

## Collection or Plunder : The Vanishing Sweet Memories of South Korea ' s Democracy Movement

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## **Collection or Plunder: The Vanishing Sweet Memories of South Korea's Democracy Movement**

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I respected my comrades because they knew exactly what “skepticism” meant. As I told you before, they doubted everything until they received a satisfactory answer. But see? Now the question “did we really not enjoy the 1980s?” is a taboo among them. So I have to start something in order to keep my sweet memories alive. (Informant B, a former activist, September 2013)

Today, discussions of collective memory seem old-fashioned. We are likely to take them for granted and to see collective memory as a topic no longer worth discussing. I would argue, however, that collective memory is a concept now entering a second phase of exploration.

The first section of this paper presents a short critique of previous explorations of collective memory, in which I will argue that discussions in the past were unintentionally but undeniably one-sided. The following two sections constitute a short ethnography of former activists who took part in the largest labor movement in South Korean history, which occurred in 1987. I focus in particular on a specific type of memory that often emerges in their narratives. The third part is also a collection of former activists' narratives; however, those I include are not introspective accounts but reactions to or even counterattacks on the mainstream social discourse that is constructed by commentators, including Koreanist researchers. The last section provides an analysis and alternative interpretation of the topics presented.

### **1. Cheers to a Brighter Future!**

Previous studies of South Korea's democracy movement share a common feature: they represent the movement as a series of social dramas, and focus on the sphere of rituals. For instance, Seong-nae Kim argues that the democratization demonstrations on Jeju Island appeared to be an act of mourning for the great massacre that occurred there in the 1950s (S. Kim 1989; 1995). Manabe, analyzing South Korean grassroots movements, represented the situation before “democratization” symbolically as “death,” while using the image of “vitality” to characterize the situation following it (Manabe 1997; 2000).

This trend in the academic approach to social movements can be found not only in

Korean studies but also in other fields. Some researchers are, however, critical of this approach. They question whether movements were or ever became integrated wholes, pointing to fragments of memory that do not fit conventional narratives (Connerton 1989: 3; Cole 2003).

Another common feature of anthropological studies of collective memory is the treatment of such memories as histories of oppression and resistance to it, rather than as history that incorporates multiple perspectives. Why this trend should have taken hold is not clear. The idea of collective or social memory is not limited to laments about past oppression and resistance. People's past experiences are not set in stone; the past is interpreted in connection with the present and the future; thus societies come to share common interpretations of past events (Le Goff 1992).

How have we come to believe that the collective memories should always be memories of oppression and resistance? Gyanendra Pandey suggests an answer in the introduction to the Japanese edition of *Subaltern Studies*:

Nationalist and Marxist historians tried to write a history or histories using terms that were already available. In these histories, words such as nation, class, bourgeoisie revolution and secularism were used as fixed categories. Therefore, histories had to be the processes through which these categories took shape. That is, the emergence and development of these concepts, and the unavoidable conflicts on the way, were regarded as histories. (Pandey 1998, vi)

On the other hand, Abu-Lughod criticizes the romanticism that we tend to feel toward the weak; we usually have sympathy for those who are oppressed and resist oppression. Research within the field of anthropology frequently shares this prejudice (Abu-Lughod 1990).

Whether these critiques are justified or not, collective memories have been treated in ways closely connected with concepts such as stigma or embodiment of suppressed experience (e.g., Das 1996; Werbner 1998; Litzinger 1998; Yoneyama 1999). This tendency can be seen with particular clarity in studies of South Korea's democracy movement, where collective memory is treated as collective lamentation, or, at best, memories of how bad things used to be.

Where, however, are the studies of the good old days? If people tend to divide all situations into death and life, and if this division applies to discussions of memories, too (West 1995), why are happy memories of life and vitality so rare?

Some people may accuse me of taking a Pollyanna approach. Some may think that I am writing an "anthropology of fun." They insist that we should focus on gloom and doom. What is presented here is how memories concerned with death reflect a people's life in the round, with the good along with the bad.

I argue that the narratives introduced here convincingly reveal that research on political movements never achieves the kind of closure imagined in studies of collective memory, because whatever conclusions are reached are subject to continuous change, both in the movements themselves and in how memories of them are shaped. This paper has, then, two goals: to complement previous discussions of memory; and to address a particularly

recognizable form of “cultural reflexivity.”

## 2. Another Strawberry Statement

During the 1980s, the South Korean political situation was unsettled. The democracy movement had been in existence since the South Korean government was established by the military in 1948, but it became much more active in the 1980s, when larger segments of the public, especially college students, became involved in the movement.

Not only did the number of activists increase, but the character of the movement also changed. For instance, student groups were authoritarian, with “ordinary members” guarding “important leaders,” in a mirror image of their enemy, the authoritarian military. However, in the 1980s, those in their twenties started to seek an alternative social order in the groups themselves. They tried to break down the wall between “ordinary” and “important” members. Activists in the 1980s wanted their movement to be more democratic. This shift also reflected the outcome of the Gwangju Uprising in 1980, when a large number of citizens who demanded democratization in the southwestern city were slaughtered, leaving residents of other cities who had not followed their example with deep feelings of guilt (Ota 2006).

Another distinguishing feature of the movements in the 1980s was the attempt to convert and recruit workers. Previously, activists had tended to think democratization must be led by intellectuals, particularly students. During the 1980s, however, it became clear that intellectuals acting alone lacked the power to effect change. Many college students concealed their student identities to take factory jobs and tried to organize factory workers from the inside, a stratagem labeled “sham employment” (*wijang chwiŏp*).<sup>1)</sup>

The sham workers first tried to establish a close rapport with ordinary employees in the workplace. They began with the suggestion that factory workers form small hobby groups, such as handicraft circles and calligraphy clubs. Once they were able to spend more time together, the sham workers taught others about labor laws and raised the workers’ consciousness of their labor environment. Consciousness-raising went on alongside cap knitting, calligraphy practice, and similar activities. The last step was to organize a labor union in each factory and to train up worker leaders who would take over the task of organizing other workers.

Some labor union leaders joined the leadership committees of secret societies. More and more of the leaders of these secret societies were factory workers. The sham workers welcomed these “democratic” changes in their secret societies. A growing number of factory workers joined the small hobby groups; during the 1980s, the numbers of labor unions and secret societies dramatically increased. A former sham worker who had been in a successful secret society recalled that while the membership of the group was secret, the members remained equal. The leadership was always structured on the bottom-up principle; more than half of the leaders were real workers, and the sham workers needed much more training to become leaders once a sufficient number of the real workers “became awakened.”

Such underground activities involved much hardship and risk. Still, most of the memories that my key informants shared with me when we initially met in 1998 involved recollections of the bright and vivid springtime of their movement. All of them had been members of

the same secret society, actually the largest of the societies, formed in the mid 1980s and based in major factories in Incheon and Seoul.

Informant A (M, b. 1963) and informant B (M, b. 1967) were sham workers who started working in the same factory in the summer of 1985. Informant A had already finished his first year of college and military service, while informant B was a freshman and had not done his military service. They became good buddies soon after meeting in the factory without revealing their colleges' names or that one was a sophomore while the other was still a freshman.<sup>2)</sup> Informant A stated that he was making desperate efforts for the secret society and democratization, yet, on the other hand, he was really enjoying it:

Perhaps you won't be able to understand this, but it's surprisingly nice to be ruled by ideology! . . . We were very active, positive, and brilliant in those days. (June 2002)

Informant B also said something similar.

What I treasure is the truth of what I was in my twenties in the 1980s. What a period, what a dramatic era! My memories are salty, spicy, but still very sweet. (September 2003)

Both of these sham workers were "ordinary" members of the secret society. What about the leaders? Informant C (F, b. 1965) entered the secret society as a sham worker and served as one of the leaders from 1984 to 1986.

The memories of college days are precious for everyone, aren't they? But we felt love for one another, and our lives felt much more significant than usual, thanks to the military (that suppressed us). (July 2002)

She went on to say that they formed very close ties to each other since they were united against the same enemy, the military dictatorship. She says she often felt this unity of purpose, not only when they were teaching workers and when on demonstrations, but also when they were hanging out, playing sports, and drinking together. "Sharing the sweetness and the bitterness of life (*donggo dongnak*), we were more than friends; true comrades. If one of us had been killed, we could have even committed a group suicide!" (May 2001).

Real workers express similar views. Informant D (F, b. 1967) was a sewing worker in her teens. She first joined a small volleyball group in the beginning of 1984 and finally joined the movement headquarters as a leader in the end of 1986. I cannot forget her exclamation of delight as she was remembering those days:

Oh, my goodness! I can join the social movement just like the students! It's possible for me, too! . . . That's what I thought. I was so excited and very happy. (September 2005)

A lathe worker, informant E (M, b. 1965) describes the situation more stoically.

We didn't have any hobbies or even televisions at our lodgings. We were spending our days just working. . . . But human beings, especially teenagers, need some fun, don't they? . . . That's why many young blue collar workers joined the small groups and got involved in the movement step by step. . . . We really needed something other than just labor, maybe just something like the club activities that college students enjoyed. (September 1999)

### 3. Coming Full Circle

In the spring of 1987, conditions in South Korean society were volatile, not far from those of civil war. Demonstrators with flags and Molotov cocktails filled the country's boulevards, demanding democratization and fighting authority. Some young people were raped, killed, and tortured by the authorities, and dozens of young people committed suicide to protest the dictatorship, ample evidence of their enthusiasm for the grassroots movement.<sup>3)</sup> Among the flags borne by demonstrators in Seoul and Incheon were those of the secret society to which my informants belonged; five thousand of its members joined the great "down with militarism" demonstration in June (June Democratic Uprising). Eventually, Taewoo Roh, the government's presidential nominee, gave in to their demands and announced the Declaration of Political Reforms on June 29.

My informants initially reacted very positively. Informant B recalls, "Hearing the announcement, I cried a lot. That was definitely one of the happiest moments of my life!" (August 1999). However, he added: "Soon I realized that we weren't quite there yet. It was still just another step toward full democratization." Informant A also states, "I have never again felt so delighted . . . I was just drunk during the summer. . . . I was falling blindly in love with a beautiful lady called Democratization, who I had adored for a long time" (July 2014).

As soon as they got "sober" and their "love" lost its passion, my informants discovered two things. One was that real democratization was still far away, but even more discouraging to them was the reality that their power and unity had suddenly weakened following the announcement. They had lost their visible enemy, while still having to struggle on toward real democratization. "We lost not only an enemy to fight, but also our *raison d'être*," said informant C (September 1999). They were not alone in this experience, this sense of loss. The most famous display of it came from a poem by Yöngmi Choi, which incited a significant social reaction. In it, she laid bare her heart, admitting that she liked her friends and atmosphere of her student sect more than the movement itself, and that she wished the movement would start again someday (Choi 1994). Her poetry achieved the highest sales of any kind of literature published in the first half of the 1990s in South Korea.

Yet, what is much less well-known is what the real workers felt. The famous metaphor, "the end of a party," that Choi used to express the circumstances of the period has also taken root among non-intellectuals. Informant E says:

That was the end of a long party. My buddies with whom I had enjoyed trading jokes disappeared one by one. I was so depressed at that time. (January 2003)

Factory workers had their own reactions to these events. Informant D claimed:

When the movement ended, students went back to college, right? It was the first time the difference between us [the sham workers and the real workers] became clear to me. (January 2003)

She decided to get support from an NGO working for the empowerment of lower-class laborers and began studying on her own. Her goal was none other than to join her former comrades, the college students. After four years of effort, her wish came true. She kept on studying and taking part in the student union and even entered a Master's course in sociology in 1998.

I wasn't able to shut up anymore. The movement had opened my mouth. . . . How could I go back to the days when I was only sewing blouses like a part of a sewing machine! . . . Even if I hadn't got into a college, I couldn't have gone back to those days. (September 2013)

Of course, very few workers could become students. Informant E stayed working as a turner even after "democratization"; his life was "just the same as before the movement," to borrow his phrase.

I'm just a turner and am not as diligent a person as D. But I can understand her very well. If democracy means equality, we had already experienced it through the movement. . . . Once you've got to know the sweetness of sugar, you can't go back, can you? I am just a turner, but I'm not satisfied with that now that I know I'm also able to be something more than a machine. . . . Now I need some hobbies, I need to discuss politics, and I need my comrades, too. (May 2002)

He kept on working in a turnery, but started to learn the basics of operating computers at a community center. Computing became his hobby and provided him with an arena where he could continue to enjoy interaction with other people.

Informant S (F, b. 1965) spoke passionately, saying "One day, the movement appeared in front of the young me and murmured words of love in my ear. Soon I fell in love, but, then, one day my love was gone, leaving me behind. To be all alone was now even harder for me than before" (February 2003). She had been a theological student, but the seminary expelled her because she had been arrested for participation in an illegal demonstration in 1984, when she was a sophomore. For her, the movement saved her life from her own dark disappointment since it let her do something with college students again.

I was clinging to the movement until 1991, crying, "Please, don't go. Please don't leave me alone." But . . . the movement was such an irresponsible bastard. Making me feel romantic and motivated, then it said, "Now it's over." Irresponsible! Don't you think so? (February 2003)

Irresponsible, flirtatious, mercurial—that's how politicians from the democracy movement were criticized by South Korean mass-media after the "democratization." Non-intellectuals do not disagree. They, too, complain about the movement's opportunism.

Informant S married a man whom she met in the factory and became a housewife in 1993. "I'm still interested in politics, perhaps more than other 'normal' housewives. . . . When political news drives me crazy, the activist inside me tells me to do something. But I don't. Instead, I always think of my kids and calm myself. . . . That's the only thing I can do now," she says, with a slightly gloomy expression and downcast eyes. "You may think it's frivolous of me." She identified the activist inside her: "It's my other face. She is active enough to react to national politics. If I hadn't joined the movement, I would have been free from her and this sense of guilt. Sometimes, I feel it's too tough to control her, even now" (March 2004).

She has a tendency to compare herself with informant D, who never married and had been working for a political cause. She also mentions informant C. Informant C stayed in the political arena working as a secretary of a politician after graduating from college, despite having married and had children before her graduation, which sometimes makes informant S feel envious. On the other hand, informant C says:

It's an addiction. I cannot forget the moment I shared everything with my comrades. . . . I adore S. She is doing well and raising her kids very well. That is a wonderful thing. I do know that's the right life for women to have, but anyway, for me, it's an addiction. (April 2004)

She is one of the successful ones. Informant A might be considered one of the most unfortunate cases: he has been unable to get any fully-fledged job since his graduation, as he used to be a communist and a North Korean sympathizer, and major companies in South Korea will not employ those who belong to their open secret "red list." Now even his former comrades steer clear of him, since South Korea's anticommunist law is still in force. He complains, "It was surprisingly good to be ruled by ideology. At least, it was much better than now; I don't know how to live" (June 2002). During the 1990s, working part-time jobs, he wondered for a time if he should emigrate to United States. He had received an invitation from his father, who got US citizenship in the 1980s.

"Democratization" created a sense of loss in those who devoted their youth to the democracy movement. Now the "good old days," which they are yearning for, have become a past to which they can never return. These narratives show how much more vital and different these memories are from the discourse of collective memory seen in previous research by other researchers as is mentioned above.

The democracy movement gradually ebbed away between the Democratization Declaration in 1987 and the mid-1990s, when the civilian control was established. It is only a mild exaggeration to say that, for former members of the movement, life without struggle is a kind of death. Since members of this generation spent most of their formative years involved in the movement, it became part of them (Ota 2012a).



#### 4. Space Invaders

On a late summer day in 1998, in the hustle and bustle of Seoul, informant A ran into informant C after ten years of not meeting. She told him that she was trying to hold a reunion party, and he replied that it would be a nice idea. On October 31, eleven people gathered at a bar, where they set up a telephone tree to make the reunion party a monthly event. The eleven people became thirty, then fifty. During drinking parties, they realized that they all wanted to share their memories. So at a party in January 1999, informant A suggested that they should organize a monthly book club in addition to their parties, to read works based on the experiences shared by their generation, and to share with each other the impressions and ideas that the literature brought to mind.

The number of participants in the book club varied from seven to eighteen. They began with Yǒngmi Choi's poems; then went on to look at Jiyǒng Kong's novels<sup>4)</sup> and other works by minor authors. Sometimes some members brought copies of newspaper articles or printouts of information they had found on the internet. The group was fond of talking about TV dramas and movies that included scenes from the 1980s, comparing them with the literature they were reading and their own experiences.

It hadn't taken long before they realized that media-based memories of the democracy movement were quite different from what they themselves so vividly recalled. No novels or published articles mentioned how much fun the movement had been; all these accounts emphasized how miserable the activists had been in the 1980s. Some members seemed deeply affected. Informant S, for example, was animated after a meeting in March 2000:

We hadn't tried to think about ourselves, but it's true! . . . We had been hit, collapsed on the boulevards several times. The only places we could breathe were gloomy factories or dark jails. . . . How sad! We couldn't love our country without becoming its enemies!

Informant C was quiet during the meetings, but sometimes muttered ironically, "So the conclusion is we had damn awful experiences, isn't it." On the other hand, other members showed skeptical attitudes to the readings. For instance, informant A argued,

This difference is simply one of experience. These "clever" persons (authors) never joined in with the movement as intensely as we did. . . . Such naive people never know the truth. (April 2000)

The book club was always a scene of loud discussion because of members' skepticism. Most of the participants strongly disagreed with the lamenting tone of the readings. While some individuals, including informant S, tried to find small points with which they could agree, it was clear that most of those participating disagreed with what they read. Informant E, in particular, often claimed to feel "discomfort" toward the readings.

Why on earth can they publish only negative opinions? There are many sides to every story, right? Positive aspects of the democracy movement have to be published, too. (July 2001)

Informant B tried to explain this gap, contrasting process with conclusion. According to him, these grief-filled memories are based on *a posteriori* reasoning, while their own brilliant memories reflect their direct involvement in the democracy movement; memories so strong that they will never change (October 2001). In short, experienced and embodied memories may differ from the forms of collective memory examined in previous studies.

However, collective memory still matters to those who themselves had personal experience of the past. The book club members are obvious cases; they deliberately began to alter their views about the gap between published collective memories and their personal experience.

It was during Daejung Kim's regime (1998–2003) that the change occurred. Once a charismatic, key figure in South Korea's democracy movement, Kim had been a focus of government surveillance before "democratization." As president, he received a Nobel Peace Prize for his reconciliation efforts with the North Korean government and was generally popular for his political ability, which helped to improve the South Korean economy and strengthen social security. Against this background, the memories of those who took part in the secret society were set to change.

Informant C stopped attending book club meetings in the fall of 2001. "These days, I feel uncomfortable there," she said to me:

The discussions often sound impure to me. . . . What we should do now is to liquidate the past. I mean, our goal was to move power and wealth from the militarists to the poor. In such a situation, to enjoy chatting about the good old days is impure, I think. (March 2002)

Something new was budding in informant A's mind. He was taking part in every meeting and continued to enjoy the conversations. Then one day, he complained to me that I did not have a sufficient understanding of their pain.

The movement was totally modest. We were totally serious when we were fighting the militarist government. There was no fun at all! (August 2002)

According to him, the group was just talking about the exciting and funny side of the movement; the "quintessence" of the movement was a "series of tragedies." Some weeks later, he asked me to get copies of some academic articles which clarified the "tragedies" of the movement in the 1980s. "I'm sure they would be helpful for your study, too." He also had been collecting numerous newspaper articles and TV documentaries for half a year.

Informant E vacillated between these two ways of thinking. Eventually, at a meeting in November 2002, he suggested that they should talk more about their dark past. Informant D accused him of being just a normal South Korean citizen who wanted to maintain political orthodoxy.

The circumstances have changed. Now, lamenting the past is a politically safer way . . . of remembering . . . socially touchy issues. (November 2002)

Her analysis sounds logical enough. When people need to talk about socially sensitive issues, politically unorthodox and politically incorrect subjects are avoided. Yet, such considerations are sometimes ignored. Especially within a close group like the former members of the secret society, people spoke honestly and with scepticism.

The next president after Daejung Kim was Moohyŏn Roh (2003–2008). Roh was also an activist, and leftists and the generation who participated in the democracy movement in the 1980s enthusiastically supported his presidential campaign, though he lost approval during his term. In short, the early half of the 2000s in South Korea was dominated by the sympathizers of the past democracy movement and its reevaluation.

The academic and media spotlight fell on the secret societies. Around the time of Roh's rise to power, journalists and academic researchers attempted to contact former secret society members, intending to present them as "wounded and forgotten heroes." Informant A complained to informant B that he was often annoyed by the interviewers, half of who were academic researchers and the other half working for the media.

They [journalists and researchers] have a fantasy about the movement. It's quite natural, and I don't blame them, but it's still annoying that they always want to hear (the same glorified account) from me. (June 2003)

Informant B responded:

I agree. We were a group whose leaders were (not part of us, but) all of the membership, and we believed we were leading South Korea. . . . But what a mess! The group described in the media these days bears no resemblance to our secret society at all.

Catchphrases that appeared in articles about the secret societies included "unfinished revolution," "revolutionaries who were born too early," and "Korean Bolsheviks." However, the group had never espoused those ideals. Some members had, indeed, insisted they and their fellows should strive toward a "workers' revolution," but they were a small minority. The aim of the movement was simply to improve the working conditions of low-income groups, and they linked this aim to "democratization."<sup>5)</sup>

Nonetheless, this misunderstanding spread quick and wide. The main issue, as the former members of the movement point out themselves, is not a problem with South Korean journalism. Academic researchers frequently pester former active members of secret societies. "The planners of Korean TV programs take their lead from academic documents and the words of professors. They are the ones who distort the facts," said informant A, while informant C nodded beside him (March 2002).

Those said to have experienced "pain" were not confined to the communist subgroup. Many individuals embodied the "pain" of their entire generation. Informant S told me,

I read a column in a newspaper. A college sociology professor was doing psychoanalysis. He says that we lost many things, that we are lonely, and that we are a generation full of *han*.<sup>6)</sup> As I read it, before I knew what was happening I began to cry, I felt so sad. He must

be right, or I wouldn't have cried like that!

Informant D was probably the most frequently bothered of the former members, since she was easy to contact via the social science academic network in South Korea.

Some graduate students majoring in sociology and politics visited me yesterday. They only asked me about the communist subgroup. . . . These days, many graduate students come to listen to me, but all they ever write about is communists. (February 2005)

I have, by chance, met one of the interviewers that informant D mentioned. He spoke heatedly to me about the importance of acknowledging the communists' "pain" in the course of "democratization." The following comment, taken from an article written by informant E on a digital bulletin board, might be seen as devious and unrepresentative, but it reflects what was actually happening.

The mainstream of our secret society was communism! And we are mentally damaged people! Our truth may be twisted, and nobody will even doubt it by the 2030s. Even we might think so, when we become 70 years old. We were victims of suppression! Let's live the rest of our life lamenting it. (January 2006)

Informant E's comments contained a fair helping of irony, but informant B grew angry after reading the article. "Whose memory is our memory? Whom is our memory for?" complained informant C, too. After their quarrel, the former members of this secret society, including informants A through E, decided in January 2006 not to accept any more interviews.

The book club broke up very soon afterward. According to informant D, the reason is that "It started off as our own space to talk and discuss things, but it had become the perfect target for them [journalists and academic researchers]" (March 2006).

As a result, the members went underground once again, although this time in a "democratic" era.

## 5. Biopower Plunders Biomemories

When Foucault introduced "biopower" as a concept in his lectures at the Collège de France, he was drawing our attention to the fact that the power of the modern state is not grounded solely in coercion, compensation, or appeals to shared values. Deeper than these is the grounding that power has in the visceral responses of those who it controls; how they experience and react to the power. Foucault also pointed out that biopower was no longer rooted in the anger and courage that drove soldiers to honourable death on the battlefield. Its focus had shifted to feelings of pleasure and security. In other words, people would no longer be driven to act. Instead they would be seduced. Terror would be replaced with seduction (Foucault 1977). The leftist governments established in Korea following the "democratization" movement appear to have followed exactly this strategy. Violent coercion would be relegated to the past, replaced by a happy and secure present. Since nothing in

the past could be happy, the movement's veterans' memories of joyful solidarity, excitement, and fun had to be erased from public memory. Official sources and mass media thus focused exclusively on the dark and painful past from which the new governments were said to have rescued the people. During the regimes of Daejung Kim and Muhyŏn Roh, the authorities gave priority to human life, rights, and peace, legitimating criticism of slaughter and oppression as tools of governance.

In this context, the memories that this paper has been calling "sweet memories," thoughts of the "good old days," and "memories of life and vitality" came to be seen as no more than nostalgia. But the problem is more complicated than that. These sorts of happy memories contradict the lamentations, the memories of oppression and resistance, described at the beginning of this paper, and both the media and previous academic research have largely ignored this contradiction. Academic research has even contributed to the conflict.

Academic researchers are not, of course, the only purveyors of collective lamentations. They are no more than a small part of the mechanism that invents social discourses and, more broadly, culture as a whole. Leftists who demand "re-democratization" and compensation for those injured during the democracy movement are also part of the problem. They openly and continuously promote only those memories of death and destruction. Here, quintessentially, the present reshapes the past, an observation that calls for renewed attention to one of the key concepts of previous memory studies.

Since both former and current social activists are especially likely to engage in such intellectual hobbies as poring over specialized writings and sharing their impressions with each other, academic knowledge may affect them more strongly than others. When we study social movements, we have to acknowledge that we are the creators of narratives concerning these movements (Pels 2000; Mamdani 2009). We must recognize, too, that sometimes our narratives may change the events we describe by altering their orbits, and erasing counter-narratives (Ota 2012b). Thus, now the fact that ideology has ended has become *a priori* knowledge in South Korea (e.g., Kang 2012), and studies of collective memory are regarded as passé in academia, researchers who study social movements may eventually face discord with their informants.

We must always remember that the memories we collect are never the social movements themselves. In the case described here, the former secret society fell apart when the democracy movement was over, then later regrouped around shared memories of joyful solidarity. Then, as South Korea's government shifted from coercion to seduction, exploiting "biomemories," so to say, for their own purposes, academic and other intellectuals followed their lead, creating narratives that depicted the democracy movement solely in dark and negative terms, as resistance to oppression.

Then, as the events that these memories recall faded into the past, these dark and negative meanings reshaped how the democracy movement was remembered. Through a kind of selective plundering, official biopower erased happier biomemories from the official memory, to justify the government's new policies, intentionally or not.

As we have seen here, however, the selective collection and accumulation of dark memories destroyed the awareness of the human side of networks that is required to launch new social movements. The members of the secret society found themselves pulled apart

once again. It was during this time of disintegration that informant B uttered the quote that begins this article. He is still searching to this day for visceral memories true to his experience.

So are the researchers. Or, at least, so we should be. For, the more we produce academic knowledge, the more the memories as well as the feelings those memories produce inside us change. Thus, discussions of collective memory can never come to an end. This is the cultural reflexivity of collective memory.

The study of collective memory is now in its second awakening.

## Notes

- 1) According to one theory, more than 10 percent of college students in South Korea infiltrated labor workplaces in the mid 1980s. One of these secret societies' history before and after the scope of this paper appears in my other articles (Ota 2008; 2012).
- 2) This was not and is still not normal in South Korean society; it was the secret society's strategy and policy so that members might be equal and that the secret society might be "democratic." Informant A and B mostly addressed each other as *hyōng* (elder bro or school mate); they didn't and still don't use honorific expressions with one another, complying with the secret society's unspoken agreement.
- 3) Therefore, South Korea's democracy movement took on an aspect of memorial and mourning. This is a reason why it tends to be represented as a matter of ritual; for example, Kwang'ok Kim argues that ritual and political allegory were necessary to integrate collective memories (K. Kim 1989; 1991). These prior studies are not usually associated with collective memory studies, but are often treated as confirmations of academic theories of memory.
- 4) Kong is a well-known author who wrote many novels depicting the mindspace typical of their generation.
- 5) The small communist subgroup was banned from the secret society as a result of an executive assembly in October 1987. Among the key informants I introduce here, A was one of the communist subgroup.
- 6) *Han* is a kind of sense of grudge particular to Korean people. For a detailed explanation, see Lee 1978.

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