

# CROSS-CURRENTS



## EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

### **Nationalist Technologies of Cultural Memory and the Korean War: Militarism and Neo-Liberalism in *The Price of Freedom* and the War Memorial of Korea**

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#### **Abstract**

This article examines the technologies of nationalism that shape how the Korean War is depicted in two museum and memorial sites: *The Price of Freedom: Americans at War*, a permanent exhibit at the National Museum of American History in Washington, DC, and the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul. It shows how the use of traditional historical artifacts in *The Price of Freedom* and cinematic and digital technologies in the War Memorial generate structures of cultural memory that celebrate both a nationalist militarism and the ethos of neoliberalism.

Keywords: Korean War, cultural memory, memorials, museums, nationalism, neoliberalism, militarism

“Epic” is a suitable epithet, in more ways than one, to describe both of the institutions discussed in this article. *The Price of Freedom*—a permanent exhibit at the National Museum of American History (NMAH) in Washington, DC—opened on Veterans Day, November 11, 2004. The 18,200-square-foot exhibit, which features hundreds of artifacts from the Smithsonian’s collection, is housed in the Kenneth E. Behring Hall of Military History. Both the exhibit and the hall were funded largely by an \$80 million donation from the real estate developer and philanthropist for whom the hall is named. While this exhibit has proved to be quite popular, especially with veterans groups, it has come in for a certain amount of criticism. The War Memorial of Korea opened, also to some controversy, ten years earlier, in 1994, during the presidency of Kim Yong Sam, though it was actually envisioned and planned by his predecessor, Roh Tae Woo. The enormous main building, which occupies roughly 65,000 square feet, houses a museum and several ceremonial spaces. On the grounds of the memorial are more ceremonial spaces, a few imposing sculptures, and a field of military equipment including tanks and aircraft.

The stark contrast in the significance accorded to the Korean War in American and South Korean historical memory respectively is reflected in these sites, which share the dual aim of educating a nation's citizenry about the role that war has played in its history and paying tribute to the soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice in its defense, thereby serving at once as museums, monuments, and memorials. But while the 6/25 War (how Koreans usually refer to the Korean War) is the centerpiece of the War Memorial of Korea, constituting the very heart and soul of the five-thousand-year historical narrative that unfolds there, the Korean War section of *The Price of Freedom* is tucked into a small room embedded in the Cold War exhibit. Nonetheless, one important parallel can be found in the ways these institutions explain the significance of that conflict: neither offers a discrete or self-contained history of the Korean War; rather, they both insert this event into a larger narrative of how war has been essential to the construction and reconstruction of national identity.

That these institutions function as sites of nationalist pedagogy should certainly come as no surprise. To a significant degree, the emphasis these museums place on historical artifacts as talismans of historical authenticity seems to demonstrate how the technologies of nationalism that we associate with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries enjoy a long afterlife in the early twenty-first century. But these two sites also depend heavily on multimedia technologies of display—televisual, cinematic, and, increasingly, digital—that illustrate the novel forms that nationalism has adopted in the age of neoliberalism. These tools are deployed, moreover, as what cultural theorist Marita Sturken (1991) terms “technologies of memory” that seek to produce nationalist subjects by engendering in them a “cultural memory” of wars that most citizens have not experienced firsthand—inviting them to claim a militaristic rendering of national history as their own. In the War Memorial of Korea in particular, visitors encounter a tour de force enactment of the forms of high-tech nationalism that museums are now capable of conveying.

What is most troubling about these sites, in the end, is not simply their yoking together of bellicosity and nationalism, but the ways in which they mount a nationalist defense of the form that capitalism has assumed in the age of neoliberalism. Indeed, what is remarkable about these museums is the overtness with which they foreground the linkage between the economic and the patriotic—the extreme visibility with which they equate the health and vibrancy of the nation

that was defended through war with the explicit promotion of capitalist values. The artifacts and technologies of display we see operating in them suggest a love affair not only with the range of media in which mass culture now takes its form but also with the economic logic of neoliberalism.

The version of cultural memory that is produced in and disseminated by these sites—the rather arresting technologies of display that visitors encounter in these museums and the prevalence of artifacts that aim to engender visceral emotional responses—is also legible as an instantiation of what cultural theorist Alison Landsberg has termed “prosthetic memory.” According to Landsberg, prosthetic memory is a particularly modern form of knowledge production and subject formation that “emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum” (2004, 2). “In this moment of contact,” she writes, “an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history” (2004, 2). What distinguishes this form of cultural memory from prior forms, according to Landsberg, is its intimate relationship to mass culture, its expression through a range of technologies of representation that are capable, especially in their initial appearance, of provoking an intense and visceral response to the past—a past that incites one to experience historical events almost as if they were prosthetic elements of one’s own personal history.

While Landsberg asserts that the reliance of prosthetic culture on mass media is value neutral, she does tend to emphasize this very quality as encouraging the development of “new modalities of subjectivity, new structures of feeling,” “creating a portable, fluid, and nonessentialist form of memory” (2004, 10, 18). But this insistence on the more open-ended structures of communal identity that prosthetic memory can produce runs the danger of overlooking how strenuously it can also be deployed by rather conservative political projects, like the ones found in both *The Price of Freedom* and the War Memorial of Korea. Both of these exhibits engage in a virtuoso deployment of a range of media—old and new—that reflects the myriad forms in which mass culture is now materialized and encourages visitors not only to identify with a jingoistic patriotism but also to embrace of the logic of neoliberalism. In the following discussion, I illuminate how these institutions function as ideological state apparatuses that seek to interpellate their visitors as good national and economic subjects precisely through

their marshaling of prosthetic memory. Close readings of these sites will illuminate the normative responses that they attempt to elicit, the meanings that their ideal visitors should extract. I also point out, however, the moments of contradiction and failure that inevitably haunt such projects by foregrounding my own experiences as a visitor to these sites.

### **The Framing Narratives of War in *The Price of Freedom***

My first visit to *The Price of Freedom* took place in the summer of 2011. It was occasioned by an invitation to participate in a roundtable at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association titled “What Is the Price of Freedom?: A Critical Exploration of Militarist Narratives at the National Museum of American History.”<sup>1</sup> My charge was to discuss the place of the Korean War in this exhibit from the perspective of an Asian Americanist scholar, a task that was made difficult by the infinitesimal degree of attention devoted by the museum to that conflict. As explained by NMAH director Brent D. Glass in the foreword to the exhibit’s companion book:

[*The Price of Freedom*] surveys the history of America’s military from the colonial era to the present, exploring ways that wars have been defining episodes in American history. . . . *Because American wars have social as well as military impact*, displays extend far beyond a survey of battles. They also describe the relationship between military conflict and American political leadership, social values, technological innovation, and personal sacrifice. (Smithsonian Institution 2004, 4; emphasis added)

It would seem that the curators of the exhibit felt that the Korean War had little to offer in terms of either “social” or “military impact.” The small room devoted to this conflict in *The Price of Freedom* sits in a quiet corner, and the physical maps found in the exhibit halls do not even indicate its location. I realized that to arrive at any useful understanding of the meanings with which the Korean War room’s meager contents are endowed, it would be necessary to gain a sense of how the exhibit as a whole is structured and to grasp the master narratives governing it.

The title of the exhibit suggests a rather powerful framing narrative, and it was all I really knew about *The Price of Freedom* prior to my visit. From its name I expected that the politics of the exhibit would be at best conservative and at worst jingoistic. At minimum, it seems to suggest that wars are the necessary price that the nation pays in order to defend its freedom. I was therefore not surprised to find that the Second World War occupies pride of place in the

exhibit as the paradigmatic American war, or even that the September 11, 2001, attacks and the subsequent War on Terror were represented in the exhibit. I was taken aback, however, by the ways in which *The Price of Freedom*'s treatment of these recent military engagements seem to affirm President George W. Bush's decision to send troops first to Afghanistan and then to Iraq.

My overall sense of the conservative politics expressed by *The Price of Freedom* was confirmed by articles written by cultural critics Scott Boehm (2006) and Carol Burke (2006), which both offer highly critical analyses of the exhibit. Boehm offers a quite persuasive account of how pivotal World War II—and, more specifically, the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor—is to the “overarching narrative” that governs *The Price of Freedom* as a whole: a narrative that “centers on national traumas that provoke feelings of retribution, such as the battle for the Alamo, Custer's Last Stand, the sinking of the USS *Maine*, and the attack on Pearl Harbor” (Boehm 2006, 1157). The centerpiece of the World War II exhibit comprises “three enormous panels depict[ing] the Pearl Harbor attack in black and white,” which is emphasized because it “acutely dramatizes how the safety of U.S. domestic space was violently penetrated by what are posited as foreign barbarians” (Boehm 2006, 1157, 1158).

However striking the display devoted to Pearl Harbor may be, Boehm suggests, its traumatic significance is most effectively conveyed by its placement in a kind of metonymic proximity with a nearer display on 9/11, which functions as a kind of objective correlative. Visitors come to inhabit, in the most intimate and intense way, what it was like in the immediate aftermath of that earlier “day of infamy”—experiencing it as a prosthetic memory, one might say—when they confront the object that arguably constitutes the exhibit's emotional epicenter, a “sagging steel column assembly from the seventieth floor of the south tower of the World Trade Center” (Boehm 2006, 1151; see figure 1). *The Price of Freedom* seems to marshal whatever private emotional responses visitors might have to this object toward an embrace of the policies that the Bush administration enacted in response, echoing its “rhetorics of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny to justify a policy of perpetual war” (Boehm 2006, 1150).<sup>2</sup>

Despite my own outrage at this aspect of *The Price of Freedom*, I was not entirely surprised by it, given the embrace of bellicosity that has characterized U.S. foreign policy since 9/11. I did take some solace in the fact that certain elements of the exhibit were in tension with its overall jingoism. As historian Beth Bailey points out in her mixed appraisal, the exhibit does

also address the “less than honorable armed conflicts in the nation’s history,” including “the forcible removal of the Cherokee and the Trail of Tears, as well as the Indian Wars; the war with Mexico for territory in the Southwest; the war in the Philippines; [and] the Spanish-American war,” and acknowledges that these were essentially wars of imperial conquest (2005, 90). Moreover, the exhibit’s treatment of the Civil War and the Vietnam War seems, as Boehm himself acknowledges, “confusing when compared to the rest of the exhibition,” because these conflicts were “episodes of domestic turmoil and highly contested meanings . . . not so easily interpreted through the patriotic lens of 9/11” (2006, 1160).



Figure 1. Column assembly from the World Trade Center in *The Price of Freedom* exhibit.  
*Source:* All photos in this article were taken by the author.

This sense of ideological tension is quite apparent in the section of the exhibit devoted to the Vietnam War. Upon entering the room, the visitor first confronts “a Nam June Paik-esqe [*sic*] stack of televisions situated in front of a couch sheathed in plastic slipcovers, whose disparate content powerfully evoke[s] the divisions of the era” (Bailey 2005, 91; see figure 2). Boehm characterizes this as “one of the few displays of genuine pedagogical value” in the exhibit, as it

displays footage of “Martin Luther King’s dissenting voice, National Guards at Kent State, and the frantic evacuation of U.S. troops” (Boehm 2006, 1161).



Figure 2 (left). Television sets from the Vietnam War room in *The Price of Freedom* exhibit. Figure 3 (right). Huey helicopter in the Vietnam War room of *The Price of Freedom* exhibit.

The impact of this hypnotic array of images that reflected and helped to expand widespread resistance to the Vietnam War pales in comparison, however, to the single largest historical artifact displayed in the exhibit: an actual 57-foot long Huey helicopter (figure 3). Boehm asserts that the story of how this very aircraft “made it from Vietnam to the Smithsonian after being shot down in combat dominates the Vietnam section” (Boehm 2006, 1161–1162). The helicopter attests to the anachronistic but still powerful effect that traditional technologies of museum display can exert, one potent enough to contain the potentially insurgent knowledge conveyed by the “Nam June Paik-esque [*sic*] stack of televisions.” For the visceral impact of the Huey stems not only from its size, but from the aura of authenticity it possesses as a material witness to the violence of war—as an object that has literally been scarred by history.

While Boehm observed that the column assembly from the World Trade Center drew the most avid response from visitors (2006, 1152), during my visits it was the helicopter that seemed to elicit the most attention. Visitors seemed to be in awe of its monumental presence in the Smithsonian, and I wondered myself about the prodigious feat of engineering that must have gone into placing it there. In hindsight, however, and spurred by Boehm’s and Carol Burke’s accounts of the controversial financial arrangement that underwrote *The Price of Freedom*, it

occurred to me that the Huey might cause visitors who know that history to wonder just how much of Kenneth Behring's \$80 million it took to move that massive object into place.

While all the artifacts in the exhibit are, in a sense, public property—and hundreds of objects from the NMAH's collection are impressively presented—the fact that *The Price of Freedom* was funded largely by a private contribution from a single donor implicitly imbues them with another kind of value. No longer simply publicly owned objects endowed with the aura of historical authenticity, they also come to seem something slightly but significantly different: *commodities* of historical value, whispering the language of commerce and exchange that enables and underwrites their display.

Ultimately, for me, the most disconcerting aspect of *The Price of Freedom* has to do with the fact that both the exhibit and the wing of the NMAH that houses it owe their existence to the donor for whom the Kenneth E. Behring Hall of Military History is named. Behring's massive contribution apparently “entailed several explicit strings, including the stipulation that the NMAH ‘maintain a close cooperative relationship’ with him, and that ‘Behring Center’ was to be added to the museum’s name and displayed ‘prominently upon the National Mall and Constitution Avenue entrances’” (Boehm 2006, 1148). Behring's contribution was solicited by Lawrence Small, who became the director of the Smithsonian in 2000, “the first head in the institution’s history without any scholarly credentials”—but with plenty of experience in the private sphere as a former executive at Fannie Mae and Citibank (Burke 2006, 241). Behring requested “an exhibition dedicated exclusively to National Medal of Honor winners,” and the final section of *The Price of Freedom* is precisely that (Burke 2006, 241). Notably, Behring very likely supplied the name of the exhibit itself (Boehm 2006, 1148; Bailey 2005, 89–90).

The outsize role that Behring played in shaping *The Price of Freedom* is celebrated in a magazine interview he gave in the summer 2010 issue of *Philanthropy*, which was also posted to the Philanthropy Roundtable website. The interview begins with a comment to Behring—“Your biography reads like a Horatio Alger story. Early in life, a hard-working kid from Depression-era Wisconsin learns the value of entrepreneurship”—and is prefaced with an account of his numerous accomplishments, including his donations to the Smithsonian. “Through the careful deployment of \$80 million,” according to this profile, “Mr. Behring played an instrumental role in creating permanent exhibits on the American presidency (‘A Glorious Burden’) and on the

nation at war (“The Price of Freedom”).” In the interview itself, Behring characterizes his donations to the NMAH in ways that emphasize his curatorial role: “We had significant input on the ‘Price of Freedom’ . . . —but I still think it could be better. For example, one of the most popular items in the exhibit is a UH-1H Huey helicopter we installed. I’d like to see more items like that” (“Interview” 2010).

The mere fact that *The Price of Freedom* is housed in a building that also functions as a monument to Behring’s largesse implicitly suggests that the exhibit expresses the values that have guided his own rise from rags to riches: thrift, discipline, entrepreneurialism, and a capacity to overcome adversity. And, to the extent that his own mythology infuses *The Price of Freedom*, another narrative runs alongside the one that memorializes the deaths of American soldiers as the tragic but necessary price of defending the nation’s freedom—one that celebrates hard work and sacrifice as the necessary price of achieving economic freedom. While Behring’s biography is not featured in the exhibit itself, for visitors who know his story and his munificence, or who become curious about the man for whom the hall is named, Behring does come to seem a ghostly avatar of this “freedom” who transcended the adversity of his humble origins in order to rise to the very apex of economic power, endowed with the wherewithal to make his compatriots the beneficiaries of his altruism.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Korean War in *The Price of Freedom***

Having outlined the overarching narrative and ideological currents that run through *The Price of Freedom* as a whole, I want now to describe how visitors arrive at the Korean War section of the exhibit, and to suggest interpretations that might come to them if they take the time to ponder the objects in the room—which, I should add, few visitors seem to do. Following the linear pathway laid out for visitors, you come to the small room devoted to the Korean War after having experienced the stunning World War II section, a huge hallway that offers a panoramic sweep of the two theaters of war with detailed portraits of the enemies who were defeated. You have been told a familiar story with the requisite villains (“The Axis Menace”); have become acquainted with the atrocities those villains inflicted on civilian populations; and, having learned of the victims’ sacrifice, have paid tribute to the fallen dead.

In the Cold War section, you have been introduced to the tensions that took shape between the two superpowers after 1945. An ominous circular vestibule conjures the increasingly apocalyptic threat that emerged as the United States and the Soviet Union began to develop ever more powerful nuclear bombs (figure 4). Arrayed around you are huge photographs of the mushroom clouds from the tests both sides conducted. The walls have been painted an alarming red and so, too, are the bodies of visitors, which are bathed by red overhead lighting. You thus enter the Korean War room duly armed with the anxious knowledge of the nuclear cataclysm that could have resulted from any direct military confrontation between the two superpowers.



Figure 4. Photos of nuclear bomb tests from the Cold War display in *The Price of Freedom* exhibit.

When you walk into the small corner room devoted to the Korean War, you find that there is not a whole lot of there there. It consists of two wall displays of maps, photographs, and placards; the only military items on display are a pair of uniforms enclosed in a glass case that comprises a third wall. It is one of the few sections of the exhibit that lacks a soundtrack: you hear only the muffled echoes of music and voices from the adjacent rooms. Perhaps it is intended, in its stillness, to engender a sense of relief that the alarming potential for nuclear annihilation did not become actualized in Korea. Perhaps it is also designed to give you a moment to rest your senses before you enter the spectacular Vietnam War room.

While the elements in this part of the exhibit appear somewhat haphazard, discernible in them is the curators' attempt at thematic coherence. A certain aesthetic sense can be detected—understated and lyric in its compactness—that sets it apart from the epic sensibility that shapes the exhibit as a whole. In fact, the room's content is structured by a series of binary oppositions that echo the geographical division in which the origins of the conflict are to be found and by an emphasis on the distinctive hardships that American soldiers in Korea faced.



Figure 5. Map display from the Korean War room in *The Price of Freedom* exhibit.

The first wall provides a brief historical overview (figure 5). At its center is a circular map of the peninsula, showing the border established in 1945 and highlighting the peninsula's strategic location between the People's Republic of China and Japan and the proximity of the Soviet Union. Above the map are two placards, the higher one introducing a paradox and binary echoed elsewhere in the room: "In 1950, the cold war turned hot when the United States led a coalition of United Nations forces to defend South Korea." What is first highlighted about the Korean War, then (and with an indeterminate degree of irony), is that it was a "hot" conflict that belied the ostensible "coldness" of the larger struggle against the Soviet Union. The second placard offers a brief historical account of the conflict's beginnings that frames it wholly as a proxy war:

The United States went to war to contain Communist expansion fostered by the Soviet Union. . . . After Japan surrendered Korea at the end of World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States agreed to oversee separate occupation zones. When North Korean forces poured into South Korea on June 25, 1950, President Harry Truman interpreted the invasion as an attempt by Moscow to expand its domain and test Western resolve. He committed American troops and rallied support in the United Nations, establishing a coalition of sixteen nations to mount a counterattack. Three years of brutal fighting left Americans divided over the war. An uneasy truce split the Korean peninsula into a Communist north and democratic south.

Any brief précis of such a complex conflict will inherently be problematic in its omissions. Perhaps the most glaring one—even within its framing of the war as one waged to “contain Communist expansion”—is its silence concerning the crucial strategic shift that took place in October 1950, when U.S.-led troops pushed past the 38th parallel and the war become one of rollback.<sup>4</sup> It is somewhat laudable, however, and in keeping with the exhibit’s overall emphasis on social impact, that the curators at least acknowledge that the war “left Americans divided” and ended with “an uneasy truce.”

Atop the second wall of the exhibit is a placard that summarizes the nature of the fighting: “U.S. and UN troops confronted changing battlegrounds and weather extremes.” A large map of Korea traces how the front line ranged the entire length of the peninsula over the course of the war, though, again, the momentousness of the decision to cross the 38th parallel is glossed over. The focus on “changing battlegrounds and weather extremes” works to highlight the hardships faced by American soldiers during this war. For example, the display features the “Hot Weather Gear” worn by U.S. soldiers when “temperatures often topped 100° F and humidity hovered at 90 percent or higher” and the “Cold Weather Gear” used when “temperatures often dropped below -30° F” (figure 6). These seasonal oppositions also resonate with the hot/cold war paradox used to introduce the Korean War section of the exhibit. The third item, marked as an “Identification Banner,” speaks to the challenges that U.S. soldiers faced as a result of the dramatic shifts in the location of the front, which could easily result in their being separated from their units. It is a 9x13-inch rectangular piece of white silk emblazoned with the U.S., UN, and South Korean flags, along with words in Korean—a banner that was to be shown “to non-English-speaking locals to ask for assistance” by soldiers who had been separated from their units.



Figure 6. Display of uniforms from the Korean War room in *The Price of Freedom* exhibit.

“Changing Battlegrounds,” the title that appears at the top of the second wall of the Korean War room, has a more symbolic, domestic referent as well, for it alludes to the conflict between President Harry Truman and General Douglas MacArthur that famously led to the latter’s dismissal. Two opposing placards display photos of these figures along with quotations depicting their differing perspectives. The conflict between them seems a metonym for the ways in which the Korean War “left Americans divided over the war,” as had been earlier noted, a development that foreshadows the much wider and more pervasive divisions that would threaten to crack apart American society during the Vietnam War.

There are attempts, however, to suture the Korean War into the “overarching narrative” of the exhibit, and they correspond with the moments in which Koreans make a token appearance. To the left of the circular map of Korea on the first wall of this section of the exhibit is a photograph that depicts a somber group of refugees walking single file past the photographer next to a train track. It is titled “In Retreat,” and the caption reads: “When North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel, the two countries’ dividing line, South Korean troops scattered in disarray, and civilians streamed south. U.S. reinforcements initially failed to stem the tide, and the North Koreans pushed the coalition into the southeast corner of the peninsula, near Pusan.” It is the freedom of these civilians that American soldiers were apparently sent to defend. While the trauma of the invasion is not directly rendered, this image encapsulates its aftermath: the masses of civilians who “streamed south,” the direction of their movement suggesting their mortal fear of the Communist forces.

But whereas the World War II exhibit highlighted the threat posed by Germany and the Japanese Empire, with several displays emblazoned with the visages of Hitler and Hirohito and graphic documentation of the atrocities they committed, there is no comparable depiction of the enemy here. In fact, the only items concerning the enemy are a facsimile of the front page of the June 26, 1950, edition of *The Washington Post* reporting the invasion by “Allied ‘Reds’” and an accompanying placard that reads: “North Korean leader Kim Il Sung launched the invasion of South Korea in an attempt to reunify the nation under Communism. The Soviets supported his decision with economic and military aid. A few months later, when their border was threatened, the Communist Chinese joined the fight as well, sending more than a million troops.” This text conveys the traditional American understanding of the origins of the conflict as stemming from an unprovoked attack by the North, rather than as the culmination of five years of civil conflict between competing nationalist factions that arose with the end of the Japanese Empire (see Cumings 2010). However, this description casts Kim as the primary agent behind the invasion rather than as a puppet of Stalin or Mao, which partly belies the notion of a proxy war. At any rate, given the minimalism of their representation, the “Allied ‘Reds’” are not conjured with the comparable degree of ominousness as Hitler’s Wehrmacht or Hirohito’s Imperial Army.

While the Korean War section of *The Price of Freedom* has a certain internal coherence—the hot/cold war paradox reflected in the “weather extremes”; the division of the

Korean peninsula echoed in the social divisions that emerged among Americans—much of its meaning derives from its connection to the exhibit’s larger narratives. The Korean War comes across as a feeble echo of the Second World War and a partial prefiguring of the Vietnam War—semiotically speaking, it is a shrimp among whales.

Visitors who already possess a deeper historical awareness of the U.S. role in the Korean War, however, might notice a few topics broached elsewhere in the exhibit that might have been better contextualized here. For example, a display devoted to President Truman’s Executive Order 9981, which mandated the desegregation of U.S. military forces, is located in the earliest part of the Cold War section, due to the year it was issued (1948). This display could have been integrated into the Korean War section, more accurately conveying when that policy shift was actually enacted. The invention and implementation of napalm is also mentioned in the exhibit, but not in relation to the Korean War, when it became integral to the strategy of firebombing that was widely used, to devastating effect (Cumings 2010, 152–154).

Most dramatically, a Korean War subtext can be found literally in the belly of the most imposing historical artifact in the exhibit. What visitors see inside the aforementioned Huey is a single video screen. The images that flicker on it tell the story of a wounded Vietnamese infant, dubbed “Baby Kathleen,” who was found by U.S. soldiers in the arms of her dead mother, airlifted to safety, and eventually adopted by an American couple. Carol Burke points out, drawing on the work of Marita Sturken, how this narrative functions as a “screen memory,” drawing attention away from an aspect of the Vietnam War that made it so controversial: “the inevitable consequence of war: civilian casualties” (Burke 2006, 237). Absent from this display is the fact that the fountainhead, as it were, of such narratives was in many ways the Korean War. Epitomized by Douglas Sirk’s melodramatic film, *Battle Hymn* (1959), one of the most self-flattering stories that Americans told about themselves to morally justify their military intervention in Korea was one in which American soldiers were depicted as the saviors of Asian orphans, rather than, as was often the case, their creators.<sup>5</sup>

A subtext that highlights a crucial difference between the Korean War and the Vietnam War is also apparent in the display, a technological clue that might partially explain why the former conflict was so easily forgotten in the United States—for it was only the latter that was experienced as a “living room war.” It is ironic and yet strangely fitting that the “Nam June Paik-

esque [*sic*] stack of televisions” in the Vietnam War room pays silent tribute to an artist who fled his homeland during an earlier war in which that medium could have played no comparable role. While his name is left unmentioned, Paik’s aesthetic sensibility haunts this display, as does the war that shaped his life.

In the Vietnam War display, then, visitors can glimpse vestigial traces of images that were once visible in American culture before the Korean War was forgotten: images of Korean civilians displaced or killed not just by Communist armies but by U.S. airpower; images of Korean orphans who were not just rescued by American soldiers but had lost their families through the actions of those soldiers; and, finally, images of a Korean diaspora swelled by emigrants (including Nam June Paik’s family) seeking to escape the devastation of the conflict and its aftermath.

Although they assume only a spectral presence in *The Price of Freedom*, Koreans do not figure only as historical subjects—as refugees or orphans—in need of rescue. The exhibit also features a micronarrative about Koreans that speaks to widespread American perceptions of the immigrant population that began arriving in significant numbers after 1965 and of the country they left. Consider the exhibit’s description of the silk-screened identification banners alluded to earlier. The placard explains that these “were produced for sale to American GIs by *enterprising* South Korean artisans” (emphasis added). This brief description highlights the notion that these civilians, even as their country was being ravaged by war, seemed to possess a preternatural fluency in the language and practice of commerce, able to extract a minimal prosperity out of their adversity.<sup>6</sup> And there is the unnamed figure of Nam June Paik, another “artisan” whose career path involved a number of self-transformations that could easily be seen as driven by a kind of entrepreneurial ethos: he began his career as a composer but remade himself artistically when he discovered the expressive possibilities offered by cinematic, video, and digital technologies.<sup>7</sup>

These subliminal depictions of Korean subjectivity resonate with the primary impressions that many Americans have of the particular Asian population whose freedom was ostensibly defended from the Communist menace in this war. South Korea has remained one of the staunchest allies of the United States, and Korean Americans are generally seen as a “model minority”: pull-themselves-up-by-their-bootstraps immigrants who have demonstrated their

implacably entrepreneurial nature as greengrocers, dry cleaners, doctors, and engineers—and increasingly as artists and writers. Perhaps the “enterprising” South Korean who sold that banner, or the child of that South Korean, was among the wave of immigrants from that country that began coming to this country in the mid-1960s. Seen in this light, this spectral Korean presence is of a piece with the larger economic subtext of *The Price of Freedom*, for these scarcely rendered sketches of “enterprising South Korean artisans” bear some resemblance to the biography of the self-made billionaire whose largesse funded the exhibit.

The account I have offered of the subliminal Korean presence in *The Price of Freedom* depends on contextual knowledge that few visitors will bring with them and little in the exhibit would encourage them to seek out. I have offered here a kind of pedagogical corrective that makes use of what is actually in the exhibit to explore curatorial paths not taken. However, what has made this Korean subtext so apparent to me in hindsight are, in part, my experiences of the War Memorial of Korea, which in surprising ways mirrors and amplifies the minimalist characterization of Koreans in *The Price of Freedom*. As I suggest below, the qualities subliminally associated by the Smithsonian with Koreanness—entrepreneurialism, self-transformation, and a kind of artisanal technological innovation—show a dramatic gain in currency as they are framed within the nationalist narrative about the 6/25 War promoted in the South Korean museum and memorial site to which I turn now. What we find there is partially a counter-memory of the Korean War as it is minimally memorialized in the Kenneth E. Behring Hall of Military History, but also a kind of collaborative expansion of it.

### **The War Memorial 1.0 and the Paradoxes of Post–Cold War South Korean Nationalism**

For reasons that will soon become apparent, I need to interject here a brief comment about the timing of my research visits to Seoul’s War Memorial of Korea, the first of which occurred in 2011, a few months after my first visit to *The Price of Freedom* in Washington, DC. The very fine work of Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Tessa Morris-Suzuki proved to be quite useful in sharpening and deepening my own intuitions about the master narratives that govern the Korean site. Their differing interpretations suggest that there is a limited but significant instability in the meanings embedded in the memorial—tensions and paradoxes reflecting the contradictory impulses that have shaped South Korean nationalism in the post–Cold War era. But when I

visited the memorial again in June and October of 2013, the rooms devoted to the Korean War had been wholly renovated: the cultural memories of the 6/25 War that the exhibit seeks to conjure and how it does so are now quite different.<sup>8</sup> I explore these changes in the next section of this article.

What initially struck me about the War Memorial in 2011 was the absence of the virulent anti-Communism that has been so integral to the South Korean state through most of its existence. This quality of the memorial is explained by a 2007 essay co-authored by Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Jiyul Kim titled “The Korean War after the Cold War: Commemorating the Armistice Agreement in South Korea.” Jager and Kim characterize the memorial as “one of the showpieces of Roh Tae Woo’s presidential legacy” and persuasively demonstrate how it functioned as a site in which an emergent *post*-Cold War narrative of the Korean War was literally monumentalized (2007, 242). In keeping with this narrative, “one of the striking features of this exhibit is its downplaying of anti-North Korean rhetoric,” as the familiar anticommunist refrains would have been discordant with the overtures toward the North that the Roh administration had begun to make. “Notably absent” from the memorial “are any depictions of the brutal struggle between the North and South Koreans” or “any reference to known North Korean atrocities during the war” (Jager and Kim 2007, 244).

Indeed, the most emotionally arresting depiction of North Koreans in the memorial is the immense *Statue of Brothers*, which—despite the clear hierarchy it establishes between the two Koreas—hardly vilifies a Communist menace (figure 7). This sculpture, which visitors encounter when they first enter the memorial grounds, symbolizes South Korea as an adult male soldier, North Korea as a boy, and the hope of their reunification through their loving embrace. Also exemplifying this post-Cold War narrative is the Korean War Monument, which was unveiled in 2003. Its centerpiece is the June 25th Tower, which resembles a gargantuan bullet or artillery shell that has been bisected vertically. According to the visitors’ pamphlet, however, it is actually “the embodiment of the bronze sword and the tree of life. The bronze sword represents the rich history and martial spirit, and the tree of life symbolizes the peace and prosperity of the Korean people.” According to Jager and Kim, the sword is linked with the earliest Korean “race,” the Yemaek people who migrated from Manchuria in 1000–700 B.C. (2007, 252). The June 25th Tower resignifies that date not as one in which a villainous enemy invaded from the north but as

one in which an immense *tragedy* visited the Korean people as a whole, marking the severance of an organically whole nation that had existed since time immemorial. The monument also gives expression to a “hope for the rebirth among brothers that union would bring” (Jager and Kim 2007, 252).



Figure 7. *Statue of Brothers* at the War Memorial of Korea, Seoul.

While Jager and Kim’s 2007 analysis of the War Memorial is persuasive, it does not highlight those aspects that are in tension with the gestures toward reconciliation that it offers. Jager had drawn attention to some of those elements four years earlier, in the final chapter of her book *Narratives of Nation Building in Korea* (2003). There, she had argued that

the idea that Korea’s war heroes, from the establishment of the ROK [Republic of Korea] Army during the Korean War era to its deployment overseas during the Vietnam and Gulf wars, could be traced back to a single “patriotic” (male) warrior lineage, beginning with the Three Kingdoms period, lies at the very core of the memorial’s significance as a state monument and national museum. (Jager 2003, 120)

Jager noted however, that while the memorial provides the ROK Army with a resplendent genealogy linking it to the various armies that have defended Korea throughout its history against multiple Japanese, Chinese, and Mongolian invaders, the soldiers of the North Korean People's Army are not included in this virtual bloodline.

Moreover, an earlier Cold War narrative about the 6/25 War is hardwired, as it were, into the very structure and layout of the museum. "The story told in the exhibit halls," as Kristin Hass puts it, "is the story of the Korean War as the culmination of 5,000 years of a linked national and military history" (Hass 2009, 273). This means that visitors come to the Korean War exhibits after having walked through room after room depicting five millennia of Korean history as a ceaseless narrative of invasion. Visitors retain a vivid memory of the various armies that have imperiled the nation over its entire existence as they move into the Korean War rooms. As a result, the most recent "invaders" need not even be depicted in order for the existential threat they pose to the nation to be conjured—they have been spectrally implied by those prior threats.

An analysis of the memorial that better conveys the ideological tensions that structure it, and how its overall meaning might be shaped by the context of *when* one visits it, is offered by Tessa Morris-Suzuki in "Remembering the Unfinished Conflict: Museums and the Contested Memory of the Korean War." While Jager and Kim's study was "written during the presidency of the late Roh Moo-Hyun, at a time when the Sunshine Policy of engagement between North and South was at its height," Morris-Suzuki based her analysis on her visit in 2009, when "the pendulum of politics had swung to the other side of the divide: the Lee Myung-bak administration had renounced the Sunshine Policy, and tensions on the Korean peninsula had reached a new peak" (Morris-Suzuki 2014). Given this context, Morris-Suzuki was especially aware of the "multiple paradoxes" embedded in it.

One paradox she points out is the tension between "the Memorial's defiant Korean nationalism" and its rendering of U.S. militarism. For the largest object on the grounds of the memorial is a B-52 bomber, the very plane that was used to lay wide swaths of North Korea to waste during the war. Morris-Suzuki succinctly conveys the paradox it poses by asking:

How, I wondered, did the nationalist symbolism of the Korean dagger fit with [the] symbolism of the giant US B-52 bomber, whose outspread wings greet visitors even before they enter the Memorial's doors? How does the emphasis on unending Korean resistance to cruel subjugation by foreigners relate to South

Korean participation in the Vietnam and Gulf Wars and Afghanistan: events which are celebrated in the memorial as Korea's contribution to the maintenance of global freedom? (Morris-Suzuki 2014)

On the one hand, by positing the South Korean warrior as its central subject and protagonist, the memorial portrays the country as a potent military force, one that is now capable of acting as an imperial power—an Asian Tiger with teeth, as it were. On the other hand, by paying tribute to the decisive role played by U.S. forces in thwarting the North Korean invasion and by celebrating the willingness of ROK forces to collaborate in subsequent American military endeavors, the memorial also intimates how South Koreans have at times acted as a kind of neocolonial auxiliary force—a *yanggongju*, or camp follower, in military drag, as it were.<sup>9</sup>

Another paradox concerns how the ideological messaging of the memorial in its original design did not seem to connect with a key target audience: the younger generation that represents Korea's future. As Morris-Suzuki walked through the exhibit hall, she noticed “the constant clamour of children in the background,” only realizing its source as she left: children who were playing in a “giant play space” on the memorial's ground floor, “which was currently featuring a Thomas the Tank Engine theme.” Most of these young visitors, she ventures in her essay, “went home with much clearer images in their heads of the Fat Controller and Salty the Dockside Diesel than they did of the Incheon Landing or the Panmunjeom armistice negotiations” (Morris-Suzuki 2014).

### **The War Memorial 2.0: Technologies of South Korean Nationalism in the Age of Neoliberalism**

The overall aesthetic of the new incarnation of the Korean War rooms at the War Memorial of Korea seems designed to better target a younger audience than that of the replaced exhibits. Whereas the paradigmatic representational medium in their original versions was the diorama and a color scheme comprised mainly of subtle earth tones, the new displays are extremely high-tech, drawing extensively on computer graphics and featuring immersive 3-D spectacles accompanied by cinematic musical soundtracks and state-of-the art sound effects. The lighting throughout is now quite dramatic—often bathing you in glaring light and then submerging you in darkness—and the color palette consists mainly of a monochromatic spectrum of grays interrupted by sheets of red. Whereas the old exhibits encouraged a

deliberative, even meditative, response (which would likely have been lost on younger visitors), the new ones aim at a more dynamic, gripping, and immersive experience—better suited to a citizenry accustomed to the blockbusters that are now a staple of the Korean movie industry, “PC bangs” (the popular internet cafés where S. Korean youth gather to play computer games), high-definition televisions, and Samsung smartphones and tablets. The computer-generated graphics familiar to anyone who has played (or even watched someone playing) an Xbox or PlayStation are found throughout the exhibit.

The anti-Communism that had been so muted in the initial version of the Korean War rooms is now much more pronounced. While not quite descending to the depths of the most virulent anti-Communism of the Cold War era, the renovated Korean War exhibits now advance a right-wing narrative: they draw a good deal of attention to North Korean atrocities, point to documentation of the communications between Kim Il Sung, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong that prefaced the invasion, and engage in a revanchist celebration of Syngman Rhee.

My focus here, however, is on another ideological message embedded in the pervasive use of digital and cinematic technologies in the rebooted memorial. Encoded into their extravagant display is what we might call a virtual nationalism that is tied to the general theme of technology that many of these dazzling exhibits address.

For example, military technology plays a decisive role in the memorial’s account of why South Korean forces were routed in the early days of the conflict. Instead of exploring how poor training or a lack of conviction about the cause may have played a role, the inability of South Korean forces to repel the invasion is explained as stemming from a pronounced technology gap: the ROK Army (ROKA) was simply outmatched by the Soviet T-34 tanks possessed by the North Korean People’s Army (NKPA). This disparity in military technology is dramatized in an especially bombastic way by a new display portraying the beginning of the war. The side hall you enter to watch the short documentary depicting the invasion seems like a conventional screening room, but in fact you are standing on a floor that trembles and shakes. The film’s central message—that the Soviet T-34 tanks possessed by the NKPA were decisive in the early defeat of South Korean forces—is enhanced by the rumbles and vibrations that seek to make you experience what it was like for ROK soldiers to feel the proximity of such devastating technology. As the film ends, lights come up behind the screen—actually a translucent scrim—

and you see that hidden in front of you the whole time was a Russian T-34 tank with a small contingent of North Korean soldiers arrayed around it.

Highlighting the nearly disastrous consequences of this technology gap in the early days of the war lays the foundation for an argument conveyed throughout the rest of the memorial: that such disparity is a thing of the past. The sheer mass of all the military equipment that is displayed in the main building and arrayed across the grounds amply reassures visitors of that fact. Moreover, the media used in the new version of the memorial also highlight another technology gap that has emerged in recent years—one that decidedly tilts toward South Korea’s advantage.

This technology gap concerns the pervasive use of cinematic and digital technologies throughout the renovated Korean War rooms. Take, for instance, the exhibit’s new conclusion to the narrative of the war. Originally the account of the war ended, as Morris-Suzuki observes, “on a note neither of triumph nor of reconciliation, but rather of a kind of uneasy sadness” (Morris-Suzuki 2014), by acknowledging Syngman Rhee’s refusal to sign the armistice agreement, thereby highlighting the conflict’s unended status. It also concluded with a tribute to UN forces that “seem[ed] to marginalize them from the main story” since it took the form of “a very static display of uniforms, flags, and statistics” (Morris-Suzuki 2014). Basically, the Korean War rooms ended in a hall of uniformed mannequins, each representing a UN member country involved in the conflict. The renovated memorial now brings the Korean War to a triumphant conclusion, trumpeting the UN’s role in displays that make heavy use of a Nam June Paik–esque aesthetic. In place of the mannequins are mementos and personal remembrances from UN soldiers that seek to tell a much more compelling and intimate story. But there is also now a striking mock cemetery of the UN’s fallen dead, with gravestones that feature video screens displaying images of their heroism.

The emotional high point of the UN exhibit comes at its end. Visitors leave the Korean War rooms by walking into a circular chamber. Swirling green and blue lights give a sense of being underwater, and the walls are adorned with the words *freedom* and *peace* in multiple languages. A central column of monitors streaming images from the final days of the conflict hangs from the ceiling (figure 8). A swelling orchestral score helps suffuse visitors with a triumphalist understanding that UN participation was integral to the arrival of peace and freedom

on the peninsula. Out of this baptismal chamber of remembrance and celebration (or Stygian chamber of forgetting), one returns to the daylight of present-day South Korea.

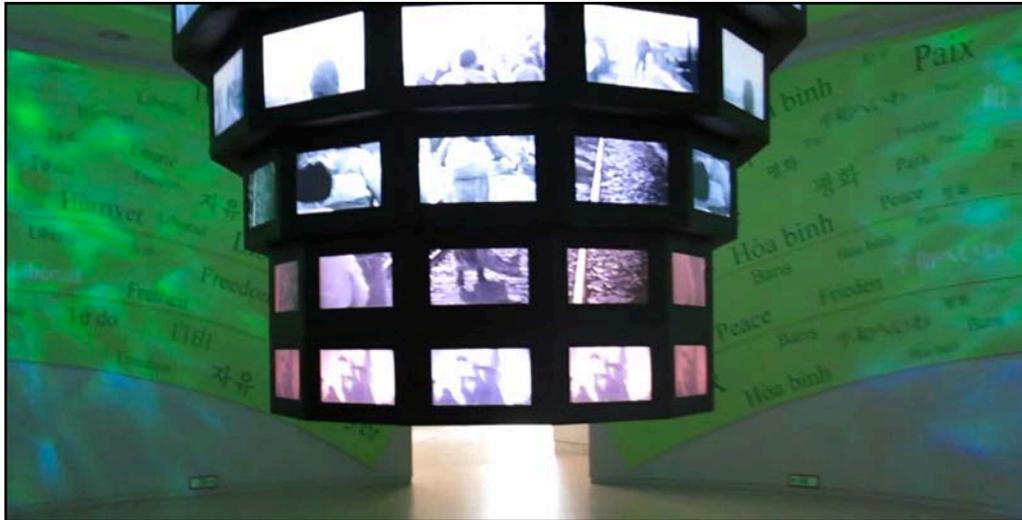


Figure 8. Concluding display of the Korean War rooms in the War Memorial of Korea, Seoul.

To understand the nationalist implications of the newfound prominence of the United Nations in the Korean War rooms, it is easy enough to point out that the current secretary-general of that organization is Ban Ki-moon. That the memorial's now-triumphalist narrative of the war concludes with a celebration of a global organization that is now headed by a South Korean national is likely no coincidence. And while Ban Ki-moon's name is not mentioned in the War Memorial, he is prominently featured in the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History, which opened in Seoul in 2012. That institution tells the story of how a phoenix-like South Korea, whose origins were forged in the crucible of Japanese colonialism, arose out of the ashes of the Korean War to become a global economic power. In so doing, it gives scant attention to the brutalities inflicted on the Korean civilian population by the military dictatorships that hastened the country's transformation into an Asian Tiger. Rather, it celebrates how South Korea, formerly a recipient of economic aid, has now become a donor nation capable of providing humanitarian and economic assistance to other countries. The events presented as symbolizing South Korea's ascendance include Seoul's hosting of the Olympics in 1988 and the World Cup in 2002; the growing popularity of South Korean popular culture globally (K-pop and

Psy's "Gangnam Style" are prominently featured); and, significantly, the rise of companies like Samsung and LG as dominant players in the global economy. Ban Ki-moon's election as secretary-general of the United Nations also assumes a significant place in this parade of contemporary events that testify to South Korea's rise as a world power.

Most importantly for my purposes, however, is how the National Museum attempts to make its strongest case for South Korea's ascendance through its extensive use of computer technology. While the museum is replete with the artifacts one might expect—flags, cars, shipping containers, clothing, movie posters, and records, to name a few examples—there is no single object that occupies pride of place. Rather, what most arrests your attention is how reliant the museum is on digital technologies of display: the software-hardware ratio, as it were, is tilted decidedly in favor of the former. The everyday feats of technological ingenuity that in most museums are marshaled toward the contemplation of objects venerated for their authenticity seem in this museum to have an autotelic, self-sacralizing, and self-fetishizing quality.

This self-referential technological fetishism is also apparent in the new Korean War exhibits in the War Memorial; indeed, the two sites share a good amount of ideological and technological DNA. These commonalities are apparent in the new version of the display that commemorates a moment in late 1950 when the dream of national reunification came close to being fulfilled, as South Korean soldiers reached the southern bank of the Yalu River (K. Amnokgang), which marks the border with China. In the original version of this display, this event was portrayed by a simple diorama (figure 9). One looked through a glass wall at four soldiers standing on the south bank of the Yalu, with mountains painted in the background. One of the soldiers was shown kneeling and filling his canteen. The accompanying placard explained: "Soldiers from the ROK 6th Infantry Division advanced to the Manchurian Border through *Chosan* on 26 October 1950, topped-off their canteens with water on the Yalu River." The soldier dipping his canteen into the Yalu's symbolically laden waters did not, however, necessarily serve as the emotional fulcrum of this scene; your eye could just as easily have been drawn to the soldier next to him, standing with his back to the viewer, his own gaze directed toward mountains across the river, his thoughts and emotions obscured along with his face. If you paused long enough to consider this tableau, you could wonder what these men must have felt like at this moment, when their country seemed on the brink of reunification.

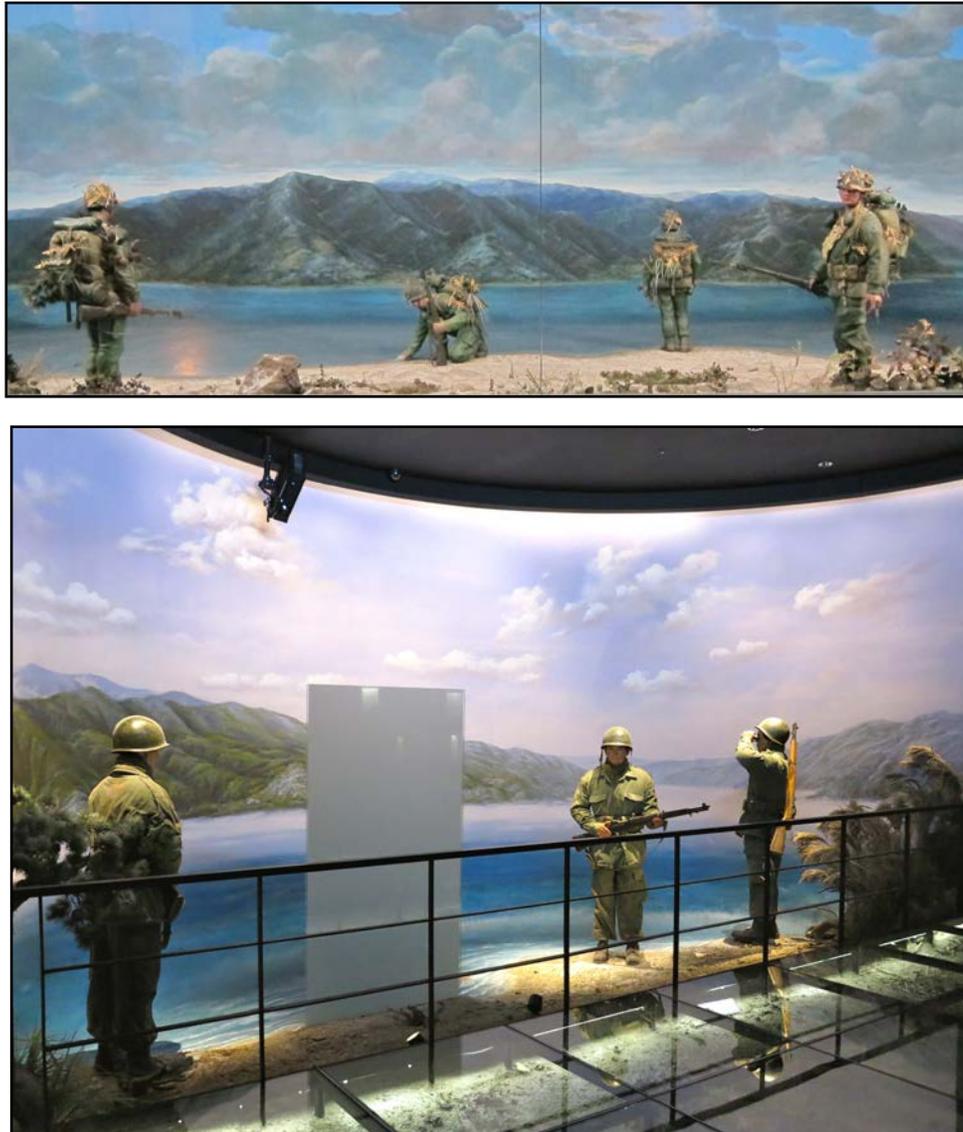


Figure 9 (above). Yalu River diorama in the War Memorial of Korea, Seoul, 2011.  
 Figure 10 (below). Yalu River display in the War Memorial of Korea, Seoul, 2013.

Elements of this display remain in the new version, but the modifications all seem aimed at producing a more immersive and spectacular experience (figure 10). The glass has been replaced by the kind of iron fence often found at scenic vistas, and the painted backdrop now soon rivets your attention as the lighting suddenly dims is the actor who appears on the small rectangular screen in front of you—a screen whose translucence gives this holographic image a simultaneous immediacy and ghostliness—as he reenacts this quiet but significant moment. As

this virtual actor exits to your left, the image of an actual veteran enters from the right to recount his memories of that day.

This elderly figure introduces himself as “the Company Commander for the 6th Division 7th Regiment 1st Battalion.” He describes how the men in his unit were ordered “to fill our canteens with the Amnokgang water.” He recalls: “I wrote in my notebook at that time about how a South Korean–born person like me had come all the way to Amnokgang and had the opportunity to look at Manchuria. I really felt that Korea was going to unify and that I could die a happy man.” Via this remarkable technology, visitors have the experience of communing with a sort of living ghost, and the uncanny intimacy that emerges between them is imbued with a sense of poignancy: the obviousness of this man’s advancing age makes evident the tenuousness of his dream of facing death with the happy knowledge that his country has been reunified.

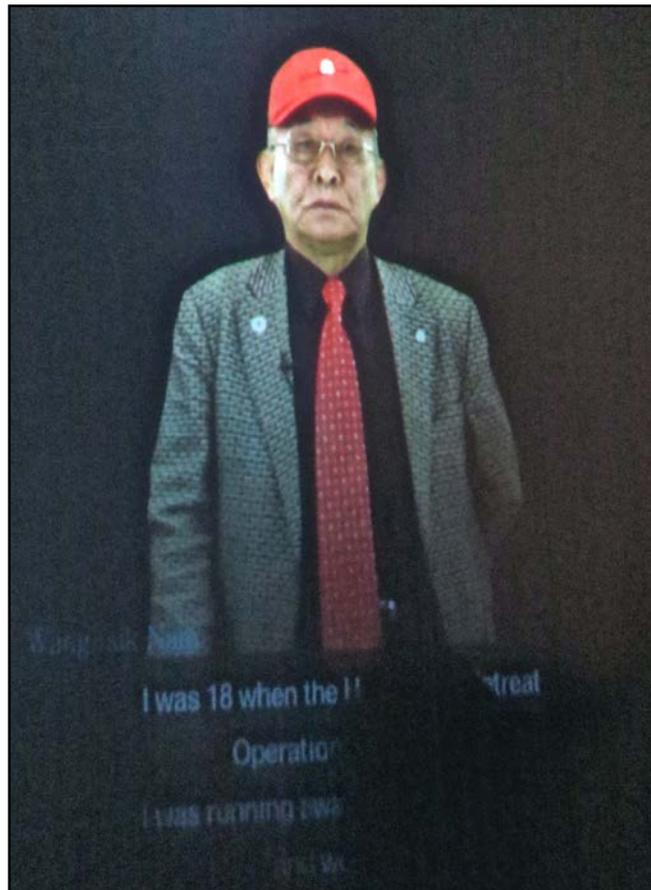


Figure 11. Virtual image of a Korean War veteran recalling the experience of reaching the Yalu River in the War Memorial of Korea, Seoul.

The incorporation of this holographic witness's testimony suggests an attempt at generating in visitors what Alison Landsberg has termed a "prosthetic memory" of a remarkable experience from the 6/25 War, or what Marianne Hirsch has termed a "postmemory" of it—the dissemination in those who did not experience a singular historical event of the feeling of having witnessed it, of harboring something that has the intimacy of a personal memory. But my experience of this particular display was that its novel use of technology drew the most attention, moreso than its emotional content. As visitors stand before the ghostly projection of the elderly man giving his testimony, what strikes them most is the novelty of the medium, which itself seems to serve as a "screen memory," in the sense that Marita Sturken has described it: both hiding and concealing "highly emotional material. . . while offering itself as a substitute" (1991, 118).

The rebooted diorama is accompanied by another addition that attests even more dramatically to how technology can function as a screen memory in the War Memorial's rendering of the arrival of ROKA soldiers at Yalu River. On my last visit, in the fall of 2013, the single display that elicited the most visceral responses—*oohs*, *aaahs*, and even gasps—in the entire memorial was on the wall directly to the right of the Yalu River tableau. The visitor looks through a small glass panel into a simple white box containing a canteen that seemingly still contains waters from the Yalu. While this object is suffused with the aura of the real—a mute witness to a historical moment when the nation's reunification seemed a thing you could literally touch or taste—it is, in fact, overshadowed by the digital technologies that are ostensibly meant to serve simply as its elaborate frame. The glass panel is actually a transparent screen that displays an animated PowerPoint presentation that is dazzlingly executed. The first moving images of the presentation, which runs in an infinite loop, are of the Korean flag, undulating as if caught by a breeze. Instead of the familiar circle at its center, however, is a photograph of the canteen, which appears to float and ripple in front of the actual canteen. Subsequent animated slides display the actor dipping his canteen; the movements of the South Korean military forces in the area; and a simple infographic explaining that this very canteen, which apparently still contains waters from the Yalu River, had been sent by ROK soldiers to President Syngman Rhee "as a Symbol of reunification." While it is quite possible that this kind of display will soon become ubiquitous, or even banal, in 2013 this simple set of images moving across a transparent

screen seemed like a revelation capable of provoking an audible sense of shock and awe in nearly every visitor I saw walk up to it.

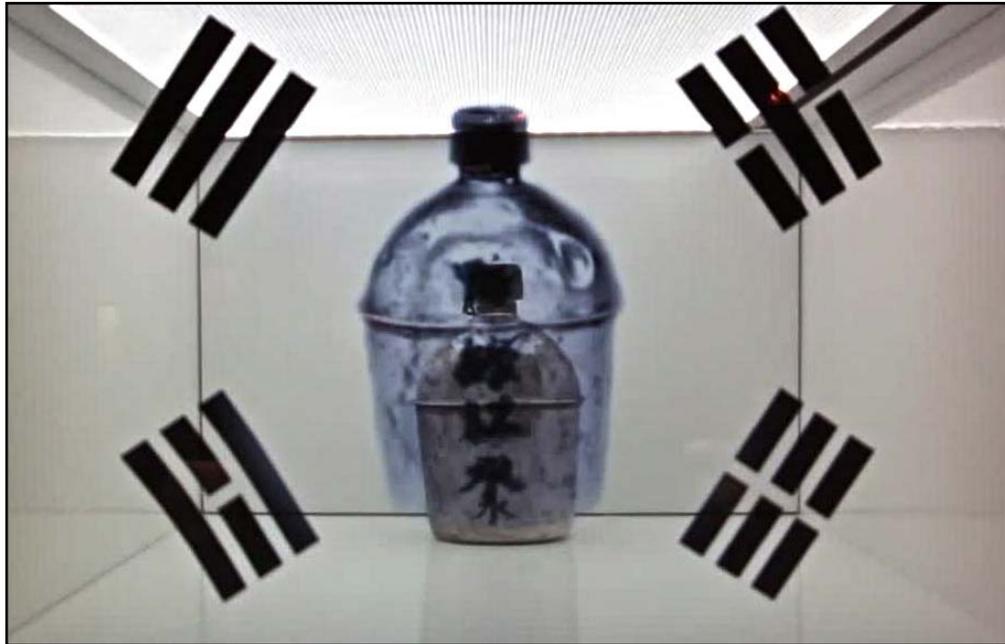


Figure 12. Canteen containing water from the Yalu River in the War Memorial of Korea, Seoul.

If such technologies of display function as screen memories, seeming to draw attention away from the affectively laden content they seek to highlight, they also nonetheless convey a powerful nationalist message. Overall, the nationalism that the memorial now seeks to inculcate in its visitors is conveyed through a pastiche of earlier forms. This resampling, however, is enabled by digital technologies that are in and of themselves infused with nationalist meanings. It is impossible not to think of the ascendance of corporations like Samsung and LG—companies that have surpassed Sony and Microsoft and are now capable of going toe-to-toe with Apple—when one walks through the new version of the War Memorial of Korea. The medium is indeed the message in the new War Memorial. While its extensive and extravagant use of digital technology quite effectively conveys what we might term a virtual nationalism, it is a nationalism that is nonetheless quite potent. This is exemplified in the concluding images of the canteen display, in which the Korean flag ripples and undulates like the Amnokgang itself before solidifying and coming to assume, paradoxically, a kind of holographic density.

## Conclusion

I would venture that many South Koreans who have visited both *The Price of Freedom* and the newly renovated War Memorial of Korea might be overtaken by a sense of nationalist pride. From a technological standpoint, and probably from an ideological one as well, the War Memorial's superiority over *The Price of Freedom* is self-evident. Some of the features of *The Price of Freedom* that have made it so popular with visitors are fairly direct manifestations of a much wider neoliberal erosion of the boundaries between the corporate world and the state that has taken place over the past few decades—what Scott Boehm has termed “the convergence of neoliberal economic policies with the cultural practice of the radical Disneyfication of public space” (2006, 1151). But the infusion of private money that is responsible for the more spectacular display elements of the Smithsonian exhibit (like the Huey helicopter) are manifestations of a decidedly old-school technology of nationalism. In comparison with the newer media technologies that are deployed in tour de force fashion in its South Korean counterpart, the best that the NMAH curators were able to come up with is the “Nam June Paik-esque [*sic*] stack of televisions situated in front of a couch.” The aesthetic of the new War Memorial in Seoul, by contrast, seems like Nam June Paik on steroids, LSD, and ecstasy—funded by Samsung.<sup>10</sup>

The masterful orchestration of the media technologies that are now the bread and butter of companies like Samsung and LG are the materialization of a resurgent South Korean nationalism that is ostensibly capable of surfing the waves of crisis that constitute the rhythm of economic life under neoliberalism.<sup>11</sup> What the extravagant display of nationalist technologies in the War Memorial of Korea attempts to mask, but can't quite, is the persistence of a subordinate relationship to the United States. It is worth returning once again to the question posed by Morris-Suzuki: “How . . . did the nationalist symbolism of the Korean dagger fit with [the] symbolism of the giant US B-52 bomber” (Morris-Suzuki 2014)? With regard to museum displays, military budgets, and national economies, size does matter. The fact that the largest object in the War Memorial is, and is likely to remain, the B-52 bomber implicitly invites visitors to ponder the fact that, however meteoric South Korea's rise as an economic or military power has been, its position in the world system—first under Cold War dispensation and now under neoliberalism—will always, in the end, be dwarfed by that of the nation that enabled its

emergence and on which it still depends—that it remains intimately connected to the United States not simply as an economic rival and military ally but also as a junior partner, if not a kind of neo-colony.

In this article, I have argued that these exhibits are linked by the ways that the technologies of display on which they rely carry a potent ideological message in and of themselves. Insofar as *The Price of Freedom* and the War Memorial of Korea attempt to place visitors in an affectively and sensuously intense relationship to the past, they are sites of prosthetic memory. However, while Landsberg (2004) suggests that the reliance of this particular form of public memory on the new forms of media that emerge out of mass culture makes them politically neutral, I believe that these exhibits demonstrate that something like commodity fetishism can remain in operation, and even assume an intensified form, in exhibits where the most visceral reactions are engendered not by the emotional content of the memories these sites disseminate but by the technologies of display themselves. At bottom, what the Huey helicopter and the dazzling use of digital media both celebrate is the economic and technological power of a particular nation and the economic players who exemplify it and the ethos of neoliberalism that putatively enabled their ascendance.

While this analysis has emphasized how these sites work as rather cunning ideological state apparatuses, I would like to conclude by simply pointing out that all such engines of interpellation can fail to reach their target. Sometimes that failure is the result of mechanical breakdown or the digital equivalent: the last time I visited the War Memorial of Korea, in the fall of 2014 after I had written the initial draft of this article, the canteen display I discuss above was actually out of order. The potential failure of such sites to successfully impart their messages is also apparent in the indifference and fatigue that is often visible on the faces of museum-goers everywhere. It is discernible as well in those who would seem to be the core audience of any such site of nationalist pedagogy, the children wandering through these exhibits, who in their boredom, distraction, or playfulness seem something other than the pliant vessels of a nationalist futurity.

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## Notes

- 1 This roundtable, organized by Kristin Hass, inaugurated an ongoing attempt among its participants to develop pedagogical projects that might enable visitors to gain a more critical perspective on the rendering of military history in this exhibit.
- 2 For an illuminating account of how such memorializations of 9/11 function as projects of nationalist pedagogy, see Sturken (2004).
- 3 Burke (2006) offers especially illuminating details about Behring's philanthropic efforts and the neoliberal privatization of national museum and memorial sites that they reveal. She points out, among other things, that the National Museum of National History, which also bears Behring's name, includes trophy animals that the benefactor himself shot, including a bighorn sheep that, under ordinary circumstances, is not allowed into the United States since it is on the government's endangered species list.
- 4 See chapter one of Cumings (2010) for a trenchant critique of the strategy of rollback that was reflected in the American decision to push beyond the 38th parallel rather than to restore the original border between the two Koreas.
- 5 See Cho (2008) for a discussion of these two aspects of the U.S. role in the Korean War.
- 6 For a thorough account of how this prodigious economic capability is a core feature of what she terms the "Asiatic racial form," see Lye (2005).
- 7 For an excellent account of Nam's career and his eventual canonization as a South Korean nationalist icon, see Lee (2011).
- 8 My thinking was also shaped by illuminating conversations with Suzy Kim, Henry Em, and Keun-Sik Jung, who accompanied me on some of my visits to the War Memorial.
- 9 As Grace M. Cho explains, "*Yanggongju*, literally meaning 'Western princess,' broadly refers to a Korean woman who has sexual relations with Americans; it is most often used pejoratively to refer to a woman who is a prostitute for the U.S. military" (2008, 3).
- 10 In fact, as Esther Kim Lee points out, Nam June Paik began using technology provided free of charge by Samsung (abandoning Sony in the process) as he came to be embraced by the South Korean government as a nationalist icon in the 1980s (see Lee 2011, 153).
- 11 For a brilliant account of how South Korean nationalism and its relation to neoliberalism is revealed through the software algorithms that are integral both to computer-generated imagery (CGI) and the derivatives that played a crucial role in the International Monetary Fund crisis, see Jeon (2014).

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