The Ambivalent Position of Korean Soldiers in Vietnam

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The Vietnam War profoundly shaped American culture, as evidenced by the appearance of anti-war protesters, by increased distrust of government, and by changes in foreign policy. Hence, many scholars have conducted researches on the implications of the war. Addressing the significance of the Vietnam war experience in American history and culture, for instance, Timothy J. Lomperis writes, "whether or not we actually served in Vietnam, those of us who were adults in the 1960s in America were involved in the Vietnam experience. We were all there."¹)

Very little known to most Americans, however, is that the war also gave a distinctive coloring to Korean culture of the time. In spite of the historical fact that many third world people and women also participated in the war, in U. S. fiction, the literary representation of their participation has been very limited. Stories of Korean participation survived only when inserted and alluded to in the major Vietnam War narratives by American writers if their participation was narrated at all. Even in the critical discourses on the war narratives, there have hardly existed these subaltern groups in the war.

With the emergence of cultural studies in the field of literature in 1980s in

U. S., more diverse approaches to the war became available. Susan Jeffords, for example, pointed out that the Vietnam War narratives expose masculinity and male homo-social bonding in its extreme forms.\textsuperscript{2) }However, Although her approach is idiosyncratic in the sense she views the war in terms of gender, Jeffords does not include any voices in the Vietnam War other than those of Americans. To Jeffords, the Vietnam War experience is only a "remasculinization of America," as her book title manifests. Another scholar, Milton Bates' discussion of Vietnam War Narratives is more extensive than any other research done to date, in the sense that he regards the war as a war of all sorts of conflicts: the frontier, race, class, gender, and generation. Nonetheless, Bates does not consider the war on an international scale any more than Jeffords does; the war as a theater of American expansionism in the years after World War Two. As though he imagined this possible criticism, Bates writes, "Others are better equipped to excavate the Vietnamese wars in Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{3) }

My doctoral dissertation is an attempt to excavate the Vietnam War from a different perspective than the American one. In my dissertation, \textit{The Vietnam War Which Is Not One: A Comparative Study of Vietnam War Narratives by Korean Writers and American Writers}, I discussed the Vietnam War as it was experienced and represented by such subaltern groups as American women and Korean men. In my dissertation chapter where I discussed the specificity of Korean writers, I argued that Koreans viewed the war as "someone else's war" in the same way as American women did and that Koreans were very sensitive to the materialistic aspects of the war recognizing their roles as mercenaries. In this paper, I intend to discuss the ambivalent identity of Koreans during the war.\textsuperscript{4) }

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\item \textsuperscript{2) }Susan Jeffords, \textit{The Remasculinization of America}. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989.
\item \textsuperscript{3) }Milton Bates, \textit{The Wars We Took to Vietnam}. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1996.) 7.
\item \textsuperscript{4) }In order to understand the materialistic aspects of the war such as PX goods and black markets, refer to my dissertation. As for the question of gender and the Vietnam War, see my paper, "Unheard Voices : The Question of 'Gender' in Vietnam War Narratives," (\textit{Journal of American Studies}. Volume 31, Number 2, Winter 1999) 455-466.
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