were a very real part of Colonial Korea, at least as portrayed by the two authors. It is possible to argue that Ch’ae Man-sik, who wrote during the heavily censored colonial period, had very limited opportunity criticize Japan, and he therefore focused on criticizing Koreans who supported the Japanese at the expense of their fellow countrymen. “Kapitan Ri,” on the other hand, was written in 1962, when it was politically correct to criticize the Japanese colonization of Korea, yet the author still chose to focus on a Korean character who supported Japanese imperialism.

While the focus in both *Peace Under Heaven* and “Kapitan Ri” in regards to Japanese and Korean interactions is on the two characters, Master Yun and Yi Inguk, who showed support for Japanese Imperialism and a lack of desire to participate in nationalist movements, there is one passage in “Kapitan Ri” that shows a different side of Korean attitudes towards the Japanese. This particular passage, which is set in American-dominated post-World War II South Korea, is a portrayal of Yi Inguk’s negative reaction (*A big-nose for a son-in-law!*) to his daughter’s desire to marry an American. He compares this marriage with those that took place between Japanese and Koreans during the colonial period. “His thoughts leaped back to all the fuss they had made over Japanese-Korean marriages during the occupation. Then such things weren’t the makings of slander and humiliation. Rather, they were thought quite natural by many, if not possibly even a mark of distinction.”²⁸

This description of Yi Inguk’s thoughts by the narrator is extremely important because it illustrates a privileging of marriages with Japanese colonists and a condemnation of marriages with American “liberators.” According to the narrator this is not Yi Inguk’s personal opinion, but the general view of “many” in Korean society. This point is of great consequence because it demonstrates an example of a “Korean” opinion or view that contradicts the nationalist reading of history of the Japanese as the enemy of the Korean nation and the U.S. as the liberator.

A third work of fiction, *The Descendants of Cain*, written by Hwang Sun-won, was published in 1954. The actual setting of the narrative takes place in North Korea shortly after the end of World War II. Since the focus of the novel is on the communist takeover of North Korea and its influence on the landowner/peasant relationship that had dominated Korea up until that point, there is very little reference to colonial Korea. However, the narrator’s description of some Japanese people present in North Korea provides a stark contrast to the images created by the nationalist paradigm.

Interaction between Korean and Japanese characters during the colonial period is mentioned only twice. The first instance is Hun’s decision to return to his hometown. Hun, a landowner “. . . decided to close the house in Pyongyang and return to the country, hoping thereby, to avoid conflicts with the Japanese, whose demands were growing harsher as the end of the war drew near.”²⁹ Hun’s desire to avoid the Japanese demands fits well within the nationalist framework because it shows Hun, a Korean, trying to escape Japanese repression. Also it is important to note that this statement refers to the latter stages of the colonial period, which is one of the two time periods most often castigated by the nationalist paradigm.

The second instance involves Pak Yongje’s, Hun’s uncle, effort to construct a reservoir. “This happened toward the end of the colonial period when the Japanese were anxious to increase agricultural production, so Yongje could easily obtain government support for his project.”³⁰ This is a very important passage since Yongje is later accused of collaboration with the Japanese because of his involvement in this project.³¹ However, the narrator does not depict Yongje’s desire to build the

²⁸ Ibid., 62-63.

²⁹ Hwang Sun-won, *The Descendants of Cain*, trans. Suh Ji-moon and Julie Pickering (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 26-27.

³⁰ Ibid., 51.

³¹ Ibid., 81.

reservoir as collaboratory but simply as self-interest. There is even a possibility that the reservoir could benefit the Korean peasants of the village. This incident gives an example of how the lines between collaborator/anti-Japan were unclear. This line was most probably unclear for the majority of Koreans. Most Koreans probably felt loyalty to Korea even while collaborating with Japan, especially when such collaboration was not overt. The nationalist paradigm casts all those who collaborated into the realm of non-Korean, but the cases illustrated in fictional works such as those cited above show that some of those who were accused of collaboration may have actually had no desire to help the Japanese and, once again, calls into question the clearly defined boundaries of the nationalist interpretation of history. In fact, it is very possible that a large number of Koreans “collaborated” with Japan, even if unintentionally, on a daily basis, that is, they did not overtly resist the Japanese or tacitly accepted Japanese authority.

Although the remaining references to Japanese people in *Descendants of Cain* all occur in the post-World War II period, the narrator’s depiction of Japanese in the post-war period once again challenge the way in which Japanese should supposedly to be represented within the nationalist framework. The descriptions of Japanese in post-colonial Korea take place during Hun’s brief visit to Pyongyang as depicted in *The Descendants of Cain*. One particularly startling scene is Hun’s observation of a Japanese man carrying his dead child on his back. The narrator describes Hun’s thoughts as he compares a Japanese beggar, who he had seen right after liberation, to his present observation, “Hun hadn’t pitied the man at the time; in fact, he had felt the Japanese deserved a taste of their own medicine, but he felt sorry for the Japanese man today.”³²

Hun’s pity for the Japanese “repressors” does not fit the vilification of the Japanese that is still an important part of the nationalist framework today. While it is true that Hun did not feel pity for the Japanese immediately following liberation, his attitude towards the Japanese had already changed within the brief one or two year span between liberation and his current visit to Pyongyang. This shift of attitude is, most likely, due partly to the humanism that can be found throughout the text. However, even though this was during the period when Koreans had to be very careful of being accused as collaborators and their vilification of the Japanese was at its supposed highest, Hwang chooses to portray the Japanese as fellow human beings who are suffering.

The narrator also describes Hun’s thoughts as he walks through a Japanese residential area in Pyongyang. Hun recalls seeing women with shaved heads trying to pass as men, imagines children dying of malnutrition, and remembers the faces of the Japanese after their defeat, “Fear and uncertainty had replaced the pride and dignity on their faces.”³³ He also sees a Japanese female prostitute.³⁴ These descriptions of the Japanese suffering could very well be applied to the Koreans or other victims of Japanese imperialism and placed within the nationalist reading of history. However, the image of Japanese people suffering because of their attempt at imperialism failed is quite different from the image of the Japanese as repressors.

Through examining these three texts I have established four examples that do not fit within the nationalist paradigm. The first is the willingness of some Koreans to cooperate with the Japanese as in the case of Master Yun or even devote themselves to the Empire as in the case of Yi Inguk. The second example is the privileging of Japanese-Korean marriages during the colonial period and the contempt for American-Korean marriages during the post-liberation period. The third is the accusation of Yongje as a collaborator even though he demonstrated no desire to cooperate with the Japanese and was motivated to build the reservoir solely by a personal desire to profit from the project. The last example is the depiction of the Japanese in post-liberation Korea as suffering victims, instead of evil repressors. These four examples show that the three authors clearly saw a different Korea than that posed by the nationalist framework. These examples also complicate the Japanese repressor/Korean resistor binary narrative. Since it is obvious that the nationalist paradigm is quite inadequate after examining these three texts, the next question is why is the nationalist paradigm still

³² Ibid., 134.

³³ Ibid., 140.

³⁴ Ibid., 141.

accepted and in use today?

It is important to note that both the right and the left in Korea have used the nationalist paradigm. As mentioned earlier, the elite of the colonial period are often labeled as “collaborators” who focused more on self-interest than the welfare of the nation. This is a common criticism posed by the left and it often differs from the state-sponsored version of history that is the focus of this paper. On the other hand, the right, as illustrated by the elision of the subject of collaboration in textbooks, has sought to distance itself from its connections with Japan during the colonial period, essentially ignoring its role in collaboration. One case that illustrates the complicated nature of the subject of collaboration is Yi Kwangsu, who has often been vilified by the nationalist framework as a collaborator. I will make no attempt to determine whether Yi Kwangsu was truly a collaborator or a nationalist or why he might have changed from a nationalist to a collaborator but will simply attempt to look at his case from a non-nationalist perspective.

His case is very interesting because it poses certain problems for the nationalist reading of history, which makes it is very hard to place him within the nationalist framework. In the words of Michael D. Shin, “Scholars are still obsessed with explaining how someone so seemingly nationalistic turned into a collaborator.”³⁵ The nationalist framework used by the left would suggest that Yi was an elite “non-Korean” who collaborated, and therefore different from the “common” people who are the “true Koreans.” However, it is very difficult to place someone, who was an integral part of establishing the “national literature” of Korea and was an avid supporter of nationalist causes around the March 1st Movement period, in the category of “non-Korean” as dictated by the nationalist framework’s definition of collaborator. When looking at the holes that examining the three Korean literary texts exposed in the nationalist framework it may not be as difficult to “place” Yi Kwangsu, one of “founders” of modern Korean literature within a framework of Korean history, who is a controversial figure when one relies solely on the nationalist paradigm.

The example of Yongje is especially relevant to the Yi Kwangsu’s case. Yi Kwangsu is considered to be one of founders--if not the central one--of modern Korean literature. Yi Kwangsu’s *The Heartless* (Mujong), first published in 1917, is regarded as the first Korean novel. Yongje obtained approval to build a reservoir from the Japanese not as a action of overt support for Japan and a rejection of the Korean, but for the purpose of accomplishing a personal goal that may have had a positive effect on his fellow Koreans. Likewise, Yi Kwangsu, most likely did not have the desire to throw away his Korean nationality to support the Japanese, but rather, saw “collaboration” as a means to accomplish personal or even “Korean nation” goals. In the words of Kim Yunshik, “When he betrayed the *minjok*, the reason that readers were so enraged and hurt was that they themselves had become Yi Kwangsu. They were not criticizing Yi Kwangsu but were criticizing, crying over, and pained at their own selves.”³⁶

One possible reason that Korean people are obsessed with Yi Kwangsu is that he represents the “Korean” people themselves (exactly opposite of what the definition of collaborator is according to the nationalist paradigm). As is abundantly clear in the three texts, Koreans in many cases started to settle into the “peace under heaven” that was established after the March 1st movement in the 1920s and 1930s. Many Koreans probably involved themselves in collaborationist actions or thoughts or at least did not actively participate in the resistance of the Japanese, but instead carried on with their daily lives. Kenneth Wells adeptly argues that it is important to complicate the simple “nationalist paradigm” when examining the colonial period, “It is important to realize that Koreans in the 1920s and 1930s did not relate everything to nationalist projects, as if there were no other reference points to their lives than the fact of Japanese rule.”³⁷

³⁵ Michael D. Shin, “Interior Landscapes: Yi Kwangsu’s “The Heartless” and the Origins of Modern Literature,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 249.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 284.

³⁷ Kenneth M. Wells, “The Price of Legitimacy: Women and the Kunuhoe Movement, 1927-1931,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 197.

Therefore the present popular images of the colonial period in South Korea and the South Korean regime's adherence to the nationalist framework suggests that many may simply want to forget that a large number of Koreans (if not the vast majority) did not resist the Japanese as much as they could have or that they collaborated with the Japanese. As reported in the *Chicago Tribune* story about the Korean textbook controversy, "A survey in the early 1990s by the Institute of National Affairs Studies, a Seoul-based civic group, found that half of all South Korean professionals and 90 percent of bureaucrats came from families [that had once had] . . . strong ties to the Japanese colonial powers."³⁸ By applying the strict binary of Japan repressor/Korea resistor established by the nationalist paradigm, all Koreans can easily be placed in the "resistor" category and absolved of any responsibility they might have had for collaboration during the colonial period. However, history is clearly much more complicated than any simple Japan/Korea or collaborator/anti-Japanese dichotomy. While history can always be re-read and reinterpreted, examination of literary texts, like colonial period Korean texts, will always be a valuable option when trying to fill the holes left by official political-motivated interpretations—even when these are found in history books.

³⁸ Magnier, *Chicago Tribune*, 30 August 2001.

Studies on Asia, series II, vol. 1, num. 1

