

Publishing the Second Issue of S/N Humanities Volume One

As Eric Hobsbawm pointed out, unlike the West, the Korean (Chosŏn) Peninsula used to be a 'historical nation', where one ethnic group (*minjok*) built and lived in a state with centralized power ever since the Koryŏ Era, at the latest. The Japanese colonization of the Korean (Chosŏn) Peninsula at the end of the 19th century was a tragedy destroying that equation between the *minjok* and the state. Therefore, liberation from Japanese colonial rule could only mean one thing - the reinstatement of '*minjok* = state'. However, the joy of liberation did not last long, as the Peninsula was divided into the South and the North under the Cold War regime of the Western powers led by the US and the USSR, and each ended up building a separate state. However, the '*minjok* ≠ state' in this case is different from that under Japanese colonialism because the mismatch between the two comes from the separation of one *minjok* into two states. As a result of all this, division trauma appeared, as yearning of the Korean people for '*minjok* = state' failed repetitiously to materialize.

The important thing here is that the two states set up by the South and the North respectively are both characterized by '*minjok* ≠ state', each forming a 'broken nation state' where neither can fully represent the *minjok*. Therefore, there arose the need for the two divided states to hide and suture that deficiency. Now, in the two states, the *minjok* and the state have switched places, and each side calls itself the legitimate representative of the *minjok*. Each monopolizes the *minjok* while considering the other as an impurity that spoils the chastity of the *minjok* - something that needs to be cleansed or eradicated. Ideological conflicts forced the eros to build a singular '*minjok* = state' to transform itself into emotions of hatred and vengeance toward the other, and the eros has been replaced by the mutually destructive thanatos. The most tragic form of this thanatos was the Korean War, which broke out in 1950.

The three year war ended with an armistice, replacing the 38th parallel with a demilitarized zone and leaving the guilt of having killed fellow countrymen. The problem is that this guilt from having massacred fellow countrymen became a taboo in the divided state, ironically acting as a mechanism of state surveillance, control and punishment. A nation state devoid of the superego of *minjok* used trauma in order to produce a 'nation' (*gukmin*), and transformed the trauma into the core of a thanatos-like antagonism and of memory distortion and reorganization. It reconstructed, long the lines of victimization, the history of tragedy on the Korean Peninsula into a memory permeated with vengeance and hatred toward the perpetrators.

However, the trauma, left by division and war and carried by Koreans, is not limited to the past generation that had directly gone through the war. It became a historical trauma, to be passed onto today's generation that had not experienced the war. Whenever a political, diplomatic or military clash takes place between the two Koreas, memories of the Korean War are revived and are used to instigate fear and terror. Some even go as far as insisting the necessity of another war and try to repeat the tragic history. These responses are similar to a Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) manifested after having experienced a traumatic event. They appear by rote and impulsively, like a reaction to an action. This is a problem not only in inter-Korean relations. The division trauma also directs its destructive force inward and leads to problems like the conflict among South Koreans. Such conflict can be witnessed most clearly in politics, where politics of the progressives are defined as pro-North Korea (or propagated by North Korea) while those of the conservatives anti-North Korean. This confrontational structure has led to social disunity.

Rational communication is impossible under these confrontations between the North and South or within the South. They merely breed the dichotomous idea of 'the enemy versus the ally' and encourages politics of deletion of trying to eradicate the other. In short, as long as division trauma is left untreated, inter-Korean communication to overcome division and realize unification will remain impossible. This is why unification humanities raise the need to heal division trauma - to enable communication between the two Koreas and within

South Korea.

The feature section in this edition is composed of three articles that focus on healing division trauma. The first article is “Division Trauma of Koreans and Oral Narrative Healing” by Kim Jong-Kun, which looks into the reality of division trauma through various examples of recounts of war experience of Koreans. It discusses the process of ‘oral narrative healing’ as a way to heal that division trauma by focusing on oral narrative methods and contents of the tales. The author calls the narrative rooted in divisionist consciousness and emphasizing hostility based on a victim’s logic as ‘division narrative’. Conversely, the narrative that discloses tragic realities of the war at the same time conveying messages of conciliation, tolerance and peace is referred to as an ‘integrative narrative’. The author tries to find examples of an integrative narrative within people’s stories including recounts of war experience because he feels that memories have been distorted, reorganized or suppressed under the divisionist regime and the history of division. Therefore, an integrative narrative is a counter-narrative to the division narrative - a mechanism that socio-psychologically reproduces hostility within the history of division. In order to heal division trauma and transform the inter-Korean hostility into solidarity and affinity, the most important task is to diffuse the integrative narrative throughout society and form a discourse.

The second feature article is “Trauma Seen Through Korean Women's Recounts of War Experience and Prospects of Overcoming the Trauma” by Kang Mi-Jung. It shares the context of Kim Jong-Kun’s article. The difference between the two is that, whereas Kim Jong-Kun discusses, on a more macro-level, the integrative narrative, its healing effects and the relevance of its social diffusion, Kang Mi-Jung focuses, on a more micro-level and from the perspective of ‘literature therapy’, on the stories of a woman called Gim Seong-Yeon to see how she self-heals the division trauma within herself. Kang Mi-Jung points out that stories of Gim Seong-Yeon’s separation and mistreatment from her family, and of having no one to rely on for protection repeatedly appear in her war experience tales. The author analyzes that, as a result of her experiences, Gim Seong-Yeon has difficulty forming relationships with others because of the distrust and fear she had developed. Nevertheless, her trauma does not develop further into a severe

disability because she carries within her a narrative that gives her comfort and consolation, as manifested by the folktales she tells. In conclusion, Kang Mi-Jung shows that when a woman suffers from trauma from division and war, a door to healing can be opened if she also carries with her a narrative that alleviates the trauma.

The third and last paper in the feature section is “The Meaning of Historical Deaths As Seen Through the Novella *Sun-i Samch'on* And Mourning as Politics of Human Rights” by Kim Jong-Gon. This article seeks to shed light on the meaning of historical deaths, nowadays being mummified, memorialized or even denied, and to discuss what kind of mourning is needed for such deaths. To this end, Kim Jong-Gon takes Hyun Ki-Young’s novella *Sun-i Samch'on* as a text. He analyzes the meaning of historical deaths as depicted in the story from the viewpoint of the responsibility and commitment of those living, and also looks into what possibilities there are in healing those who are in pain because of a tragic history. In short, the author asserts that not forgetting but remembering historical deaths and completing the process of mourning can be one way of healing trauma. He also explains how mourning has become impossible for some deaths despite progress being made in democratization as an important landmark in Korean modern history, justice for historical deaths and truth-finding. This impossibility comes from a problematic way of approaching historical deaths and mourning, as can be seen in the novella. He points to ‘selective mourning’ as the source of the problem, and proposes mourning as politics of human rights by adopting Balibar’s concept of ‘universal human rights’ as a way of overcoming that problem.

All three feature articles show that the process of healing of division trauma is different from pathological therapy. Generally, therapy aims to normalize what is abnormal within the frame of normal versus abnormal. However, the concept of healing in these papers refers to the process of transforming the body of division, formed under the divisionist regime, into a body of unification. In other words, the authors are saying that division trauma can be healed when the socio-psychological basis producing hostility internalized and embedded in our minds and subconsciousness is transformed on a politico-ethical level, thereby

allowing energy of affinity and coexistence to emanate. In this sense, the process of healing division trauma is a practice that makes our lives, suffocating under division, more free and peaceful.

The second issue of the S/N Korean Humanities Volume One contains two other articles - “The History of the Present: Foundational Meta-Narratives in Contemporary North Korean Discourse” (Eric Ballbach) and “Korean Unification: Political and Economic Aspects in the East-Asian Context” (Stanislav Tkachenko) - and book reviews on *Re-Imagining North Korea in International Politics: Problems and Alternatives* (Shine Choi) and *The Origins of the Panmunjom Regime: The Korean War and Liberal Peace Projects* (Kim Hak-Jae).

The first article “The History of the Present: Foundational Meta-Narratives in Contemporary North Korean Discourse”, by Eric Ballbach, analyzes the foundational meta-narratives in North Korea’s discourses to enhance understanding of North Korean society. Eric Ballbach defines a meta-narrative as a totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience. He also explains that, on the national level, meta-narratives refer to those over-arching, all-encompassing myths and stories that contain the historical knowledge of a country’s foundational history. Based on this definition, the paper discusses three important meta-narratives permeating North Korea’s contemporary political and cultural discourses: the meta-narrative of national ruin, of (Kim Il Sung’s) armed resistance and of constant threat of external aggression. It also describes the process of how these meta-narratives, as ‘historical contextualizations’, are strategically employed in contemporary discourse. Eric Ballbach concludes that through these ‘historical contextualizations’, particular interpretations of the past are used as arguments for political actions in the present and produce a normative frame for evaluating contemporary events and actions. He also argues that historical references and myths contained in those meta-narratives play an important role in establishing identity and fostering integration, for they level differences within the North Korean community and thus construct sameness and communality.

The second paper is “Korean Unification: Political and Economic Aspects in the East-Asian Context” by Stanislav Tkachenko. In this article, the author explains Russia’s recent policies regarding the Asia-Pacific region and its stance on the

Korean Peninsula, focusing on “The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation”, approved by the Russian President Putin in February 2013. He deals with Russian foreign policy from the perspective of multipolarity and, in particular, discusses the changes in international politics around the Korean Peninsula together with the changes in the US and Chinese leaderships. He goes on to describe three scenarios of political shifts likely to take place on the Peninsula, aside from the various economic interests of related parties. Stanislav Tkachenko explains what Russia’s interests are for each of these scenarios and which it most prefers. The three scenarios are the breakout of a major war in the Asia-Pacific region, the collapse of the North Korean regime and annexation of DPRK by the Republic of Korea/invasion by China, and gradual rapprochement of North and South Korea without losing by any of their sovereignty. Stanislav Tkachenko argues that the last scenario is the one most preferred by Russia and forms the basis for Russia’s policy on the Korean Peninsula.

The first book review is by Robert Winstanley-Chesters. In “Under the Demilitarized Zone...the Beach’: Or reading Choi through Guy Debord’s ‘Society of the Spectacle’”, he deals with Shine Choi’s *Re-Imagining North Korea in International Politics: Problems and Alternatives*, published in 2014. According to Robert Winstanley-Chesters, Shine Choi points out the fact that North Korean studies with distorted views in politics and security are results of the spectacle described by Guy Debord. The second book review is “Panmunjom Regime: A Global Historical Exploration for Peace as Social Solidarity” by Cho Bae-Joon, based on Kim Hak-Jae’s *The Origins of the Panmunjom Regime: The Korean War and Liberal Peace Projects*, published in 2015. This book labels the divisionist regime between North and South Korea the ‘Panmunjom regime’, in order to position it not as an issue limited to the Korean Peninsula but within broader world history, it being a product of the Cold War. The book review describes the contents of the book, focusing on the concept of the Panmunjom regime and the significance it has in contributing to overcoming division, reaching unification and building international peace.

This is only the second edition of S/N Korean Humanities, so the journal still has room for improvement, like a child just learning to walk. However, this also

means that the journal also has potential for further development, just as learning to walk is a process of preparing for future growth. Of course, I do not believe such development comes naturally with flow of time, without any effort. The Editorial Board of the S/N Korean Humanities will continue to exert more effort into in-depth research not only on how to overcome division of the Korean Peninsula and attain unification, but also on ways to build peace in Northeast Asia and the world at large. Finally, I would like to convey my sincere appreciation to all those who contributed to this publication of S/N Korean Humanities, and assure you that the next edition will be yet another leap forward.

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Editor-in-Chief
S/N Korean Humanities