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EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

Specters of War in Pyongyang: The Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum in North Korea

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Abstract

While North Korea accused South Korea of starting a “civil war” (*naeran*) during the Korean War, it has now moved away from such depictions to paint the war as an American war of imperialist aggression against Korea that was victoriously thwarted under the leadership of Kim Il Sung. In this regard, it may be more than a coincidence that the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum in Pyongyang was built in the early 1970s, just as the Vietnam War drew to a close with a Vietnamese victory. This article examines the memorialization of the Korean War in North Korea at two pivotal historical points—the end of the Vietnam War in the 1970s and the end of the Cold War in the 1990s—with a particular focus on contemporary exhibitions at the war museum in Pyongyang. Rather than offering a simple comparison of divergent narratives about the war, the article seeks to illustrate that North Korea’s conception of history and its account of the war are staunchly modernist, with tragic consequences.

Keywords: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), North Korea, Korean War, Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum

Pyongyang, the capital of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea), is a planned city in characteristic Socialist style, with expansive central squares and gargantuan monuments dotting the landscape.¹ In that sense, the showcase capital—like Washington, DC, with its National Mall—may be regarded as one giant memorial, commemorating the foundation of the republic and the principles it has spawned. Anyone familiar with the iconic architectural symbols of revolution in Pyongyang will conjure up the Arch of Triumph and the Tower of Juche Idea, each of which is touted as the largest of its kind in the world.²

Ironically, the reconstruction of Pyongyang in the 1960s into one of the most modern cities in Asia at the time was made possible by the Korean War (1950–1953). The far superior American airpower leveled the city, along with the rest of the country. More bombs were

dropped on North Korea than on the entire Asia-Pacific region during World War II (Armstrong 2010). This geographic history is crucial to appreciating the significance of spatial context for the sites related to the Korean War, not just in Pyongyang but throughout North Korea. As a way to situate the memorialization of the Korean War in the DPRK, we might ask why there is such a preoccupation with monuments and memorials in North Korea. In many ways, the answer leads back to the Korean War.

Memory studies scholar James Young observes that both Friedrich Nietzsche and Lewis Mumford scorned the “monumental” as utterly archaic (1993, 4)—Nietzsche in referring to monumental histories that bury the living under the guise of perpetuity, and Mumford in critiquing monumental architecture as a direct contradiction to modern sensibilities for change and innovation. Mumford may have overstated the case when he concluded, in Young’s words, that the “shakiest of regimes...installed the least movable monuments [as] a compensation for having accomplished nothing worthier by which to be remembered” (Young 1993, 5). After all, the Washington Monument seemed a far cry from symbolizing “shaky” American power when it was built in the late nineteenth century. But there is something to be said for Mumford’s observation. The Korean War was catastrophic, with an estimated two million casualties for the North alone, which meant that the war claimed, on average, at least one member from every family in North Korea (Cumings 2010, 35, 63). In light of the high death toll, Mumford’s remark that “stone gives a false sense of continuity, and a deceptive assurance of life” helps explain the significance of monuments and memorials in North Korea (Young 1993, 4). Part of the reconstruction efforts there involved inscribing into the landscape as permanently as possible the legitimacy of the surviving state.

During my own visit to North Korea in 2011, I witnessed how monumental Pyongyang’s topography truly is, not just in terms of architectural style and visual discourse but also in the historical narrative reproduced throughout countless museums and memorials. If “the Korean War has played a fundamental role in defining the masculinist language of national self-definition and state legitimacy in South Korea,” as Sheila Miyoshi Jager (2002, 388) contends, the same could be said of the North. During my trip, I shared with a North Korean professor of politics some of the projects that had been undertaken in the United States to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Korean War in 2010, asking whether any special initiatives had commenced in the North. His response was sobering: to commemorate the anniversary would not

make much sense for North Korea because it has been in a continuous state of war since 1950. Confirming his comments, the sixtieth anniversary of the official start of the war was marked as usual with a “month-long joint anti-American struggle” (*panmi kongdong t’ujaeng wŏlgan*) between June 25 and July 27, which included rallies and gatherings on the “June 25 day of struggle against U.S. imperialism” (*6.25 mijebandae t’ujaeng ũi nal*).³

By contrast, the sixtieth anniversary of the armistice—or “Victory Day” (Chŏnsŭngjŏl), as it is called in North Korea—became the focal point of grandiose celebrations, prepared for months leading up to July 27, 2013. An entire week of celebratory events was devoted to commemorating the anniversary, with a host of visits from foreign delegations, including China, Cuba, India, Indonesia, Iran, Laos, Mongolia, Mozambique, Namibia, Pakistan, Palestine, Russia, Syria, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zambia.⁴ Several large-scale projects were completed in time for the anniversary, including the unveiling of the newly renovated Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum (Choguk Haebang Chŏnjaeng Sŭngri Kinyŏmgwan).⁵ This edifice was part of the efforts to rebuild major sections of Pyongyang, including the Mansudae Grand Monument, to make room for a statue of the now-deceased Kim Jong Il to join that of his father, Kim Il Sung.



Figure 1. *Victory* statue at the Monument to the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War. *Source:* Wikipedia Commons.

In contrast to the rather bland attitude that characterized the anniversary of the start of the war, Victory Day three years later was a considerable undertaking. Politically, this could be read as a strategy to shore up Kim Jong Un's leadership in the aftermath of his succession to power in December 2011. However, while this may account for some of the differences between the anniversaries in 2010 and 2013, the contrasting emphases on the official beginning and end points of the war run much deeper, having to do with North Korean characterizations of the war and its historicity. For example, the Monument to the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War that stands near the museum and includes the emblematic bronze statue titled *Victory* had already been built to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the armistice in 1993 (figure 1). That year, China likewise unveiled the Memorial of the War to Resist America and Aid Korea in Dandong, just across the border from North Korea (see Jung in this volume). Not surprisingly, China also commemorated the armistice as a definitive victory.

During my trip I began to suspect that the war memorials offered more than just a different narrative of the Korean War, one diametrically opposed to South Korean or American renditions. This thought was prompted by another visitor, who commented that perhaps the North Koreans had a point: if the war would not have happened without U.S. intervention and occupation in 1945, then perhaps the Korean War was, indeed, a war between the United States and Korea, as the North Koreans portray it. While accurately reflecting the *current* official North Korean position, this perspective has not always had the same nuance. During the war itself, North Korea accused South Korea of starting a "civil war" (*naeran*), as indicated by wartime leaflets found among the captured North Korean documents at the National Archives in Washington, DC, including one whose caption reads: "See the heroic figure of our People's Army, repelling and marching bravely upon the thieving U.S. imperialist troops who lawlessly invaded our country, instantly destroying the so-called National Defense Army of the Syngman Rhee puppet government that provoked a civil war!" (see figure 2). Even while indicting the United States as "imperialist invaders," the original caption begins by calling the Korean War a civil war, thereby complicating its origins. Nowhere was the nature of the war as a civil war more plainly visible than during the 1950 Sinch'ŏn Massacre. In a 1998 visit to the site of massacre, Kim Jong Il himself acknowledged in tacit recognition of the tragedies of civil war that domestic "reactionary elements" massacred people in revenge (see Han in this volume). By and large, however, North Korean historiography has moved away from depicting the war as one

between brothers to paint it as an American war of imperialist aggression against Korea that was victoriously thwarted by the northern forces. Several scholars have explained this strategy as a way to facilitate reconciliation between the two Koreas by circumventing the postcolonial conflict among Koreans (Jager 2002; Morris-Suzuki 2009).

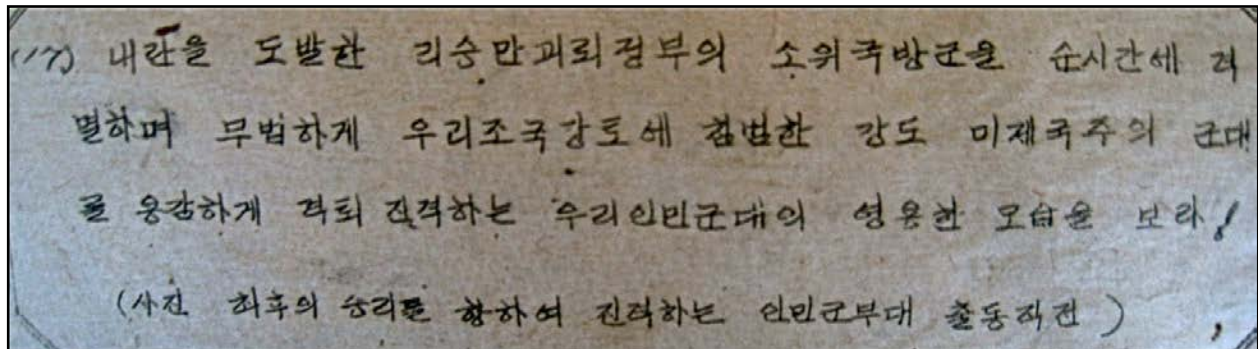


Figure 2. Caption to North Korean wartime flyer. *Source:* U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

Since my 2011 visit to North Korea, I have wondered whether there might not be an additional logic—not so much conciliatory as modernist—to the way history is conceptualized in North Korea. Such reasoning could explain the facile jump from the division of the country in 1945 to the outbreak of all-out war in 1950. Rather than simply highlighting North Korea’s divergent perspectives about the war, this article explores North Korea’s conception of history, which renders its understanding of the war in disparate ways, with particular attention to the war museum and its related sites. Together, the sites become ceremonial spaces within the monumental landscape that incite visitors to experience a ritual pilgrimage, tracing a linear history from Kim Il Sung’s anticolonial exploits against Japan to his anti-imperialist struggles against the United States. By attributing a teleological trajectory to the Korean War, whether in the form of American imperialist designs or Korean desires for national liberation and unification, the tragic costs of the war both past and present are sidelined and suppressed.

The remainder of this article is divided into two parts. The first part provides an analysis of the evolution of the North Korean museum devoted to the Korean War in terms of two key geopolitical turning points: the 1970s, with the end of the Vietnam War, and the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War. The second part offers a discussion of the events and episodes considered relevant in the North Korean historiography of the war, both in text and in exhibition form, that

renders the account inherently modernist in its affirmation of human agency to “make history.” I expand on the significance of this point in the concluding section. From the abiding emphasis on victory to the framing of the war as an anti-imperialist war, my concern with North Korea’s war memorialization has less to do with historical accuracy (already explored by other scholars) and more to do with the consequences of certain narrative strategies. Tracing the history of North Korean war memorialization to global developments, I situate North Korean narratives of the Korean War broadly within modernist historiography, not as an exception but working in tandem with others, to produce modernist temporalities that forsake a proper reckoning of the past and present in the rush to claim victory.

Claims to Victory from the 1970s to the 1990s

Unlike the War Memorial of Korea in Seoul (see D. Kim in this volume), which places the Korean War within a *longue durée* of foreign invasions and national resistance to establish an “unbroken warrior tradition” going back to the Three Kingdoms period (Jager 2002, 393–394), the focal point in North Korea is the Korean War, to which the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum is dedicated. Opened on August 17, 1953, soon after the signing of the armistice, as a “Comprehensive Exhibit on the Korean People’s Army” (Chosŏn inmingun chonghap chŏllamhoe), the museum underwent a major renovation and relocated to its current location on April 11, 1974.⁶ A North Korean guidebook explains that it was at this time that the museum added “Victorious” to its name, whereas it had been previously called the Fatherland Liberation War Museum (Hwang and Kim 1997, 47). The timing of this change is highly suggestive. The museum was reborn in the early 1970s, just as the Vietnam War was drawing to a close in precisely the fashion that North Korea had envisioned for the Korean War.

News coverage of the Vietnam War in North Korea peaked between 1973 and 1975, as the war ended in a Communist victory (table 1).⁷ *Rodong Sinmun*—the main newspaper of the ruling Korean Workers’ Party—declared the Paris Peace Accords (Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam), signed on January 27, 1973, a great victory for the people of South Vietnam. It went on to congratulate the Vietnamese people on their struggle against their “common enemy of U.S. imperialism.” The party newspaper called for cooperation in their mutual fight to expel the Americans from their respective countries to achieve national self-determination.⁸ During her visit to North Korea in April 1973, Nguyễn Thị Bình, one of the

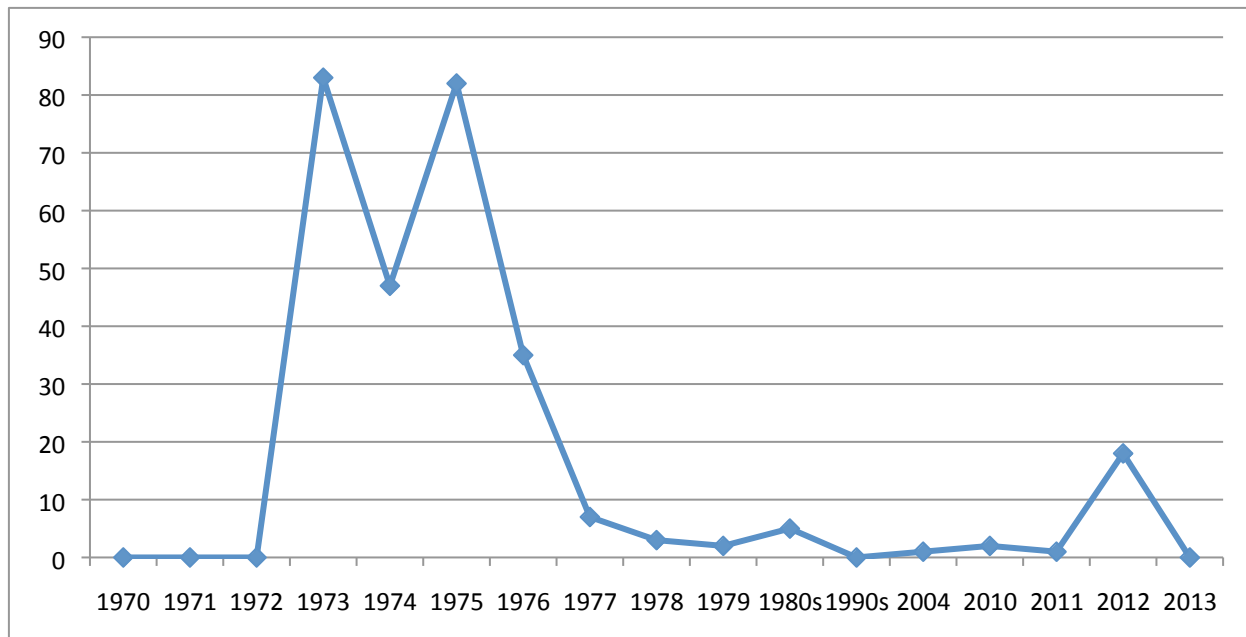
signatories to the Peace Accords on behalf of the Vietcong, declared that North Korea during the Korean War had been the “first in the world to deal a critical blow to U.S. imperialists,” but that the Vietnamese had achieved a “historical victory” by signing the Peace Accords that politically and legally ended the war and restored peace to Vietnam. She hailed the agreement as a “great victory,” not only for the Vietnamese people but also for Indochina (Laos and Cambodia) and the progressive revolutionary and peace-loving forces of the world, including all national liberation movements.⁹

A couple of months later, official representatives of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), led by Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng, visited North Korea to sign a joint communiqué, in which North Korea agreed to provide free aid to North Vietnam the following year.¹⁰ During the visit—which took place from June 27 to July 1, 1973, shortly before the twentieth anniversary of the Korean War armistice—Phạm Văn Đồng affirmed Vietnamese support for Kim Il Sung’s new policy of Korean reunification, which he had declared the week before, on June 23.¹¹ The Five-Point Policy for National Unification advocated a confederation plan for the reunification of Korea by its admission into the United Nations as the Democratic Confederal Republic of Koryo. This plan has remained the backbone of the northern reunification policy ever since. Throughout their visit, North Korean officials introduced the Vietnamese to the North Korean public as “friendly comrades-in-arms,” fighting a common enemy for the same purpose, and declared the anti-American war of resistance by the Vietnamese people a “brilliant victory considered one’s own” (*pitnanŭn sŭngri rŭl chasin ũi sŏnggwa wa kach’i*) by the Korean people.¹² The imminent Vietnamese victory was seen as a hopeful sign of the eventual triumph of the Korean people in the struggle to achieve reunification. In fact, Phạm Văn Đồng congratulated North Korea on its upcoming twentieth anniversary of the Fatherland Liberation War, repeatedly emphasizing its “illustrious victory” against American imperialist aggressors during the Korean War and the “complete victory” of Socialism in North Korea.¹³

After a slight dip in North Korean news coverage of Vietnam in 1974, the final takeover of Saigon by Communist forces on April 30, 1975, led to front-page news of the “great victory of all Vietnamese people.”¹⁴ *Rodong Sinmun* again editorialized that the Korean people had been “endlessly shaken and encouraged” by news of the victory, holding the “brilliant victory in the anti-American struggle as one’s own” (*pitnanŭn sŭngri rŭl chasin ũi sŭngri wa kach’i*). The

Vietnamese victory was considered a beacon of hope for the revolutionary peoples of the Third World and a sign of the efficacy of armed struggle against American imperialism, which seemed to prove that “no matter how small a country, it can ably defeat imperialist aggression if one believes in the strength of one’s own people and fights courageously with weapons in hand.” American military defeat during the Korean War was credited with initiating the decline of American power, whose final destruction had now been expedited by the Vietnamese victory. As a result, *Rodong Sinmun* declared that the period of invasion and interference by imperialists looking down on the peoples of Asia was over. Some twenty thousand Korean workers, youth, students, and soldiers gathered in Pyongyang to celebrate the Vietnamese victory.¹⁵

Table 1. Number of articles on Vietnam in *Rodong Sinmun*, 1970–2013.



If the early 1990s would later come to be seen as the end of the Cold War and the triumph of the liberal West, the early 1970s may be hailed as the apogee of hope for the triumph of the Socialist East. Worldwide social protests in the late 1960s brought to the fore profound disillusionment with the liberal capitalist order, from sexism and racism at home to neocolonial policies abroad. In Korea, the North and South reached an unprecedented agreement in the form of the July 4 Joint Communiqué of 1972, which called for peaceful reconciliation and reunification at a time when North Korea seemed poised to become the leader of the two Koreas

(Lee 2013, 196).¹⁶ While the South declared martial law and unlimited presidency for General Park Chung Hee in the 1972 Yushin Constitution, the North inaugurated the 1972 Socialist Constitution. Although it also declared Kim Il Sung president and his Juche (主體, often translated as “self-reliance”) ideology the only legitimate creed, insistence on self-reliance in politics, defense, and the economy enabled the North to achieve higher standards of living without having to bow to foreign forces. By contrast, the South Korean government had to negotiate with the United States to prevent it from reducing its military commitment to the South in reaction to the Nixon Doctrine that called for the “Vietnamization of the Vietnam War” and demanded that Asian allies take up their own security. As if to declare its upper hand, the 1972 Socialist Constitution finally established Pyongyang as the capital of Korea, unlike previous constitutions, which had acknowledged Seoul as the historic capital (Schinz and Dege 1990, 27). Vietnamese victory against the Americans by 1975 only seemed to confirm the Socialist camp’s optimistic outlook.

The timing could not have been better, as these international trends coincided with Kim Il Sung’s sixtieth birthday celebrations. The most iconic of visual landmarks denoting the epochal event in 1972 was the new bronze statue of Kim Il Sung, the Mansudae Grand Monument, which at 20 meters high was one of the largest statues ever erected for any living leader. As if to inscribe the prevailing sense of optimism onto the physical landscape, the unveiling of the statue was followed two years later, in 1974, by the aforementioned relocation and renaming of the war museum.¹⁷ Celebrating the occasion, the front page of *Rodong Sinmun* announced the museum’s opening as the culmination of “Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung’s self-reliant military strategy and creative tactics that led to the great victory...defeating the U.S. imperialist aggressors and honorably guarding the freedom and independence of the fatherland and the dignity of the nation.”¹⁸ According to the paper, the museum traced Kim Il Sung’s military exploits, “defeating two imperialist powers—the Americans and the Japanese—in just one generation to achieve national liberation and victory in the Fatherland Liberation War,” so that his military philosophy and strategy became a precious resource not only for the Korean people, but for all revolutionaries.

While the Korean War was immediately declared a victory for the North for having repelled the mighty United States, in the 1970s that victory was definitively inscribed to become part of the visual narrative. The achievement of national unification under Ho Chi Minh at the

conclusion of the Vietnam War was the kind of ending Kim Il Sung had undoubtedly wished for the Korean War. Even without unification, however, the rebirth of the museum in the 1970s was intended to stake a claim to victory. Whereas the previous museum had been housed in a modest two-story building in the foothills of Haebang Hill, the new building—itsself since replaced—was an imposing L-shaped structure with three floors and a basement (Kim Insik 1993).¹⁹ The total floor space of 52,000 square meters (or almost 13 acres) contained more than eighty showrooms in eighteen halls with more than sixty panoramic murals. The focal point of the museum was a massive 360-degree revolving panorama and diorama of the Taejŏn Battle (figure 3). Fought against the U.S. Army's 24th Infantry Division from July 7 to July 20, 1950, the battle led to the capture of its commander, General William Dean, the highest-ranking military official ever to have been taken prisoner in American history. During my visit to the museum, the guide declared that the cyclorama was the largest in the world at 10 meters high and 132 meters long, taking a full fifteen minutes to make one rotation. She added that it took a full year and a half and forty artists to finish the painting in time for the museum's opening in 1974. The museum's complete erasure of South Koreans as enemy combatants is best exemplified by this exhibit, which shows them as civilians greeting the liberation brought by the northern forces (figure 4).



Figure 3. One section of the Battle of Taejŏn Cyclorama in the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum. *Source*: DPRK 360.



Figure 4. Close-up of South Korean villagers looking at a portrait of Kim Il Sung. Source: Photo by author.

Twenty years later, however, North Korea commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the armistice in 1993 under very different circumstances. With the collapse of the Socialist bloc, the North once again insisted that the war had been a categorical victory and undertook yet another major construction project by installing the *Victory* monument near the museum. The dissolution of Eastern European allies signaled by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was soon followed by the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and the Soviet Union in 1991, and China in 1992, turning the tables on the optimistic outlook of the 1970s. Though nothing like the crisis and famine that followed the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, the end of the Cold War and the global collapse of Socialism was a serious blow. North Korea lost almost all its trading partners and many of its diplomatic allies overnight, leaving it isolated and insecure about its own future. The government redoubled its efforts to ideologically strengthen its society with a renewed commitment to guarding its legacy.

Rodong Sinmun hailed the war museum as a “great school that teaches the path to victory,” reporting that some 15.4 million domestic visitors and 230,000 foreign visitors, including heads of state and government delegations, had visited the museum over the course of its forty-year

history.²⁰ Moreover, the paper covered the new construction of the Monument to the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War in great detail, with numerous photos of its progress and even greater fanfare than the museum's reconstruction in the 1970s had received. Descriptions of the monument's location and design, including specific measurements of the materials used, became regular features in the news.²¹ The central *Victory* statue was reportedly placed atop a 7-meter base for a total height of 27 meters, to symbolize July 27 as Victory Day. It was also flanked by five additional statues on each side to represent the heroic episodes during the war, including statues dedicated to the navy and air force units, the guerrilla units, and the people's efforts in the rear. Commissioned by Kim Jong Il himself in April 1992, the focal point of the monument is the *Victory* statue, weighing over 100 tons and standing above eight granite blocks.²² *Rodong Sinmun* opined that the monument was distinctive from monuments in other countries for its representation of "the belief and commitment of the new generation to follow the path of Juche and follow the party's leadership" rather than simply dwelling on the past.²³ In trying to distinguish its own monuments as serving the present interests of the people (rather than the dead elite of the past), the party organ confirmed that the past is really about the present, aligning its conception of history with modernist interpretations.

A Convergence of Histories from East to West

Indubitably, the function of monuments and museums is to summon the past to serve the present. It is no surprise, then, that the war museum in Pyongyang employs a variety of strategies to present the past, ranging from reenactments of specific battle scenes (such as the cyclorama of the Taejŏn Battle) to displays of archival documents, photos, and wartime newsreel footage. During my visit to the museum in 2011, television screens showed documentary film clips about the war. A six-part documentary titled *The Fatherland Liberation War (Choguk haebang chŏnjaeng)*, which may have been used for these clips, facilitates an understanding of the museum and its framing of the Korean War.²⁴ The documentary begins by detailing the five years before the war (1945–1950), tracing its origins to American ambitions in East Asia in the aftermath of World War II. The American occupation of South Korea is depicted as a bridgehead toward conquering the rest of Asia, as the U.S. occupation of Japan became the base from which to invade Korea. The organization of police forces and the military academy in the South with

personnel that had served the Japanese colonial regime are shown to be examples of the U.S. military government's preparing for war from the very outset.

As a result, the North Korean narrative is unequivocal about who is responsible for the war: "U.S. Imperialism Is Provoker of Korean War and Sworn Enemy of Korean People," reads the museum pamphlet. Correspondence between South Korean president Syngman Rhee and American officials is reproduced to show premeditated calculations for a northern invasion. The legacy and continued impact of the war are traced to American conduct during the war. Declaring that "U.S. atrocities...are indelible forever," the museum notes the use of germ warfare and the dropping of 564,400 tons of bombs during the three-year conflict. Likewise, the documentary details the brutal effects of germ warfare and the scorched-earth policy of the American bombing campaign, as the narrator explains that more than one bomb was dropped for each Pyongyang resident and that five times the amount of napalm used during all of World War II was used in North Korea, until there was "nothing left to destroy."

As in most war memorials, such sacrifices are extolled and honored so as to justify the loss of life. The following poem by North Korean war hero Ri Su Bok is representative.²⁵

I am a young man of liberated Korea.	나는 해방된 조선의 청년이다
Life is precious	생명도 귀중하다
As is the hope for a bright future.	찬란한 내일의 희망도 귀중하다
But my life, my hope, and my happiness	그러나 나의 생명, 나의 희망, 나의 행복
Are no more precious than	그것은 조국의 운명보다 귀중치 않다
The destiny of the country.	하나밖에 없는 조국을 위하여
Is there any life, hope, or happiness	둘도 없는 목숨이지만
Nobler, greater, or more beautiful	나의 청춘을 바치는 것처럼
Than giving up my youth for my country?	아름다운 희망
	위대한 행복이
	또 어디 있으랴!

In a similar vein, the documentary depicts the heroic civilian efforts at industrial production in extensive underground factories and the perseverance of those who continued farming, despite the repeated bombing of fields and dams. The desperate living conditions in caves and bunkers in the face of constant American bombing are juxtaposed with images of the North Korean state's care and protection of orphans and the injured through the operation of underground schools, hospitals, and markets.

Despite the brutality of war and the continued division of the peninsula, the war museum presents the armistice agreement signed on July 27, 1953, as a victory for the North, because this was the first time the United States had signed an armistice without a clear victory. Indeed, the site of the armistice signing, P’anmunjŏm, visually affirms North Korea’s view of the Korean War. The two parties that signed the armistice are denoted by the North Korean flag and the flag of the United Nations (figures 5, 6, and 7). In describing P’anmunjŏm as the location where Korea was artificially divided by the Americans in 1945, North Korea charges U.S. imperialists with starting a war of aggression “in order to swallow up the whole of Korea,” whereas the same place becomes a “venue of north-south dialogues and contacts” for Koreans from both sides (“Panmunjom” n.d.). In this way, the Korean War ceases to be a civil war; instead, it is an imperialist war of aggression that was successfully repelled by North Korea. The Korean people are painted as a “homogeneous nation who have lived harmoniously in one and the same territory,” erasing the divisions in the aftermath of colonial rule. Those who joined forces with the Americans during the war are labeled “puppets” and “cannon fodder,” stripping them of any autonomy and duplicating the way in which the North has been construed as a Soviet puppet by the South.



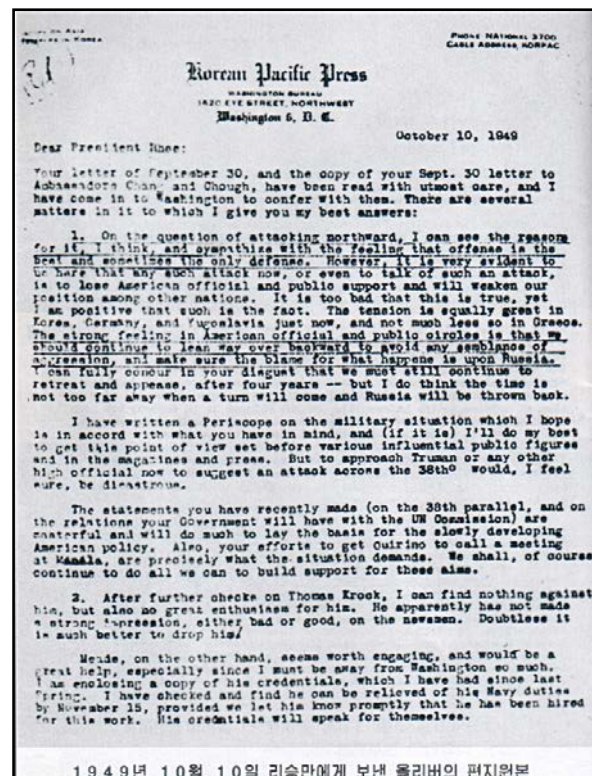
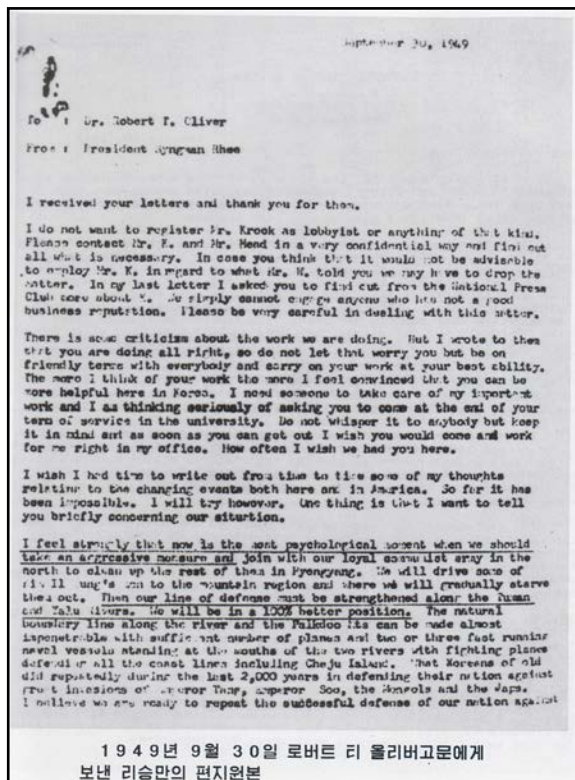
Figures 5, 6, and 7 (left to right). Armistice Signing Hall with flags of the DPRK and United Nations. *Source:* Photos by author.

Along with the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum and P'anmunjŏm, the list of sites connected to the Korean War would not be complete without mentioning the Sinch'ŏn Museum (see Han in this volume). Located in South Hwanghae Province, Sinch'ŏn County has been memorialized for the brutality of its civilian massacre. According to North Korean accounts, the U.S. military occupied the county for fifty-two days, between October 17 and December 7, 1950 (Chŏng 2009). Nearly a quarter of the population of 35,380, including infants and the elderly, was reportedly massacred during this time—burned or buried alive, shot, drowned, or tortured to death. Mass graves were being discovered well into the 1990s, according to the museum exhibit. The most gruesome of the massacres took place in the village of Wŏnamri. Children were separated from their mothers and locked up in a storehouse into which gasoline was dumped, burning 102 children to death, while some 400 mothers in another storehouse nearby were likewise burned alive. Three of the children survived to tell the story. If the war museum in Pyongyang seems to background the horrors of war to emphasize victory, the Sinch'ŏn Museum instills the need for revenge through graphic depictions of the pain and suffering borne by women and children. North Korean news outlets reported on the sixtieth anniversary of the start of the Korean War that “the soldiers of the Korean People’s Army held revenge meetings (*poksu moim*) on the 25th in front of the Four Hundred Mothers’ Grave and One Hundred and Two Children’s Grave at the Sinch'ŏn Museum in South Hwanghae Province.”²⁶

The presence of the Sinch'ŏn Museum may seem like a deliberate attempt to separate the site of “pain and death” from the site of “strength, heroism and triumph,” as Tessa Morris-Suzuki (2009) has observed, but the museums are interconnected sites that must be regarded as parts of the same ritual visit of learning about the Korean War for all visitors, foreign and domestic. They are geographically separated, but share the same narrative about the Korean War: a war that was devastating and cruel, horrific and ghastly—as exemplified by American conduct in Sinch'ŏn—but nonetheless heroically thwarted under the leadership of Kim Il Sung, and therefore victorious. The three sites of division, war, and massacre point to one conclusion: the need to repel, at whatever cost, any further American threat. This visual discourse is backed up by archival evidence exhibited throughout the museums.

The most damning piece of evidence used repeatedly by the museums and publications to prove that the Americans initiated hostilities is the correspondence between Syngman Rhee and

his American advisor, Robert T. Oliver. In a letter dated September 30, 1949, Rhee implores Oliver to consider working for him, relaying his “strong” feeling that “now is the most psychological moment when we should take an aggressive measure” (figure 8). To this, Oliver responds on October 10, 1949, that “we should continue to lean way over backward to avoid any semblance of aggression, and make sure the blame for what happens is upon Russia” (figure 9). What is not highlighted in the documents displayed is Oliver’s acknowledgment that “to suggest an attack across the 38° would...be disastrous.” The potential ambiguity of these letters is thus dispelled by pointing to the increased frequency of visits by American officials to the region between 1949 and 1950, especially Rhee’s meeting with General Douglas MacArthur in Japan in February 1950 and Republican politician John Foster Dulles’s visit to the 38th parallel on June 19, 1950, just a week before the outbreak of war (figure 10).²⁷ These episodes constitute the primary evidence mobilized to show that the Americans manipulated Rhee’s “puppet army” to invade the North.



Figures 8 and 9. Correspondence between Robert T. Oliver and Syngman Rhee displayed in the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum. *Source*: Photo taken by author.



Figure 10. Republican politician John Foster Dulles at the 38th parallel (June 19, 1950). *Source:* U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

However, in a glossy English-language pictorial book about the Korean People's Army published in 1993 and devoted almost entirely to the Korean War, there is one passing indication that the war was in fact a civil war of "a bitter class struggle against the enemies of the people" (Kim, In Il 1993, 14). But even here, Americans are held responsible for providing U.S.\$110 million in military aid, building military airfields, and concentrating the South Korean troops along the 38th parallel. Thus, the book concludes, it was the "south Korean puppet clique...[that] started the criminal armed invasion of the northern half of the country at the instigation of the U.S. imperialists" (Kim, In Il 1993, 16). Setting aside the question of who "invaded" whom, North Korean accounts do not explain how the so-called defensive war turned into an all-out offensive war. Simply stated, Kim Il Sung organized a "decisive counterattack," calling for "all-out victory" in the war for reunification of the country during his national radio address the day after the outbreak of war. This successful counterattack then led to "the liberation of 90 percent of southern territory and 92 percent of the southern population" as a "miraculous feat unknown in the thousands of years of war history" and only possible with "the leader's undefeatable military strategy."²⁸ This is one indication of the muddled beginnings of a civil war, despite the North's reluctance to call it that.

Displacing the civil origins of the war, the basic assumption undergirding North Korean narratives is that the Korean War was the first step in American designs for world hegemony

(Kim H. 2004). Pointing to President Roosevelt's suggestion for a forty-year trusteeship over Korea as early as 1943, the United States is accused of having long coveted Korea for its geographic location and its ports and rails stretching into Northeast Asia and the Soviet Union, with the potential to reach Europe. Toward that end, the United States maintained and revived the fascist colonial apparatus in Korea after the Asia-Pacific War, reinstating pro-Japanese collaborators. The division of the peninsula is thus regarded as a premeditated plan to occupy the southern half of Korea "without spilling a single drop of blood," in contrast to the Soviet occupation of the North, which had begun in early August 1945 battling the Japanese.

Ironically, this perspective is bolstered in inverted form by the original American understanding of the war as an international conflict, but in this case waged to counter Soviet expansionism.²⁹ In this framing, to call the Korean War a civil war is "misleading," because "the war included combatants representing twenty different governments," with "fifty to sixty percent of the estimated casualties" being non-Korean and "virtually all of the weapons and ammunition...[coming] from outside the peninsula" (Stueck 2001, 189). The indigenous origins of the Korean War are disavowed not only due to the participation of foreign troops but also because the division of the peninsula in 1945 was carried out "by two great powers...without Korean input" (Stueck 2001, 189).

Two opposing accounts of the war are thus brought together by virtue of hindsight. The division of the peninsula and the two separate occupation zones are seamlessly tied to the point of American or Communist entry into the Korean War along one continuum. From the North Korean perspective, there are no conflicting interests or different contingencies that can account for a shifting American policy between 1945 and 1950, whereas from the American perspective, the Korean peninsula is a blank canvas without history or people, on which Communism attempted to spread its influence and was successfully repelled by a U.S.-led international force. The past is interpreted from the vantage point of a world already divided along the Cold War axis.

But the international dimensions of the war are visible only *through* the unfolding of the war itself. While the division of the peninsula in 1945 created the 38th parallel, across which the Korean War was fought, to say that the cause of the war was therefore the division itself mistakes historical relevance for historical causation. History is contingent, with multiple possibilities, and at each turn—from the Moscow Agreement in December 1945 to the last-ditch

efforts at talks between the leaders of the North and South in April 1948—there could have been a breakthrough that did not leave Korea on a war footing. Conversely, there is no certainty that without division, there would have been no war. But modernist historiography demands clear causal connections aided and abetted by the “musealization” of experience, whereby the museum emerges as “the paradigmatic institution that collects, salvages, and preserves,” in order to reconstruct the past in terms of the present (Huysen 1995, 14–15). Here there are no ambiguities, what-ifs, or uncertainties with blurred outcomes—only the end result: the residual artifact illuminated under the viewing box, neatly categorized and contained and lacking any of the complexities of actual events.

Modernist Temporalities and Tragic Ends

In commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the armistice in 2013, Kim Jong Un initiated yet another reconstruction of the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum in recognition of its “important significance in carrying forward the fighting spirit displayed by the former generation.”³⁰ The “soldier-builders” of the Korean People’s Army were put in charge of the project, which included the construction of a new dock to host the USS *Pueblo*, an American spy ship captured by North Korea in 1968. The ship was moved from the Taedong River, where it had been on exhibit since 1999, to the Pot’ong River, which ran alongside the museum. The new site thereby made more explicit the ways in which the Korean War continues despite the armistice, as shown by the example of American incursion into North Korean territorial waters. The vessel is still listed as commissioned by the U.S. Navy and is the only American ship held by a foreign country.³¹ The large weaponry, tanks, and aircraft that were previously displayed in the basement of the museum, including those captured from the Americans during the Korean War, have been moved outside on either side of the main building to complement the *Pueblo*.

In sync with the construction boom observed throughout Pyongyang in recent years, the museum’s gallery hall received a complete makeover as well as a new structure, featuring gilded decorations and an updated design to the interior exhibition space, built right behind the *Victory* statue. As shown in an aerial image of the site, the new building is connected directly to the monument, in contrast to the gallery’s previous location across the river (figure 11). The spatial reconfiguration that binds the museum and the monument as a single site is a visual manifestation of the *taut* relationship between the history of the war and its claim to victory.

Victory is affirmed by spatially connecting the museum to the monument, and yet the very resources that had to be expended to link the two structures expose the spatial stretch that was made to relocate the museum, thereby (re)situating the war as victorious. At each step—from the first relocation of the modestly sized building tucked away in the foothills to the more prominent 1974 structure, and then the second relocation that tied the 2013 museum closer to the 1993 monument—the museum’s relocations constitute a spatial fix for the ambiguities of the war.

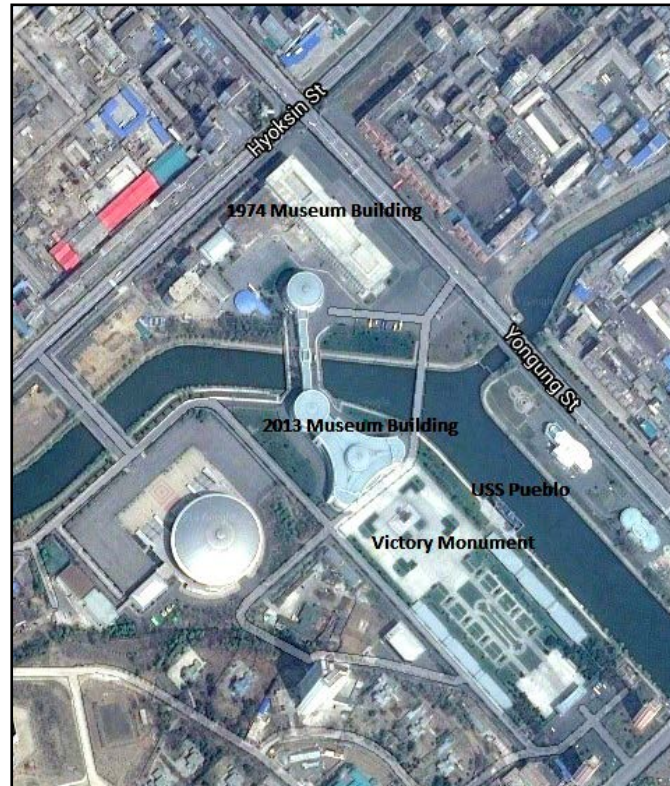
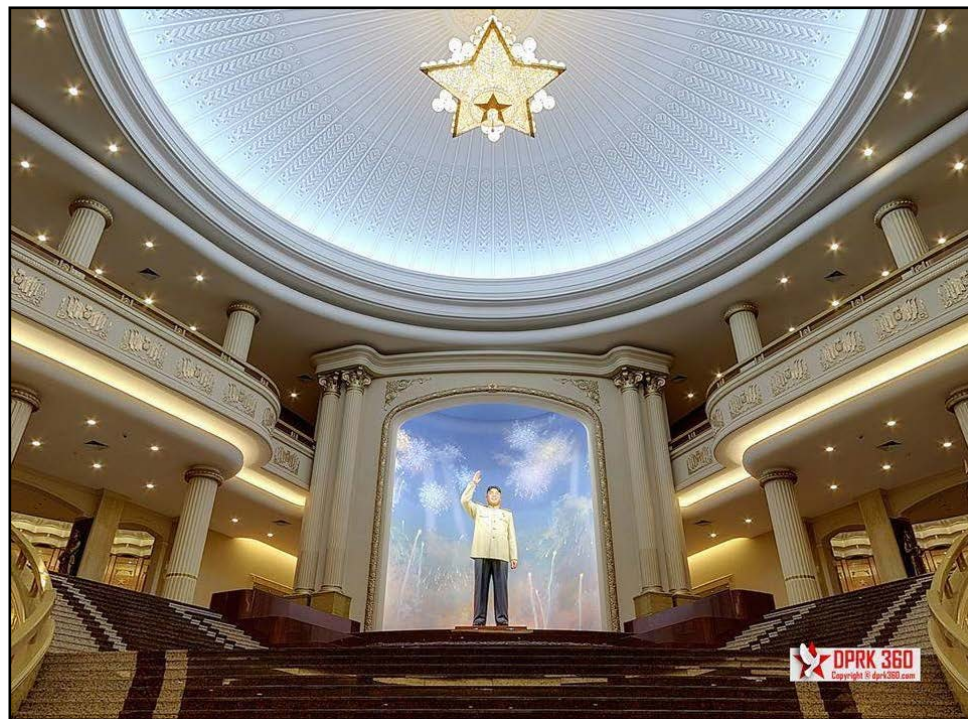


Figure 11. Aerial view of the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum and Monument site in Pyongyang. *Source:* Google Maps.

In the gap between the old and new museums lie the uncertain configurations in the narrative of the war, filled with tension and anxiety about its (un)ending. The spatial link aims to compensate for the temporal gaps in history, whether those gaps are the complexities in the years leading up to the war or those in the years since its unresolved aftermath. As geographer Edward Soja has argued, “space can be made to hide consequences from us” (1989, 6). Despite North Korea’s insistence on an emancipatory modernist historiography of people “making history,” as reflected in its triumphalist narrative of the war, it is the unacknowledged tragedies and the limits

to modernist temporalities that have displaced the temporal logic and its narrative uncertainties with the spatial logic that visually appears immutable due to its materiality.



Figures 12 (above) and 13 (below). The museum entrance before and after the 2013 renovations.
Sources: Wikipedia Commons and DPRK 360.

In the lobby to the rebuilt museum entrance, a new statue of Kim Il Sung has replaced the famous painting of him leading the people to victory (figures 12 and 13). It features the same likeness of the leader, wearing the white military uniform, but the people who had accompanied

him in the painting are now gone and he stands solitary with a halo of chandelier lighting above his head as if to emphasize his singular status in North Korea. News outlets reiterated the purpose of the museum, lest there be any doubt. Reporting on the reconstruction under way in February 2013, North Korea's central news agency declared that "the museum serves as a base for anti-U.S. education as it equips service personnel, working people and youth and students with the Juche idea, the anti-imperialist revolutionary ideas, outstanding commanding art, and military strategies and war tactics of President Kim Il Sung."³²

In official North Korean discourse, the Korean War is depicted as a heroic fight against a far superior power through the determination of sheer human will. In this narrative of the Korean War, Kim Il Sung saved the world from annihilation by preventing a Third World War with his fearless defense against American imperialists.³³ His actions were as sublime as that of a "mother who sacrifices herself to confront a beast of prey in order to save her child" (Kim H. 2004, 167).³⁴ This perception of history as being made through the strength of resolve in the exercise of self-determination leaves no room for human failures, historical contingencies, or unintended consequences. How can a war as devastating as the Korean War *not* be the result of premeditated foreign ambitions when North Korean political ideology relies on the principle of self-determination—that is, the ability and responsibility of human beings to shape and mold the course of history? Without the war's official end and a proper reckoning of accountability on all sides, trauma festers into resentment as a reminder of unsettled pasts (Brudholm 2008). In North Korea, the Korean War is relived continually, not just through museums and memorial sites, but also through the constant reminder of continued conflict with the United States.

The restoration of transformative politics requires an acknowledgment of the past. Reconciliation demands recognition of the victims of the conflict on all sides. A model example was provided by the work of South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up under President Roh Moo Hyun's administration in 2005. By the end of its five-year term, the commission had received a total of 11,174 individual petitions, of which the vast majority were related to civilian massacres during the Korean War. Most of the instances of mass killings (82 percent) investigated by the commission were committed by South Korean state agents, including the police and military (see Wright in this volume).³⁵ American handling of Nogŭnri, where a U.S. army unit killed as many as three hundred civilians during the early weeks of the

Korean War (see Hong in this volume), suggests that the United States has yet to fully acknowledge its own mistakes.³⁶ Needless to say, neither has North Korea.

This is not to point fingers at North Korea, but to underscore its inability to confront the past. Anthropologist David Scott poignantly notes that certain “histories tend *not* to inquire systematically into the ways in which the expectation of—or longing for—particular futures helps to shape the kind of problem the past is constructed as for the present” (2004, 31). His critique of modernist historiography and its temporal dependence on triumphant futures, which limits how the past is seen, can be productively applied to North Korean renditions of the Korean War. If the museum represents one of the primary institutions by which a modernist historiography is publicly displayed and collectively performed, by enabling visitors to actively insert themselves into a heroic vision of history, then perhaps it is time to imagine a different kind of museum for the Korean War, one that is humble in the face of tragedy. It is worth quoting Scott again to appreciate what tragedy, as a narrative form, can offer:

Tragedy has a more respectful attitude to the past, to the often-cruel permanence of its impress: it honors, however reluctantly, the obligations the past imposes. Perhaps part of the value of the story-form of tragedy for our present, then, is not merely that it raises a profound challenge to the hubris of the revolutionary (and modernist) longing for total revolution, but that it does so in a way that reopens a path to formulating a criticism of the present. (2004, 135)

In other words, it is by letting go of the claim to victory and accepting the possibility of tragic ends that we can fully acknowledge past mistakes and take stock of present problems. The responsibility of doing so falls on everyone involved, but perhaps more heavily on those who hail the “end of history” and the “triumph” of the West precisely because of their hegemonic claim to have won the Cold War. Victory forecloses an honest consideration of what was (and is) lost.

The Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum’s insistence on victory—from its first visible claim in 1974, to the addition of the *Victory* monument in 1993, and finally to the latest reconstruction of the museum in 2013—is an indication of North Korea’s deep insecurities about its past, present, and future. The heroic depiction of the war as a victory is partly an attempt to forget the real sense of trauma and tragedy left in its wake, especially as tensions continue to flare, with military brinkmanship across both sides of the demilitarized zone. In that sense, the specters of war in Pyongyang are not felt merely through the presence of war memorials and

monuments in the mandate to remember, but equally through the haunting absence of true mourning in the need to forget what has been lost for those living in the presence of unending war.

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Notes

- 1 Socialist cities are not exposed to the kinds of pressures found in capitalist cities, which must weigh the benefits of generating revenue from taxation on private real estate against public spending. As a result, Socialist cities tend to devote large amounts of public space to parks, squares, and infrastructure based on central planning that highlight the city as a symbol of the Socialist collective: as a “city of production,” a “city of green,” and a “city of symbolism” (Im 2011). The last function is especially pronounced and different from the capitalist city since large public squares are used for mass political gatherings rather than as marketplaces or religious sites. See Im (2011, 46–51, 88–89).
- 2 The Arch of Triumph is slightly larger than the French Arc de Triomphe, on which it was modeled, and the Juche Tower stands exactly 1 meter taller than the Washington Monument. See Springer (2003, 87, 109).
- 3 “Kakji esō ‘6.25 mije pandae t’ujaeng ūi nal’ moim dŭl chinhaeng” [Gathering of “June 25, the day of struggle against U.S. imperialism,” held all over], Korean Central News Agency, June 25, 2010, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/calendar/2010/06/06-25/2010-0625-024.html> (accessed July 8, 2014); “‘6.25 mije pandae t’ujaeng ūi nal’ P’yōngyangsi panmi kunmin taehoe” [Anti-U.S. rallies held in Pyongyang by residents on “June 25, the day of struggle against U.S. imperialism”], Korean Central News Agency, June 25, 2010, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/calendar/2010/06/06-25/2010-0625-023.html> (accessed July 8, 2014); “6.25 mije pandae t’ujaeng ūi nal P’yōngyangsi kunjung taehoe” [June 25, the day of struggle against U.S. imperialism mass rally in Pyongyang], Korean Central News Agency, June 25, 2013, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/calendar/2013/06/06-25/2013-0625-031.html> (accessed July 8, 2014).
- 4 See Korean Central News Agency bulletins from July 25–27, 2013.
- 5 For panoramic views of the renovated museum, see DPRK 360: The North Korea Panoramas and Photography Project by Aram Pan, http://www.dprk360.com/360/victorious_fatherland_liberation_war_museum/ (accessed July 8, 2014). The website also offers fascinating views of other renovated and newly built sites.
- 6 For information about the opening of the museum in 1953, see Ki Pyōngin, “Sŭngri ūi kirŭl karŭch’yōjunŭn hulyunghan hakkyo” [Great school that teaches the path to victory], *Rodong Sinmun*, August 17, 1993. Details about the museum before the 2013 renovations come from Hyon (n.d.).

- 7 Using the databases at the Information Center on North Korea (Seoul), an electronic search of the main newspaper and organ of the ruling Korean Workers' Party, *Rodong Sinmun*, from 1970 to the present produced 287 articles with references to Vietnam, with over 200 appearing between 1973 and 1975.
- 8 “Chosŏn inmin ūn minjujuūijŏk minjok hyŏngmyŏng ūl wansuhamyŏ choguk ūi p'yŏnghwajŏk t'ongil ūl irukhagi wihan nambu Wetnam inmin ūi t'ujaeng ūl kyesok chŏkkŭk chiji sŏngwŏnhal kŏsida” [The Korean people will continue to strongly support and root for the struggle of South Vietnamese people to achieve democratic revolution and national peaceful reunification], *Rodong Sinmun*, April 18, 1973.
- 9 “Kunjung taehoe esŏ han Wen Tibing tanjang ūi yŏnsŏl [Speech by Director Nguyễn Thị Bình at mass rally], *Rodong Sinmun*, April 18, 1973.
- 10 “Kongdong k'omunik'e” [Joint Communiqué between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam dated July 1, 1973], *Rodong Sinmun*, July 3, 1973.
- 11 “Pŏm Mundong tongji ūi yŏnsŏl” [Speech by Comrade Phạm Văn Đồng], *Rodong Sinmun*, June 27, 1973.
- 12 “Kim Il tongji ūi yŏnsŏl” [Speech by Comrade Kim Il], *Rodong Sinmun*, June 27, 1973.
- 13 “Pŏm Mundong tongji ūi yŏnsŏl” [Speech by Comrade Phạm Văn Đồng], *Rodong Sinmun*, July 1, 1973.
- 14 “Chŏnch'e Wetnam inmin ūi widaehan sŏngri yŏngungjŏk t'ujaeng ūi pitnanŭn kyŏlsil” [Great victory of all Vietnamese people as the brilliant result of heroic struggle], *Rodong Sinmun*, May 3, 1975.
- 15 “Panmi kuguk t'ujaeng esŏ Wetnam inmini irukhan widaehan sŏngri rŭl yŏlyŏlhi ch'ukhahanda!” [Jubilant congratulations on the great victory of the Vietnamese people in the anti-American struggle for national salvation], *Rodong Sinmun*, May 4, 1975.
- 16 Despite the historic declaration, relations between North and South Korea were severely strained throughout the 1970s. According to historian Steven Lee (2013), the war in Vietnam could have influenced North Korea's unification policy toward a more aggressive strategy of guerrilla infiltration into the South and attacks against South Korean soldiers that paralleled American and South Korean military aggression in Vietnam. Examples include the attack by North Korean commandos on the Blue House in 1968 and the attempted assassination of Park Chung Hee in 1974.
- 17 The 1970s marked a peak in the construction of monumental architecture that also included the Korean Revolution Museum and Korean Central History Museum (1970), Pyongyang Indoor Stadium (1973), People's Palace of Culture (1974), April 25 House of Culture (1975), Mansudae Art Theater (1976), Taesongsan Funfair (1977), and International Friendship Exhibition Hall (1978). The subway lines in Pyongyang also began operation during this period. See Hwang and Kim (1997) and Im (2011, 143–149).
- 18 “Widaehan suryŏng Kim IIsŏng tongji ūi ch'amsŏk mit'e saero kŏnsŏltoen choguk haebang chŏnjaeng sŏngri kinyŏn'gwan kaegwansiki sŏngdaehi chinhaeng toeyŏtta” [Opening ceremony for the newly constructed Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum grandly proceeded under Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung's attendance], *Rodong Sinmun*, April 12, 1974.
- 19 For a photo of the pre-1974 building, see the cover of *Choguk haebang chŏnjaeng kinyŏmgwan* (1969).

- 20 Ki Pyŏngin, “Sŭngri ūi kirŭl karŭch’yŏjunŭn hulyunghan hakkyo” [Great school that teaches the path to victory], *Rodong Sinmun*, August 17, 1993.
- 21 Ch’oe Kwanbin, “Choguk haebang chŏnjaeng sŭngri kinyŏmt’ap kŏnsŏl him ikke ch’ujin” [Strongly promoting the construction of the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Monument], *Rodong Sinmun*, October 12, 1992.
- 22 Kim Myŏngji, “Choguk haebang chŏnjaeng sŭngri kinyŏmt’ap kŏnsŏl pparŭn sokdoro chinch’ŏk” [Rapid progress on the construction of the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Monument], *Rodong Sinmun*, May 28, 1993.
- 23 Sim Chaejun, “Sidae ūi yŏngung kinyŏmpi choguk haebang chŏnjaeng sŭngri kinyŏmt’ap” [Heroic monument of the times, the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Monument], *Rodong Sinmun*, July 30, 1993.
- 24 Although the cover lists 1994 as the publication year, the actual production date appears closer to the 1970s. The film includes original black-and-white wartime footage, as well as more contemporary shots in color, showing various cities entirely reconstructed after the war.
- 25 The translation comes from Hyon (n.d., 35).
- 26 “Kunindŭl ūi poksu moim” [Soldiers’ revenge meetings], Korean Central News Agency, June 25, 2013, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/calendar/2013/06/06-25/2013-0625-030.html> (accessed July 8, 2014).
- 27 John Foster Dulles was a prominent Republican who was to be appointed secretary of state under Eisenhower upon the latter’s election to the presidency in 1953. Dulles positioned himself early as an aggressive Cold Warrior criticizing the containment policy in favor of “liberating” Communist areas.
- 28 Kim Chŏnghŭi, “Chŭksijŏkin pan’gonggyŏk ūro” [On the immediate counterattack], *Ch’ŏllima*, June 1980.
- 29 For an example of a “traditional analysis” by his own account, see William Stueck (1995). Scholarship on the Korean War produced by scholars in South Korea, North America, and China has become quite varied and complex; a full discussion of this historiography is beyond the scope of this essay.
- 30 “Kim Jong Un Visits Construction Site for Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum,” *Korean Central News Agency*, February 21, 2013, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2013/201302/news21/20130221-37ee.html> (accessed July 19, 2014). A good documentary introduction to the 2013 museum can be found on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bgqHelH3A> (accessed January 15, 2015).
- 31 Eric Talmadge, “USS Pueblo: North Korea Expected to Unveil US Captured Spy Ship This Week,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 25, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Latest-News-Wires/2013/0725/USS-Pueblo-North-Korea-expected-to-unveil-US-captured-spy-ship-this-week> (accessed July 19, 2014).
- 32 “Kim Jong Un Visits Construction Site” (2013).
- 33 President Truman also justified American intervention in Korea as preventing a third world war: “I want to talk to you plainly tonight about what we are doing in Korea and about our policy in the Far East. In the simplest terms, what we are doing in Korea is this: We are trying to prevent a third world war” (Truman 1951, 223).
- 34 For an analysis of martial motherhood as applied to male leaders in North Korea, see Kim (2014).

- 35 For a concise introduction to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Korea in English, see United States Institute of Peace, “Truth Commission: South Korea 2005,” <http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-south-korea-2005> (accessed July 19, 2014). See also the preliminary report in English published by the commission in March 2009, http://www.jinsil.go.kr/pdf/%EC%98%81%EB%AC%B8%EB%B0%B1%EC%84%9C_20MS%ED%8C%8C%EC%9D%BC_0205.pdf (accessed July 19, 2014).
- 36 In September 1999, the Associated Press reported that a U.S. Army unit had killed as many as three hundred civilians at Nogūnri in the opening weeks of the Korean War, ranking it as the second deadliest committed by U.S. troops after the 1968 My Lai massacre in Vietnam. A fourteen-month investigation by the Pentagon resulted in a January 2001 report that effectively absolved the American military of any wrongdoing, stating that “the passage of 50 years reduces the possibility that all of the facts will ever be known. . . . [M]any of the U.S. soldiers deployed to Korea were young, under-trained, under-equipped and new to combat. . . legitimately fearful of the possible infiltration of North Korean soldiers who routinely entered American lines in groups disguised as civilians in refugee columns.” The Statement of Mutual Understanding between the United States and the Republic of Korea on the No Gun Ri Investigations is available at <http://www.defense.gov/news/Jan2001/smu20010111.html> (accessed March 15, 2015). For criticism of the investigation that may have covered up evidence of direct orders to shoot civilians, see Jeremy Williams, “‘Kill ‘Em All’: The American Military in Korea,” BBC, February 17, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/coldwar/korea_usa_01.shtml (accessed July 19, 2014). For the full story of the incident, see Hanley, Choe, and Mendoza (2001).

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