Conceptualizing Sorrow and Hope: The Discourse of *Han* in South Korea

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Bodily memory of pain is
Easily erased
But
The wound of the heart
Grows ever worse
It departs and returns and
Stares at me deep in the night
Not only stares but
Weeps sadly
Shakes from anger
Or embraces despair
The pain of the body is sensory but
The wound of the heart
In touch with the essence of life
Is perhaps what is called *han*

Han by Pak Kyŏngni[1]

Introduction

In the summer of 1983, a reporter from the *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, a major daily Korean newspaper, traveled to Wonju to interview Pak Kyŏngni, a prominent writer considered by some as "the mother of Korean literature."[2] The occasion for this interview was the publication

1 Pak Kyŏngni 박경리, *Pŏrigo kal kŏnman namasŏ ch'am holgabunhada* 버리고 갈 것만 남아서 참 홀가분하다 [I leave light-heartedly with nothing left to keep] (Seoul: Maroniebuksŭ 마로니에북스, 2008), 106, my translation.

2 Ch'oe Chaepong 최재봉, "Pak Kyŏngni t'agye…sunanŭi minjoksa p'umŭn 'han'gungmunhak ŏmŏni' 박경리 타계…수난의 민족사 품은 '한국문학 어머니' [Pak Kyŏngri passes away…the 'mother of Korean literature']," *Hankyoreh* 한겨레, May 5, 2008, accessed August 15, 2018, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/obituary/285931.html.

of the fourth volume of what became Pak's five-part, sixteen-volume historical epic called *T'oji* 토지 (Land), a story spanning five generations of a rural landowning family in the politically turbulent late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and set in Japan, Korea, China, and Russia.[3] In the course of their discussion, Pak expanded on a concept that she considered a major theme running throughout her work: "The meaning of *han* is not limited to sadness or mournfulness. That may be part of *han*, but *han* itself is deeper and more fundamental. Every living thing in the world possesses some degree of *han* and lives to resolve it. That is why *han* can also be a source of strength and a creative, life-steering energy." The reporter went on to explain how each character among the hundreds in *T'oji* had to live with their own form of *han*.[4]

In the mid-1990s, *T'oji* was translated into English for the first time as part of a UNESCO effort to collect representative literary works worldwide. Under the title "Trapped by Han: Land," a *Los Angeles Times* reviewer wrote: "Like the 19th century Russian writers who gave us glimpses into the Russian character, Pak explores the Korean soul. Central to *Land* is *han*, which has no English equivalent. *Han*, the Korean tenet of an eternal woe, unrequited love and unending hope, lives in all Pak's characters."[5] Straddling essentialist and nationalist tones, *han* has been understood as a prominent and unique emotional feature of Korean identity not only in the literary field but also in other academic fields. Despite its widespread use, its meaning has been difficult to pin down and has thus led to various broad and contradictory claims regarding its nature, cause, and function.

Han as an emotion concept

Han 한 derives from the Sino-Korean character 恨 and is, arguably, not a specifically Korean word, concept, or characteristic, especially in the context of other Asian languages and areas where Chinese script is used. It has, however, developed a contemporary "ethnonationalist" and essentialist

3 Sowon S. Park, "An Unknown Masterpiece: On Pak Kyŏngni's Land and World Literature," *European Review* 23, no. 3 (2015): 433, doi: 10.1017/S1062798715000113.

4 "<T'oji>ŭi chakka Pak Kyŏngnissirŭl ch'aja <토지>의 작가 박경리씨를 찾아 [Visiting Pak Kyŏngri, author of *T'oji*]," *Kyunghyang Shinmun* 경향신문, June 3, 1983, accessed August 15, 2018, https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn.

5 K. Connie Kang, "Trapped by Han: LAND," *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 1996, accessed August 20, 2018, http://articles.latimes.com/1996-09-15/books/bk-43990_1_park-kyong-ni.

significance in Korea.[6] The emotion concept[7] has been discussed and used individually and collectively with variable force and meaning depending on its historical context. The following is a concise compilation of key studies that have attempted to define *han* in the literary and academic spheres.

In the 1980s, poet and activist Ko Ŭn 고은 wrote: "we cannot deny that we were born from the womb of *han* and raised in the bosom of *han*."[8] Ko viewed *han* as a negative emotion accumulated over Korea's history through the peninsula's experience of foreign aggression, colonization, and poverty.[9] Linguist Chŏng Taehyŏn 정대현 wrote that due to its long period of accumulation, *han* has not easily disappeared; it is independent of an object or a cause, and it is experienced passively, like a bodily ache.[10] Chŏng also emphasized that *han* is the sorrow of helpless victims such as women oppressed by Chosŏn-period Confucian values and social structures.[11] In contrast, literary scholar Ch'ŏn Idu 천이두 drew out the positive aspect of *han,* arguing that it "has both negativity and transcendence nested within it."[12] Ch'ŏn viewed *han* as a multifaceted emotional "complex" that contained both "bright" and "dark" sides as well as both affection, chŏng 정 情, and resentment, wŏn 원 怨.[13]

In the 1990s, inquiries into shamanism in Korean folk culture pointed to *han* as a crucial cause for being drawn to shamanism, according to

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6 Sandra So Hee Chi Kim, "Korean *Han* and the Postcolonial Afterlives of 'The Beauty of Sorrow,'" *Korean Studies* 41 (2017): 257, doi:10.1353/ks.2017.0026.

7 The term "emotion concept," as used by Margrit Pernau, views emotions not as stable objects but as embodied conceptual "indicators" and "factors of a changing reality" based on the experience and interpretation of materiality. See "Introduction," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 11, no. 1 (2016): 25, doi:10.3167/choc.2016.110102.

8 Chi Kim, "Korean *Han*," 255.

9 Kim Tongkyu 김동규, "Han'gukchŏk uurŭi chŏngch'e: Han(恨)kwa mellangk'olli sai 한국적 우울의 정체: 한(恨)과 멜랑콜리 사이 [The identity of Korean depression: between *han* (恨) and melancholy]," *Hegel yŏn'gu* 헤겔연구 [Hegel Studies] 37 (2015): 299. doi:10.17281/khegel.2015..37.010.

10 Chŏng Taehyŏn 정대현, "Han(恨)ŭi kaenyŏmjŏk kujo 한(恨)의 개념적 구조 [The Conceptual Structure of *Han*]," *Han'guk munhwa yŏn'guwŏn* 한국문화연구원 [Journal of Korean culture studies] 6 (1985): 70.

11 Chŏng, "Hanŭi kaenyŏmjŏk kujo," 72–75.

12 Chi Kim, "Korean *Han*," 256.

13 Ch'ŏn Idu 천이두, "'Han(恨)'ŭi kujoe taehayŏ '한(恨)'의 구조에 대하여 [On the structure of *han*]," *Hyŏndae munhak iron yŏn'gu* 현대문학이론연구 [The journal of modern literary theory] 3 (1993): 171.

cultural anthropologist Ch'oe Kilssŏng 최길성.[14] Writer and former minister of culture I Ŏryŏng 이어령 gave a series of lectures compiled into a book linking the economic success of South Korea with the shamanic ecstasy derived from the resolution of *han.*[15] In the late 1980s and 1990s, psychiatrist Min Sŏngkil 민성길 published and presented his psychiatric findings on *han* identifying it as a "uniquely Korean psychological state" linked to a physical malady called *hwa-byung* 화병 (fire-illness). He called for an "ethnic psychiatry" that would identify uniquely Korean socio-cultural factors to treat patients.[16]

As this brief overview of existing literature attests, the understanding, perception, and application of *han* have been varied and often contradictory. Some of the main tensions nested within the emotion concept based on relevant literature include the following:

Han is an emotion afflicting the socially disadvantaged—especially women and the working classes—while claiming applicability to the whole of Korean society.

Han cannot be fully comprehended by non-Koreans and it cannot be translated accurately, although other people with a history of foreign aggression may feel *han* and not recognize it as such*,* making it both universal and unique.

Han is both sorrow and hope. It is both negative and positive.

Such broad and ambiguous claims regarding the emotion concept of *han* underline the contentiousness and complexity of its vocabulary and discourse. Despite—or perhaps because of—this ambiguity, *han* has been able to play a significant role in shaping Korea's realm of experience. An emotion's tangible, lived experience is closely bound to its discourse, since the vocabulary of emotion is inextricably tied to its social experience and expectation. Thus, as the language of *han* increased and diversified in its formulation, it has arguably affected the way individuals and groups feel and express themselves over time. Additionally, the more *han* has been written and theorized about, the greater and more legitimate its vocabulary has become.

The primary sources examined here are two essays from a collection titled Hanŭi iyagi 恨의 이야기 (*The Story of* Han), published in 1988. The first text,

14 Soyoung Suh, "Stories to Be Told: Korean Doctors Between Hwa-byung (Fire-Illness) and Depression, 1970–2011," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 37, no. 1 (2013): 88, doi:10.1007/s11013-012-9291-x.

15 I Ŏryŏng 이어령, *Kŭraedo paramgaebinŭn tonda* 그래도 바람개비는 돈다 [Still the pinwheel turns] (Seoul: Tonghwasŏjŏk 동화서적, 1992), 238.

16 Suh, "Stories to Be Told," 87–88.

"Hanŭi kŭkpokŭl wihayŏ" 恨의 극복을 위하여 (Towards the overcoming of *han*), is an essay first published in 1980 by the poet Ko Ŭn. The second text, "Hane taehan minjungsahoehakchŏk shiron" 한(恨)에 대한 민중사회학적 시론 (Essay on *han* and *minjung* sociology), is an essay first published in 1987 by sociologists Han Wansang 한완상 and Kim Sŏngki 김성기. Ko, Han, and Kim have creatively formulated the meaning, value, and application of *han* in an attempt to redefine and establish Korean culture, identity, and history. Arguably, these interpretations, which build upon one another, show that *han* is neither stable nor timeless and that its meaning and value have been wide-ranging, even among contemporaries.

This article does not attempt to pinpoint exactly when, where, and by whose authority the notion of *han* came into existence, if that were possible at all. The word *han* existed in the Korean vocabulary as a Sino-Korean character, as previously mentioned, before the emergence of the presently examined discourse. It would also be a misleading claim to simply consider it a twentieth-century construct seized by Korean intellectuals in the postwar years to construct a national identity, as this would overlook the lived experiences of those who have actually felt this emotion.

What this article attempts to address are the different interpretations of *han* based on a close reading of two texts to uncover how its authors endeavored to imbue the emotion concept with a sense of urgency and agency. This article is based on written material and intends to comparatively approach the aforementioned texts to disclose some of the underlying presuppositions and conceptual tensions that deserve closer scrutiny. The analysis will be categorized temporally, according to past, present, and future dimensions of the writers' interpretations of *han*.

Ideological demystification is not the ending to the story but rather the hope to better understand how the tensions within *han* opened up a discursive space that allowed different agents to conceptually engage with this emotion. Ultimately, the goal is to examine what the writers attempted to *do* with the emotion concept of *han.*

The theoretical impulse upon which this article is based has to do with the critical relationship between emotions, concepts, and history as proposed by Ute Frevert, Margrit Pernau, and Imke Rajamani. Ute Frevert has laid out two basic premises in her introductory text to *Geschichte der Gefühle*: (1) Emotions make history. *Gefühle machen Geschichte*. They motivate and deter actions, form and destroy communities, and allow and disrupt communication. (2) Emotions are not only able to make history (*geschichtsmächtig*) but also have histories of their

own (*geschichtsträchtig*). They are not constant but rather changing in expression, object, and value.[17]

Emotions and their vocabularies are embedded in particular spatial and temporal contexts that lend them meaning; they are not passive descriptors and instead actively form and project what they describe.[18] The language of emotion "mirrors cultural conventions and social norms. But it also allows [historians] to read back what people actually felt, wanted to feel, or meant to feel. And they impart an insight into the transience of emotions, in their historicity and temporality (*Zeitgebundenheit*)."[19]

Han will be treated as both emotion and concept here—as a temporally and spatially grounded subject of both conceptual history and emotion history. Such a perspective, which aims to "expand conceptual history beyond language" through "concepts of emotion," has been suggested by Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani.[20] Pernau and Rajamani have argued that emotions play an important role in conceptual change and aim to "bring conceptual history and the history of emotions into a dialogue from which both will profit,"[21] a view that is regarded as important and necessary in this article.

Based on Frevert's emphasis on the place of emotion within history as well as Pernau's and Rajamani's stress on the potential of emotions as agents of conceptual change, *han* is regarded in this article as an emotion concept that has a history just as much as it is a part of it, as a case study exemplifying how emotion and reason are entangled and not opposed,[22] and as a concept that can create as well as embody change. By analyzing how *han* has been interpreted and explicated in different ways by different intellectuals, this article hopes to contribute to its discourse by arguing that *han* is a contested and multifaceted emotion concept in history. By situating it in a particular historical context and examining its contradictions, it also seeks to challenge common essentialist, ethnonational perceptions.

17 Ute Frevert, "Was haben Gefühle in der Geschichte zu suchen?" *Geschichte Und Gesellschaft* 35, no. 2 (2009): 207.

18 Ute Frevert, *Vergängliche Gefühle* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013), 11–12.

19 Frevert, *Vergängliche Gefühle*, 15.

20 Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani, "Emotional translations: Conceptual history beyond language," *History and Theory* 55, no. 1 (2016): 46.

21 Pernau and Rajamani, "Emotional translations," 47.

22 Pernau and Rajamani, "Emotional translations," 55.

***Han* and the *minjung* movement**

Out of the many historical moments in which *han* has been discussed, one of the significant periods in which it conveyed momentum as a concept of change was during the *minjung* movement in the 1970s and 1980s.[23] *Han* was crucially linked to this movement by various writers who saw the suffering of the people due to political, economic, and social oppression as a central element in the *minjung* realm of experience.[24] This connection between *han* and *minjung* is a prominent feature that threads together the collection of essays in *The Story of* Han.

Minjung 민중, roughly translated as "people," "proletariat," or "folk,"[25] was a highly debated idea that came into public focus as a result of the adjustments in the state–society relationship after a successful military coup d'état led by Pak Chŏnghŭi 박정희 in 1961.[26] The ensuing regime, which prioritized rapid industrialization and repressive strategies of control, birthed groups of dissidents that looked to *minjung* as a rallying concept.[27] Though its contours were contested by groups influenced by differing ideologies and the role that intellectuals envisioned for themselves in relation to it changed over time, the general consensus among its advocates was that *minjung* did not include all Korean nationals, that it excluded the wealthy and those with political power or privileges, and denounced foreign influence.[28] It has been argued that the flexibility and inclusivity of the concept gave it a greater practical relevance in social movements, which continuously reinterpreted the concept according

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23 Kim Jin 김진, "Han(恨)iran muŏsin'ga 한(恨)이란 무엇인가? [What is *han*?]," in *Han(*恨*)ŭi hakchejŏk yŏn'gu* 한(恨)의 학제적 연구 [Interdisciplinary studies of *han*], ed. Sin Ch'angsŏk 신창석 (Seoul: Ch'ŏrhakkwa hyŏnsilssa 철학과 현실사, 2004), 12.

24 Kim Yŏngp'il 김영필, "Hanŭi hyŏnsang hakchŏk punsŏk 한의 현상학적 분석 [Phenomenological analysis of *han*]" in *Han(*恨*)ŭi hakchejŏk yŏn'gu* 한(恨)의 학제적 연구 [Interdisciplinary studies of *han*], ed. Sin Ch'angsŏk 신창석 (Seoul: Ch'ŏrhakkwa hyŏnsilssa 철학과 현실사, 2004), 212.

25 O Seyŏng 오세영, "80nyŏndae han'gugŭi minjungsi 80년대 한국의 민중시 [*Minjung* poetry in the 1980s]," *Han'guk hyŏndae munhak yŏn'gu* 한국현대문학연구 [The journal of Korean modern literature] 9 (June 2001): 138, http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/NODE00586933.

26 Chang Sangch'ŏl 장상철, "1970nyŏndae 'minjung' kaenyŏmŭi chaedŭngjang 1970년대 '민중' 개념의 재등장 [Reemergence of the '*minjung*' concept in the 1970s]," *Kyŏngjewa sahoe* 경제와 사회 [Economy and society] 74 (June 2007): 118–119, http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/NODE00837729.

27 Chang, "1970nyŏndae 'minjung' kaenyŏmŭi chaedŭngjang," 119.

28 O, "80nyŏndae han'gugŭi minjungsi," 141.

to the situation.[29] Most *minjung* movement activists advocated for an "ideal democratic society" in opposition to authoritarian rule,[30] although there certainly were socialists who used the term "proletariat."[31] The term *minjung* had been used in the context of Japanese colonial rule to refer to the Korean people in opposition to the Japanese people, as exemplified in the 1923 *Korean Revolutionary Manifesto* by Sin Ch'aeho 신채호,[32] but its usage since the 1970s has revolved around a distinct sense of purpose—an urgent need to establish a *minjung*-centric society and an effort to reinterpret Korean history based on their resistance to oppressive rule.[33]

The movement's central premise was that the *minjung* were the principal and rightful agents of society and of history.[34] Groups of intellectuals differed on whether they themselves were part of the *minjung* or separate from them, but nevertheless compelled to help them realize their own political agency.[35] In the 1970s, they tended to see their role as educators, awakening the "sleeping" *minjung* to realize their historical agency; in the 1980s, the intellectuals increasingly thought of themselves as a part of the *minjung*.[36]

Han was a central theme in the writings of *minjung* movement intellectuals. Poet Kim Chiha 김지하, whose unwavering critical stance was inspired by his Catholic faith[37] and whose works were influential to many *minjung* theologians,[38] was one of the leading figures of the *minjung* movement. Starting with "Five Bandits," a poem that led to his arrest in May 1970, he suffered multiple subsequent beatings and arrests, later

29 Cho Taeyŏp 조대엽, "Kwangju hangjaenggwa 80nyŏndaeŭi sahoe undong munhwa 광주항쟁과 80년대의 사회운동문화 [Gwangju uprising and the culture of social movements in 1980]," *Minjujuŭiwa in'gwŏn* 민주주의와 인권 [Journal of democracy and human rights] 3, no. 1 (2003): 197. http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/NODE00504847.

30 O, "80nyŏndae han'gugŭi minjungsi," 143.

31 O, "80nyŏndae han'gugŭi minjungsi," 142.

32 Chang, "1970nyŏndae 'minjung' kaenyŏmŭi chaedŭngjang," 119.

33 Chang, "1970nyŏndae 'minjung' kaenyŏmŭi chaedŭngjang," 136.

34 Chang, "1970nyŏndae 'minjung' kaenyŏmŭi chaedŭngjang," 128.

35 Chang, "1970nyŏndae 'minjung' kaenyŏmŭi chaedŭngjang," 135.

36 Chang, "1970nyŏndae 'minjung' kaenyŏmŭi chaedŭngjang," 136.

37 Kyung Moon Hwang, *A History of Korea*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 247.

38 Mun Tonghwan 문동환, "Kim Chihaŭi 'Ojŏk' minjung sinhak chaech'ok 김지하의 '오적' 민중신학 재촉 [Chiha Kim's 'Five Bandits' prompts *minjung* theology]," *Hankyoreh* 한겨레, August 26, 2008, accessed October 26, 2018. http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/306754.html.

coming close to being executed by Pak's regime.[39] In 1971, he wrote in "Satire or Suicide" that the ceaseless violence inflicted on the *minjung* and the resulting accumulated experience of sorrow produced *han.* This *han* was the foundation on which poetic resistance was based.[40]

Ko Ŭn 고은, also a poet and a former Buddhist monk, whose writings carried a certain "Buddhist sensibility" as Kim's works had with Catholicism, wrote various socially conscious poems in the 1970s and 1980s, such as "Arrows" (1977), which called for democratic activists to leave behind everything for the sole purpose of "advancing with all our might" towards an envisioned political struggle.[41] He saw the tragic pain of *han* accumulated in the *minjung* as a passive emotion that cannot lead to a will to reform—as Kim Chiha believed—especially in his essay "Towards the overcoming of *han*."[42]

Minjung theology was an activist ideology and "theology of praxis" that drew its divine knowledge from the experience of the oppressed and marginalized and gained their energy from *han.*[43] As its main proponent, Sŏ Namtong 서남동 proclaimed himself to be a "medium" or "prophet of *han*" in his 1983 publication titled *A Study of* Minjung *Theology*.[44]

Minjung sociology, according to Han Wansang 한완상, was "conceived and raised in a site of suffering" and emerged as a kind of social diagnosis and potential prescription to treat this pain.[45] His critique of social inequality and national division between north and south as well as advocacy of democratic ideals were influential in the social movements into the 1980s.[46] Kim Sŏngki 김성기, who coauthored papers with Han, was part of the next generation of scholars influenced by *minjung*

39 Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 236–237.

40 Chang, "1970nyŏndae 'minjung' kaenyŏmŭi chaedŭngjang," 120.

41 Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 242.

42 Kim, "Haniran muŏsin'ga," 24.

43 Donald N. Clark, "Growth and limitations of minjung Christianity," in *South Korea's Minjung Movement,* ed. Kenneth M. Wells, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 92.

44 Sŏ Namtong 서남동, "Hanŭi saje 한의 사제 [Prophet of *han*]," in *Minjung sinhagŭi t'amgu* 민중신학의 탐구 [A study of *minjung* theology] (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1983).

45 Chŏng Supok 정수복, "Han Wansanggwa pip'an sahoehagŭi hyŏngsŏng 한완상과 비판사회학의 형성 [Han Wansang and the making of critical sociology in Korea]," *Han'guk sahoehakhoe* 한국사회학회 [The Korean sociological association] 51, no. 1 (2017): 389, http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/NODE07117666.

46 Chŏng, "Han Wansanggwa pip'an sahoehagŭi hyŏngsŏng," 368.

sociology.[47] Han and Kim later wrote about *han* in "Essay on *han* and *minjung* sociology," viewing it as a potential catalyst for social change.[48]

I Hyojae 이효재 regarded *han* as an emotion borne most acutely by women on behalf of the *minjung* and argued that *han* represented the afflictions of the weak more generally. By drawing attention to the historical and societal oppression of women, she called for a "new image of women" that does not consider *han* as a given female instinct or social fate.[49]

Interest in *han* thus spread through various fields of study as *minjung* movement frontrunners employed it as a lens for social scrutiny and as a magnifier for the suffering caused by structural violence. *Minjung* and *han* were strategically connected by various writers who lent these concepts increasing political significance. Foremost among these were Ko, Han, and Kim, whose essays on *han* were published together in a collection in the late 1980s.

The Story of Han

In 1988, a selection of fourteen essays on the subject of *han* was assembled and published under the title *Hanŭi iyagi* 한의 이야기, or *The Story of* Han. A three-part collection concerning the nature, structure, and resolution of *han*, these essays were meant to serve as a foundation for further research according to its editor, Sŏ Kwangsŏn 서광선.[50] Contributions from the fields of psychology, literature, sociology, politics, theology, and women's studies had been published in various books and journals between the late 1970s and the mid 1980s, a period marked by dictatorships, censorship, mass demonstrations, and the rise of the *minjung* movement in South Korea.

Of particular interest here are two of its essays, which are addressed to the writers' peers, urging them to advance their understanding of *minjung* experience and of *han*. The authors of these texts are concerned with democratization, unification, and nation building in a broader sense, attempting to situate Korea in the world through the crafting of an emotional identity.

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47 Chŏng, "Han Wansanggwa pip'an sahoehagŭi hyŏngsŏng," 390.

48 Han Wansang 한완상 and Kim Sŏngki 김성기, "Han(恨)e taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron 한(恨)에 대한 민중사회학적 시론 [Essay on *han* in *minjung* sociology]," in *Hyŏndae chabonjuŭiwa kongdongch'e* 현대자본주의와 공동체이론 [Modern capitalism and community theory], ed. Seoul University Sociological Research Group, (Seoul: Hangilsa 한길사, 1980).

49 I Hyojae 이효재, "Han'guk yŏinŭi han 한국 여인의 한 [The han of Korean women]," *Yŏsŏnggwa sahoe* 여성과 사회 [Woman and society], Seoul: Jungwoosa, 1978.

50 Sŏ Kwangsŏn 서광선, "Mŏrimal: 恨maech'in saram, 恨 maech'in minjok 머리말: 恨 맺힌 사람, 恨 맺힌 민족 [Preface: *han*-filled people, *han*-filled nation]," in *Hanŭi iyagi* 한의 이야기 [The story of *han*], ed. Sŏ Kwangsŏn 서광선 (Seoul: Borhee Press, 1988), 8.

The first essay, "Towards the overcoming of *han*,*"* was written by poet and activist Ko Ŭn. He wrote during a time of national crises, becoming "awakened" to the political reality following the act of self-immolation of garment-worker Chŏn T'aeil 전태일 in 1970[51] and the implementation of a constitutional dictatorship in 1972.[52] Ko became a leading figure in the struggle for democracy, human rights, national unity, and the *minjung* movement as attested by various leadership roles in the Association of Writers for Practical Freedom (1974), the National Association for the Recovery of Democracy (1974), the Korean Association of Human Rights (1978), and the Association of National Unity (1979).[53] He served several prison terms and experienced detention and torture under the watch of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency.[54]

Following the assassination of President Pak Chŏnghŭi 박정희 in October 1979 and the successful coup led by Chŏn Tuhwan 전두환 in December of that year, laborers and students demonstrated en masse against Chŏn's takeover during the so-called "Seoul Spring" in early 1980. Groups of dissidents had been rallying around opposition leader (and future president) Kim Taejung 김대중, meeting regularly to discuss their views of the state, plan countermeasures, and exchange information.[55] On May 15, 1980, one hundred thousand protesters—mostly students—demonstrated in front of Seoul Station.[56] That same day, the "Declaration of 134 Intellectuals" was issued in public opposition to Chŏn's regime, which included Ko Ŭn's and Seoul University professor Han Wansang's names.[57] On May 17, martial law was forcibly extended to the whole country, campuses were shut down, and Kim, Ko, Han, and many others were arrested and tortured under sedition and conspiracy

51 "Chronology," Ko Ŭn, accessed November 21, 2018, http://koun.co.kr/koun/chronology.html.

52 Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 236–237.

53 Anthony of Taizé, "Ko Un: Korean Poet, World Poet," Translations of Korean Literature by Brother Anthony of Taizé, accessed November 21, 2018, http://anthony.sogang.ac.kr/Kounbio.htm.

54 "Ko Un," The Griffin Trust For Excellence in Poetry, accessed November 21, 2018, http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/awards-and-poets/lifetime-recognition-award/ko-un/.

55 Han Namgyu 한남규, "Sigi kidarimyŏ naesil tajyŏ – Kim Taejungssi 시기 기다리며 내실 다져-김대중씨 [Kim Taejung, ensuring internal stability while waiting for the right moment]," *Chungang Ilbo* 중앙일보, April 17, 1980, accessed November 22, 2018. https://news.joins.com/article/1534768.

56 Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 263.

57 "1980nyŏndae ch'o chisigin siguksŏnŏn 1980년대 초 지식인 시국선언 [Early 1980s declaration of intellectuals]," Minjuhwa undong kinyŏmsaŏphoe 민주화운동기념사업회 [Korea democracy foundation], accessed November 23, 2018, http://www.610.or.kr/board/content/page/40/post/384?.

charges.[58] The demonstrations culminated on May 18 with the Kwangju Uprising, a student protest that turned into a bloody civil movement lasting ten days, during which a brutal government crackdown killed over two hundred and injured hundreds more.[59]

That was also the year in which Ko's essay, "Towards the overcoming of *han*," was first published. Given the political backdrop of tireless demonstrations by students, intellectuals, laborers, and other activists, a *minjung* movement gaining traction and running the gamut of academic discourses, and with the challenging tasks of democratization and unification ahead, Ko's broad, radical, and uncompromising style and content seem to encapsulate South Korea's *zeitgeist* of the 1970s and 1980s, as will be examined in further detail in this article.

The second text, "Essay on *han* and *minjung* sociology," coauthored by Han Wansang and Kim Sŏngki 김성기, was first published in early 1987. Social critic and activist Han Wansang was twice relieved of his professorship at Seoul National University in the 1970s for his involvement in the democratic movement, especially after reading an anti-government declaration in 1975.[60] Along with many other opposition leaders, Han was imprisoned in 1980 under conspiracy charges.[61] He was invited to Emory University as a visiting professor after his release "to ensure his personal safety," effectively living in exile only to return a couple of years later as democratic movements were starting to build momentum.[62]

In the 1960s, Han had studied and taught in the southern United States. There, he was exposed to the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-Vietnam War protests, events that deepened his commitment to social reform back home.[63] Han later wove together "Western theory" and the concept of *minjung*,[64] striving to make the tools of sociology more applicable to

58 Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 263.

59 Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 264.

60 Kim P'ansu 김판수, "Han Wansang puch'ongninŭn nugu? 한완상 부총리는 누구? [Who is Deputy Prime Minister Han Wansang?]," *Kyunghyang Shinmun* 경향신문, January 29, 2001, accessed November 30, 2018. http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?art_id=200101291915401.

61 Kim, "Han Wansang puch'ongninŭn nugu?"

62 "Han Wan-Sang," Emory University, accessed November 30, 2018, http://www.emoryhistory.emory.edu/facts-figures/people/makers-history/profiles/han.html.

63 Chŏng, "Han Wansanggwa pip'an sahoehagŭi hyŏngsŏng," 367.

64 Kim Hogi 김호기, "Han Wansangŭi 'Minjunggwa Chisigin' 한완상의 '민중과 지식인' [Han Wansang's 'The *minjung* and the intellectual']," *Hankook Ilbo* 한국일보, October 8, 2018, accessed November 30, 2018, http://m.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/201810071104343156.

Korea's current situation.[65] Along with *minjung* theology and *minjung* literature, the field of *minjung* sociology that he spearheaded greatly influenced scholarly debates in the 1970s and 1980s, especially his works *The Minjung and the Intellectual* and *Minjung Sociology*.[66] Cultural critic and professor Kim Sŏngki was part of a subsequent generation of *minjung* sociologists, publishing studies on *minjung* and subjecthood in the late 1980s as well as collaborating with Han on "An essay on *han* and *minjung* sociology," published in February 1987.[67]

The year 1987 was a year of political breakthrough in South Korea, as Chŏn Tuhwan 전두환 succumbed to domestic and foreign pressure and assented to a direct presidential election.[68] The memory of the 1980 Kwangju Uprising—kept alive through underground networks even as the Chŏn regime maintained official silence surrounding the "Incident"—the slowdown of the economy, and the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines in 1986 fueled the resistance against the authoritarian system.[69] When Chŏn declared that a parliamentary election would follow the end of the term in June 1987 to ensure the succession of his preferred candidate, over a million demonstrators—students, laborers, and activists, joined this time by "salary workers, managers, housewives" and other middle class people—flooded the streets throughout the country.[70]

Earlier in January, it had come to light that Pak Chongch'ŏl 박종철, a linguistics student at Seoul National University suspected of anti-government activities, had died from torture in police custody despite the authorities' botched attempts to conceal the truth.[71] This event, which shocked and galvanized the nation, moved Han Wansang to write the following in the *Joongang Daily*: "as his contemporary, as a professor, as a parent dismayed by the speechlessness of Pak's *han*-filled father, we eagerly await the day of freedom, the day of justice that will burst forth the

65 Chŏng, "Han Wansanggwa pip'an sahoehagŭi hyŏngsŏng," 367–368.

66 Kim, "Han Wansangŭi 'Minjunggwa Chisigin.'"

67 Chŏng, "Han Wansanggwa pip'an sahoehagŭi hyŏngsŏng," 390.

68 Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 262.

69 Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 265–266.

70 Hwang, *A History of Korea*, 267.

71 Clyde Haberman, "Seoul Student's Torture Death Changes Political Landscape," *New York Times*, January 31, 1987, accessed November 29, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/31/world/seoul-student-s-torture-death-changes-political-landscape.html.

language of sorrow that has accrued into *han* […].”[72] The “Essay on *han* and *minjung* sociology,” published shortly after this incident, reflects a growing sense of anticipation. Collective resentment and anger are intimately intertwined with resolution and hope for a new future, as will be analyzed in the sections below.

The bitter past

In his essay on *han*, Ko Ŭn argues for the existence of a unique and cohesive Korean national history that has produced *han* but has also been disrupted by it. *Han* is said to be a product of a particularly adverse history, one constantly undercut by “Sinocentric thinking and the feeling of historical marginalization.”[73] *Han* is strongly linked to past experiences: “*Han* is not a wound but a scar. *Han* is not pain itself but the long memory of pain […].”[74] *Han* is not only a painful product of history but also the present “memory” of all the layers of suffering from the past. The repeated use of “accumulated” and “accumulation” throughout the text underscore *han*’s association with a prolonged buildup of past recollections.

While Ko underscores that *han* is a product of history, he also points the blame at *han* for facilitating the isolation and suffering of the Korean people—in other words, for being a cause of rupture with world history, cutting the Korean people’s ties with all other world peoples. He writes that “*han* is exactly this history, that of a non-diverse path of ordeals and suffering”[75] associated with “the internal toadyism of a regressive culture”[76] that has only allowed Korea to maintain a relationship to China and no other world regions.

Ko acknowledges that “every nation or tribe that survives to this day has undergone a long and turbulent historical unfolding.”[77] He seems to take for granted that there are distinct, ethno-national communities that develop corresponding distinct, basic emotions, even though—as he notes himself—international affairs are moved by “political and social

72 Han Wansang 한완상, “In’gwŏn pojangŭi hwaksirhan changch’irŭl 인권보장의 확실한 장치를 [For the firm implementation of human rights],” *Chungang Ilbo* 중앙일보, January 21, 1987, accessed November 29, 2018, https://news.joins.com/article/2083267.

73 Ko Ŭn 고은, “Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ, 恨의 극복을 위하여 [Towards the overcoming of *han*]” in *Hanŭi iyagi* 한의 이야기 [The story of *han*], ed. Sŏ Kwangsŏn 서광선 (Seoul: Borhee Press, 1988), 26.

74 Ko, “Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ,” 30.

75 Ko, “Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ,” 28.

76 Ko, “Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ,” 24.

77 Ko, “Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ,” 28.

relations of conflict"[78] and thus must form in contexts of continuous contact. If every community that survives has a history of conflict, it remains unexplained why *han* should occur only in Korea and why it should be "untranslatable." Despite his prior statement regarding Korea's Sinocentric foreign relations, Ko categorically argues that Korea's emotional experience is "completely different" to that of its East Asian neighbors China and Japan and that "there is no *han* to be found there."[79]

Though the current form of *han* may not exist elsewhere, remnants of the "original form of *han*" from primitive nomadic communities is said to continue to exist in other languages, as seen in Chinese as "hen" 恨, in Sanskrit as "upanāha," in Mongolian as "korosul," and in Manchurian as "korsocuka."[80] In Manchuria, however, which has "had close ties to the Korean peninsula since prehistoric times," Ko writes that a feeling of "wild anger or loathing […] lapsed into a form of sadness" following the dismantling of the Manchu Dynasty.[81] Similarly, the evolution of "korosul" in Mongolian into an emotion denoting "sorrow" is linked to the demise of the Mongols and the Jurchen.[82] These supposedly analogous transformations of "korsocuka" and "korosul" to that of *han* in the Korean context do no service to the claim of *han*'s untranslatability, and neither do the translations of the word itself in other geographical contexts. The lack of a similar deteriorative process in *han*'s development in China is partially attributed to "the economic and cultural gap caused by the Great Wall and the Sinicization of nomadic tribes,"[83] although this vague explanation regarding the assumed stability of *han* in China leads to more questions than answers in regard to Korea's emotional uniqueness.

Ko traces *han* back to a time in history when *han* was not "untranslatable" but a common feature in Asian prehistoric societies. Referring to the "nomadic" cultures of Sumerian and Ancient Indo-Aryan civilizations, he writes that

> […] [their] relocation implies two conditions: occupation caused by invasion, and resignation caused by defeat. Nomadic groups were required to develop a way out of each moment of crisis as well as the fear and insecurity caused by the process of relocation.

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78 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 27.

79 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 29.

80 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 34.

81 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 43.

82 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 43.

83 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 39.

> Here, a feature of nomadic life on the continent—a wild, combative spirit and the terrible hostility toward the Other—develops. This is likely the original form of *han*.[84]

Before *han* decayed into its current shape in the Korean context, its “original form” was that of a “wild, combative spirit.” Ko idealizes and grossly generalizes “nomadic life on the continent” and its character despite having no substantial historical evidence to support his claims. He romanticizes collective life of the ancient past and its “vigor.”[85] What is bemoaned is a supposedly primordial, dynamic, and belligerent desire in the face of danger that has been lost in *han*’s current form—and by extension, in the current Korean people. Ko attempts to argue that a dynamic spirit that belonged to the people long ago must be recovered.

In an essay also published in *The Story of* Han, literary critic and journalist Im Hŏnyŏng 임헌영 responds critically to Ko’s theory of *han*. Im agrees with Ko on the point that the emotion of *han* has “existed for a very long time” and that the usage of *han* in Korea differs from that of China and Japan, where it means “loathing and resentfulness.”[86] Im situates Ko’s take on *han* as part of an attempt by various nationalist writers to assign *han* a social and historical function. He notes, however, that Ko’s concept of *han* is much too “vague” and its “scope of applicability is too broad.”[87] The statements in the excerpt above imply that “kings, generals, aristocrats as well as frail women and slaves could all have *han*, and its emotional scope ties together everything from lofty patriotism to petty individual resentment under the name of *han*.”[88] Im further wonders how well-known lyrics written by the ruling class from the feudal past could have been regarded as part of the literature of *han* if the emotion occurs only in the *minjung*. In national literature, Im points out, most works that express extreme sorrow are linked to *han*,[89] in contrast to Ko’s claims that *han* has never existed in pre-modern literature.

Like Ko, Han Wansang and Kim Sŏngki agree with his interpretation of *han* as an emotion caused by and accumulated through prolonged

84 Ko, “Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ,” 36.

85 Ko, “Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ,” 38.

86 Im Hŏnyŏng 임헌영, “Hanŭi munhakkwa minjungŭisik 한의 문학과 민중의식 [The literature of *han* and *minjung* consciousness],” in *Hanŭi iyagi* 한의 이야기 [The story of *han*], ed. Sŏ Kwangsŏn 서광선 (Seoul: Borhee Press, 1988), 104.

87 Im, “Hanŭi munhakkwa minjungŭisik,” 106.

88 Im, “Hanŭi munhakkwa minjungŭisik,” 107.

89 Im, “Hanŭi munhakkwa minjungŭisik,” 109.

oppression, referencing him as an authority on *han*. Han and Kim also describe *han* as a "product," an "accumulation," even a "cultural heritage" of despair stemming from systemic, historical injustice.[90]

Unlike Ko, who reaches back into a reimagined prehistory, Han's and Kim's account of *han* is more focused on the structural conditions of the relatively recent past. According to Han and Kim, two particular factors are responsible for the occurrence of *han*: economic exploitation and political exclusion. Economic exploitation and consequent poverty are named as the first "structural cause" of *han.* Poverty is shown to be "chronic" as *han* is traced from the Chosŏn period to the colonial period and finally to the present.[91] In regard to the second cause of *han*, they write:

> An even more important structural factor of *han* is the limitless abuse of power of a section of the political bureaucratic authorities. This was then aggravated by the conspicuous consumption and lifestyles of the emerging upper classes formed of the political bureaucracy and business elites. By the 1970s, the *minjung*, who had grown vast, began to perceive their own political, economic, and cultural exclusion and accumulated *han* in a new way.[92]

Political exclusion, they argue, is the second cause of *han*, one that is closely tied to economic exploitation. Han and Kim take critical note of the "conspicuous consumption and lifestyles of emerging upper classes" and "business elites" that represent the politically privileged. They also mention "political bureaucratic authorities" in a rather neutral way without explicitly elaborating on the present political regime, perhaps out of caution. Though the issue of class is mentioned in reference to both causal factors, Han Wansang saw the concept of *minjung* as different from class. His view was that "class could be included in the *minjung* concept, but *minjung* could not be subjected to the classist concept."[93] He does, however, group those with political and economic power into a ruling class, "critiquing the ideology of the ruling class" through a sociological perspective.[94]

90 Han Wansang 한완상 and Kim Sŏngki 김성기, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron 한(恨)에 대한 민중사회학적 시론 [Essay on *han* and *minjung* sociology]," in *Hanŭi iyagi* 한의 이야기 [The story of *han*], ed. Sŏ Kwangsŏn 서광선 (Seoul: Borhee Press, 1988), 96.

91 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 68.

92 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 68–69.

93 Chŏng, "Han Wansanggwa pip'an sahoehagŭi hyŏngsŏng," 389.

94 Chŏng, "Han Wansanggwa pip'an sahoehagŭi hyŏngsŏng," 391.

The first factor of *han,* poverty, is characterized as "absolute lack," while the second factor, political exclusion, as "relative need."[95] The characterization of "absolute" versus "relative" is interesting given the political situation of the time, since the political need might be seen to be just as "absolute." Perhaps seen from the perspective of the *minjung*, material, tangible needs were certainly the more pressing issue. The political and economic problems, however, go hand in hand—as Han and Kim have noted themselves in the previous passage—and cannot easily be disentangled in addressing structural oppression and *han.*

Beyond internal historical, political, and socioeconomic factors, Ko, Han, and Kim broaden *han*'s causal range to foreign influences. Ko writes that Japanese authorities in the colonial period are said to have deliberately removed epic myths, heroic folktales, and enterprising seasonal customs, leaving only *han*-filled, "plaintive folk culture" behind.[96] *Han* is perceived to be assisting the colonizer, as a causal factor in what Ko regards as the current collective lack of will. Explained in this way, he echoes to some degree "The Character Features of the Korean People" identified by the Japanese Governor-General's Office and Korean intellectuals of the colonial period, which included the features "lacking in vitality," "lacking in courage," and "lacking in self-reliance."[97] Based on his critiques of *han* as a backward national trait, Ko may have been influenced by essentialist and fatalist views of *han* himself and internalized colonial-era self-blame, which interpreted Korea's weakness and colonization as a natural consequence of intrinsic, non-progressive characteristics in Koreans.

Interestingly, while arguing that foreign influence is partly to blame for producing *han*, Ko nevertheless presents the historical continuity of *han*, an "indigenous sentiment," in defiance of a "Western logic" that "separates traditional and modern consciousness in modern cultural history."[98] Ko goes so far as to say that "*han* is hereditary,"[99] echoing a biological view of *han* also developed by Kim Chiha, who wrote that *han* is "inherited and transmitted, boiling in the blood of the people."[100] As notions of race and ethnicity became conflated with nation*, han*

95 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 69.

96 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 29.

97 Kyung-Koo Han, "The Anthropology of the Discourse on the Koreanness of Koreans," *Korea Journal* 43, no. 1 (2003): 27.

98 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 32.

99 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 32.

100 Chi Kim, "Korean *Han*," 255.

became an "ethnonational, biologistic badge of Korean uniqueness" in the process.[101]

While Ko focuses on the remnants of the colonial era, Han and Kim reference "Cold War logic" in the footnotes, claiming that the marginalization of the *minjung* and thus the continuation of their *han* is attributed to the polarized ideology of the Cold War and national division dictated by foreign powers.[102] The political domain of *han* is thus extended beyond a matter of ruling class versus *minjung* in Korea, attributing *han*'s cause partly to international conflict, although this explanation remains at the level of a theoretical assumption rather than a concrete political example.

The uncertain present

Ko sees the current notion of *han* as a popular ideology beyond the bounds of the emotional. In his view,

> *Han* was discussed as an ideological standard in the pursuit of a national literature, affecting historical science, religious studies, *minjung* culture, and even socioeconomics […] when the social possibilities deferred in the 1970s were opened and the need arose to critique *han*, it had already become a trend."[103]

Not only did the less-educated Korean *minjung* fall prey to *han* but also intellectuals, who became "slaves to the conceptual trend."[104] Ko's contemporary Mun Sunt'ae 문순태 also critiqued the notion of *han*'s alleged "conceptual lineage," which was taken as a given in literary circles of their time. In an essay titled "Haniran muŏshin'ga" 한이란 무엇인가 (What is *han*?), Mun lists various contemporary writers and critics including Kim Yŏlkyu 김열규, Kwŏn Yŏngmin 권영민, and Chŏng Hyŏnki 정현기, questioning why and how they interpret well-known works to carry *han* at its base.[105] This uncritical reception of *han* as a conceptual banner of national intellectuals and *minjung* alike is what Ko aims to recognize, critique,

101 Chi Kim, "Korean *Han*," 266.

102 Kenneth M. Wells, "The Cultural Construction of Korean History," in *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence*, ed. Kenneth M. Wells (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 17.

103 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 24.

104 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 24.

105 Mun Sunt'ae 문순태, "Haniran muŏshin'ga 한이란 무엇인가 [What is *han*?]," in *Hanŭi iyagi* [The story of *han*], ed. Sŏ Kwangsŏn (Seoul: Borhee Press, 1988), 138.

and correct. By “social possibilities deferred in the 1970s,” he alludes to the oppressive Pak regime and the building momentum of social change in the 1970s, leading up to the present moment in which the path to social change has been “opened.”

Further, this “individualistic, regressive” *han* is said to be interfering in *minjung* psychology, becoming a widespread convention in the emotional expressions of daily life. The danger of getting caught up in the emotion and subsequently “becoming blinded to life’s renovation and activeness produces the paradoxical need to identify what *han* is.”[106] As though it were an infectious disease that stealthily invades the senses, *han* is described as though it possessed a life of its own, catching the oblivious *minjung* unawares and thwarting collective action. Ko assigns a great deal of agency to *han* and its ability to overpower “our optimistic willpower” and to lead to “extinction” while stripping the agency from the people, depicted as merely passive recipients. Especially in the early sections, the text downplays the human actors, and in this way avoids assigning either blame or agency to any specific group of people. Humans are simply swept along in the unfolding of history and the workings of *han.* Ko even writes that

> […] *han* is not in time but is an atemporal experience. Thus, *han* is the creation of the politically-excluded Korean people’s apolitical and ahistorical experience. *Han* is not an emotion of loss but rather of extinction and is not temperamental but subdued in nature. When this *han* outweighs our other facets and our optimistic willpower, it leads to the fog of alienation, resignation, and decadence.[107]

Han is associated with “atemporal,” “apolitical,” and “ahistorical” experience. The non-progressivity of this emotional characteristic in Koreans is extended to temporal, political, and historical dimensions. According to this description, *han* seems to lie beyond the realm of progress altogether, and it indicates Ko’s subscription to the notion of universal and linear historical progress. This severe diagnosis sits uncomfortably with the other claims that *han* is deeply historical and political—a “national emotion formed out of Korean peoples’ history” and “a political outcome.”[108] *Han* is the “creation” of the experience of political exclusion, but it is also a causal factor for suspension from time, history, and politics and a potential

106 Ko, “Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ,” 24.

107 Ko, “Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ,” 30.

108 Ko, “Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ,” 44.

menace for Koreans that could lead to "alienation, resignation, and decadence." Han and Kim also seek to correct the trend of abstraction and idealization of *han* through the analysis of common *minjung* rituals that deal with *han.* It must be noted, however, that their emphasis on *han* as a tangible, lived emotion rather than as a theory has its limitations as their essay is based on external sociological observations. Han and Kim investigate two present modes of *han*'s expression: *kut* 굿, or shamanic ritual, and *t'alchum* 탈춤, or mask dance, two "important forms of expression of *minjung* arts" that "articulate the long-held hopes, emotions, and conflicts of the *minjung* collective."[109]

First, shamanism and shamanic ritual became imbued with symbolic political value during the *minjung* movement. At a student rally on June 26, 1987 at Seoul National University, students and professors witnessed Professor I Aeju 이애주 expressing her grief over the torture and death of student Pak Chongch'ŏl 박종철 through a symbolic dance of rebirth and liberation. On July 9, at Yonsei University, Professor I once again performed a *hanp'uri* 한풀이 dance at the funeral of another student martyr, I Hanyŏl 이한열, to console the *han* of the deceased.[110] These performances, which Professor I described as "belonging to the *minjung,* a leap into the wave of liberation and unification," became a widely publicized symbol for the democratization, unification, and *minjung* movements.[111]

The *hanp'uri* dance performed by I Aeju is a form of *kut* 굿, "a religious ceremony in which the shaman interacts with spirits through song and dance,"[112] and it epitomized a burgeoning trend of symbolic folk rituals in protest movements that began in the 1960s.[113] The "Ritual to Invoke Native Land Consciousness," for example, became a legendary performance in which over a thousand students participated during a massive protest at Seoul National University in May 1964, and which concluded with a symbolic funeral of the military government.[114]

109 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 96.

110 "I Aeju kyosuŭi 'parammaji' ch'umgwa 'hanp'uri' ch'um 이애주 교수의 '바람맞이' 춤과 '한풀이' 춤 [Professor I Aeju's 'parammaji' dance and 'hanp'uri' dance]," Minjuhwa Undong Kinyŏmsaŏphoe, accessed December 1, 2018, http://www.610.or.kr/board/data/view/114.

111 "Hangjaengŭi kŏrimunhwa, 'kŏri kut' kwa I Aejuŭi parammaji" 항쟁의 거리문화, '거리굿'과 이애주의 바람맞이 [The street culture of resistance, 'kŏri kut' and I Aeju's parammaji], Minjuhwa Undong Kinyŏmsaŏphoe, accessed December 1, 2018, http://www.610.or.kr/board/content/page/20/post/199?.

112 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 74.

113 Chungmoo Choi, "The Minjung Culture Movement and Popular Culture," in *South Korea's Minjung Movement*, ed. Kenneth Wells, 108.

114 Choi, "The Minjung Culture Movement," 109.

As leaders and participants of movements steeped in such forms of expression, Han and Kim explain the social, religious, and political significance of *kut* for the *minjung* in the following way:

> A major experience of *minjung* religion is found in shamanic form. *Kut* could be seen as the formal expression of the *minjung*'s collective religious experience. *Kut* is the *minjung*'s effort to change from excluded and objectified masses to subjects. It is the survival mechanism of the *minjung*, their "subjective and collective spirit."[115]

In a 1983 book titled *Theology, Ideology, and Culture*, Sŏ Kwangsŏn 서광선, editor of *The Story of* Han, had written that the shaman had the social role of undoing the *han* of a *minjung* that had nowhere else to turn.[116] He describes shamanism as "'folk,' 'popular,' 'people's,' and now '*minjung*,' not only because it is shared by the majority of the Korean people, but also because it has been officially ignored, if not openly persecuted, first by the literati of the Yi dynasty, and then by the new and modernized governments, both Japanese and then Korean."[117] Sŏ justifies shamanism as "a proper Korean religion because it predated Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism or Christianity" and "is pervasive in Korean minds, and […] alive in the Korean way of life."[118] The shaman carries the burden of addressing the *minjung*'s "*han*, their troubles, their tears, and their frustrations."[119] Han and Kim share the view towards shamanic *kut* as a significant and historically marginalized religious form, which has nevertheless "sustained them [*minjung*] through the crises and perils of this world and the other-world."[120]

Historian Kim Sŏngsik 김성식 also referenced shamanic ritual in a 1984 column in the *Donga Ilbo*, using it as an analogy to explain the role of politics in people's lives. Kim wrote that rituals such as *okukut* 오구굿 existed to relieve the burdens of *han* carried by the dead, while politics assumed the role of relieving the emotional burdens of *han* in the living. In his analogy, politics was supposed to be a figurative *kut* for the living—the technique of relieving people of their burdens and

115 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 74–75.

116 Sŏ Kwangsŏn, *Theology, Ideology, and Culture*, (Hong Kong: World Student Christian Federation, 1983), 37, accessed December 5, 2018, https://www.ibiblio.org/ahkitj/wscfap/arms1974/Book%20Series/TheologyIdeo&Cul/TIC-chapter2.htm.

117 Sŏ, *Theology, Ideology, and Culture*, 35.

118 Sŏ, *Theology, Ideology, and Culture*, 35.

119 Sŏ, *Theology, Ideology, and Culture*, 35.

120 Sŏ, *Theology, Ideology, and Culture*, 36.

sorrows.[121] Such references to *kut* and shamanism exemplify how elements from the *minjung* culture and movement had become widespread in the vocabulary of political resistance.

In contrast, Ko's view is that shamanism is a cultural feature that must be overcome. Ko dismisses shamanic rituals as distractions to social change, since

> *han* must be resolved not through folk or spiritual dimensions using *hanp'uri* 한풀이 (ritual for releasing *han*) or *haewŏn* 해원 (notion of undoing a grudge) but rather on a political level. In other words, the only way to eliminate *han* would be through a political and human equality that would allow the oppressor and oppressed to dance together."[122]

He later lists various forms of *hanp'uri* in rural folk culture including dances, satire, and games, only to argue that

> […] if the release of *han* means to liberate society of it, then such amusements are only amusements. These types of activities only lead back to *han*. Amuse yourself all you want, but you will have to return to your old place of *han.* This is the structural mechanism of such activities.[123]

Ko addresses the rising interest in folk culture and its reformulation as a contemporary tool for nationalism and resistance as advocated by a growing cultural movement, especially in universities and public festivals.[124] Ko rejects "folk" expression as merely temporary "amusements" that do not permanently alleviate *han*. He claims that only something on a more explicitly "political level" could help achieve utopian "equality," but declares this vaguely without further elaboration on how to attain such change. Given such public, politicized performances as that of I Aeju, however, his negative assessment of folk culture does not take full account of the expressive potential of *han* and ritualized forms of resistance.

121 Kim Sŏngsik 김성식, "'Naenggasŭm'ŭi sŭt'ŭresŭ '냉가슴'의 스트레스 [The stress of a 'cold heart']," *Donga Ilbo* 동아일보, June 2, 1984, accessed December 5, 2018, http://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn.

122 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 43.

123 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 55.

124 I Hana 이하나, "1970–1980nyŏndae 'minjok munhwa' kaenyŏmŭi punhwawa chaengt'u 1970–1980년대 '민족문화' 개념의 분화와 쟁투 [Differentiation and controversy over the concept of 'national culture' in the 1970s–1980s]," *Kaenyŏmgwa sot'ong* 개념과 소통 [Concept and communication] 18 (2016): 198, doi:10.15797/concom.2016..18.005.198.

Second, mask dances also became a popular mode of expression for the *minjung* movement in the 1980s.[125] The mask dance developed from harvest ceremonies to popular village performances satirizing the rich and powerful. The *minjung* movement adopted the genre, "drums, gongs, cymbals," noisiness, vulgarity and all, as a way for the *minjung* to transcend their *han* through laughter.[126]

"Folk culture" became popular in universities in the 1970s starting with the establishment of mask dance groups on every campus.[127] Through folk song, dance, and theater, this counter-cultural trend merged with student movements under the Pak Chŏnghŭi 박정희 regime.[128] Even in the 1960s, students had organized campaigns for *hyangt'ogaech'ŏk* 향토개척 (national unification and native land development), turning their attention to farming life instead of state-building projects.[129] Students would perform mask dances and folk music after lectures on agriculture.[130]

Kim Chiha wrote in 1970 that the satire and songs of the *minjung* must be developed into an explosive possibility for change;[131] as he predicted, various forms of "folk" expression such as theater, mask dance, and music became symbolic displays of anti-government and anti-foreign sentiment.[132] The Pak regime dismissed shamans, their rituals, and other such "folk" elements as outdated customs in the uncompromising drive toward modernization.[133] Despite and against such an approach, a budding revival of *minjung* culture appropriated elements of "folk culture"—though greatly romanticized, formalized, and essentialized[134]—creating new practices of resistance.

125 Clark, "Growth and limitations of minjung Christianity," 95.

126 Clark, "Growth and limitations of minjung Christianity," 96.

127 O Cheyŏn 오제연, "1970nyŏndae taehangmunhwaŭi hyŏngsŏnggwa haksaengundong 1970년대 대학문화의 형성과 학생운동 [The creation of a new 'university culture' in the 1970s, and its relationship with the student movements]," *Yŏksa munje yŏn'gu* 역사문제연구 [Critical studies on modern Korean history] 28 (October 2012): 107.

128 O, "1970nyŏndae taehangmunhwaŭi hyŏngsŏng," 108.

129 Choi, "The Minjung Culture Movement," 108.

130 O, "1970nyŏndae taehangmunhwaŭi hyŏngsŏng," 94.

131 Chang, "1970nyŏndae 'minjung' kaenyŏmŭi chaedŭngjang," 120.

132 I, "1970–1980nyŏndae 'minjok munhwa,'" 198.

133 I, "1970–1980nyŏndae 'minjok munhwa,'" 180.

134 I, "1970–1980nyŏndae 'minjok munhwa,'" 180.

Han and Kim interpret the mask dance positively as a *minjung* form of resistance on a collective and political level, affirming that all gathered at the mask dance stage are "subjects and participants" in a "collective event."[135] In doing so, they advocate a "revolutionary aesthetic" in folk arts, expressing a rather idealized notion of the *minjung* and their culture as many members of folk-theater groups did at the time.[136]

Though they paint a straightforward image of counter-cultural resistance in masked performances, it was also the case that landowners sometimes financed such communal festivities in the pre-capitalist period "to ease farmers' discontent and thus rule them more effectively."[137] Further, mask dances at universities were partially student reconstructions of popular performing arts, which objectified popular culture. There was a case in which students taught the reconstructed mask-dance ritual back to villagers.[138] Further, the 1960s Pak regime passed the Cultural Assets Conservation Act, under which select regional "folk cultures" were officially recognized, formalized, and preserved, losing their connection to the lives of the *minjung*.[139] Thus, popular performing arts genres were complex and contested but did, nevertheless, "further revolutionary imagination."[140]

Thus, Ko renders shamanism as a distraction, while Han and Kim appreciate it for its vitality. Ko regards folk forms of expression as simply amusements and possibly temporary solutions for *han* that are ultimately useless, whereas Han and Kim hold up *kut* and mask dance as highly transformative, unifying, and politically radical means of expression. Han and Kim, along with *minjung* theologians, hold that shamanism sustained the *minjung* through crises and that mask dances afforded them a break from reality as well as a new social perspective through humor. The ritualistic and masked performances by I Aeju and university students also exemplify how *han* served as a creative impulse for real action and how these religious and cultural modes of thought, feeling, and expression provided new creative, syncretic ways of expressing dissent even if they were based on misinterpretations or appropriations of an essentialist notion of "tradition." These certainly served as the basis for dynamic and contested reinterpretations and reformulations of what could be said in an era of limited political expression.

135 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 87.

136 Choi, "The Minjung Culture Movement," 110–111.

137 Choi, "The Minjung Culture Movement," 115.

138 Choi, "The Minjung Culture Movement," 111.

139 I, "1970–1980nyŏndae 'minjok munhwa,'" 180.

140 Choi, "The Minjung Culture Movement," 115.

The imagined future

The broader divergent views of *han* in scholarship—particularly in the literary sphere—are schematized by Im Hŏnyŏng 임헌영 in the following way:

> *Han*—retaliatory emotion—catharsis—social consciousness—revolution
> *Han*—resignation—catharsis—acceptance of reality—nihilism[141]

According to Im, "the debates in the literature on *han* have been over which of these is truly the literature of *han*."[142] The first line of thought has led to a literature of *han* linked to social critique, which is the trend exemplified by Kim Chiha. It also links *han* to social consciousness and revolution, which is closer to Han's and Kim's conception of what this emotion can achieve, although it is not "retaliatory." The latter progression is closer to Ko's interpretation of *han*, which links the emotion to nihilism and resignation.

Ko repeatedly critiques suggestions that current *han* is conducive to revolution:

> It is claimed that this *han* can birth a new historical will through its accumulated strength, but the logic that the accumulation of *han* can develop into revolutionary willpower is incorrect. The moments of combative *minjung* action occurred only when there was a complete break from *han* [...]. It would be impossible for the *minjung* of *han* to eradicate social incongruities through *han*. *Han* cannot evolve into other values. In order for *han* to become revolutionary, it would have to be reformed into a stronger emotion that borders on resentment, hatred, and vengeance.[143]

Ko calls for a radical transformation of *minjung* emotion into a stronger, more forceful form—and, by extension, a radical transformation of the people themselves. If *han* is "hereditary" and so engrained within the "*minjung* of han," then it follows that not only the emotion must be eradicated or transformed but the nature of the people themselves must be completely renewed and undergo a "complete break from *han*." Ko argues that previous revolutionary moments in history, "moments of combative *minjung* action" occurred not due to *han* but due to a fundamental departure from it.

141 Im, "Hanŭi munhakkwa minjungŭisik," 107.

142 Im, "Hanŭi munhakkwa minjungŭisik," 107.

143 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 48.

Han and Kim, however, approach *han* as "an agent of structural and historical change"[144] with an important social function:

> In this text, *han* is seen as a major driver of *minjung* actions and attitudes and as a force that will create a new history. Therefore, *han* is not simply the despair accumulated over a long time or the affective experience of the past but rather an experience of the future—a force that can open up a new history. What is historical should not be limited to the past. *Han* seems to be individual, but it is a collective experience. It might seem to be a thwarted desire or hope, but it is at the same time an energy that creates new structures. It is the experience of the past while also being the energy that opens life to the future.[145]

Han, a "major" dynamic emotional force, shapes "*minjung* actions and attitudes" in potentially new ways. Han and Kim argue that it is not historically insignificant, not "limited to the past," not "individual" and not "thwarted desire or hope," but just the opposite. In the passage above as well as in their conclusion, it is continually emphasized that *han*, being "both sadness and strength," can "create a new history" and "a new society," and "open up future horizons for the *minjung*."[146] Thus, collective *han* can become the link between past and future and take on the "gateway role from despair to hope,"[147] although one might ask how uniform and inclusive an emotion linked primarily to *minjung* could be. Again, they write,

> The reason why *han* is emphasized is because it is […] both a cumulative inherited form of *minjung* life experience and the basis upon which the *minjung* collective's latent ability could develop a future directionality.[148]

The *minjung* collective, it is argued, already possess a "latent ability" to look towards the future—an underlying will to devise change based on experience.

144 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 65.

145 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 67.

146 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 96.

147 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 96.

148 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 70.

In stark contrast, Ko argues that "the revolutionary claims of *han* are not […] required to earn the support of the *minjung,*"[149] that it is irrelevant:

> There is a claim that this sort of accumulated *han* may contribute to the *minjung*'s revolutionary potential. If this *han* were able to link itself to justice and lead to historical change, *han* would be a creative mechanism to display to the world. However, it is impossible for *han* to fuel the will to achieve historically significant acts. *Han* only leads to more *han*.[150]

The achievement of "justice and historical change" was a major concern of intellectuals in Ko's time, and there was an earlier tendency, particularly in Kim Chiha's satirical works, which viewed *han* as an emotional trigger for revolution.

For Ko, the path to a "healthy *minjung* culture" involves the discarding of outdated customs, particularly shamanism and *han*.[151] These must be overhauled and "*han* itself must undergo a creative transformation":[152]

> Rather, it is due to *han* that the Korean people are handicapped from developing ideological gravity or a passionate realization of values. *Han* is the residue of the truth of our experience, not the truth itself. *Han* is not progressing towards the future but a way forward that coincides with the past."[153]

As previously stated, *han* is seen as the cause of Korea's historical deviation from other world regions and its stunted development. *Han* cannot be taken as the "truth" of *minjung* experience but rather its by-product, a deterrent to the realization of historical progress and the attainment of "ideological gravity." A history of *han* moves forward in time but can only "coincide with the past" rather than leading to a new kind of future through a revolutionary and political transformation.

Given these differing interpretations of *han*'s potential, what is the way to a new future? For Ko, the solution to *han* and the way to a better future seems to take a religious or spiritual form. Biblical and Buddhist references are made in his argument for radical emotional change:

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149 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 32.

150 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 31.

151 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 46.

152 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 46.

153 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 32–33.

> The Old Testament is composed of the suffering of the *minjung* […] It is full of resentment, curses, hatred, and punishments that denounce evil […] this resentment is not unlike Korea's primitive notion of *han*, although Korea's *han* is not based on prophetic will but on shamanic sources. The New Testament then replaces this resentment with love, unfolding the history of a new era.[154]

The practice of drawing parallels between the afflicted Korean *minjung* and the children of Israel date back to Korea's period under Japanese rule. In the 1920s and 1930s, Korean Christians drew comfort from the story of deliverance in the Bible.[155] In this case, Ko inserts the concept of *minjung* into the Biblical narrative, weaving together the histories of the Jews and the Koreans and seeing the older, reactive notion of *han* in the prophetic workings of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, however, "Jesus, a carpenter and man of the *minjung* who was surrounded by *han*-ridden people, lived a life and died a death […] through which others were liberated."[156] He seems to imply that a radical eradication of *han*—an emotional liberation—should occur based on transformative divine intervention, through a spiritual overcoming. Ko also writes that change is shown in

> […] the mercy of Buddha toward a society of love that allows human beings not to remain subordinate and that allows them to continuously become Buddha. *Han* needs to become sublimated into the power that leads to a world of love […] its significance will be transformed by the larger calling to unification and democratization.[157]

Han must be "sublimated," overcome by higher spiritual and political means. Ko's "world of love" is one based on the bond of unification and democratization. Ko's reference to Buddha here is interesting, since he critiques the "nihilism" and "resignation" associated with Buddhism earlier in his essay. In line with such a view, it could be argued that the forms of spirituality propagated by both Buddhism and Christianity emphasize sacrifice and giving up material life, which might be used to keep the *minjung* poor and oppressed rather than make them active political agents. Thus, the spiritual aspect of his proposed solution to *han* is ambiguous and problematic.

154 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 58.

155 Clark, "Growth and Limitations of *Minjung* Christianity," 93.

156 Clark, "Growth and Limitations of *Minjung* Christianity," 93.

157 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 58.

Further, the political and spiritual seem to converge in Ko's vision of a future without *han*. National unification and democratization constitute the "true" vision of the future, and *han* is its obstacle.

> Thus, if *han* is indeed the remnant of a long history that must be overcome urgently, it is necessary to find a way to regenerate it as the will and emotion of the true identity of the nation. *Han* is not our destiny but an external force from the past blocking a new future. We must confront this external force.[158]

Only by tackling *han,* this "force from the past," can a new future be achieved. *Han* is removed from the "true identity of the nation" and is externalized and antagonized as an urgent task, although it is questionable how "external" it can be. The destiny of the nation is progress, to change the course of a history "blocked" by *han*. The issue is that Ko only states the necessity "to find a way" to the achievement of the new future and does not offer a concrete solution on how to attain the resolution of *han*. It is possible that by the statement, "its significance will be transformed by the larger calling of unification and democratization," Ko means that *han* will fade away or be replaced by a different emotion as a side effect of larger political endeavors, such as the unification of North and South Korea. However, he also sees the need to "confront this external force" urgently. The question remains: how, what, and who can bring about the radical affective transformation that is required for historical regeneration and for *minjung* revolution, unification, and democratization? Can change come from within without interference from outside forces? Is the solution spiritual?

In their observations of *minjung* religion and arts, Han and Kim seem to provide answers to these questions. They argue that there is an embedded potential for social change and means of action in *kut* and the mask dance. First, the ritual of *kut* is a social mechanism that facilitates the release of *han*, which manifests itself as collective ecstasy.

> In the ritual of *hanp'uri*, the release of *han* could lead the possessed shaman to reproach the spirit's former tormentors. However, the shaman does not allow for the *hanp'uri* to lead to revenge. What is important is to note that the space of *kut* allows the shaman to play the role of a comforter that relieves the victim's suffering rather than that of an avenger. Thus, social resentment and psychological buildup can be released. The space of such release is *kut.*

158 Ko, "Hanŭi kŭkpogŭl wihayŏ," 59.

> If *han* is buildup, ritual ecstasy is its release. The buildup of *han* and its shamanic release can be seen as two opposite extremes, but actually these are two sides to the same coin. If the buildup of *han* is a phenomenon that occurred most frequently in the discrimination and abuse of the lower classes of Chosŏn society and in the repressed ambitions and desires of the modern *minjung* and its release is shamanic ecstasy, then the social utility and function of *han* and ecstasy can be easily confirmed.[159]

Ecstasy in Korean shamanism is a state of spirit possession in which emotions and the body are released through a supernatural power. In the site of *kut*, the shaman controls the flow of emotions in the people who are present through song, dance, and play.[160] Korean Studies scholar Kim Yŏlgyu 김열규 argued in the early 1970s that in shamanic rituals, the observers—members of the community—were also made to participate in the spiritual performance, experiencing shared ecstasy.[161]

The function of the shamanic performance in *kut* is the undoing of pent up emotions, to "relieve the victim's suffering" caused by "social resentment and psychological buildup" in a way that avoids retaliation. It is an internal as well as a collective manner of releasing *han* that opens a space that is both metaphorical and literal for spiritual restoration. Ecstasy fills the collective and drives away the mundane world.[162] Han and Kim seem to argue that the solution to *han* already exists in folk culture, and that is contained in the complementary mechanisms of buildup and release found in *kut*. This dual process is not simply spiritual; rather, its significance is amplified to address the broader societal and historical resolution of collective victims' suffering:

> *Kut* is the expression of a culture's dream for a world of fusion and the restoration of a mythical world through song and dance. It is not about fixed religious precepts but about a Dionysian dance.[163]

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159 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 79.

160 "Sinmyŏng" 신명 [Ecstasy], *Encyclopedia of Korean Culture*, accessed December 11, 2018, http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Index?contents_id=E0032913.

161 Kim Yŏlgyu 김열규, *Han'guk minsokkwa munhak yŏn'gu* 한국 민속과 문학 연구 [Korean folklore and literature] (Seoul: Ilchogak 일조각, 1971), 271, as cited in Choi, "The Minjung Culture Movement," 115.

162 "Sinmyŏng."

163 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 76–77.

The "Dionysian dance" alludes to an irrational, spontaneous, playful, emotional outpouring beyond the boundaries of the given norms. Through *kut,* the *minjung* can perform through their bodies and voices—and thus live out in tangible form—their desires for a different kind of "mythical world" of harmony.

Han and Kim see a potentially "mutual relationship" between the process of *han*'s "formation, accumulation, expression, and eruption" with the "developmental stages of social movements."[164] They define as a necessary future task the detailed study of how the *minjung*'s *han* and historical revolutions are connected, as this kind of knowledge will reveal how to link the passion of ecstasy with the fervor of *minjung* participants in the current revolutionary movement.[165]

Second, the mask dance transcends the present and unites the collective through satire:

> The most holy and most secular, most divine and most human are thus mixed together in an event such as the mask dance […] It has an asynchronous factor in that it does not wholly deny the normative frame of the past and present while simultaneously dreaming of a new future […] the mask dance is not a simple performance of an enlightened state but a crafting together of this world and the world of enlightenment. This world and the next are not severed. The forbidden elements in the traditional dance narratives such as eroticism or mockery dissolve existing conventions and discard social logic.[166]

According to this passage, the narrative of the mask dance breaks with social conventions in its "eroticism" and "mockery." Simultaneously, it removes boundaries between the holy and secular, the divine and human, "this world and the next," and between past, present, and future "crafting together" an integrated world. Therefore, "mask dances are not only about humor or mockery but rather […] express situations of current social conflict through a satirical spirit and can be interpreted as the deep rooted *minjung* will to fashion new structural change."[167] This echoes the notion propagated by cultural critic Ch'ae Hŭiwan 채희완 that ritualized theater challenges divisions—"the division of work and play, of production and consumption, of haves and have-nots"—in the lives of Koreans.[168]

164 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 99.

165 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 99.

166 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 92–93.

167 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 96.

168 Choi, "The Minjung Culture Movement," 115.

The characters, themes, and narratives in mask dances are consequently deeply rooted in a collective awareness of the world and of society:

> The stage of mask dances is a site in which critical observations of reality and feelings of resentment explode in artistic form. The suppressed and accumulated *han* erupts. Through this outburst of *han,* the *minjung* can affirm their own feelings and become conscientized. With the release of *han* on a higher stage, they experience the victory over the absurdities of reality. This experience of triumph becomes the hope and promise of a complete restoration and overcoming. It is also the *minjung*'s political yearning to participate in a future utopia. Given the point that the latent desires emerge in ritualistic collective play, the mask dance represents the dream of the *minjung* collective. A living dream that is performed directly through the body.[169]

Han "erupts" in mask dances in dramatized confrontations based on "critical observations of reality." This leads to political awakening and self-realization, as the *minjung* "affirm their own feelings and become conscientized." By public, collective means on a "higher stage," the release of *han* occurs as participants and observers realize the "absurdities of reality" and overcome *han* through humorous narrative resolution. The spontaneous and unintentional eruption of emotion also expresses unaddressed "latent desires" and "dreams" that can finally emerge in unrestrained artistic form. It is through this deeply embodied experience—"performed directly through the body"—that Han and Kim find the utopic yearnings of the *minjung* beyond the present reality.

In direct contrast to Ko's view, they emphasize the significance of the social mechanism of *han*, which fulfills "a key role in the mechanism of social change" and is "the emotional core of the […] social reform movement":[170]

> And finally, this is how the *minjung*'s *han,* along with individual self-realization, prompts collective social change. Founded on ecstasy and a spirit of resistance, the *han* of *minjung* does not flow regressively and can rather function as a dynamic factor for historical development. In this way, *han* and social change can meet in a meaningful way.[171]

169 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 94.

170 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 96.

171 Han and Kim, "Hane taehan minjung sahoehakchŏk siron," 97.

This is their conception of the *minjung*'s collective mechanism of structural change: *han* leads to self-realization and a critical awareness of reality through religious and artistic performance, a dramatization rooted in social and political conflict; the "spirit of resistance" shown in the satire of mask dance leads to the emergence of a critical attitude and a transcendence of the boundaries of the present; the ecstasy resulting from *kut* leads to a "collective consciousness" that unites human and divine, the dead and the living; through the processes of affective resolution in mask dances and *kut*, *han* can be seen to act as a trigger for the "expansion" of awareness and experience. Thus, it is argued to be a progressive and dynamic factor that "prompts collective social change," builds a sense of solidarity, and leads to "historical development." Ultimately, *han* must converge with social change.

Han and Kim thus argue that *minjung* forms of expression constitute an intrinsic mechanism of change and an orientation towards the future. Even though their essay remains at a theoretical level, they attempt to exemplify how resistance and social critique has occurred and can occur through collective, performative means triggered by *han.* Though an explicit path for "the overcoming of *han*" was not established by Ko, he opens a space through this essay to critique popular, revered notions of *han* and to call on his readers—his peers—to confront obstacles to national and historical transformation. Ko's broad sketch of the transformation of *han* as well as its sociocultural environment over time also suggest a potential for change in the emotion concept itself. Underlying Ko's theory of *han* is the notion that, despite essentialist claims, things have not always been the way that they are and that they need not stay that way.

Conclusion

"Towards the overcoming of *han*" and "Essay on *han* and *minjung* sociology" are similar in their examination of *han* as a deeply rooted and primarily collective emotion belonging to the *minjung*; the accumulated result of political and historical exclusion; having a spiritual and religious dimension; and an emotion that plays with temporal, political, social, and historical boundaries. Ko argues that *han* is a thoroughly negative facet of Korean people, while Han and Kim see it as an emotion that is negative but carries much positive potential as well. For Ko, it is a factor that is to some extent "external" and must be completely transformed and overcome. It is a tool for self-critique directed towards "Korean" qualities that hinder Korea's progress. Ko's perspective on current *han* is more individualistic compared to the united, collective sense of *han* as argued by Han and Kim.

The most striking and significant difference lies in their ideas about *han*'s relation to past, present, and future. Ko's understanding of *han* is past-oriented and stresses impossibility, while Han and Kim see *han* as a future-oriented emotion of possibility. Ko laments the loss of a past "original" form of *han*, which manifested itself as a dynamic and heroic spirit of retaliation. Han and Kim, however, attribute political potential and social utility to *han* as an "experience of the future." For Han and Kim, *han* is a deeply internal and embedded coping mechanism that can lead to political and social transformation. They regard *han* as a valuable and indispensable aspect of *minjung* culture as opposed to Ko's interpretation of *han* as an emotion that must be discarded. Han and Kim argue that *han* is deeply performative and embodied, even though, as they admit themselves, their interpretations may be a stretch as they themselves are outside observers of "folk culture." Whereas Ko argues cynically that were *han* revolutionary, it would have been a creative mechanism to show to the world, Han and Kim seem to suggest that *han* might actually be a mechanism of such value.

Rather than focusing on isolated, essentialist theories on *han* that are common in the *han* discourse, tensions within individual conceptions of *han* were teased out in the present textual analysis. Based on the comparative findings, it can be said that *han* varies not only from person to person or community to community but within these entities themselves. Moreover, *han* itself has been considered as an emotional and conceptual agent, as its language shaped and was in turn shaped by experience and expectation at a particular moment in Korean history. This article has attempted to show that the concept of *han* is not a self-contained unit of emotion with one true, authentic meaning, nor a relativist construct simply depending on individual interpretation. *Han* has shaped and been reshaped by its discourse. Because *han* was given a language, it was able to speak; because *han* created a space for multidisciplinary debates, and because of *han*'s inherent conceptual tensions, the greater and more legitimate its vocabulary became. As an emotion concept, it can and has played a significant role in individual and collective ways of thinking, feeling, and perceiving Korean society, history, and the world.