

CROSS-CURRENTS



EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

Politicial Violence and the Problematics of Localized Memory at Civilian Massacre Sites: The Cheju 4.3 Peace Park and the Kōch'ang Incident Memorial Park

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Abstract

This article examines two South Korean sites dedicated to the remembrance of Korean War–era civilian massacres, the Cheju 4.3 Peace Park and the Kōch'ang Incident Memorial Park. Specifically, the article explores the sites' localized, victim-centric epistemology as one that counters nationalist discourses and narratives that privilege the state. While acknowledging that these sites offer a physical mnemonic space for challenging the hegemonic “June 25” (*yugio*) narrative, the author suggests that, in their narrow spatial and ideological orientation, these sites cumulatively fall short of offering a cohesive narrative of the politicidal, anti-Communist state-building project of which they are a consequence. Though of tremendous value in restoring victims' honor, critiquing human rights abuses of the Republic of Korea, and giving a voice to marginalized groups, these spaces fail to provide historical clarity to a distorted era of South Korea's past. In addressing this problematic, the article examines the role of family bereavement associations, narrative constructions, and the silencing of the National Guidance League Incident at these locations.

Keywords: Korean War, civilian massacres, politicide, politics of memory, anti-Communism, Cheju 4.3 Peace Park, Kōch'ang Incident Memorial Park

Introduction

For most of South Korea's post–civil war history, reconciling the conflict and its legacies has remained an elusive task. This is particularly true in the case of atrocities that were carried out by Republic of Korea (ROK) Armed Forces during the Syngman Rhee government's campaign of politicide (1948–1954): a widespread, systematic eradication of the South Korean indigenous political left. The process of democratic transition in South Korea afforded civil society groups and bereaved family associations (*yujokhoe*) the opportunity to successfully petition for a series of special acts, which culminated in the establishment of the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission of South Korea (Chinsil Hwahae rül wihan Kwagösa Chöngni Wiwönhoe) in 2005 under the liberal government of No Muhyön. Outside these legal frameworks, civil society groups successfully petitioned governments and raised money for the funding of memorial parks in honor of unarmed victims and their bereaved families.

This article examines two such sites, the Cheju 4.3 Peace Park (Cheju 4.3 P'yönghwa Kongwön) and the Köch'ang Incident Memorial Park (Köch'ang Sagön Ch'umo Kongwön). Once caricatured as a Communist uprising provoked by North Korea, the Cheju Incident (Cheju Sagön) is now recognized as a series of incidents that took place from 1947 to 1954 in which as many as thirty thousand civilians were killed—the majority at the hands of the American-supported South Korean army, police, and paramilitary groups.¹ The Köch'ang Incident, meanwhile, occurred in the winter of 1951, when veteran counterinsurgency commanders from the Cheju campaign ordered the systematic slaughter of over seven hundred civilians—the majority of whom were women, children, and the elderly—throughout the township of Sinwön. Though the victims were initially accused of aiding and abetting southern Communist partisan (*ppalch'isan*) forces, subsequent investigations have exonerated and restored their honor. Expunged from the historical record through decades of obfuscation, intimidation, and indoctrination, the memories of these two calamitous episodes have only recently reemerged in South Korean historical discourse. However, despite their shared histories, public memorialization has tended to treat these incidents as only vaguely related, as we shall see. This article explores the causes and consequences of this disjuncture between a collectively shared history of systematic violence and a subsequently localized memory, and the mnemonic representation of this disjuncture at these two specific sites.

An overarching theoretical concern here is an interrogation of what anthropologist Michel Ralph Trouillot has referred to as the two sides of historicity: that which happened, and that which is said to have happened (Trouillot 1995, 5). Structurally, the article is therefore divided into three sections that navigate this cleavage. The first section advances a case for the integrated character of the two massacres. Challenging the tendency in public memory to view these two episodes as distinct incidents (*sagön*), I employ genocide studies Barbara Harff's rubric of "politicide" and argue that these incidents were part of a broader and systematic campaign of violent political cleansing—a significant historical phenomenon that has largely been concealed throughout South Korea's history. In the second section, the emphasis shifts to

the two specific historical sites that constitute the bulk of my analysis. Here, I examine the epistemological, temporal, ideological, and spatial assumptions that govern each site. I argue that both sites share a localized, victim-centric narrative, one that paradoxically prevents a national narrative of collectively shared political violence from forming. Following from this, the final section of the article explores the absences and silences embedded in each park. Of fundamental concern here is the failure of each site to directly engage with the other or with related episodes of mass violence, such as the National Guidance League Incident.² Consequently, despite the impressive mnemonic work that these sites perform, a cohesive narrative linking the widespread phenomenon of state-led violence against civilians to the origins and nature of the anti-Communist South Korean national security state fails to emerge in these spaces. The article concludes with a reflection on the continuing power of anti-Communist ideology to shape the historical representation of South Korea's civil war period.

Theoretical and Historiographical Issues

South Korea's process of political transition was paralleled by an explosion of monuments and museums dedicated to honoring both soldiers and civilians killed in wars. Indeed, as South Korean scholar Chŏng Hogi's research has demonstrated, state construction of monuments accelerated considerably throughout the initial period of civilian government—particularly during the liberally oriented administrations of Kim Taejung and No Muhyŏn (Chŏng 2008, 195). A myriad of explanations may be posited to explain this phenomenon, but two interrelated points strike me as most salient. The first concerns the rise of the “memory industry” around the globe. Theorists have argued that this phenomenon is rooted in the acceleration of history, which in turn has disrupted the equilibrium between past and present that stabilized previous societies. According to these critics, monumentalization, the explosion of museums, and the popularity of historical drama may all be read as responses to this malaise, as societies seek to anchor an increasingly unmoored past (Nora 1989; Jameson 1991; Huysen 1995). Meanwhile, in the case of post-authoritarian societies, greater political freedom has led nations to reconsider their recent pasts. A concern with justice has propelled these inquiries, as previously maligned groups have sought legal restitution, petitioned for truth and reconciliation commissions, and adopted universalist discourses of healing and human rights in an attempt to correct the wrongs of their still-present pasts—thus bringing to mind Milan Kundera's assertion

that the “struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (Hinton and O’Neil 2009). The global proliferation of so-called “dark tourism” has also played a role in this process, with specific sites dedicated to trauma integrated into nations’ tourist infrastructures. As a hyper-developed capitalist nation with a traumatic legacy of colonialism, internecine conflict, Cold War partition, and dictatorship, South Korea converges significantly with these global developments.

More critical to our present inquiry are processes endogenous to South Korea’s democratic transition itself—specifically, shifts in cultural memory associated with the phenomenon of transitional justice. Ruti G. Teitel (2000) posits that transitional periods are ones in which a clear shift of political order toward greater liberalization is at stake. The quest for justice is central to these periods, as societies strive for novel political and normative frameworks to transcend previous periods of darkness. To Teitel, epistemic change is of profound importance, with history and the law conscripted into these developments. In times of political transition, previous epistemic “truth regimes” regarding a nation’s past are frayed, and actors compete—however problematically—to forge a novel historical consensus appropriate to the society’s future political development. The law integrally bonds with this process of historical reimagining. As Teitel notes, the law provides a canonical language, lending official sanction to contested histories in a time of epistemic fluidity (Teitel 2000, 69–117).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, South Korea’s democratic transition was accompanied by legal and epistemic struggles pertaining to the nation’s recent traumatic past. In this climate, bereaved families, civil society groups, and activists sought not only restitution and the restoration of honor, but also a reevaluation of, and admission into, dominant national narratives. As historian Linda Lewis’s research attests, this process was most thorough in the case of the Kwangju massacre, where an incident once officially portrayed as a Communist insurrection was reframed and co-opted by the state as a catalyst for the nation’s painful democratic march (Lewis 2002). Though less romantic in tone, activists petitioning for restitution regarding pre–Korean War and Korean War–era massacres adopted the discursive forms of transitional justice. Groups such as the Kōch’ang Incident Bereaved Families Association (Kōch’ang Sagōn Hūisaengja Yujokhoe) and the Provincial 4.3 Committee launched investigations, held demonstrations, and petitioned governments for legal recognition—activities that culminated, respectively, in the 1996 Special Measures Act on the Restoration of the Honor of Those People Involved in the Kōch’ang

Incident (Köch'ang Sagön tǔng Kwalyōnja ūi Myōngyehobok e kwanhan T'ūkpyōljoch'ibōp) and the 2000 Special Act on the Fact-Finding Investigation into the April 3 Cheju Incident Victims and the Restoration of their Honor (Cheju 4.3 Sagön Chinsang Kyumyōng mit Hūisaengja Myōngyehobok e kwanhan T'ūkpyōlbōp). These acts helped spur the eventual creation of the 2005 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Korea (TRCK).

However, as Korean scholars Chōng Hogi and Han Sunghoon have demonstrated, in South Korea there have been severe limitations in relying on this legalistic strategy to institute broader changes in social consciousness. These limitations include the major time lapse between these incidents and the establishment of the subsequent truth commissions, the continuing social and political power of anti-Communist conservatives, fissures within the aggrieved victims' communities, lack of punishments for the perpetrators, a shortage of financial restitution for the victims, a dearth of official documents, and a lack of subpoena power for the commissions to obtain documents or testimonies from government security institutions. The cumulative result has been a large gap between the number of official victims tallied and the number estimated to have been killed in this time period. Beyond these issues, Han and Chōng point out, there have been epistemological contradictions within the logic of transitional justice itself. Han, for example, notes that the notion of "reconciliation," which is premised on moving beyond a painful past, mitigates punishment for perpetrators, therefore stymieing a proper acknowledgment of the past. Chōng, meanwhile, raises a more profound problem, one with which my own work engages. The various commissions' focus on a specific legalistic category of institutionalized "victimhood" has effectively excluded larger causal questions concerning these massacres, such as questions about the legacies of the Japanese colonial era, national division, anti-Communist ideology, and exclusionary state policies. The social "truth" produced by these endeavors, therefore, has been myopic at best (Chōng 2008; Han 2010). Attempts at epistemic change have not, however, been confined to the legal realm, as the narrative modes of transitional justice have been complicit with the broader phenomenon of monumentalization that South Korea's political present has witnessed. By focusing on two sites that were both constituted by and constitutive of this dynamic process, I examine the implications and boundaries of these attempts at transitional justice in South Korea.

Beyond the issue of democratic transition, I engage with a broader shift in Korean War historiography. Indeed, contemporaneous with Korea's democratization has been a growing body

of academic literature that explores the social and cultural legacies of the unending Korean conflict. Once dominated by American-centric geopolitical concerns (Stueck 1995), Korean War scholarship has broadened its spatial and intellectual parameters to include questions of nationalism (Shin 2006), state building (Cumings 1981, 1990; Pak 1995), communal violence (Pak 2000), social history (Lee 2001; J. Kim 2010), state massacres (Kwon Kwisuk 2002; D.-C. Kim 2009; Kim Hakchae 2010), and individual and collective memory (Jager 2007; Kim H.-G. 2007; Cho 2008; Han 2008). Significant to my present purpose has been an effort to probe the linkages between the nation's traumatic history of violence and its ongoing geopolitical and societal divisions, while exploring the political, ideological, ethical, and mnemonic implications of this unending dialectic—a task at which South Korean intellectuals have been at the forefront (Jung, Na, and Pak 2006; Han 2008; D.-C. Kim 2009; Kwon 2010; Pak 2000; Paik 2011). More specifically, scholars such as Chŏng Hogi, Kim Paekyŏng, Kim Minhwan, and Han Sunghoon have analyzed the sociological and epistemological modes of production within disparate sites dedicated to honoring victims of state massacres before and during the Korean War. Though offering a range of interpretations, recurrent themes throughout these analyses are the gaps between historical “truth” and its subsequent representation, the silences embedded in these sites, and the lingering power of state narratives to produce these distortions (Chŏng 2008; Han 2008; Kim M.-H. 2014; Kim and Kim 2014). By exploring the causes and legacies of two episodes of mass state violence, the tensions between local and national practices of memory, and the shortcomings of epistemological strategies that privilege the episodic over the systematic, this article represents a modest contribution to the ongoing dialogue surrounding these important issues.

Finally, I should note that while the focus here is on two particular incidents south of the 38th parallel, the fundamental issues that I am dealing with are hardly isolated to the peninsula. As anthropologist Heonik Kwon notes, the global Cold War was experienced by many decolonizing states in the form of mass death and a subsequent “political displacement of memories” by the political order's stifling bipolar logic (Kwon 2010, 6). Likewise, the Taiwanese intellectual Chen Kuan-Hsing perceptively observes that “the effects of the Cold War have become embedded in local history” and inscribed into the East Asian peoples' “national, family, and personal histories.” To Chen, despite the formal end of the global Cold War, societies that were structured along the lines of the Cold War bipolar order remain unable to

overcome many of its legacies (Chen 2010, 118). Korea's contemporary status as a living monument to the Cold War's deformities renders it fertile ground for navigating these tragic complexities. By exploring the inherent political, social, and psychological dimensions of a history of systematic politicidal violence at these two sites, this article provides an illustration of the peninsula's capacity to illuminate deeper scholarly and global concerns.

Local Atrocities and the Question of Politicide

Though more subdued in recent years, the scholarly debates surrounding the Korean War have often resembled an epistemological minefield, with seemingly innocuous labels serving as signifiers for deeply held methodological and ideological convictions. One finds a similar phenomenon surrounding the issue of violence by the Republic of Korea (ROK) against civilians that transpired during South Korea's civil war. In the case of the events that transpired in Cheju on April 3, for example, a series of conflicting epithets—"riot" (*p'oktong*), "struggle" (*hangjaeng*), "uprising" (*ponggi*), "situation," (*sat'ae*), and "incident" (*sagŏn*)—are alternatively invoked in scholarship and public memory. When defining the deceased and the families of those killed during the period of civil war violence, a plethora of often mutually antagonistic descriptions proliferates. Indeed, depending on the context, the level of knowledge, or the ideological proclivity of the author, the same individual may be described as a "victim" (*hŭisaengja*, *p'ihaeja*), an "impure" person (*pulsunpunja*), or a "Commie" (*ppalgaengi*). There are, in order words, deep connections between the residual social tensions that arose during the period of national division and the subsequent inability to adequately describe the traumatic events that were endemic to this era.

These internal divisions within South Korean society render it unlikely that a unified social memory of this bleak but formative period of the nation's history will emerge. However, South Korea's democratic transition and the advent of various special acts and truth commissions has led to a paradigm shift of sorts, as episodes once cavalierly dismissed as Communist revolts have now achieved official recognition as incidents of mass violence against civilians. In general terms, we may identify two salient features within this shift. The first is the increasing ubiquity of the term *sagŏn* (Kim D.-C. 2009).³ The second, and perhaps more critical, component is the emphasis on the local, or singular, character of these atrocities. The result is that in the official mnemonic sphere, state violence during the civil war period is represented as a series of locally

bound incidents, such as the 4.3 Incident, the Yösun Incident (Yösun Sagön), the National Guidance League Incident, and the Köch'ang Incident.

Concerning the 4.3 Incident, for example, the legal definition says that “the April 3 Incident was a series of incidents in which thousands of islanders were killed as a result of clashes between armed civilian groups and government forces . . . over the period from March 1, 1947 . . . until September 21, 1954” (Cheju 4.3 Sagön Chinsang Kyumyöng mit Hüisaengja Myöngye Hoebok Wiwönhoe [hereafter, Cheju 4.3 Chinsanghoe] 2003, 536).⁴ Though employing an expansive temporal definition and incorporating a series of violent episodes into a singular definition, this definition portrays the 4.3 Incident as an isolated, localized affair. In the case of Köch'ang, a similar pattern emerges. According to the 1996 Special Act, the episode is defined as a massacre that occurred from February 9 to 11, 1951, in the township of Sinwön. Over the three-day span, the Third Battalion of the Ninth Regiment raided the surrounding villages, killing 719 unarmed civilians and destroying the majority of houses and livestock. Close to half of all those killed were women and the elderly, and young women were raped en masse (Chinsil Hwahaerül wihan Kwagösa chöngni Wiwönhoe [hereafter, Chinsil Hwahaehoe] 2010a, 260).

The merits and limitations of this orientation are explored below. I would like to begin, however, with an interpretive intervention. While the locally specific character of the events ought not to be ignored, a compelling case exists that these events were part of a larger pattern of systematic violence that I identify here as a politicide of the South Korean political left in the context of a civil war. Genocide studies scholar Barbara Harff (2003) argues that politicides entail “the promotion, execution, and/or implied consent of sustained policies by governing elites or their agents—or, in the case of civil war, either of the contending authorities—that are intended to destroy, in whole or part, a communal, political, or politicized ethnic group.” Critical to the identification of politicides are the related issues of systematic duration and state intent. Because episodes of transparent intent, such as the Holocaust or the Khmer Rouge killings, are extremely rare, we may deduce intent if (a) the perpetrators are agents of the state; (b) the level of violence from the state is disproportionate to that from the opposition; and (c) the state does not make a concerted effort to reduce the crimes (Harff 2003, 58–59). The organized mass killings of armed, unarmed, real, and imagined leftists that transpired throughout South Korea's civil war fit this pattern.

That the 4.3 and Kōch'ang incidents were embedded within a larger trajectory of systematic state-on-society violence is beyond dispute. Let us first turn to the composition of the American-backed emerging South Korean national security state, and the destructive and highly political character of its counterinsurgency tactics. Headed by Syngman Rhee, the early ROK national security state was a coalition of anti-Communist independence activists, Japanese-trained security forces, and zealous anti-Communist youth groups often recruited from dispossessed families who had fled the 1946 North Korean land reform. Though rife with factions, the embryonic national security state was held together by an ideological commitment to anti-Communism and coalesced into its violent and political form during the events at Cheju. Within the state, the principal groups responsible for the violence on the island were the police, the constabulary, and the Northwest Youth Association (Sōbuk Ch'ōngnyōndan).

Critical to our understanding of the events at Cheju is the programmatic and overtly political character of the violence. Buttressed by the October 1948 quarantine of the island and the December 1948 National Security Law, the suppression forces were given carte blanche to accelerate the existing societal bifurcation, and they utilized their advantage in violent capabilities to advance anti-Communist power. The nature of the winter suppression campaign (November 1948–March 1949) was illustrative of this process, as the island was spatially and ideologically divided and violently uprooted. For instance, head of the Cheju Constabulary Song Yoch'an established a 5-kilometer safe zone of hamlets (extending from the ocean onto the mainland), and declared that anyone found beyond this shoreline perimeter would be deemed suspicious and could potentially be killed—thus simplifying the lines between friend and foe, and therefore between life and death (*Tonga Ilbo*, October 20, 1948). These polarizing policies were synonymous with increasingly militant and exclusionary discursive practices within the suppression forces. As Cheju massacre researcher Kwōn Kwisuk has demonstrated, by the time of the winter suppression campaign, any capacity to distinguish between the enemy and innocent villagers had all but disappeared within the minds of the suppression forces, consumed by the totalizing logic of “us” versus “them” that is typical of episodes of large-scale massacre or genocide (Kwōn 2002, 180–185). The numerous village massacres that transpired on Cheju followed this Manichean logic. To cite just one grim example, according to the findings of the Cheju 4.3 Incident Report, on January 19, 1949, roughly one thousand residents of the village of Pukch'onri were brought into a schoolyard where they were forced to watch the burning down of

over four hundred of their homes. The villagers were then divided between suspected government and Communist sympathizers, and over three hundred unarmed civilians were gunned down. The following day, an additional one hundred villagers were executed on a road leading out of the village as part of a “red family hunting mission” (*ppalgaengi kajok saekch’ul chakchŏn*) (Cheju 4.3 Sagŏn Chinsanghoe 2003, 413–414). National security and violent political cleansing were therefore synonymous.

For the national security state and its attendant suppression forces, the 4.3 Incident was a success story and became a blueprint for similar operations. Throughout the Yŏsun Incident and the subsequent guerrilla suppression campaign (October 1948–June 1950), as many as ten thousand civilians were killed, as veterans from the Cheju campaigns employed similar tactics throughout the Kyŏngsang and Chŏlla regions, with American guidance. The most common victims were families suspected of providing food or shelter to antigovernment forces, indicating an expansive definition of what constituted a threat to the state (Chinsil Hwahaehoe 2010a, 87–130; Yŏsun Sagŏn Chinsanghoe 2006). In the organized mass killing of the National Guidance League members—in which an estimated twenty to one hundred thousand registered Communist converts were systematically eliminated in the early months of the Korean War—individuals were ranked within an ideological hierarchy and then, depending on their position within the pyramid, executed without trial (Chinsil Hwahaehoe 2009, 302–634). Unsurprisingly, therefore, the killings that occurred in the surrounding areas of Kŏch’ang were of a similarly calculated and polarized manner. Before carrying out the killings, the Third Battalion separated the members of the local security forces, wealthy landlords, and their families from the general population. This suggests that, while civilians were clearly targeted, the violence was explicitly discriminatory and calculated to achieve a political objective. Furthermore, nearly identical incidents transpired from December 1950 through March 1951 in the townships and villages of the nearby Sanch’ŏng region. (Chinsil Hwahaehoe 2010a, 261–262).

It is clear, then, that the ROK state carried out a series of calculated massacres. Let us now consider Harff’s second point: that a state is guilty of politicide if the violence is disproportionate to that carried out by the opposition. Without question, the fledgling Rhee government faced very real security and legitimacy crises in its initial years. However, in the case of Cheju, the available data gives a strong impression of a grossly uneven encounter. In a December 1948 report on the Ninth Regiment’s battle engagements, for example, 431 guerrillas

were reported killed and 5,719 jailed, compared with only 3 dead and 8 injured on the side of government forces; meanwhile, suppression forces lost only 17 men during the entire winter campaign (Cheju 4.3 Sagŏn Chinsanghoe 2003, 295, 373). This discrepancy takes on more significance when we consider the fact that, throughout the whole period of the guerilla uprising, the total number of poorly armed guerillas was estimated to have remained below five hundred people at one time—hence, an unnamed U.S. Army official’s statement that the suppression campaign was a “program of mass slaughter.”⁵ The fall 1950–spring 1951 partisan warfare of which the Kŏch’ang Incident was a part represented a more credible threat to the Rhee government, as it came on the heels of a northern invasion, with anywhere between twenty and fifty thousand guerrillas estimated to be operating behind United Nations lines.⁶ However, over the three-day killing spree at Kŏch’ang, resistance was absent. Indeed, while a total of ten police officers and right-wing youth groups members were killed in a December 5, 1950, guerrilla raid, Sinwŏn had been tranquil for two months, and the largest single killing occurred after all the villagers had been screened and interrogated (Chinsil Hwahaehoe 2010a, 260). State violence in both episodes, therefore, was disproportionate.

Let us now consider Harff’s third criterion: that politicides are present when the state does not make an effort to curb the violence. Ample evidence is available to support this contention in the case of the Korean War, but it is most clearly illustrated if we briefly evaluate the personnel and institutional composition behind each incident. The Third Battalion responsible for the atrocity at Kŏch’ang was part of the Ninth Regiment—the same regiment that headed the Cheju winter suppression campaign. Moreover, both the Third Battalion commander, Han Tongsŏk, and the head of the Ninth Regiment, Kim Ikyŏng, were veterans from the Cheju and Yŏsun campaigns. Further up the chain of command, the head of the Eleventh Division, which was responsible for overseeing the 1950–1951 partisan suppression campaigns, was Chong Ilkwŏn, a principal architect of the Cheju and Yŏsun slaughters. The specific tactics employed in Kŏch’ang likewise mirrored those of the Cheju offensive. During the partisan suppression campaigns, the security forces employed a tactic known as “Kyŏnbyŏkch’ŏngya.” A brutal if effective policy, Kyŏnbyŏkch’ŏngya was premised on the idea of securing safe villages while starving the enemy of critical resources. In practice, this meant dividing villages along ideological lines and moving civilians and food to safe hamlets, with suspicious villages burned down and reduced to ashes in an effort to cut off guerrilla access to crops: in other words, a

carbon copy of the scorched-earth tactics employed on Cheju Island two and a half years prior (Chinsil Hwahaehoe 2010a, 254; Han, 2007, 43–48). That we find the same cast of characters and methods carried out over a two-year duration indicates not only an absence of effort from the state to stem the tide of atrocities, but a sustained drive to entrench such practices.

Systematic Violence, Localized Memory

With an argument for the systematic and politicidal character of the Cheju and Kōch'ang incidents now in place, we move to our discussion of each respective memorial park. Mirroring their parallel histories, the struggles for victims of these massacres to achieve recognition have been intertwined. Suppressed throughout the rule of Syngman Rhee (1948–1960), these issues came to light briefly during the Chang Myōn period (1960–1961), as legislators and family bereavement associations petitioned the government to punish perpetrators, launched a series of investigations into Korean War civilian massacres, built monuments and memorials, held funerals, and constructed mass graves for the previously unacknowledged victims. In the aftermath of Park Chung Hee's May 16, 1961, coup d'état, however, these efforts were laid to waste as the incipient military regime arrested the groups' leaders en masse, destroyed monuments to the victims, and desecrated mass graves throughout the country (TRCK Report IV 2010, 77–83; Yi, 2010, 255–271). South Korea's democratization from 1987 onward and activism from civil society groups led to legislative efforts for compensation and the restoration of the Cheju and Kōch'ang victims' honor. As previously mentioned, prosecution of perpetrators was absent and compensation was limited, indicating the political compromises that activists were forced to accept.⁷ However, funding and space for the construction of memorial parks were important components of this process.

Opened on October 8, 2004, and March 28, 2008, respectively, the Kōch'ang Incident Memorial Park and the Cheju 4.3 Peace Park represent the symbolic fruits of an arduous struggle for recognition. Spatially and ideologically removed from the nationalist monuments and museums that dominate the nation's capital, their physical isolation and autonomous management structures ensure a degree of narrative independence from more explicitly state-oriented sites.⁸ Though their remote locations mean a moiety of visitors compared to Seoul-based national monuments, attendance at the parks has been steady, and according to one study of responses to the Cheju 4.3 Peace Park, there has been success in fostering historical reflection

and feelings of empathy for the victims of this tragedy (Kang et al. 2011, 257–265). Moreover, the sites function as locations for educational field trips, as well as places for official memorial functions within each community. Turning our attention to issues of epistemology and narrative, both sites lend credence to Susan Sontag’s observation that “the memory of war . . . is mostly local” (Sontag 2003, 35). This section focuses on each site’s localized, victim-centric motif as an alternative to the state-led, anti-Communist “June 25” (*yugio*) narrative. Critical to note is that June 25 is not merely a date, but an epistemological field for demarcating the origins, character, and meaning of the conflict. As former TRCK member Kim Dong-Choon has noted, memorializing the conflict under the heading of “June 25”—the day that North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel—has allowed various South Korean governments to attribute all the war’s casualties and devastation to a “Communist conspiracy” (D.-C. Kim 2009, 3–6). Beyond this binary logic, an ideology of nationalism forged around state legitimacy has reigned supreme. Legally and epistemologically estranged from the national narrative of the war period, it is unsurprising that victims’ groups have sought an alternative framework for making sense of their communal trauma.

Though possessing notable differences in terms of scope and narrative strategies, the parks’ two most prevalent shared features are an emphasis on the local character of the atrocities and a depiction of the state as predatory, rather than as the guardian of the Korean peoples (*minjok*). Through this narrative mode, each site actively works to demystify, though not necessarily to transcend, the June 25 narrative’s power over historical production. The emphasis on the local is apparent immediately upon entering the Cheju 4.3 Peace Park, as the main gate is decorated with poetry by local authors dedicated to the massacre. Common among many of the pieces are an emphasis on the island’s unique physical features, village life, and the tragedy’s integration into these traditional facets of the Cheju identity. Likewise, upon entering Kōch’ang Incident Memorial Park, the visitor is introduced to a poem titled “The Road to Sinwōn” (“Sinwōn kanūn kil”), composed by Paek Hyōngjin. Etched into a mock memorial stone (*wiryōngbi*), the poem presents Sinwōn as a community collectively defined by its trauma, stigmatization, and overcoming of these obstacles through duty and defiance. Written in a series of stanzas that depict Sinwōn as a place that others close their eyes to and turn away from, that is isolated from the politics of the country’s cities, and whose needs for redemption from the “*ppalgaengi*” (“red” or “commie”) label are dismissed by the Seoul *yangban* (in this case, a

euphemism for a wealthy elite), the poem is unified by a recurring motif that states: “If you say come, we will come; if you say go, we will go” (figure 1).

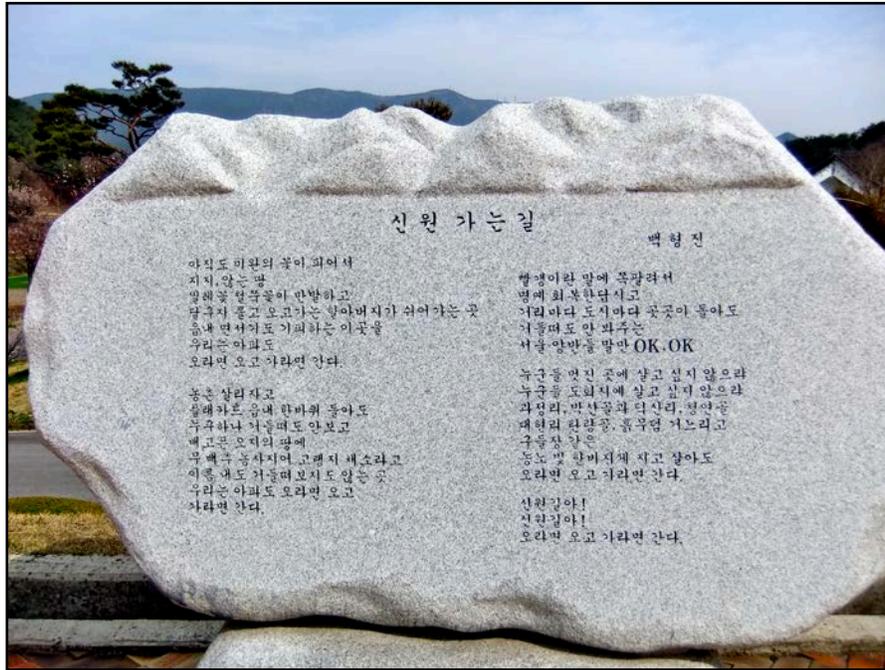


Figure 1. “The Road to Sinwön” (“Sinwön kanŭn kil”), Kōch’ang Incident Memorial Park, April 7, 2014. *Source:* All photos in this article were taken by the author.

This vantage point—which privileges the local over the national and the intimate over the abstract and mythological—is further demonstrated through an examination of the representation of victims. In the Cheju 4.3 Peace Park, this strategy is well pronounced, as four sections of the massive park—“Monument with the Victims’ Names” (“Kak myōngbi”), “Memorial Tablet Shrine” (“Wip’ae pong’anso”), “Tombstone for the Missing” (“Haengp’ulim p’yosök”), and “Recovered Mortal Remains Enshrining Hall” (“Pong’angwan”)—impress on the visitor the critical linkage between the individuals’ sufferings and the Cheju locale. In the first section, for example, the names of the 14,032 officially registered victims are etched into concrete black murals and divided into sections according to the counties and villages on the island in which they were born (figure 2).⁹ Likewise, in the “Tombstone for the Missing” section, bereaved individuals have set up mock graves for victims whose remains were never recovered or who died in prisons on the Korean mainland. To add a sense of intimacy, prison letters from the victims, some of which exude a longing to return home, are enshrined on tablets (figure 3).



Figure 2. “Monument with the Victims’ Names” (“Kak myōngbi”), Cheju 4.3 Peace Park, Cheju-do, May 21, 2014.



Figure 3. “Tombstone for the Missing” (“Haengp’ulim p’yosök”), Cheju 4.3 Peace Park, Cheju-do, May 21, 2012.

At the Kōch'ang park, a similar attempt at countering the dehumanizing legacies of anti-Communist discourse through a victim-centered narrative prevails. In contrast to the impersonal representations that are presented at the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History (Taehan Minguk Yōksa Pakmulgwan) and the War Memorial Complex (Chōnjaeng Kinyōmgwan) in Seoul, depictions of civilian suffering here are ubiquitous and dealt with thoroughly. A recurrent theme is the appeasement of the spirits of the victims, who, because they suffered a dishonorable death, have been unable to rest in peace. Lying behind the Memorial Monument (“Wiryōngt’ap”), for example, is a joint grave (*haptong myoyōk*) with individual gravestones to serve as a symbolic resting place for the souls of the victims. The name, age, and village of each victim is etched into each plaque. Artistic pieces throughout the park are likewise framed to cultivate intimacy with, and empathy toward, the victims. In the Historical Education Museum (Yōksa Kyoyukkwan), a series of graphic narratives and dioramas are dedicated to the massacres that transpired in each specific hamlet over the three-day period. Beside each display are video recordings of the surviving family members’ tearful testimonies, with the caption, “Is this a partisan [Communist]?” scrolling across the screen. We are thus given a window into the local and the intimate, and their integral role in the politics of memory surrounding both atrocities.

The preceding analysis should not, however, be interpreted as a suggestion that the nation is absent from either site. Rather, the shift in orientation toward a localized, individual-centric memorialization allows each venue to confront critical elements of the state-centric nationalist hegemonic discourse—the most salient being the notion that the South Korean state is the protector of the citizenry. Indeed, in these sites, the state ceases to be portrayed as a modernizing force and bulwark against Communism, and instead is presented as a facilitator of murder, an incubator of national division, and a repressor of historical truth. On this subject, the Cheju 4.3 Peace Park is the more stridently political of the two sites, as much of the historical narrative presented throughout the “Cheju April 3 Peace Memorial Hall” (“Cheju 4.3 P’yōnghwa Kinyōmgwan”) documents the cynical incompetence of the U.S. military and the Syngman Rhee government, which helped usher in the division of the peninsula, as well as the deliberate strategies of both regimes that led to the episode of mass violence that engulfed the island from 1948 to 1954. Beyond exposing state complicity in the slaughter of their community, the designers of the Kōch'ang Incident Memorial Park make clear the South Korean state’s efforts to

conceal its crime and to punish bereaved family members for their efforts at restoring the honor of the victims. For example, we learn how the army successfully prevented a full investigation of the atrocity by disguising soldiers as partisans and attacking the National Assembly's investigation team in April 1951. Further, we are informed that family members were prohibited by the state from properly burying or performing funeral rites for the victims for three years after the killings. Finally, we are presented with the tragic 1961 mass arrest of family bereavement association members and the destruction of the victims' mass grave and memorial stone by the Park Chung Hee military government. The power dynamic between the incidents' victims and the state, however, is not presented as unidirectional. For example, in a gesture that in both symbol and reality partially subverts the anti-Communist state's monopolistic power over historical production, the Kōch'ang Incident Memorial Park contains a restored, and revised, version of the 1960 memorial stone erected in November 1960 and smashed in May 1961 (figure 4). Through such gestures, these sites, and the epistemological and narrative logic that they utilize, offer alternative mnemonic horizons for reimagining a traumatic history—the implications of which have too often been concealed by the stifling discourse of the anti-Communist “June 25” ethos.



Figure 4. Reconstructed memorial stone, Kōch'ang Incident Memorial Park, April 7, 2014.

Embedded Silences, Fragmentation, and Residual Anti-Communism

It can therefore be stated that the importance of the memory work found within these sites transcends the laudable mission of restoring the honor of previously maligned victims of atrocities. Indeed, by becoming a permanent fixture within South Korea's mnemonic landscape, these sites may provide a useful safeguard against some of the more egregious features of the statist imagination that continues to dominate official memories of the peninsula's divisive history. However, an epistemological tragedy is at work at both of these sites: the ideological and spatial orientation that gives them their dynamism—a localized, victim-centric narrative—necessarily etiolates a critique of the systematic character of South Korean state violence outlined above. The result is a troubling paradox, as the two parks' shared mnemonic strategies produce a fragmented representation of the sustained state-on-society violence endemic to the civil war era.

The evidence and implications of the silences embedded in each site are manifest, and I will therefore focus on a few salient points. Most striking, perhaps, is that, despite their shared histories, neither site directly engages with the other in any significant fashion. At the Cheju park, for example, there is not a single mention of the Kōch'ang Incident or any direct reference to any of the other civilian massacres that occurred in other regions of the country in the wake of the Cheju rebellion. Ensnared in its localized purview, there is little effort or need to consider the implications of Cheju providing a blueprint and testing ground for ROK counterinsurgency tactics, which spread throughout the southern half of the peninsula and manifested themselves more than two years later in Sinwŏn. At Kōch'ang, the picture is more complicated, since within the Historical Education Museum there are two references to Cheju. However, in both cases, the connections between the two incidents are underdeveloped. For example, early in the exhibit, the "Historical Background of the Kōch'ang Civilian Massacre" ("Kōch'ang Yangmin Haksal Sagŏn ūi Sidaejōk Sanghwang") panel briefly mentions that both the Cheju Uprising and the Yōsun Mutiny threw South Korean society into chaos. However, no details or explanation of either of these incidents is provided. Later in the exhibit, there is a more developed treatment of the connections between Cheju and Kōch'ang in a section devoted to the history of the Ninth Regiment. Here, we learn that the Ninth Regiment caused enormous harm to civilians while stationed in Cheju until the end of 1948, and repeated these practices when resurrected in

September 1950. Instead of further pursuing the implications of this connection, however, the relationship between the events in Cheju and Kōch'ang is reduced to that of the Ninth Regiment. Consequently, a pedagogical opportunity is lost. By providing no historical account of the 4.3 Incident, the exhibit ignores the class-based and ideological political cleavages that were constitutive of the Cheju uprising and that structured the subsequent guerrilla partisan campaigns, which in turn led to the episode at Kōch'ang. As an alternative, the visitor is provided with an interpretation of mass violence centered on the Ninth Regiment—one that omits both the broader practices of counterinsurgency and mass killings that were carried out south of the 38th parallel and the political character of the ROK anti-Communist state that formulated such strategies. Again, we are encouraged to ponder the local over the national, and, therefore, the episodic over the sustained.

This lack of dialogue between the parks is further evident in each site's treatment of the 1960–1961 era. As previously mentioned, the collapse of the Rhee regime in the aftermath of the April 19, 1960, student movement provided a brief period of relative legal and ideological liberation under the Second Republic stewarded by Prime Minister Chang Myōn. Within this atmosphere of greater political freedom, family bereavement associations demanding historical justice were forged, and the community of Sinwōn was central to these developments. Pent-up feelings of resentment exploded in Sinwōn on May 11, 1960, when an angry mob broke into the home of the village chief (*myōnjang*), who had collaborated with the military during the atrocity, and dragged him into the streets, where he was beaten to death (*Kyōnghyang Sinmun*, May 12, 1960). This incident garnered national attention, leading to numerous petitions and newspaper reports on other episodes of state-on-society violence that had happened during the Korean War. For example, calls for investigations into the National Guidance League killings proliferated, while bereaved family members of victims executed without trial in Taegu Prison sought compensation and the punishment of perpetrators. In Cheju, meanwhile, the Paekchoilsonhoe victims association was formed, and its members demonstrated with radical students for historical restitution. These collective efforts culminated in brief National Assembly investigations (made public on June 24, 1960), which reported that thousands had been illegally killed during the war. The community of Sinwōn, in other words, was at the vanguard of a much broader political movement and, indeed, consciously saw itself as being engaged in this political project (*Hanguk Ilbo*, June 21, 1960).

The reactionary terror against these activists in May and June 1961—recently dubbed the “Bereaved Family Incident” (Yujok Sagŏn)—was of a similarly national and highly politicized character (Chinsil Hwahaehoe 2010b, 77–83; Yi 2010). To buttress his internal control and his image in the United States, Park Chung Hee labeled these activities as part of a North Korean Communist conspiracy and ordered the mass arrest of group leaders and the destruction of graves and monuments that had been erected the previous year. In the case of Kŏch’ang, seventeen people were arrested and convicted, and the community was forced to pay for the desecration of their family members’ tombstones. In other towns throughout the country, police raided the offices and homes of bereaved family association members, destroying family records, and hauled leaders to jail, where they disappeared for months or years without explanation. In Cheju, some leaders fled to Japan, thus severing ties with family members who were forced to live with the stigma of the *yŏnjwaje* (guilt-by-association system).¹⁰ Though both sites address the possibilities and ultimate tragedy of this era, these events are presented as isolated episodes of a community’s struggle against an indifferent state. Similar to the presentation of the killings themselves, the systematic and historically constituted nature of these events is obscured from the viewer.

This estrangement does not exist merely between these two sites. Rather, it is a reflection of a broader epistemological insularity from the politicidal history to which these incidents belong. Evidence to support this argument may be recited ad nauseam, but it is perhaps best illustrated by examining the Cheju park’s curious relationship to the National Guidance League (NGL) killings. Formed in June 1949, the National Guidance League was a nationwide institution tied to the incipient ROK national security state. Ostensibly designed to alleviate the problem of prison overcrowding, the NGL was premised on confessed Communists’ voluntary surrender to a program of ideological indoctrination in exchange for clemency. Coercion and bribery were important recruiting tools, and on the eve of the June 25, 1950, North Korean invasion, the group’s membership had swelled to close to three hundred thousand, 80 percent of whom are estimated to have been illiterate peasants (Chinsil Hwahaehoe 2010a, 158–162). Immediately following the northern invasion, however, the Rhee government ordered the mass arrest and execution of NGL and South Korean Worker’s Party members, as well as pre-detained prisoners from the Cheju and Yŏsun rebellions. The majority of killings took place in July and August 1950, and official estimates of the number of NGL members killed range widely, from

twenty to one hundred thousand, making it perhaps the largest mass killing in Korean history. Further, it was a deterritorialized affair, as 105 specific massacre sites have been identified, ranging as far north as Ch'unch'ŏn in Kangwŏn-do and all the way south to Sŏgwip'ŏ in Cheju (Chinsil Hwahaehoe 2010a, 158–162). When we consider its geographic diversity, its sustained manner, its connections to the ideological political project of the ROK government, and its intentionality, the National Guidance League Incident is perhaps the most transparent example of the systematic political violence that plagued this era.

Because thousands of Cheju residents were slaughtered during this campaign, it is unsurprising that these victims are honored throughout the Cheju 4.3 Peace Park. Here, the largest and most powerful exhibit is “Tombstone for the Missing” (Haengp'urim p'yosŏk) (figure 5). Individual gravestones for the 3,780 missing bodies lie throughout the section, the majority of which are dedicated to those presumably killed in mainland prisons during the 1950 summer extermination campaign. The exhibit's effect is further buttressed by a statue depicting lost souls attempting to cross the void into the afterlife (see figure 3). Circling this construction are haunting letters from prisoners requesting food, medicine, and a yearning to return home. Memorial plaques are positioned in front of the mock cemetery, referencing the disparate locations throughout the country where each individual disappeared. While cryptically addressing the phenomenon of prison killings, there is no reference to victims from other regions who died at these sites, nor is there a single mention of National Guidance League killings, despite the fact that thousands of Cheju citizens joined the group and were victims of this organized campaign of violence. The National Guidance League Incident's relationship to the site is therefore contradictory: present, yet unnamed, and ephemeral to the park's mnemonic function.

The troubling implications of this strained and ambiguous relationship to the National Guidance League Incident is further demonstrated when we consider the function of Cheju 4.3 Peace Park's temporary exhibit “Genocide in the World” (“Segye ūi Chenosaidū”)—an exhibit that was being shown when I visited the park in the spring of 2012 but has since been taken down. Physically isolated from other parts of the museum, the section was devoted to some of the worst slaughters of the twentieth century around the globe, such as the Shoah, the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, and the Hutu genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994. Next to panels depicting these incidents was a discussion of the historical use of the term “genocide,” and the

legal and epistemological ambiguities surrounding this term—most notably the removal of political groups from the category of “victims.” Though not overtly stated, the message of this exhibit was hardly subtle: that the Cheju Incident belongs in the global pantheon of genocides, and that its exclusion from this definition forms another layer of the tragedy that the island’s people have had to endure. In evoking comparable mass atrocities, the exhibit spoke against this form of symbolic violence and likewise rendered the horrors of Cheju intelligible to the uninformed visitor, by making the events of 1948–1954 relatable to more globally recognized extermination campaigns. Whatever merits there are to this strategy, it betrays a troubling silence: while the site can allegorically position itself within a narrative of global, genocidal violence, it does not embed itself within the more immediate national systematic killing campaign that the Cheju Incident portended. Symbolically identified within a network of politically, temporally, and geographically disparate episodes, the Cheju Incident—like the Kōch’ang Incident—remains isolated from broader, nationally articulated patterns of political violence endemic to the creation of the ROK national security state.



Figure 5. “Tombstone for the Missing” (“Haengp’urim p’yosŏk”), Cheju 4.3 Peace Park, Cheju-do, April 7, 2014.

If the Kōch'ang and Cheju parks are representative of a broader mnemonic pivot toward the collective memory of civil war violence, they reveal a certain impasse. While state-on-civilian violence has now been partially integrated into the physical and symbolic architecture of the Korean War's mnemonic landscape, the spatially localized and victim-centric narrative mode used to convey this violence works against an integrated representation of the historical phenomenon of politicide that these disparate incidents constituted. What, then, are the implications? As a final thought, I would like to move beyond the narrow focus of my analysis thus far to briefly reflect on the role of anti-Communist ideology in shaping the mnemonic contours of South Korea's political present in the context of democratic transition. In his research on the politics of memory surrounding the memorial monument dedicated to the victims of the Kōch'ang massacre, Han Sunghoon (2008) presents a persuasive case that the victims' families' strategies of memorialization have been historically constituted through a series of accommodations and compromises with the anti-Communist state. According to Han, these methods emerged in the wake of the traumas inflicted on Sinwŏn by the 1961 crackdown and included consistently voting for the ruling party, depoliticizing the issue from a case of state-on-community violence to one of soldier excess, and emphasizing the abjectly apolitical bent of the massacre's victims. In Han's reading, the most salient expression of this movement was the decision by victims' groups in the 1980s to change the language on the memorial monument to a state-friendly account of events and to focus their legal efforts on restoring the victims' honor and seeking medical compensation (Han 2008). Because of its special administrative status, activists in Cheju were able to approach the issue with considerable autonomy (H.C. Kim 2012), and this is reflected in the park's aforementioned function as a partial critique of the U.S. military and Syngman Rhee's early Cold War machinations. However, as Korean scholar Kim Minhwan's recent research has demonstrated, a similar strategic compromise was at work in the construction of the Cheju 4.3 Peace Park. Kim notes that artistic works and exhibits that either honored the deaths of Cheju guerrillas, or offered radical critiques of U.S. policies or those of the Syngman Rhee regime, were either discarded or altered into a less potent political form during the consultation process (Kim M.-H. 2014, 26–31). In other words, historical representation at both parks was premised on a Faustian bargain of sorts, as victim groups partially submitted to the political and ideological hegemony of the anti-Communist leviathan.

Han's chief concern is the parasitic effect that this history of coercion and compromise has had on the self-identity of the Sinwŏn's community. Beyond this valid concern, however, lurks a broader crisis surrounding the production of the Korean War past: the residual power of anti-Communism as a political and ideological project to shape and distort the representation of its own violent ascent to dominance. Indeed, an argument running through this article has been that the narrative tropes used in these parks reflect a deeper national, social, and communal memory toward these episodes. Seen from this perspective, the local and victim-centric epistemological frame common to both exhibits and their attendant fragmentations and silences may be interpreted as consequences of a complex sociopolitical process, in which groups' identities and frames of resistance were molded by and against the ideological and spatial demands of anti-Communism. The failure to forge a horizontal mnemonic solidarity surrounding the civil war politicicide is therefore rendered intelligible. Marginalized, maligned, and coerced by successive anti-Communist dictatorships, victim groups were forced to insulate themselves from the *ppalgaengi* label by emphasizing the locally particular aspects of these episodes and the apolitical nature of their victims. The virtual silencing at both sites of the National Guidance League Incident—an episode of national trauma involving confessed Communists—is a predictable, albeit troubling, consequence of this process. In the realm of official monumentalization, reconciliation thus remains an unfinished process, as the inclusion of certain episodes of mass killing has been premised on a partial closing-off of spatial and epistemological avenues for exploring South Korea's still-opaque history of mass violence. As spaces that carry with them an aura of sacrosanct, objective, and unimpeachable historical truth (particularly with progressives), the risk is that these sites will enshrine this particular epistemological impasse into a new mode of hegemonic understanding of South Korea's era of civil war violence—one that has not yet fully transcended its anti-Communist predecessor. The historian's relationship to these sites must therefore be critical and dialogical, with the aspiration that these parks will function as a starting point for visitors to further pursue the nation's still-unacknowledged history of politicicide.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion sketched out the possibilities and pitfalls of dislodging the hegemony of the “June 25” anti-Communist narrative of the Korean War through a localized,

victim-centric epistemological framework. Focusing on the Cheju and Kōch'ang memorial parks, this article identified both the triumphs and shortcomings of this endeavor as embedded in these two sites. When compared to the distortions and bleakness of the recent authoritarian past, both locations undoubtedly provide a useful corrective. By acknowledging and enshrining the chronicle of wrongful deaths that plagued these communities, these sites restore a modicum of dignity to previously maligned souls and their families, who have had to endure decades of degradation and stigmatization. Further, by exposing state crimes that took place during the civil war era, they offer a rare vantage point from which to peer into a period of national trauma too often reduced to the intrigues of a predatory North Korea. In speaking to the maladies inherent to the ROK Army's counterinsurgency strategies, they compel visitors to reconsider the fundamental assumption that underpins South Korea's anti-Communist nationalism: that the state is the guardian of the people. However, this strategy's acumen manifests itself precisely at the point where it shows its limits. While sharing a similar history and mode of narration, neither site engages with the other, or with similar incidents of trauma that collectively form a history of systematic political violence. Moreover, through offering an alternative to the stifling "June 25" narrative, this novel form of understanding was in part forged through compromise and subjugation to the demands of an anti-Communist ideological and political climate. The result is that the narrative and ideological frameworks of anti-Communism are not so much transcended as reinscribed into the narrative in a cryptic and residual form.

Admittedly, with these thoughts, we are merely scratching the surface, and these criticisms should not be interpreted as a condemnation of the version of history that these sites present. It is therefore incumbent on scholars and activists alike to pursue a deeper inquiry into the nature and meaning of the South Korean state's history of systematic violence against its population in the civil war era. Regrettably, the current national mood of political reaction compromises the terrain for exploring and transcending the relationship between the nation's civil war past and its political present. For those interested in greater historical justice and clarity, this final point is an unpleasant, but necessary, one to ponder.

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Notes

- 1 While it is true that the events at Cheju are now recognized as occurring between March 1947 and September 1954, the official name of the incident still utilizes the “4.3” nomenclature. This is a reference to the events of April 3, 1948, in which members of the Cheju branch of the South Korean Labor Party launched a series of coordinated attacks against police stations and the offices of local rightist groups.
- 2 The National Guidance League (or Bodo League) was an institution formed in June 1949, ostensibly to rehabilitate alleged leftists. Its membership swelled to roughly 300,000 by the outbreak of the June 25, 1950 North Korean invasion. Fearing a Communist uprising within its ranks, evidence suggests that Rhee ordered members to be detained en masse and executed at the discretion of local police officers. From June 1950 until September 1950, anywhere between 20,000 to 100,000 unarmed members are suspected to have been executed without trial.
- 3 Though the term *sagŏn* is typically translated into English as “incident,” there is no direct English equivalent of the word. Its literal meaning is “an event that causes social problems and attracts social attention.”
- 4 This article borrows extensively from the research completed by the National Committee for Investigation of the Truth about the Cheju April 3 Incident and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Korea (TRCK). Considerable controversy has surrounded the activities of these institutions. The most significant criticisms in my view regard the limited scope and nature of these bodies. Work was hampered considerably by issues such as term limitations, the fact that victims had to petition for recognition, lack of subpoena power, the loss or destruction of evidence due to the passage of time or government interference, continuing social stigma and fear surrounding these issues, and lack of publicity, to name just a few. In my estimation, the cumulative effect of these problems renders the determination of an unvarnished objective “truth” concerning the numbers and precise nature of these atrocities improbable. The numbers I cite throughout the article are therefore estimates and reflect this issue. However, as the overall effect has been to understate the number of atrocities and their direct linkages to state policies, these shortcomings do not challenge my claim that they were systematic and sustained, and therefore political. While I rely on the more detailed original Korean versions of these commissions’ reports, a brief English-language synopsis of the TRCK’s methods can be found in Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Korea (2009, 23–41).
- 5 Headquarters of the United States Army Forces in Korea, *G-2 Periodic Report*, No. 1097, April 1, 1949.
- 6 The number of guerrillas who operated in the southern provinces remains a matter of speculation. A South Korean government official estimated that close to fifty thousand guerrillas operated in South Chŏlla alone, while a National Assembly investigation in late October 1950 put the number at forty thousand. However, given the Rhee government’s penchant for exaggerating enemy strength to justify military procurements and draconian policies, one needs to view these statistics with a modicum of suspicion. American sources put the number at a more modest twenty thousand, with as many as ten thousand

- coming from retreating Korean People's Army (KPA) forces (Chinsil Hwahaehoe 2010a, 264).
- 7 In the case of the 4.3 Incident, compensation was limited to those who were disabled or who had lost the ability to work and had no relatives. No financial restitution was given to the bereaved families from the Kōch'ang Incident.
- 8 The Cheju 4.3 Peace Park is officially administered by the Cheju Special Self-Governing Province. The Kōch'ang Incident Memorial Park is managed by the Kōch'ang Massacre Management Office.
- 9 Since many of the bodies could not be recovered, or families avoided making claims out of shame, the actual number is estimated to be much higher.
- 10 Translated into English as either the “involvement system” or the “guilt-by-association system,” the *yōnjwaje* was a legal and social practice that discriminated against families whose relatives were accused Communists. Common practices included families being spied on, prevented from entering the civil service, or denied access to employment. See, for example, Cheju 4.3 Sagōn Chinsanghoe (2003, 496–508).

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