

**“Sindoan”:
Dissident Memories of Modern Korean History in a
Cinematic Revision of Korean *Minjung* Art***

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Abstract

Sindoan (2008), a work of video art by a South Korean artist, Park Chan-kyong (b. 1965), traces the hidden history of Sindoan, a mysterious town in southern Korea. This town, a center for indigenous beliefs and a shelter for oppressed people, emblemizes the Korean people’s bittersweet modern history and forgotten dreams. Park examines the lost history of the town through photographs, films, and documentaries that have been produced in modern Korea. He also enables these dissident visual memories to combine or collide with each other. Park’s video at times evokes an aesthetic that reminds viewers of Korean *minjung* (common people) artists’ paintings. The work thereby functions in part like an archive that comments on modern Korean history and *minjung* art. Examining *Sindoan*, particularly in its relation to *minjung* art and Park’s broader oeuvre, this essay seeks to explicate how the artwork represents modern Korean history through multimedia and performances, in effect inheriting and expanding the cultural meanings of *minjung* art.

Keywords

Sindoan, *minjung* art, modern Korean history, Park Chan-kyong, video art

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Introduction

Shown in an extreme long shot, gradually sloping mountains appear in silence, immersed in an early morning fog that highlights the reddish blue sky that occupies most of the screen. The whoosh of a strong wind amplifies the wildness, conveying a sense of mystery seemingly enwrapped in nature. As the camera lingers over this evocative imagery, the caption indicates that viewers are seeing Sindoan, a town situated in a hollowed-out valley beneath Gyeryong Mountain in South Korea. Sindoan, which translates literally as “New Capital,” was designated to become the capital of the new Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910). The plan for this new capital was, however, never fulfilled. Hundreds of years later, *Jeonggamrok* (鄭鑑錄), a book of prophecy, surreptitiously disseminated the idea that Sindoan had been intended to serve as the capital of a new dynasty that would have replaced the Joseon Dynasty. This subversive move in effect revived the utopian dream of people who were being exploited by the nobility and later suffered Japanese and Chinese invasions. This unfulfilled dream of a would-be new world was instead absorbed into Korean folk religions and traditions. In this sense, Sindoan has long served as a symbolic site for the defeated dream of Koreans throughout the course of their country’s modern history.

In his video work *Sindoan* (2008), the South Korean artist and filmmaker Park Chan-kyong (b. 1965) explores these hidden dreams and traces these histories concealed in Sindoan. In his exploration of the town, Park utilizes previously developed photographs and film footage, as if to summon its hidden history, using his characteristic camerawork and cinematography. His inquiring camera, as in the first scene described above, approaches the mysterious scenery of the town fully immersed in its own ancient dream and folk tradition. Here, the camera’s encounter with the forgotten scenery of Mt. Gyeryong enables viewers to experience what Park once described as an “indescribable shock,” and elsewhere as “the sublime in Western aesthetics” (C. Park, “On Sindoan” 7). Such a combination of shock and wonder makes clear Park’s infatuation with the “unknown” quality of “religious culture and the mythological structure of traditional life” that the town sustains (9).

The vernacular and spiritual tradition embedded in Sindoan has in fact stood in sharp contrast to such modern values as science and technology, and thus it was hidden, or even suppressed, during the process of modernization. The town of Sindoan’s mode of life was also marginalized as being something weird and uncanny and its religious groups were ostracized (15). In his video art, Park closely examines the town with his camera, seeking to retrieve the history of a people whose voices

had been silenced by such oppressive modern forces as the Japanese colonial government (1910-45) and the dictatorial Korean government. In so doing, he seeks to help viewers understand the true nature of Korean modernity, and the collective experience and psyche of Koreans shaped by a distant past which so diverges from the official narratives of modern Korean history.



Fig. 1. Photographs of Sindoan, from *Sindoan*. Still image courtesy of the artist Park Chan-kyong.

Park's longstanding interest in modern Korean history and its "Others," which happens to converge with central issues of the *minjung* art ("people's art") movement of the 1980s, developed at first out of his involvement with that art during his college years. *Minjung* art, whose essential nature was initially articulated through a critique of Korean art institutions, evolved into a political avant-garde which was actively engaged in the pro-democracy movement of the 1980s. Unlike other Korean artists at the time, who emphasized internationalism, *minjung* artists questioned what it meant to practice art in Korea's very special sociopolitical and historical environment: they questioned what art is, how it should be understood, and how it could exist in and communicate with Korean society. In reconfiguring art, *minjung* (the people) became the center of their artistic endeavor, like other dissident cultural movements linked to the pro-democracy movement—questioning the existing parameters of the subject matter, of visual language and the media, and of the production and dissemination of art.

In the discourse of *minjung* or the people, who are historically oppressed, suffering, and marginalized, they are able to rise up and assert their identity. They have become the force behind those counter-hegemonic cultural practices which support the goal of a horizontal, utopian community—often conceived in the image of an agrarian communal village. This notion of *minjung* is articulated through *minjung* theology and folk traditions, through the performances by cultural activists of the mask-dance, *madanggeuk* (contemporary reinterpretations of the mask dance)

and *pungmul* (agrarian percussion music)—with its emphasis on a communal spirit. Yet the concept of *minjung* became radicalized following the Gwangju Uprising in 1980. The notion of *minjung* expresses the ethos of the vanguard forces that sought to break the chains of oppression imposed upon the people by the feudalistic dictatorship and the neo-colonial and comprador capitalist powers. Thus the people were now considered to be the liberating force, the embodiment of the postcolonial visions of dissident intellectuals.

In spite of the momentum for change these movements were building, both the pro-democracy movement and the historical view of *minjung* history (which we will discuss later) were challenged by significant national and international changes in the late 1980s. In particular, the 1987 June Democracy Movement brought about significant changes in South Korean democracy that were reflected in a Constitutional Reform, whose major achievement was the institution of a system for electing a president directly through the popular vote. Yet with the failure to agree on a single candidate from the opposition party and pro-democracy forces, President Chun Doo-Hwan's favored candidate Roh Taewoo was elected president. He appeased the middle class by promoting economic growth backed by the "three lows" (low exchange rates, low oil prices, and low interest rates) while suppressing student activists and labor strikes and strategically separating students and laborers from the rest of the society. Along with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a hard blow to pro-democracy forces as the student activists perceived the Soviet Union as the actualization of the Marxist-Leninist ideology and as the fundamental source of their ideology and movement. In addition, they were struggling with the radically changed social atmosphere, advanced by global capitalism and the rampant "cultural logic of late capitalism," effectively turning South Korea into a full-fledged consumerist society. The new circumstances demanded them to revise their outlook and movement strategies and tactics. It was in this political context of the early 1990s that Park, as both artist and critic, critically reflected on the demise of *minjung* art.

In the 1990s Korean society entered the era of liberalization and consumer society. *Minjung* art, which once had a clear political agenda, lost its direction, and some *minjung* artists began to create works for museum and gallery exhibitions rather than in protest. Above all, this art was seriously contested for its lack of political efficacy and affective power (Shin 22). Park perceived the most serious problem of *minjung* art to be its "persistent representational attitude"; in other words, *minjung* artists applied a reductionist understanding of political aesthetics: they simply saw "art's participation" as being "a reflection of social relations" and a "representation

of politics” (C. Park, “Gaenyeom” 23). Moreover, they were indifferent to or lacked a sophisticated understanding of modernism and its practices, the production and reception of artworks, and the changing conditions of artistic practice, among other things. Such a lack of understanding of the material and cultural environment in which art is produced and received appeared even more problematic in light of capitalism’s omnipresent penetration of every aspect of Korean life by the 1990s.

Park’s problem was shared by other young art critics, such as Yi Yeonguk, Sim Gwanghyon, Yi Yeongchol, and Baikjisuk, and in 1989 they organized the “Art Criticism Research Group” (ACRG: *misul bipyeong yeonguhoi*) (1989-93). Park and these critics sought to reestablish a new theoretical foundation for *minjung* art while examining the issue of art institutions, contemporary visual culture, and mass media—areas that had long been considered “the exclusive property of modernism” (Ki 125). Park repurposed the core idea of modernist art, namely “medium-specificity in modernist art and site-specificity in minimalism, conceptualism, and institutional critique,” in order to critically reflect *minjung* art’s achievements and problems while moving toward “conceptually-oriented realism” (Shin 22; C. Park, “Gaenyeomjeok hyeonsiljuui” 21). According to Park, conceptually-oriented realism “takes the essence from modernism and *minjung* art while still retaining the paradoxical forces [and unpredictable imagination (Park’s words)] produced from the clashes of terms combined here” (C. Park, “Gaenyeomjeok hyeonsiljuui” 21). Thus, this realism does not aim to represent the totality, but functions as a “new mapping method that looks for the route in the age of the movement of transnational capitalism that proliferates like rhizome without roots and stems” (21).

While facing the challenge of “learning from both modernism and *minjung* art” (Shin 22) as described by the art historian Shin Chunghoon, Park explored how conceptual realism intersects with the discourse of “post-*minjung* art”—particularly in terms of the latter’s social engagement and use of diverse forms of media and visual culture, and its awareness of the changing socioeconomic circumstances of artistic practice. ‘Post-*minjung* art’ is a pseudo-journalistic term that refers to political art that was produced from the late 1990s. The term is elusive and open to interpretation. The crux of the issue is how one should evaluate the relationship between *minjung* art and the new political art—post-*minjung* art—where the question is whether to continue with *minjung* art or break away from it. Another problem is deciding which core assets of *minjung* art should be passed on to its successor: Do we wish to emphasize the first generation’s institutional critique and cultural avant-gardism or the activism and agitprop art associated with later *minjung* art? This question is debatable. On the one hand, many *minjung* artists situated the movement’s

quintessential nature in its political avant-gardism, believing that its spirit would be continued by post-*minjung* art. On the other hand, for Park and other young artists, as the artist Choe Jin-uk observed, the practice of younger artists found an affinity with the first generation of *minjung* artists: the young artists focused on disrupting “the institutionalization of culture in the era of global capitalism or ‘cultural authority,’ including contemporary popular culture” (Hyun 12).

For instance, the so-called “post-*minjung*” artist Yang Choelmo of “Mixrice”—a group that engages particularly with the issue of immigrant workers in multicultural Korean society, and seeks a new model of art and activism—agrees that art’s expression of and intervention into society is critical, and views such an artistic tendency in the context of the history of *minjung* art (Han 95). Nonetheless, some young artists voiced their discomfort at being called “post-*minjung*.” According to Yang, *minjung* art adopted a dichotomous world view according to which the ruling class’s oppression was met by the people’s resistance. Thus, their art had clear objectives and was praxis-oriented. However, the new generation of artists faced a complex and irregular cultural terrain shaped by capitalist development (Han 95). The times demanded of them a more complex aesthetic with more complex political strategies for dealing with the globalization of art and biennale, with postmodern and postcolonial discourse, and even with the introduction of Deleuze’s philosophy. Park was concerned that this international atmosphere might make one lose sight of localism and Korean history (Shin 23). Yet many post-*minjung* artists have probed the multiple divisions and sites of Korean society and interrogated the mainstream values held by a majority of the population, as well as those of progressives, by working with members of society.

While Park shares the problems of the younger generation, we can distinguish his work from that of both *minjung* and post-*minjung* artists insofar as he goes straight to the core question of *minjung* art and the pro-democracy movement, interrogating the true nature of Korean modernity. In his earlier works, such as *Black Box: Memory of Cold War Images* (1997) and *Sets* (2000), Park dealt with the issues of the national division, North Korea, and Cold War ideology using a wide range of visual materials and media that included photographs, installations, and videos combined with texts (C. Park, “On Sindoan” 8). Yet he was not concerned with tracing historical events and figures or with seeking to find their literal truth; rather, as *Memory of Cold War Images* and *Sets* suggest, he aimed to examine “what such images do to our memory of the Cold War” (Shin 24) as he shuffled existing images and newly-narrated stories. Park’s critical inquiry into representation can be read as an “ongoing critique of ‘presentational *minjung* art’” (Shin 24). This strategy is shared by other post-*minjung*

artists, including Joseub (b. 1976). He revisits and intervenes in journalistic, media, and visual representations of contemporary Korean history through parody and satire in his performance art, videos, and photography. Yet Park distinguishes himself from Joseub, and other artists who reenact or perform historical events and subjects, by positioning himself as more of an archivist or historian.

Sindoan came at a critical point in Park's oeuvre. In this work he shifts his focus to various historical Others in Korea, including folk traditions and especially indigenous religions and shamanism—a shift that is central to conceptualizing the notion of *minjung* within the histories of the people. Folk religions were brutally suppressed and disparaged, by institutional religions (i.e., Christianity) and in the name of modernization, as being mere superstitions or outdated traditions. Nonetheless, this Otherness of the folk religions, Park argues, charts an alternative if convoluted path along which to explore Korean modernity at its core (“Special Feature: Artist as a Shaman” 87). These folk religions and shamanism offer a basis upon which the collective experience and knowledge of modern Koreans could help to cultivate new hope for the people's community as well as for a vernacular, postcolonial critique of modernity. After all, for Park these traditions represent a productive site for rethinking a new aesthetics, wrestling with its historicity, and carrying out new modes of critiquing and examining one's own (artistic) realities.

The artists of Korea's post-war generation have seen Korean tradition as a critical yet complex subject for their artistic practices as they have sought to carve out a place for their work in the international art world. For the *minjung* artists, this tradition was the cultural expression of the people's own lives and histories. It was also a source for humanism and communal life as opposed to urbanism and modernization, as well as a counter-hegemonic practice against dictatorship. Park, who was born in the late 1960s, lived in an apartment complex in Seoul, and even studied in the USA in a photography MFA program, acknowledged the importance of Korea's *minjung* tradition but also found it somehow alienating, something which he “always postponed” like “a student not wanting to do his homework” (C. Park, “On Sindoan” 9). Still, as his expression of shock upon accidentally encountering Gyeryong Mountain shows, he finds encounters with his own tradition, especially folk religion and mythological beliefs, as being something like experiencing the sublime. Here the sense of the sublime or of sublimity is something we experience when encountering the immensity of nature, something that cannot be grasped through our ordinary human faculties.

For Park, religious tradition, quotidian to pre-modern life, tenaciously continues to exist, yet it has been oppressed violently by modernization, like a

“trauma of traumas” or a ghost haunting the collective memory—much as Jacques Derrida’s hauntology refers to the past’s repercussive and violent return to the present (Shin 27). That is why, for Park, keeping his culture’s indigenous spiritual tradition is such a sublime experience. Instead of delving into his own limited familiarity with this tradition or its modernization, he found his own emotional and psychological response to this tradition to be the source of his own artistic inspiration. His art asks what our reactions to or perceptions of the tradition mean and what this implies about our relation to reality and to our understanding of Korean modernity. What, he asks, can art do to further investigate this matter?

Thus, it is not surprising that Park sought alternative narratives from the perspective of the indigenous tradition in his investigation of Korean modernity. His undertaking has been shaped by the culture industry of the 1990s. Korean cinema in the 1990s began to look into politically oppressed histories and historical experiences such as the Gwangju Uprising of 1980, which had been buried or ignored by mainstream historical narratives. Moreover, his own narratives, facilitated by a wide range of visual records and materials as well as by the mass media—which make people “the subject of polyphony”—can be juxtaposed with a critical reassessment of the *minjung* historiography of the late 1990s and 2000s (Heo 313). *Minjung* history emerged as part of a political movement which critiqued ’70s-’80s nationalist history with its ruling ideology and its “sovereign historical view of a nation” (Bae 34). However, after the 1980s the efficacy of *minjung* historiography, not to mention the notion of *minjung* as a unified collective subjectivity, was vigorously challenged.

To revise this historiography, many historians have adapted postmodern and postcolonial historiographical methods, exploring cultural history, subaltern studies, micro-history, the history of the everyday, and regional history (Heo 313). In these revisionist histories, *minjung* is reconceived in terms of multiple voices and disparate histories, allowing people to relive the everyday lives and the social contradictions and structural problems embedded in modern Korean history (Y. Lee 204). To illuminate such narratives, indigenous religious and spiritual traditions provide a productive site where powerful social forces and the people’s everyday life meet and create a new historical topography. This essay examines how *Sindoan* serves as a kind of archive that engages with the fractured nature of Korean modernity and its postcolonial character, while contemplating alternative narratives by deconstructing *minjung* history and *minjung* art. We argue that, by reenacting the people’s historical experiences in visual and performative terms, Park’s work creates a space for more pluralistic narratives that deny the state-people binary, the very logic of the nation-state and *minjung* ideology.

An Uncanny Encounter with the Ancient Spirit, or the Historical Other

Sindoan consists of six episodes; the first four episodes utilize existing photographs and film footage, while the last two comprise the filmmaker's imaginative response to (memories of) Sindoan. The film begins with two talking-head interviews that explain the topography of the town. While one expert argues that Sindoan would have made a good site for a dynastic capital because of its positioning in a basin-shaped valley surrounded by mountains, another asserts just the opposite. In response to these verbal descriptions of the topography, the film presents a faded, wide-angle, black-and-white photograph of the town. Over the photograph, the film then superimposes other scenery taken from alternate angles, as if to present every "perspective" of Sindoan. The camera then immerses this seemingly ordinary imagery in a strange and unfamiliar fog, creating an uncanny atmosphere. As the camera zooms out and captures the entire town again in an aerial shot, the scene thus suggests the town's unknown history—which is perhaps sensible only through our sense of the town's aura, as in what Walter Benjamin describes as an ephemeral and anxiety-provoking affect that one experiences at the holy sight of a mountain range on the horizon in the morning, or as in the art of storytelling, with its "ancient coordinates of soul, eye, and hand" indebted to oral memory, or even in worn-out photographs from the medium's early days (Link-Heer 115).

In the next scene, the film takes the viewer on a sort of tour of the town. As a native stringed instrument gives forth a disorienting rhythm, the camera sweeps along the sparse countryside, passing over a few old houses, cars, and a school, all of which are strangely deserted. Signs associated with traditional religions and shamans only increase the creepiness that envelopes this lonely path. Over this scenery, a man's voice is heard giving an off-screen narration: "Sindoan also used to mean a place [where one could] capture a ghost instead of a new capital" (00:06:09-00:06:20). This remark shifts the meaning of Sindoan from that of a secular dream (the forgotten dynasty) to that of a religious wish, thereby complicating the historical meaning of the town.

The camera soon arrives at a secluded path. It is nighttime in the middle of a forest. At some distance a woman in traditional white Korean garb walks towards the viewer, her face obscured by the darkness. She is Kim Jeongsim, a female shaman who lives in the *Samsindang*, or Three-Deity Hall, in a temple. Turning her back to the camera, she bows to the air. She then pushes into the dark forest, fighting through

bushes. Following her from behind, the camera tells her story accompanied by a voiceover narration: “One day, I heard from *seonyeo-nim* [a Taoist fairy] that I would cure people. The café, once run here, turned into a cure house. . . . Then, *she* kept granting me a pill, and said ‘the god of Gyeryong Mountain calls you’. . . . I was scared. I didn’t want to enter the house” (00:08:03-00:09:00). The camera continues to follow her as she climbs a gentle slope and encounters another chain of thick bushes, with the shadows of trees outlined on wide boulders, as if in its own search for the secret of the mountain, and then captures the eerie faraway apparition of an old house.

Jeongsim makes her way gingerly down a rocky cliff; the camera now moves ahead of her, holding onto the bushy path that stretches endlessly into darkness. Breaking this dark vision, her narration continues: “[All of a sudden,] I could see everything in the forest. Not only all the trees but also the smallest leaves became clearly visible as if under an electric lamp. . . . From then on, I was able to cure people” (00:09:45-00:11:00). Here, the film contrasts her state of being lost in the dark forest with the lucidity of this moment, of the truth that now dawns on her. Also, her ability to see invisible or inanimate things is tied to her capacity to cure—or to retrieve life from the edge of death. In this sense, for viewers the moment of her awareness is a surrealistic experience that initiates a dialogue between life and death, the animate and the inanimate. Eventually, she arrives at the old house and confesses, “I knew the god of the mountain (*sansin*) entered my body as a beast would. Then I began to growl at an old lady. . . . At this moment, the god of the mountain embraced me, welcoming me as his ‘pupil’” (00:12:35-00:14:00). In this way, Jeongsim’s (and the film’s) mysterious journey informs viewers that she is the incarnation of the holy spirit or, by extension, of the repressed memories of the town.

Throughout Jeongsim’s journey to the Three-Deity Hall (the house that viewers saw in the distance), the camera never shows her from the front, leaving her identity completely veiled. Her identity thus remains only a voice that resonates in the dark forest. While following this unknown figure and listening to her mysterious story, the film’s viewers might be overwhelmed by a combination of curiosity and dread. As the sequence nears its end, however, she stops and faces the camera—suddenly revealing her identity. Standing from afar, she gazes up towards the camera, and then reveals her blank, unusually white face, which delivers to viewers an acute feeling of shock, fear, and shame. This interplay of looks may also echo the description of Jacques Lacan’s famous voyeur out on a hunt. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, Lacan describes a man in a field waiting for game. Everything is quiet, and then he hears the sudden rustling of leaves. At this moment, marked by an unexpected break

in the sheer silence, in a visible space in which the man thinks he is alone, he becomes aware of the shocking presence of the Other, which thus diminishes his own existence, leaving him fearful and ashamed (87).

Joan Copjec, adapting the Lacanian gaze to the cinematic field, also suggests that the gaze haunts the visible space in the form of “terrifying alterity.” She asserts that the gaze, which cannot be seen or perceived, is understood only through such an anxiety-provoking effect, revealing the invisible presence of the Other (69-70). As in these psychoanalytic explanations, *Sindoan* viewers, at the moment when Jeongsim turns back and casts her gaze at them, feel the overwhelming affect, which thus brings an awareness of the Other that is lurking beneath the visible. This might be also the moment when viewers come to really believe in the riddle of the history of the Other, the mysterious story that Jeongsim has related thus far. In this way, the unexpected return of her gaze directs us to a place that is beyond *diegesis*, revealing a gap in our knowledge, a riddle lurking in the dark scenery of the town.

One may say that this presence of the Other surely resonates with the forgotten history that Park aims to convey through his contemplation of folk religion, particularly via his method of shocking viewers. As Jeongsim continues to suggest, the Other here relates to the spirit of the past, of people who suffered from modern Korean oppression, thereby allowing the secretive voices who have been excluded from official history to speak. It is also, as Park suggests, through the “Otherness” of these folk religions that we find alternative, if convoluted, ways to explore Korean modernity. After all, *this* is the history that *minjung* art tried to find in its search for the true nature of the Korean past.

In the next sequence, a caption informs viewers that, as an incarnation of the mountain god, Jeongsim cures some fifty patients. The caption also suggests that the god that is incarnated in Jeongsim has in effect embodied the spirit of a Korean who was tortured to death for his involvement with the Korean National Liberation Front under Japanese occupation (1910-45). As a following voiceover explains, Japan sought to eradicate the religious groups in *Sindoan* because they often sheltered people advocating Korean liberation. In this way, from the perspective of Jeongsim, the film reveals that the town is entangled with modern Korean history, and particularly with the Japanese occupation and the Korean resistance.

This secretive history of oppressed people takes concrete form in the subsequent episode. Here the film tells the story of Kim Hang, who wrote the *Jeongyuk* (정역) in 1789 (C. Park, “On *Sindoan*” 33). A Korean version of the Chinese *Juyeok* (the *I Qing* in Chinese, or *The Classic of Changes*), the *Jeongyuk* is a philosophical treatise on the movement of the universe. Its main text consists of

sixty-four hexagrams, each of which is followed by an explanation and corresponding judgment. The book explains that all change in the cosmos is a continual manifestation of abstract relationships between and among the elements mirrored by these hexagrams (B. Jeong; J. Jeong). Kim Hang prophesied “the Coming of Late Heaven” (후천개벽 *hucheongaebyeok*), a crucial moment when Earth’s oblique axis straightens up. Once the Late Heaven arrives, there will be no more oppression and no more discrimination between classes, ethnic groups, or genders, thereby heralding the advent of a new universe. Along with this announcement of the Coming of Late Heaven, the film portrays a few contemporary believers residing in Sindoan. By staging this brief scene featuring religious treatises and believers, it showcases the forgotten voices, or the historical Others, that had been repressed and yet still remain in the form of religious rituals.

The Cinematic Revision of “Modern Korean History”

The third episode of *Sindoan* begins by relating the history of roughly eighty religious groups that proliferated in Sindoan between 1924 and 1975. The film introduces these religious groups by staging a series of formal group portraits. The first photograph pictures a group of believers in the Way to Heaven (Cheondogyo), which evolved out of Donghak, or Eastern Learning. As is well known, Donghak was created by Choe Je-u (1824-64) in opposition to Western learning (Christianity and modern science) and imperial threats in the nineteenth century, as well as to the corruption of the ruling class and the oppressive extortion applied through taxes. Donghak, which taught that “there is heaven in every person” and emphasized the equality of all people, became the ethical and spiritual foundation of the anti-elite, anti-imperialist peasant struggles of the late nineteenth century and thereafter. However, the Donghak uprisings were crushed by the combined forces of Joseon and Japan, and the survivors hid in secluded places such as Sindoan, continuing their religious practices.

In 1905, the third sect’s leader, Son Byeonghee (1861-1922), changed the name from Donghak to Cheondogyo. Inheriting Donghak’s teaching and the people’s aspirations, Cheondogyo was actively involved in Korean liberation movements, such as the March 1st Independence Movement. This nationwide uprising, which took place in 1919, involved millions of Koreans who expressed their aspirations for Korean national liberation. As one can see, the Cheondogyo nationalist movement can be traced back to the Donghak uprisings. Likewise, dissident intellectuals and students placed the pro-democracy movement of the 1960s-1980s in the lineage of

Donghak and other anti-imperialist, nationalist movements. Thus, the dissident intellectuals cherished the Donghak uprisings as the beginning of the people's history and the birth of the people's consciousness (Abelmann 27; N. Lee 5). In addition, this anti-imperial, anti-elite struggle and this yearning for a new, egalitarian community provided the conceptual origins of *minjung* in the 1970s and 1980s, as both a form of historical subjectivity and as a primordial (agrarian) community (Abelmann 23-26; K. Park 51-61). As Donghak was central to the formation of historical consciousness and cultural practices, the national literature and culture as well as *minjung* art referred to it widely. The fact that Park investigates Cheondogyo, which may be traced back to Donghak, implies that his artistic practice is closely connected to *minjung* art and its cultural memories.

In *Sindoan*, Park returns to images of Cheondogyo several times, highlighting this religion's deep relationship with the Korean people's history and with the utopian aspirations rooted in the religion. The repeated appearances of Cheondogyo also suggest that the film portrays not only the tenacity and persistence of indigenous religions, but also their ubiquitous presence in shaping the people's collective unconscious and belief system. Following the opening sequence, the film displays several series of photographs of groups that once existed in Sindoan: Christians, Catholics, Taoists, Cheondogyoists, and shamanists, among others. The multitude of photographic evidence testifies to the presence of the many religions, believers, and "hopes" (either religious or secular) which have gathered in this area to escape political oppression.

Here every photograph depicts members of groups who are typically wearing religious attire, with their temples and mountain views in the background; their motionless, stable, calm, and solemn faces are all directed at the camera. Also, when seen in long shots, the individual people are almost indiscernible, composing a mass of human faces bearing an uncanny resemblance to one another. Furthermore, as the cinematic parade of photographs continues through superimposition and sometimes panning, the members grow in number and continue to congregate. Such cinematic effects may persuade viewers that there were even more people and religious groups here, all of them proliferating religious teachings and fervor, although now this has all disappeared.

When looking at the group photos, viewers initially feel like they are glimpsing the history of the town. Yet soon they might feel overwhelmed by feelings of discomfort and strangeness after confronting memories which are so foreign to one's sense of reality. Above all, it is unsettling to encounter the (entirety of) Sindoan's history, or of modern Korean history, through a tangible yet disjunct and alienating

mass of people; facing what seems like an ungraspable entirety is almost overwhelming. Perhaps such a perceptual and sensory shock is also experienced when one encounters the monumental *Modern Korean History* series of paintings by the *minjung* artist Shin Hak-Chul (1943-). In this series of works, Shin also articulates the painful history of Koreans and of their overcoming of this history in the monstrous, corporeal totality of a photomontage.

Shin's surrealistic oil painting *Modern Korean History—Synthesis* (1983, 130 cm x 390cm) is composed of countless photographic images from popular culture and from the news coverage of historical events, most of which depict Koreans suffering after the failed Donghak peasant uprisings, the liberation from Japan in 1945, and the resulting national division into North and South Korea followed by dictatorships and state-led modernization. Displaying humans in the form of layered histories and crowds, Shin clusters these human bodies together along with weapons and cultural commodities, after which the entire work transforms into large and grotesque shapes, like the surface of a brain. Over the course of this sequence, Shin's modern Korean history gradually ceases depicting each individual historical event. Instead, it portrays modern Korean history as a monumental and corporeal form, while highlighting the underlying forces of the people's lives and the collective unconscious that Shin saw as the true face of history.

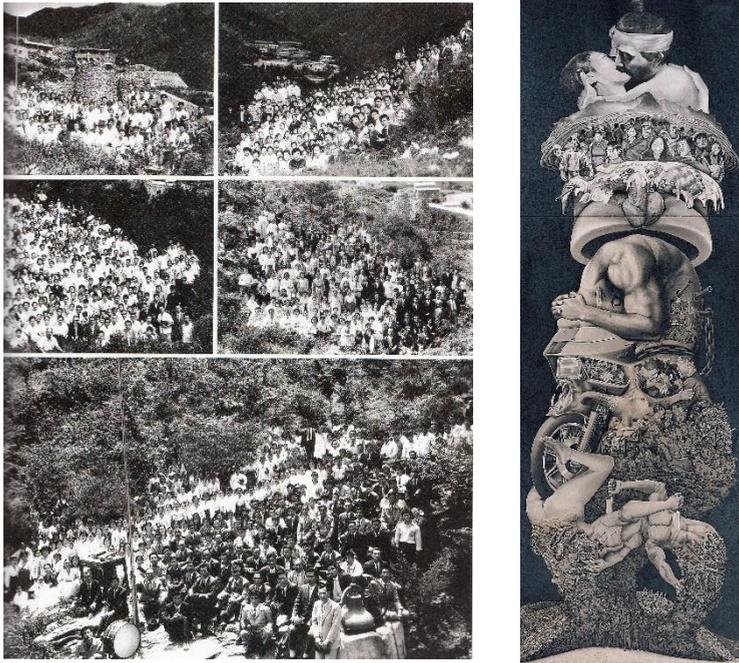


Fig. 2. Photos of Saeil Monastery, from *Sindoan*. Still image courtesy of the artist Park Chan-kyong.
 Fig. 3. Shin Hak-Chul, *Modern Korean History—Synthesis*, 1983, Oil on Canvas, 130 cm x 389.9 cm. Image courtesy of Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art.

The Korean art critic Kim Yunsu describes Shin’s work as a representation of “our modern history as all cuts and bruises, as a massive body with pains, as a being of diabolic power” (Y. Kim 111). Another critic, Sung Wan-kyung, saw Shin’s work as depicting history in terms not only of hardships and suffering but also of the resilience of the people’s life force and culture (Sung 9). However, Sung draws our attention to the masculine, phallic, militaristic aspect of the work: this “organism” is full of muscles and muscular expressions and operates within “the logic of the phallus,” suggesting inflation and stiffness as well as sexual violence (13-14). Here it is noteworthy that as Shin combines fragments or “*objets*” into what he calls one monument, his integration of these objects defamiliarizes commonplace images into something bizarre. These elements are situated in an “uncomfortable coexistence of filmic and sculptural quality, documentary and fiction and realism and surrealism,” creating an anachronistic feeling (10).

In the process of gluing images together, the tangible shape of the people's dynamic force comes into view and gives us a clearer picture of the true modern Korean history. Like any history, this one is not a series of individual images but their composite, the overall form and force of their artistic expression. Thus Shin's work may overwhelm those who see it—giving them perhaps what Park suggested would be the experience of the sublime. This work may seem minuscule in comparison with the multitude of people it seeks to represent, and the perpetuity of their accumulated lifetimes, locked as it is within the corporeal form of modern Korean history.

This sense of the sublime and the monumental is further emphasized by the narrow width of *the monument* in comparison with its extraordinary sculptural height. This material aspect emphasizes the experience of viewing the sublime as much as its actual subject matter—memorializing and narrating history from the people's viewpoint. Although Shin's work depicts the people's history in terms of hardship and liberation, his "monument" nevertheless distinguishes itself from state monuments to patriotic figures such as General Yi Sunshin and from the historical paintings of agitprop *minjung* art in terms of the way of viewing them presupposed by their visual expressions. Both state monuments and *minjung* art expect viewers to communicate with the works in communal and hierarchical terms, where "artistic communication" is thought to be merely reading the intention of the artists. In contrast, the visual and other sensory effects of Shin's work, along with its montage techniques, enable a piece to disown such an intellectual or enlightenment approach to artistic communication. Furthermore, although Shin emphasizes "the content" of the work as do many *minjung* artists, his ingenious use of formalistic elements fosters an individual and more open approach to it (and possibly for the viewer, to modern Korean history). And it is no different in Park's case.

In *Sindoan*, Park adopts Shin's strategy of utilizing existing photographs and film footage. As in the documentary footage seen in the early part of the film, group photographs in the third episode provide a good example of this aesthetic strategy. As the human faces in each photograph are superimposed upon pictures of other groups of people, forming a cinematic montage, viewers are made aware of a multitude of folk religions and of the people's aspiration for liberation. In the next sequence, however, Park inserts that dark moment of history that played out during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1975, President Park Chung-hee announced a plan to establish a National Park at Gyeryong Mountain, forcibly removing most of the religious facilities from the town. Later, in 1983, when the Chun regime built a unified headquarters for the armed forces in Sindoan, the religious and residential facilities of the remaining religious establishments were eliminated or moved away

from the mountain.

In addition to tracing this history of oppression, the film inserts photographs of people who were evicted from Sindoan. Here, Park plays again with his photographs of the eviction, dividing and overlapping images and thereby generating multitude of human faces that fill the screen. This human multitude parallels the cinematic montage of group photographs that appeared in the previous sequence. Moreover, Park plays eerie Korean instrumental music to accompany each parade of human photographs, rendering the parallel still clearer. Yet this comparison again recalls the contrast between the people and the history of oppression which constitutes modern Korean history, as in Shin's work.

In this way, Park expands upon Shin's photomontage technique to create a cinematic montage using similar photojournalistic objects (*objets d'art*) of the past. Park, like Shin, seeks to reconstruct and deconstruct modern Korean history. While Shin attempts to capture the core of the people's history as a "history of the unconscious" as he calls it (Park and Shin 240), Park investigates the people's tradition and history through his notion of the sublime—while still finding a considerable affinity between himself and Shin. Still, stark differences between Park and Shin are found, as in Park's questioning and diversifying of the monolithic and patriarchal narratives of those who were subordinated to the Marxist dialectic of history, and to the notion of a unified historical subjectivity. Although the narrative of the Korean people's predicament might be familiar, through his formalistic and media-based experiments Park repurposed his work to make it into an archive of fragmented, pluralistic, subaltern histories; that is, he made no conscious effort to create unified narratives or any conception of the people as such. In this way, Park's work proposes counter-narratives or deconstructive narratives in an active sense in order to ask, among other things, what it means to narrate (or represent) one's stories on one's own terms, what prevents one from doing so, what constitutes worthy subjects for history-writing, how histories constitute one's identity, and in what way historical narratives can be made critical and liberating.

The radicality of Park's project is further accentuated by his choosing to explore the history of indigenous religions. This tradition was a central motif of *minjung* art and of the national-culture movement, as it provided an alternative vision of modernity for utopia and liberation. Nonetheless, neither indigenous religion nor the spiritual tradition has been a dominant theme of *minjung* art except in a few cases, including that of the prominent *minjung* artist O Yun (1946-86), whose influence was explicitly visible in Park's 26-minute, three-channel video installation *Citizen's Forest* in 2016. Furthermore, Park's audiovisual narrative and reenactment surely

follow *minjung* art's approach to history, yet in their own way. In addition to its use of cinematic montage to complete the meaning within a temporal flow, Park's work plays with media footage as it makes these fragmented memories conflict and collide with each other, thereby forging a new meaning.

Ultimately, the difference between Park and Shin lies in Park's emphasis on individualized narratives or on individuals in relation to the people and their narratives. This surely distinguishes Park from Shin and other *minjung* artists. Here the cinematic montage of group photographs can clarify this point. In the midst of the cinematic parade, Park suddenly pauses and blacks out the entire screen, thus the full-screen image of the human group. Against the backdrop of the black screen, however, the camera spotlights in a tiny circle the face of only one woman, as if highlighting the feeble presence of the ordinary people against the massive dark background of (modern Korean) history. Furthermore, as the one remaining face comes back and turns into a schoolgirl's face on a school trip, the film signals to viewers that such visual effacement, or political oppression, applies not only to religious groups but also to ordinary people. Here this "relieved" human face—once seen among groups of people, and now appearing alone—showcases Park's spotlighting of individuals/individual voices within the embalmed temporality of an oppressive past, which may thus emblemize a certain potential that one feeble individual might carry throughout history.

Here, this emphasis on the individual surely departs from Shin's work and *minjung* art in general. Also, the playful deletion of people's faces underscores a clear contrast between the masses and any single individual, highlighting the importance of the individual. This change is pervasive in Park's work. Unlike Shin's rather serious and rigid *minjung* work, Park's cinematic *montage* seems to make a playful comparison while also issuing self-reflexive comments on both the medium and *minjung* art in general. Seen in this light, Park's cinematic montage enables him to mimic—and inherit—the *minjung* spirit, but at the same time to detach himself from the *minjung* tradition through this very technique of cinematic montage, a technique which allows him to parallel or contrast various images within the flow of time.

Dissipating Media Memories: The Haunting Specter of the Past

Park's creative engagement with Shin's work suggests that the former's aim is not merely to reread modern Korean history. Park's attempts to open up this history are predicated on medium-specific representation as well as on his ongoing dialogue with Korea's past and present history of art, such that he refuses to be circumscribed

by definitive narratives or meanings. His film engages with media representations of the history of Sindoan, as we see in several episodes of *I Want to Know What It Is* (*Geugeot-I Algosipda*, SBS, 1997), in photographs taken under Japanese occupation and by the Korean government, and in the feature film *Gyeryong Mountain* (*Gyeryongsan*, dir. Gangcheon Lee, 1966). These media memories, reflecting the indexical nature of film technology, testify to a past that no longer exists. Created at different times and in different genres, these memories convey dissident views and aspects of the town of Sindoan during the modern era.

Park plays with these media memories in particular by juxtaposing them, making them alternately run parallel to and collide with each other. For instance, the interviewers' evaluations of the topography of Sindoan were mutually opposed in the documentary footage, and here the verbal testimony brings no concrete meaning to the photographic memories of the town, allowing its meaning to remain a riddle. In addition, the founder of Donghak, shown in the feature film *Gyeryongsan*, is not the same figure we see in the temple which was screened in the fourth episode. While the latter seems closer to the holy spirit, the former embodies a corrupted cult priest. Also, the futuristic view of Sindoan, when it is shown as a strategic military outpost in the government propaganda film, is contrasted with those faded photographs showing people being forced to leave the shabby town. As such, media records of Sindoan, presented through a multimedia dialogue, conflict and collide, thereby constituting an archive of dissident and convoluted memories.

Here one may say that “this past”—enabled by the patchwork of media memories—functions in a way that is similar to that of Shin Hak-Chul's photomontage, particularly as Park places these fragments of media memories together and then continues to examine them with his own camera. Shin combines and examines media memories to find the true story of the past. Nevertheless, the memories comprising this hybrid collection constantly collide, as if they were in a sense paradoxical, and thus seem to converge on what contemporary cultural critics suggest is the impossibility of representing the past as it “really was.” Relying on the Freudian understanding of the unconscious and palimpsestic memories, contemporary film scholars have recently critiqued the traditional claim to reality that documentary films once made. For these scholars, an “event” remembered is neither whole nor fully represented in a single mode of representation, which sounds like a postmodern view of reality from the 1990s (Williams 13-15). Park places together apparently paradoxical fragments of the past, and then examines them relentlessly with his camera. Thus the past that *Sindoan* embodies may seem to imply an abandonment of cinema-vérité realism: this could all be seen as a highly theatrical

performance staged via shifting versions of “memories,” one that ultimately reveals the difficulty, or impossibility, of truly touching the past.

In the fourth episode of *Sindoan*, however, the film seems to push forward to a point at which Park can actually see the past again. As this episode begins, we are at an old Cheondogyo temple that remains in Sindoan, and are briefly introduced to a new Cheondogyo religious school that operated until 1983. Here the film shows us Cheondogyo followers listening to a lecture. Cutting to an empty temple, the camera slowly pans to the door which opens by itself as if a ghost were entering the room. A Cheondogyo priest in a black suit, Moon Kyeongjang, walks into the room and stands behind a lectern—one at which the founder of the new school once spoke. Facing the floor—the place where many Cheondogyo followers listened to speeches about religious doctrines, though now it is empty—he expounds on the doctrine of Cheondogyo, including the doctrine of heaven, the earth, and human existence.

As Kyeongjang continues his lecture the film shows faded photographs of the temple—perhaps taken in the past, when it was flooded with believers. Then, the camera flickers on an old photograph which gives us vague glimpses, or traces, of past followers. There is an “uncanny aura” here that might suggest Benjamin’s melancholy photographs of a vacant Paris street or a portrait of a fisherman’s wife shot by Eugène Atget and David Octavius Hill (Benjamin). At this moment, the scene appears to haunt the new congregation like an invisible specter, and the old temple seems to come alive, become literally physical. After Kyeongjang finishes his lecture, he walks towards his followers and kneels, joining them, thereby incorporating himself, his own being, in or within the past. Here, the priest’s being caught between two temporalities or between the inanimate past and the physical present—through the faded photographic evidence and his own reenactment of the lecture—may suggest Derrida’s notion of the “specter” in *Specters of Marx*. For Derrida, the commodity-fetish (in the Marxian legacy) functions as a “specter” in the sense that it is “the material incorporation of universal abstractions, neither flesh nor blood, but materially appearing form, a *morphantom*” (Hamacher 178; emphasis added). This specter substitutes for the referent that cannot appear in material form, thus embedding (and disavowing) something already past via its phantom appearance.

In *Sindoan*, therefore, as Kyeongjang enters into the old photograph in the form of a specter, the moment does not reach back into the past itself. Nevertheless, this effort to grasp the past discloses a certain trauma that is never manifestly recorded yet still lurks in the cultural archive of modern Korean history, just as Derrida suggests in *Archive Fever*: “[A]n archive takes place at the place of the originary and structural breakdown of sad memories” (11), and thus an archive inevitably carries a

certain violence that is born at the moment when the archive itself is demarcated. The term “archive fever” refers to this innate violence, this inevitable omission and repression of memory that is embedded in an archive. This fever, this violence, returns at an opportune time, just as traumatic experiences continue to come back to the human psyche (19-20).

Furthermore, the haunting presence of repressed memories in *Sindoan* may also embody the never-represented yet surely-present memories of the people—which have (had) already been long dismissed in modern Korean history. In this regard, Dipesh Chakrabarty, working in the subaltern studies tradition, stresses modernity and modern history-writing, both of which in fact served to silence subaltern groups, or silence those who had been unrepresented in official histories. He contends that histories codified from a nineteenth-century perspective in modern historiography are predestined to become a part of modern colonialism (Chakrabarty). In similar fashion, the dismissal of ordinary people’s memories in *Sindoan* also brings into play various modes of violence that are embedded in the cultural archive of modern Korean history, making it still harder to reach back into the true past.

As such, in *Sindoan*, Park’s efforts to reach back to “the origin” through media footage, and the difficulties he faced in trying to do so, echo the malice that lurks in the cultural archive of modern Korean history, or in “the palimpsestic narrative” of oppressive history. Nevertheless, Park’s move into past temporality generates a certain “magical effect that conjured into being an unstable and inconstant semblance [*Schein*] without substance,” and in so doing serves as a vehicle through which history, memory, and desire can be materialized and transmitted to the present (Schopenhauer 484). In this sense, the photomontage mode—which was enabled by video technology’s superimposition in *Sindoan*—grants access to the past, even if only momentarily.

At the end of the episode, the film stages a momentary appearance of the past in order to reach the “origin” of the spirit—the very place where the holy spirit, or the secret of *Sindoan*, may be grounded. One night Kyeongjang retires to bed, but he soon rises and goes out—seemingly awakened by a strangely auspicious atmosphere. He stands in the back yard behind the house, where he finds on the ground a huge spiral shape combined with a thick “branch” with four squares inscribed on it. This talisman, which is thought to have been given birth by Taeguuk, or the *yin-yang*, embodies the idea of Earlier Heaven and Later Heaven. If the former can be defined as the brutal history of humanity until the present, Later Heaven represents the struggle against oppression and the beginning of a new world. Kyeongjang calls this shape Yeongbu, a sacred talisman, a symbol of his religion. Yeongbu is the primary

form of heaven, and it is the talisman of the New School which captures the core of the people's yearning for and vision of their own community.¹



Fig. 4. No. 1 Talisman of Cheonjin-gyo, Donghak, from *Sindoan*. Still image courtesy of the artist Park Chan-kyong.

In this way, the film finally reaches the physical materiality in which the spirit of the people and of Donghak resides. When Kyeongjang finishes explaining Yeongbu, the film briefly inserts a story about the “origin” in a caption. Nevertheless, this discursive recovery of the origin does not seem to bring us a clear sense of rediscovery: instead it increases the secretive mood that pervades the film, as if to resonate with the history that itself is imbued with Korean folk religion and tradition. As the camera gradually pans a full 360 degrees, accompanied by the sound of a drum,

¹ It is also true that because it was believed to have magical power, many followers in the nineteenth century used it to heal themselves, burning the papers of the talisman to make a tea and drinking it, or attaching it to their clothes before they went to battle.

the film fades out again, abruptly ending its cinematic investigation of spiritual origins.

(Re)enacting or Embracing (the Forgotten Dream of) *Minjung*

Sindoan draws to a close with a group of young performers hiding on Gyeryong Mountain, where they perform a ceremony on Yeoncheon Hill. On a large flat rock at the top, five young men are variously standing, sitting, or stooping. Yet their gestures look arbitrary and eccentric: one man sports a birdcage on his head (while otherwise dressing in conventional white shirt and pants); another wears a student-military uniform of the 1980s; yet another wears a red T-shirt with a yellow star at the center; viewers see a woman in a white dress and a man in a tiger costume. They are walking hand in hand, arriving at Yeoncheon Hill's stone sculpture garden. At one moment the young man and woman hug each other in a warm embrace. Then the camera zooms out and shows them situated on an almost deserted rocky island. Here again we see an apparent reference to *minjung* art in the contrast between the warm embrace and the deserted background: this resonates with the work of another *minjung* artist, Min Jeong-gi—his oil painting entitled *Hugging* (1981).

The work places a man and a woman embracing against a landscape, mostly in gray-black and gray-blue. They are standing inside what looks like an iron fence next to a rocky place near the open sea, which reflects a cloudy sun. This scene reminds one of scenic spots on Korea's East Coast, yet here the natural surrounding coexists with iron fences and watchtowers. As one scrutinizes the painting, however, its elements seem weirdly placed, and depicted in an unfamiliar or unexpected way. For instance, on the left side of the painting stands a small pavilion at the top of the high rock face, while on the right side a thick, undulating pine tree looms. Although the pavilion appears to be situated far behind the couple, they seem to be moving forward along with it. This visual effect carries over to the pine tree as well because the tree is disproportionately large, zig-zagging across the right side of the picture's plane or surface. Min says that he wanted to express the "alienation or 'alienness' one feels in the tourist area," although one might also see the iron fence as an obvious reference to Korea's national division (Min 30).



Fig. 5. Production Still (Yeoncheon Hill) from *Sindoan*. Still image courtesy of the artist Park Chan-kyong.



Fig. 6. Min Jeong-gi, *Hugging*, 1981, Oil on canvas, 145.5 cm x 112cm. Image courtesy of Private Collection.

Park Chan-kyong himself explains this sense of alienation, the feeling that something is not “right” in Min’s painting through the notion of a makeshift stage (C. Park, “Poong” n. pag.). Park speculates that if one removed the couple from the painting, the work would function more like a background, as in an old photo studio or on a theater stage, than like an independent painting. Park’s reference to a stage in effect implicates Min’s long involvement in theater and his art’s reputation as being “barbershop painting,” appropriated from kitschy paintings found in barbershops and chop houses, apparently in contrast to “the serious face and authority” of institutional

art (Min 97). In a similar vein, Park conceptualizes Koreans' experience of modernity as a form of stage performance. He wonders whether, "for [Koreans], the experience of modernity is to live a real life on a makeshift stage." And he connects the "modernization of the fatherland" with Korea's "wrecked landscape" and "wrecked psyche" (C. Park, "Poong" n. pag.). By combining the couple's transgressive act with elements of tradition (the pavilion and the pine tree) and the national division (the iron fence), Min's work reveals a juncture that has been silenced in the public arena of Korean society, and yet has powerfully shaped the Korean psyche as well as forms of political and cultural expression. Park's *Sindoan*, deploying a similar strategy, endeavors to bring out into the light the oppressed who have been submersed in the unconscious of Korean culture.

In staging Min's *Hugging*, Park seems to have concluded his search for history in the context of the *minjung* art movement. However, Park translates this painting into a bizarre scene on Yeoncheon Hill. The man in the military training uniform that was worn by high school recruits from the time of the liberation into the 1980s hugs a woman. The group begins performing various forms of communal dance: one shows athletes holding hands while stretching their bodies, another seems to enact Matisse's dance from a famous collage; yet another reproduces a North Korean game involving a massive crowd. These dances are used for communal rituals, commemorations of historical events, and acts of cultural resistance, reenacting memories through ritualized gestures (Hamera 65). Such "bodily knowledge" often conveys oppressive and effaced histories that remain lurking in the shadows, as in *minjung* culture's bodily performances that assuage the people's pain (*han*), particularly through the excitement, *jouissance*, or *shinmyeong* arising from collective dance. Im Jintae, a *madanggeuk* creator and *pansori* performer, perceives *shinmyeong* as "a sense of collective reality" (Im 86). According to Im, *shinmyeong* can be shared not only among dancers but also with an audience, thereby potentially spreading like an explosive force towards social transformation (86). In this sense, as these dancers perform they seek to sublimate the people's pain and repressed memories into liberation.

The performers at *Sindoan* also take a step forward—honoring an existing protocol while creating a new mode of expression. They form a circle and thus resemble a Korean circle dance (*ganggangsuumolrae*), echoing the people's desire for community. In addition, this combination of dances, the embodied knowledge of several cultures, surely constitutes a form of reconciliation between South and North Korean culture, and perhaps even to a place beyond this. That their performance takes place at the site where a hopeful future was envisioned seems to represent a promise

to be delivered.

One may say that this promise, or hope, also coincides with the shaman's religious ritual as the expression of a desire to retrieve a disavowed memory in a contemporary setting. Indeed, this promise runs throughout Park's work, giving meaning to scenes in which shamans, priests, and religious believers in Sindoan testify to their religious experiences in which they encounter spiritual ghosts and cure the sick. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that this promise always arises with a persistent reading of the mysterious or, as Park terms it, "the sublime" atmosphere of Sindoan.

For Park, therefore, seeing *Sindoan* as an awesomely fearful and unknowable object makes it possible to reread modern Korean history, which similarly remains a riddle. Park fully utilizes the camera's capacity to represent both animate and inanimate life by capturing profound impressions of reality and history. Thus, as the film presents folk religions and traditional performances, Park explores the preexisting boundaries of the medium, posing "questions of being" (Heidegger) and the limits of the knowable—a gesture that surely echoes the film's effort to reach the spirit of the people that suffuses *Sindoan*. The film also explores Koreans through moving images of dance and song, the very primordial expressions of living/life. In so doing, it captures the people in sensory and spiritual terms, treating them as worlds of their own instead of violently opposing them or analyzing them in rationalistic and scientific terms.

Insofar as the final sequence of the film is staged in the future, one may also say that this return of the past that has been inscribed only as a promise of history recalls what Derrida says about the function and temporality of memory:

The relation between forgetting and memory is much more disturbing. Memory is not just the opposite of forgetting. And therefore the *anamnesis* of the *anamneses* I just mentioned will never be able to lift an origin out of oblivion. . . . To think memory or to think *anamnesis*, here, is to think things as paradoxical as the memory of a past that has not been present, the memory of the future—the movement of memory as tied to the future and not only to the past, memory turned toward the promise, toward what is coming, what is arriving, what is happening tomorrow. (*Points* 382-83; emphasis added)

In this sense, the final sequence of *Sindoan* ultimately suggests that similar unfulfilled wishes remain scattered across the town, a town in which Korean viewers are situated

which is precisely also a space of historical potentiality. Moreover, the film seeks to stage these vanished memories in a visual tableau, particularly through Park's strategic array of *minjung* art and the experimental use of media, in order to reveal fully dissident memories that have not been inscribed in modern Korean history. In this way, the town is deemed simultaneously a "new capital for the future" and a "town of specters." As the film stages what one might call the presence of the future, fully surrounded by fragmented media memories of the past, Park informs viewers that the history secretly remaining in Sindoan will arrive in the form of a promise.

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