

CROSS-CURRENTS



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Silenced in Memoriam: Consuming Memory at the Nogŭnri Peace Park

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Abstract

Tensions abound at the Nogŭnri Peace Park. It is a public memorial, but it originates from one man's testimonial account. It purports to commemorate and restore honor to the victims of the Nogŭnri Massacre, yet it marginalizes those victims in favor of a "truth" whose validation seemingly rests on the perpetrators. It subverts the hegemonic knowledge of American rescue and friendship, even as it follows a common Korean War-as-6/25 narrative absolving South Korean and American responsibility during the Korean War. Finally, it champions a globalized value of peace that, in turn, risks enabling the consumption of Nogŭnri as commodified culture. By looking at the Nogŭnri Peace Park and the narratives, images, and artifacts exhibited there, this article explores the tensions that complicate constructions of history, community, and nation at the site of memorialization. It examines how the Nogŭnri Massacre is recollected and represented alongside the transitional shift from domestic authoritarianism to global neoliberalism in today's South Korea. Further, it investigates the limits of the state critique that the Nogŭnri Peace Park performs.

Keywords: commemoration, globalization, Korean War, memorial, neoliberalism, Nogŭnri Massacre, Nogŭnri Peace Park, peace, privatization, state violence, war politics

Amid the verdure of Yŏngdong County's lush mountains, the Nogŭnri Peace Park stands proudly, yet forlornly, with its gold and steel commemorative monument and rusty red memorial hall blazing under the sun.¹ Nary a visitor in sight, the sprawling park looks and feels utterly desolate.² To the left of the monument stand the concrete twin tunnels riddled with bullet holes and peppered by inscrutable markings left from the 2001 South Korea–U.S. joint fact-finding investigations (figure 1). A large banner flutters angrily against the highland winds, with the words "This is the site of the Nogŭnri Incident" imprinted on it in imposing red and black letters.³ To the right, an expanse of freshly mown lawn stretches out before meeting the rolling hills so distinct to Yŏngdong in North Ch'ungch'ŏng Province. Here, weapons of war left behind by the U.S. forces—including a jeep, tank, truck, and the very F-86F fighter plane used to strafe

fleeing civilians by the twin tunnels that fateful day in 1950—are neatly displayed. The initial sense of isolation, emptiness, and unease one feels when encountering the park befits a memorial dedicated to an event that still remains largely marginalized in Korean history.



Figure 1. The twin tunnels at Nogŭnri, Yŏngdong County, North Ch’ungch’ŏng Province.
Source: All photographs in this article were taken by the author in 2014.

The Nogŭnri Massacre occurred over four days (July 26–29, 1950) at the outset of the Korean War. On July 25, soldiers of the U.S. Seventh Cavalry arrived at the villages of Imkyeri and Chugokri and forced the villagers to evacuate their homes and flee south. The next day, as the refugees reached Nogŭnri, the soldiers drove them onto the railway tracks and began a violent body search. After a futile search for possible weapons, the soldiers called in to their superiors via radio, then quickly disappeared. Shortly after, fighter planes arrived and began firing at the refugee column. Those who survived the initial strafing scrambled down to hide in the twin tunnels beneath the railway tracks. They would remain there, under rifle and machine gun fire, for the next three days. Approximately one hundred died in the air assault and an additional three hundred perished in the twin tunnels (Hanley 2010, 590).

In the aftermath of the Korean War, what occurred at Nogŭnri that sweltering July in 1950 was buried deep in the recesses of memory. With the fall of Syngman Rhee in April 1960, a short-lived spring of political freedom blossomed in South Korea. For the first time, people were calling for an investigation into atrocities committed during the war. It was at this time that

thirty-seven-year-old Chung Eun-yong, whose life had been torn asunder by the attack at Nogŭnri, found out that the U.S. government was accepting claims for compensation related to American actions during the Korean War. Chung sent in a letter of petition, signed by fellow survivors, asking for an apology and compensation for what he dared to call a “war crime” (Chung Koo-do 2014). However, the U.S. Forces Compensation Office denied the petition on the grounds of statute of limitations, and further remonstrance eventually fell on deaf ears.

Following Park Chung-Hee’s coup d’état in 1961, the name Nogŭnri again became unspeakable—even villagers dared not utter the word.⁴ Throughout the repressive regimes and democratic upheavals of contemporary South Korea, Chung bided his time, meeting with historians, shuffling through libraries, and collating archival documents to support his case. Finally, in 1994, more than forty years after the event, Chung, with the help of his son, Koo-do, opened up publicly about Nogŭnri. After discovering Chung’s testimonial, the Associated Press (AP) broke the horrifying story of the massacre on September 29, 1999. Within hours of the AP report’s release, U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen directed the army to conduct an investigation “to find the truth no matter where it leads” (Hanley 2010, 592). Distrust between the American and South Korean teams deflated the once-hopeful joint investigation, and the Nogŭnri Survivors’ Committee “denounced the U.S. investigation as a ‘whitewash’ of U.S. command responsibility” (Hanley 2010, 590).

After several more years of demonstrations, petitions, and rallies by the survivors, the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea passed the Special Act on the Review and Restoration of Honor for Nogŭnri Victims in 2004. The Nogŭnri Special Act decreed that a government committee (with the prime minister as committee chair) be established to ascertain the identities of the dead and wounded, to provide medical subsidies for the survivors, and to oversee the building of a commemorative monument and memorial park at the massacre site (Committee for Nogŭnri Victims 2009, 364–366). Despite initial disputes over budget issues, construction of the twenty-nine-acre Nogŭnri Peace Park began in June 2008, with US\$17 million in government funds and with Chung Koo-do as its director. The park opened to the public in October 2011.

Built at the site of the 1950 destruction, the Nogŭnri Peace Park comprises an imposing commemorative monument, a stylish memorial hall (named the Peace Memorial), an expansive outdoor sculpture park, a capacious education complex, and a communal burial ground.

Attracting upward of twenty thousand visitors a year, mostly students, both the national government and the local Yöngdong County office endorse the Peace Park. According to the signage at the memorial, the Nogŭnri Institute for International Peace, established in 2001 to “focus on academic research [that would] expand the values of Nogŭnri into a case of peace and human rights,” sponsors the International Peace Conference, the Nogŭnri Peace Prize, a human rights essay contest, and a summer peace camp for university students—“to raise human rights and peace leaders”—at the Peace Park.

Constructed with the purpose of “promoting national unity [by] restoring honor to the victims and their bereaved families” and “teaching future generations the importance of human rights and peace,” the Nogŭnri Peace Park reinforces two central narratives: that the Nogŭnri Massacre was a true incident, and that Nogŭnri is a symbol of peace and human rights (Committee for Nogŭnri Victims 2009, 311–312). The long struggle for recognition, apology, and compensation validates the park’s need to valorize truth. In the face of outright denial by the United States, the veracity of the event needs to be asserted so that what happened at Nogŭnri is not forgotten again. Yet the demand for truth raises the fundamental question of who actually has the authority to define truth. Since the killings were committed by American soldiers alone, the admission of truth seems to rest solely on the United States. This produces the ironic and troublesome effect of positioning the United States as the authority of truth and as the benefactor of apologies and restitution.

The dilemma between needing to assert truth and authorizing the United States to affirm that truth is further complicated by the vexing privatization of commemorative space at the Nogŭnri Peace Park. Framed as a commemoration of Chung Eun-yong and Chung Koo-do’s personal quests, this ostensibly commemorative and public space erases other victims and survivors of the massacre. The Chungs’ seeming monopoly over Nogŭnri, their freedom from an ethical responsibility to alterity, runs in line with the hegemonic ideology of neoliberal globalization in South Korea today. In the desire to “move beyond Nogŭnri and into the world,” there occurs an abrupt jump from remembering the event to marketing and capitalizing on Nogŭnri as a global site for peace and human rights (Yi Sang-ki 2012).

In problematizing the concession of authority to the United States and the neoliberalization of Nogŭnri, this article questions not only who “owns” the Nogŭnri Peace Park but how this public mnemonic site produces, maintains, mitigates, and contradicts its own

epistemic project. I examine the Nogŭnri Peace Park as a site at which different knowledges of the Korean War simultaneously clash and collude. I also explore how the structural conditions of domestic state authoritarianism and international neoliberalism shape the project.

The Korean War as 6/25: The Discourse of National Security

Despite its sleek and modernist exterior, the Peace Memorial is modestly sized and exhibited. One's experience of the memorial begins with a dramatic descent downward. The tilt is gradual, but the narrow concrete passageway—similar in color and texture to the twin tunnels—brings about a momentary displacement (figure 2). For a moment, engulfed by the concrete walls, one loses sight of the wider world: the sculptures, edifices, water, green lawns, trees, and mountains all disappear. Visitors are forced to look about the walls where patina-coated plaques depict, in bas-relief, events in the history of Nogŭnri: a U.S. soldier aims his gun at civilians; masses huddle in the twin tunnels; U.S. Army Secretary Louis Caldera visits the site of the massacre; U.S. and South Korean representatives sit for talks.



Figure 2. The entrance to the Nogŭnri Peace Memorial.

Inside the Peace Memorial, the exhibit begins with the Korean War. Large placards, chronologically ordered from “Independence in 1945” to “Invasion by North Korea on June 25, 1950” to “Armistice Negotiations in 1953,” reproduce the all-too-familiar Korean War-as-6/25 narrative of American rescue, North Korean invasion, and South Korean perseverance.⁵ A glass-encased section titled “6/25: Korean People’s Tragedy” further elaborates the narrative with old, blurry black-and-white photographs. Images begin with “Superior North Korean Military Invading South” and “Occupying Seoul in Their Soviet T-34 Tanks”; move through the “Collapse of the Kūm River Line” (Taejōn), “MacArthur’s Successful Inch’ōn Landing,” and “North Koreans Welcoming U.S. Soldiers in P’yōngyang”; and end with “Communist Chinese Invasion” and “Armistice Negotiations.”

Sociologist Dong-Choon Kim problematizes how the 6/25 narrative ignores the complexities of the Korean War by highlighting only its outbreak. It serves as a reminder of “who was responsible for starting the war and which forces and ideological groups made them suffer such a national tragedy” (2009, 3–4). Laying blame on the North Korean Communists for invading a peaceful South Korea, the 6/25 narrative effectively forecloses any counter-knowledge of the Korean War. International relations scholar Jae-Jung Suh, too, criticizes how 6/25 pins the origin of the war at June 25, 1950, and thereby erases all “colonial origins of the war” (2010, 505). That is, 6/25 situates the Korean War as an isolated event and not as a “second-order effect produced by Western imperialism” in which the United States came to exercise sovereign power over South Korea by usurping Japan’s sovereign power (505–506). Hence, 6/25 refracts the Korean War through a Manichean prism of good versus evil in which the Americans are “welcome” friends, Communist North Koreans are evil “invaders,” and South Koreans are innocent victims.

Under the authoritarian regimes of Syngman Rhee, Park Chung-Hee, and Chun Doo-hwan, wartime suffering was exploited to produce and maintain this pro-American and anti-North Korean world view under the banner of 6/25. Stories of aid from the United States and recurring provocations by North Korea further solidified and strengthened this ideological construction. Buttressed as the state narrative of the Korean War, 6/25 was how the war was studied, remembered, taught, and commemorated (Kim 2009, 4). Under prohibitive national security laws, any deviation from the 6/25 narrative was deemed unpatriotic—and, more importantly, punishable. Why, then, does the Nogūnri Peace Memorial reproduce this “myth”

produced and perpetuated by the state to police and enforce “anticommunist patriotism” (Suh 2010, 504)? What does this reveal about the Nogŭnri Massacre, Nogŭnri Peace Park, and South Korea?

In its uncritical rendition of the state-sanctioned 6/25 narrative, the memorial maintains curious silence concerning American and South Korean massacres and atrocities committed during the Korean War—including at Nogŭnri. It is not until the next section of the exhibit, unequivocally titled “Innocence: Innocent Villagers Unaware of War,” that Nogŭnri is first mentioned. Here, a video plays on an eternal loop. Grainy black-and-white footage of American soldiers running chaotically dissolve, intermittently, into a bright, colorful papier-mâché diorama of idyllic rural life: two elderly men play *paduk* (go) perched on the wooden *maru* (floor), little children gather in cheeky mischief, and buxom women with their head-bundles walk to the fields. The caption reads: “Villagers in Yŏngdong were totally unaware of the war situation. Despite the sound of occasional gunshots heard, they remained busy with weeding the field, hoping for a good harvest.”

In front of this scene stands an unassuming touch-screen kiosk that displays, on command, short, stale images of the Korean War and several brief testimonies. Each testimony, clearly edited for time, begins and ends with an impassioned account of the “unexpected brutal shootings by Americans.” Charged with emotion, the survivors speak with grimaces and in high-pitched, urgent tones. Astonishingly, this kiosk (one of four interactive screens) is the only space within the memorial dedicated to survivor testimony. Yet the screen remains dark until visitors engage with it, and, as modern technology is apt to do, was experiencing technical difficulties and blacked out during my visit.

Far from plumbing the complexities of how an event like Nogŭnri could have occurred, the Peace Memorial plays up the trope of simple, innocent country folk blissfully unconcerned with politics, ideology, or warfare. By juxtaposing the bleak war footage against the pastoral diorama, the memorial screens the Nogŭnri Massacre through a victim/perpetrator binary whereby the villagers (in this case, the South Koreans) are always already victimized. In this way, the memorial tries to safely enfold the Nogŭnri Massacre into the national tragedy of 6/25. In the rush to victimize Nogŭnri, however, the memorial ends up contradicting its own historical position. For how can an event like Nogŭnri occur within the pro-American/anti-North Korean 6/25 framework?

Moreover, who is the perpetrator here? Without the survivors' testimonies (discreetly contained and often silenced within the touch-screen monitor), there appears to be no plainspoken incrimination of the United States as perpetrator. The memorial simply urges us to a feeling of indignation—at the shattering of innocence—about a national tragedy that began on June 25. Failing to question the why and how of the massacre, the memorial always begins after the event. Focusing solely on Nogŭnri, all the while reiterating the innocence and victimization of South Koreans as a whole, the Peace Memorial conveniently elides South Korea's own perpetration of wartime atrocities. In this sense, the memorial unwittingly colludes with the very state narrative that silenced any talk of Nogŭnri for so long and erases its own presence as a counter-narrative.

In establishing the victims of the Nogŭnri Massacre as simply “victims,” the Peace Memorial makes two glaring historical omissions. First, the fall of Taejŏn in the early weeks of the war and the subsequent retreat of U.S. troops and refugees are key to better understanding the Nogŭnri Massacre. It was in Taejŏn that the U.S. Army suffered its biggest and most humiliating defeat, by North Korean soldiers dressed as refugees (Cumings 2010, 167–168). Rumors soon spread of “Red infiltrators” mixed among the hordes of white pajama-clad refugees fleeing alongside the soldiers. Terrified by guerrilla warfare and fueled by intense, racialized hatred toward the Koreans, the U.S. Army thus sanctioned the “strafing of refugee columns moving down roads toward U.S. units” as they, too, fled southward—toward Nogŭnri (Hanley, Choe, and Mendoza 2001, 74–76).

The second blatant omission—in the Peace Memorial exhibit, the AP reporters' *Bridge at No Gun Ri*, the Pentagon's investigation report, South Korea's report, as well as many other cultural representations of Nogŭnri—is any discussion of Yŏngdong's leftist past. As Bruce Cumings points out, “a strong, indigenous left-wing” emerged in the mountainous region of Yŏngdong just after liberation in 1945 (2001, 513). Long before the Korean War officially began on June 25, 1950, leftist insurrections and guerrilla warfare surfaced in response to the USAMGIK's (United States American Military Government in Korea) hardline anti-Communist policies. In fact, Americans already considered Yŏngdong a “Red County” as early as 1948 (2001, 513–519).⁶ From the American side, the fear of potential guerrillas hiding in the hills of Yŏngdong was not unwarranted.

As if making this history known would somehow mitigate or justify the massacre, almost all representations of the Nogŭnri Massacre take pains to highlight the apolitical nature of Nogŭnri and the innocence of its villagers—effectively reasserting them as *yangmin*.⁷ The term *yangmin* literally means “innocent person” and is a highly politicized term. In his work with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Korea, Dong-Choon Kim (2010) advises bereaved families to use the term *min’gannin* (civilian) over the problematic *yangmin*. The uncritical use of *yangmin* perpetuates the arbitrary and violent classification of Koreans under the binary logic of the Cold War framework to bifurcate people into “innocent citizens” versus the “others”—subversives, guerrillas, and Communists—considered un-innocent and, therefore, dispensable.

Here, then, is a possible explanation for why the Peace Memorial reproduces the repressive 6/25 myth. Considering that survivors and bereaved families of Korean War civilian atrocities were “branded as communists” and systematically policed by the South Korean state, the conformity seems a learned and almost natural response to escape further persecution (Kim 2010). We would do well to remember that, although the Nogŭnri Special Act was passed under the liberal Roh Moo-hyun administration, the memorial itself was built and organized during the conservative, anti-North Korean, pro-American Lee Myung-bak administration. Thus, a deeply internalized fear and suspicion of the state can explain the troubling irony of how a memorial dedicated to “reinterpreting the historical meaning of Nogŭnri” ends up replicating the very hegemonic discourse it purports to dismantle (Committee for Nogŭnri Victims 2009, 311). This contradiction evinces the limitations of the Nogŭnri Peace Memorial—as a state-funded public memorial—to properly “reinterpret” historical meaning when the politics of 6/25 remains very much alive.

As a state-funded public memorial, then, the Peace Memorial faces a dilemma: how to inculcate the United States even as it abides by the “official” narrative of the Korean War in which the United States is always a friend and savior. The Korean War is at war with itself, as the memorial simultaneously praises and condemns the United States. It exhibits images of valiant, self-sacrificing American soldiers during the Korean War only to display another soldier exercising violence a few feet away. The exhibit’s captions also rebuke U.S. responses toward Nogŭnri but “wish for the U.S. to be our undeterred friend in the future,” with the hope that “the U.S. will work toward healing our pain and act in genuine good conscience to tell the truth.”

Evident in the Peace Memorial is a valorization of truth—and, subsequently, a privileging of the United States as the agent to validate that truth as truth. After all, it was the American AP news agency that placed Nogŭnri “on the map”—igniting international and national attention the likes of which have not been granted to any Korean War–related event either before or after Nogŭnri. As previously mentioned, after several years of poring over declassified U.S. military documents, interviewing Korean War veterans and Nogŭnri survivors, and combatting internal delays, the Associated Press voiced a silenced past back into the present. The alarming and horrifying story of “wholesale slaughter” at Nogŭnri made headlines worldwide and forced the U.S. Army to open an investigation into the event (Choe, Hanley, and Mendoza 1999).⁸

After fifteen arduous months, U.S. Defense Secretary Cohen announced that, although American troops had killed civilians, specific casualty figures and the existence of orders from the United States could not be definitively confirmed: “U.S. Commanders did not issue oral or written orders to fire on refugees in the vicinity of Nogŭnri” (Hanley 2010, 593).⁹ By affirming participation but gainsaying direct involvement, the investigation turned the massacre at Nogŭnri into an incredible, ghostly event in which “people died, but no one killed” (Yi Hyŏn-su 2013, 68). Confirming the army’s account, then president Clinton issued a carefully worded statement of “regret” in lieu of an official apology acknowledging wrongdoing, a declaration quoted on the memorial’s signage:

I deeply regret that Korean civilians lost their lives at Nogŭnri in late July 1950. Although we have been unable to determine precisely the events that occurred, the U.S. and South Korean governments have concluded that an unconfirmed number of innocent Korean refugees were killed or injured there. . . . As we honor the civilians who fell victim to this conflict, let us not forget that pain is not the only legacy of the Korean War. American and Korean veterans fought for the cause of freedom and they prevailed. The vibrancy of democracy in Korea, the strong alliance between our two countries, is a testament to the sacrifices made by both of our nations 50 years ago.

The joint investigation was thus officially closed and effectively buried under liberal democratic notions of “freedom” and “sacrifice.” Clinton’s statement not only repeats the “triumphalist reading of U.S. military campaigns as a perennial struggle for freedom from tyranny,” but, in doing so, recalls the 6/25 narrative in which the United States is a friend who helped South

Korea rise phoenix-like from the ashes of the Korean War (Boehm 2006, 1148). In this way, the victims are urged to seek solace for their “pain” and “sacrifices” in their nation’s prosperity.

The U.S. government also refused to offer restitution to the victims; instead, it offered a modest scholarship fund in addition to US\$1 million for the erection of a Korean War memorial at Nogŭnri (Chung Koo-do 2014). The survivors rejected the funds once they discovered that the memorial would be dedicated to *all* American-inflicted civilian casualties from the Korean War. Deeming these measures insincere and perfunctory, they rejected the “gesture” (Kim 2010). To this day, Chung Koo-do, chairman of the Nogŭnri Survivors’ Committee, expresses resentment toward the United States for “lacking the will to investigate the truth” and “minimizing the truth.” Yet he also claims to find the “gesture” meaningful and alludes to it as “small David’s win over giant Goliath” (Chung Koo-do 2014).

In the face of such denial, there is a legitimate urgency for the Peace Memorial to focus on the veracity of the Nogŭnri Massacre. Many artifacts, therefore, exist to prove American military action in Nogŭnri. These include a page from the North Korean newspaper *Chosŏn Inminbo* (which first reported the incident in August 1950), the front page of the *New York Times* (carrying the AP story), a photograph of the Pulitzer Prize–winning team of AP reporters, an operational map from July 1950, a photograph of U.S. army secretary Louis Caldera’s visit to Nogŭnri, the U.S. and Republic of Korea (ROK) Investigation Reports, a copy of President Clinton’s Statement of Regret, the Nogŭnri Victims Report, three different Korean history textbooks (opened to the pages on the Nogŭnri Massacre), and military facsimiles showing what the signage identifies as “direct orders by U.S. Forces.”

Among the various artifacts, there is a definite privileging of American sources—especially of the Pulitzer Prize–winning AP report. It is a little-known fact that, in 1994, *The Hankyŏre*, a progressive Korean newspaper, first broke the silence on Nogŭnri by reporting on survivor testimonies; only two months later, *Mal*, a now-defunct liberal news magazine, published an in-depth investigative report on the Nogŭnri Massacre. Neither story received the attention that would be bestowed on and stirred up by the AP report only five years later. Kim Hyosun, the reporter who first broke the story in Korea, bemoans how the mainstream Korean press slighted Nogŭnri as insignificant until the American press paid attention (*Tanbi Nusŭ* 2011).¹⁰ In the Peace Memorial, both *The Hankyŏre* and *Mal* reports (like the survivor testimonies) are stowed away in a small touch-screen monitor.

Efforts by the Nogŭnri Survivors' Committee have always revolved around two agendas vis-à-vis the U.S. government: clarification of the truth (*chinsangkyumyŏng*) and official redress (in the form of an apology and compensation). Truth and compensation work in association because the latter cannot occur without the former. However, depending on the United States to act "in genuine good conscience to tell the truth" is problematic. For example, as legal scholar Hyunah Yang has acutely argued with regard to the issue of comfort women, another painful and sensitive colonial residue, "the colonizer's viewpoint" should not prevail (1997, 56). In the need for truth, the memorial renders too much agency to the United States by ceding authority (and perhaps even authenticity) of the Nogŭnri Massacre to the Americans. Hence, the survivors become mere evidence of a truth only the United States can prove.¹¹

On the other hand, it seems possible to conceptualize this insistent appeal to the United States as the authority for establishing the truth about Nogŭnri not as a symptom of a neocolonial mentality but as a dogged challenge lashed at the U.S. government to unequivocally acknowledge its guilt. The Peace Memorial is doubly caught between the South Korean *and* the American states. Seen in this way, the privileging of American sources may offer a way for the "colonized" to safely talk back to the colonizer, in the colonizer's language. Rather than a sign of inferiority, this contradiction may be seen as what exposes the insidious pervasiveness of the state's ideological authority. For those at Nogŭnri, whose social and political statuses have so long been tenuous, the pressure to acquiesce to the nation's dominant self-image must indeed seem pressing.

Privatizing Nogŭnri Memories

Rushed to memorialize but thwarted by the scarcity of artifacts, the Nogŭnri Peace Memorial resorts to filling its space with reproductions of scenes from Chung Eun-yong's testimonial novel *Do You Know Our Pain?*, the book that was discovered by AP Korea Bureau correspondent Sang-Hun Choe to "jumpstart it all" (Chung Koo-do 2014). Chung had been working on his account of Nogŭnri since first compiling survivor testimonies in 1960 and had countless stories to unleash. In 1977, he wrote a novella, *The Abandoned*, testifying to the massacre, and submitted it to the monthly literary journal *Hanguk Munhak*'s literary contest (selecting works by new writers).¹² Considering the political and social milieu under Park Chung-Hee's dictatorial Yusin regime, it is a wonder that the novella passed the preliminary

round; it is no wonder that it was not selected. Chung continued to work on his Nogŭnri story, and the inception of a civilian government in 1993 inspired him to publish his manuscript. However, as the “first book in South Korea to accuse U.S. troops of civilian killings,” his book was deemed by publishers as “too controversial” (Chung Koo-do 2010, 58). One lesser-known publisher, Tari, agreed to print the story—but only under the condition that it be categorized as a “novel based on a true story” (Hanley, Choe, and Mendoza 2001, 259).

Chung Eun-yong’s *Do You Know Our Pain?* offers a more complex perspective on the massacre at Nogŭnri than the Peace Memorial affords. A *mélange* of historical facts, survivor testimony, and family drama, the book allows for a cacophony of anguished voices to be heard; Chung’s wife, his second cousins, and many others all have a say (albeit not equally). In this sense, *Do You Know Our Pain?* reads more like a *testimonio* than a “novel based on a true story.”¹³ In the preface, Chung plainly states an ethical responsibility to speak up: “I am now past *kohi* [seventy]. If I do not speak now, I fear this event will be buried forever. This is why I write this story” ([1994] 2011, 4). As such, *Do You Know Our Pain?* courageously shows that the proscription to forget does not necessarily prohibit private remembering.

Chung did not actually experience firsthand the events of July 25–29, 1950. Having been an officer with the staunchly rightist South Korean police, he feared that he and his family would be killed by the fast-approaching North Koreans. Urged to flee by his father and his wife, Chung left for Pusan on his own. This was a mere day before the retreating American troops entered Yŏngdong (Chung Eun-yong [1994] 2011, 91–95).¹⁴ Chung’s parents and two young children, a boy and a girl, died in the tunnels. He reunited with his wife, who was convalescing at a refugee camp in Pusan, a few days later. There, he learned of what had ensued beneath the railroad tracks at Nogŭnri, and he “knew, instantly, that [his] life would never know happiness again” (136).

Chung arranges *Do You Know Our Pain?* chronologically, with occasional flashbacks. His account begins in December 1948; having just returned from Cheju, where he was “forced to witness the tragedy of fratricidal war against the red guerrillas,” Chung expresses a “strong distaste” for his job with the police ([1994] 2011, 28). Hence, despite the fervent anti-Communist and maudlin Christian overtones, the testimony is, at times, candidly critical of the South Korean state. Chung questions the “insanity” of the Bodo League killings, criticizes fellow officers for their heedless anti-Communist brutalities (272), and exhibits guilt over Cheju (282).¹⁵ However, his defensive, prosaic language—with phrases like “forced to witness” and

“tragedy of fratricidal war”—evinces the care Chung takes not to explicitly implicate himself, and understandably so. His narrative is written in the third person, often veiled by Christian tones of redemption.

In the fifth chapter, titled “Two-Faced Americans,” Chung rightly concedes the narrative to the survivors to describe what he calls the “manhunt” (*ingan sanyang*) (148). He also addresses his readers directly for the first time: “I will explore the historical background to this tragedy and then relay the stories from the site of the massacre” (138). Details of how and why the U.S. Army came to Nogŭnri are taken from T. R. Fehrenbach’s *This Kind of War* (1963) and the Korea Military Academy’s *Korean War History* (*Hanguk chŏnjaengsa*) (1959) to create a full picture of the events leading up to the massacre. After describing the fall of Taejŏn, the American fear of refugees, the soldiers’ lack of experience and resolve, and the ridge-lined conditions of Yŏngdong, where refugees were living in makeshift huts, Chung catalogs survivor testimonials in numerical order.

Framed as “stories that my good wife, Pak Sŏn-yong, faithfully told me” (138), the testimonials record the shock, horror, fear, pain, and brutality felt, seen, and experienced by the survivors: Yang Hae-ch’an lost his grandmother and two brothers in the first strafing and was petrified to see his sister Hae-suk’s “eyeballs dangling from a wispy thread-like vein”; Chŏng Sin-ung witnessed his old mother crawl out of the tunnel for air only to be killed instantly; Sŏn-yong observed young men barricade the tunnel entrance with the bodies of those who had lived, worked, and eaten together only a few days before; and Nam-il abandoned his newborn baby in an attempt to escape the tunnel (148–152).

The titular two-facedness of the Americans comes from Pak Sŏn-yong’s memory. After her daughter, Koo-hi, is shot, she desperately but successfully crawls out of the tunnel with her three-year-old son, Koo-p’il. In the lush ridges, however, they encounter an African American soldier resting; against Sŏn-yong’s pleas, he shoots at the mother and son. Finding Koo-p’il dead, Sŏn-yong prays to God to take her life. A moment later, two “white soldiers” approach her, tend to her wounds, and transport her to the U.S. military field hospital in Kimch’ŏn. Lying in her cot, Sŏn-yong wonders in disbelief: “Who are these two-faced American soldiers who kill on one side and heal on the other?” (171–175).

Unlike Chung’s testimonial novel, which gives voice to Kim Pok-jong, Chŏn Ch’un-ja, Yang Hae-ch’an, and others, the Peace Memorial erases the variegated experiences of those who

lived through the Nogŭnri Massacre and focuses, instead, on Chung Eun-yong and his efforts to make the incident known. Under the heading “Forgotten Tragedy Finally Revealed to World” and the title “Pain of Nogŭnri Victims Turned into Literature,” the elder Chung’s letters of petition, manuscript, book, and book reviews take up a third of the section on the upper level. Chung Koo-do’s own contributions, in the form of op-ed pieces, petitions, scholarly publications, and peace and human rights activities with the Nogŭnri Institute for International Peace, also comprise a large portion of the upper hall.

Downstairs, a life-sized white plaster sculpture titled “Dragged Footsteps” reproduces the familiar image of Korean War refugees: an ox-drawn cart, adults carrying bundles, mothers with their children (figure 3). In the front, a soldier blocks the refugees’ footsteps with an M4 carbine. The whiteness of the plaster and the vacant expressions of the figures produce an eerie feeling. Across from “Dragged Footsteps” is a heavy metallic composition suitably titled “Tragic Memories of 1950’s Summer: Road,” in which two pairs of graphite military boots march along two parallel lines of skulls, shrapnel, bullet shells, and barbed wire (figure 4).



Figure 3. “Dragged Footsteps” sculpture, Nogŭnri Peace Memorial.

According to Chung Koo-do, “Dragged Footsteps” “depicts faithfully” the escape scene in his father’s novel, in which “the Americans duped the villagers to their deaths under the promise of

protection.” He adds that “Tragic Memories of 1950’s Summer: Road,” unlike “Dragged Footsteps,” was not created explicitly for the memorial; it was privately purchased by his brother, a medical doctor, as a gift for their father, who then donated it to the Peace Memorial (Chung Koo-do 2014).



Figure 4. “Tragic Memories of 1950’s Summer: Road,” Nogŭnri Peace Memorial.

Though their groundbreaking, Herculean efforts to make Nogŭnri known should certainly be duly acknowledged, the overwhelming presence of the elder and younger Chung at the memorial is disconcerting. One cannot erase the feeling that a certain privatization and ownership of Nogŭnri—both the event and the memory—has been transacted by father and son in this public memorial. And, through this transaction, the Nogŭnri Peace Memorial expresses the values not so much of the victims and survivors but of Chung Eun-yong and Chung Koo-do: values of education, discipline, enterprise, sacrifice, and perseverance. Time and again, Chung Koo-do praises his father as a man who “always wanted to make more of himself” and did so by “choosing to go to university in Seoul” (which, in turn, makes his silence about Chung Eun-yong’s past as a police officer more acutely felt) (Chung Koo-do 2014).¹⁶ The celebration of Chung Eun-yong’s self-made rise is subsequently a celebration of the hard work and sacrifice he made to achieve the creation of the Peace Memorial.

These neoliberal values of individual enterprise and perseverance are inscribed at the entrance of the memorial for all to see: “The restoration of human rights is the fruit of sweat and sacrifice of so many people. Peace is given to those who strive to cherish it.” But when other survivor testimonies remain hidden, what the memorial seems to celebrate from the outset is the “sweat and sacrifice” not of “so many people” but of Chung Eun-yong and Chung Koo-do. Thus, however much the memorial claims to speak for and commemorate all the victims, the stories of those who actually perished in the twin tunnels are again forgotten.

To be fair, the dead are not entirely absent from the memorial and park. In a small foyer leading to the upper level, under the heading “Mortified Souls: In Memory of Nogŭnri,” small wooden plaques are inscribed with the names of those who were killed in the Nogŭnri Massacre (figure 5). Outside, beyond the towering commemorative monument, a steep fifteen-minute trek up the hill, is the Nogŭnri Incident Victim Cemetery (figure 6). Twenty-eight graves are marked by tombstones; the majority of the victims, whose bodies were shattered beyond identification, are laid to rest in three collective tombs. While the cemetery is noted on the Nogŭnri Peace Park brochure (it is listed as number 18, after the Facility Maintenance Office), it is hidden behind the rolling hills. Much like the touch-screen monitors, it requires initiative on the visitor’s part to visit the cemetery.



Figure 5. “Mortified Souls: In Memory of Nogŭnri,” Nogŭnri Peace Memorial.

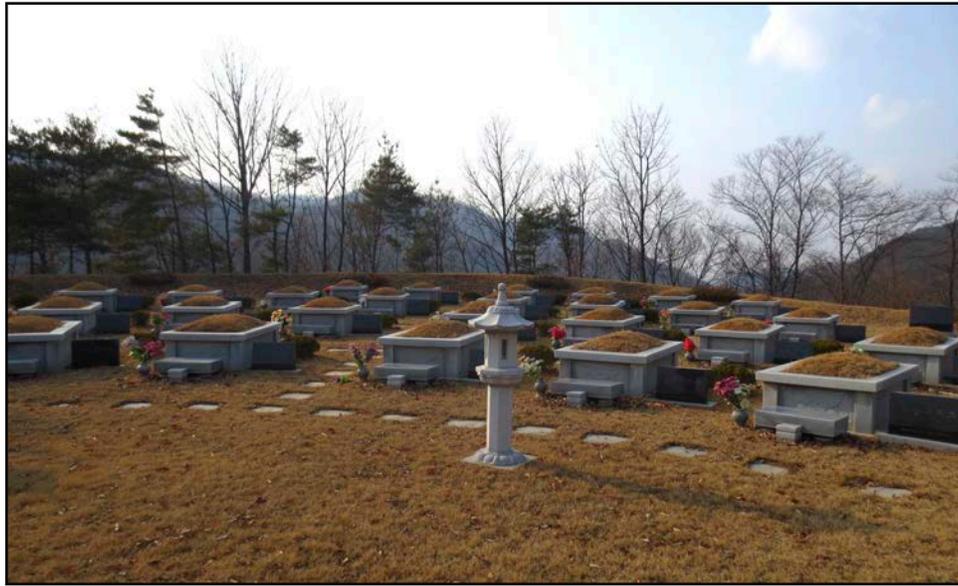


Figure 6. The Nogŭnri Incident Victim Cemetery, Nogŭnri Peace Park.

In response to my inquiries about the absence of the dead at the Nogŭnri Peace Park, Chung Koo-do offered Korean culture as an answer. He explained that, “unlike [for] Westerners, death is fear-inducing for Koreans; we hide our dead” (Chung Koo-do 2014). Sadly, the dead remain so well hidden that I never realized that a shrine, where the ancestral tablets are kept, exists at the Peace Park. The shrine lies behind and beneath the commemorative monument, and one cannot enter it without assistance from park personnel. The topography of the victim cemetery and shrine at Nogŭnri is made all the more puzzling when compared with other memorial sites in South Korea. For instance, the Cheju April Third Peace Park places its dead in a wide, open space (see Wright in this volume).

Indeed, citing the change in the memorial park’s name from the original Nogŭnri Commemorative Park to the current Nogŭnri Peace Park in 2009, Chung Koo-do added: “We decided to place less emphasis on the dead; we wanted to move forward and make the Nogŭnri Peace Park a symbol of peace” (Chung Koo-do 2014). The desire to bury the dead—and the past—and to move on to a happier and brighter concept of peace resonates throughout the park.

In the memorial, across the wall of names, a delicate butterfly mobile hangs from the ceiling; its flittering shadow is projected onto a wall where a short animated video plays on a

loop (figure 5). Drawn in thick, strong brushstrokes, the clip begins with a single white lotus; from the lotus, a woman dressed in a traditional white *hanbok* arises, dancing gracefully and waving an airy white sheet in each hand. Her dance brings to mind a shaman's *kut* (exorcism) ritual. Having consoled the dead, the woman disappears; petals dance with the winds as green shrubs spring by the twin tunnels and more butterflies flutter above. Life—peace—has returned to Nogŭnri.

What Peace? Whose Peace?

The Nogŭnri Peace Park and Memorial repeatedly champions itself as a symbol of peace. However, in the drive to refashion Nogŭnri as more than a site of tragedy—into the face of peace—the park avoids any elaboration of the concept of peace. Here, peace is an empty, abstract concept, devoid of any political or ideological value. It is not an impetus for reconciliation; it is not solemn or dark. Rather, as the animation declares, peace at the Nogŭnri Peace Park is new, bright, vibrant, and joyous.

Nothing more clearly demonstrates the evident desire to mask the memory of the brutal massacre with a peaceful Nogŭnri than the nostalgia-inducing gallery called “Memory-Stirring Gallery” (Ch’uŏkŭi Saenghwal Ch’ŏnsigwan) (figure 7). The oddly named display, situated a few yards from the Peace Memorial, invites visitors to experience a bygone time. An old classroom from the 1970s and 1980s is reproduced, replete with an old-fashioned briquette stove, on which dented nickel-silver lunchboxes are kept warm; hand-painted anti-Communist posters also line the walls. The adjoining rooms recreate an outdated furnace (*agung’i*), tearoom (*tabang*), mill (*pang’akkan*), barbershop (*ibalso*), and comic book store (*manhwabang*). At the end of the eight-zone gallery is a venue where visitors can, according to a placard, “experience traditional Korean living.” The gallery, Chung Koo-do explained, is “a space for adults to reminisce about the good old days and for children to learn how their parents lived back in the day—for fun” (Chung Koo-do 2014).

A wholly different kind of experience is also made available at the memorial. On the lower level, there is a replica of the kind of machine gun used by the American soldiers at Nogŭnri. The replica points to a narrow passageway titled “Road of Lamentation” (figure 8). Airy gossamer white sheets hang from the ceiling of the entrance. Facing the passageway, one realizes that the passage is meant to symbolize the tunnel. The sheets flutter about, sheer and

translucent, like ghosts haunting the tunnel; the sound of machine guns and bombs reverberate from within the passageway. In Korean only, a didactic message hangs at the entrance: “Experience the fear of those who perished in the twin tunnels.”



Figure 7. “Memory-Stirring Living Gallery,” Nogunri Peace Park.



Figure 8. “Road of Lamentation,” Nogunri Peace Memorial.

Both walls of the passageway are punctured by bullet holes, reminiscent of those peppering the tunnels outside. A railroad track traverses the ceiling; the floor is painted a bloody red and lined, on one side, with fluorescent white plastic skulls and bone fragments. Red and green laser lights flash about to highlight the skeletal remains—and dot the visitors in specks of red and green. The entire experience is, at once, garish and incredible. This Disneyfication (as if the tunnels were a theme park attraction to experience in a minute) of an event that still lives on, as pain, agony, and trauma for so many, simplifies and mocks the actual experience itself. In its aim to educate and let visitors “experience” the event, the “Road of Lamentation” desecrates the very event we wish to remember. It corrupts by way of its fiction.

At the Nogūnri Peace Park, peace is about waxing nostalgic and having harmless fun. The “memory-stirring” gallery sends a clear message that is, again, in line with the 6/25 narrative, in which South Korea perseveres in the aftermath of the war to become one of the most affluent nations in the world. It is a triumphant narrative that elides the ways in which such progress was built on the backs of violence, repression, and imperialism—forces that silenced Nogūnri in the first place—and instead fosters a sense of gratitude for the prosperity we enjoy today. Accordingly, the Nogūnri Massacre is effectively domesticated and pushed to the periphery.

This is complicit with the hegemonic neoliberal culture of twenty-first-century South Korea, a cultural condition in which image dominates substance and everything is commodified (Harvey 2005). Discussing South Korean culture in the age of global neoliberalism, intellectual and activist Kang Nae-hi argues that the South Korean state’s transfer of responsibility onto individual provinces, cities, and villages creates a “push toward competitive entrepreneurial practices,” so that “even fresh air, clean water, rural simplicity become commodified and marketed as cultural capital particular to a village, city, province” (2000, 25). It is, then, tragedy—veiled under a vague, global concept of peace—that becomes commodified at the Nogūnri Peace Park.

That neoliberalism is the governing political economy at the Peace Park is made more evident by the park’s recent admission into the International Network of Museums for Peace (INMP), a “worldwide network of peace museums, gardens, and other peace related sites and institutions that share in the same desire to build a global culture of peace” (INMP 2014). The agenda of the INMP is to “inform the public about peace and non-violence . . . and [to] reach out

to people who may not be involved in the peace movement.” It works toward preventing war and promoting remembrance, historical truth, and reconciliation.

Despite being the “very first in South Korea to join the INMP,” the Nogŭnri Peace Park fails to achieve these goals (Chung Koo-do 2014). By marginalizing the dead and subsuming the tragedy of the Nogŭnri Massacre under the rhetoric of “global” and “international” peace, the park encourages an incessant blanching of the past. Remembering the Nogŭnri Massacre is made palatable so that it can be forgotten in a safe—domesticated—way. Furthermore, the sleek, modern, impeccable appearance of the park combined with an elitist global recognition—first by the AP report and then by the INMP—urges the blind consumption of South Korea’s global affluence and, in turn, precipitates amnesia of a past that was so hard-won.

It is a shame that the Nogŭnri Peace Park fails to capture the multilayered voices and nuances of the Nogŭnri Massacre. Perhaps the shortcomings evince the myriad contradictions intrinsic to the Nogŭnri Massacre that cannot and will not be neatly teased out. In many ways, the lionizing of Chung Eun-yong at the Peace Memorial plays out the tensions of an event like Nogŭnri. As a police officer for South Korea, he fled south in fear of the advancing North Korean People’s Army—only to lose his family at the hands of American—not North Korean—soldiers. And yet it is his past as a police officer that allowed him the privileged position from which to safely testify to a counter-hegemonic narrative like that of the Nogŭnri Massacre in postwar South Korea, where to be anti-American means to be pro-North Korean, and vice versa. How can the park and memorial embody the moral and political dilemma involved in articulating so complicated a past history?

From its replication of the 6/25 narrative to its fostering of peace, the Nogŭnri Peace Park takes care to circumvent politics or ideology. Peace is mobilized to mask the multiple tensions that abound in the Nogŭnri Peace Park. This brings us to the question of what peace can actually attain or resolve through memorial practices. Even when so many South Korean memorials end on the note of peace and human rights, there remains an incommensurate gap between such “ideals” and the present state of South Korea, where peace and rights continue to be violated. Naturalized into a teleological conclusion in the aftermath of war, the uncritical concepts of “peace” and “human rights” create the danger of reinforcing the dominant ideology and obscuring responsibility for both past atrocities and current social iniquities. In its desire to “move beyond Nogŭnri” and participate in a universal (post-ideological) discourse of peace, the

Nogŭnri Peace Park circles us back to the deeply politicized and ideological knowledge of the Korean War in South Korea.

In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Walter Benjamin ([1940] 2007) writes that history, as presented in a linear, teleological narrative of progress, reduces and represses alterity. Yet for Benjamin, effective counterpoints can be articulated by “seiz[ing] hold of a memory that flashes up at a moment of danger” (255). That is, when past events are made urgently relevant to the present, they, in turn, question the hegemonic power over the present. Amid the rise of the discourse of *chongbuk chwap’a* (pro-North leftist) in South Korea today, the anti-Communism of the authoritarian regimes that silenced Nogŭnri seem not so much a distant past. Dragged into new contexts, the Nogŭnri Peace Park holds itself up to scrutiny and encourages us to critically examine how the past is appropriated and recast in our current surroundings—to our present struggles for social change.

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Notes

- 1 Korean transliterations follow the McCune-Reischauer system, unless the person uses a different spelling for his or her name. When citing Korean names, I follow the native convention of listing the last name first, unless the cited text bears the author’s name otherwise, as in the case of English texts written by Korean authors.
- 2 Both times I visited the Nogŭnri Peace Park, in June 2013 and in March 2014, my party and I were the only visitors there.
- 3 All documents and artifacts at the Nogŭnri Peace Park and Memorial refer to the massacre at Nogŭnri as the “Nogŭnri Incident.” Unless citing others, I prefer the term “Nogŭnri Massacre.”
- 4 By prosecuting and arresting leaders of investigative committees, the military government made it clear that any person attempting to raise the issue of verifying deaths during the Korean War would be regarded as a Communist and considered a threat to the state. For twenty-seven years, from 1961 to 1987, all sympathetic discourse on raising awareness of massacres was subject to prosecution. Bereaved families and survivors also suffered severe discrimination, as authorities systematically marginalized them from society and placed them under police and Korean Central Intelligence Agency surveillance. See Kim Dong-Choon (2010).

- 5 All titles are English translations from the Nogŭnri Peace Memorial.
- 6 Although the Americans acknowledged that the guerrillas in Yŏngdong were indigenous and had no direction from North Korea, they still considered Yŏngdong “a hotbed of resentment and insurrection” (Cumings 2001, 514). According to Cumings, three hundred guerrillas were operating around Yŏngdong, and American and South Korean forces regarded it as a tough battlefield (2001, 519).
- 7 There are several cultural representations of the Nogŭnri Massacre: *Nogŭnri, kŭ yŏrŭm* (That summer in Nogŭnri) (2005), a children’s book; *Nogŭnri iyagi* (Nogŭnri story) (2006; 2010), a graphic novel in two parts; *Chakŭn yŏnmot* (A little pond) (2010), an independent film; *Nahŭl* (Four days) (2013), a novel; and *Lark and Termite* (2009), an American novel by Jayne Anne Phillips.
- 8 See also the BBC documentary *Kill ‘Em All: The American Military in Korea* by Jeremy Williams (2002).
- 9 According to Hanley, the U.S. Army’s declaration that the killings were “not deliberate” was logically untenable in the context of acknowledged facts in the U.S. Defense Department’s *Nogŭnri Report*: trapped refugees were fired on for days, with no cease-fire orders given; they were subjected to mortar and artillery fire, requiring fire-direction orders from U.S. Army officers; and numerous veterans attested to oral orders to fire on what were known to be women, children, and civilians. Moreover, blanket orders to shoot civilians had spread across the war front. This particular information was withheld from South Korean investigators and therefore excluded from the *Nogŭnri Report*.
- 10 There is no denying that the AP report—and the international response it garnered—pushed the United States to investigate the Nogŭnri Incident. No U.S. official has made even the gesture of fact-finding concerning U.S. atrocities during the Korean War before or after the Nogŭnri investigation.
- 11 Hayden White (1992) has taught us that every historical discourse is produced as a story. “Facts,” therefore, are always already interpreted, and any given historical event is open to multiple meanings—or truths—and this in no way diminishes the “truth value” of the history narrated. Hence, “truth” should not be the end-all framework.
- 12 The Nogŭnri Peace Memorial displays the 1977 edition of *Han’guk Munhak*, in which news of *The Abandoned* is printed. Unlike *Do You Know Our Pain?*, not much is known about the novella; Chung Koo-do, too, dismisses it as his father’s “first literary attempt.”
- 13 Testimony as the Latin American *testimonio* speaks back to hegemonic discourses. According to literary critic John Beverley (2004), *testimonio* is a nonfiction, popular-democratic form of narrative told in the first person by a narrator who is the protagonist or witness of the events recounted. It acts as an ethical recovery after an experience of exclusion and oppression.
- 14 According to Chung Eun-yong, a number of Yŏngdong men had fled in fear of being conscripted by the North Korean forces. The few that were captured in the twin tunnels also escaped. This is why a great majority of the Nogŭnri Incident victims are women, children, and the elderly.
- 15 The Bodo League was a massacre of Communists and suspected sympathizers (many of whom were innocent civilians) that occurred in the immediate outbreak of the Korean War. The massacre was wrongly blamed on the Communists and concealed by the South

Korean government for over four decades. For more on the Bodo League, see Kim Dong-Choon (2009).

17 See also Chung Eun-yong ([1994] 2011, 29).

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