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## Chapter 2

### *Pangmyǒng*: A hero's dilemma amidst war

#### Introduction

Han Yongun's fiction is still largely *terra incognita*. Few among the general public know whether this nationally acclaimed writer ever wrote a novel, and if he did, how many novels he produced during his lifetime and when he did that. In people's minds, this literary giant seems almost to be a one-hit wonder who wrote only his *magnum opus*, *Nim-ŭi ch'immuk* 님의 沈默 (Silence of the beloved, 1926). Yet he wrote several novels that merit attention. The first novel manuscript, *Chugŭm* 죽음 (Death, 1924), although unpublished, is important as historical source material for re-evaluating his approach to nationalism. A decade later, Han published several novels in various newspapers and magazines.<sup>1</sup> Apart from this creative novel writing, he also translated and serialized the famous Chinese novel *Samgukchi* 三國志 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms, 1939-1940) in the *Chosŏn ilbo* 朝鮮日報. Why are his novels nearly forgotten? What are the signature characteristics of his novels? Are they all Buddhist novels?

The main reason that Han's fiction has become more or less neglected is that it cannot be considered as having great literary value. As many literary scholars concede, his fiction far from displays the level of mastery shown in his poetry. His work is not even up to par with other novels of the 1930s. His plot, style, themes, and characters are all basic and straightforward, similar to fiction written in the very early twentieth century and have a great distance to go in terms of sophistication and subtlety to catch up with his literary contemporaries. However, his fiction constitutes the bulk of his later writing. As previous scholarship has excessively focused on his early texts, in order to provide a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of Han as a person and as an author a consideration of his fiction is overdue.

In spite of its scant aesthetic and literary value, Han Yongun's fiction has many redeeming qualities. As scholars such as Kim Chaehong claim, the serialized novels of Han Yongun are full of cultural and ideological significance and can play an important role in understanding his time and his work.<sup>2</sup> Han Yongun himself stated that he was neither a talented novelist nor aspired to be

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from *Pangmyǒng*, the topic of this chapter, *Hukp'ung* 黑風 (Black Wind, 1935-1936) in *Chosŏn ilbo* and four uncompleted and unpublished works such as *Chugŭm* (written in 1924, unpublished), *Huhoe* 後悔 (Remorse, 1936, uncompleted) in *Chosŏn chungang ilbo* 朝鮮中央日報, *Ch'ŏrhyŏl miin* 鐵血美人 (A woman with steel in her blood, 1937, uncompleted) in *Pulgyo* 佛敎, and *Samgukchi* 三國志 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms, 1939-1940, uncompleted) in *Chosŏn ilbo* 朝鮮日報.

<sup>2</sup> Kim Chaehong 金載弘, *Han Yongun munhak yŏn'gu* 韓龍雲 文學研究 (Seoul: Ilchisa, 1982/1996), p.109.

a novelist. He used the novel as a chance to speak to his readers and inform them of his opinions.<sup>3</sup> He did not concern himself with a single pet issue; instead, his novels cover a wide range of problematics. Most grippingly, he juxtaposes contradictory and incompatible views with one another, such as feminism and patriarchal Confucianism, Confucianism and Buddhism, religion and socialist revolution, nationalist and colonial arguments, and fictional and factual elements. All of these issues are very complex, and therefore require full enquiry and serious discussion, but in the scholarly literature few of them have invited more than cursory attention or rash speculation.<sup>4</sup>

Among Han Yongun's novels, *Pangmyŏng* 薄命 (Misfortune, 1938-1939) is arguably the work most worth examining. This is one of the two finished works. The rest of his novels were left unfinished, as their serialization was interrupted by the closure of the newspaper company. As his last creative piece of work, *Pangmyŏng* also shows some improvement in artistic character and techniques. Above all, I will argue that it is the one and only Buddhist novel Han ever wrote. Generally, Buddhism is seen as the ideology underlying all of his work, including his fiction. Indeed, Buddhist terms and figures are ubiquitous in nearly all of novels, but, as In Kwŏnhwan remarks, it is too early to leap to the conclusion that all Han's novels are Buddhist fiction or a collection of Buddhist sermons.<sup>5</sup> According to In Kwŏnhwan the only novel which deserves the appellation of Buddhist fiction is *Pangmyŏng*. He sees this as the potentially best Buddhist work ever produced in the history of Korean Buddhist literature.<sup>6</sup> That may be somewhat exaggerated, and this is not the only reason why this novel is significant. Apart from Buddhist teachings, this novel imparts Han's alternative views and narratives, once again, providing a different perspective on the assumed heroic nationalism that saturates narratives of his life in colonial Korea in wartime. His interest in the experiences of people from diverse backgrounds, his political opinions that diverge from the mainstream, and in particular, his autobiographical experience of the dilemma of morality and politics will be discussed.

<sup>3</sup> "Sin yŏnjae changp'yŏnsosŏl yego" 新連載長篇小説豫告 in *Chosŏn ilbo* (April 1935) Quoted from *Ibid.*, p.108.

<sup>4</sup> One of the noteworthy changes in recent years is a "postcolonial" (*t'alsingmin*) approach to Han Yongun's literature. Scholars such as Song Hyŏnho and Yi Sŏni reflect on the excessive preoccupation with Han's nationalism and pay attention to "postcolonial theories". Yet, due to the confusion of crucial concepts and the narrow focus on the modernity issue, their studies have not reached a stage yet in which the intricate and ambivalent interactions between colonizing imperatives and counter-discourses are illuminated in detail. See Song Hyŏnho 송현호, "Manhae-ŭi sosŏl-kwa t'alsingminjjuŭi" 만해의 소설과 탈식민지주의 in *Han'guk hyŏndaemunhak-ŭi pip'yŏng-jok yŏn'gu* 한국 현대문학의 비평적 연구 (Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 1996); Yi Sŏni 李善伊, "Manhae Han Yongun munhag-e nat'an an t'alsingminjjuŭi-jŏk insik" 만해 韓龍雲 文學에 나타난 脫植民主義의 인식 in *Ōmun yŏn'gu* 語文研究 31:2 (Summer 2003)

<sup>5</sup> In Kwŏnhwan 印權煥, "Han Yongun sosŏr-ŭi yŏn'gusa-wa munjetchŏm" 韓龍雲 小說의 研究史와 問題點 in *Han'guk Pulgyo munhak yŏn'gu* 韓國佛教文學研究 (Seoul: Koryŏ taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1999), pp.426 and 429.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.429.

## A Buddhist novel written in the midst of war

As its title implies, *Pangmyŏng* deals with a miserable life, a life of suffering. The main character, Sunyŏng, is a young girl living with a wicked stepmother in a remote mountain village. She works like a servant girl, plowing a stony field, cooking and cleaning, maltreated by her stepmother. She runs away and goes to Seoul with her hometown friend Unok and her foster mother Mrs. Song. However, these kind sympathizers turn out to be a barmaid and a madam. The heroine is deceived, forced to learn singing skills for entertainment and finally sold to an old-style Korean tavern (*saekchuga*, 色酒家) in the port city of Inch'ŏn. Despite her wretched situation, she behaves properly and shows dedication in performing her music. As a consequence, she basks in the favor of customers and the tavern's madam. This rouses jealousy and resentment from her colleagues. Being falsely accused of theft and of having syphilis, her life is threatened, but soon the incident is solved.

The hardest ordeal for the heroine comes later. Sunyŏng marries Kim Taech'ŏl who saved her from drowning. After their marriage, her husband engages in gold mining speculation and completely neglects his family. Taech'ŏl wastes his whole fortune digging for gold and finds himself penniless. Sunyŏng struggles to make a living and to care for her child alone. Nonetheless, her husband demands a divorce, claiming that he needs to marry a rich woman to restore his mining business. His violent behavior gives a fatal shock to their son who dies. Four years after their divorce, Taech'ŏl re-appears with his new wife as an opium addict. The heroine cares for her ex-husband, begging for money to buy medicine and drugs for him. She sacrifices herself to serve the man until he dies. After his death, she becomes a Buddhist nun.

This main story unfolds the misfortune and ordeals the heroine must get through. Despite various other incidents, the hardship in marriage is treated as the main theme. In "Chakcha-ŭi mal" 作者의 말 (A Word from the Author, 1938), in which Han Yongun succinctly described the intended storyline before the serialization of the novel, he makes this clear:

*I would like to tell a story about the loftiest woman I have ever heard about. The main story will be approximately as follows. A country girl becomes the wife of a prodigal son. She is first forsaken by her husband but when he returns ill and penniless, she serves him wholeheartedly until his last breath. I never intended to apply the old [Confucian] concept of the chaste woman (yŏllyŏ, 烈女) to the heroine. Rather, I would like to depict the lofty and sublime spirit of a person who remains unchanged from start to finish and serves the other person despite all difficulties, even completely sacrificing herself.<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Han Yongun *chŏnjip* 6, p.6.

A woman's troublesome marriage to a libertine and her loyal and self-sacrificial spirit toward her husband creates the novel's main storyline. This plot resembles that of Han's first novel, *Chugŭm*, in which the heroine, Yŏngok, is troubled by the libertine Sŏngyŏl, but remains faithful and self-sacrificing to her husband, Chongch'ŏl. In the first novel, Han advocated traditional (Confucian) femininity against the contemporary cultural trend of *yŏnae* (free love).<sup>8</sup> *Pangmyŏng* depicts a similar type of woman but the writer flatly denies a concern with the traditional female virtue of fidelity. According to his intention, the heroine does not represent a virtuous wife but a "human being" (*in'gan* and *saram*) who works for another person. What he aims to emphasize is not traditional femininity but a "noble and sublime spirit" (*kogwi-hago kŏruk-han simjŏng*) in a religious sense. In the short quote above, he twice uses *kŏrukhada*, a term with sacred connotations. The last sentence, the essential part of the text, strongly alludes to the bodhisattva nature and perfections (*paramitas*) such as compassion (*chabi*, 慈悲), giving of oneself (*posi*, 布施), patience (*inyok*, 忍辱), and strenuous effort (*chŏngjin*, 精進), which as we have seen in the previous chapter, he emphasized in a similar way in essays around that time. It is easy to see that he intends to write a Buddhist novel, a fictionalized embodiment of his Buddhist ideas and insights.

True to his intention, this novel contains many explicit Buddhist themes. The writer depicts how the heroine becomes a Buddhist adherent. The heroine has a Confucian background because of the influence of her father who has been a Confucian scholar and taught children at a *sŏdang* (traditional school). She encounters Buddhism for the first time when she is sold and moves to a tavern in the port of Inch'ŏn. On her first day there, she is led to the madam's personal room. There she sees a luxurious cabinet inlaid with mother-of-pearl, a goldfish basin, a radio and a gramophone. Yet these luxury goods were not what draws her attention. Instead, it is a Buddhist altar and a low table with an incense burner and prayer beads. The tavern's madam is a Buddhist laywoman. She shows the heroine a Buddha statue on the altar and talks about Buddhism. She explains that while practicing *yŏmbul* (念佛, invocation of the Buddha Amitābha), one can expiate one's sins, make one's dreams come true in this life and be reborn in a good place after this life.<sup>9</sup> Hearing the madam's explanation, the heroine comes to believe in Buddhism without any doubt.

After that, Buddhism plays an important role in the heroine's life. When she is falsely accused of stealing, nothing can stop the mad madam from beating her to death. The madam even takes a knife to force her to confess. In such a dangerous moment, Sunyŏng turns to the altar and prays to the Buddha Amitābha. This conduct stops the madam. The heroine clears herself of

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<sup>8</sup> Jung-Shim Lee, "Women, Confucianism and nation-building in HanYongun's novel *Death*" in *IIAS Newsletter* 54 (Summer 2010).

<sup>9</sup> In the early writings Han had strongly denounced this practice as "superstition." It was basically an attempt to reform the Buddhist sangha. However, this novel reflects his perception of reality in which *yŏmbul* was a popular form of practice among lay Buddhists.

suspicion thanks to a dharma speech by a monk. After the incident, the madam goes to a temple and hears about basic Buddhist teachings such as the three karmic activities (*samŏp*, 三業)<sup>10</sup> and three poisons (*samdok*, 三毒).<sup>11</sup> Hearing the sermon, she was reminded of her violent act and felt guilty for distrusting the innocent heroine.

Also, there is a Buddhist nun who plays an important role in the heroine's life from the beginning. The heroine believes Taech'öl saved her life because he ostensibly rescued her from drowning, and she dedicates her entire life to finding him and returning his kindness. However, it was not thanks to him but to a benevolent Buddhist nun that her life was saved. Before he dies, Taech'öl confesses that seeing the heroine in danger, he thought that it was none of his business but the nun urged him to save her from drowning. The nun offered thirty wŏn, a considerable amount of money, and that changed his mind. Therefore, the heroine would not have survived without the nun. The nun is the heroine's real benefactor. It is no coincidence that the heroine enters the temple where the benevolent nun is present and becomes a nun.

More implicitly, Sunyŏng's life symbolizes the practice of a bodhisattva (*posalhaeng*, 菩薩行). Bodhisattvas live and work in this world to save living beings but are never contaminated by the vice and the evil that surround them. They are pure, just as a lotus flower that is not defiled by muddy dirty water. The heroine lowers herself to the status of a barmaid, the lowest in Korean society. Entertaining men, she has to sell her smile and is exposed to harassment from her customers. Despite her miserable situation, she never lets her body and mind become polluted. As is repeatedly emphasized, although she works in a tavern where women often happen to sell their bodies, she remains pure and is never defiled by her environment.<sup>12</sup>

While Sunyŏng's sense of chastity might have influenced her, Han Yongun cites her strong determination as the primary reason she does not give up her goal of repaying the kindness shown to her.

*While serving drinks, Sunyŏng is exposed to temptation and threats. It is not once that she is in danger of losing her chastity. Her determination to keep her humble body chaste is not derived from her sense of female chastity, but due to a debt of gratitude she owes to the man [Taech'öl]. If she bumps into him some day and if the situation allows, she will devote herself to him. It is an intention that comes from the bottom of her heart.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Samŏp* refers to the committing of a sin through deeds, words, and thoughts.

<sup>11</sup> The three poisons are greed, anger, and ignorance. Because the mind of living beings is defiled by such poisons they do not realize their innate true nature of Buddhahood and fail to achieve enlightenment.

<sup>12</sup> *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 6, pp.79, 80, 115 and 172.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.150.

According to the writer, Sunyöng's commitment to Taech'öl is not that of a woman who remains faithful to her man, but is the gratitude of a person who owes her life to somebody and is determined to repay the debt. In fact, this determination is already there before the heroine and Taech'öl enter into a conjugal relationship. The heroine's sacrifices for Taech'öl's sake take place not only during their marriage but also after their divorce. Although they are not wife and husband anymore, Sunyöng keeps her mind and body clean and sacrifices herself for the sake of T'aech'öl, which means that her attitude and practice have nothing to do with the conjugal relationship or a woman's virtue or her duty to serve her husband. Instead, her attitude embodies the practice of a bodhisattva. This is the author's intention and conclusion of this novel. A dharma speech at the end of the novel explicitly articulates this.

Borrowing a high priest's voice, Han Yongun elucidates that Sunyöng's acts do not embody a wife's duty to her husband or a woman's subjugation to a man as usually demanded by the secular world. In this novel, this secular view is represented by New Women (*sin yösöng*).<sup>14</sup> Seeing Sunyöng begging on the street for her ex-husband, they laugh at her and ridicule her as an old-fashioned "virtuous woman" (*yölliyo*, 烈女) or a "wise mother and good wife" (*hyömmo yangch'ö*, 賢母良妻).<sup>15</sup> In their eyes, the heroine is blindly subservient to her husband, a slave to the traditional moral imperative. The heroine is condemned as an obstacle to women's liberation and to struggles for extending women's rights and individuality.<sup>16</sup> Against this secular view, the priest clarifies that the heroine did not practice the Confucian imperatives of chastity, fidelity or submission to men. What she demonstrated were the commitments of *poün* (報恩, repaying kindness) and compassion 慈悲.

The priest laments that people are usually grateful if they receive a favor, but as time goes by they easily forget it. If their benefactor has a problem or can disadvantage them, they are prone to avoid contact with him/her. A feeling of indebtedness to someone and a wish to return the favor is forgotten easily and quickly. However, the heroine is different. In response to the mercy and benevolence Taech'öl has shown her, the heroine continues to feel indebted and tries to repay the favor. She never forgets the kindness and never gives up her wish to repay the debt. Repayment of that kindness becomes her goal. Whatever happens to her and wherever she goes, the heroine does not forget her goal or gives up halfway. Such strong tenacity is reminiscent of the bodhisattva's practice of strenuous effort (*chöngjin*), which Han explained and emphasized in his Buddhist essays.<sup>17</sup>

The heroine's sacrifices and selfless spirit represent the bodhisattva's hallmark: benevolence. Taech'öl leads a fast life, loses all his money, and

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<sup>14</sup> For more details about New Women in colonial Korea, see Chapter 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Han Yongun chönjip* 6, pp.267-270.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> For more details, see Chapter 1.

impairs his health by his dissipation. He returns to the heroine as a homeless, penniless drug addict. As the priest says, ordinary people tend to turn their backs on such a ruined person. They only concern themselves with asking if their involvement with that person can harm them or taint their reputation.<sup>18</sup> However, the heroine embraces the devastated and miserable man and takes care of him. She does not think of herself, only of others. She constantly recalls the kindness done to her. Seeing the plight of the man, she thinks that it is a good chance to repay the favor he did her once and takes pity on him. According to the priest, she conducted such a sacrifice out of the compassion that takes pity on a degenerate man.<sup>19</sup> In other words, it is Buddhist teaching to practice altruism and compassion with regard to all living beings without discrimination.

The heroine in the novel never blames people who deceive, slander and insult her. This is in conformity with another practice of the bodhisattva, that of forbearance. When she is deceived and forced to learn entertainment skills and finally sold to a tavern, she never resents the people who do this to her or seeks revenge. She tries to reflect on herself and does her best to cope with her miserable situation. Although her husband has lied and cheated on her, she is never suspicious of him or feels anger or jealousy. Even when her son dies because of her husband's reckless behavior, she does not rage against him. Although people laugh at her and humiliate her while she begs, she endures the suffering, humiliation and insults. In sum, she never complains about her fate or laments her misfortune. Such a heroine personifies the virtue of endurance that a bodhisattva perfects.

### Human trafficking and gold speculation

*Pangmyŏng* deals with a woman's turbulent life from a Buddhist point of view. Refraining from using direct Buddhist terms, it expounds and illustrates basic Buddhist doctrines in its plot and its characters. However, Buddhism is not the only theme in this novel. Kwŏn Podŭrae has observed that this novel is unusual because it takes a bar waitress (*chakpu*) as its protagonist and vividly portrays the scene of bars in the 1930s and the education for barmaids, which is not often treated in modern Korean literature.<sup>20</sup> However, Kwŏn does not ask further why country girls like Sunyŏng become barmaids or *kisaeng* and how this fictional novel is associated with the social problems of wartime colonial society around 1940 and portrays the experiences of a diverse group of people, which cannot be reduced to single narrative of striving for national independence we habitually expect from Han Yongun.

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<sup>18</sup> *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 6, p.289

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.288

<sup>20</sup> Kwŏn Podŭrae 권보드래, *Yŏnae-ŭi sidae: 1920-nyŏndae ch'oban-ŭi munhwa-wa yuhaeng* 연애의 시대: 1920년대 초반의 문화와 유행 (Seoul: Hyŏnsin munhwa yŏn'gu, 2003/2004), pp.231-241.

The first social issue Han Yongun addresses is the trafficking of women. Human trafficking was rampant in colonial society during the second Sino-Japanese War. It was deeply connected with the rural crisis of the 1930s. The Great Depression severely hit the rural economy in colonial Korea. The price crash of main agricultural crops such as rice and silkworm cocoons threatened rural communities. In a year of bad harvest, farmers suffered from rice shortage, whereas in a year of abundance, they were afflicted with a severely lowered price of rice.<sup>21</sup> Landlord-tenant disputes raged out of control. Many small farmers were ruined and suffered from heavy debts. A mass of small farmers lost and left their land and drifted about, creating slums in the cities. These rural problems of the 1930s came to be recognized as a “national problem” and the colonial government, nationalists, socialists, religious leaders and many more were urged to take countermeasures.<sup>22</sup>

During the war, rural communities fell into a state of misery called “starving hell” as malnutrition became common.<sup>23</sup> The majority of rural families languished in extreme poverty, heavily burdened with debt. A shortage of food under the pressure of war and a bad harvest due to natural calamities in 1939 forced many rural households to devise survival strategies. As a consequence, many country girls were sold off to the cities as labor to support their families. Traffickers hung out an employment agency signboard but in practice traded girls and women. They wandered around rural areas to seek girls from impoverished households. They usually employed deceit and trickery, promising them a better life in cities, educational opportunities, and employment. However, many girls were sent to factories, cafés, bars, taverns, and brothels and were forced to work like slaves under poor labor conditions.<sup>24</sup> Moving one step further, these girls became a cornerstone for wartime industrialization and later on were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military.<sup>25</sup>

This social problem is woven into Han Yongun’s Buddhist novel. Sunyŏng is a country girl, but one day she meets Mrs. Song, a recruiter who

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<sup>21</sup> Chŏn Pongwan 전봉관, *Hwanggŭmgwang sidae* 黄金狂時代 (Seoul: Sallim, 2005), pp.60-65; Han Suyŏng 한수영, “Habakkun-esŏ Hwanggŭmgwang-kkaji: Singminji sahoe-ŭi ‘ugi yŏlp’ung-gwa Ch’ae Manshig-ŭi sosŏl” 하바꾼에서 황금광까지: 식민지사회의 투기 열풍과 채만식의 소설 in *Ch’inil munhag-ŭi chaeinsik*, p.267.

<sup>22</sup> For more details, see Gi-Wook Shin and Do-Hyun Han, “Colonial Corporatism: The Rural Revitalization Campaign 1932-1940” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999): 70-96.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78

<sup>24</sup> “Ch’un’gung kigŭn nongch’on-ŭr, yunyŏ-nŭn kŏik chŭngga” 春窮飢饉 農村으로, 遊女는 去益增加 in *Maeil sinbo* (May 1936); “Insin maemae hyŏmŭi-ro” 人身賣買嫌疑로 in *Maeil sinbo* (March 1939).

<sup>25</sup> Shabshina, F.I., *Singminji Chosŏn-esŏ: Ōnŭ Rŏsia chisŏng’in-i ssŭn yŏksa hyŏnjang kirok* 식민지 조선에 서: 어느 러시아 지성인이 쓴 역사현장 기록, translated by Kim Myŏnggho (Seoul: Hanul 한울, 1996), pp.92-98; Yuki Tanaka, *Japan’s Comfort Women: Sexual slavery and prostitution during World War II and the US occupation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.33-44; An Yŏnsŏn 안연선, *Sŏngnoye-wa pyŏngsa mandŭlgi* 성노예와 병사 만들기 (Seoul: Samin, 2003/2008), pp.19-23.

wanders around the countryside in search of girls. She is told of luxury items, urban living, modern education, and tourist attractions in Seoul.<sup>26</sup> Deceived by such sweet talk, Sunyŏng follows the old woman and is brought to big cities such as Seoul. Instead of sightseeing and getting an education, she is forced to learn entertainment skills and is traded by a fellow called Kim, a broker who trades sing-song girls and prostitutes for a large amount of money (500-800 wŏn). The heroine is not the only girl who is subjected to human trade. In Mrs. Song's house, there are many more girls who are supposed to be sold to a human trafficker. The story of one of them, Ch'aeran, unfolds in a different way than Sunyŏng's. She is the daughter of a tenant farmer. In a year of bad harvest, the land owner took the whole crop from her family and they faced starvation. To escape from this fate, the family resorted to selling their daughter. Thus Ch'aeran was sold by her own parents.

*If I [Ch'aeran] am sent there [Shinmachi], I will run away or kill myself. How the hell would I do such a thing? Working as a kisaeng and hostess would be better. Prostitution is to serve this and that man for a day. Far from serving but a single man, a woman is forced to sell her body for a little money like dog meat. Death would be a better choice.*<sup>27</sup>

Girls were sent to restaurants (*yorchip*), bars, taverns (*saekchuga*) and whorehouses (*yugwak* or *ch'anggichip*). In the quote, Ch'aeran expresses her anxiety and frustration about being sold as a sex slave. "There" in Ch'aeran's remark indicates Shinmachi 新町 in Seoul, which was widely known as a licensed prostitute quarter, which was named after Shinmachi in Osaka. Girls who were sent to brothels in Shinmachi were deprived of their dignity and worth as a human being and forced to sell their bodies in return for payment. There was no hope for them to live like a human being unless they ran away. Yet, the writer questions again if they can run away. As a dialogue between Mrs. Song and Kim reveals, many of those girls would run away with friendly customers. However, these men would turn out to be traffickers themselves who after seducing the girls would resell them.<sup>28</sup> The girls thus were stuck in a vicious cycle of human trafficking.

The craze for gold mining is the second issue this novel portrays. As Chŏn Pongwan brings to light, the 1930s was the period of a Korean style "Gold Rush."<sup>29</sup> In the aftermath of the Great Depression, gold came to hold an absolute place in international trade. The Japanese government needed to increase its gold holdings and for that purpose, gold exports were banned and smuggling was severely punished. The colonial government extensively promoted gold production and bought gold in large quantities. Due to these

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<sup>26</sup> Han Yongun *chŏnjip* 6, pp.32-33 and 45-46.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp.55-57.

<sup>29</sup> Chŏn Pongwan, *Hwanggŭmgwang sidae*, p.15.

policies, colonial society plunged into gold speculation.<sup>30</sup> In reality, a renowned professor and nationalist immediately headed for his own gold mine after his release from prison where he had been incarcerated because of connections with the independence movement. An independence activist affiliated with the Provisional Government of Korea in Shanghai ceased his activities and returned to Korea for gold mining, and a socialist leading the Korean Federation of Labor renounced his affiliation and headed to a northern province in search of gold.<sup>31</sup>

The president of *Chosŏn ilbo* newspaper, where Han Yongun published this novel, was a man nicknamed the “Gold King” (*kŭmgwang wang*) in colonial Korea. This man, Pang Ŭngmo, had acquired a basic knowledge of Confucianism in a *sŏdang* but despite his low education level, became a gold millionaire and took over one of the leading newspaper companies when it was in financial difficulties. Writers were not immune to the gold craze. Kim Kijin left *Chosŏn ilbo* complaining that he could not work under the gold digger (Pang Ŭngmo) but ironically became a gold digger in search of a rich vein of gold ore himself.<sup>32</sup> Prominent writers such as Ch’ae Mansik and Kim Yujŏng, also dug for gold during the day and wielded the pen at night.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, intellectuals, farmers, *kisaeng*, students, lawyers, doctors, nurses and female activists all were crazy about gold and abandoned their occupations, dreaming of becoming a millionaire.<sup>34</sup>

Han Yongun’s novel illustrates the gold speculation fever that swept the whole country. Taech’ŏl, the heroine’s lifesaver and husband, represents the crazy gold seekers. At first, he hesitates to marry the heroine because she is a bar hostess, but hearing that she has saved a considerable amount of money, he takes an interest in her. Through a matchmaker, he informs her that he is engaged in gold mining and is short of funds. If this problem is solved, he is willing to get married. He does not force her outright but subtly seeks voluntary payment from her. As expected, the heroine gives him her savings. Furthermore, she pays her ransom with the rest of the money. This is usually what a man does to free a barmaid but in her case, she did it herself. Before marriage, he brazenly proclaims that he cannot be at home or support and sustain the household while operating a mine. In spite of this, the heroine marries him.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For details, see Chŏn Pongwan, *Hwanggŭmgwang sidae*, pp.213-290; Han Suyŏng, “Habakkun-esŏ Hwanggŭmgwang-kkaji”, pp.263-278.

<sup>31</sup> “Kwangsang-hanŭn ‘Kŭmgwang sinsa’gi” 광산하는 ‘금광신사’기 in *Samch’ŏlli* 三千里 (Nov. 1938).

<sup>32</sup> Chŏn Pongwan, *Hwanggŭmgwang sidae*, pp.31-33.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.34-37; Han Suyŏng, “Habakkun-esŏ Hwanggŭmgwang-kkaji”, pp.263-278; Ch’oe Kangmin 최강민, “Singminji-jŏk kŭndae-rŭl paehoe-hanŭn yurang’in: Kim Yujŏng munhag-ŭi kŭndaesŏng-ŭl chungsim-ŭro” 식민지적 근대를 배회하는 유랑인: 김유정 문학의 근대성을 중심으로 in *1930-nyŏndae munhak-kwa kŭndae ch’ehŏm* 1930년대 문학과 근대체험, Edited by Munhak-kwa pip’yŏng yŏn’guhoe (Seoul: Ihoe munhaksa, 1999), pp. 224-227.

<sup>34</sup> Chŏn Pongwan, *Hwanggŭmgwang sidae*, p.15-37.

<sup>35</sup> *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 6, p.205

As the matchmaker and heroine state, it is widely told and believed that “gold digging is a sure road to riches these days” and that “all millionaires are persons who prospected for gold.”<sup>36</sup> Preoccupied with gold digging, Taech’öl does not come home and takes no notice of his family. If he goes home, it is to squeeze money from Sunyöng. However, the heroine does not oppose or complain about Taech’öl. She supports him and tries to make the best of the situation.

*Whenever Taech’öl takes money from her [Sunyöng], he preaches that while gold digging, it is not strange to mortgage the slip of one’s wife. Only after hardship, one comes to discover a rich vein of ore. She also knows by hearsay that most who get rich by finding gold have a difficult time and find gold at the very last moment. That is the usual course for someone who becomes rich or a millionaire.*<sup>37</sup>

Taech’öl and colonial society dreamt of making a fortune in one stroke. It can be seen as a social ill on the one hand, but on the other hand, as Chön Ponggwon remarks, it was the only way to endure the distress and to stay hopeful in a poverty-stricken society.<sup>38</sup> Sunyöng, who in this novel represents what is good, does not think that the gold craze is a false or idle dream either. She also dreams of wealth and happiness through gold prospecting. She forgets life’s difficulties with the expectation that one day she will be reimbursed ten times or a hundred times for all her efforts. Even when she gives birth to a baby all alone, she does not complain about her husband’s indifference. She continues to seek comfort in the dream that her child will be the son of a gold king and inherit a large fortune from his father.<sup>39</sup>

Contrary to their expectations, gold mining destroys the rosy dreams and happiness of the novel’s main characters. Blinded by gold fever, Taech’öl abandons his wife and child and marries a woman whose money is available for mine prospecting. Sunyöng desperately looks for ways to protect her family from divorce and considers selling herself again and funding the mining with the proceeds. Nonetheless, she is forced to divorce and her family is broken up. To make matters worse, her son dies of shock in the midst of a quarrel between her and her husband. Taech’öl abandons his family out of greed for gold and causes the death of his own son. The gold-digger ends up addicted to opium and meets a painful death.

In this way, Han Yongun’s Buddhist novel sketches a distorted colonial landscape during the second Sino-Japanese War without generalizing or politicizing his narrative. There are no words used in this novel that remind the reader of the Japanese expansionist war or the militarization of colonial Korea.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.186.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.211.

<sup>38</sup> Chön Ponggwon, *Hwanggümgwang sidae*, p.59.

<sup>39</sup> *Han Yongun chönjip* 6, p.211.

Wartime propaganda slogans or national consciousness (*minjok ūisik*) are not mentioned, either. The human trafficking, gold craze and opium addiction he dealt with in this novel were part of the actual lived experience of various social groups and the living condition of individuals, and so the story he told is far removed from the homogenizing nation-centered historical narrative of Korea's resistance and national struggle.

In sum, Han Yongun was aware of social problems rampant in wartime colonial Korea and wove them into his Buddhist novel. The women trafficking, gold craze, and opium addiction he tackled exhibit the distorted colonial landscape in the contemporary wartime. Although he did not mention any words reminding the reader of wartime propaganda slogans or policies, it is clear that these social problems were associated with the turmoil created by war. Han gave voice to voiceless people who were involved in or victimized by social evils in wartime. Yet, his concern with particular individuals or groups and their various experiences and living conditions was not homogenized to the monolithic of Korean nation. Also, it has nothing to do with the central concerns of the nationalist movements such as resistance or independence.

Using the heroine's voice, Han expressed rage about social evils. For example, in the quoted remark of Ch'aeran, he expressed his deep detestation of women trafficking and forced prostitution, interestingly, taking the Confucian womanly virtue that "a woman cannot serve two men" as his yardstick. He certainly felt the horror of the inhumanity shown to colonial women whom their family or parents mercilessly sold off and whose bodies were traded like meat by traffickers. His anger, however, did not stem from his national consciousness (*minjok ūisik*) but from humanistic concerns. Han did not delve into the problems any further, but the social problems he tackled were much more complicated than what could be solved by venting anger or accusing some immoral individuals. Many issues were involved: the second Sino-Japanese War, the massive breakdown of the Korean rural economy, extreme poverty and the struggle for survival, wartime industrialization, violence against women, the breakdown of families and human values, lack of material and moral support by the colonial government, etc. These social problems also call into question the representation of Koreans as victims and victimizers.

### **A lingering concern with Confucianism**

Yet, it seems that Han Yongun was not completely indifferent to or ignorant of the political events or atmosphere in colonial Korea during the turbulent war period. The second Sino-Japanese War (1937) was a decisive event through which hosts of prominent nationalist and socialist leaders deviated from their existing creed and activities and turned to collaboration with the colonial authorities. An number of Han Yongun's companions and acquaintances followed this path. For example Ch'oe Namsŏn 崔南善, who had been the

drafter of the manifesto of independence of Korea during the monumental event of the March First Movement (1919) became a councilor of *Chungch'uwŏn* (中樞院, the advisory council for the governor-general) in 1938 and from 1939-1942, taught as a professor at Jinguo University, established by Japanese officials in Manchukuo. Han's close acquaintance Ch'oe Rin 崔麟, who had been a national leader heading *Ch'ŏndogyo*, the biggest religious group, and had been appointed a councilor of the *Chungch'uwŏn* in 1934, was appointed to become the president of the colonial governmental newspaper *Maeil sinbo* 每日新報 in 1937 and a board member of the Korean National Mobilization Association (Kungmin ch'ongnyŏk Chosŏn yŏnmaeng, 國民總力朝鮮連盟) in 1940. Some hearsay statements inform us that Han expressed disgust against these so-called turncoats, flatly rejected the financial support they offered, and ended his relationships with them. This is often used as evidence to prove his brave and staunch nation-loving spirit, remaining unbroken in spite of the oppressive atmosphere at the end of the colonial period.<sup>40</sup> However, *Pangmyŏng* shows that his own narratives, experiences, and explicit and implicit reactions to the political atmosphere were somewhat different than the stories told about him, far more diverse and intricate than the homogenized accounts.

The Confucian tradition that Han once reinvented for his attempt at modern nation building as seen in his unpublished manuscript *Chugŭm* 죽음 (Death, 1924) still served him as a useful means to articulate his political stance in this novel with strong Buddhist characteristics. He depicted how Sunyŏng grew up under the influence of Confucianism, her father being a Confucian scholar who taught Confucian primers to children at a *sŏdang* (traditional school). In such an atmosphere, she had a chance to get acquainted with basic Chinese characters and Confucian textbooks for children such as *Ch'ŏnjamun* 千字文 (Thousand Characters Classic), *Tongmongsŏnsŭp* 童蒙先習 (First Lesson for Ignorant Children), and *Kyŏngmongyogyŏl* 擊蒙要訣 (The Right Way to Get Rid of Ignorance).<sup>41</sup> She was also taught proper womanly moral conduct according to the standards of Confucianism.<sup>42</sup> This Confucian-based home education later awakened her to a sense that *kisaeng* or barmaids deviate from the proper behavior of a decent woman when Mrs. Song forced her to learn songs to entertain men.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, Confucian virtue imposed upon women is not what Han Yongun underscored in this novel. As mentioned before, his authorial intention was not to apply the Confucian concept of the chaste woman to the heroine. The ultimate aim of the heroine's story was to convey Buddhist moral views and practices. That is why he maybe needed an alternative Confucian concept

<sup>40</sup> "Manhae-ga namgin ilhwa" 萬海가 남긴 逸話, Edited by Kim Kwanho in *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 6, pp. 370-372 and 374; Im Chungbin 임중빈, *Manhae Han Yongun 만해 한용운* (Seoul: Pŏmusa 범우사, 1995/2002), pp.183-192.

<sup>41</sup> Composed in 1577 by the famous Confucian scholar Yi Yulgok (李栗谷, 1536-1584).

<sup>42</sup> *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 6, pp.21, 22 and 61.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.61-62.

to send a political message, in the form of a poetic expression of Confucian allegiance to the king. When the heroine succumbs to Mrs. Song's coercion and starts to learn songs to entertain men, the song the elderly music master teaches her is not a vulgar song, but a fourteenth century *sijo* poem of Chǒng Mongju (鄭夢周, 1337-1392):

*Though this frame should die and die, though I die a hundred times,  
My bleached bones all turned to dust, my very soul exists or not-  
What can change the undivided heart that glows with faith toward my lord?*<sup>44</sup>

The music master explains to the heroine who the composer was and what this song means. Its composer, Chǒng Mongju, was an official of the Koryŏ dynasty. When the dynasty he had served, Koryŏ, perished, he did not yield to the new rulers but maintained fidelity (*ch'ungchŏl*, 忠節) toward his old master. As a result, he was killed on a bridge which later was named *Sŏnjukkyo* 善竹橋 (The Good Bamboo Bridge) because on the spot where his blood was found, bamboo shoots, symbols of loyalty, grew. While explaining the meaning of the verse, the master spells out the designation of "nim" (the beloved). Ignorant people think that it merely refers to one's husband (*sŏbangnim*) or lover (*chŏngdŭn nim*). This term was commonly used to refer to the king (*imgŭmnim*). Besides, one's parents, spouses, one's country and what one cherishes can be all called "nim".<sup>45</sup> The heroine is so enthused by the verse that she decides to find out what the significance is.<sup>46</sup>

It is easy to conclude that in borrowing this old poem, the writer tries to send a message to the readers that one should persist in one's effort to maintain a sense of political constancy for the Korean nation. As is widely known, the historical person Chǒng Mongju is a national symbol of loyalty. In a more strict historical sense, he was a Koryŏ civil officer who remained loyal to Koryŏ and opposed a new political power, Yi Sŏnggye, when the latter attempted to found a new dynasty, the Chosŏn dynasty. His faithful allegiance to the Koryŏ king, his *sijo* poem "Tansimga" 丹心歌, and his death prove his devotion to the Confucian principle of loyalty (*ch'ung*, 忠). This Confucian political ethic is revisited by Han Yongun and refashioned into the political attitude of patriotic loyalty to the Korean nation during wartime. It is quite noticeable that he did not use the name of dynasties such as Koryŏ and Chosŏn. Instead he speaks of "his country" and "the other country," which leaves open the possibility that he is actually talking about colonial Korea and the Japanese empire rather than the states of the fourteenth century. Telling of Chǒng's unyielding spirit and willingness to risk life and limb, Han sends a covert message that one should

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Rutt, *The Bamboo grove: an introduction to sijo* (the University of Michigan, 1998), p.51.

<sup>45</sup> Han Yongun *chŏnjip*, pp. 69-70 and 113-114.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71.

bravely maintain one's political loyalty and defend the Korean nation in spite of the political repression of the wartime colonial government.

However, this should not be the end of discussion. Ironically, the Confucian virtue of loyalty he insisted on was at the very foundation of the national polity (*kokutai*, 国体) propagated by the Japanese government as the core of the imperial ideology and a justification for thought control.<sup>47</sup> An expression of Japanese ultranationalistic ideas, the concept of *kokutai* posited the uniqueness and the divine origin of Japan, its people and its ruling family.<sup>48</sup> It had Confucian roots, however. As Robert King Hall points out, it established "a code of ethics based on the patriarchal Confucian structure of social obligations".<sup>49</sup> The corresponding virtues of loyalty and patriotism and filial piety are all Confucian. The national polity clarified that the country of Japan was established by an emperor who was a descendent of the Divine, Amaterasu Omikami. Individual Japanese were fundamentally one body with the emperor and the state. Loyalty which means to obediently serve the emperor and follow him was claimed to be a unique way of existing. Offering one's life to the emperor does not mean self-sacrifice. It means "the casting aside of our little selves to live under his august grace and the enhancing of the genuine life of the people of a State."<sup>50</sup> The Japanese country is assumed to be "a great family nation and the Imperial Household is the head family of the subjects and the nucleus of national life."<sup>51</sup> In this sense, loyalty and filial piety to the emperor are one. Although filial piety is common characteristic of Asian morality, the oneness of loyalty and filial piety was regarded as the unique characteristic of Japan, without parallel in the world.<sup>52</sup>

These Confucian tenets of *kokutai* were not only applied to Japan but also to its colonies such as Korea and Taiwan, as a means of thought control and as the ultimate purpose of spiritual mobilization. In colonial Korea, *kokutai* was linked to various other concepts, such as the idea that Japan and Korea are one body (*nasesŏn ilch'e/naisen ittai*, 内鮮一体), that they shared the same ancestral origin of, that every man should be loved with impartiality (*ilsidong'in/issihidōjin*, 一視同仁), that the Koreans should be educated to become imperial citizens (*hwangminhwa/kōminka*, 皇民化), and that all the world should be united under one roof (*p'algoeng iru/hakkō ichiu*, 八紘一宇). How such ideas might propagate loyalty and filial piety to the Emperor is well expressed in the collaborationist writing of Yi Kwangsu by 1940. Thanks to the grace of the emperor, he wrote, the Koreans were given a chance of discarding the label of

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<sup>47</sup> Robert King Hall, "Introduction" in *Kokutai No Hongi: Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan* trans. by John Owen Gauntlett (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1949), p.36.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, republished in *Japan 1931-1945: Militarism, Fascism, Japanism?* Edited by Ivan Morris (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1963), p.47.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.48.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

the colonized and becoming the subjects of the Japanese empire (*sinmin*, 臣民) and the children of the emperor (*chökcha*, 赤子). Yet, the chance was not given but rather earned by demonstrating loyalty and filial piety to the emperor, obediently following the directives of the Japanese state in the name of public service.<sup>53</sup> Yi further exclaimed that the Koreans, should appreciate the Great Care of the Emperor (*taeösim*, 大御心,) and gladly and gratefully dedicate themselves to be reborn as real Japanese, cast off their Korean selves and offer up their lives for the emperor's sake.<sup>54</sup> Seen in this light, Han's emphases on Confucian loyalty and the heroic act of risking one's life for that virtue in no way obviously oppose the imperial ideologies. On the contrary, the voices in his narrative appear to echo Confucian-based war propaganda, but they are not exactly identical to it.

In this context it is necessary to explain Han's use of the term *nim* in greater detail. First of all, it is strongly reminiscent of the use of the term in Han's early poetry collection *Nim-üi ch'immuk*. This open concept allows for a variety of the meanings signified by *nim*, including the Korean nation, but it might potentially also invite a much more contentious signifier, in particular by the time of the Pacific War: the Japanese emperor. At the time, Yi Kwangsu wrote a considerable number of poems in both Japanese and Korean dedicated to the emperor, calling him *imgümnim* (king). In those poems, Yi overtly called on the readers to look up to the emperor, protect the Japanese empire in obedience to his directives, to honor him, and to purge the darkness with his imperial radiance.<sup>55</sup> Yi insisted that the emperor is the head of the country, as a father is the head of a household, and that therefore, to honor him is to be both loyal and filial.<sup>56</sup> Of course, different from Yi, Han never wrote a single poem explicitly glorifying the Japanese emperor but as far as his interpretation of *nim* in this novel principally embraces all and includes the monarch, the symbolic designation might very well have been interpreted as signifying the emperor who was the locus of all ideologies and activities in wartime.

In short, Han's insistence on Confucian loyalty and *nim* through revisiting Chöng Mongju's *sijo* presumably was intended to counteract the spread of a political conversion of the Koreans and their leaders to the Japanese cause and to call for a steadfast political loyalty to the Korean nation, but, this attempt is not simply nationalistic, because on some points it was congruent with wartime ideologies rather than that it opposed or defied them. In the eyes of the contemporary public and censors, his novel may have been read as if it propagated loyalty, (Japanese imperial) patriotism and service to the Emperor.

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<sup>53</sup> Yi Kwangsu 이광수, *Tongp'o-e koham: Ch'ünwön Yi Kwangsu ch'inil munhak* 동포에 고향: 春園 李光洙 親日文學 edited by Kim Wönmo and Yi Kyöngun (Seoul: Ch'örhak-kwa hyönsilsa, 1997), pp.31, 34, 52, 72-73, 77, 81-82, 88-89, and 161.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.74, 91, 112, and 118-119.

<sup>55</sup> Yi Kwangsu 이광수, *Ch'unwön Yi Kwangsu ch'inil munhak chönjip* 춘원 이광수 친일문학전집 II (Seoul: P'yönminsä, 1995), pp.13-15 and 19.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.16-17.

In this sense, his novel is pro-Japanese collaborationist. Collaboration was not what he intended. In my view, he was not even aware that his depiction of Confucianism could be confused with the imperialist use of it, but this unexpected confusion deluded the Japanese censors and eventually enabled him to express his concern for the Korean nation.

### Political implications of Buddhism

In *Pangmyŏng*, it was Buddhism rather than Confucianism that Han Yongun primarily employed to express in a round-about and subtle way his reactions to the political climate. This novel is characterized by clear Buddhist allusions and motifs. The heroine is a messenger designed to deliver Han's intention of Buddhist moral edification. Yet, at the same time, she is recruited as a political agent whose Buddhist spirit and practice create a more diverse narrative on the sociopolitical issues of the day. First, we can find an explicit criticism of the mass political conversion of Korean national leaders.

*How deplorable is the way of the world now! Those, who once behaved like real men, loudly proclaiming this or that ideology and leading the whole country, now look like a turkey before Thanksgiving. A patriot (chisa, 志士) this morning is degraded to a puny coward by the evening. An "-ist" yesterday today has turned into an anti "-ist". Without consistency, they change their creeds only in pursuit of personal interest and safety, faster than a cat's eye moving.<sup>57</sup>*

In the concluding part of the novel, Han Yongun borrows a priest's voice and directly rebukes the Korean social leaders for their political inconsistency and spiritual frailty. His criticisms are not only addressed to Korean nationalists, but include nationalists, liberalists, socialists, communists, patriotic activists, feminists, and any other social leaders who "converted" politically at that time. As the term, *taejangbu* (a real man), indicates, he thinks mainly of the male leaders rather than their female counterparts. According to him, faced with unfavorable political circumstances they too easily gave up and discarded their creeds and beliefs. He despises them as impatient, capricious, cowardly, unmanly, opportunistic, and above all, selfish. They only count their own interest and safety, never feeling a concern for other people. In other words, it was impossible for them to endure the difficulties for the public good. He even calls the political converts "monkey-like" gentlemen. They changed their political attitudes in favor of the wartime colonial authorities and this in his eyes is like what a monkey does to please people.

The heroine who embodies the bodhisattva spirit and practice is intended to impart a strong criticism of such Korean social leaders. Han

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<sup>57</sup> Han Yongun *chŏnjip* 6, p.289.

articulates that women are traditionally viewed as fickle as a reed. They are supposed to be weak and emotional whereas their male counterparts are supposed to be strong and determined. Against this traditional view or even subverting the gendered prejudice, the heroine demonstrates how a woman, especially armed with Buddhist belief, can be more strong-willed than any man. She encounters a series of obstacles and difficulties, but this does not keep her from persisting in her effort to achieve her goal of repaying kindness. This is contrary to the social leaders who did not persevere to the last and abandoned their initial ideologies and activities in an unfavorable political situation. She does not think of herself but only of other persons such as her benefactor and endures unbearable sufferings, whereas the social leaders thought just of their own interests and benefits. Despite all temptations and humiliations, she remains unchanged. The heroine never gives up her goal and finally realizes it, thanks to her persistent and strenuous effort, which is called *chōngjin* 精進 in Buddhism.

Likewise, the heroine's selfless spirit and perseverance stand in sharp contrast to the political attitudes and behavior of the Korean male leaders. Yet, Han Yongun seems to have noticed some logical problems in his attempt at comparison. The heroine's actions are basically religious, whereas the Korean male leaders' acts are basically political. Her sacrifice for an individual has nothing to do with society or country, which means that he might have made a mistake comparing the different levels of commitment in this novel. Considering this, Han remarks,

*There may be some difference in scale between an effort on behalf of a single individual and of one's society or country, but there is no difference in the sense that in both cases the actors should have an indomitable spirit. Sacrifice for the state and society is not bigger, nor is sacrifice for an individual smaller. Only the results differ. The cause for the acts, in other words, the sacrificial spirit of the actors is in both cases the same.*<sup>58</sup>

Han Yongun insists that the sacrifice, patience, unyielding spirit, compassion, and perseverance of the heroine are not just prescribed by Buddhist (religious) precepts but that these are basic prerequisites for benefiting individuals, society, and country and for achieving ideals and goals in human life, regardless of the different levels of activity. His further clarification that "if we would have let the nun Sōnhaeng [the heroine of *Pangmyōng*] work for the state or the society, she would have sacrificed herself to her last moment. If she had become a leader or thinker, she would have remained unchanged from beginning to end, whatever the risk, and put monkey-like gentlemen to mortal shame"<sup>59</sup> makes his intention clearer. He

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.288.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.289.

intends to denounce the social leaders and counteracts their changes in political attitude and behavior, by refashioning the bodhisattva precepts into a basis to criticize spreading political tendencies among Korean social leaders.

However, regarding Han Yongun's criticism of the politically disloyal Koreans, there are some important questions to consider before simply reducing its interpretation to the cliché of his heroic nationalism. First, his consideration of political turncoats is leaning toward scorn and contempt rather than to constructive criticism. According to him, their political decision entirely stemmed from their lack of character. Their personality flaws – impatience, cowardice, selfishness, unmanliness, cunning and opportunism – made them incline to the “wrong” political attitudes and behavior. He humiliates them and even debases their human dignity, ridiculing them as “monkey-like gentlemen.” According to him, these people do not deserve respect as a human being due to their political tendencies. By rebuking them, he may demonstrate the indomitability of his own patriotic nationalism, but on the other hand he denies their humanity, ruthlessly wielding the whip of nationalism.

The problem is that the political turn to collaboration was not as simple as Han Yongun thought. Few gave up and discarded their creeds and beliefs “easily.” Unlike he surmised, many of them agonized over the political decision, experiencing inner conflicts and feelings of loss or an extreme fear of safety, as we shall see in Yi Kwangsu's case in the following chapters. Individual motivations and circumstances behind the political decision were too diverse and heterogeneous to conflate into the single narrative of self-interest and cowardice Han presents. There were many people like Ch'ae Mansik, who changed their political color to support their families and survive under extreme financial difficulties.<sup>60</sup> Not all of them were egoistic persons who did not care about other people and public matters. Many of them found other values and activities, e.g., human life, religion, and education, more important than the nation and nationalism. While collaborating, some writers could devise ways of creating counterdiscourses against the colonial discourse. Therefore, Han Yongun's critical reaction to the political atmosphere proves its own limitations by failing to listen to more diverse voices and individual experiences from wartime colonial Korea.

Secondly, it is noteworthy that Han Yongun's Buddhist-inspired political critique once again diverges from the cliché image of anti-colonial resistance. Upon close examination, the heroine who represents the writer's Buddhist insight into wartime colonial society does not challenge her situation or try to improve her lot. She just submits tamely to humiliation and accepts her

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<sup>60</sup> Ch'ae Mansik, Kim Tongin, Chang Chiyŏn, Chang Tŏkcho and many more writers produced collaborative literature to cope with financial problems. After liberation, Ch'ae wrote an autobiographical novella *Minjog-ŭi chŏein* 民族의 罪人 (1948) and denounced his own “pro-Japanese” activities, but also the postcolonial social atmosphere in which people were preoccupied only with accusing what the collaborators did without any consideration of why they did it and under what circumstances. Han Yongun at least in this respect cannot avoid criticism.

misfortune with resignation. She never complains about her ill fate and never expresses discontent and anger. Suffering hardship, she even feels thankful. Reduced to begging, she thinks that she is treated by people much better than other beggars and finds comfort and satisfaction.<sup>61</sup> With this depiction, the writer voices a narrative of the wartime colonial situation that differs from the standard accounts. Nowhere does he even hint at a challenge to the colonial authorities or criticism of wartime reality. Rather, his depiction strongly suggests that people in wartime colonial Korea should “endure” the reality of hardship and difficulties. This is the way for the Koreans to lead their lives during the war. And this is not Han’s unique idea but common among other Buddhist writers such as Yi Kwangsu and Hong Sayong regardless of their political stand.

Such an endurance exercise almost looks like “submission” to the wartime government. What the heroine puts into practice is that one may not try to change or improve one’s miserable life in wartime colonial Korea, nor challenge one’s circumstances. One should accept the colonial reality as it is. The enduring heroine who never expresses complaint, discontent, anger or criticism does not oppose the Japanese wartime regime but on the contrary interacts with it in a way that strives to reduce the spread of social unrest and to stabilize the extreme political tension in colonial Korea during the second Sino-Japanese War. This interaction shows that Han’s criticism of the converted Korean leaders does not necessarily imply criticism of Japanese colonialism or his anti-Japanese heroic nationalism.

Then, is Han’s emphasis on endurance simply meant to propagate the policies of the wartime government? Does he plead with the Koreans to submit to the authorities? To find the answer, we should have a look at his essay “Innae” 忍耐 (Forbearance, 1938) written in the same period. In this long essay, he insists that forbearance should be certainly distinguished from blind subservience. The point he makes is that forbearance is a goal-oriented act whereas subservience is aimless.<sup>62</sup> On the way toward reaching a goal, one often encounters difficulties and needs to endure them. This is forbearance Han argues. According to him, patience determines whether one can have success or not. As various phrases he quotes from Buddhist scriptures show, forbearance is originally one of the bodhisattva’s practices to attain Buddhahood. Yet, Han Yongun interprets the Buddhist precept broadly and proposes it as a sociopolitical attitude one should hold fast to in wartime society. Forbearance is suggested not as a goal in itself but as a skillful means (*pangp’yŏn*, 方便) for people to cope with war and sociopolitical adversity and to continuously pursue and achieve their goals such as national identity or liberation.

In short, Han Yongun’s Buddhist articulations have diverse social and political implications. They cannot simply be regarded as either direct

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<sup>61</sup> *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 6, p.266.

<sup>62</sup> *Pulgyo: sin* 佛教: 新 (July 1938). Republished in *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 2, p.343.

resistance or blind submission to the colonial authorities. The writer creates a critical voice to stop the political conversion of Korean leaders, but consciously or unconsciously acts in congruence with wartime colonial policies, instead of challenging or criticizing them. Yet, his interaction with the colonial government cannot simply be reduced to propaganda because he produces a counter-discourse that proposes an alternative, divergent way to persist with national (Korean) goals.

### Compassion, sacrifice and repaying kindness

To extricate more political implications, we need to have a closer look at some Buddhist themes that recur frequently in *Pangmyŏng*. These are compassion, sacrifice (*hŭisaeng*, 犧牲), and repaying kindness (*poŭn*, 報恩). The Buddhist way of indebtedness is the leitmotif of this novel. On the way to Seoul, Sunyŏng nearly drowns and is rescued by a man called Kim Taech'ŏl. This incident is not a one-time experience to her, but the incident that will determine her entire life. When she is taken out of the water, she keeps repeating in the confusion "how can I repay your kindness?"<sup>63</sup> From that moment on, she is filled with a deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness. She never forgets her savior and only wishes to meet him again in the future.<sup>64</sup>

*Mister! I am indebted to you. What can I do to repay you? If I had been rich, I would have paid my debt of gratitude with money. What else can I requite you with? In old days, one often gave oneself to the man one owes but it is not allowed to me because I have this humble occupation as a bar waitress. Even if I had not been a barmaid, with what could I have served you? I wish you would allow me to be your maid. But you will turn me down due to my humble occupation, won't you?*<sup>65</sup>

The heroine's sacrificial desire to serve does not result from ignorance or poor judgment. According to Han Yongun, it stems from an awareness of indebtedness and compassion.<sup>66</sup> The first is the most beautiful and purest ideal one can have, the latter the beautiful virtue of feeling deep sympathy for a man in misery. These virtues are not trained or taught; they are all inherent in Sunyŏng. The heroine just puts them into practice. She does not aim for reputation or reward. This altruistic and sacrificial compassion is the main theme or the message of the novel as later episodes, near the end of the novel, will relate. Han elucidates that the Buddha's altruistic compassion reaches not only to human beings but also to all sentient beings, without discrimination. For that reason, certain monks in ancient times risked their lives to save

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<sup>63</sup> Han Yongun *chŏnjip* 6, p.165.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.167.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp.288-289.

insignificant beings such as a goose or grasses. In this respect, it is only natural to show mercy to human beings and to sacrifice oneself for the person who saves one's life.

The willingness to realize one's indebtedness and to requite it by practicing the enduring sacrifice and compassion which are emphasized by Han in Buddhist teachings flow from the Four Graces (*sajungŭn*, 四重恩). There are several formulations of the four graces but the most widely accepted one is the grace of parents, of all sentient beings, of sovereign (country), and of the Three Treasures of Buddhism (i.e. Buddha, dharma, and sangha).<sup>67</sup> One has great debt to one's parents for giving birth to and caring for. Without all living beings, one cannot make a vow to save them and to accrue merit. One is indebted to one's king, ruler and country for bringing order and security to one's life. One greatly owes a debt of gratitude to Buddha, Buddhist law and sangha which opened the way toward enlightenment and supported to change and improve one's quality of life.

The importance of the Four Graces is probably more explicitly stated through a non-fictional prose literature. In his early writing of *Chosŏn Pulgyo yusillon* (1913), he was against the Buddhist tradition of clerical celibacy and instead, proposed a marriage of monks and nuns. One of the main reasons was that celibacy does not respect filial duty and does not benefit society.<sup>68</sup> In his later days, he wrote some more essays in which he directly dealt with the Four Graces in parallel with in his novel. In a long essay "Pulgyo-wa hyohaeng" 佛敎와 孝行 (Buddhism and filial duty, 1938), he quoted many phrases and passages from Buddhist scriptures which deal with the virtue of respect for parents. This was to demonstrate how Buddhism has actually regarded filial piety as important. Seeing renunciation, leaving home and becoming celibate clergy, people in secular world concluded that Buddhism as a whole was a religion ignoring parents and moral principles. In his early essay mentioned above, he agreed with the secular view and required to reform the practice of celibacy. However, in this later essay, he argued that the secular prejudice was ignorant of the essence of Buddhism. Renunciation was a part of Buddhism which was only practiced by the clergy and priests. It had nothing to do with lay believers. He argued that still, for monks and nuns, renunciation was not the purpose in itself. Its ultimate goal was to benefit all sentient beings.<sup>69</sup>

Han's editorial "Kamsa-rŭl nŭkkinŭn maŭm" 感謝를 느끼는 마음 (Gratitude, 1938) directly illustrated the Four Graces and applied it to people's lives in colonial Korea. He claimed that one should feel gratitude for one's family (parents), neighbors, society, the state, and all living beings. He did not explain the details of indebtedness one owes to them and of the duty of repaying it. Instead, he explained that by feeling gratitude for all, immeasurable

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<sup>67</sup> Brian Daizen Victoria, *Zen war stories* (London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p.250.

<sup>68</sup> Han Yongun *chŏnjip* 2, p.84.

<sup>69</sup> *Pulgyo: Sin* (May 1938). Republished in *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 2, pp.337-338.

merit can be accrued. He also changed the content of the classical four groups to make the Buddhist doctrines easy for the common people to practice. Gratitude was emphasized as a practical tool for removing the root of suffering such as greed, anger and ignorance and living a peaceful and content life.<sup>70</sup>

The problem is that Han emphasized the Four Graces against the backdrop of the second Sino-Japanese War. Seen in its historical context, this Buddhist tenet was not immune from the political ideology or war propaganda, such as the ideology of the Imperial Way, the philosophy of favor and indebtedness, and the doctrine of selflessness and sacrifice. Japan and its colonies were engaged in a war based on an imperial ideology and system. It was a war against Western imperialism being propagated as a “just and holy” war to liberate Asian brothers from Western imperial aggression. Challenging the violent, humiliating Western domination of Asia, the Japanese empire declared a “New Order for Asia” in 1938 based upon the notion of “imperial benevolence.”<sup>71</sup> Under the principle of *hakkō ichiu*, for example, it was proclaimed that different from Western imperialists, the eight corners of the world should be ruled by a “benevolent” emperor and his moral principles, and that instead of conflict and exploitation, harmony and peace should be spread around the world under his leadership. In return for his benevolence, his subjects were required to feel grateful for the Emperor’s grace and strive to glorify him and repay the Emperor’s love. Han’s emphases on benevolence (mercy), gratitude, indebtedness, and repaying kindness in this novel, like his references to Confucianism mentioned earlier, resonate with *hakkō ichiu* and the philosophy of debt to the Emperor whether he was conscious of it or not.

It is no surprise that collaborationist Buddhists in his days rediscovered and reworked this ideal Buddhist way of life to support Japanese government in its fight against China and the West. Kwōn Sangno 權相老, for instance, explained that one should strive to repay the four debts of gratitude and to save suffering humans in times of both war and peace. As Shakyamuni defeated evil ghosts, Mahayana Buddhists should “punish” all who resisted the Pan-Asianism and bring about peace by building the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere.<sup>72</sup> According to Kwōn, the four graces and salvation were the true duty of Buddhists during wartime to benefit society and myriad beings under the slogan of “New Order in Asia.”<sup>73</sup> In a collaborative essay, Yi Kwangsu, focused on the grace of the monarch among the four graces and demanded repayment of the debt one owes the Emperor.<sup>74</sup> According to Yi, this

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<sup>70</sup> *Pulgyo: Sin* (June 1938). Republished in *Han Yongun chōnjip* 2, p.361.

<sup>71</sup> Miwa Kimitada, “Pan-Asianism in modern Japan: Nationalism, regionalism and universalism” in *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, regionalism and borders*. Edited by Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann (London and New York: Routledge, 2007) pp.24 and 29.

<sup>72</sup> Kwōn Sangno 權相老, “Ŭngjing sōngjōn-gwa Pulgyo” 膺徵聖戰과 불교 in *Maecil sinbo* (Sep.1941), pp.324-325.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p.328.

<sup>74</sup> Yi Kwangsu, “Jingi to chūkō” (仁義と忠厚) in *Keijō nippō* (Feb. 1940). Republished in *Tongp’o-e*

is the attitude of civilized people. They should know that they exist because of the grace of the Emperor. They owe everything –public order, education, industry, culture– to their country. The grace of country is equated to that of the Emperor. It means that people breath and live thanks to the Emperor’s august grace. Yi recalls that “Shakyamuni Buddha taught us the grace of the ruler (country) as the first among the four graces.”<sup>75</sup> Yi saw that expressing gratitude to the Emperor is the first step to completing the “Japanese spirit” which implies oneness of loyalty and filial piety.

Han did not directly mention the grace of the Emperor or country and the repayment of the debt to it in this novel but it is clear that he did not state the opposite of what Kwŏn and Yi proclaimed but he basically shared their collaborationist claims. In a similar vein, we may reconsider Han Yongun’s glorification of the heroine’s spirit of selfless service and anguished effort to offer her life for the sake of her benefactor. This was intended to condemn the Korean leaders for their egoism, pursuit of personal ends and lack of the sacrificial spirit for the public good, as I mentioned before. As a counter-model against those egoistic persons, he cited some more extreme examples, of compassionate and sacrificial monks who risked their own lives to save others at the end of the novel. However, this is eerily similar to pivotal wartime propaganda motifs such as the no-self philosophy of destroying the self to serve the Emperor, the state, and the public, and the criticism of individualism.<sup>76</sup>

For example, the principles of the *kokutai* 国体 condemn individualism, which is the root of modern Occidental ideologies, and is held responsible for the ideological and social confusion and crisis in Japanese society. “A society of individualism is one of clashes between [masses of] people” and there exists no true harmony.<sup>77</sup> The true meaning of the Japanese national polity, the killing of the self, one’s ego and one’s own purpose of life, and offering one’s life for the sake of the Emperor, is opposed to Western individualism and egocentricity. By casting themselves aside, the Japanese imperial citizens can live under the Emperor’s august grace.<sup>78</sup> However, “the spirit of self-effacement is not a mere denial of oneself, but means living to the great, true self by denying one’s small self.”<sup>79</sup>

For Japan, this articulation had various connotations in the wartime context; it was a pivotal logic for war mobilization, aggressive anti-Westernism, a reaction to modernity, a protest against the dominance of the hegemonic Western discourse, an appreciation of “Japanese values,” and ultra-nationalism

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*koham*: Ch’ūnwŏn Yi Kwangsu ch’inil munhak, pp.77-79.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.

<sup>76</sup> Christopher Ives, “Ethical Pitfalls in Imperial Zen and Nishida Philosophy: Ichikawa Hakugen’s Critique” in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism*. Edited by James W. Heisig & John C. Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), p.28.

<sup>77</sup> Ivan Morris, “The Unique National Polity” (Kokutai no Hongi) in *Japan 1931-1945: Militarism, Fascism, Japanism?* (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1963), p.49

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p.50.

as a belief in the spiritual and cultural superiority of the Japanese over other Asian countries.<sup>80</sup> It does not seem probable that Han Yongun caught all the connotations and reacted to them. Although he respected the Korean tradition, he did not address the dichotomous construction of the West versus the East prevailing at that time (as I will show later, another Buddhist writer, Hong Sayong, was clearly aware of it). Nowhere in his writing, including this novel, did he mention overcoming modernity or anti-Westernism. However, one thing is clear; his articulation of the spirit of self-sacrifice against egoism is far from showing antagonism, resistance to or criticism of the colonial authorities and their *kokutai* wartime ideology, in particular “sacrifice for the sake of the Emperor, country and society,” but is closer to sharing their ideas and spreading them through this novel. Han Yongun was not an anti-colonial nationalist as we believe, but a nationalist who used the same mechanism and the same themes as Japanese imperialist propaganda, but with a different goal. He structurally imitated Japanese imperialist discourses, but filled in the contents differently with nationalist ideas.

It is no surprise that there is a common thread between Han Yongun and Korean collaborators such as Kwŏn Sangno and Yi Kwangsu. According to the nationalist historical narrative, it is impossible that the heroic nationalist Han Yongun and the pro-Japanese stooges shared religious and literary ideas and political beliefs. They appear to be completely different from each other. Han’s lofty sociopolitical ideas and prominent literary stature are regarded as diametrically opposed to the depraved collaborationist ideologies and practices. However, *de facto* Han, Kwŏn and Yi had a lot in common. In his essay on the four graces, Kwŏn Sangno stressed that Buddhism plays a significant role in the total mobilization by inducing people to forget their individual selves (*sa*, 私) and to serve the public goal (*kong*, 公), to renounce the small in order to secure the great, and to return to the one (the Emperor), forgetting their bodies, lives and deaths.<sup>81</sup>

Yi Kwangsu produced a novel that in many ways provides a parallel to Han Yongun’s. In 1939 when Han was publishing his novel *Pangmyŏng* in *Chosŏn Ilbo*, Yi wrote *Sarang* 사랑 (Love, 1939) about a woman who thoroughly forgets herself and sincerely sacrifices herself for her decadent husband, his mistress and her mother-in-law, until they all die. Yi stated explicitly that “love must be characterized by indiscrimination. It is the love of Buddha [i.e. compassion]. It is to cast one’s physical instincts aside. It further means to abandon one’s “self-centered mind” (selfishness). If one forgets “oneself” and thinks only of “him/her” in love, then the love is transformed into

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<sup>80</sup> Robert H. Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism” in *Curators of the Buddha: The study of Buddhism under Colonialism* Edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (The University of Chicago Press: 1995), pp.133 and 135-139; Chris Goto-Jones, “The Kyoto School, the Cambridge School, and the History of Political Philosophy in Wartime Japan” in *East Asia Cultures Critique* 17:1 (Spring 2009):13-42.

<sup>81</sup> Kwŏn Sangno 權相老, “Üngjing söngjŏn-gwa Pulgyo”, p.325.

“compassion” as pure as gold.”<sup>82</sup> Yi, like Han, intended to shed light on the Buddhist tenets of selflessness and compassion through the figure of such a self-sacrificing woman. As some have pointed out, Yi’s Buddhist notions of the relinquishing of egocentricity (*myōlsa*, 滅私), self-sacrifice and compassion were employed to support wartime activities and justify his collaboration.<sup>83</sup>

Of course, it is clear that Yi Kwangsu’s literary activity was much more blatantly, intensely and intentionally collaborationist than Han’s indirect collusion with the Japanese authorities, but at the same time, Yi’s collaborationist writing seems more carefully crafted than Han’s, containing hidden motives and messages and even subversive tactics aimed at overthrowing colonial authority and its oppressive culture, as will be discussed more in detail in later chapters. It is important to note that Yi’s collaborationist works I have referred to compare with Han’s were not written for Koreans but for the Japanese. The texts were all published in the Japanese governmental newspaper *Keijō nippō* 京城日報 which mainly targeted Japanese residents in colonial Korea (For the Korean public, there was another governmental newspaper, *Maeil sinbo* 毎日新報, which was issued in Korean). While using Japanese language and publishing his works in *Keijō nippō*, Yi was keenly aware of the fact that the Japanese were his readers. In his collaborative writing in which war propaganda overtly surfaced, he denounced the Japanese colonial domination in strong terms such as “exploitation and enslavement.” Responding to the criticism of the Japanese that the Koreans were not sincere and serious about the war-effort, he answered back with a question whether it was natural for the Koreans to love Japan and die for the sake of Japan, and why only the Koreans should love Japan one-sidedly, why the Japanese did not love the Koreans.<sup>84</sup> Counter-discursive strategies which are evident in Yi’s writing did not appear in Han’s novel. Han seems not to have intended to promote any war ideology but what happened was that Han used the structure of Japanese propaganda but used it for his own ends.

### The hero’s dilemma between morality and politics

The final matter I want to examine in relation to *Pangmyōng* is the account of Han Yongun’s life through the period of war. As mentioned, what the standard narrative repeatedly dictates and speculates on is that he was a tenacious heroic nationalist who remained loyal to the Korean nation in this turbulent period and dared to reject all offers, i.e., of money and land and requests from the

<sup>82</sup> Yi Kwangsu 李光洙, “Chasō” 自序 (Author’s note) in *Sarang* (Love, 1939). Republished in *Yi Kwangsu chōnjip* 李光洙全集10, p.526.

<sup>83</sup> Yi Kyōnghun 이경훈, *Yi Kwangsu-ūi ch’inil munhak yōn’gu* 이광수의 친일 문학연구 (Seoul: T’aehaksa, 1998), pp.91-152; Ch’oe Chuhwan 최주환. *Cheguk kwōllyōg-eūi yamang-gwa pan’gam sai-esō: sosōr-ūl t’onghae pon chisigin Yi Kwangsu-ūi ch’osang* 제국권력에의 야망과 반감 사이에서: 소설을 통해 본 지식인 이광수의 초상 (Seoul: Somyōng ch’ulp’an, 2005), pp.138-151.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.11-29.

colonial government. Hearsay reports that he detested speaking the Japanese language, changing his Korean name for a Japanese one, and the mobilization of student soldiers.<sup>85</sup> However, Han Yongun's personal story, inasmuch as it can be elicited from *Pangmyŏng*, neither reiterates nor disproves the conventional story of his life. It reveals a hidden side of the putative hero Han Yongun, who was confused and confounded by the dilemmas of life and struggled to resolve the inner conflict between morality and politics.

The fact that Han Yongun had no *minjŏk* (civil registration, 民籍) or *hojŏk* (family registry, 戶籍) is one of the most famous biographical facts about him. Civil registration is a system by which a state or government measures, records and controls its population. It has, in principle, existed throughout the ages, changing its purpose and appellation. In the case of Korea, the *minjŏk* system originated in the last years of the Taehan Empire (in 1909) under the strong influence of Japanese administrative authority, and continued after annexation. In 1923, the system was partly revised by introducing the full-scale Japanese *koseki* family registration system and promulgating the *Chosŏn hojŏngnyŏng* (Korean family registration ordinance, 朝鮮戶籍令).<sup>86</sup> By the time Han Yongun published his novel, the civil registration system was about to be more coercively enhanced by the Name Order (lit. creating surnames and changing given names, 創氏改名) which entirely abolished Korean names and implied a total Japanization of the Koreans.

As Yi Sŭngil and Chŏng Chusu point out, the *minjŏk* or *hojŏk* system introduced in 1909 was used to institutionalize the Japanese family registry centering around the head of household (*hoju*, 戶主). It was a compulsory registration of only the Korean residents in colonial Korea.<sup>87</sup> Offenders who neglected to register were subjected to fewer than fifty strokes of the cane or a fine of below five wŏn, and those who made false reports were more heavily sentenced and sent to jail, flogged or heavily fined one hundred wŏn.<sup>88</sup> These penalties were abolished by a law revision in 1923. According to Yi, the Japanese colonial authorities seemed to have found it difficult to control and rule the Koreans by the use of the pre-existing Korean civil registration system, and therefore, the Taehan Empire's *Hogu chosa kyuch'ik* (Census Edict, 戶口調查規則, 1896) was abolished as soon as *minjŏk* was implemented.

<sup>85</sup> "Manhae-ga namgin ilhwa" 萬海가 남긴 逸話, Edited by Kim Kwanho in *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 6, pp.365, 373- 374 and 379-380.

<sup>86</sup> Yi Sŭng'il 이승일, "Chosŏn ch'ongdokpu-ŭi Chosŏnin tŭngnok chedo yŏn'gu: 1910-nyŏndae munjŏk-kwa kŏju tŭngnokpu-ŭi tŭngnok tanwi-ŭi pyŏnhwa-rŭl chungsim-ŭro" 조선총독부의 조선인 등록 제도 연구: 1910년대 민적과 거주등록부의 등록 단위의 변화를 중심으로 in *Sahoe-wa yŏksa* 사회와 역사 67 (June 2005): 2-40; Chŏng Chusu鄭周洙, "Ilche kangjŏmgi hojŏkchedo-ŭi koch'al: Ilche kangjŏmgi pŏmmuhaengjŏngsa yŏn'gu" 일제강점기 戶籍制度의 고찰: 일제강점기 法務行政史 연구 in *Sabŏphaengjŏng* 司法行政 (April 2010): 33-54.

<sup>87</sup> Yi Sŭng'il, p.26, 28, and 35; Chŏng Chusu, p.42.

<sup>88</sup> Chŏng Chusu, p.36.

Nevertheless, there were misinterpretations and confusion about some concepts and Korean common law traditions, particularly concerning inheritance and the Korean family name system, which were necessary counterparts to the Japanese-style system in the beginning phase of the *minjök* law period.<sup>89</sup> Yet, through several law revisions, the Koreans soon began to accommodate to the Japanese style. Through a new census, the Japanese government-general of Korea was able to reorganize the Koreans and their families under the same system of population control as in metropolitan Japan. In this way, they were also able to improve the surveillance of their lives and to promote the goal of assimilating Koreans to be more like the Japanese.<sup>90</sup>

Han Yongun lived and died without a *minjök* and *hojök*. Why did he not register? According to an anecdote referred to as “Hojök ömnün ilsaeng” 戶籍 없는 一生 (Life without family registration), he was resolute, saying, “I am a Korean man (*Chosön saram*). I will not register my name in a register managed by *waenom* (a disparaging term for Japanese).”<sup>91</sup> A strong sense of anti-Japanese patriotic nationalism is speculated to have been the reason. The hearsay further informs us that as a result he faced various difficulties. His life was in danger, as he was excluded from legal protection during the entire colonial period. During the period of war, in particular, he was completely excluded from the state rationing system of commodities like food and rubber shoes. He could not send his beloved daughter (born in 1934) to school because she did not have a *hojök*.<sup>92</sup> It is told that he taught her himself, saying, “I will become a Jap’s citizen (*ilbonnöm-üi paeksöng*) over my dead body. I will not send her to a Japanese school, either.”<sup>93</sup>

According to this brief hearsay account, it was a very courageous and heroic act and evidence for an invincible national spirit when Han Yongun willfully refused to register. His steely determination probably deserves to be admired. However, some questions still remain unanswered. He was a man of flesh and blood. How could he live and survive without receiving rations in wartime or at any time in a colonial reality in which even many “registered” subjects barely managed to get by? Moreover, he was not a single man but a husband and the father of a family. How did he support his family? Was not his nationalist ideology victimizing the rest of his family, disregarding their own intentions? How did he himself express his view of *minjök/hojök* through his writing?

The issue of *minjök/hojök* was not overtly problematized or criticized by Han Yongun in his literature. In fact, it was not even one of the recurrent issues such as the Temple Order 寺刹領, which he constantly questioned in his

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<sup>89</sup> Yi Süng’il, pp.23 and 37; Chöng Chusu, p.34.

<sup>90</sup> Yi Süng’il, p.26.

<sup>91</sup> “Manhae-ga namgin ilhwa” 萬海가 남긴 逸話, Edited by Kim Kwanho in *Han Yongun chönjip* 6, p.378.

<sup>92</sup> He married Yu Sukwön in 1933. A daughter was born in 1934.

<sup>93</sup> *Han Yongun chönjip* 6, p.378.

writings. The biographical fact of his refusal of civil registration is only briefly hinted at in two of his literary works. The first is his early work *Nim-ŭi ch'immuk* (1926). In a poem in this collection, he poetically expressed this fact as the female narrator is in danger of being sexually assaulted and being deprived of her human rights due to her lack of civil registration.<sup>94</sup> The other is in a short passage from his last novel.

*Did you [Sunyŏng] ask me [Mrs. Song] what we can do with the civil registry? These days, if you don't have it, you can be murdered at any moment and you have nowhere to appeal. Wherever you go, whatever you do, nothing works without the paper. Therefore, you need it.*<sup>95</sup>

This is an excerpt from a conversation between Mrs. Song and the heroine in the beginning of this novel. The first thing Mrs. Song does after bringing the heroine to Seoul is to make a civil register for her. Sunyŏng, who has lived in the backcountry her whole life, has never heard of civil registry. Mrs. Song explains to her that it is indispensable to life. Without papers, nothing is possible. If the papers are not valid, one does not have basic human rights. Mrs. Song emphasizes the necessity and importance of civil registration to the ignorant heroine.

As in the poem, Han Yongun focuses here on how the *minjok/hojŏk* paper wields power over people (the Koreans), controlling their lives and safety, infringing on their basic human rights when they refuse. It is implicitly expressed that “unregistered” persons, like him, were not safeguarded by law and were in danger of losing their lives anytime. One literary difference is that in the poem, he showed some opposition (*hanguŏ*, 抗拒) against the colonial government’s control of the population through *minjŏk* and vented his emotional reactions, such as fury and self-pity. However, the quoted passage from the novel does not convey resistance or anger. Rather, it appears almost as propaganda, alerting people who were ignorant of or indifferent to the importance of civil registration, ironically, as Han himself never had such papers.

Apart from this one quote, Han Yongun does not again mention civil registry in this novel. However, *Pangmyŏng* needs further close examination with regard to that issue and, in particular, to unanswered questions about how he managed to live and support his family without registration and what was going on in his mind. This novel deals with various adversities faced by the heroine, but the main focus is on her relationship with Kim Taech’ŏl, once a praiseworthy savior to the heroine, now degenerated into an abhorrent prodigal. The heroine does not turn her back on him but instead performs acts

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<sup>94</sup> Poem “Tangsin-ŭl poassŭmnida” 당신을 보았습니다 Republished in *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 1, pp.57-58.

<sup>95</sup> *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 6, p.73

of self-sacrifice and shows compassion, in spite of humiliations, insults and rebukes. Surprisingly, it may be argued that this fictional story recounts Han Yongun's personal narrative.

One might disagree on this point because as Kwŏn Podŭrae points out, this novel took a real begging husband and wife whom Han Yongun witnessed in Sajik Park as a model.<sup>96</sup> Han's first attempt at the novel was *Huhoe*, but he failed and *Pangmyŏng* was his second attempt. However, although these two novels are based upon the same real story, there are many differences between them. While writing *Pangmyŏng*, Han added many other issues as we have discussed in this chapter. His personal narrative can be regarded as one of them. He was keenly aware of the long literary tradition that a man speaks through the mouth of a woman. Using the female persona, the male literati could talk about their personal stories and experiences as many Chinese poems as well as *sijo* and *kasa* show us. So, the heroine in this novel may be seen not only as a real woman or the symbolic body of the Korean nation but as an avatar of the male writer Han Yongun himself.

Seen in this way, Kim Taech'ŏl represents Han's benefactors, whereas the heroine represents Han himself, who was beholden to these benefactors for financial and material help. The problem was that those benefactors had "degenerated" and collaborated with the wartime colonial authorities. Thus, Han was stuck with a dilemma: whether he was morally bound to defend his degenerate benefactors or to turn his back on them and condemn them for political reasons. His obsessive overemphasis on the "repayment of kindness" indirectly informs us how deeply he was troubled, what his choice was, the answer between moral and political (nationalist) imperatives and how skillful he was in justifying his choices and actions.

It is not difficult to find evidence that there were a cluster of people who knew that Han Yongun was in difficult circumstances and helped him to survive (dramatized in this novel by the incident in which Sunyŏng is in danger of losing her life by accidentally falling into the sea but is saved by Kim Taech'ŏl). The construction of the house called *Simujang* (尋牛莊, Ox-searching Villa) is also a good example. As he confessed in a poem in *Nim-ŭi ch'immuk* (1926), Han did not have shelter to rest and he lived moving around until *Simujang* was prepared in 1933. Seeing that he took a wife and began a family, many of his acquaintances worried about his unsettled existence without a house and took the initiative to build him one. It is told that Pang Ŭngmo 方應謨 (the president of *Chosŏn ilbo*), Pak Kwang 朴珹, Song Chinu 宋鎭禹 (the president of *Tong'a ilbo*) and another businessman Hong Sunp'il gave financial support to him. The monk Kim Pyŏksan donated his land to him.<sup>97</sup> It would have been impossible

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<sup>96</sup> Kwŏn Podŭrae, *Yŏnae-ŭi sidae: 1920-nyŏndae ch'oban-ŭi munhwa-wa yuhaeng*, pp.225-231.

<sup>97</sup> Ko Ŭn 고은. *Han Yongun p'yŏngjon* 한용운 평전 (Seoul: Hyangyŏn, 2004), pp.341-344; "Manhae-wa Kyech'o Pang Ŭngmo sŏnsaeng" 만해와 계초 방응모 선생 in *Chosŏn Ilbo* (7 August 2007); *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 6, pp.365-366.

for Han Yongun to afford a tile-roofed house without their kind consideration and financial support. However, the existing nationalist narrative tends to underestimate the support of various people for Han Yongun and instead highlights the fact that *Simujang* was a house facing north because Han detested seeing the hated building of the General Government.<sup>98</sup>

Life became more difficult for Han Yongun during wartime. As mentioned previously, he was severely restricted in his activities and experienced inconveniences and safety problems. During the heat of war, he was excluded from the rationing of food and any kind of commodities. However, there were many donors who paid visits to him to present gifts or who sent gifts to him, although it is uncertain whether he accepted any of the offers or not. He certainly refused a huge amount of money from the Japanese colonial government and a wide stretch of land for free from the Chosŏn industrial bank because it was too closely tied to the colonial government.<sup>99</sup> Apart from these politically motivated offers, there were other donations made on humanitarian grounds from close colleagues such as Ch'oe Rin 崔麟. In this particular case, Han threw the money back at him in anger because Ch'oe had become a "pro-Japanese" collaborator.<sup>100</sup>

In this situation, publication fees earned from submitting his essays and novels to newspapers and magazines must have been an important source of income for Han Yongun to support his family. Yet, he could not do it alone. There were journalists and writers who saw his difficulties and offered him jobs. For example, chief and subordinate executives of *Chosŏn ilbo*, such as Pang Ŭngmo, Yi Kwangsu and Hong Myŏnghŭi, allowed him to publish a couple of serialized novels so that *Hŭkp'ung* (黑風, 1935), *Huhoe* (後悔, 1936), a translated version of the Chinese novel *Samgukchi* (三國志, 1940) as well as the novel *Pangmyŏng* were all issued in the newspapers they were connected with, supplying him with some income. Han contributed many more essays in those years to *Chosŏn ilbo*'s sister magazine *Chogwang* 朝光 (1935-1944).

The problem is that many of those businessmen, journalists, and writers Han Yongun owed his livelihood to turned toward collaboration with the Japanese around the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War. Once compassionate benefactors degenerated into archenemies, just as in *Pangmyŏng* Kim Taech'ŏl degenerates from a lifesaver into a depraved prodigal man, addicted to gold speculation and opium. Ch'oe Rin, who invited Han to participate in the March First Movement (1919), and Yi Kwangsu, who was a great help to him during novel writing as they discussed literature and

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<sup>98</sup> Apart from the donations, he also took a loan from a savings and loan association. This was arranged by his acquaintances, too. Regarding this, but some researchers assert that Han never took money from them but loan.

<sup>99</sup> "Sisihan simburŭm" 시시한 심부름" and "Nan kŭrŏngŏ morŭo" 난 그런 거 모르오" in *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 6, p.371.

<sup>100</sup> "Tŏrŏn ton" 더러운 돈, Ibid., pp.372-373.

Buddhist doctrines,<sup>101</sup> were all appointed to important posts in imperialist organizations for wartime mobilization.

In *Pangmyŏng*, Kim Taech'ŏl, who is involved in gold mining, is reminiscent of Han's enthusiastic backer, Pang Ŭngmo. As mentioned before, Pang was one of the most successful gold miners, and nicknamed the Gold King. As a millionaire, he had a very high profile in colonial Korea. However, he was not a simple *nouveau riche* who wasted his fortune on entertainment and pleasure. He took over the *Chosŏn ilbo* newspaper company when it was in financial difficulties and pumped in a huge sum of money (500,000 wŏn) in order to bring it up to working order. He established a scholarship for poor students and spent his fortune for education and social welfare services.<sup>102</sup> Han Yongun was one of the beneficiaries of Pang's charity work. However, as the president of a newspaper, Pang was involved in war mobilization and participated in imperialist associations, such as Chosŏn munyehoe (Society of Chosŏn Art and Literature, 朝鮮文藝會, 1937), Kungmin chŏngsin ch'ongdongwŏn Chosŏn yŏnmaeng (Chosŏn National Spirit Mobilization League, 國民精神總動員朝鮮聯盟, 1937), and Chosŏn imjŏn poguktan (Korean National Defense Association, 朝鮮臨戰保國團, 1941). He gave some speeches about homage to the Japanese Emperor, active contributions to the war effort, and enlistment in the Japanese army. Yet, compared with others, his collaborationist activities were limited, and perhaps unavoidable because of his post as the president of a newspaper. Even according to a strong nationalist perspective, he is considered as neither anti-Japanese nor pro-Japanese but more an opportunist than a pro-Japanese collaborator.<sup>103</sup>

Han Yongun's dilemma became more pronounced as his benefactors became more deeply engaged in wartime collaborationist activities. Could he simply put them to shame, scare them away, slap their faces, even go as far as regarding the living as dead and holding a symbolic funeral for them (as hearsay evidence claims)?<sup>104</sup> If he had really done this to them, he might have proved his own unchanged patriotic nationalism, but his conduct in this respect was somewhat problematic, because he rather indulged in personal accusations, defamation, and libel regarding their human dignity than providing constructive criticism targeting their "activities" related to government wartime propaganda. A bigger problem is that if he decided to break off his relationships with them and repudiate them, he himself would become an immoral and ill-mannered person, too easily forgetting their kindness and aid, and acting ungratefully. Conversely, if he remained faithful to them, he could have been misunderstood to be a sympathizer or defender of national betrayers and wartime collaborators. In a word, there were probably some tensions

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<sup>101</sup> "Ch'unwŏn-gwa Manhae" 春園斗萬海, Ibid., p.374.

<sup>102</sup> Chŏn Pongwan, *Hwanggŭmgwang sidae*, pp.198-209.

<sup>103</sup> Kim Hangmin, Chŏng Unhyŏn 김학민 정운현, *Ch'inilp'a choesanggi*, p.381.

<sup>104</sup> *Han Yongun chŏn* 6, pp.370-371 and 373-374.

between his ideals and reality and between politics (nation and nationalism) and morality (indebtedness to personal benefactors).

The hearsay episodes that are popularly accepted as truth are overtly weighted toward Han's preoccupation with the (Korean) nation and nationalism. However, this novel informs us about an alternative path for individuals and a moral life based upon his Buddhist conviction. The main themes, "repayment of kindness" and "compassion," which are so much stressed in this novel, are important clues to the answer. The heroine, who represents the writer, does not ignore Taech'öl or scare him away when he becomes a degenerate. Instead of breaking off the relationship, she embraces him with a compassionate heart and sacrifices herself to serve him out of gratitude. Using the high priest Tögam's speech, Han denounces people who feel grateful if they receive a favor but forget it soon without repaying the kindness.<sup>105</sup> He further explains that one might question if this sacrifice for the sake of an individual, especially for such a harmful, trouble-making person in society, is significant in comparison with the sacrifice for other, bigger entities such as society as a whole or one's country (*kukka*). His answer is that sacrifice for the sake of one's society and country is not bigger and that sacrifice for an individual is not smaller.<sup>106</sup> He adds that while repaying what one owes and showing mercy, one must not weigh the others' personality or circumstances. He makes it abundantly clear that it is an unchangeable and most important fact that one should be first faithful to individuals whom one owes one's life to, although those individuals now became degenerates (in the case of his benefactors, collaborators) and one might be reviled and get into trouble.<sup>107</sup>

On the basis of this speech it seems that Han Yongun does not hesitate to make decisions based upon his strong religious morality. That his decisions are based more on religious imperatives than on the political or national imperatives of one's nation, society and country is surprising if one regards him exclusively as a national hero. According to Han, repaying kindness and compassion are fundamental principles that should be followed under all circumstances, which means that even though his benefactors become degenerates, he must not forget what he owes them and try to repay their kindness out of gratitude and compassion. He must remain loyal to his benefactors, even one single individual, a choice that involves a risk. If he maintains contact with his politically converted benefactors, he may be regarded as one of them, or be misunderstood, humiliated, and spiritually tortured, as the heroine in the novel is for serving the man who saved her life. The choice might ruin his fame and reputation as well. Nonetheless, like the heroine in the novel, he is resolute in his determination to be first and foremost a moral man before a politically lofty nationalist.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.289.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.288.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Han's experience of the dilemma between moral and political (nationalist) imperatives and an alternative individual religious morality is surprisingly very much akin to that of the alleged pro-Japanese collaborator Yi Kwangsu. As will be discussed in the following chapters in greater detail, Yi was also faced with a quandary in the midst of the Suyang tonguhoe Incident: whether to save the lives of individuals or to be loyal to the (Korean) nation. His choice for humanity before nation and nationalism was based upon his strong Buddhist beliefs. It was to follow the Buddhist moral imperative to sacrifice oneself to save a living being. While doing so, he must have known that he risked losing his fame and his reputation as a national leader. Han Yongun and Yi Kwangsu, who are assumed to be totally different figures due to their political positions, one the uncompromising nationalist and the other a pro-Japanese collaborator, to a great extent shared similar experiences, inner conflicts, and even Buddhist-inspired choices.

However, the conflict, distress and political pressure Yi Kwangsu had to face, as revealed in the concrete historical incident of Suyang tonguhoe and vividly dramatized in his novels, were probably more violent and serious than what Han Yongun experienced. Yi's choice was more extreme than Han's because Yi was inclined to skepticism and criticism of the Korean nation and nationalism, and very actively took part in collaborationist activities. Despite his firm religious beliefs and the influence of religion on his life, Han did not criticize or deny the nation or the patriotic national spirit, or change his name a Japanese one. Nor did he participate in any mobilization campaign or political organization. Han did not collaborate with the wartime government, but he remained loyal to benefactors friendly to the authorities who collaborated with the colonial government. His contributions to print media such as *Chosŏn ilbo* and *Chogwang* during wartime are the outcome of this.

It is an exaggeration to denounce these publications as "pro-Japanese" from the outset and by their very nature. What we can say is that from 1936 on, wartime collaboration became general practice for the newspaper company that published the *Chosŏn ilbo* and *Chogwang*. Many alleged collaborators joined the company and published propaganda essays in the newspaper and its sister magazine. These were the media for which Han Yongun wrote. As discussed in Chapter One, many of his publications in these print media are controversial. In 1940, when the wartime colonial government forced *Chosŏn ilbo* to shut down, he wrote a poem of consolation all of the associates of the newspaper company. His commitment to *Chosŏn ilbo* and *Chogwang* is totally incomprehensible to nationalist scholarship. According to their vision, he had to make a clean break with those "tainted" print media and adopt a more critical attitude toward them. The present-day *Chosŏn ilbo* newspaper company conversely claims Han Yongun's involvement as strong evidence that the principle of collaboration was merely a disguise to run the company amid pressure by the wartime

government and that their newspaper always served the Korean nation, as did Han Yongun.<sup>108</sup>

## Conclusion

Han Yongun was not a heroic hermit living a life shielded from colonial society. He lived together with his contemporaries, observing and experiencing the vicissitudes of colonial history. His fiction was an important medium for him to make a living and to speak to the public, and on behalf of them, in turbulent times of war. His reactions to wartime colonial society diverged from the popular single narrative of heroic nationalism. He showed more interest in the actual lived experience of various social groups than in the nation, the national spirit, and the nationalistic movement. His alternative views and diverse sociopolitical narratives were above all informed by Buddhist notions. Examples of this, such as ideas about self-sacrificing compassion and a sense of indebtedness, were in harmony with various wartime ideologies and propagandas. To us these notions provide important clues that help us detect a deeper level of his life experience and reveal the choices between religious moral values and politics he had to face in wartime colonial reality.

Han Yongun's fiction was not isolated from the historical context or the work of contemporary writers. In particular, Yi Kwangsu's Buddhist novels that were published around the same time invite comparisons. According to the conventional master narrative, Han and Yi should be completely different persons. One was an honorable national hero whereas the other was a mean-spirited betrayer of the nation and a "pro-Japanese" stooge. However, as I have briefly indicated, they experienced more or less the same existential dilemmas and to a great extent shared religious (Buddhist) and political ideas. Even, their choices were similar. It is obvious that Yi interacted with the wartime colonial authorities more closely, but at the same time he was more crafty and tactful in producing counter-discourses against the colonial discourses than Han. This I hope to show in the next two chapters.

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<sup>108</sup> Chosŏn ilbosa saryo yŏn'gusil 조선일보사 사료연구실, *Chosŏn ilbo saramdŭl: Ilche sidae* 조선일보사 람들: 일제시대 (Seoul: Raendŏm hausŭ chungang, 2005), pp.308-311.