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The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. provides a privileged site for Americans to "remember" the Vietnam War. W.J.T. Mitchell writes that

> The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is antiheroic, antimonumental, a V-shaped gash or scar, a trace of violence suffered not of violence wielded in the service of a glorious cause (as in the conventional war memorial). It achieves the universality of the public monument not by rising above its surroundings to transcend the political, but by going beneath the political to the shared sense of a wound that will never heal…. Its legibility is not that of narrative: no heroic episode such as the planting of the flag on Iwo Jima is memorialized, only the mind-numbing and undifferentiated chronology of violence and death catalogued by the fifty-eight thousand names inscribed on the black marble walls. [1]

The monument, however, produces meaning, and constructs a national narrative, precisely in its performance of differentiation, its exclusion of the deaths of the "other" (the Vietnamese). [2]

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial with the Washington Monument

in the background in Washington, DC.

The list of U.S. names, of course, points to an abstraction, a theoretical equality denied a disproportionately large number of U.S. servicemen and women in life, but which they always achieve in their deaths: these names are not marked by race or class, only by the understanding that they are "American." The writing of these names upon this wall of death, then, produces an "inside," a "shared sense" of *national* mourning only by erasing the reality of internal difference (of a society divided by class and race) and the violence the U.S. has perpetrated upon the Vietnamese people. What we are left with—and what characterizes the contemporary U.S. memory of the war—is a sense of aberration (embodied by the "antimonument," a monument that is not a monument) and causeless, baseless tragedy (the ahistorical naming of "America" as victim).

The monument also elides those who fought on the side of the U.S. during the war: the "more flags" program that brought Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand into the war in the mid-1960s does not appear on the screen of the U.S. national imaginary. Americans do not learn in their high school history textbooks that over 300,000 South Korean troops fought in Vietnam, and that over 4,000 of them were killed.

맹호사단장 이·취임식을 끝내고 환영, 환송 「파티」에서 주월한국군 사령관 및 주월미군 사령관, 월남군 제 2군단장, 주월 미 야전군 사령관, 청룡부대장, 주월한국군 작전 부사령관, 이택근 공사, 신·구임 맹호사단장

Korean Commanders of "Tiger Division" at a party with American officers, including US Commanding General William Westmoreland (4th right), September 20,1967. The Division experienced extensive combat during both the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

Hwang Suk-Young's *The Shadow of Arms* (Mugi ui kunul; 1985, 1988) interrupts what has become the predominant understanding of the Vietnam War in the U.S. by providing a counter-history, one that disables the contemporary U.S. attempt to view the war as anomalous, to locate itself as victim (often this sense of victimization is produced by representing the war as a violence inflicted by the U.S. upon itself, as we see in Oliver Stone's *Platoon* and the popular "Rambo" films). In *The Shadow of Arms*, Vietnam becomes the site where the U.S. championing of the "free world" unravels, revealing its systematic racism, the violence it inflicts upon others, and, above all, the effort to reproduce the desire structuring the global capitalist order—its refusal to comprehend desire outside the workings of commodity fetishism (thus the privileging in the text of the PX as sign of the U.S. imperialist project).

The critique of the U.S. aggression in Vietnam in *The Shadow of Arms* effects a particular kind of decentering: Hwang's text locates the U.S. as a radical outside, objectifying the U.S., granting it its word, its "free world" ideology, even its self-critique (via Stapley, a disillusioned

U.S. soldier), but denying it the position of subject. The text accomplishes this objectification by way of its narrative strategy: the third person omniscient narration shifts into free indirect style to access the minds of three characters, to produce three subjects, Pham Quyen, Pham Minh, and An Yong-gyu, the Korean protagonist. [3] Americans, including Stapley, are denied an "inside"; they can only engage in dialogue or appear as voices recorded in transcripts of official investigations documenting U.S. war atrocities.[4] Hwang's text, then, produces a remembering of the war that refuses its recuperation by a mourning, reflective, or even critical, U.S. subject. What we have in *The Shadow of Arms* is a reversal of the process noted by Rey Chow in which Western "Man" manufactures his subjectivity by way of the white/non-white divide, by way of the exclusion of the colonized (or, the case of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and numerous popular films, by way of its solipsistic exclusion of violence inflicted upon the Vietnamese). In Hwang's text, "Western man is now…*thrown* back to his proper place in history, where he, too, must be seen as an object." [5]

It is important to recall that literary critics such as Paik Nak-chung, Ch'oe Won-sik, and Im Kyu-ch'an consider *The Shadow of Arms* one of the most significant interventions of the 1980s by any writer associated with the progressive national literature movement (*minjok munhak undong*). [6] At the same time, Paik Nak-chung offers the following critique:

> At the heart of the various questions one is left with regarding Yong-gyu is the issue of what sort of life he led prior to his arrival in Vietnam. The author seems to deliberately avoid dispelling the reader's curiosity. Leaving this to the reader's imagination certainly presents itself as one way to avoid weighing down the novel with a lengthy recollection of Yong-gyu's past. But it is a different matter altogether if it is not only Yong-gyu's background, but also an awareness of the reality of South Korea that is absent or given short shrift. In my view, the portrait of the Vietnam War so clearly drawn in *The Shadow of Arms* and the awareness Yong-gyu gains there make us rethink not only the reality of the South Korea of the 1960s, but also of the 1980s. At the same time, the text does not provide us with a sufficiently concrete suggestion as to how we should approach [these realities]." [7]

The text, I think, advocates the identification of the South Korean reader not with Yong-gyu, but with the Vietnamese revolutionary subject, or, more precisely, with the transposition of this subject, its organization, its defeat of Western imperialist powers, and its successful reunification of the divided nation, onto the South Korean scene. Here we might consider an allegorizing of the Vietnam War that rests upon a figure familiar to South Korean readers, the Korean War as fratricidal struggle. The Vietnam War can become the Korean War because of the privileged trope in the text of a tragic struggle between two brothers who are marked not by any specificity associated with Vietnam, but by their alignment, the locations they have chosen for themselves in the moment of crisis: the student Pham Minh, that is, can be read as revolutionary subject associated with the student movement (*undonggwon*) of 1980s South Korea and the revolutionary potential of North Korea in the immediate post-liberation period and during the Korean War, while Pham Quyen represents an incarnation of the South Korean elite frequently appearing in South Korean literary texts critical of the state and the neocolonial condition, the amoral, acquisitive, denationalized familist/capitalist.

Book cover of English translation of *Shadow of the Arms*

The movement from one section to the next in *The Shadow of Arms* is accompanied by a corresponding alternation between two genres, the detective novel, with Yong-gyu as protagonist, and a socialist realist novel, one that traces Pham Minh's movement from apolitical medical student in Hue to NLF cell member in Danang. Katerina Clark writes of socialist realism in the Soviet Union that it was

> expected to provide a parable showing how the forces of "spontaneity" and "consciousness" work themselves out in history. This was the fundamental dialectic in the Leninist appropriation of Marxism, with spontaneity standing for those forces, groups, or individuals which as yet are not sufficiently enlightened politically and might act in an undisciplined way, be willful or self-centered, and with consciousness standing for those who act from complete political awareness, in a disciplined manner…. [8]

According to Clark, spontaneity in the Soviet socialist realist text is associated with a character occupying the structural position of "son," while consciousness is located in a "father." The socialist realist narrative in Hwang's text, we should note, resembles this structure, with Pham Minh ("son"), under the tutelage of his mentor, Nguyen Thach ("father"), progressing along a continuum from spontaneity to consciousness.

The location of Pham Minh and Yong-gyu in separate sections, genres and worlds privileges not only the gaze of the omniscient narrator, but also the reader, who is provided access to the realities/modes of writing associated with each character (even as they cannot see each other). The first and only meeting of these two genres/protagonists is a deadly one: Yong-gyu kills Pham Minh. While Yong-gyu has learned from Vietnam, moving from non-conscious militarized body (combat soldier in the field) to full awareness of the workings of the black market, of white racism, to a sympathy with the plight of the Vietnamese (particularly as fellow Asians), it is this "spontaneous" act, the killing of Pham Minh near the end of the text, that signals the limits of his movement, his confinement to the register of the detective novel. Yong-gyu's killing of Pham Minh instantiates the subimperialist trajectory of the South Korean state in Vietnam (the counterrevolutionary violence of the South Korean military apparatus bought and paid for by the U.S.). Yong-gyu, in other words, kills himself in this scene by eliminating the revolutionary subject he should have become: the death of Pham Minh serves as an exhortation to the South Korean student movement of the 1980s to locate a form of revolutionary subjectivity that was not achieved in the 1960s and 1970s.

Yong-gyu, that is, serves as sign both of alienation and possibility: the desire he indicates at the close of the text to leave Vietnam, to never see anyone he met there again, can itself be read as desire to move beyond the narrative that has produced him, to abandon the register of the detective novel (the genre associated with the securing of the bourgeois home by the detective-genius). Yong-gyu cannot locate a position in which to act meaningfully in Vietnam—he never considers crossing over to the NLF. Vietnam becomes a location both abundant in meaning (the socialist realist narrative which the reader can learn from, but which Yong-gyu does not enter) and, on one level, meaningless (the detective novel which, while allowing the gaining of certain forms of knowledge, precludes Yong-gyu from revolutionary activity). We should note that the "father," sign of consciousness, appears in both genres, making use of one location (the black market) for the benefit of the other (the revolutionary cause). Nguyen Thach is more than an actor in both narratives: his ability to read the black market, the detective novel, in socialist realist, revolutionary terms marks him as a master of genres. It is through the figure of Nguyen Thach that the socialist realist narrative becomes a mode of reading rather than writing, a frame to comprehend the black market/detective novel.

ROK forces in action in Vietnam

The elimination of Pham Minh, the failure of Yong-gyu to act meaningfully, halts the movement from spontaneity to consciousness, leaving Nguyen Thach as "father" to a protagonist who stands beyond the text, who is yet to come. It is at this point that *The Shadow of Arms* becomes an advocative text, enjoining its readership to reject the global system that has caused Yông-gyu to kill Pham Minh—the act that locates Yong-gyu as subimperialist—by constructing the positive hero, the revolutionary subject, on the Korean peninsula, in other words, by supplying the form of the defeat of the U.S., of national reunification, of the revolutionary construction of an alternative historical trajectory, with a localized content. *The Shadow of Arms* calls upon its readers to participate in a remembering of Vietnam that will produce a consciousness, above all, an overcoming of Yong-gyu's alienation, in 1980s South Korea. It is up to the reader to continue where the text left off in the 1960s, to summon the revolutionary spirit of the student Pham Minh, to open up the possibility of a realignment, a move from "spontaneous" collaboration (Yong-gyu's killing of Pham Minh) to "conscious" contestestation of U.S. neocolonialism and the developmental authoritarian regimes of Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo. [9]

* * *

Hwang Suk-Young produced the first South Korean literary work addressing the Vietnam War, "Pagoda" (T'ap, 1970). Written while the war was still in progress, the text portrays a firefight that follows when South Korean marines are deployed to R Point to protect a pagoda from falling into the hands of the NLF—possession of the pagoda will secure both the "trust of the villagers and the protection of the Buddha." [10] The pagoda, in the end, signals the construction of a pan-Asian subject formed by a communality and understanding that stands in opposition to the rationalism and destructiveness of the U.S. At the same time, O, the protagonist, comes to an awareness of himself as an Asian precisely because both Vietnamese and Koreans are undifferentiated objects of white racism: the bulldozer driver declares of Koreans before summarily razing the pagoda that he cannot understand "these yellow bastards." [11] While *The Shadow of Arms* eschews the culturalist turn in "Pagoda" for a detailing of U.S. capitalism (including a critique of the classism of the U.S. draft) and the introduction of the revolutionary subject in the form of Pham Minh, it follows "Pagoda" in its understanding of the racism informing the U.S. aggression in Vietnam. Yong-gyu, for example, tells Stapley the following:

> "As I work with Americans, the one thing I hate most is to listen to you people say how alike we are, how I'm no different from an American, and other garbage like that. In the same breath I hear you guys whispering how filthy the Vietnamese gooks are. 'Gook' is the label American soldiers picked up in the Korean War from the word 'Hanguk,' mispronouncing it 'Han-gook.' Americans used it with a racist edge. I just spit out to you that I'm more like a Vietnamese myself." [12]

One of the central concerns of *The Shadow of Arms* is the fracturing of "free world" universalism at a moment of crisis. It is for this reason that we have an elaboration throughout the text of boundaries/off-limits areas, divides in South Korean/U.S. organization. The simultaneous inclusion/exclusion of South Korea as "free world" subject, manifest in the

structures of inclusion/exclusion in Danang, demonstrates the foundational instability of the "free world" universalist claim, the reality of its discriminatory practices, the reproduction of racial hierarchies. [13] Yong-gyu's remark, then, reveals the contradiction of inclusion/exclusion, the way in which the transcendental, supra-ethnic U.S. hegemon comprehends the ethnic free world subject (South Korea) as "alike" even as it refuses to allow this subject to ever become "no different." The space allocated this subject is simultaneously off-limits and accessible, the space of the semi-peripheral ethnic (Yong-gyu in Danang).

The etymology Yong-gyu provides for the pejorative "gook" points to the production of the abject, the "first-world" reading of the other's assertion of national subjectivity/identity as declaration of racial inferiority: "Hanguk" becomes "gook." [14] The naming of the Vietnamese as "gooks" lifts Korea into Vietnam, reiterating, at each occurrence, the racism underlying U.S. aggression in both wars. Kim Tong-ch'un points out that

> The massacres of innocent civilians by U.S. soldiers during the Korean War demonstrates that rather than maintaining a strict view of South Koreans as affiliated with the right and North Koreans with the left, all Koreans were viewed as enemies whenever it was deemed operationally necessary to do so; U.S. soldiers saw Koreans as members of an inferior yellow race whose lives and property could be disregarded at will. [15]

The history of the term "gook" as it appears in *The Shadow of Arms* allows us to see My Lai as the reenactment of Nogun-ri.

* * *

Baudrillard concludes that the Vietnam War was not only fought, but also ended, only when a capitalist, developmental trajectory was assured for East Asia:

> Why did such a difficult, long and arduous war vanish overnight as if by magic? Why didn't the American defeat (the greatest reversal in history) have any internal repercussions? If it had truly signified a setback in the planetary strategy of the USA, it should have necessarily disturbed the internal balance of the American political system. But no such thing happened. Hence something else took place…The long sought-after securing and concretising of China's non-intervention. China's apprenticeship in a global *modus vivendi*, the passing from a strategy of world revolution to one of a sharing of forces and empires, the transition from a radical alternative to political alternation in a now almost settled system (normalisation of Peking-Washington relations)…. [16]

The Korean War, of course, served to secure the position of the U.S. as hegemon in Northeast Asia, reincorporate Japan into the world system, and strengthen the division between the two Koreas; the continuing post-1953 U.S. military deployment in South Korea, moreover, has always sought to make use of the "threat" posed by the demonized North to ensure the suppression of a "radical alternative" within the South. While Baudrillard overstates his case both regarding the lack of internal repercussions in the U.S. (the battles of the 1960s are still being fought out) and China's ready compliance with a U.S.-led "modus vivendi," his remarks allow us to consider a very specific linkage between Vietnam and Korea. The Vietnam War can be seen as a continuation of the Korean War insofar as the armistice agreement concluding the latter meant not only the concretization of North/South national division, but also a standoff with China, an inability to coerce China into apprenticeship in the global capitalist order. [17]

The Vietnam War provided a crucial moment in South Korea's incorporation in the global

system. In return for the deployment of forces to Vietnam, South Korea received approximately $1 billion dollars from the U.S. from 1965-1970. As Bruce Cumings notes, "Vietnam became a frontier for South Korean enterprise, as many firms, especially construction companies, got contracts to support the American effort. Vietnam absorbed 94 percent of Korea's total steel exports and 52 percent of its export of transportation equipment." [18] The promise offered the U.S.-backed authoritarian Park Chung Hee regime in 1965 (the year of the normalization of diplomatic relations with Japan and the first deployment of South Korean forces to Vietnam) was nothing less than location on a developmental trajectory (upward mobility within the world system) that would lead to the incorporation of South Korea as junior partner in the "sharing of forces and empires." Indeed, as Hyun Sook Kim points out, this remains the state-sponsored narrative: "The South Korean state, in fact, promotes the development of its nation as a 'subempire' that advances into Vietnam, a rising power that exploits the vulnerability of an economically weakened Vietnam, while resisting but dependent on the United States and Japan." [19] *The Shadow of Arms* details the multilayered "national reality" of South Korea: its neocolonial subordination to the U.S., the violence of the U.S. purchase of South Korean militarized bodies to subordinate Vietnam; and, at the same time, the position the South Korean state seeks to occupy, precisely as a result of this incorporation into the "free world": sub-hegemon, extracting profit from the periphery, what the text calls "the privileges received by businessmen in Seoul." [20] Hwang's text seeks to contest this developmental trajectory not only by exposing the alienation produced by capitalist relations (represented in the text by the calculated alliance between Pham Quyen and the entrepreneur Hye-jong), but, more importantly, by unsettling its attempt to naturalize its narrative as universal. In *The Shadow of Arms*, the U.S. effort to eliminate the "radical alternative" in Vietnam requires a degree of violence—the designation of "free fire zones," the prosecution of "search and destroy" missions, the construction of phoenix hamlets—that fissures its own presumption of "development" as inevitability.

Theodore Hughes is an assistant professor, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, at Columbia University.

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Notes:

[1] W.J.T. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art: Do the Right Thing," Critical Inquiry 16 (1990), 888, cited in Donald E. Pease, "Hiroshima, The Vietnam Veterans War Memorial, and the Gulf War," in Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease eds. *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press), 569.

[2] This is a revised version of "Locating the Revolutionary Subject: Hwang Suk-Young's The Shadow of Arms" (Hyongmyongjok chuch'e ui charimaegim: Mugi ui kunullon), which appeared in Korean in Ch'oe Won-sik and Lim Hong-bae, eds. The Literary World of Hwang Suk-Young (Hwang Suk-Young munhak ui segye) (Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yongsa, 2003), pp. 234-246. I am very grateful to Ch'angjak kwa pip'yongsa for allowing the republication of the article in English in Japan Focus. I would also like to thank Mark Selden for critical comments that proved invaluable in the revision process.

[3] For the linkage of free indirect style to the production of character as locus of meaning, see Lydia H. Liu, Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China 1900-1937 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 104-107.

[4] The repetition in the text of the transcripts of official investigations of U.S. war crimes (the rape-murder of a Vietnamese woman, the My Lai massacre, the torture-murder of a Vietnamese boy) serves less to expose the frequency of atrocities than to dismantle the "ethical" workings of institutionalized critique. Rather than prevent

atrocities, the prosecutions provide an "ethical cleansing," assuring that such acts will continue to occur by legitimating the system that carries them out.

[5] Rey Chow, The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 3. Italics in original.

[6] See Ch'oe Won-sik, "Han'guk sosol e nat'anan Petunam chonjaeng," in Paik Nak-chung and Chong Ch'ang-yol eds. Han'guk minjok minjung undong yon'gu (Seoul: Ture, 1989); Im Kyu-ch'an, "Pundan ul nomoso?minjok munhak ui hyon tan'gye wa kwaje," in Minjok munhaksa yon'gu ed. Minjok munhaksa kangjwa vol. II (Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yongsa, 1995). The Shadow of Arms, as Im Kyu-ch'an suggests, should be located not only in the context of the anti-authoritarian, anti-imperialist national and people's literature movement of the 1980s, but also as part of the post-1945 camptown literature addressing the continuing U.S. military occupation of the southern half of the Korean peninsula. It is worth mentioning here that Ch'ae Man-sik's "Mr. Pang" (Misuto Pang, 1946) and Yom Sang-sop's Dawn Wind (Hyop'ung, 1948), two of the earliest texts to address Korean/U.S. relations, understood the U.S. occupation of the southern half of the Korean peninsula following the surrender of Japan not as liberation but as an extension of colonial rule.

[7] Paik Nak-chung, "T'ongil undong kwa munhak" (Ch'angjak kwa pip'yong 63, 1989), in Paik Nak-chung, Minjok munhak ui sae tan'gye: minjok munhak kwa segye munhak III (Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yongsa, 1990), 108.

[8] Katerina Clark, "Socialist Realism with Shores: The Conventions for the Positive Hero," in Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko eds. *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 29.

[9] Hwang's works frequently move to break down the boundary between text and reader. Chungmoo Choi, for example analyzes how the madang guk form in Hwang's "The Hawk of Changsan'got" (Changsan'got mae, 1979), constructs a participatory space, one in which members of the audience cannot stand apart, distanced, but become relocated as co-producers of revolutionary meaning. See Chungmoo Choi, "The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea," *positions* 1 (Spring 1993), 92-4. A similar movement, we should note, also occurs in Hwang's recent The Guest (Sonnim, 2001): the exorcism performed by the text's summoning up the ghosts of history (the horrific violence associated with rigidified forms of Marxism and Christianity) effects, in the end, the removal of the text as object, the creation of a participatory space in which the reader cannot stand outside the text, but is also summoned into its space, compelled to articulate his/her position within a dialogizing history of repressed memories.

[10] Hwang Suk-Young, "T'ap" (1970), in *Kaekchi: Hwang Sok-yong sosoljip* (Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yongsa, 1994), 374.

[11] Ibid, 400.

[12] Hwang Suk-Young, *The Shadow of Arms*, trans. Chun Kyung-Ja (Ithaca, Cornell East Asia Series, 1994), 343.

[13] Rey Chow points out that "ethnicity exists in modernity as a boundary—a line of exclusion?that pretends to be a nonboundary—a framework of inclusion—only then to reveal its full persecutory and discriminatory force whenever political, economic, or ideological gains are at stake." See *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 30.

[14] While Yong-gyu locates the origins of the epithet "gook" in Korea, the term occurs as part of a longer history of white racism in Asia, most likely going back to the Philippine-American War.

[15] Kim Tong-ch'un, *Kundae ui kunul* (Seoul: Tangdae, 2000), 190.

[16] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 66-7.

[17] At the same time, the armistice agreement has yet to be converted into a peace treaty, and China remains as something much more than an "apprentice" on the global stage. Indeed, as we see in the

recent six-party talks, China has emerged as a major political/diplomatic player.

[18] Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 321-2.

[19] Hyun Sook Kim, "Korea's 'Vietnam Question': War Atrocities, National Identity, and a Reconciliation in Asia," *positions* 9 (Winter 2001), 631.

[20] Hwang Suk-Young, *The Shadow of Arms*, 202.