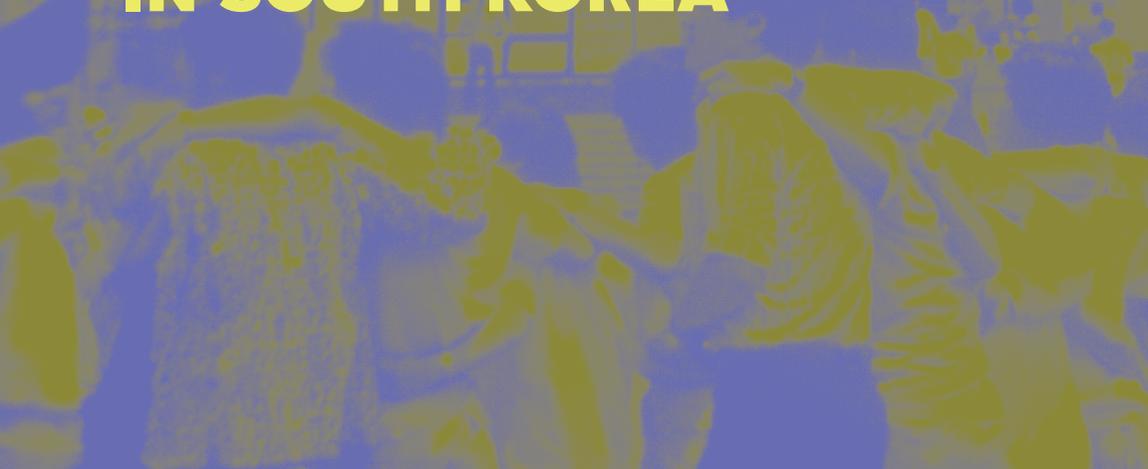


**SOHL LEE**

**THE  
MINJUNG  
ART  
MOVEMENT**

**DECOLONIZATION  
AND DEMOCRACY  
IN SOUTH KOREA**



**THE  
MINJUNG  
ART  
MOVEMENT**



**BUY**



# THE MINJUNG ART MOVEMENT

SOHL LEE

DECOLONIZATION  
AND DEMOCRACY  
IN SOUTH KOREA

(국립현대미술관 소장)

社 會

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## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

I use the McCune-Reischauer romanization for Korean, except for (1) artists and scholars with a preferred published spelling; (2) cities, towns, and well-known historical figures with official romanization (e.g., Seoul, Gwangju, Park Chung Hee); and (3) institutions, companies, or businesses with established romanization (e.g., National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea). For Korean authors with different spellings in English publications, I provide the McCune-Reischauer form in square brackets at first mention in the bibliography.

Names of East Asian origin appear family name first unless otherwise widely known.

All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first full-color memory of my childhood is precisely dated: September 17, 1988. I had just turned five, and the opening ceremony of the Seoul Olympics was unfolding on my family's twenty-eight-inch cathode-ray television. Intense early fall sunlight streamed through the veranda windows, heating the screen, where vivid national flags and uniforms beamed brightly—blazing, moving in synchrony, seemingly beyond the Cold War and into a new age of neoliberal prosperity.

But my most visceral childhood memory is neither visual nor fixed in time. Between 1988 and 1992, while my family lived near the Seoul National University campus, my mother's voice would often pierce a calm afternoon: "Sohl-a! Tear gas!" At her call, I would drop whatever I was doing—probably doodling or playing with my younger siblings—and help her shut the windows. Though authoritarian rule had officially ended in 1987, student protests on campus persisted, and tear gas remained the tool of choice for crowd control. The gas was always a beat faster than we were ready for. My runny nose carried a lingering fear. I don't remember the first or last time it happened—only that my body knew the routine.

In the peppered eyes of this child, politics appeared as excessive violence—congressmen's televised fistfights were inseparable from the sting of gas and whispered rumors of student activists fleeing police into our apartment complex. For the longest time, I thought the students themselves were tear-gassing my home (!!). Only much later did I begin to understand the history this book now attempts to engage. Or rather, it was the process of researching 1980s art and cultural activism that unearthed these memories. In conversations with artist and scholar friends who grew up in the same period, I came to realize my experience was not unique. For those of us raised in 1980s and '90s South Korea, inhaling tear gas was a shared, unspoken rite of passage—forgotten only until it returns, in gas or in memory.

The seeds of this book were planted in the first decade of the 2000s, amid South Korea's triumphant narratives of the Han River Miracle, the Seoul Olympics, the overcoming of the Asian financial crisis, and during a time when neoliberal survivalism saturated the air—just as noxious, I now believe, as the tear gas of my childhood. In 2008, 2016–17, 2024–25, and countless moments

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in between, people again stepped out of the comfort of their homes to ask fundamental questions about justice and democracy. The age of mass protest has returned, along with newly emergent aesthetics of politics.

As I write, memories of martial law in South Korea remain vivid—not from 1972 or 1980, but from a brief, chilling reappearance in December 2024. History is a reservoir: of dissenting voices, of activist tactics, of the fragile courage to gather against injustice and invent hope each day. It also bears the sediment of authoritarian aspirations, persistent and mutating. The frequencies of history—its rhythms, ruptures, and returns—have graced and interrupted these pages. They shaped this book, just as the act of writing became entangled with participating in street protests. To borrow Lisa Yoneyama’s words, this project became “an unlearning that critically unsettles the way we believe we know our history.”<sup>1</sup> Artists in this book model such labor of decolonization and democratization. Their work is not simply a historical document, but an invitation to relearn.

In this spirit, I hear the urgency in cultural theorist Yi Yöng-mi’s preface to the first major study of the *madanggük* movement—experimental theater’s counterpart to minjung art. “As modernity was experienced as rupture,” she writes, “we let paltry achievements take us by surprise and even repeat past errors. Isn’t this because we’ve lived like refugees—always on the run and not doing the important work of documentation?”<sup>2</sup> Her words echo across time. Against tales of larger-than-life heroes or state-led triumph, this book on South Korea’s democracy movement joins works like Yi’s in insisting that dissent must not be forgotten—or flattened—lest we risk each time starting all over again. We write so these histories get reignited, pulsating through our muscle memories.

WRITING AND RESEARCH require the world’s most precious resource: time. This book is steeped in the time of many people—mine and theirs.

My intellectual foundations were laid at the University of Rochester (2007–14), where I was trained in art history and visual cultural studies. Rachel Haidu taught me how to recognize a range of aesthetics of politics while being attuned to what delights most in art. Douglas Crimp showed me that life is a search for position—a journey of finding ways to articulate our desires. His work remains a compass. Eleana Kim, with her generosity and interdisciplinary clarity, helped me untangle years’ worth of ideas and field notes. Mentorship from Janet Berlo, Paul Duro, Bob Foster, and many others always felt timely and warm during Rochester’s long winters. The friendships and insights from my cohort, especially Bo Zheng, Shota Ogawa, Jessica Horton, and Lucy Mulroney, continue to sustain me. My curiosity for postcolonial discourse and institutional critique first

began in the classrooms of Dana Leibsohn and Fraser Ward at Smith College—a place that instilled a lasting passion for art and a conviction in critical thinking and liberal arts education.

The rhythm of unlearning and relearning unfolded in galleries, cafés, studios, curatorial offices, rallies, and funerals. A pivotal moment came during my time at the 2008 Gwangju Biennale, under Okwui Enwezor’s artistic direction. His work illuminated Korea’s postcolonial entanglements within global histories. Living briefly in Gwangju deepened my understanding of the 1980 uprising and its destructive afterlives. That year’s Biennale coincided with mass candlelight protests across South Korea—an uncanny initiation into the aesthetics and urgencies of present-day activism. With the guidance of friends and mentors like Soo Yon Lee, Hyunjin Kim, Suki Kim, Mihee Ahn, Yoonsuk Jung, Sunghye Lee, Namgyeong Hong, Eunyoung Park, Kim Jong-gil, Shin Chunghoon, and many others, I began to navigate the entangled histories of Korean art and politics.

Among the artists and critics featured in this book, I am especially indebted to Jung Jungyeob, whose reflections on the “integrity of art” shaped my understanding of minjung art’s enduring stakes. Conversations with her offered rare insights into the emotional work of activism and its multiple afterworlds. Equally essential has been Ch’oe Yöl’s early recognition of the fragility of movement ephemera; at his own expense, he photographed works in situ and safeguarded materials that might otherwise have vanished. His painstaking archival labor—now preserved in the MMCA Ch’oe Yöl collection—has been crucial for later researchers like myself to grasp the breadth and shifting conditions of minjung art. I was fortunate to speak with critic Sung Wan-kyung on multiple occasions between 2011 and his untimely passing from COVID in 2022. His ideas are interwoven throughout this book. These conversations offered not just nuanced historical memories but also critical insights and encouragement. At a funeral for critic Kim Yun-su in 2018, You Hong-june described this project as an effort to synthesize the situated positions of each movement participant—a challenge I carry. In a phone conversation, Hong Sung-dam described the effort to translate space-time-specific concepts central to the minjung art movement as nearly impossible but necessary.

This labor of cultural translation is never unidirectional. It has been nourished by the Korean studies community in the United States through conferences and presentations at Irvine, Columbia, Berkeley, Michigan, Rutgers, Princeton, and Harvard; by dissertation and manuscript seminars, special issues, and anthologies. I owe much to early encouragement from Nancy Abelmann, Namhee Lee, Kyung Hyun Kim, Theodore Hughes, Olga Fedo-

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To the thinkers, artists, and fellow travelers in global modernisms and global contemporary art—especially those grappling with the politics of translation and translocality—thank you. Conversations and exchanges of writing with Peggy Wang, Gemma Sharpe, Vivian Li, Christine Ho, Jung Joon Lee, Yang Wang, Chelsea Haines, Abigail Lapin Dardashti, Alison Miller, Amanda Wangwright, Doris Sung, Kyunghye Pyun, Asato Ikeda, and Chaeun Lee kept this work in dialogue. Reiko Tomii has always offered clarity and camaraderie. Joan Kee's writing and sharp insight have been a north star in thinking about how to present Korean art outside Korea. Ming Tiampo's steady belief and intellectual example continue to inspire. Jane DeBevoise has been not only a visionary presence in shaping the scene, but a coconspirator in welcoming Korean artists to New York.

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## INTRODUCTION

Around nine o'clock on the morning of July 9, 1987, a large funerary procession exited Yonsei University's front gate to find a crowd of almost 100,000 gathered in downtown Seoul. Leading the procession was a funerary portrait of the deceased student activist Lee Han Yeol. Roughly two meters tall, the painting was completed by a group of artists within a day, creating the resemblance based on Lee's student ID photo. The hyperrealist bust in black and white was set against an ominous bright yellow sky, where white clouds were outlined in thick black contours—a style akin to the vernacular aesthetics of traditional Korean brilliant-color paintings (figure I.1). By the time of the funeral, many South Koreans had heard Lee's name; he was the victim of the authoritarian regime's crackdown on pro-democracy protests that had taken place exactly a month before. Unlike the cases of other student activists, whose injuries and even deaths had been covered up, the sight of Lee's slumped body and blood-covered head amid a sea of tear gas was caught on camera by a photojournalist. The published photograph immediately spread the activist fervor nationwide, and Lee's death from the wound came several days after the military regime's June 29 Declaration, which pledged democratic reforms including the general's eventual resignation from presidency. Held at such a time of popular uprising and political transition, the funeral procession marked the first time that a large crowd was able to see Lee's face in full in the form of an upright portrait, just as his body was lying horizontally, being carried in the coffin covered with the South Korean national flag. The procession also included dozens of long flags in red, yellow, and green primary colors, reminiscent of the premodern period, when the appearance of such flags indicated the interruption of ordinary life by events like festivals and funerals.

In reimagining art as a medium rooted in the dissenting public, activist artists of the 1980s drew on the deep reservoirs of precolonial popular visual culture, reanimating them as politically charged expressions of the common people (*minjung*). This impulse coexisted with a figurative painterly style, references to nationalism, widespread reproduction and circulation of dissident images, and public gatherings that combined affective intensity, collective participation, and the strategic use of visual and material forms. Together, these

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FIGURE I.I. Yonsei University Main Gate at Lee Han Yeol's funeral on July 9, 1987.  
Photograph: Chu Li-Shi. Courtesy of Lee Han Yeol Memorial Museum.

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elements shaped the multi-decade formation of the dissident cultural movement known as minjung art—recognized by its practitioners as South Korea’s first homegrown, autochthonous art movement. The collective manifestation of dissent, mourning, and hope that had exploded during the country’s democratization movement was not simply represented in protest art and visual culture; art and culture were the very organizing principle of activism and the aspirations therein. This book centers these aesthetic and cultural aspects of South Korea’s protracted democratization movement (*minjuhwa undong*), also known as the people’s movement (*minjung undong*). It historicizes the emergence of minjung art, a strikingly new type of art and visual culture that was driven by artists who envisioned a new relationship between art and society. By the time of Lee Han Yeol’s funeral, “minjung art movement” (*minjung misul undong*) had become an umbrella term referring broadly to artistic activities that expressed democratic aspirations. While this South Korean social movement’s successful end was considered by some to occur in December 1987 (marked by the nation’s achievement of a direct presidential election with a whopping 89.2 percent voter turnout) or by others in 1993 (marked by Korea’s first democratic election of a nonmilitary civilian as president with an equally impressive voter turnout), few would disagree that South Korea thrust itself into the 1990s globalization wave and the new millennium with the rich historical experience of the minjung movement and its political culture.<sup>1</sup>

A compound of two Sino-Korean characters that refer to the common folk (*min*) and the masses (*jung*), the term *minjung* was conceived of during the early twentieth-century anticolonial resistance period to encapsulate an anticolonial subjectivity related to but distinct from the terms *proletariat* (considered to have a narrower focus on class) and *minjok* (which refers to the ethnonation).<sup>2</sup> In an instance of resurgence of the anticolonial movement spirit in decolonial politics, the term *minjung* only began to gain prominence in the postwar period as a reference to those subjected to homegrown dictatorship and the former and current imperial powers of twentieth-century East Asia—namely, Japan until 1945 and the United States during the global Cold War. This book seeks to fold the history of the prolonged postcolonial period into the history of the pro-democracy art movement. Art was at the center of the work of the cultural imaginary necessary for manifesting what I call the conjoint aspirations for decolonization and democracy.

Charting the art movement’s developments, beginning in the late 1960s and leading up to the late 1980s, I interrogate how debates about art, democracy, and postcolonial dilemmas were waged by a range of artists and critics, and I analyze the underlying tensions and discursive frameworks for such debates

as well as their global implications. The predicaments of democracy, decolonization, and overcoming Cold War divisions were not limited to either the Korean Peninsula or the postwar period. Rather, the South Korean minjung art movement opened up a radical decolonial questioning of democracy and its underpinning assumptions that extended transnationally and continues to resonate in the present. Insofar as the minjung art movement was a world-making project that required cultural productions to reshape the forms of the world given to us, this book, as the first in-depth art historical study about such a world-altering project, envisions a reflexive reshaping of the existing methods of understanding art so as to illuminate a decolonial and democratic epistemic expansion of modern and contemporary art.

### **Toward a New History of Minjung Art: Movement Culture and Interdisciplinarity**

I contend that the history of the minjung art movement was shaped by neither artists' intention and bravery nor what was in the painting, the infrastructure of visual protest culture, the development of new art methods and theories, or even the authoritarian state alone. Instead, history evolved as an entangled ecology in which all of these agents and components operated in tandem. This is why art criticism and art history's inclination to define minjung art solely by content (depictions of the oppressed), uniform style (figurative realism), or iconography (identification and explanation of source materials) is a misconception shared by many of its detractors and sympathizers alike. There was no ready-made formula, no artistic prototype for an ideal minjung art. What we now understand as the minjung art movement did not have a singular directive or narrative of development; its explosive nature was deeply rooted in the multiplicity of approaches to art that a diverse group of artists experimented with under the conditions of neocolonial export economy and undemocratic authoritarianism. Any impulse to summarize the art movement under the slogan "art of minjung, art by minjung, and art for minjung" is born out of a mishap of simplification or, at the very least, takes artists' intentions toward representation too literally.<sup>3</sup> It is important to know that by the early 1980s, the multidirectional expansion of the oppositional art scene had already produced a wide range of terms, among them "aesthetics of reality" (*hyönsiljuüi*), "art of life" (*sam üi misul*), "the new art movement" (*seroun misul undong*), "new figuration" (*sae kusang*), "critical realism" (*pip'anjök hyönsiljuüi* or *pip'anjök riöllijüm*), "national art" (*minjok misul*), "minjung arts" (*minjung yesul*), and "national minjung art" (*minjok minjung misul*), which collectively

referred to the rising tide of engaged art making that by the mid- to late 1980s had gained the nomenclature minjung art movement.

The operational unit of the artist collective was germane to this movement. Multiple artist collectives, each one with a different entry point to the movement, contributed to the formation of a dissenting art public. The very foundation of the minjung art movement was this newly formed public sphere constructed by the artist collectives and the slew of publications, exhibitions, workshops, and symposia that will be introduced in this book. Notably, even when a group of artists got together, there was no preconceived notion of how collaboration might work: The question of method was always an open one. No single artist, artwork, or artist collective alone can represent the breadth of the minjung art movement; there was no archetypal minjung art as such. This is why I seek to historicize the movement culture of minjung art. The history of the movement's aesthetics must recognize that a movement is always more than a sum of the objects and actions generated amid the moment of the movement itself. Likewise, each object, each moment, and their stories of conception, production, exhibition, and social manifestation open up a unique entry point to the art movement's political import in radical transformations of the society. As I synthesize multiple positions within the movement, the goal is not to arrive at a singular narrative of triumph or failure but to reconstruct the network of ideas and their multidirectional energies that were, like a living organism, contingent on rapidly changing historical circumstances. Prioritizing the many instances of unmet aspirations and continued dilemmas in the movement's history, I seek to articulate in each chapter the moments of exigency experienced by a diverse group of artists and artist collectives. In transforming aesthetics, aspirations, and agendas, these artists were able to move history toward previously unimaginable paths.

The history of the movement told in this book challenges the later canonization of minjung art, most notably established by the 1994 exhibition *15 Years of Minjung Art, 1980-1994* at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea. Sponsored by the state museum of the by-then democratic and civilian government, the exhibition signaled the opening of a new era in the relationship between the state and its people, defined by an embrace of the pro-democracy activist culture that had given rise to the regime and its legitimacy. A purported survey, the exhibition bracketed the movement's timeline to the period of 1980-94. In this chronology, the years 1980-84 were cast as the period when artist collectives began forming; the years 1985-89 as the period when art activism expanded and nationwide organizations, such as the minjung art movement's umbrella organization, the National Art Association

(Minjok misul hyöpyihoe, or Minmihyöp for short), formed; and the years 1990–94 as “the period when minjung art returned to the gallery . . . and individual creation was consolidated as artistic achievement.”<sup>4</sup> With these words, the exhibition’s narrative arc presumes a conclusion to the minjung art movement by, first, casting a reverted focus on individual authorship and the gallery as a privileged site of artistic achievement and, second, leaving out the still-vibrant site of labor activism that many artists continued to participate in well into the 1990s. Furthermore, the exhibition’s presentation of only a few site-contingent protest paintings diminishes the expansion of the very notion of art aspired to by many of the movement’s participants. Some critics called it the “funeral of minjung art,” a definitive temporal mark of the movement’s demise.<sup>5</sup> The most pernicious outcomes of the show were, I believe, the territorialization of minjung art as a tool for political empowerment that was reserved for only a few artists, the canonization of only a few paintings and their styles, and the sublimation of the existing battlefield to one between the so-called modernist faction and the minjung art faction, between a hegemonic narrative and an equally forceful counterhegemonic narrative of art making in South Korea.<sup>6</sup>

The 1994 retrospective exhibition catalog was filled with testimonies in defense of minjung art. Those writings in part reflected certain tendencies particular to 1980s writing on minjung art: impassioned and even self-righteous in tone and propagandistic in objective, given that the writers of the minjung art movement were always art critics and artists themselves who wrote on behalf of their positions with eagerness and desperation because there was no preexisting means of evaluating their burgeoning art practices. Most writings from the 1980s were time sensitive in nature and are therefore characteristically contingent on the authors’ political positions at the precise time of their conception. This temporal specificity, in addition to the lack of contextual information provided by the authors and the often fragmentary nature of the insights offered in the primary texts, therefore requires a historicization that places the varied positions against one another. We must also move beyond the practitioners’ categorization of minjung art, such as that of gallery art versus street art, or that promoted by Minmihyöp’s establishment of committees according to medium (prints, banners, comics, murals) and subject (workers and women).

Attempts to historicize the art movement have often struggled to grapple with the binaries that shaped the movement itself: between the state and dissident intellectuals, the conservative right and the progressive left, abstraction and figuration, modernism and minjung, or one minjung art group and another.

Since the advent of the new millennium, the most exciting Korean-language art historical scholarship on minjung art has resisted these binaries and an impulse to define the art movement in antagonistic terms. In viewing the post-Korean War period's art, art historian Kang T'ae-hüi has tested the rising tenets of postcolonialism, then new in South Korean art history and still rarely discussed, thereby considering aspects of neocolonial copying in modernism and anti-imperial resistance in minjung art as double manifestations of Korea's unequal contract with America's imperial power.<sup>7</sup> Kim Youngna has probed the commonplace investment in the so-called Korean tradition shared by abstract painters and minjung artists as a way to move beyond oppositional politics within the art world.<sup>8</sup> Yun Nan-jie has investigated the significance of the term *riöllijüm* (realism) for the minjung art movement and has shown how the movement opened up a potent space of heterogeneous mixture, wherein the practitioners' investment in *riöllijüm* should be interpreted "not as a singular style of realism but as a singular name of realism."<sup>9</sup> Shin Chunghoon has more recently read the movement's stated nemeses (state capitalism and its mass culture) not as forces of opposition but as sources of ambivalence. For instance, artists of the group Reality and Utterance were attracted to, as much as they criticized, the select elements of commercial mass culture that they invited into their pictorial space.<sup>10</sup> Other scholars in South Korea have rightly historicized the frequency with which androcentric nationalism has been problematically expressed within minjung art as a misogynistic representation of women, while acknowledging that minjung art simultaneously sprouted important origins of feminist thinking in postcolonial society.<sup>11</sup> While I engage with these new developments, this book expands on earlier—often article-length—scholarship in both depth and breath, situating minjung art's methodological and theoretical innovations within their global context and implications.<sup>12</sup> It joins a small but growing body of art historical scholarship on modern and contemporary Korean art history written in English.<sup>13</sup>

As established, the minjung art movement was part of an interdisciplinary driven activism; the shared sphere of cultural activism fostered collaboration whose cross-disciplinary nature was as much decolonizing (of colonial modern institutions of disciplinary divisions) as experimental (with direct participation in politics). In short, political radicality was not just in the work's content or the artist's intention but was achieved through an infrastructurally decolonial collaboration across fields previously categorized as separate following the colonial inception of so-called modern art, modern literature, and modern theater. Writing the first English-language art historical monograph on the minjung

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movement, then, engages with and expands the interdisciplinary study of Korea, understood as Korean studies or East Asian studies, that has itself long paid attention to the minjung movement's cross-pollination of fields and disciplines.<sup>14</sup> The work of cultural anthropologist Chungmoo Choi and historian Namhee Lee offer key theoretical approaches to the operation of the decolonial cultural imaginary, while situating Korea within the global postwar geopolitical landscape.

At the earliest academic symposium on the minjung movement hosted outside Korea—held in 1989 at the University of Indiana—the Korean-born American scholar Chungmoo Choi noted the minjung movement's manifestation not just as an intellectual discourse but as “a social praxis” that seeks to reconstruct popular culture, a site of reinterpreting hegemonic history and inventing counterhegemonic memory.<sup>15</sup> The cultural practice of the minjung movement became important for Choi in the early 1990s as she joined a slew of Marxist-oriented literary and cultural studies scholars critiquing the rise of postcolonialism in an increasingly depoliticized American academia as a replacement for the Third World (thus removing revolutionary possibilities once garnered in Third World politics). In furthering her case for “the necessity of the decolonization discourse in the truest sense of the word,” Choi situates South Korea's work for decolonization at the juncture of colonialism and the Cold War.<sup>16</sup> The *longue durée*, nonlinear temporality of South Korean postcoloniality speaks to what Pheng Cheah has more recently called “the multivalent complexity of colonial and postcolonial relations” in his study examining the experiences of the Sinosphere.<sup>17</sup> For Choi, the temporal rupture marked by the prefix in postcolonial signals a transformation rather than an overcoming or a break, which renders postcolonial South Korea “a space [that lies] between the empty signifier, ‘postcolonial,’ and the reality that it (mis)represents.”<sup>18</sup> Because the removal of the colonizer from the Korean Peninsula was facilitated by the Allies' victory over Japan in 1945, rather than being achieved by a homegrown anticolonial independence movement, the United States became a new occupier and imperialist force while also casting itself as the liberator of southern Korea (though not of northern Korea). Thus, as Choi explains, the rise of the South Korean government as a nation-state was at once interlinked with that of the international powers during the Cold War and dependent on denying its own people their popular sovereignty.<sup>19</sup>

Choi suggests that in contrast to the “old notion” of decolonization centered on a “restoration of the political and ideological sovereignty of a nation,” and thus bound by the realm of national sovereignty alone, South Korea's minjung movement was intent on decolonizing the “colonization of consciousness.”<sup>20</sup>

In other words, political decolonization was not enough; the work of cultural imagination had to be decolonized. While Choi's analysis of counterhegemonic cultural practices like the experimental open-air theater, called *madanggük*, serves as the basis of her theorization of the critical discourse of decolonization, it prompts me to ask how visual arts, in conjunction with theatrical performances and literature, functioned to decolonize the cultural imaginary and how exactly a decolonial cultural imaginary worked as and in tandem with the pro-democracy movement.<sup>21</sup>

In her definitive study of 1980s South Korean university student activism for democracy, Namhee Lee likewise considers the importance of the cultural imaginary in the conceptualization of *minjung*. Despite the ubiquitous deployment of the term *minjung*, there existed significant challenges to defining it. It was understood not as an existing category of identity defined in ethnoracially marked terms. Nor was it "an analytic concept that is materially or historically grounded": That is, it was not a Korean adaptation of the Marxist proletariat defined by economic status (even amid the surge of Marxist and neo-Marxist thought in 1980s student activism), nor does it translate seamlessly to the subaltern understood as a subject defined solely by oppression and circumvented representation.<sup>22</sup> Instead, the very challenges of defining *minjung* offered a source of conceptual and discursive power, and the process of "making *minjung*" bolstered the power of the social movement. As Lee notes, "The very abstraction and elasticity of the term required a constant shoring up of the counterimage of forces considered to be inimical to *minjung*: the military dictatorship, corporate conglomerates, and foreign powers. The combinations of exalting the *minjung* and otherizing these three forces constituted *minjung* discourses and practice."<sup>23</sup> Dissident intellectuals and cultural producers found a bottomless well for such counterimages in both the present moment and the historical past. History offered concrete, material evidence of a possible *minjung*-oriented world and became "a foundational source for creating or recovering subjectivity in the *minjung* movement." Most importantly, while *minjung* was shaped by history, it was also projected into the future via "those who are oppressed in the sociopolitical system but who are capable of rising up against it . . . thus [constituting] a true historical subjectivity." When *minjung*, a neologism invented at the turn of the previous century, rapidly gained traction in postwar and postcolonial South Korea, it did not merely repeat its prior connotations; rather, it called for the transformation of Korea's history as a malleable site of intervention from which its future could be reoriented. *Minjung* provided, as Lee states, "the site of intense longing for a 'utopian horizon' by intellectuals and university students and of contestation with the state."<sup>24</sup>

In relation to interdisciplinary engagement, this book's historical reassessment recuperates the performance-oriented, activist-generated practices that are often left out of the existing historicization of minjung art in art history. The 1990s canonization of the minjung art movement, based largely on artworks that had physically survived the 1980s, marginalized the ephemeral objects and activities that were central components of the movement's radical praxis. Each chapter reconstructs select situations in which these objects and actions came to life, demonstrating how the radical politics of multidirectional and interdisciplinary energy were activated by, and embedded in, minjung art practices. Starting in the late 1980s, artists used the term *hyŏnjang misul* (literally, "art of the site") to refer to these situated activist practices. While in the minjung art movement *hyŏnjang* often referred to protest sites or political gatherings, its meaning is contextual; in investigations, for instance, it denotes an accident or crime scene. What unites these usages is the emphasis on transformation: *Hyŏnjang* marks a site defined not by its fixed form or history, but by unfolding action.<sup>25</sup> Attending to the generative interplay between art objects and participating subjects at such sites—often producing outcomes beyond the artists' intentions—I refer to *hyŏnjang misul* as "site-contingent art" in this book.<sup>26</sup>

The recent resurfacing of primary archival materials on minjung art has benefited the primary research for this book, serving its goal of historicizing the movement's depth and breadth as a radical cultural formation. Many materials, including the artists' writings, manifestos, exhibition pamphlets, documentation of exhibitions and events, and especially the works themselves, have not fared well. If not destroyed or confiscated by the government, works were often discarded by artists themselves, particularly in the case of collective productions and *hyŏnjang misul*, either out of lack of interest in preservation or to avoid future persecution. As a case in point, the artworks and related documents confiscated from the *Power of the Twenties* show in 1985 were only recently returned to the artists and, following thirty-four years of obscurity, debuted to the public in a 2019 exhibition.<sup>27</sup> The private archives scattered among the homes of the participants are often neglected by their owners, many of whom have since left the art scene and feel less of an imperative to present their past publicly, and no public institution in Korea began collecting minjung art movement-related documents and ephemera until 2013.<sup>28</sup> Given these new archival conditions and the renewed investment in decolonial politics and democracy globally today, there has never been a better time to revisit, delineate, and theorize the radical aspirations for South Korea's decolonization and democratization in art.

## Toward an Art History of Decolonization and Democracy

This book advances four interlinked historical and methodological objectives. First, it interrogates how contemporary art history might recontextualize artistic production as integral to activist culture, collective struggle, and political justice. South Korea's pro-democracy movement was not only a resistance against authoritarian rule but also an active envisioning of a new form of collectivity rooted in the common people, *minjung*. To account for the indispensable role visual art played in articulating this emerging collective, it is hardly suitable to focus on individual artists as prime units of analysis. The case of the *minjung* art movement expands a largely underdeveloped conversation about the historical entanglement of artistic practice and cultural activism—one in which art is not merely interventionist but also transformative and revolutionary. Few art historical accounts of twentieth-century visual culture critically examine revolutionary formations. Notable exceptions include studies of the Russian avant-garde, Mexican muralism, the Indian Peoples' Theatre Association, socialist realism on the postwar Japanese left, AIDS activist art, and the visual culture surrounding the Occupy Movement, among others.<sup>29</sup>

*The Minjung Art Movement* considers a discussion of collectivity pushed to its limits, where the people and the individual are in a constant state of negotiation. In proposing a historical analysis of art whose very genesis and afterlife are deeply intertwined with the politics of uprisings, mass mobilizations, and transformative social actions, I focus on what I call movement culture. By this, I do not mean a cultural movement per se, but the culture of social movements: that is, the aesthetic form and operative structure of radical political struggle. Movement culture is not only a background that informs the social context for artistic production but also the foreground in which art takes shape. Its shifting occupation of these two positions vis-à-vis visual objects generates a dynamic energy for transformation in both art and the lived practice of decolonial democracy. The attention paid to the historical form of *minjung* art's movement culture is also inspired by Frantz Fanon's understanding of decolonization as "a historical process"—one that becomes intelligible only by attending to "the movements which give it historical form and content."<sup>30</sup>

The book's second methodological objective is to investigate the complex workings of nationalism, rather than to dismiss the concerns of the nation as parochially nativist or essentialist. On the one hand, the case of the *minjung* art movement demonstrates powerfully that the ideology of the ethnonation and the nationalist framework can serve as bases of social transformation and as important sites of imagined community through which antistate and alternative

forms of social belonging can be articulated.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, many scholars in and outside South Korea have pointed out that nationalism was also the commonality shared by the authoritarian state and the antistate movement. The minjung art movement's readiness to unify voices rather than recognize their diversity is a reflection, if an unwitting reproduction, of the authoritarian state's top-down anticommunist ethnonationalism under which these dissident activists were educated. The coalescence or simultaneous emergence of state-driven nationalism and bottom-up popular resistance is, as political theorist Pak Myŏng-rim observes, the key characteristic of nationalism in a postcolony.<sup>32</sup> In terms of aesthetic operation, several cases of minjung art, like certain large banner paintings that depict minjung as historical subjects, in part resemble state propaganda paintings, whose objective was to subjugate the masses.

While fully acknowledging this aesthetic convergence, I hope to illustrate how the relationship between nation and state was considered unstable, conceptualized by members of South Korea's democratization movement as distended, loose, and ultimately decoupled. Nation and state were often imagined in opposition to each other. This was a time and place in which the claims of popular sovereignty carried greater weight than the state's assertion of national sovereignty, and the subjectivity of minjung, the people, took precedence over the continuation of an illegitimate state propped up by the global Cold War order. Decolonization in culture was, above all, a decolonization of imagination, one that could only be conjured from below. Within this framework, the minjung-oriented nation would rise from below and from within as an anti-state that would replace the authoritarian state's illegitimate, undemocratic governing structure with a new constitution—as it did in 1987.

By accounting for such complex operations of nationalism in relation to the state in 1960s, '70s, and '80s Korea, I seek to identify the minjung art movement as a rare instance in twentieth-century art history wherein an art movement sought to engage both a state politics (democracy as a governing system, with elections and representatives, within a demarcated territory) and the ideals of popular sovereignty (democracy as social relations and sociality based on the ideals of equality and justice). Engaging with both fronts vitalized the art scene. Such an engagement with both realms of politics, however, goes against the accepted norms of art history as performed in capitalist society, and to a certain extent its affiliate disciplines in the arts as well, where the domain of politics granted to artistic imagination can only exist on the level of the individual, and individually isolated objects, within the safely guarded spaces of the artistic institution.<sup>33</sup> Here, we may remember that the foundation of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century European project of the nation-state, the

very unit of a democratic political system, rests upon two supports: the individualistic conception of rights and a state based on the representation of the nation.<sup>34</sup> It is hard to ignore the fact that modern and contemporary art history's almost exclusive preoccupation with the first support has always had as its backdrop—though unaddressed if not repressed—the second support, which buttresses the very institutional structures of art that reinforce existing power imbalances in the art world and society at large. The concept of the neo-avant-garde, central to North American and Western European interpretations of art and politics in the postwar period, has long been sequestered within, and used to uphold, the confined realm of art.<sup>35</sup> The move away from formalism and toward (post)structuralism during the 1970s has maintained the reductionist isolation of art and ultimately handed over the final word on it to the neoliberal market. In the field of art, the possibility of envisioning noncapitalist economic forms and nonstate political forms is closed precisely because the portal to radical interrogation is padlocked. How then can we reimagine a broad (not limiting) and radical (relating to the root) interrogation that questions the terms of state, nation, and democracy, in relation to the history of imperial nationalism and decolonial discontents?

The book's third methodological objective is to approach the question of democracy in contemporary art history from the entry point of decolonization and deimperialization. Off the table is any automatic equation of democracy with concepts like user-friendliness, free admission, and viewer participation—code words that stand in for public access. The question of justice is not achieved simply by increasing access to the existing institution of modern art, one that was from the start founded on the terms of imperialist inequity and prejudice. In this context, the notion of democracy and the operation of democratization acquired an increasing currency in the North American and Western European discursive economy of contemporary art theory starting in the 1990s, resulting in the proliferation, by the first decade of the 2000s, of terms like “new genre public art,” “participatory art,” “relational aesthetics,” “dialogical art,” “social turn,” “antagonism,” “socially engaged art,” and “social practice.”<sup>36</sup> In brief, this discursive economy appropriates, and is organized by, two theoretical lineages of political philosophy that themselves grappled with the operations of liberal democracy at the demise of the Cold War.

The first lineage concerns the post-structural, post-Marxist Gramscian notion of hegemony and is particularly identified with philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theorization of “radical democracy.” Interrogating the prevailing idea of democracy as a process of reaching consensus, concepts like agonism and antagonism are proposed as true reflections of social

life under radical democracy. When a society-wide revolution seems beyond the horizon (and unwanted due to its totalizing ramifications), this New Left model for democracy is one that sustains multiple voices as a “chain of equivalence” rather than under one singular voice.<sup>37</sup> In art historical scholarship, terms like *antagonism* and *dissensus* have provided a framework for understanding artworks that entail various forms of participation or that compel viewers to be more conscious of their own privileged positions in society. Artworks that engage immigrants or economically marginalized participants, for example, illustrate how the social is often revealed as fractured—even in moments of alliance building.<sup>38</sup> The second lineage concerns the reinvention of Jürgen Habermas’s public sphere theory among North American intellectuals at the tail end of the Cold War. Scholars like Nancy Fraser and Houston A. Baker Jr., while criticizing the Habermasian model for its exclusive focus on bourgeois, literate, male participants and privileging of written communication, saw value in expanding public sphere theory as it might provide a foundation for envisioning alternative models of democratic society beyond the horizon of neoliberal democracy.<sup>39</sup> In art historical adaptation, we see the rise of terms like “new genre public art” and “dialogical art,” where dialogues themselves (rather than art objects) are considered central to art’s engagement with the members of a public, and art’s facilitation of constructing a microcosm of a public sphere.<sup>40</sup>

Yet these artistic practices are invariably bound to global biennial circuits, or as public art projects they are fettered to funding from various government or development organizations. In short, these otherwise most vibrant analyses of art and democracy once again uphold the autonomous, privileged realm of art and therefore have limited bearing on direct challenges to state politics. Even in its attempt to address the prolonged crisis within liberal democracy, this discursive genealogy of art and democracy bars us from the radical politics that move beyond liberal democracy. This is why art historian Anthony Gardner reassesses this investment in art and democracy as an “aesthetic of democratization,” in which democracy serves as “contemporary art’s master signifier.”<sup>41</sup> The two lineages, or frameworks, also reflect contemporary art’s interpretation of Barthes’s “death of the author,” even while incorrectly assuming that the increased agency of the viewer is inherently virtuous. This diffusion of authorship—transferring agency from the artist to the viewer, from its supposedly illegitimate holder to its rightful owner—effectively vilifies the author, as if authorship were a form of property to be shared with others only at the author’s discretion. What we may need, above all, to think art and democracy together is what Walter D. Mignolo calls “decolonizing epistemology” or, more fully, “working toward epistemic decolonial democratization.”<sup>42</sup>

This book suggests a much-needed antidote to these limitations by taking (post)colonial conditions and the frailties of democracy therein as its starting point. One such intervention comes from Homi Bhabha, who proposes the phrase “democracy de-realized,” generating the evocative notion of “de-realization” from Bertolt Brecht’s concept of “distantiation.” The “power of democracy” for Bhabha is located in “its capacity for self-interrogation, and its translatability across traditions in the modern age.” Bhabha surmises, if “we attempt to de-realize democracy, by defamiliarizing its historical context and its political project, we recognize not its failure, but its frailty, its fraying edges or limits that impose their will of inclusion and exclusion on those who are considered—on the grounds of their race, culture, gender, or class—unworthy of the democratic process.”<sup>43</sup> This distinction between failure and frailty is significant. Failure upholds that the ideal is correct and the fault is at the level of implementation; resulting failures are only the aberrations (i.e., bad apples). To recognize democracy’s frailty actually puts a stop to the myth of innocence and triumph that the largest global empire, namely the United States, presents to the world.<sup>44</sup> Such myth-driven thinking underpins a developmentalist logic, exemplified in political science by scholars like Samuel Huntington, for whom South Korea—along with post-Soviet Eastern European countries and Asian nations such as the Philippines and Taiwan—serves as a prime case of the “third wave” of democracy. This wave, as this framework would have it, follows the “first wave” in nineteenth-century Western Europe and North America and “second wave” in the immediate aftermath of World War II.<sup>45</sup> But during the South Korean democracy movement the concept of democracy itself, alongside art and within art practices, was fundamentally reimagined rather than belatedly followed. Only when intellectuals, activists, artists, and the broader public began to recognize that the Euro-American version of liberal democracy was not the future they ought to pursue for South Korea did the future become untethered from the present and the journey of imagining a different democratic future begin.

To dream of a democratic society on South Korean soil during the twentieth century was to reimagine the very politics of democracy through the lens of decolonization. Within the *minjung* art movement, this reimagining took shape as a conceptual matrix of democracy, in which democracy was understood as both a historiographical investigation and a matter of epistemological justice. In artistic practice, this entailed engaging every aspect of art’s production, dissemination, exhibition, and consumption, thereby redefining the very concept of art itself. Central to this process was the recurring invocation of *minsok*—Korea’s precolonial cultural practices often translated as “folk”—as

a broad set of indigenous inspirations for new art, as elaborated in chapter 3. Resuscitating such noncolonial vernacular traditions aligns with what Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo describe as the decolonization of knowledge: “extrication” and “delinking” from the colonial matrix of power, coupled with “rebuilding and re-existing under new conditions and modes of existences that are your own.”<sup>46</sup> When practiced through the embodied learning and transmission of new *minsok* art—that is, minjung art that emerged within a popular, antiauthoritarian resistance movement—this work of rebuilding and re-existing enacts what anthropologist and anarchist David Graeber calls “prefigurative politics”: the realization of revolution’s end goals in the here-and-now of dissent, or what I theorize in chapter 4 as the “metonym of democracy.”<sup>47</sup>

Concurrently and equally important, this book enjoins us to view the ongoing journey of decolonization in art history from the entry point of an equally ongoing process of democratization.<sup>48</sup> Art historians, following scholars and theorists of postcolonial studies, recognize that decolonization is not a *fait accompli* at the moment of political independence. Yet what is entailed in the long process afterward is rarely discussed except as a space of postcoloniality, wherein the inescapability of the colonial modern epistemology of art as neocolonial operation is negotiated by each of the newly independent nation’s elites, whether at home or within the confines of a former imperial metropolis. While acknowledging the prevalent operation of postcolonial predicaments in the writing of art history, this book insists on the varied genealogies of postcolonial art across the world.<sup>49</sup> In addition to considering the deep temporal structure of postcoloniality that challenges academic periodization of Third World national liberation and transnational globalization, the book also offers a notable antidote to the danger of the discipline’s replicating what Pheng Cheah criticizes as “the unspoken spatiotemporal matrix of postcolonial studies.”<sup>50</sup> For Cheah, the generalization of British and French colonialism in the theorization of coloniality and postcolonial conditions retains the West-versus-non-West binary, thereby leaving out other forms of (post)colonial ideologies beyond a civilizing mission, especially when the postcolonies, like those in East and Southeast Asia, are deemed to have successfully replicated the developmentalist path to techno-economic growth and modernization. Just as (post)colonial operations are multivalent and complex, so are the lived experiences of the people negotiating those historical situations—and, most importantly for this book, their envisioning of decolonial cultural imaginaries and their hard work toward decolonial futures. Following Chungmoo Choi’s attention to the decolonization of culture as a fundamental process of South Korea’s pro-democracy movement, I ask what will happen if the art of a postcolony in East

Asia begins by asking the question of democracy and democratization; if the site of art becomes the very location in which the forms of politics are decolonized and the aesthetics of popular sovereignty are enacted; if the questions of aesthetics and those of politics are asked not only to critique neocolonial domination but to change the terms of their operation in the lived reality of many.

The book's fourth methodological objective is to examine the legacy of the global Cold War in art history by interrogating rather than embracing it as a matter-of-fact divisional mechanism. Postwar art history still operates largely within Cold War cartography. Its discursive and institutional developments are understood to have taken place mainly within the bloc, either capitalist or socialist, and rarely across blocs.<sup>51</sup> The divided world map reflects how the transnational exchange of art, artists, and ideas was determined by geopolitics. A paragon of this predicament is the case of the colonial Seoul-born diasporic artist Nam June Paik (1932–2006), who famously did not set foot in any Eastern European countries, despite invitations from Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland, for fear of losing the opportunity to one day return to his hometown.<sup>52</sup> Paik was right to be cautious, as South Korea under authoritarianism was itself a veritable microcosm of Cold War oppositions. In anticommunist South Korea, the complex battle over institutional hegemony and aesthetic dispositions was often misconstrued as an oversimplified rivalry between painterly styles of abstraction and figurative realism, with any call for the use of realism potentially eliciting the blanket charge of being a communist sympathizer. The activities of *minjung* artists readily fell victim to the Cold War's binary operation. In 1969, paintings intended for display as part of an inaugural exhibition by the artist coterie known as Reality Group were accused of stylistic proximity to the socialist realism of North Korea and censored as a result. As this book demonstrates, however, South Korea's decolonial democratic resistance can also be broadened to include a position that challenges the Cold War map itself.

Nevertheless, the complicated legacy of the Cold War within South Korean democratic politics must also be kept in mind. During the late 1980s' critique of national partition, there was a shared tendency among some to idealize North Korea as the legitimate Korea and as a ready-made alternative to South Korea. I am exceedingly mindful of the shortcomings in such a desire to find an alternative future within the binary of the Cold War. My historicization of the *minjung* art movement instead recognizes the decimation of political imaginations outside of binarism as another pernicious effect that the Cold War had on South Korean dissident artists. For this reason, I agree with Kim Jae-Yong, a literary critic and cultural activist of the pro-democracy movement, who notes that a true historicization of 1980s activism could begin only after the collapse

of the Eastern bloc had allowed the tides of socialist ideologies among 1980s South Korean university student activists to subside.<sup>53</sup> The de-Sovietization of the 1990s was as necessary as the anti-Americanism of the 1980s for the work of democratization in South Korea. Kim's assessment is similar to Kuan-hsing Chen's proposition that in East Asia decolonization and deimperialization could happen only after the Cold War, or what Chen calls "de-cold war."<sup>54</sup> Writing a minjung art history today is about overcoming the political ideologies of the Cold War that gave fierceness to the movement. Thus, the possibility of a decolonization redux in the post-Cold War period calls for a critical reassessment of the methodological and historiographical divides of the Cold War period that continue to shape the discipline of art history. By reopening the potential for decolonization—revived not as a repetition of postwar national liberation struggles or the nonaligned movement's resistance to capitalist and communist imperialisms, but as a critique that unleashes decolonial thinking beyond this geohistorical framing—this book invites a reconsideration of global contemporary art and its histories. In South Korea, a contemporary art practice that understands the world in coeval terms emerged from the aspiration for decolonial democracy and its lived manifestations.

In a similar vein, the minjung art movement asks us to reconsider the current demarcations of the post-Cold War period as opening the era to so-called global contemporary art. Propelled in part by globalization and research-based exhibitions, scholarship in art history since the 1990s has shown that the Eurocentric model of modern art history can no longer hold. Moved beyond pointing out the blind spots within previous art history texts, we are compelled to note the kinds of historiographical reorientations proposed by, among others, Delhi-based critic and curator Geeta Kapur. Considering the time prior to the 1990s, Kapur has rigorously critiqued Euro-American neo-avant-garde discourse and its reliance on temporal continuity across pre- and postwar periods, and from Paris to New York. For Kapur, such a model of art and politics is therefore set up to ignore the expansive spatial multiplicity of the avant-garde art projects unfolding outside that narrative.<sup>55</sup>

This book contributes to that reclaiming of multiplicity, taking on the project of revising the discipline's scope and methods and pursuing multiple modernities and multiple modernisms.<sup>56</sup> It follows the past decade's expansion of the art historical field in, for example, Ming Tiampo's "decentering of modernism" in the negotiated practice of internationalism for Gutai; Chika Okeke-Agulu's excavation of "postcolonial modernism" in postindependence Nigeria; Joan Kee's consideration of "chaotic input" for the "world-making" aspects of South Korean painters; Elizabeth Harney's "postcolonial agitation"

that historicizes the transnationality of political art making within and from Senegal; Sanjukta Sunderason's "partisan aesthetics" that investigates art and politics in Calcutta during India's prolonged decolonization; Reiko Tomii's consideration of "connections and resonances" for 1960s internationalism and postwar Japanese art; Christine I. Ho's theorization of the heterogeneous and cosmopolitan characteristics in the formation of socialist realism in the People's Republic of China as "an act of agency and expression of modernity"; Peggy Wang's microhistorical attention to material and visual references that offers a corrective to previous appraisals of "contemporary Chinese art"; If-tikhar Dadi's reading of the juncture between religion and modernism in Muslim South Asia and its diaspora across the last century's modernization and decolonization; and Sonal Khullar's exploration of "worldly affiliations" in Indian art between the 1930s and 1990s by crossing the temporal ruptures of 1947 as well as 1945.<sup>57</sup> Much of this growing list expands not only upon the covered time periods but also upon our sense of temporality, crossing premodern/modern and colonial/postcolonial divides and thereby redefining these very paradigms of modernity and coloniality. This book engages in the recent search for a global understanding of art history that traces the precise moments of transnational cultural exchange through institutions like capitalist culture industry and state-driven diplomacy, as well as those of the political ideologies of socialist international friendship and nonaligned movements. In doing so, *The Minjung Art Movement* gestures toward a new historiographical model for global art history, where transnational and translocal encounters between previously dislocated processes of reorientation are reactivated for a world picture that is less expansionist and more relational.<sup>58</sup>

The book locates within the minjung art movement the potential to envision such global connections across borders and regions through the movement's radical politics, dilemmas, and aspirations.<sup>59</sup> To that extent, it calls for the practice of interrogating the conjuncture of art and social transformation—in response to Kapur's more recent call to consider "the very frisson between poetics and politics" as a "conjunctural politics."<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the case of the minjung art movement asks us to rethink modern art historiography in more ways than one. To this end, this book traces how it asks us to liberate art history from the historico-geographically provincial if not epistemically parochial construct of Euro-American modernist autonomy in order to rewrite the twentieth-century history of modern and contemporary art from a radically decolonizing, collective-oriented perspective. A call for such liberation is an invitation to all those whose discursive and embodied dispositions are located in what is considered the Global North as much as in the Global South. Our journey

begins with recognizing the specific expressions, lexicons, and modalities with which South Korean cultural practitioners sculpted their perspective, and re-imagined their futurity, on their own terms.

### **A Tale of Two Minjung Art Movements: Artists, Works, and Sites of Struggle**

Before turning to the book's chapter outline, the following pages provide a brief history of minjung art. Dozens of artist collectives and hundreds of artists across the nation have claimed a connection to the minjung art movement, and its history is both culturally and interpersonally diverse, encompassing a disparate group of individuals working under the successive authoritarian regimes of General Park Chung Hee (1961–79) and General Chun Doo-hwan (1980–87).<sup>61</sup> For example, Choi Byung-soo (b. 1965), who was the designer and engineer of the large-scale protest art used during the 1987 summer uprising (including the aforementioned funerary portrait), was a middle-school dropout who worked odd jobs as a deliveryman and a carpenter. In contrast, Sung Wan-kyung (1944–2022)—a photo-based conceptual and prominent critic associated with minjung art—graduated from Seoul National University's prestigious art school and studied at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris on a French government scholarship in the early 1970s. The minjung art movement had no unified leadership, and any misconception that it was guided by a clear ideological vision should be dispelled. Its umbrella organization, *Min-mihyöp*, was established in 1985, which was relatively late for the movement, and it included over 120 founding members, multiple committees, and a range of differing viewpoints. Only in the late 1980s and the early 1990s did socialist leanings among some participants begin to cohere into something resembling a centralized ideological directive.<sup>62</sup>

The format of artist collectives emerged as the most prevalent method of navigating a period of political authoritarianism and social oppression; and yet, the gradual rise and organic formation of the minjung art movement as a loosely knit network of artists and artist collectives embracing a vision for a different society took many years to coalesce. To help make sense of this organic emergence, this section frames the history of the minjung art movement around two early artist collectives formed in 1979: *Reality and Utterance* (*Hyonsil kwa parön*) in Seoul and the *Gwangju Freedom Artists Association* (*Kwangju chayu misulin hyöpüihoe*) in Gwangju, each of which formed independently and without knowledge of the other. The origin stories of these two

collectives not only exemplify the divergent approaches to radical art making in operation at this time but also encapsulate the fissures and differences in political dispositions which would become clearer by the mid-1980s in ways that sustained the art movement's dilemmas and vibrant debate culture.

### *Reality and Utterance*

Reality and Utterance began when a dozen individuals—including critics such as Sung Wan-kyung, Wŏn Tong-sŏk (1938–2017), and Choe Min (1944–2019), and artists like Oh Yoon (1946–86), Kim Jungheun (b. 1946), and Joo Jaehwan (b. 1940)—gathered in Seoul in late September 1979. Most were men in their mid- to late thirties. Over the course of several months, they came to agree on the group's name and developed a mission statement. This mission statement expressed a shared interest in exploring the questions related to “an artist's consciousness and their encounters with reality [*hyŏnsil*].” For these artists and critics, the normative art world had removed itself from concerns of reality, whether the adopted practices were “conservative” (i.e., academic realism) or “avant-garde and experimental” (i.e., abstract painting, performance, and installations).<sup>63</sup> More than a comprehensive method of art making or even a style, the term *reality* therefore signals an antithesis to the existing art scene, a future alternative to the status quo. These critiques of the art world's institutional operations served as the group's launch pad. The artists listened carefully to critics like Kim Yun-su (1938–2018) and You Hong-june (b. 1949), whose writings emphasized that the colonial understanding of art (art for art's sake, or *simmijuŭi*) continued to prevail in postcolonial Korea, while at the same time the blind pursuit and copying of the latest overseas trends (in the name of internationalism or *kukjaejuŭi* under the US-led postwar world order) kept a considerable distance between artists and their surrounding reality.<sup>64</sup> The rare chance of exhibiting abroad, especially in international festivals like the Paris Biennale and the São Paulo Biennial, had since the 1960s been subjugated to the authoritarian state's zealous control of its citizens' contacts with the outside world, and this tarnished the act of art making with what critic and Reality and Utterance member Yun Bŏm-mo (b. 1950) called “atrocious acts” of nepotism and corruption.<sup>65</sup> In addition, the mid-1970s art market boom provided fertilizer for the careerism and commercialism of the prevailing art scene.<sup>66</sup> To remedy Korean contemporary art's “off-course path” (*pitnagan kwaejŏk*), as Sung Wan-kyung called it, necessitated an integration of the artist's here-and-now-grounded positionality into the art. Kim Yun-su waited with bated breath the new decade of the 1980s; though it began with a

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FIGURE 1.2. Kim Jungheun, *Marching with Tomboy*, 1980, color on magazine advertisement, 22.2 × 18.5 cm. Art Archives, Seoul Museum of Art. Courtesy of the artist.

“nondemocratization” (*piminjuhwa*) of the arts, there were artists “opening up their eyes to huge contradictions and seeing reality from their own perspective to recover reality.”<sup>67</sup>

There was a considerable difference in how each artist translated their desire to relocate the vector of referential direction from the state capital and the overseas art centers (Euro-America, Japan) to the artist’s immediate surroundings, as each hunted for new visual references that could be invited into their framework. In the case of *Marching with Tomboy*, a drawing submitted to the group’s inaugural exhibition catalog in the fall of 1980, Kim Jungheun used magazine advertisements as a new surface for art making (figure 1.2). Onto the shiny, crisp photographic surface of the full-color illustration for the newly launched fashion brand Tomboy, Kim’s coarse black outlines and expressive brushstrokes in diluted plum red and yellow ochre colors insert the unlikely figure of a farmer. The farmer’s baggy pants are rolled up for demanding labor in the rice fields, which Kim’s broad strokes conjure out of the original sleek

background. At the time, the tapered trousers and oversized jackets worn by the two tall models had been promoted as the so-called young casual style, a youthful, activity-ready style distinct from the miniskirts and custom-made formal attire that had been popular in 1970s Korea. And yet, in a scene where patches of rice field are divided with levees and faraway mountains mark the horizon in ways that recall the quintessentially Korean agricultural landscape, it is the models with their ankle boots and T-string sandals who are out of place, and not the farmer in his rubber sandals. Kim would soon develop such a drawing into a series of paintings featuring a farmer as an icon.

Kim was neither alone in using advertisements as visual reference and physical material for art, nor unique in pressing on the juxtaposition between consumption and production, between the city and the countryside, with the moralistic value assigned to the social agents of (male) farmer and worker. In rendering them in such figurative representations, these artists gave a nod to the rise of “national literature” (*minjok munhak*), itself a nod to Third World literature. Its foremost champion, the literary quarterly *Creation and Criticism* (*Changjak kwa pip'yŏng*), launched in 1966, was read avidly by most Reality and Utterance members; the quarterly also published writings on Korean history with the “national historical view” (*minjok sagwan*), a revisionist perspective on the rise that viewed the common people as the true subjects shaping Korean history. It was here that, in the early 1970s, art critic Kim Yun-su published essays exploring his proposal of “national art” (*minjok misul*) as an alternative to modernism (or transliterated as *modŏnijŭm*), which he considered to be perpetuating a (neo)colonial consciousness in Korean art history. The connection between art producers and the literary field was notable and long-lasting, as is further explored in chapters 1 and 2. Another member artist, Oh Yoon, was a longtime collaborator of the dissident poet laureate Kim Chi-ha (1941–2022) and designed book covers for oppositional writers that featured his characteristically condensed, coarse, decisively carved woodcut prints of mostly singular human figures or a small group setting (figure I.3). The language of figuration was such a common thread linking the artists of Reality and Utterance that critic Kim Yun-su would be inspired to write, in 1981, about the rise of new figuration (*sae kusang*) as a notable new wave. Regardless, the art world’s response was not kind. In October 1980, on the day their inaugural exhibition was set to open, the state-run gallery the group had rented cut off the electricity and canceled the event.<sup>68</sup> The artists scrambled to find another venue to hold an exhibition a month later, but the art world remained unmoved, with one of its leading critics, Kim In-hwan, writing that the works were laden with “shortcomings in plasticity,” a blanket charge and denigration.<sup>69</sup>

# 일하는 아이들

농촌 아이들의 글 277편

이오덕 엮음 청년사 펴냄



FIGURE 1.3. Oh Yoon, woodcut print as book cover, Yi O-dök, ed., *Children at Work* (Seoul: Ch'öngnyönsa, 1978). Courtesy of the Oh Yoon Estate.

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### *Gwangju Freedom Artists Association*

By contrast, the artists of the Gwangju Freedom Artists Association elected to cancel their own inaugural standalone group exhibition and never pursued another—an explicitly political decision for the young artists of the collective. Like Reality and Utterance, the Gwangju Freedom Artists Association consisted of a group of artists who had expressed frustration with the current state of the art world, and these artists also came together in late 1979. Altogether, seven artists in their early twenties, including Hong Sung-dam (b. 1955) and Ch'oe Yöl (b. 1956), penned a manifesto, in which they wrote, “Artists should always approach the concreteness of the situation, not pursue the vain.”<sup>70</sup> But right before the opening of their exhibition in May 1980, their hometown was swept up in what is known as the Gwangju Uprising. Between May 18 and May 27, what began as a peaceful march against the new junta was met with violent counterinsurgent tactics, carried out by the state and condoned, if not outright approved of, by the United States.<sup>71</sup> The city was cut off from the rest of the nation, both roads and telephone lines, and the state’s propensity for shooting at anyone out in public resulted in an estimated several hundred casualties. As the situation grew progressively more dire, Hong joined the citizen army who guarded the makeshift morgue, shared food, and made pamphlets about survival tactics and latest developments in the besieged city. His skills as an artist facilitated his participation in the formation of an alternative media outlet, one operating against the state-sanctioned news media that vilified citizens as members of an unruly mob. The contrast between Hong’s initial plan—that is, holding an inaugural exhibition of his newly launched artist group—and what he ended up doing is a powerful reminder of how a conviction in the power of visual materials can arise from the urgency of lived political realities.

Upon the conclusion of this state-sanctioned atrocity, Hong soon joined another battle. In the artist’s words, it was a “struggle over memory” (*kiök üi t’ujaeng*), a hard battle to “expose the truth” of what happened and “punish those responsible.”<sup>72</sup> Due to the state’s unrelenting censorship of photographs taken during the massacre, Hong was called upon to make images from his memories of on-the-ground experiences, so that said images could be sent outside the confines of Gwangju to spread the truth. In 1981, Hong began to meet the increasing demand for these images by employing a reproducible medium: monochrome woodcut or linoleum prints, replicated with the assistance of other artists who helped to print dozens, if not hundreds, of these images at a time. One of the first images Hong carved was *Blood Tear*, a linoleum print that visualizes a scene of violence and victimhood (figure I.4). While the eyes



FIGURE 1.4. Hong Sung-dam, *May Print: Blood Tear 3*, 1983, woodcut print, 23 × 29.5 cm. Collection of the Gwangju Museum of Art. Courtesy of the artist.

that saw the streets of Gwangju running with blood might have shed a “blood tear,” the image also calls attention to the ongoing battle in which citizen activists had been mobilized to fight. Throughout the 1980s, the divide between those who condoned or enabled authoritarianism and those who resisted it was a battleground for memory, truth, and justice. While Hong was likely familiar with Reality and Utterance member Oh Yoon’s woodcut book cover designs, the direction of his work, culminating in the fifty-print series *May* (1981–89), reflected a different kind of dissident public sphere on the rise at the time and its correlate aesthetics.

Whereas Oh in the late 1960s and early 1970s in fact looked toward Mexican prints by José Guadalupe Posada, none of these South Korean artists working in the 1980s had access to Korea’s own history of the use and widespread propagation of woodcuts among the Korean Artists Proletariat Federation active in the 1920s—largely unknown until the ban on the circulation of information about early twentieth-century Korean communists was lifted in 1989.<sup>73</sup> It is also notable that only in 1983–84 did the Korean art scene begin

to see a limited circulation of examples from the early twentieth-century Chinese woodcut movement, writings by Lu Xun (1881–1936), and the German Expressionist prints of Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), which served as precious and inspiring evidence that revolutionary art had multiple, not solely Western, genealogies.<sup>74</sup> In the case of Hong's *May* series in particular, it was a willing audience emerging out of the strong opposition to the new military regime's use of force that demanded prints like *Blood Tear*, and that audience was amplified and solidified by the circulation of such images.

One of the most cherished and sought-after prints from the *May* series is *Utopia* (*Taedong saesang*, literally, “the opening of a new world”), carved in 1984 (figure I.5). Hong was asked to make an image that would celebrate the launch of the Gwangju branch of the newly inaugurated antistate, pro-democracy organization Alliance of Youth for the Democracy Movement (Minjuhwa undong ch'ongyŏn yŏnhap), which, following its inauguration in 1983 in Seoul, participated in a new phase of pro-democracy activism during 1983–84. In Hong's two-part composition, the upper left quadrant shows a truck filled with a citizens' army, their rifles lifted in the air. The right bottom quadrant is anchored by a woman with a tray, who represents the many women who were quick to offer food, such as rice balls, and fed those isolated in the city center during the conflict. All of the figures in the scene beam with wide smiles. This is a collective built on compassion and joy, as much as blood and death, and it represents a utopian world emerging from the common struggle in Gwangju—a visualization of the self-generated space of the commons that sociologist Jung-woon Choi later theorized as “the absolute community.”<sup>75</sup> The careful avoidance of linear perspective and singular viewpoint is a distinctive characteristic of the print. Not only does the truck float in midair, forming a circular composition with the rest of the pictorial elements, its scale is miniaturized so as to emphasize the human figures. In the absence of a firm ground on which to stand, it is the people themselves who form a new ground of the commons. Furthermore, Hong draws on *chudaechongso*, a premodern pictorial convention in which the scale of a figure reflects its significance, to highlight the woman distributing food to the citizen fighters. The print thus reflects an effort to adapt precolonial visual cultural languages to the art of a new era.

The Gwangju Freedom Artists Association notably rejected professional skills, seeking instead to expand art production beyond the bounds of formally trained artists. In the early fall of 1983, Hong and his fellow artists in Gwangju launched the Citizen Art School, at which the people of Gwangju were invited to learn printmaking and produce images about their everyday lives and their experiences of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising. This form of educational platform,



FIGURE 1.5. Hong Sung-dam, *May Print: Utopia*, 1984, woodcut print, 41.8 × 55.5 cm. Collection of the Gwangju Museum of Art. Courtesy of the artist.

which included lessons on the vernacular folk cultures of precolonial Korea, subsequently spread to several other cities. The predilection for precolonial visual language, a collective approach to art making, and the principle of art as a tool for the many were also mainstays of another group named Turǒng, active in the Seoul metropolitan area starting in 1982. Later, Turǒng’s member and critic Ra Wǒn-sik would characterize the two collectives together as enacting “art activism below” (*mit’ǔrobot’ǒ ǔi misul munhwa undong*).<sup>76</sup>

*On the Verge of Life or Death*, a 1984 painting by Turǒng’s founding member Lee Kiyeon (b. 1957), exemplifies art making as both activism and ethical dilemma (figure 1.6). Lee sought to convey the “weight of sound” in the words of a factory worker and mother of two—the painting’s central figure—who described her life with the titular phrase after her husband was fired for unionizing.<sup>77</sup> To enfold the many stories of workers and the broader emergence of South Korea’s labor activism, Lee adopted the pictorial method of *chudae-chongso* and the multiepisode narrative format of Buddhist ritual painting, which integrates past, present, and future within a single pictorial framework. Yet Lee remained ambivalent about the work. While it aimed to amplify collective voices,



FIGURE 1.6. Lee Kiyoon, *On the Verge of Life or Death*, 1984, color, paper collage, and ink on paper, hanging scroll, image: 120.5 × 93 cm; scroll: 194.5 × 104.7 cm. Collection of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea. Courtesy of the artist.

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it was ultimately an individually authored piece and was at odds with Turǒng's commitment to collective production. This tension was not just ideological but practical, as domestic labor and childcare limited her ability to collaborate with other Turǒng members that year. The painting's size further reflects the material constraints of its making—determined by the dimensions of her cramped living space in a Seoul shantytown, where she lived with her newborn child and activist husband.<sup>78</sup> As was often the case for activist artists, Lee's economic precarity mirrored that of the workers she sought to depict, underscoring her artistic and political proximity to them.

### *Peak Years: The Mid- to Late 1980s*

By the mid-1980s, the two distinctive approaches to pro-democracy and decolonial art making had become clear to its practitioners. Broadly speaking, the division was drawn along the lines of age and generation (members of Reality and Utterance were mostly born in the 1940s, whereas artists in Gwangju and Turǒng were born in the 1950s and 1960s), concepts of authorship (individual authorship for producing discrete artworks versus collective authorship, where names are often not noted), and sites of exhibition (art galleries versus activist sites). The debates around the divergence grew in the second half of the 1980s, using terms such as “critical realism” (*pip'anjök hyönsiljuüi* or *pip'anjök riöllijüm*) to refer to paintings by those like the Reality and Utterance members and “minjung realism” (*minjungjök riöllijüm*) or “revolutionary realism” (*pyönh yokchök riöllijüm*) for the more activist-oriented artists.<sup>79</sup> Early examples of revolutionary realism were the aforementioned print series *May*, which, if not given away or sold for fundraising, were pasted on walls at activist events and sometimes hung outdoors between telephone poles and trees.<sup>80</sup> Art filled the open spaces between built structures; it literally constructed new sites of sociality and affect as it left the familiar institution of white walls.

The increasingly vibrant protest culture of nationwide antiauthoritarian dissent compelled these young artists to make decisive choices, for art was considered “a matter of the artist's worldview and ideology.”<sup>81</sup> It was not the artists in groups like Reality and Utterance, but those in the Gwangju Freedom Artists Association and Turǒng, who drew inspiration from Buddhist painting formats for mass outdoor gatherings to develop a new form of large-scale image-making called *kölgae kürim* (literally, “hanging picture”). This format would soon prove central to *hyönjang misul* (“site-contingent art”) and to the visual aesthetics of mass protest in the years that followed. In the matter of the expanded notion of art, however, there was little disagreement between the two broadly defined factions.<sup>82</sup> Critic Sung Wan-kyung thought highly of the

infrastructural expansion into art education and cultural activism pioneered by the Gwangju artists and others. Yet, as he expressed in 1984, Sung was skeptical of how effectively icons and pictorial conventions from vernacular Korean traditions could speak to the audience of present-day South Korea, which was already deeply entrenched in the cultural infrastructure of industrial society.<sup>83</sup> Whether or not to incorporate precolonial visual forms into the democratic and decolonial aesthetic was thus a thorny subject.

While the methodological and theoretical concerns around minjung art's direction generated heated debates, some artists took a more fluid approach, and by 1987 certain productions of *kŏlgae kŭrim* were more connected to their sitedness than the initial inspiration of precolonial Buddhist painting had been. Artists like Kim Insoon (b. 1941) navigated the so-called categories of critical realism and revolutionary realism, shifting between the gallery and the rally without perceiving any contradiction. A graduate from Ewha Womans University's art school, Kim only returned to art making in her mid-forties after reading critic Kim Yun-su's call to engage with reality in art.<sup>84</sup> Her initial paintings from 1985–86 were individually authored and faithful to characteristics of critical realism, with a particular focus on her feminist critique of the gendered social reality that had caused the gap in her career. At the same time, she quickly began to practice what may be considered exemplary minjung realism or revolutionary realism. A wall-size painting, *Let's March as One Until the Dawn of Liberation Rises* (*Haebang ūi haet saebyōgi ttōorŭl ttaekkaji hana toō naagase*) was completed in early July 1987 at the Myungdong Cathedral during the Citizen Festival for Democracy and Against Tear Gas rally, convened by the United Autonomous Women's Association (Yōsōng danch'e yōnhap) (figure I.7).<sup>85</sup> Under Kim's direction, five out of a dozen women artists who had recently formed the Women's Committee within Minmihyōp worked together to picture a utopian landscape of equality, in which the hardships and euphoric moments of the daily rhythm surround the central figure of a female dancer. The outline drawing set the stage for citizens and event participants to collectively color the picture; it was then hung outdoors for the duration of the event. Participating in collective production did not mean an outright dismissal of individual art making. Kim also kept her individual practice going, and she was not unique in that sense. Among her colleagues, Jung Jungyeob (b. 1962), a member of both Turōng and the Women's Committee, not only drafted the aforementioned picture at the Myungdong Cathedral but also honed her skills at woodblock prints. In an exhibition produced in collaboration with an all-women cast of writers and women and gender studies scholars, then a nascent field of study in South Korea, Jung rendered worker-turned-poet Pak



FIGURE 1.7. Women's Committee of Minmihyöp (Yun Suknam, Kim Chong-rye, Kim Insoon, Jung Jungyeob, Ch'oe Kyöng-suk, Ku Sön-hoe), *Let's March as One Until the Dawn of Liberation Rises*, at Myungdong Cathedral, Seoul, July 8–11, 1987, acrylic on fabric. Work no longer extant. Courtesy of Art Archives, Seoul Museum of Art.

No-hae's self-critical reflection on the unequal relationship between productive and reproductive labor as a scene of a husband and a wife attending to housework together (figure 1.8).<sup>86</sup>

By the late 1980s, as state repression intensified, the distribution of artwork often shaped its political meaning beyond the artist's intent. A key case is Shin Hakchul's *Rice Planting* (1987), which led to his arrest and three-month imprisonment in 1989 (figure 1.9). The painting envisions a rural utopia inspired by his hometown, known for its peach orchards, where farmers labor in harmony, pushing aside a mound of discarded imperialist symbols—Uncle Sam, nuclear weapons, tanks, and Japanese figures. At the top, Mount Paektu, the highest peak on the Korean Peninsula, located in North Korea, symbolizes a future reunified Korea. Initially exhibited in a gallery, the painting took on new political weight when a university student activist group reproduced it on folding fans two years later. The appraisal submitted to the court by the state-run Institute of Anticommunism alleged that the work glorified North Korea while portraying the South as a garbage heap, leading to a charge of sedition.<sup>87</sup> The painting was damaged during the legal proceedings, and a repainted 1993

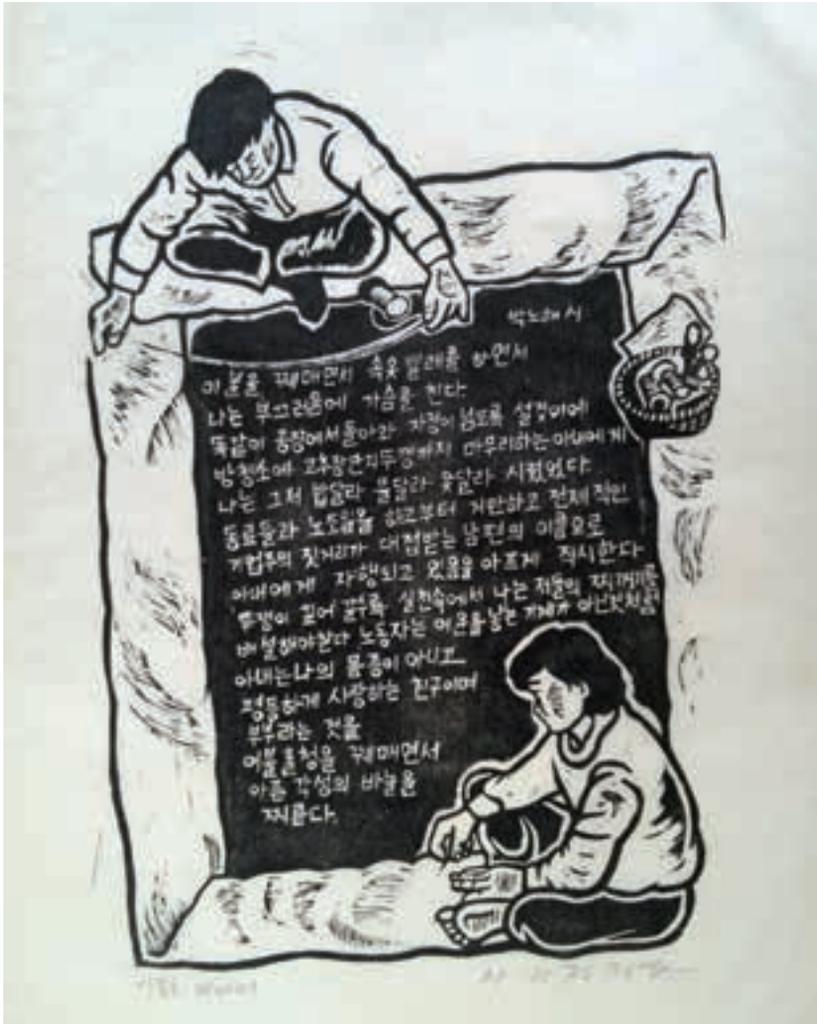


FIGURE 1.8. Jung Jungyeob, *While Sewing the Quilt Cover*, 1988, woodcut print on paper, 55 × 40 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy of the artist. The text of the poem reads: “While sewing the quilt cover and washing my underwear, I feel ashamed. To my wife—who comes home from work late, like me, but stays up past midnight doing the dishes, cleaning the house, even refilling the chili paste jar—I once called out for food, water, clothes. Since I began working with my colleagues on union matters, I’ve come to see—painfully—that the boss’s arrogance and authoritarian ways have been carried out against my wife under the banner of a respectable husband. As the struggle deepens, through practice, I try to purge their filth. Just as workers are not machines for profit, my wife is not my servant, but my dear friend, my equal partner. I sew the quilt cover and prick myself with the needle of awakening.”

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FIGURE 1.9. Shin Hakchul, *Rice Planting*, 1987, oil on canvas, 162.1 × 130 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

version remains the primary surviving copy. Shin's case exemplifies how artistic production and dissemination in the 1980s operated along a fluid spectrum rather than within rigid ideological camps. While distinctions between individual and collective authorship, critical realism, and revolutionary realism were debated, moments of convergence—whether through shared political stakes or the state's indiscriminate repression—reveal the movement's internal complexity. More importantly, *Rice Planting* underscores how the meaning of

an artwork was not determined solely by its content but was produced at the site of its reproduction, dissemination, and viewing. The state's suppression of Shin's work was a reaction not just to its imagery but to the dissident networks that circulated it, demonstrating how minjung art's power often lay in its modes of distribution rather than its original form.

Despite such points of overlap, divisions among minjung artists remained a subject of intense debate. In 1991, Ch'oe Yŏl expressed concern that the divide between collective and individual production had become too stark.<sup>88</sup> A year earlier, post-Marxist critic Shim Kwang Hyun likewise sought to foreground the multiplicity and "broad spectrum" of minjung art, writing that it "shifts in accordance with class struggle to encompass all points at which art and culture—more broadly, visual culture and the entire visual environment—intersect with every sphere of social and historical life. In its scope, breadth, and depth, minjung art must be understood as an unrestricted category. From the standpoint of dominant culture, what is most feared is precisely this unbounded nature of minjung culture."<sup>89</sup> With hindsight, the divergence in institutional and spatiotemporal conditions that shaped the movement's urgency was a defining characteristic of the period—whether seen as productive or detrimental at the time. I see that the very debates that divided artists reflected the dilemmas of radical art making during democratization. As Park Chan-kyong observed in 1991: "From the beginning, the concept of national art or minjung art never meant a singular movement ideology. The art movement in the 1980s was a place of democratic debate over a wide variety of ideologies and methods, and a heated stage for its practice and inspection. . . . The difference in opinion can be a creative source of advancement. In other words, 'minjung art' itself is a concept of solidarity and affiliation."<sup>90</sup> At stake, then, is not merely defining minjung art's ideological contours but rather historicizing its moments of convergence and divergence—the crossroads of aspirations and shortcomings that shaped the work of democratizing art, thought, and imagination in a postcolony.

### **The Movement in the Making: Chapter Outline**

The book loosely follows a chronological organization, beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, when the minjung art movement's ethos emerged in an episodic manner, and continuing to the late 1980s, when the euphoria of mass protest emerged on a previously unthinkable scale. I see minjung art as a journey of many artists whose activities in the visual arts conceptualized, and in some cases successfully materialized, the space between what was and what could be. My reconstruction of the historical developments that took place

over these two decades highlights the minjung art movement not as an inevitable rupture in history but as a congregation of twists and turns, each earned with sweat and sometimes blood. Central to this inquiry is the question of how individual artists formed alliances with one another, through their works and practices, as their worldview was constantly subjected to rapid shifts.

Chapter 1, “Decolonizing Modernism During the Cold War: Origins of the Minjung Art Movement,” traces the genesis of the minjung art movement within an ethos of the political mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s, focusing on the infamous censorship of Reality Group’s inaugural exhibition in 1969. In the wake of this event, young artists like Oh Yoon and critically minded writers like Kim Chi-ha developed new concepts and positions about art making through which they opposed what they saw as a perpetual dependency on imported styles and discourses that were manifested as *modōnijūm*. Against the formalist silence of abstract painting that in South Korea stood for the art of *modōnijūm*, what emerged were concepts like the aesthetics of reality (*hyōnsil-juūi*), proximity to reality (*hyōnsil*), and the ethnonation (*minjok*) that served as a barometer for artists’ ability and willingness to invite elements of social reality into pictorial space. Reality Group is generally singled out as an origin point for the minjung art movement. I complicate this narrative by introducing other cultural and social events that took place during the regime of General Park Chung Hee and that constituted a broader shift in the terrain of transformative politics and aesthetics in South Korea at this time. The interdisciplinary beginnings of the minjung art movement are located within this radical turn in the antistate opposition movement, which involved writers and dramaturges as much as artists and art critics. When the mandate to protect liberty, especially from the communists up north, turned to a desire for liberation from home-grown dictatorship and its US support, the minjung art movement’s grammar was articulated through vibrant discussions on what I refer to as decolonizing modernism. The debates on abstraction and figuration in South Korea thus shed a new light on the worn trope of Cold War binarism and also, importantly, open up our understanding of figurative realism’s political significance in the decolonizing of modern art history.

In chapter 2, “The Visual Cultural Turn for Decolonial Democracy: Forms and Methods of Reality and Utterance (1979–1984),” I present the first five years in the life of Reality and Utterance, an artist group founded in late 1979 and composed of two dozen artists, most of whom were graduates of Seoul National University and who were close friends with the leading dissident intellectuals in the fields of literature and the performing arts discussed in chapter 1. Their collective activities in publishing, organizing thematic exhibitions, and holding sympo-

siums fostered a laboratory for the ideas that had percolated over the previous decade. On the level of visual analysis, I pay special attention to the particular elements of mass cultural sources and popular cultural sources invited into the pictorial space. My reading of the group's thematized exhibitions and the practices of artists such as Joo Jaehwan, Kim Jungheun, Min Joungki, and Kim Yong-t'ae points to the broader political implications of what I call a visual and cultural turn in their work across painting, print, and photography. I argue that Reality and Utterance forged a new model of artist collectivism centered on thematized exhibitions, which allowed members to propose exhibition topics, return to individual production, receive peer critique, and present their work publicly. As a method of artistic practice, this model encouraged the incorporation of everyday visual references previously excluded from the realm of fine arts. Their refusal to adopt prevailing trends from Japanese, American, or French art magazines was not merely oppositional; it was accompanied by the construction of alternative institutional frameworks for artistic production. In this sense, their project constituted a decolonial as well as a visual and cultural turn—one that positioned Seoul's exhibitions and debates as key sites of interaction among artists and heterogeneous visual languages.

Korea's precolonial vernacular traditions served as a source of a new artistic practice on behalf of decolonial democracy. This forms the focus of chapter 3, "The Decolonial Place of Vernacular Folk Culture in Democracy: Turöng, Collective Painting, and Sited Knowledge Production (1982–1985)." Turöng was founded in 1982 by artists like Kim Bong-jun, Lee Kiyeon, and Chang Chin-yöng, who attended the prestigious art school of Hongik University in the mid- to late 1970s and who found inspiration for their art making not in their art school education but rather in performing arts like *madanggük* and mask dancing (*talch'um*). The group paid special attention to a range of vernacular traditions (*minsok*) that they subsequently reinvented and updated to express antistate, pro-democracy sentiments in authoritarian Korea. This nativist turn was central to the group to a greater degree than had been the case for other artist groups. As these young artists were reborn as practitioners in cultural activism (*munhwa undong*), they envisioned a new form of community at labor union gatherings, night schools for teenage factory workers, and church vigils for social justice. Analyzed by Chungmoo Choi and Namhee Lee, *madanggük* envisioned a space between work and play, producer and consumer, and thus emerged as a new form of collectivity whose principles were opposed to the state mobilization of citizens. It is from the experience of coproducing theatrical performances with workers that these artists learned the potential for collaborative production and shared authorship. If Reality and Utterance needed

reality for art, Turöng members recognized that reality itself needed art. As with artists like Hong Sung-dam in the Gwangju Freedom Artists Association, the artists in Turöng found ways for new images to exist in social space, while the images in turn transformed that social space. Hence the rise of another set of key terms: *hyönjang* (site undergoing transformation) and *hyönjangsöng* (site contingency), which add a more complex spatiotemporal dimension to the discussion of the minjung art movement that was previously waged with concepts like reality and ethnation. In 1983–84, Turöng invented a new painting genre, later known as *kölgae kürim*. A contemporary reinvention inspired by the large-scale painting format used in massive Buddhist rituals held outdoors since the Chosön dynasty, *kölgae kürim* became foundational to what, by 1988–89, would be termed *hyönjang misul* (site-contingent art). Although Turöng did not use the term at the time, this format would come to define its early practice and proliferate in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Chapter 4, “To Bring Back to Life: On the Metonym of Democracy (1987),” returns to the spectacular mass protest of summer of 1987, presented at the start of this introduction, to examine it as a pivotal instance of *hyönjang misul*. By this time, artists had organized. Umbrella organizations like Minmihyöp were fighting the regime’s increasing censorship of art, and a broad network of artists as social activists were working to shape the aesthetics of the 1987 uprising. The ample photographic documentation of art objects enmeshed with large crowds of people makes possible a careful reconstruction of the physical qualities of the works displayed as part of the protests, including their texture, weight, size, thickness, pliability, and shape. On the ground, various protest art objects not only helped move the crowd but also demarcated its newly forged political identity, generating what Michael Warner theorizes as a “counterpublic” with its own poesis of publicness.<sup>91</sup> In this chapter, I follow a month-long journey in which a press photograph of the bleeding student activist Lee Han Yeol was transferred to multiple surfaces, including handkerchief-sized woodblock prints that citizens wore on their chests and the hanging picture format *kölgae kürim* that was then increasingly ubiquitous in public spaces. My account of the aesthetic mediation and dissemination in this chapter focuses on two chief individuals caught up in this moment of historic conjuncture: the carpenter-cum-artist Choi Byung-soo and the student-cum-activist Lee Han Yeol, whose stories help narrate the network of art objects and protesting citizens enacting what I call the metonym of democracy. The multiple origins and dispositions of the minjung art movement that had developed up to this point culminated in an unprecedented form of mass protest aesthetics in public squares and on the streets. Art thus contributed to the formation of a democratic public, just as

the protests in June 1987 eventually tipped the balance of power between the authoritarian state and the oppositional, alternative nation of people.

Chapter 5, “Exhibiting Minjung Art Abroad: Tokyo, New York, and Pyongyang in the Twilight of the Cold War (1986–1989),” offers a rare historicization of the encounters between minjung artists and leftist cultural scenes in Japan, the United States, and North Korea—situated at the juncture between Third World politics and the emerging dynamics of 1990s cultural globalization. The shared dilemma of people’s sovereignty across national borders becomes the motivation for international artistic exchange, but these sites of contact set the stage for clashing visions and frictions. The Korean Minmihyŏp’s counterpart in Japan was the Japan, Afro-Asian, Latin American Artists’ Association (JAALA), founded by Hariu Ichirō in 1979 as part of the former empire’s leftist opposition culture. The JAALA invited minjung artists to contribute to the exhibition *Third World and Us* in 1986. Just weeks after the Summer Olympics in Seoul opened in 1988, New York City hosted *Min Joong Art: New Cultural Movement from Korea*, the first comprehensive exhibition of the minjung art movement in North America, co-organized by Bahe Mo (Bahe Yiso, 1957–2004). At the accompanying symposium, where panelists included New York–based critics like Lucy Lippard and Hal Foster, the vision of a world with equality was split between the American dilemma of multicultural inclusion and the Korean concern with decolonial liberation. The discussion of art, politics, and the possibility of democracy at the end of the Cold War is further speculated on in North Korean artists’ reproduction of South Korean minjung paintings at the Pyongyang 1989 World Festival. The chapter thus offers a translocational history of art, a glimpse into a crucial time flanked by the end of the global Cold War and the beginning of an increasingly neoliberal globalization. In doing so, the chapter proposes a new model for structuring a transnational history of art grounded in decolonization and deimperialization, and a new framework for understanding democratic politics across national borders—an alternative to what Aamir Mufti has recently criticized, in the context of world literature, as “a border game, a system for the regulation of movement.”<sup>92</sup> As in the conceptualization of world literature, the expansion of modern and contemporary art to include non-Western art centers has implemented a mechanism for regulating and accelerating power imbalances. The chapter ends with a South Korean curator’s dilemmas in presenting minjung art in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin 1950s–1980s*, a 1999 exhibition held in New York that showcased the worldwide proliferation of conceptualist practices probing multitudinous matrices of art, politics, and life as intertwined praxis.

Perhaps the greatest challenges to writing about the minjung art movement came after its demise in the 1990s and in the new millennium. The concluding chapter, “Revolutionary Presents: Making Histories of Decolonial Democracy,” leans to the future by returning to the question of gender in the minjung art movement, thereby drawing contours of possible routes for a decolonial historicization of the minjung art movement. As articulated by feminist art historians of recent years, South Korea’s decolonial democracy movement inherited a paradox of anticolonial nationalism: decolonization without parity for gendered citizens. I articulate the germination of feminist thinking and practices in the minjung art movement by offering a brief genealogy of *yösöng art* (*yösöng misul* or art for women’s liberation) that artists like Kim Insoon and Jung Jungyeob spearheaded during the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Yösöng art* is both a part and critique of the minjung art movement. The core dilemma of the minjung art movement is exposed as the space that exists between, on the one hand, the effect of the force that national thinking exercises on cultivating a powerful movement culture and, on the other, the equally real limitation of a national framework. What expands the parameters of imagination also confines its potential. To accept the complexity of nationalism and gender in the postcolony is to acknowledge the urgency of the continued work of decolonization and democratization.

Fundamentally, the history of the minjung art movement explores the relationship between a radical political movement and the visual arts through their operation within physical, social sites. The art forms that appear in this book—be they paintings on canvas or information pamphlets—are therefore approached not as isolated objects but as practices operating within a thick space animated by a shared desire for social change, however limited they may now appear in hindsight.<sup>93</sup> Understanding these operations means excavating how the materiality and physical objecthood of works contributes to the activation of space in ways even unfathomed by their producers, and we must also understand how minjung artists and critics were themselves radical historians who took modern art and history as a site of intervention and a ground for opening up alternative trajectories of possibility. In telling the story of these artists, and the forms, practices, spaces, and imaginations they helped generate, this book insists on continuing that reimagining.

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1. Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 49.
2. Yi Yöng-mi, *Madanggük, riölijüm, minjokgük* [Madanggük, realism, and national theater] (Seoul: Hyöndae mihaksa, 1997), 11.

## INTRODUCTION

1. On South Korean electoral politics and democracy, see Erik Johan Mobrand, *Top-Down Democracy in South Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).
2. Sunyoung Park, “Introduction,” in *Revisiting Minjung: New Perspectives on the Cultural History of 1980s South Korea*, ed. Sunyoung Park (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 1–2. For Henry H. Em’s historicization of the invention of Korean *minjok* circulated in the United States and Korea via presentation, see Henry H. Em, “Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Ch’aho’s Historiography,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 336–62; Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006). On the genesis of anticolonialism and the anti-imperialist origin of Korean nationalism, see, among others, Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895–1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
3. Wön Tong-sök surveys the notion of minjung in literature, sociology, and economics through Paik Nak-chung, Han Wan-sang, and Pak Hyön-ch’ae but acknowledges that the notion of subjectivity operates differently in art. Wön Tong-sök, *Minjokmisul üi nollu wa chönmanng* [Logic and perspectives of national art] (Seoul: P’ulbit, 1985), 387, orig. pub. in 1984, in *Onül üi ch’æk 4-ho*. As early as 1987, Wön perceptively argued that self-declared minjung art productions should neither be taken as the absolute standard nor regarded as the sole examples of minjung art. Wön Tong-sök, “Minjok minjung misul üi chip’yöng” [The horizon of national and minjung art], *Silch’ön munhak*, no. 8 (January 1987): 147.
4. National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, foreword to *Minjung misul 15-nyöñ chön, 1980–1994* [15 years of minjung art, 1980–1994] (Gwacheon: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, 1994), 9.
5. Kang Söng-wön, “90-nyöndae misul undong üi palchön üil wihan pip’yöngjök sogo” [A critical commentary for the 1990s development of art movement], *Gana Art*, March/April 1994, 38.

6. An anthology of art criticism published in December 1980 by the Korean Art Critics' Association, an establishment institution, lacks a consideration of the broader public as primary producer and consumer of art or of the sociopolitical turmoil affecting South Korean society at the time. Han'guk misul p'yŏngronga hyŏphoe, ed., *Han'guk hyŏndae misul ūi hyŏngsŏng kwa pip'yŏng* [The formation and critique of Korean contemporary art] (Seoul: Yŏrhwadang, 1980). Well into the 1990s and 2000s, the hegemonic narrative excluded minjung art from its summation of South Korean art history. For single-authored books reflecting this trend, see Kim Youngna, *Isipsegi ūi han'guk misul* [Twentieth-century Korean art] (Seoul: Yegyŏng, 1998); Kim Youngna, *Isipsegi ūi han'guk misul 2* [Twentieth-century Korean art 2] (Seoul: Yegyŏng, 2010); Kim I-sun, *Han'guk ūi kŭnhyŏndae misul* [Modern and contemporary art of Korea] (Seoul: Chohyŏng kyoyuk, 2007). Periodic evolution of the discourse, based on styles and generations, often in concert with the so-called international art scene of First World liberal democratic regimes, is reflected in more recent anthologies. Chapters on women artists or feminist art, just like minjung art, are included as stand-alone units that often do not correspond with other chapters. See, for the most recent example, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, *Korean Art 1900–2020* (Seoul: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, 2022).

7. Kang T'ae-hŭi, "Chŏnhu hanmi kwangye wa misul ūi t'alsingminjuŭi" [Korean-American relationship after the Korean War, and Korean art's postcolonialism], *Sŏyang misul hawakhoe* 11 (June 1999): 231–60.

8. Kim Youngna, "Hyŏndae misul esŏ ūi chŏnt'ong ūi sŏnbyŏl kwa kyesŭng: 1970-nyŏndae ūi monok'ŭrom misul kwa 1980-nyŏndae ūi minjung misul" [Selection and succession of traditions in contemporary art: 1970s monochrome art and 1980s minjung art], *Chŏngsin munhwa yŏn'gu* 23, no. 4 (2000): 33–53.

9. Yun Nan-jie, "Honsŏng konggan ūrosŏ ūi minjung misul" [Minjung art as a hybrid space], *Hyŏndae misulsa yŏn'gu* 22 (2007): 271–311.

10. Shin Chunghoon, "Sanŏp sahoe, taejung munhwa, tosi e taehan Hyŏnsil kwa parŏn ūi yangga chŏk t'aedo" [Ambivalence in Reality and Utterance's relationship to industrial society, mass culture, and the city], *Han'guk misul iron hakhoe* 16 (2013): 41–69.

11. Kim Hyŏn-ju, "Han'guk hyŏndae misulsa esŏ 1980-nyŏndae yŏsŏng misul ūi wuich'i" [The position of "women's art" in the history of Korean contemporary art], *Han'guk kŭn hyŏndae misulsa hakhoe* 26 (2013): 131–63.

12. Just as this book entered its editorial phase, several monographs with varying degrees of historical depth came out in Korea, including Sŏ Yu-ri, *It'al kwa pyŏni ūi misul: 1980-nyŏndae minjung misul ūi yŏksa* [Dislocation and countersubjectification: A history of minjung art in 1980s Korea] (Seoul: Somyŏng, 2022).

13. Kim Youngna's Korean-language scholarship has been translated into English in two surveys: *20th Century Korean Art* (London: Laurence King, 2005) and *Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea* (Seoul: Hollym, 2005). More recent anthologies with broader historical and thematic scope through translations of Korean scholars include Yeon Shim Chung, Sunjung Kim, Kimberly Chung, and Keith B. Wagner, eds., *Korean Art from 1953: Collision, Innovation, Interaction* (London: Phaidon, 2020), and Kyunghye Pyun and Jung-Ah Woo, eds., *Interpreting Modernism in Korean Art* (London: Routledge, 2021). Joan Kee's *The Urgency of Method: Tansaekhwa and Contemporary Korean Art*

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013) remains the only monograph on contemporary Korean art written in English for an Anglophone audience.

14. The symposium South Korea's Minjung Movement (1989) invited a group of Korean scholars (themselves movement participants, such as literary critic Paik Nak-chung, historian Kang Man-gil, and women's studies scholar and activist Cho Han Hae-jeong) and US-based scholars of Korean studies (including anthropologists Chungmoo Choi and Nancy Abelmann, who took the 1980s social movement as their subjects of study). See the edited volume of presented papers, Kenneth Wells, ed., *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995). For other anthologies on South Korea's dissident culture, see Youngju Ryu, ed., *Cultures of Yusin: South Korea in the 1970s* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2018); Park, *Revisiting Minjung*. For the first English-language historicization of minjung art by a scholar not involved in the movement, see Frank Hoffman, "Images of Dissent: Transformations in Korean Minjung Art," *Harvard Asia Pacific Review* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 44–49.

15. Chungmoo Choi, "The Minjung Culture Movement and the Construction of Popular Culture in Korea," in *South Korea's Minjung Movement*, 107. While I see an affinity between Choi's notion of counterhegemonic memory and what Saidiya Hartman calls "counterhistory," minjung cultural practitioners expanded the historical archive to include embodied knowledge expressed through cultural forms. See Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1–14.

16. Chungmoo Choi, "The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea," *positions* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 78. For Walter Mignolo's mapping of the distinct geopolitical genealogies of decolonial thought and postcolonialism, see Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 55. While East Asia is mentioned elsewhere in the book, it is notably absent from this particular mapping.

17. Pheng Cheah, "Introduction: Situations and Limits of Postcolonial Theory," in *Sitting Postcoloniality: Critical Perspectives from the East Asian Sinosphere*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Caroline S. Hau (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023), 8.

18. Choi, "The Discourse of Decolonization," 78. This distinction between epistemological break and historical break is productive. I am, however, also cautious of the periodical layout that risks ignoring transperiodical connections and the intergenerational activation of politics, when the anticolonial inspires and is revised within decolonial aspirations.

19. Dissident intellectuals' reassessment of the United States' role in the politics of the Korean Peninsula was in large part prompted by the publication of *Haebang chönhusa üi insik*, whose first volume launched in 1979, and Bruce Cumings's primary research on the origins of the Korean War in 1981.

20. John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, "The Colonization of Consciousness," in *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), cited in Choi, "The Discourse of Decolonization," 79.

21. Choi, "The Discourse of Decolonization," 79.

22. Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 6.

23. Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 6.
24. Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 6.
25. This emergent and unstable quality resonates with Alain Badiou's concept of the "event" and, more tentatively, with Lauren Berlant's theorization of the "situation" as a space of ongoing transformation and not-yet-formed outcomes. See Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
26. I wish to distinguish the siteness in *hyönjang*—a "site undergoing transformation"—from the genealogy of site-specific art rooted in sculptural traditions in North America and Western Europe. Chapters 3 and 4 elaborate on *hyönjang* and *hyönjang misul*. For discussions of site-specificity in contemporary art, see Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
27. Kim Hong-hee, ed., *Gyeonggi-do üi him* [The power of Gyeonggi Province] (Ansan: Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, 2010).
28. Here I refer to the Ch'oe Yöl collection at the Research Center of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea; the Art Archives of Seoul Museum of Art; and the Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art's digital archive project. The Leeum Museum's archive is less accessible.
29. For the matrix of social revolution and material culture in the Soviet Union offering an early twentieth-century model, see Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). Geeta Kapur considers the Indian Peoples' Theater Association as the most important aspect of the communist movement's cultural front prior to independence. See Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2000); Sanjukta Sunderason, *Partisan Aesthetics: Modern Art and India's Long Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020); Justin Jesty, *Art and Engagement in Early Postwar Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); Douglas Crimp, ed., *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988); Yates McKee, *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (New York: Verso, 2017). I take seriously the decolonial critique of the Occupy Movement's resettlement and reoccupation. See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.
30. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 45.
31. The origin of the strong ethnonationalism in the minjung art movement is the legacy of anticolonial resistance recurring in the postcolonial era, and the complex relationship between this legacy and the postwar-period decolonization process may not be unique to South Korea. Political nationalism promoted by anticolonialist nationalists is distinguished from nationalism as such in Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). Chatterjee more recently has argued for distinguishing a people-nation from a nation-state in his analysis of federalism in the Indian nation.

32. Pak Myŏng-rim, Kūndaehwa p'ūrojekt'ū wa Han'guk minjokjuūi [Modernization project and Korean nationalism], *Han'guk ūi kūndae wa kūndaesŏng pip'an* [Criticizing the Korean modern period and modernity], ed. Yŏksamunjae yŏn'guso (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 1996), 334, cited in Yi Na-yŏng's elucidating article that charts the historical trajectories of Korean nationalism and critiques it from a feminist perspective, "Minjokjuūi wa chendŏ: Tojŏn kwa pyŏnhyŏng ūl wuihan ironjŏk chihyŏngdo kŭrigi" [Nationalism and gender: Mapping theoretical debates and feminist challenges], *Han'guk yŏsŏnghak* 31, no. 2 (2015): 236.

33. Douglas Crimp, "AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism," *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 3–16. See also *October* Editors, "Visual Culture Questionnaires," *October* 77 (Summer 1996): 25–70.

34. Massimiliano Tomba, "1793: The Neglected Legacy of Insurgent Universality," in *Insurgent Universality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 30–70.

35. See, among others, Benjamin Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde," *October* 37 (Summer 1986): 41–52; Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Hal Foster, "What's Neo About the Neo-Avant Garde," *October* 70 (Autumn 1994): 5–32. Geeta Kapur is most cogent in positing her suspicion that temporal extension within neo-avant-garde discourse ended up disavowing spatial multiplicity in the avant-garde. Geeta Kapur, "Dismantled Norms: Apropos an Indian/Asian Avantgarde," in *When Was Modernism*, 365–413. The original essay was published as "Dismantling the Norm," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, exh. cat. (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1996), 60–69.

36. See, among others, Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1994); Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002); Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Nato Thompson and Gregory Sholette, eds., *The Interventionists: Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (North Adams, MA: MASS MoCA, 2004); Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 51–79; Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum*, February 2006, 178–83; Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, eds., *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination After 1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Nato Thompson, *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991–2011* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

37. Laclau and Mouffe wrote: "[There exists] the need to create a chain of equivalence among the various democratic struggles against different forms of subordination. We argued that struggles against sexism, racism, sexual discrimination, and in the defense of the environment needed to be articulated with those of the workers in a new left-wing hegemonic project." Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2001), xviii.

38. Rosalyn Deutsche is the first art historian to consider the space of democracy as that of social relations without coherence. Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). Claire Bishop critiques and challenges

Nicolas Bourriaud's formulation of "relational aesthetics" for its overly simplistic celebration of open-ended artistic conceits. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*; Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." On dissensus, see Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006).

39. Jürgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989). For a critical assessment of Habermas's notion of the public sphere, see, among others, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). Revisions to the public sphere theory that account for the possibilities of multiple and politically resistant spheres generated by concerns of gender (Nancy Fraser), race (Houston A. Baker Jr.), and sexuality (Michael Warner) have critiqued and expanded the original theory.

40. Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain*; Kester, *Conversation Pieces*.

41. For Anthony Gardner, this task falls upon the shoulders of postsocialist artists. Gardner, *Politically Unbecoming: Postsocialist Art Against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015). Critic Sung Wan-kyung was aware of the abuse of democracy in art and insisted that the answer lay in "socialization of art" rather than "democratization of art." Sung, "Han'guk hyöndae misul üi pinnagan kwejöök" [The misled trajectory of Korean contemporary art], *Kyegan misul* (Summer 1980): 140.

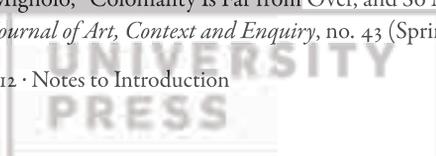
42. The limitations of the above-discussed theories of art and democracy—which take Europe and North America as their primary sites of critique—can be illuminated by Mignolo's distinction between two political genealogies: "one materialized within the local histories of imperial Europe," exemplified by figures such as the refugee in the writings of Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben; and "the other within the local histories of the European colonies," exemplified by the Zapatista figure of the Indigenous. This book seeks to enact what Mignolo describes as "shifting the geography of reasoning." See Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 92, 238.

43. Homi K. Bhabha, "Democracy De-Realized," in *Democracy Unrealized: Documenta II Platform I*, ed. Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 349.

44. For scholar Eddie S. Glaude Jr., thinkers like James Baldwin help locate the roots of these undemocratic practices within the United States through the very elevation of democracy as an ideal. The validity of such an interrogation continues today. See Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own* (New York: Crown, 2020).

45. Samuel Huntington, "Democracy's Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 12–34.

46. Walter D. Mignolo, "DELINKING: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 452–53; Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 177, orig. pub. in 1991 as "Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad"; Walter D. Mignolo, "Coloniality Is Far from Over, and So Must Be Decoloniality," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, no. 43 (Spring/Summer 2017): 45.



47. For David Graeber, the “prefigurative politics” is “the idea that the organizational form that an activist group takes should embody the kind of society we wish to create.” David Graeber, *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013), 23. See also David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2004), 54.

48. In South Korea, critical theorist Kuan-hsing Chen sees the inseparable and simultaneous operation of decolonization and deimperialization in the modern history of East Asia as accompanied by efforts for democratization. Kuan-hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). Because decolonization and deimperialization can only happen after the Cold War, Chen proposes an imperative that he designates as “de-cold war [*sic*].” As I discuss in this volume’s conclusion, for South Koreans, the de-Cold War period coincided with the postdemocratization movement and required a new type of social movement different from that which was in operation in the 1970s and 1980s. It is in this context that the legacy of the minjung art movement should be understood and historicized. For a project with a historiographical ambition that reexamines the Cold War period by the expansion of its genesis prior to 1945, see Theodore Hughes’s engagement with both the Pacific War and the Cold War in *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom’s Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

49. The journal *October*’s 2020 questionnaire on decolonization includes no mention of democracy. The questionnaire also reveals that only a few art historians like Saloni Mathur and Iftikhar Dadi are cogent in their consideration of the historical *longue durée* of decolonization—that is, in connection with earlier liberational movements—even as protests demanding institutional changes in museums have erupted across settler colonial and former imperial cities during the second decade of the new millennium. The bifurcated approaches to decolonization in art—the desire to critique Western metropolitan art institutions and the historical study of decolonization in postcolonies—are also evident in the recent publication *The Routledge Companion to Decolonizing Art History*, edited by Tatiana Flores, Florencia San Martín, and Charlene Villaseñor Black (London: Routledge, 2024). For a comparative decolonial framework for visual culture studies, Nicholas Mirzoeff offers a genealogy of visibility—a nineteenth-century term for the visualization of history, and thus a site of authority where the “right to look” is denied—analyzed through the intertwined complexes of visibility and countervisuality; see Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visibility* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

50. Cheah, “Introduction,” 5.

51. Among recent large-scale exhibitions that sought to challenge such divisional thinking, *International Pop* seeks to cross these blocs through the politico-aesthetic angle of pop art. *Postwar: Across the Pacific and the Atlantic*, while seeking to present works from both blocs and nonaligned nations, offered only a small collection from the socialist bloc. Recent studies of artistic exchanges within the socialist bloc generated in North American and Western European academies and institutions seek to offer much-needed remedies. Mark Nash, *Red Africa: Affective Communities and the Cold War* (London: Black Dog Press, 2016); Vivian Li, ed., “Red Networks: Postwar Art Exchange,” special issue, *Art History* (Winter 2022).

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52. Shigeko Kubota, *Naüi sarang, Nam June Paik* [My love, Nam June Paik], trans. Nam Chöng-ho (Paju: Arte, 2016), 247.
53. Jae-Yong Kim, "In Search of Alternative Modernity: The 1980s in South Korean Intellectual History," in Park, *Revisiting Minjung*, 77–78.
54. Chen, *Asia as Method*, 4.
55. Geeta Kapur, "When Was Modernism in Indian/Third World Art," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 92, no. 3 (1993): 473–514.
56. Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee, eds., *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For earlier discussions of multiple modernities in other disciplines, see, among others, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "On Alternative Modernities," *Public Culture* 11, no. 1 (1999): 1–18; S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 1–29.
57. Elizabeth Harney, *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960–1995* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Joan Kee, *Contemporary Korean Art: Tansaekhwa and the Urgency of Method* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Sonal Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations: Artistic Practice, National Identity, and Modernism in India, 1930–1990* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Reiko Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016); Jesty, *Art and Engagement*; Christine I. Ho, *Drawing from Life: Sketching and Socialist Realism in the People's Republic of China* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020); Sunderason, *Partisan Aesthetics*; Peggy Wang, *The Future History of Contemporary Chinese Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).
58. Here I follow Massimiliano Tomba's model of "insurgent universality."
59. As a way to move beyond the West as an original place for theories later applied to the rest of the world, Chen argues for inter-Asian references and, equally importantly, demonstrates a productive conversation with early postcolonial theoretical thoughts from other locations in the Third World like Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Ashis Nandy, and so on. See the chapter "Decolonization: A Geocolonial Historical Materialism," in Chen, *Asia as Method*, 65–113.
60. Geeta Kapur, "Proposition Avant-Garde: A View from the South," *Art Journal* (Spring 2018): 89.
61. In January 1985, Sung Wan-kyung estimated that, over the previous five years, more than 140 exhibitions had taken place, with over 1,000 artists participating annually. Lee Yil and Sung Wan-kyung, "80-nyöndaë misul üi kösen yölp'ung" [The fierce wave of 1980s art], *Kyegan misul* (Winter 1985): 39.
62. Kim Jong-gil, one of the most active researchers of minjung art from 2000 to the 2010s, promotes a reading of the minjung art movement through the Marxist-oriented social formation theory, which offers theoretical guidance only on the actions of mid- to late 1980s student activists. Kim Jong-gil, "1980-yöndaë sahoe pyönhöyökron kwa minjung

misul 1” [1980s social reform theory and minjung art 1], in *Chöngch’ijögin köt ül nömösö: Hyönsil kwa parön 30-nyön* [Beyond the political: Reality and Utterance, 30 years], ed. Kim Jungheun et al. (Seoul: Hyönsilmunhwayöng’u, 2012), 23–80.

63. *Reality and Utterance Inaugural Exhibition*, brochure (1980).

64. Kim Yun-su, “Kwangbok 30-nyön üi Han’guk misul” [Korean art during the thirty years since liberation], *Ch’angjak kwa pip’yöng*, June 1975, 207–31; You Hong-june, “Hyöndaejuüi simmijuüi” [Modernism and aesthetic purity], in *80-nyöndae misul üi hyönjang kwa jakkadül* [The 1980s art scene and artists] (Seoul: Yörhwadang, 1987), orig. pub. in 1984.

65. Yun Böm-mo, “Kukchejon ch’amga 20-nyön üi malssöng” [Troubles of 20-year participation in international exhibitions], *Kyegan misul* (Summer 1980): 33.

66. Sung Wan-kyung, “Kyöngnyökchuüi sangöpchuüi” [Careerism and commercialism], *Ppurigip’ün namu*, March 1980, 23–24.

67. Kim Yun-su, “P’ungyo wa pin’gon, mosun sok üi kaltüing: 70-nyöndae üi pansöng” [Abundance and poverty, and a conflict in contradiction: Reflection on the 1970s], *Wölgan jungang*, December 1979, 164.

68. The details of this incident are discussed in chapter 2.

69. Kim In-hwan’s review is a typical evaluation and blanket denigration of the new art movement in the mainstream art scene. Kim In-hwan, “Hyönsil kwa parön tongin üi söngp’ae” [Success and failure of Reality and Utterance], *Kyegan misul* (Spring 1981): 213.

70. The Gwangju Freedom Artists Association, Research Center Collection, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea.

71. See Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang, eds., *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea’s Past and Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003). With the recent memory of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the United States sought to prevent “another Iran” in Gwangju—an example of decolonization struggles elsewhere shaping events in South Korea. Tim Shorrock, “The Gwangju Uprising and American Hypocrisy: One Reporter’s Quest for Truth and Justice in Korea,” *The Nation*, June 5, 2015, [https://www.thenation.com/article/world/kwangju-uprising-and-american-hypocrisy-one-reporters-quest-truth-and-justice-korea/#google\\_vignette](https://www.thenation.com/article/world/kwangju-uprising-and-american-hypocrisy-one-reporters-quest-truth-and-justice-korea/#google_vignette).

72. Hong Sung-dam, “Owölp’anhwa nün kiökt’ujaeng ida!” [May prints are the battle over memory!], in *Owöl: 5.18 Kwangju minjunghangjaeng yönjakp’anhwa* [May: Print series of Gwangju democracy movement] (Goyang, Korea: Tanbi, 2018), 125. The images were rendered first as drawings. What I find most significant is that popular demand deriving from the exhibition site generated supply (i.e., the commissioning of the artist). Initially, there was no concrete plan to produce a complete set of prints offering a shot-by-shot or hour-by-hour documentation of the ten-day struggle. Due to the demand, the printing process became collaborative. For more on Hong’s account of the production, see Hong Sung-dam, “Owölp’anhwa,” in *Owöl*, 122–89. See also Hong Sung-dam and Kim Chöng-hwan, *Haebang p’anhwasi* [Print and poetry of liberation] (Seoul: Ilwölsögak, 1987), a publication originally planned in 1985, as the first attempt at producing a set of chronological prints of the event.

73. One minjung art critic, whose late 1980s writings propagated the call for minjung art, turned his attention to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anti-imperial, anti-colonial art productions. Ch’oe Yöl, *Han’guk hyöndae misul undongsa* [History of Korean

contemporary art movement] (Seoul: Tolbaege, 1990). Not until the 1990s and more recently did South Korea see scholarship on early twentieth-century leftist tradition. See, for example, Sō Yu-ri, “Chōnwi üisik kwa Han’guk üi misul undong: 1920–30 nyōndae rül chungsim üro” [Avant-garde consciousness and Korean art activism: Focusing on the 1920s–30s], *Han’guk künhyōndae misul sahak* 18 (December 2007): 24–38.

74. You Hong-june, *80-nyōndae misul üi hyōnjang kwa chakkadül*. Even this limited range of references was inaccessible to many. According to my research, unofficial translations and limited circulation of the Chinese woodcut movement and German prints did not begin until 1984. Lee Kiyeon recalls being introduced to Käthe Kollwitz’s work in 1980 by a German woman advising a labor union in Anyang. At the time, Lee had already created *A-frame Carrier* (1980)—a linoleum print on a rubber sole sheet depicting an aged porter in sharply etched lines, as part of her work supporting local factory workers. Upon seeing the print, the advisor noted its striking affinity with Kollwitz’s oeuvre, which Lee encountered for the first time through that exchange. Turōng k’ollokwiōm pyōnch’an moim and Suryusanbang, *Turōng aptwi: Han’guk minjung misulsa üi chaegus-ōng* [Turōng, before and after: Reconstructing the history of Korea’s minjung art] (Seoul: Suryusanbang, 2024), 531. For a recent effort to construct an inter-Asian history rooted in woodcut printmaking, see Kuroda Raiji and Igarashi Rina, eds., *Woodcut Movements in Asia 1930s–2010s: Blaze Carved in Darkness*, exh. cat. (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum; Arts Maebashi, 2018).

75. Jung-woon Choi, “The Formation of an ‘Absolute Community,’” in *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea’s Past and Present*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang, 3–10 (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003). The concept of prefigurative politics resonates with Choi’s notion of absolute community. See Graeber, *The Democracy Project*.

76. Ra Wōn-sik, “Mit’ürobut’ō üi misulmunhwaundong: Kwangju chayü misulin hyōbüihoe wa misul tongin Turōng” [Art and cultural activism from below: Gwangju Freedom Artists Association and art collective Turōng], in *Minjung misul 15-nyōn chōn, 1980–1994* [15 years of minjung art, 1980–1994], exh. cat. (Gwacheon: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, 1994), 23.

77. Lee Kiyeon, “Twiro mullösöl chariga tō isang öpsöyo” [There is no room to fall back], in *San misul*, exh. cat., ed. Turōng (Seoul: Turōng, 1984), 23. The phrase is also the title of pastor, poet, and social movement activist Mun Ik-hwan’s 1984 poetry book.

78. Turōng et al., *Turōng, aptwi*, 544.

79. On the distinctions between these terms, as developed from 1983, see Ch’oe Yöl, *Minjokmisul üi iron kwa silchōn* [Theory and practice of minjok art] (Seoul: Tolpeke, 1991), 97, 102. A notable exhibition that propagated a sense of urgency for collaboration among divergent artist groups was *Life and Art (Salm kwa misul)*, held in 1984. You Hong-june, “Minjok misul 10-nyōn ödikkaji wannünka” [After 10 years of national art, what is its current status], *Changjak kwa pipyōng* 17, no. 3 (September 1989): 314–15. Debates around the art movement’s relationship to the ideology of minjung and social movements continued well into the late 1980s and early 1990s. While Ra Wōn-sik argued for the importance of minjung in the promotion of national art, Shim Kwang Hyun understood the emphasis on minjung by the early 1990s as increasingly losing the focus of class and partisanship. Ra Wōn-sik, “Minjok misul undong üi söngkwa wa munjejöm”

[The achievements and problems of the national art movement], *Midae bakpo* 11 (1988): 60–75; Shim Kwang Hyun, “90-nyöndae minjok minjung misul undong üi kwaje wa chönmang” [The challenges and prospects of the 1990s national minjung movement], *Taebak sinmun*, March 27, 1989, 6. See also Lee Young-chul, “80-nyöndae minjok minjung misul üi chönkae wa hyönsiljuüi” [The development of 1980s national minjung art and realism], *Gana Art*, November/December 1989, 77–87.

80. Hong Sung-dam, *Owöl*, 132.

81. Ch’oe Yöl, *Minjokmisul*, 133.

82. This is why we should not categorize these two divergent aspects of the minjung art movement as entirely distinctive and separate, or temporally organized as in the Chinese woodcut movement’s categorization of the 1920s–30s as the “aesthetic avant-garde” and the 1940s as the “political avant-garde” according to Gao Minglu’s formulation. Minglu Gao, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 4–6, 42–46.

83. Sung Wan-kyung, “Turöng chön” [Turöng’s exhibition], *Kyegan misul* (Summer 1984): 186–87.

84. Kim Yun-su, “Sam üi chinsil e tagasönün sae kusang” [New figuration for the truth of life], *Kyegan misul* (Summer 1981): 103–10.

85. O Hye-ju, “Yösöng nodong misul” [Women, labor, art], in *Yösöng in’gan yesul chöngsin* [Women, human, artistic spirit], exh. cat. (Seoul: Isibil segi hwarang, 1995), 67.

86. Around 1987–88, Jung made small-scale woodblock prints on her own while maintaining active participation in the collective production of hanging pictures. She did not want to make paintings that were only used at protest sites. Jung Jungyeob and Yang Chöng-ae, “Chöng Chöng-yöp, saraon naeryögi chakp’um toegi üi tangyönham” [Jung Jungyeob, the history of life itself as artwork], in *Minjung misul, yöksa rül tünmünda 2* [Listening to the history of minjung art 2] (Seoul: Hyönsilmunhwa, 2021), 528–29.

87. The court case continued into the new millennium. See critic Sung Wan-kyung’s visual analysis of the work, “Monaegi kamjöngsö” [Appraisal statement for *Rice Planting*], submitted as a rebuttal to the state organ’s appraisal, republished in *Shin Hakchul* (Seoul: Hakgojae, 1991), 111–14.

88. Ch’oe Yöl, *Minjokmisul*, 129.

89. Shim Kwang Hyun, “80-nyöndae misul undong üi chaengjöm kwa 90-nyöndae misul munhwa üi chönmang” [Problems of the 1980s art movement and prospects for 1990s art culture], orig. pub. in 1990, in *Munhwa pyöndong kwa misul pip’yöng üi taeüng: 90-nyöndae Han’guk misul üi chindan kwa mosaek* [Cultural transformation and the response of art criticism: Diagnosing and seeking directions in 1990s Korean art], ed. Misul pip’yöng yön’guhoe (Seoul: Sigak kwa önö, 1993), 36–37.

90. Park Chan-kyong, “Ch’amdaun pyönhyökki üi pip’yöng ül wihan ch’oesohan üi chogön” [Minimum conditions for real “criticism of a transformative period”], *Gana Art*, July/August 1991, 85–86.

91. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2002), 118–24.

92. Aamir Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 9.

93. I use the term *thick space* to signal a sociopolitically saturated context, as theorized in anthropology and spatial theory, while also grounding it in a decolonial perspective. It is one of political intensity and material entanglement, where artistic practices are embedded in collective meanings and art making is inseparable from acts of resistance, solidarity, and shared aspirations for social transformation. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3–30; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005).

## 1. DECOLONIZING MODERNISM DURING THE COLD WAR

1. In the field of photography under anti-communism, reportage photography depicting grounded realities during and after the Korean War similarly avoided the terms *reality* and *realism*, opting instead for *saenghwalchuii* (everyday life-ism) or *saenghwalchuii sajin* (everyday life photography). See Jung Joon Lee, “No End to the Image War: Photography and the Contentious Memories of the Korean War,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 337–70; Jae Won Edward Chung, “Maps of Life and Abjection: Reportage, Photography, and Literature in Postwar Seoul,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 79, no. 2 (2020): 335–65.

2. For the debates surrounding the history of modern art in Japan, see, among others, Karatani Kōjin, “Japan as Museum: Okakura Tenshin and Ernest Fenollosa,” in *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*, exh. cat., ed. Alexandra Munroe (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1994), 33–39; Chelsea Foxwell, *Making Modern Japanese-Style Painting: Kano Hōgai and the Search for Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). On the case of China, see Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, eds., *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Yi Gu, *Chinese Ways of Seeing and Open-Air Painting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2020). See also, on the case of colonial India, Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850–1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

3. Kim Yun-su, “Han’guk kundaе misul: kŭ pip’anjŏk sŏsŏl” [Korean modern art: A critical introduction], in *Han’guk hyŏndae hoehwasa* [Korean contemporary painting history] (Seoul: Hanguk ilbo, 1975), reprinted in *Han’guk hyŏndae misul ūi pansŏng* [Critical reflection on Korean contemporary art], ed. Minjok misul hyŏpuihoe (Seoul: Hankyoraе, 1988), 13, 31–32.

4. Even though the ambitious manifesto was removed from public circulation just as quickly as the show itself had been censored, the few surviving copies were shared at various study groups organized by the artists outside the school system and served as a guiding principle for later art groups like Reality and Utterance. Art critic You Hong-june recalls receiving ten copies from Kim Chi-ha only days prior to the censored Reality Group show. You Hong-june, conversation with author, December 1, 2018.

5. The connection between Kim Chi-ha’s promotion of surrealism in South Korea’s decolonial context and the Latin American development of magical realism—or anti-imperialist, feminist employment of surrealist tactics—remains underresearched.

6. Kim Chi-ha, “Na ūi hoеsang, moro nuun tol’buch’ŏ 152” [My reflection: Stone Buddha in oblique recline], *Pressian*, October 8, 2002, <https://www.pressian.com/pages>