

Trauma Seen through Korean Women's Recounts of War Experience and Prospects of Overcoming the Trauma*

Kang, Mi-Jeong**

KU Research Professor, Konkuk University Humanities Research Institute

Abstract

Korean women's recounts of war experience manifest realities of a war that permeated through their everyday lives. They are important materials that reveal trauma from the war. What kind of traumas can be found in those recounts of war experience and what can be done to alleviate those traumas? In order to find answers to these questions, this article discusses the case of a woman called Gim Seong-Yeon, who was forced to live in difficult conditions as a refugee during the war. In her war experience tale, there is a repetition of how she was separated from her family, how she was mistreated and how she had no one to depend on for protection. The war left Seong-Yeon with a trauma in the form of fear and distrust. But Seong-Yeon also narrated folktales aside from her recounts of her war experience. Unlike her war experience testimonies, her folktales are mainly about reassurance and trust. Therefore, this article seeks to compare Seong-Yeon's recount of her war experience and her folktales, to reveal the fact that when a person suffers from trauma in the form of fear and distrust as an aftermath of the Korean war, as in the case of Seong-Yeon, stories about reassurance and trust, even if they are far from reality, can help in overcoming that trauma.

Key Words : Korean Women's Recounts of War Experience, Fear and Distrust, Trauma, Folk Story, Feeling of Relief and Trust, Overcoming the Trauma

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** superego0308@hanamail.net

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1. Introduction

If war for Korean men was a time of concentration on confronting the enemy, threatening their lives every single moment at the battlefield, then war for Korean women was a time of everyday survival amidst family members they had to care for and family members who would not care for them. Whereas the muzzle of the rifle aimed at the enemy can gain justification, it was difficult for feeling of mistreatment and anger at family members to gain justification. Therefore, Korean women, amidst the chaos of the war, had no choice but to let themselves be swept away by the turmoils of life and endure their hardships, without the luxury of being able to ask what had caused them to go through all they had to go through.¹⁾ The reason why we must now turn our eyes towards the reality of the war experience of these women is because the wounds from the war that had upheaved their lives had not healed then and there, but instead have become scars that continue to exist in their daily lives. Men who have been recognized for their service may receive some material compensation and also carry a certain amount of psychological pride.²⁾ However, for women, who were left to fend for themselves amidst day to day hunger and poverty, it was very often the case that what remained at the end of their hardship as remnants of the war, were only illnesses and estrangement from their family members.

This article seeks to make an inquiry into trauma and how that trauma can be healed, focusing on the case of Gim Seong-Yeon (alias; born in 1927)³⁾, who went

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- 1) "The Korean War did not take place only on the front forged by the confrontation between the UN forces, including the South Korean military, the People's Army and the Chinese military. Depending on the circumstances at the front, many people became refugees, and in areas outside the front, there were massacres and revengeful killings due to ideological differences. Movements of people due to the flow of refugees led to the overall change in the Korean society, while the massacres and the revengeful killings between local populations could be seen as a distorted manifestation of various forms of contradictions within the Korean society. Majority of the people who lived during that period directly and indirectly experienced the war, and all have at least one story to tell about their war experience" (Han, Jeong-hoon 2014, 117-118)
 - 2) "When reminiscing and talking about the war, many women tend to talk about their family and neighbors, and the hardships they had gone through in relation to them. On the other hand, most men usually center on themselves and recount their war experience as an exciting heroic tale. Such difference clearly shows that when it comes to historical lives, there is a division of life or a division of narration that exists between women and men." (Shin, Dong-Hun 2012, 280)
 - 3) Gim Seong-Yeon(alias), still surviving today, is a woman who had experienced the Korean War. She is the storyteller of "Refugees who are extreme days of sorrow" (Shin, Dong-Hun et al., 2013,

through harsh experiences such as displacement, poverty, separation from her family and unfair treatment. Of course, it is difficult to assert that the war experiences of women like Seong-Yeon can be generalized to that of all Korean women. However, just like Seong-Yeon, the focus of this article, majority of Korean women of that time indeed felt constrained by conflicts with their family members at the same time having to take care of their children in the thick of displacement and war.

The case of Seong-Yeon, who tells us her tales of hardships as a refugee, is actually a common experience of countless other women in the rear who had become refugees, particularly women who had no one to depend on for protection and had to fend for themselves. Therefore, her recount of war experience cannot be limited to an example of one particular individual. Her story now becomes the story of many other women who, during the Korean War, had to bear the burden as a fighter in everyday life.⁴⁾

Seong-Yeon gave accounts of her war experience, but at the same time, narrated folktales. Thus, text materials relating to Seong-Yeon exist both in the form of her describing war experience (Sin, Dong-hun et al., 2013, 11~128) and also in the form of folktales⁵⁾ independent from her war experience. It is rarely the case that there are both the material portraying a woman's real life and also material recording stories creatively told by the same woman. However, until now, research on Gim Seong-Yeon has focused mostly on her recount of her war experience.⁶⁾

11~128). A pseudonym is used, noting that a pseudonym was used in prior research that had introduced her.

- 4) The fact that Korean women who had experienced war, like the case of Gim Seong-Yeon, did not have any choice but to live as a fighter in everyday life is revealed and discussed as the following. "The woman, who could not free herself from the 'narrative of separation' planted in her heart by a man during her youth, is now living her life as an old woman, still traumatized. It is heartbreaking to imagine her dying without having relieved herself of the pain and the mortification she carries in her heart. The case of Gim Seong-Yeon probably does not represent the circumstances of all men and women during the war. Not all husbands and brothers were that cold-hearted. However, one cannot deny that her experience is a portrayal of the lives of men and women exposed to extreme conditions of a war" (Shin, Dong-Hun 2012, 288~289).
- 5) Gim Seong-Yeon(alias) told a total of 18 stories on 7 occasions. These folktales are mostly related to legends and historical tales from her birth place of Hwanghae Province. These stories can be found in *City traditions, a story about how the information package* (Shin, Dong-Hun et al., 2009).
- 6) "Recently, in oral literature, a lot of research is being made into the Korean War. Due to the development of the media, mobility of people and generational changes, it has become difficult to find bases for stories compared to the past and to research new oral literary texts such as narrated stories. It is under these circumstance that oral literature started to focus on recounts of experience

Against this backdrop, this article seeks to link Gim Seong-Yeon's recount of her Korean War experience and the folktales she told. Such an approach is an interesting one from the perspective of literature therapy because information about one's actual life is useful in understanding one's personal experience while the fictitious stories that one remembers are useful in analyzing the inner self-narrative. Moreover, it may be possible to find trauma - cause of the problem - in the recount of war experience whereas the way to heal that trauma can be found in the folktales. If the recount of war experience could be said to be a reflection of harsh reality, then the folktales narrated by Seong-Yeon could be said to contain something through which she tried to escape from that reality. Thus, the second part of this article will look at Seong-Yeon's trauma based on her tales of her war experience, and the third part will try to find clues on how to overcome the inner trauma based on the fictitious stories she tells.

2. Life Unprotected as Depicted in War Experience Recounted by Korean Women and Their Trauma

Who would not be vulnerable amidst the flames of a war. Under such circumstances, women, ignorant about the world, with no power and nothing to own, are themselves vulnerable, but they are nonetheless burdened with the responsibility of taking care of their children, who are even more young and vulnerable, and other family members. The history of such hardships is not left as social records but is rather handed down after a long time in the form of testimonies of experience. In this sense, tales of war experience of Korean women straightforwardly show the effects of war deep in their lives, and are important materials that show the resulting trauma. Seong-Yeon's recount of her war experience, which is the focus of this article, is all the more meaningful because it shows the various forms of human relationships created during the wartime

as texts. With traditional genres like folktales disappearing, oral literature researchers have started to pay attention to the fact that recounts of people's real experience, instead of folktales, are being actively exchanged in the story marketplace" (Han, Jeong-hoon 2014, 118).

displacement. This part of the article, based on Seong-Yeon's recount of her war experience, will look into the hardships that Korean women faced during the war and on the scars that resulted from such experience.

Seong-Yeon's recount of her war experience is filled with sad memories from her life as a refugee. When the war broke out, Seong-Yeon, who had just turned twenty, had to run from home with two children left in her care, while her husband did not do anything to help. In fact, the two children were not even her own. They were born from an affair of her husband. However, Seong-Yeon was determined to save those children, whom her parents had told her to neglect. So she became a refugee - difficult enough for a woman as it is, let alone with two young children.

In a refugee settlement, women and children are the most vulnerable. They have no access to information about the war and have no choice but to follow others running away this way and that way. The experience as a refugee, where one does not know what to expect, is always afraid, can just barely survive and constantly have to be on the run, forces one to distrust everyone and not stay anywhere long.

The hardships of Seong-Yeon, who, under the sense of responsibility and sacrifice, had to evacuate on her own with two young children, coincide with those of most other women during the war. It was also the experience of many women struggling to survive in the patriarchal society of the time. Receiving the care of a husband, forming solid unity among all family members and caring for one another were mere dreams during the perilous time of a war. This is why people rarely remember and recount in their war experience family members being able to stay together and escape from danger. In this sense, a war is an oppressive force that destroys the family-centric culture and forces one to focus on one's own survival. This seems why when women reminisce on the war, they repeatedly talk about how they were hurt when they were rejected at a time when they needed protection. The pain also comes from women finding it too hard to look back on their war experience and time of suffering, and also from the many tormenting memories still embedded in them.

Seong-Yeon's war experience is not any different. In fact, her life was even harder because her husband, whom she had expected to take at least a little care

of her, did not protect her in any way. Seong-Yeon's husband did take care of his wife and children, and even ignored his wife's calls for help. He was unkind to her, constantly out searching for him, scolding her for not dying and chasing him around instead. He was a harsh father who refused to give his own children any money. In this sense, Seong-Yeon's husband was a person who made her feel the brutality of a war up close.

This kind of situation, where she had a husband but could nonetheless expect neither protection nor any consolation from, repeats itself throughout Seong-Yeon's recount of war experience, making it all the more vivid. The coldheartedness of her husband was the decisive factor in breaking down the trust she had for her family and hopes she had for her relatives, and in engraving in her heart a sense of betrayal. Therefore, in Seong-Yeon's tales of her war experience, sorrow from the unkindness of people around her and rejection from people whom she thought would help appear frequently and constitute a major part in her overall experience. However, Seong-Yeon remains very calm when narrating that heartbreaking past as a refugee, and in many cases, she blames herself for being mistreated. Thus, her story is like a record of self-blame for not being able to refute the people who made her suffer and for allowing herself to live under an such oppressive atmosphere.

On the other hand, Seong-Yeon's war experience story is the story of many other women who had to stand on their own during the war and take care of their family - of women who had no resources whatsoever and had to sacrifice themselves for their children even if it meant they had to become beggars. Although Seong-Yeon and her children could just barely survive, she even helped another young woman and her child who were facing a similar plight.

Help, in this situation, was not about giving material support because both women were mothers at the far end of poverty. Then one day, the young woman, whom Seong-Yeon had taken care of, reunited with her separated husband. Seong-Yeon was genuinely happy for her, however, the young woman left without even a goodbye. The memory of those events are carved into her heart as betrayal and sorrow. The following is an excerpt from her story.

That was when I felt the most sad. When that woman left. I had nowhere to go. I was alone. If I were her, even if my husband was obstinate in taking only me, I would have tried to take care of her because, after all, we were both families of police officers. But she left me. I will never forget that even when I die.⁷⁾

The above excerpt shows quite clearly how Seong-Yeon felt when the woman she had helped during the refugee period simply left. A refugee on the road is not really in a situation to help others, however, Seong-Yeon had sympathetically taken care of the woman. But the woman left without a word. Those were the times when even a little warmheartedness was considered a luxury because of constant instability and fear. Nevertheless, Seong-Yeon became aware of the plight - very similar to her own - of the woman and so treated her like a younger sister. But what came back was betrayal. And that betrayal and heartbreak remained for such a long time that the story of that woman who left without looking back is frequently mentioned in her recount of the war experience. The experience makes her conclude that it was naive of her, in a war, to hope a better life would be possible by helping one another during hard times and that the woman was wiser in acting the way she did - self-centeredly finding a way out.

When I was still in the kitchen, before bringing our food into the room, my brother and his family would make my daughter just stand there in the room while they ate. That really broke my heart, and later, I didn't go visit my family. Whatever happened to my brother's family, I didn't go, because they hated my children. That's how I raised the kids - cutting off my relationship with my own family. Now they've grown up, but we don't really see each other any more. If I go to the community center, I can probably find out where they live. But I think they're not coming to see me because money is tight. I'm sure they'll come when they're better off.⁸⁾

The excerpt above shows indirectly that Seong-Yeon, who is now old, has

7) The speaker's manner of speech has been refined to make translation easier. The original quote can be found in the following book (Shin, Dong-Hun et al., 2013, 79).

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become distant from the children she had cherished and raised during the war. In the past, her brothers were unkind, refusing to give food to the hungry children and making them stand there in the room, simply because the children were not their real niece and nephew. Seong-Yeon still weeps as she recalls those days. Seong-Yeon's family had been very displeased at her taking care of children who were not her own. Seong-Yeon's brothers could not understand why Seong-Yeon took care of those children instead of taking care of herself. They would have disapproved even if life was better, let alone difficult as in a war. So it seems that her brothers were making a statement that they were willing to take on Seong-Yeon but not the young children she had brought.

So Seong-Yeon disregarded her family and concentrated on taking care of the children. However, when those children, whom she had protected, grew up, they would not take care of Seong-Yeon. Seong-Yeon nonetheless defends them, saying they would have supported her if they were doing better, but at the moment couldn't come because money was tight. Like a monologue. As such, for this Korean woman Seong-Yeon, who had gone through a war and was now old, the past misfortunes as a refugee still remain like an old scar.

Particularly notable in the case of Seong-Yeon is the fact that she had repeatedly experienced alienation from various relationships. Her adopted daughter and son, whom she defended and raised despite rejection from her family, became distant after growing up, calling on their mother only to use her. And regarding the friend she had met and helped on the road, who had nevertheless given nothing in return, the sense of betrayal still continues after more than 50 years. In the process, the time as a war refugee became a wound she does not want to recall but cannot erase from memory. Anyone who is not free from the experience of displacement has no choice but to live as a victim of that wound.

The pieces of the sad experience of not being protected but rejected, which appear often in Seong-Yeon's story, remain as lumps unresolved in her memory. So we have here, the story of a woman who had no one to trust, lives with the remnants of a bitter memory that helping others will not bring anything in return. She continues to live a lonely life with that experience in her heart. Also, Seong-Yeon felt as if she was fighting in an actual protracted war because of the

hardships she had endure every single day. In the battlefield, there were soldiers who killed the enemy but then got killed themselves marching forward. Then there were women like Seong-Yeon, who, as mothers, had to raise children amidst poverty - who had no choice but to endure the deep frustration and sorrow of not being able to get any help and to simply wait for time to pass.

Trauma, left by a life with no one to rely on, becomes stark because of a war, but it sometimes becomes even more stark as time passes by, rather than becoming more diluted. In the case of Seong-Yeon, she had to tolerate the wartime hardships and then go through the pain all over again in the process of recalling that experience because the children she had protected during the war started to live a life similar to that which led her husband to his ruin. Her husband, who had treated her coldly, made a deep impression on her together with the fear of war. But then she sees that repugnant impression reappear in her daughter. The daughter was a child she had lovingly taken care of during the war. That girl, who had refused to let go of Seong-Yeon's hand, grew up, deviated and then disappeared, neglecting her own children. Just as Seong-Yeon's husband had left his family in pursuit of life's pleasure, his daughter followed suit. However, Seong-Yeon blames herself for the way her daughter lives her life, believing that the daughter turned out the way she did because of the difficult life on the road. Blaming everything that goes wrong on the war is a form of a trauma from the war experience.

The voice of despair about a life with nowhere to rely on, heard often through the tales of Korean women recounting their war experience, is like the end of a war experience that has not yet ended. In particular, Seong-Yeon's tale of her experience of the Korean War reveals the mortification and the guilt deeply rooted in her life. The experiences of mistreatment from her trusted family and the betrayal of a friend she had helped were the main sources of her negative feelings during her period as a refugee and are remembered vividly even after many decades. Those feelings still dominate her life in the form of guilt that she had not properly taken care of her children.

3. Possibility of Moving Towards Trust and of Overcoming Trauma

Tales of the Korean War experience are the closest accounts of wartime everyday life, in particular, of the painful history of individuals and of problems arising in society at large. They also act as material elaborately articulating the past in the present. Paying attention to such recounts of the Korean War experience is necessary because, on one hand, they enable diagnosis of the trauma emerging from that kind of experience, and on the other hand, they give clues on how to surmount that trauma.

Clearly, if national division becomes consolidated as a result of the Korean War, and if the trauma from the division becomes a mental wound to all in both North and South Korea, then that mental wound will transform itself into antagonism towards others and root down. (IHU, 2015, 36-48) Then the trauma will not disappear but persistently continue to transform itself, incapacitate rational judgement and strengthen fear and distrust. Until now, hints on how to heal the Korean War trauma were sought for in works of literature and war experience tales dealing with the Korean War. Through such a process, researchers have been able to conclude that the best way to heal trauma is for people to revive the memories filled with past wounds, re-interpret the meaning, voice out the experiences that previously were not verbalized and thereby relieve the lumps in one's heart. There is also emphasis on the fact that, in order to heal trauma, one has to remain distant from the dichotomous ideological conflict between the left and the right.⁹⁾

In the case of Seong-Yeon, the focus of this article, she was able to look back on the fear and the distrust arising from her sad life of not having anyone to protect her through her recounts of her war experience. She also still shows a lot of concern for the children whom she feels she must take care of. However, she does not seem to experience paralysis in her daily life due to some form of neurosis,

9) "Consistently pointing to ideological conflicts as the root of various problems has not at all helped find ways to heal trauma. Instead, it has aggravated the social problems arising from trauma, and has often acted as a trap to degrade those suffering from trauma and living with symptoms of neurosis into social delinquents. Ideology itself is an anti-healing mechanism (Jang, Il-gu, 2014, 401)"

anger or hostility. Her tales do show trauma, but beyond her life filled with anxiety, there seems to be something that keeps her up. She is not simply pouring out her anger through her tales, but rather reviving her past. Although she sometimes still shows unrelieved distrust, there is some glimmer of hope that her family will become happy again.

In other words, although her war experience tales contain trauma from the war, there are aspects that have not sunk in the depths of a trauma. The article will now look at the folktales Seong-Yeon has narrated, to find out whether there is anything different in them compared to her inner experiences that prevented her from becoming sunk in trauma. In short, the article will look at what underlying factors within her folktales diluted Seong-Yeon's trauma to prevent it from becoming severe.

If we had to find ways to overcome trauma based only on her tales of war experience, then it would be necessary to design a life different from her past unprotected life, or find alternatives to alleviate her distrust. However, a unique aspect of the case of Gim Seong-Yeon is that there are also materials that contain her folktales independent from the records of her actual war experience. Therefore, it may be possible to find ways to overcome trauma by looking at the correlation between what she had actually experienced and the fictitious tales she has narrated. In short, if Seong-Yeon's recounts of her war experience are related to the trauma of fear and distrust, then perhaps the stories Seong-Yeon narrated contain aspects related to overcoming of that trauma.

Furthermore, if, in relation to her trauma, Seong-Yeon's folktales show ways to overcome that trauma - if they contain contents other than fear and distrust found often in her war experience - then it may be possible to say that her folktales acted as a buttress to her life. If her folktales contained the same kind of suffering, distrust and fear as her tales of war experience, a testimony to her harsh life, then those stories could not have held her up because, for something to be a support line to one's life, it has to act as an exit, large or small, in a situation where there does not seem to be a way out.

In fact, Seong-Yeon's folktales contain neither feelings of mistreatment by people around her nor fear. Her folktales evolve around hope of a better life and

solution to problems, even under very realistic circumstances. Of course, folktales in general, not just those of Seong-Yeon, are like that. They start from the most simple aspects of human relationships, and are beneficial in that they show very simply how issues arise from those relationships and how they are resolved. These stories do not necessarily need detailed description of the psychology of characters but usually have protagonists who find a way to resolve the issues they face and mature from that process. Therefore, when life faces a difficult uncontrollable circumstance, then a folktale that finds a solution to the similar problem can be a consolation. Seen from this light, it seems that the stories Seong-Yeon remembered well and happily narrated were like rain amidst a drought. The next part of the article will focus on the folktales narrated by Seong-Yeon, to look for a possibility that those stories indeed transformed the sense of distrust into trust.

Once upon a time, there was a couple who were very close to one another. They spent a life time of happiness, but then one day, sadness came upon them. The elderly woman was ill and was about to die. She called her husband to her side, and confessed that there were three men in her life - the boy next door, a boy in her school and then her husband. After the woman died, the elderly man cried every single day. People tried to comfort him and asked why he was crying, when it was all in the past. He told them he felt sorry for his wife, who had spent her whole life loving only him. The boy next door and the boy at her school were all me, he said. The elderly woman had loved only one man her entire life. (Gim, Seong-yeon 2009; Shin Dong-Hun et al. 2009, 442)

The above story is about a couple who cared for each other their entire life. This kind of tale is far from what Seong-Yeon herself had actually experienced. However, she remembered this story and narrated it when she got a chance. The husband inside this story is completely different from the cold-hearted husband who repeatedly appears in her tales of war experience. The husband in her tale misses his wife and is in sorrow because he loved her dearly. It is quite surprising that Seong-Yeon, who never had that kind of person in her life, would narrate such a story.

Of course, the process of creating a story can be based on one's actual experience, or it can be based on complete fiction. If there are various evidence to prove Seong-Yeon was a talented and creative storyteller, then the imagination of the above story could have come from her talent. However, it is more probable that Seong-Yeon, who was a refugee during the Korean War, and later had a tough life making ends meet even though she received some help from her family and acquaintances, was not able to afford the luxury of fine tuning her writing skills and creating works of fiction.

That is why it is impressive how Seong-Yeon was able to narrate a story about the love between a couple, with no base in real life. In particular, after she had told the story, she added, "The old man, he was so heartbroken and was crying because his wife had loved only him her entire life, and they could not die together," showing that this story was engraved deeply inside of her. Perhaps she was able to go on searching for her husband despite him abandoning her whenever they met, precisely because she had this story inside of her.

Brutal reality did not allow Seong-Yeon any warmth that she had hoped for from her husband. Nevertheless, she preserved in her heart this story with contents acting as a proxy for her dreams. So when the interviewer asked her to narrate not a real-life story but a folktale, she told a story completely different from her harsh reality. Perhaps this story of a trustful couple she had preserved inside her had allowed her to endure a hard life.

At the same time, the desire for a protective husband is also conveyed through the 'story of a husband caring for his wife even after her death'. Let's look at another of her stories aside from 'The Woman Who Loved Only Her Husband Her Entire Life' - 'The Woman Who Married Her Husband's Friend After Her Husband Appeared in Her Dream'.

Once upon a time, there was a poor married couple living with the husband's mother. The son left home, saying he would go far away to earn money so they could live a better life. The son's mother felt sorry for her daughter-in-law, all alone after her husband had gone away and not returned. Then the mother found out that her son's friend, Dolswoe, took a liking to her daughter-in-law. However,

the daughter-in-law said she would continue to live with the mother and wait for her husband to come home, and rejected Dolswoe's hand in marriage. Dolswoe tried to convince the mother-in-law, saying he would become her son, in place of his friend who had not returned for years. So the mother and Dolswoe made a grave for her dead son - Dolswoe's friend - and prayed for the daughter-in-law to change her mind. Not long after, the dead son appeared in his mother's dream, saying she should get his wife to remarry Dolswoe. The dead husband also appeared in his wife's dream, telling her not to live a hard life waiting for him and for her to remarry Dolswoe. The mother and daughter-in-law told each other how they had the weirdest dreams and found out they had both dreamt the same dream. The mother called Dolswoe and told him to marry her daughter-in-law, and Dolswoe took good care of the mother as if she were his own. Later, when the mother passed away, Dolswoe mourned for her at her grave for three years. (Gim, Seong-yeon 2009; Shin Dong-Hun et al., 2009., 443-445)

One of the biggest obstacles in Seong-Yeon's real life was her husband. And her experience of the war was made all the more harsh because of the coldheartedness of her husband. According to Seong-Yeon's recount of her experience, her relationship with her husband was a bad match from the very beginning, in that her husband was a person who constantly reminded her of her reality of not having anyone to rely on and of being neglected. 'The Woman Who Married Her Husband's Friend After Her Husband Appeared in Her Dream' is a story about a relationship unthinkable for her and her husband. What was completely impossible with her husband was being elaborately depicted in the folktales she narrated.

Unlike the real life of a woman who had no one to look out for her, in the story she told, after the husband, who was the original protector, disappeared, the husband's friend came to become the protector. The mother-in-law is also another protector, and even her dead husband encourages the woman to start a new life. All characters in the story take it upon themselves to look after the woman, who takes the form of a wife, a daughter-in-law and the wife of a friend.

As such, in the stories Seong-Yeon narrated, people come out of their way to

protect a vulnerable woman, completely opposite from the accounts of Seong-Yeon's real life. And also, unlike the fact that Seong-Yeon's recount of experience was filled trauma full of fear and distrust from not getting the protection she needed, her folktales were full of reassurances and trust.

Looking at the tales Seong-Yeon narrated, one cannot but help feel that she was able to continue her life minimizing neurosis and feelings of anger and hostility because she was able to remember her warm stories despite the wounds she had attained during the war. Seong-Yeon, who is now elderly, still has to fend for herself, but whenever there is someone who needs help, she does not think twice. Just as a victim transforms into a healer, Seong-Yeon feels bad that her grandson, just like herself, is unable to live a bountiful life, and is able to maintain benevolence towards people around her.

Seong-Yeon also has a history of giving away all her savings, if her children came to her for money. She even feels guilty that the reason her children are not well off is perhaps because she was not a good mother. During her life as a war refugee, she longed for protection and reassurance from people around her, but decades after the war, her life had not really changed. However, she does not deplore her life. In fact, she wants to help her children in whatever way she can. She wants to give others affection and care, although she herself was denied of them.

As such, her tales of her war experience show her inner trauma, whereas her folktales enable her to look back on her life, slowly diluting that trauma. In particular, in Seong-Yeon's attempts to narrate in detail things she had never experienced and construct a whole story, one can find hints of the epic of self used in literature therapy. The 'epic of self' in literature therapy refers to a person's inner story, whether or not it is based on real experience.

In order to be able to understand such epic of self, it is important to know how life and literary work are defined in literature therapy. In a nutshell, in literature therapy, understanding a person's life is made possible by analyzing the epic of self embedded inside oneself, while understanding a literary work is made possible by analyzing the epic of literary work, which is the basic framework of a work.

Therefore, while life may not correspond exactly to a literary work, the epic

of self and the epic of literary work, extracted from life and literary work respectively, can come in contact with one another because of the principle that they operate under the same mechanism. Literature therapy's main principle is that humans do not directly come in contact with literary work, but rather that a doorway between the two is opened so that the epic of self and the epic of literary work can meet, and this is how works of literature can contribute to widening the horizons of our lives.

Based on such principle of literature therapy, Seong-Yeon's life story is manifested by her tale of her war experience, and her epic of self is articulated through her folktales. Furthermore, the role that 'the epic of self' plays under the historically shocking circumstances of a war is all the more important because the 'epic of self' has to provide the means for one to interpret the 'historical event' one experiences, look back on one's life and understand it. There is no doubt that the experience of a war leaves everyone with at least some trauma.

However, this sort of experience does not leave everyone with a severe trauma and a ruined everyday life because the 'epic of self' that interpret 'historical events' of a war are not the same for everyone. If one has a narrative that can lessen the shock inside oneself, then that person will be able to eventually find peace by decreasing the destructive effects of a shocking event. This is the context upon which literature therapy finds ways to overcome historical trauma.¹⁰⁾

The characteristics of Seong-Yeon's recount of her war experience and those of her folktales can be summarized as the following. Seong-Yeon's war experience tale is a record of a historical event Korean women like her had to endure and is also a testimony of the shock they received. The tale also repeatedly portrays a life with no one to protect her and the fear and the distrust bred by that kind of life. On the other hand, her folktales unrelated to her war experience depicts a life where people offer to help and protect one another.

The two different streams of stories that come out of one person, on one hand, convey a historical event, and on the other, reveal one's inner story rendered all the more vivid through the experience of the historical event. In short, the reason

10) "When one's life is under shock from a historical event, it is possible to continue to maintain a healthy life by interpreting that shock with a self-narrative" (Jeong, Un-chaee, 2013).

why Seong-Yeon was to maintain peace within herself without blaming anyone despite the brutal shocks is because of the stories about trust she preserved inside of her. The stories, which had been buried inside, came up to the surface after a long time and show the readers what kind of narrative had allowed her to sustain herself.

Therefore, as mentioned in the introduction, Seong-Yeon's recount of her war experience reveals her actual life and is a text that can be used to expose the age-old trauma. On the other hand, tales she narrated were preserved inside her and allowed her to alleviate the shock and endure her life. As a result, the folktales inside her about lives that are well cared for and respected are compensating the life depicted in her war experience tales - life that was denied protection and neglected.

It is rarely the case that there are available texts both for exposing trauma and finding clues on how to overcome the trauma, as in the case of Seong-Yeon. What is important to remember from through these texts is that it is difficult to heal trauma or the effects of healing may be minimal if one relies only on the tales of war experience revealing the trauma in the first place. A better and more proactive way to heal trauma would be to look for any repetitions in the process of one's narration of past suffering, and then propose new contents that can neutralize that repetitive symptom. Seong-Yeon's case informs us that the way to neutralize the distrust related experience is to have stories related to strong trust.

4. Conclusion

The reason we should pay attention to the realities of Korean women's war experience is because of the fact that one's life is overturned not only by some dramatic event, but also by its frightening influence on today's life that seems no different from yesterday. Thus, this article has focused on the case of Gim Seong-Yeon(alias; born in 1927), who had experienced a harsh life of displacement, poverty, separation from her family and mistreatment due to a war, to look for what kind of trauma she had experienced and to project how she could

overcome that trauma. The case of Seong-Yeon, who conveyed stories of how she had suffered as a refugee, is actually an experience shared by many other women during the Korean War, who had to live in refugee settlements in the rear, especially women who didn't have anyone to depend on and had to fend for themselves. Therefore, Seong-Yeon's experience of the Korean War cannot be limited to that of one particular individual.

Furthermore, Seong-Yeon not only recounts her war experience, but also narrates folktales. So texts on Seong-Yeon exist in the form of both war experience tales and fictitious stories¹¹⁾. The two sets of texts were analyzed with the aim of searching for trauma and also how to overcome that trauma. Seong-Yeon's war experience tale is filled with stories of a life not having anyone to depend on and being betrayed repeatedly by people around her. What is left as a result of that experience is distrust towards others. In other words, the repetition of frightening events had led to a trauma in the form of distrust.

In the meantime, the folktales narrated by Seong-Yeon are mainly about strong love between couples and how they try to protect one another. They are also about trust. In this regard, Seong-Yeon's recount of the war experience was a testimony of her real life and revealed the age-old trauma whereas the folktales she told, embedded inside her, alleviated the effects of shocking events and helped her endure her life. As a result, the stories preserved inside her about lives that are protected and respected are compensating the life that was denied protection and neglected as shown by her war experience tales. Furthermore, in the case of Seong-Yeon, she had a 'self-narrative' inside her that could contribute to more positively interpreting the 'historical event', i.e., a war. So she was able to provide herself with the ability to overcome that trauma even though there were dangers of her falling into a deeper one.

11) Gim Seong-Yeon(alias) told a total of 18 stories on 7 occasions. These folktales are mostly related to legends and historical tales from her birth place of Hwanghae Province. These stories can be found in *City traditions, a story about how the information package* (Shin, Dong-Hun et al., 2009).

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