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Ecopoiesis: Korean American Women's Poetry Rooted in Generational Trauma

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"The hostility between humanity and nature is caused by the machine mind and will be alleviated only when some radical change of human attitudes is made."

– Won-Chung Kim, "Environmental Literature and the Change of Its Canon in Korea"

Introduction Part I:

Ecopoetics is the practice of engaging with nature's elements, such as climate, fauna, or flora, to voice a poet's critical stance on society. Contemporary Korean American ecopoetry is centered on "the restoration of ecological balance necessitate[ing] a simultaneous reconstruction of a healthy social, cultural, and spiritual ecology" (He 770). In particular, Korean American poets in the 20th and 21st century Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982), Suji Kwock Kim (b. 1969), and Franny Choi (b. 1989), think through difficult topics including, the destruction of nature in the aftermath of the Japanese occupation of Korea, generational trauma, and the modernization of modern Korea. In other words, from using the eco as a descriptor to giving it a voice, these three poets show the evolution of how Korean Americans have used the eco in their work. In addition, they model the way Koreans post-Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) have been able to "regain cultural confidence and re-evaluate their place in the global realm" (W.C. Kim 2) through returning to traditional values of caring about the environment. Won-Chung Kim, a professor at Sungkyunkwan University, highlights how a restoration of the Korean landscape can only happen through the "radical change of human attitudes" back to traditional Korean values of caring for the environment.

Ecopoetics as a field of literary criticism has expanded rapidly during the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s due to increased interest in sustainability and emphasized the need to "study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty 18). In other words, it is the study of the relationship between mankind and the environment and the consequences of social and economic progress. It refers to the utilization of nature to form a new "reconceptualization of modernist notions of human psychological identity and political subjecthood" (Heise 506). Ecopoetics "coheres more by virtue of a common political project" rather than focusing on universal "theoretical and methodological assumptions" (Heise 506) shared by cultures and societies. Ecopoetics is a tool which is used by the three poets in this thesis to exemplify their own personal social movements: one of restoring Korean culture and healing the trauma of past generations.

In addition to functioning as a stand-alone theory, ecopoetics has often been used by poets throughout the world to draw parallels between themselves and nature in an attempt to process the trauma they have faced in their communities during, for example, times of war or political oppression. This is especially evident in the work of contemporary Korean American poets, who have used and are using ecopoetics to process the trauma of war-torn and/or politically unstable countries. In the case of this thesis, examining the use of ecopoetics by Korean American female poets helps better understand the impact of both the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and the Korean War's (1950-1953) effects on later generations in the Korean diaspora. In this thesis I ask: What can be learned about generational memory, what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory," through the ways that Korean American women poets use ecopoetics? How do the concepts of "(post)memory" and "ecopoetics" speak to each other through this poetry?

In particular, I will be examining how three Korean American poets, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1989), Suji Kwock Kim (b. 1969), and Franny Choi (b. 1989), all utilize ecopoetics to more accurately express their feelings as Korean American post generation writers. That is, they are poets whose work grapples with the struggles and trauma faced by Korea and Korean Americans since the late-20th century and in the aftermath of both the Japanese Occupation *and* the Korean War with the dictatorships that followed. More specifically, I focus on the way that ecopoetics exemplifies the cultural trend of Koreans and Korean Americans post-1987 that concentrates on the restoration of environmental spaces act as a type of healing process for trauma inflicted on the public in the recent past. By being able to appreciate newly restored green spaces, often previously damaged by the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953) or the era of Korean dictatorships (1948-1987), Koreans physically have begun to remake and restore their environments to try to heal trauma. The restoration of these physical spaces, in theory, allows society to reconnect with nature within an urban environment, creating a space that is a physical representation of healing from past violence. Korean American poets are utilizing ecopoetics as part of an artistic expression that allows for a process of healing.

Thus, in this thesis, I examine how these three poets reflect on their motherland and the generational trauma resulting from the Japanese Occupation of 1910 to 1945. I begin with a close reading of the work of the experimental artist and writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* published in 1982, then I turn to Suji Kwock Kim's *Notes From the Divided Country* (2003) to explore the relationship between the eco and food, and I end with a look at Franny Choi's *The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On* (2022) and its criticisms towards the role Western society has played in damaging the Korean environment. In all three texts I will be examining the evolution of the use and adaptation of ecopoetics in their works and how these poets are

utilizing the eco to process both generational memory, what Hirsch calls “postmemory,” and their associated traumas. Their use of ecopoetics serves as a critical framework through which the three poets advocate their own methods for restoring Korean culture and addressing inherited trauma.

Each poet uses the eco in different ways to reflect her unique perspective and background all the while addressing similar concerns which tie them together. The evolution of ecopoetics through these three generations of Korean American poets showcase the postmemory trauma resulting from the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953). These poets have incorporated ecopoetics into their work not only to criticize their political systems, but to process the trauma resulting from the colonialization. Cha’s use of the eco acts as a descriptor, detailing the unique experience of growing up in South Korea post-Korean War with survivors of the Japanese Occupation as parents. Kim also does this but combines it with her examination of her mother’s traditional role cooking for the family and the impact this played with her interpretation of the world around her. Following both poets, Choi takes the eco in an entirely new direction: explicitly criticizing the impact the West has played in damaging not only Korean landscapes, but traditional Korean practices of restoring the environment. Ecopoetics represent not only the method chosen to process their trauma, but also as an example of healing. Through reconnecting with the natural world, they begin a healing process.

It is important to emphasize, here at the beginning that ecopoetics is not a new trend in Korea. Historically, ecopoetics have been used since before the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897) as a method for poets, especially Buddhist monks, to express their criticisms of Korean society (W.C. Kim). Because of the prevalence of Buddhism and Confucianism throughout the culture, the natural world was held in high esteem and the Joseon Dynasty kings understood that it was

necessary to work alongside the religious temples if they wanted to have peace and prosperity (Buswell). At that time, monks were extremely influential in society and central to how the kings, who were also devout Buddhists, approached social issues which typically implanted laws adhering to Buddhist beliefs (W.C. Kim). Poets using the eco in their work were able to express their frustrations with society without directly referencing the government, meaning they were able to criticize the king with little fear of repercussions.

The monk's heavy involvement in politics often meant that they needed to resort to alternative means of expression to prevent the government from suppressing their activities. Thus, the concept of ecopoetics was created. Using previous beliefs regarding natural elements[1], monks worked to adapt the eco into writing allowing them to express their political beliefs under the guise of aesthetic appreciation. This method of criticism was adapted by poets, authors, and artists during the Japanese Occupation as a safe means of protesting Japanese attempts at suppressing dissenting voices.

Korea experienced many social and cultural changes which would cause Korean artists to return to traditional means of expression as both a means of protecting their culture and speaking out against societal issues. One of the most significant traumas Korea would face in the 20th century that was the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) which was modelled after the colonial civilizing missions that the West had perpetrated across the globe for decades. The Japanese Occupation took the West's ideology of "represent[ing] colonialism as fundamental to the progress of both the metropole and the colony" (Hong 507) to convince Korea that the

[1] Bok Hui, the Korean belief in Yin, Yang, and the power of natural elements rose to prominence during the Joseon Dynasty. Its beliefs were incorporated into existing practices by Buddhist monks and entered the people's everyday lives. For example, consuming rice meant consuming the power of the five elements: water, fire, earth, metal, and earth (Shin).

destruction of their culture was for their own benefit. The Japanese enforced strict rules regarding Korean society and culture, often restricting the usage of the native language and inserting propaganda into the education system. All art, literature, and music were subject to Japanese control and artists had to find alternative ways of expressing themselves, so Koreans writers and artists kept shifting and changing. Ecopoetics eventually became a way to convey their messages as they tried to avoid political trouble. Essentially, this was a return to a historical method of using ecopoetics as an avenue for criticism of the political powers of the day while also providing an outlet for cultural creativity through something that Korean culture holds nature in high regard, the natural world.

The history of the Korean post-Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897) is a crucial element needed to understand why the three poets being examined work so intently on revitalizing traditional Korean culture and values. Following the Japanese Occupation, the Korean War resulted in immense damage done to the landscape, particularly around the region now separated by the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) wherein an estimate by the Korean Government Defense Department in 2010 states that 489 years would be needed to be "rid of all the landmines in the area" (Kwon et al. 79). An entire section of the peninsula has been made uninhabitable to the Korean people. The DMZ now exists as both a nature preserve – since flora and fauna are the only beings capable of safely living there – and a military checkpoint. The Korean War has left a permanent mark on the very landscape, and the "national myth of restoration" (Chung 28) becomes nearly impossible. Korean culture hold restoring and maintaining a sustainable environment in high regard, yet the Korean American poets in this thesis will be unable to see this occur in the DMZ. The war has made restoration, in their lifetimes, impossible. The act of restoring the environment

must be done another way for them to be able to heal past traumas. They use the eco in their poetry as a way of restoration, providing an outlet for the landscape to be healed metaphorically.

Thus, poetry became a way for Korean artists to express the trauma they faced during both the Japanese Occupation and the Korean War that followed. For example, using the natural or "eco" world, Korean authors, such as Yi Kwang-su (1892-1950) in his novel *The Soil* (1932), have been able to draw parallels between the environment and themselves to better explain how the Occupation continued to affect him. Others such as *Vegetable Garden* by Kang Kyeong-ae (1933), *Evergreen Tree* by Shim Dae-seop (1935), and the more recent, *Who Ate Up All the Shinga?* by Park Wan-suh (1992), all utilize the eco to provide evidence of the effect the Japanese Occupation and the Korean War have had on themselves and their characters. For example, Park's, who is of a more recent generation, description of traditional Korean villages and how the transition from rural to urban affected her family's dependence on their garden even within the dense city of Seoul shows the shifting ideology within Korea. Their garden is smaller, and the apartment building does not provide much room, instead, city resources are dedicated to building more houses, factories, roads, and manufacturing plants not protecting the landscape as they did pre-Occupation. All three of these authors rely on natural elements as a means of expressing and processing their personal and familial trauma. They draw on their personal experiences and perspectives on Korean history in a manner reminiscent of Korean poets from before the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945).

Poetry as a response to occupation and war, has gone beyond the borders of Korea and can now be seen in the generations that follow and who have inherited these memories and their traumas, especially in the United States. Thus, one can say that in the last 50 years many Korean American poets have used ecopoetics to underscore the traumatic events of the 20th century. In

the 1980s poets such as Ko Un (1933-present) and Kim Hyesoon (1955-present) emerged as Korean American writers focused on discussing their experiences living through the tail end of the Occupation and subsequent Korean dictatorships[2] (*Ko Un | Smith College*). The two, but especially Ko Un, utilized ecopoetics to express their trauma. His poems such as *Sunlight* (2009) discuss the aftermath of surviving and feeling "utterly helpless" (Ko line 1) in the wake of the Korean War. Here, Ko uses natural sunlight as an example of a stabilizing force during his arrest transforming his cell from "a coffin holding a corpse" to "the sea" (Ko lines 20 & 21). The sunlight is what gives Ko hope during a time of political instability with the sunlight transforming his imprisonment into a place of tranquility. Here, Ko Un uses the eco to transform his imprisonment into a place of peace – enacting healing during a time of active trauma. Kim Hyesoon's poetry often centers around violence and injustice, with her poetry gaining notoriety in 1997 after winning the Kim Suyeong Literary Award ("Awards | Kimhyesoon"). Her poetry utilizes the eco to express her frustration and pain at witnessing the effects of the Korean War on her parents and those around her.

We see this trend continuing today with Korean American authors such as Nobel Prize in Literature recipient Han Kang (1970-present), who explicitly details their interpretations of their memories of the Korean War through the use of the eco and elements of Korean folklore. Kang uses the eco as a method to "not merely recover historical 'truth' of the Korean War, but also to

[2] The Five Dictatorships of Korea (1948-1987): Syngman Rhee (1875-1965) was appointed by the United States government in 1948 as the new president of the First Republic of Korea (1948-1960). In 1961, the government was controlled by an interim administration before Park Chung-Hee (1917-1979) led a military coup and placed himself as the president of the Second Republic (1960-1963) using the military to control the country. His reign continued into the Third Republic (1963-1972), and into the Fourth Republic (1972-1981) when he was assassinated in 1972. Prime Minister Choi Kyu-ha (1919-2006) served as the next president until Major General Chun Doo-hwan's (1931-2021) December 12th Coup in 1980, leading to the creation of the Fifth Republic (1981-1988). The Sixth Republic (1988-present) saw the first democratically elected president, Roh Tae-woo (1932-2021), and the end to military rule and dictatorships (Y.M. Kim 120-121; J.W. Shim 243).

examine the very historical and cultural conditions" (Koh 3) associated with being part of the postmemory generation. Kang even draws on the postmodern work of one of Korea's most influential and revolutionary poets Yi Sang's (1910-1937) line "humans should be plants" referring to how Korean people should take a defensive stance against the violence perpetrated against them by Japan (J.Y. Kim). This singular line inspired Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* (2007).

Part II: Ecopoetics: A Comprehensive Korean History

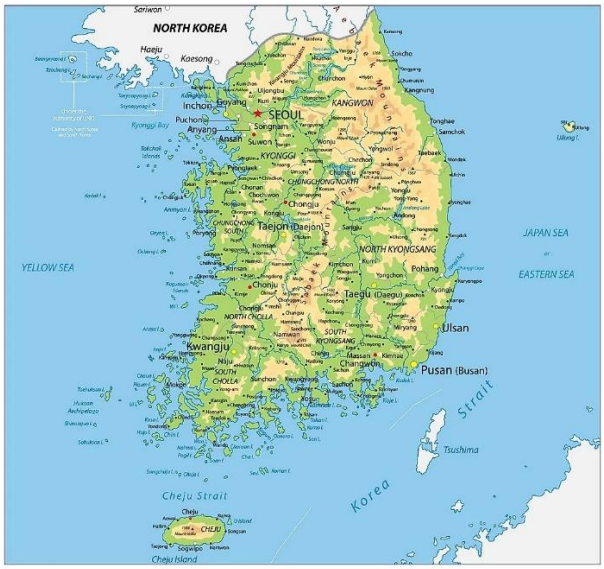
As discussed earlier, the idea of the eco goes back to the earlier religious cultures of Korea when the monks had a stronghold on the Joseon Dynasty kings (Buswell). Alongside this, it is important to note that the eco combined with writing, "ecopoetics," has also had a long tradition of being used within Korean literature to express dissatisfaction with the social and political environment as well as provide a means of communication for trauma which authors may not otherwise have the words for.

Beyond the influence of the religion itself, monks were also highly influential in society. It is important to note that unlike the Buddhist monks of Japan or China who considered themselves as strictly nonviolent, Korean monks were often participants in violent struggles against rival temples or the government. One such incident involved Kim Haksan, newly elected head monk by the Japanese Governor General in 1921, to Hwaeomsa Temple in Gurye County. The monks residing at Hwaeomsa resisted this change and leadership and twice prevented Kim Haksan from entering the temple before finally beating him to death on his third attempt (Song 282). The monks influence in Korea extended past the government and impacted the art scene.

The monks set the standard for appreciation of nature, and their use of violence correlated with how they approached criticism. Over time, poetry and art depicting nature also followed the monks in becoming outlets for criticism. The connection between Buddhist appreciation of nature and the Korean economy's dependence on agriculture meant that everyday life was affected and influenced by the natural world (Chung). Consequently, the use of the eco in poetic works – ecopoetics – has been adapted by Korean and Korean American poets as a means of self-expression. These poets utilize the eco to outline their trauma in ways they had been unable to before. This became especially relevant as the power of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897) waned and Japanese influence became more and more apparent. Beginning in 1897, the Japanese imposed many tariffs and treaties which slowly suffocated the Korean royal family before finally stripping them of their power entirely in 1910 when Japan formally annexed Korea.

Korean society was further pushed away from its relationship to nature when the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) forced it to rapidly adapt to outside influences and develop a new economic focus. Japan modelled its attempted rebranding of Korea after its own Meiji Restoration in 1868 which shifted the economy focus from agriculture to innovation (Wells 8). This moved Korean society away from the traditional mindset of keeping the natural world close. In addition, the Japanese colonial government had inserted itself in every area of life, including drastically altering the education system to insert Japan-centric textbooks essentially eliminating all traces of Korean culture. This was on top of rebuilding the economy to better meet the needs of the Japanese government (Tizzard). For example, the cities of Busan and Seoul exploded in development: skyscrapers, apartment buildings, malls, factories, and warehouses were all built to chase after the industry Japan had adapted to compete with the Western world. The number of farms across Korea dropped, and the rapid development of the cities pushed the environment out.

The rapid development of Korea may have led to a robust economy, but only through endeavors of restoring the environment itself can Korean society heal from the decades of trauma it has experienced. Cha, Kim, and Choi all explore ways the eco can be used as a healing tool without taking away from the post-Japanese Occupation values Korea adopted.



"South Korea Physical Map." *www.worldatlas.com*, uploaded by John Misachi, 13 Feb. 2021, www.worldatlas.com/r/w960-q80/upload/c9/39/f9/south-korea-physical-map.png.

Part III: Physical Restoration and Ecopoetics

Following the end of World War II, Seoul continued to rapidly change under the leadership of President Park Chung-Hee (1917-1979). He pushed for an industrial based economy, and Seoul built hundreds of apartment buildings to accommodate the new influx of workers moving from the rural villages (Gemici). Park's goals for Korea were to have it engage in international business, to work on developing technology and exports and bring in money to fund a variety of public projects. For example, Hyundai, Samsung, and Kia have all become household names and direct competitors with Western companies despite only being developed

after World War II. Despite the controversial nature of Park's presidency, the resulting economy boost, and infrastructure has ensured that Korea continues to grow economically and compete on a global scale (Gemici). The intense industrialization left little room for green spaces or areas which allowed the public to connect with nature. Yet, despite all this industrialization, the Korean people found a way to incorporate nature into urban development which shows how vital it is to their culture and history.

One such example of the physical restoration being done is Cheonggyecheon stream. This stream, located in Seoul, had historically been used as a drainage system beginning with King Taejong (1367-1422) who deepened the stream bed as well as inserted bridges for public use (Seoul Museum of History). Later it was used by the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897), the last dynasty of Korea, as a drainage system for the city of Seoul and continued to be used in that way until Park Chung-Hee's reign (1962-1979). In his attempt to industrialize, ended up clogging the stream with pollution and debris (Hwang 136). Park went so far as to cover up the stream with an elevated highway beginning in 1958 and finally being completed in 1977, a feat the Japanese had been unable to accomplish, yet somehow it became a symbol of the successful development of Seoul (Seoul Museum of History).

Sotnikov, Michael. “Hi Seoul’ 2008. Spring. 2nd day.” *www.flickr.com*, 5 May 2008, www.flickr.com/photos/25869929@N03/2468502996.

Yet, it soon came to be understood that the practical use of this freeway counteracted the cultural needs of the Korean public and in 2005, inspired by public complaints of pollution, the government made the decision to demolish the freeway and restore Cheongyecheon to its previous state (Hwang 135). With this restoration came much of the wildlife that had fled during urbanization and new vegetation attracted native birds and insects back into the city. In addition, this move reduced the urban heat island effect caused by the amount of concrete and air pollution caused by vehicles (Hwang).

The success of Cheonggyecheon’s restoration exemplifies how nature has once again become a vital part of Korean culture. Since Cheonggyecheon’s return, the Korean government has placed more emphasis on establishing and preserving natural areas which provide recreation, historical preservation, and works to minimize the negative effects of urbanization. The physical restoration of the environment provided the opportunity for the public to heal past trauma, literally removing the damage caused during the Occupation and dictatorships.

Nature was also affected and the Cheonggyecheon case was only one example as to how both Japan and the dictatorships of Korea worked to eliminate any form of self-expression in Korean culture. The stream’s restoration involved expanding the existing stream as well as inserting pathways, planting native vegetation, and removing trash and symbolizing the restoration of free expression (Hwang). Vegetation, wildlife, and clean water returning to the industrialized area is a very real example as to how nature is the avenue of expression Korean writers are utilizing to express their trauma regarding the Occupation.

In summary, Korean American writers have incorporated their culture's belief that nature is not simply a part of life, a way of sustaining oneself and the economy, but also a means of combatting the ongoing effects of the past. The unresolved trauma from the Japanese Occupation, the Korean War, and the following dictatorships is still being discussed and processed. Poets such as Cha, Kim, and Choi are uncovering decades of their own and their families' traumas through the natural worlds' importance in their culture, which can be evident in Park's focus on describing the gardens her family had both within urban Seoul and the rural countryside. Poets and writers are rediscovering their culture through processing their trauma. Incorporating the eco into their works allows them to re-examine past trauma and the perceptions forced upon them.

Part IV: Trauma

> "The postmemory generation of artists and filmmakers, I argue, deal with the themes of the Korean War and the history of ideological conflicts not merely to recover the historical 'truth' of the Korean War, but also to examine the very historical and cultural conditions in which the remnants of historical materials are consistently explored, understood, and even obliterated."
>
> – Dong-Yeon Koh, "The Korean War and Postmemory Generation: Contemporary Korean Arts and Films"

To better understand how memory and trauma are affecting the poets in this thesis, it is vital to look at the theoretical framework of generational memory and how Korean American poetry can be read through this particular lens. The study of the effects of trauma has become an established field within the past 100 years, going back to the work of Sigmund Freud in his

essays including *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917). In this essay Freud studies the effect grief of "a loved one, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as the fatherland" (153) had on the human psyche, describing it as "open wound" (163). Trauma is derived from the Greek word "wound," and Freud's breakthrough is that he said trauma can be a wound of the body, but it can also represent a wound on the mind. The "loss" Freud refers to is the loss of stability and normalcy resulting from displacement, with the effects of which would continue to affect individuals for years after. Freud's description of trauma is one of "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth 3) – a permanent injury which Hirsch would later theorize can be passed down generationally. Healing the wounds of the mind relies not only on the survivors of violence, but in the later generations who have the distance to critically examine the events that transpired. The eco used in Korean American poetry represent an act of restoration, returning to their cultural roots while also processing the trauma that has been passed to them.

Freud's work influenced that of Jewish American theorist Marianne Hirsch (b. 1949) who developed the term "postmemory" (Hirsch "Home") after closely examining the generational trauma as result of the Holocaust present in literary works such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980). Hirsch focuses much of her research on what she calls "postmemory"—that is how the 1.5 (child survivors) and second-generation survivors of largescale tragedies – particularly the Holocaust. Hirsch calls these the "postmemory generation[s]" (34), who have inherited the memories of the previous generation (usually their parents) as well as witnessing the grief, guilt, anger, and other complex emotions associated with surviving intense trauma. These generations grapple not only with their own interpretation of events space, but also with those of their parents, grandparents and the larger traumatized community.

The impact of trauma on Korean American poets runs deep. The poets analyzed in this thesis – Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Suji Kwock Kim, and Franny Choi – are second-generation survivors of either the Japanese Occupation or the Korean War. The 'postmemories', the inherited memories of traumatic experiences, passed down from their ancestors, particularly their parents, profoundly shape their perspectives on the world. Though the poets did not personally experience the Japanese Occupation, in Cha's case, nor the Korean War, in Kim and Choi's cases, the negative impact of these times influenced how they were raised with their parents discusses these times often enough that the poets inherited the memories themselves. They become traumatized on their parents' behalf and use their poetry to process said trauma.

Postmemory is central to understanding contemporary Korean American poetry, even if the topic is not related to the Holocaust which is Hirsch's main subject. Essentially, the postmemory generation of Korea has been kept "suspended between a failed remembering and an incomplete forgetting" (Cho 79) through governmental suppression of information and a generation of people who wish to move past the horrors they faced during both the Korean War and Occupation. That said, the poets in this thesis are all writing about postmemory, in relation to the trauma felt from the Japanese Occupation and Korean War while also having to process their own trauma. These memories have resulted in a "structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience" (Koh 4) that shows itself through the poetics.

Interestingly, the Koreans have their own concept that, while not exactly what Freud and Hirsch after him write about, still has similarities to the notion of postmemory as a concept of generational witnessing of trauma. The Koreans call this *Han. Han* is a cultural concept centering around "suffering is believed to be a part of the blood of Koreans, pass from one

generation to the next" (S.S.H.C. Kim 255). Much like postmemory, it is a belief that the Korean people are inherently prone to hardship, and that tragedy is inevitable.

There are different ways to interpret *han.* For example, some research surrounding the idea suggests that *han* is the result of a colonial stereotype that has been adopted and redefined by Korean society. Sandra So Hee Chi Kim, a researcher at Stony Brook University, believes that "its contemporary nationalist, biologistic oriented meaning emerged first during the Japanese colonial period as a colonial stereotype" (257). The Japanese created *han* as a method of distancing Koreans from the Japanese people by "Orientalizing" their culture (S.S.H.C. Kim 259). The Japanese government branded Korean goods as both exotic and "crude and primitive" (S.S.H.C. Kim 259). It was an act of othering, a way of categorizing the Korean people separately from the Japanese.

However, I believe that *han* is the effect of postmemories on later generations of Koreans, with the children of survivors categorizing their trauma in a way that can be succinctly expressed within their culture. In this thesis, I surmise that *Han* encapsulates the emotional and physical symptoms of trauma and is a legitimate diagnosis in South Korea if an individual presents insomnia, depression, and abdominal pain – all of which can also be symptoms of anxiety or depression or even Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (W. Cho).

Nevertheless, the effects of postmemory are present in the children and grandchildren of survivors of the Japanese Occupation and the Korean War. These second and third generations of Koreans and Korean Americans display their traumatic inheritance in their opinions about politics, about women's autonomy, and even about the food they consume. Their survival through decades of oppression has resulted in a postmemory that affects their descendants: children and grandchildren have grown up listening to the stories of survival, of death, of the

hardships their loved ones faced at the hands of the Japanese, the violence of WWII and the Korean War, and at the hands of the Korean government. As Hirsch writes, their "'not memories' [have been] communicated in 'flashes of imagery' and these 'broken refrains,' transmitted through 'the language of the body' are precisely the stuff of the postmemory trauma, and of its return" (Hirsch 31). We can say that this has influenced not just the writers of the post-Holocaust era, but also the post-violence of Korea. For Korean Americans the memories of their ancestors have become part of their own psyche, and so the memories become their own as well as those of the previous generation. They grapple with the reality of having just escaped the trauma that has impact their parents and grandparents and feel "exiled by their belatedness" (Chu 188) which they process through their writings.

This is especially true for female identifying Korean American poets who are second generation survivors. Historically, females within Korean society were subjected to especially brutal treatment during the Japanese Occupation due to forced conscription into sexual slavery for the benefit of Japanese soldiers. Decades of sexual abuse were swept under the rug by both the Japanese government and Korean dictatorships in an effort to ease tensions between the two countries (Choe). It was this enforced silence which added to the generational trauma female Korean Americans must also process. Hirsch says, "in that process of failed translation, the second-generation daughter can hold the memory with which she has been entrusted, because she can respect and perpetuate her parents' act of 'historical withholding'" (93). The daughters of parents who personally experienced the violence of the Japanese Occupation and/or the Korean War take on the role of healer – they understand the reasoning behind their parents' actions, while also working to heal the trauma of her parents. Female Korean American artists are not only working through the violence and trauma associated with the Occupation and Korea War,

but also a gendered trauma of the conscripted Comfort Women. “It is widely known that 200,000 ‘comfort women’ most of whom were Korea, were drafted or dragged against their will…went through indescribable sexual slavery, violence and pain” (Shim 252) and the legal nature of their forced service is still a controversial subject. The postmemories these poets experience reveal the extent of the trauma survivors of the Japanese Occupation and the Korean War feel.

All of these factors discussed above have led to why Korean American poets examined in this thesis utilize the eco as a method of projection and processing – the natural world is a part of them and they are part of the natural world. Combining the imagery of the environment to represent a traumatic past may be thought of as a symbolic act of restoration, much like what was done with Cheonggyecheon when it was restored.

IV: Korean American Female Poets

The three Korean American poets discussed in this thesis bring the eco into their poetry as a method of processing postmemory trauma. Their inherited memories have influenced how they view the world, and they all incorporate their cultures historical use of ecopoetics into their work to discuss these views. Their interpretations of the eco are slightly different with Cha focusing on the eco’s ability to translate her trauma to an audience outside of her culture, and Kim’s use of the eco in examining the impact of food and her relationship with her mother, and finally Choi’s outright condemnation on the United States’ government role in damaging ecosystems in Korea. Each poet uses their poetry to process their own trauma and aim their messages towards the issues they feel specifically play into their trauma’s creation.

Chapter 1, “Rooted in the Past: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee*”, covers Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s (1951-1982) poetry book *Dictee* (1982) in which she utilizes ecopoetics in a

contemporary manner. She not only criticizes the violence purported by the Japanese government during the Occupation, but also writes about how her family, especially her mother, handled the trauma of the post-Occupation and post-Korean War.

Cha was a Korean American artist who explored the impact and effect of language on immigrants. Her method of utilizing the eco is as a descriptor. The eco exists alongside the human in Cha's interpretation, and it is used to further emphasize emotions Cha is otherwise unable to fully articulate. Born in Busan, Cha's family frequently moved to escape the violence of the Korean War, Cha immigrated to the United States with her family in 1962 when she was twelve. Cha witnessed the effects of the Japanese Occupation firsthand and grew up hearing from her parents about the forced assimilation to Japanese language and culture while living in Manchuria. After immigration, Cha worked to explore the impact language has had on herself and her family. She became fluent in three languages: Korean, English, and French. All three would be utilized in her art projects.

Cha first published *Dictee* in 1982. It quickly became one of the foundational texts of the ecopoetics movement within Korean American poetry. Cha was outspoken in her criticism of the Japanese occupational government and military, and much of *Dictee* outright details the violence Cha and her family experienced during this time. Cha in particular experiments with format as she switches between typical poetry forms and prose, alongside alternating usage of English, French, and Korean. The abrupt transition between languages helps emphasize the chaotic nature of having one's culture uprooted by another. Unlike later poets, Cha utilizes ecopoetics as a descriptive force. Instead of an independent agent, the ecopoetics in *Dictee* work to set the scene of the traumatic descriptions and emphasize Cha's feelings through natural elements.

Chapter 2, "The Nature of Motherhood: Suji Kwock Kim", looks at Suji Kwock Kim's *Notes From the Divided Country* (2003), which, like the work of Cha, utilizes the eco as a descriptor but also draws parallels between humans and the environment. She closely examines her mother's traditional role in the family as the cook. Kim's great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents were all born in North Korea prior to the division of the peninsula and her poetry focuses on the division happening on the Korean peninsula - the forced separation from a homeland Kim and her family cannot return too. While Kim does not explicitly bring up the inability to return to her cultural homeland in her work, it is an important element that must be considered while reading her poetry[3]. Language and writing are a notable element that Kim plays with, much like Cha, however she uses the McClune-Reischauer romanization of the Korean language to keep the Korean names for food, plants, and traditions apparent. These words are italicized to further emphasize to the audience that Kim had to translate them from Korean, that it is an act of effort to provide the audience with an English-centric translation of something commonly known among Koreans.

Published in 2003, *Notes from the Divided Country* branches off from the precedent Cha has set. Explicitly detailing memories and events from her own family Kim also brings in elements of nature to describe and draw comparisons between the ongoing traumatic effect of the Occupation. The eco is brought into the conversation alongside humanity because Kim is drawing on traditional Korean views towards nature. Humanity and the eco exist side by side, equally affected by each other's actions and inactions.

[3] Her family was also very active in the resistance effort during the Occupation. Her great-grandfather founded the Korean Language Society amid the Korean War and Occupation and later became the dean of Yonsei University (Poetry Foundation)

In Chapter 3, entitled “Confronting the West: The Poetry of Franny Choi”, I examine Franny Choi and her work *The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On* published in 2022. Choi follows the trend set by Cha and Kim and utilizes the eco into her poetry critique the way Western society has negatively impacted Korean landscapes. Yet Choi differs from Cha and Kim because she chooses to give a symbolic voice to the eco by using ecopoetics as a descriptor and to draw parallels between mankind and nature much like her predecessors, but she evolves the concept through providing a voice to the environment itself. She uses her work as a way for the eco to testify to its traumas done by humanity, in the same vein she uses the eco to iterate her trauma.

Choi’s poetry explicitly details her perspective on the impact American culture has had on Korean environmentalism. Partially inspired by American Beat Poet Allen Ginsburg (1926-1997), whose fascination with Asian cultures and his own belief in Buddhism inspired his work, Choi combines her Korean culture and heritage with that of America. Nature is represented as an ‘other’ who is outside of human understanding. Yet, it is still the responsibility of humanity to work to better themselves for the preservation of the eco. She focuses on how the United States government played a crucial role in damaging the Korean landscape and their lack of accountability for doing so. Her usage of ecopoetics combines past trauma with contemporary ideology, revealing the way ecopoetics has progressed with Korean American poetry.

In conclusion, this thesis closely examines the works of three Korean American women poets and how ecopoetics is used in their writing to work through the trauma and memory of the violence faced by their families and society in 20th century Korea. It focuses on how their eco poetry intersects with the notion of generational memory, what Marianne Hirsch calls “postmemory,” in the wake of this violence, that has been passed down to them through the

memories of their parents and grandparents. They use their poetry to grapple with this inherited trauma, while they try to understand the current traumas of a Korea that wants to get back to nature and recover from the past.

Rooted in the Past: Language, Art, and "Rememory" in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's "Dictee"

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* encapsulates the way the trauma her mother experienced growing up during the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) has been passed down to her. Her mother's experiences are "burned into your ever-present memory. Memory less. Because it is not in the past" (Cha 45) and have been passed on to Cha to process and heal on her own. These inherited memories greatly impacted Cha's life and work, influencing the way she perceived the world around her. *Dictee* is semi-autobiographical, following Cha's life as well as that of her mother, Hyung Soon Huo (Friedrich 25). It details the way traumatic memories of parents are inherited by their children; Cha addresses the impact these memories have had on her throughout her life. Within *Dictee* Cha utilize ecopoetics as way to both reconnect with Korean culture and process the harm these memories have had on her. Thus, the primary focus of this chapter will be on examining the use of ecopoetics in the sections entitled "Clio – History," a section focusing on executed independence activist Yu Guan Soon, "Calliope – Epic Poetry," focuses on Cha's mother, and "Melpomene – Tragedy" in which Cha speaks about her own experiences.

Dictee, to begin with, is a response to the complex family history of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. She was born in 1951 in Busan, South Korea amidst the upheaval of a recovering society (Saltzstein). Though Cha only spent eleven years of her childhood living in Korea, those years

were highly turbulent. Her family moved frequently to escape from the control of the Japanese colonial government and later from the advancing Chinese and North Korean armies during the Korean War. They moved from Busan, where she was born, to Japan controlled Manchuria, to Seoul, back to Busan, back to Seoul, before immigrating to the United States in 1962 (Saltzstein). Finally, her family settled in San Francisco where Cha began to develop her creativity and passion for experimental art (Saltzstein). She studied art alongside Jim Melchert (1930-2023), a multimedia artist who specialized in ceramics, at the University of California Berkeley. Both Melchert and Cha were part of what is now called the "Funk Movement," a regional movement based in San Francisco beginning in the 1960s that was comprised of anti-establishment themes (Melchert). Cha and Melchert bonded over the movement's core ideas and over Melchert's conscientious objection to the Korean War (Saltzstein). Cha's development of *Dictee* reflected her approach to art, mixing traditional poetry alongside experimental prose and mixed media.

Much of Cha's art was performance based throughout her career, though she also explored film and mixed media (Bolling). Audience members described her "[speaking] softly, with the hypnotic rhythms of incantation" and watching her "Korean dance and tai chi" (Wallach). Her performances explored her relationship with her culture, and her experience with the "blurring of memory and the muffling of native speech" (Wallach). All her work contains a message focused on "displacement" as a key theme (Salztstein). She incorporated French, English, and Korean into her work to project feelings of helplessness and confusion onto the audience. In a sense, it is a mimicry of what she and other Korean American immigrants have experienced. She used mixed media in film allowing her to play with sound, movement, and materials. There is not a set movement, nor genre, nor even type of material Cha favors more

than others. She even created black and white short films, documentary style, about her family's experiences in Korea. *Dictee* is the culmination of Cha's experimental art, combining her experiences with memory and her relationship with her mother.

Cha's work not only expresses her experiences surviving the Japanese Occupation, but the experiences of generations of Korean women. She references the mythology of Demeter and Persephone alongside Yu Guan Soon, a Korean independence activist who was imprisoned, tortured, and executed by the Japanese (Kang). Yu Guan Soon is not just used by Cha as a way of explaining to the audience the violence Korean women experienced during the Japanese Occupation (and later during the Korean War (1950-1953)), but also of the violence the landscape itself suffered. She is a representative of the massive amount of environmental damage that was the result of war and the Japanese government and subsequent dictatorships' focus on industrialization.

Cha's life in the United States was focused on her art. However, in 1982 her career and life would be tragically cut short. 1982 was a busy year for Cha – she married photographer Richard Barnes and officially published *Dictee.* In November 1982, Cha took a break from organizing an art exhibition to go to the Puck Building in SoHo New York City which Barnes was documenting the renovations of (Saltzstein). There, security guard Joey Stanza, who had a very long history of sexual violence against women in multiple states (*People v. Stanza*), brutally murdered Cha. Sanza viciously attacked Cha, raping, strangling, and beating her to death (Christensen). Journalist Dan Christensen wrote in the South Florida Sun Sentinel in 1983 that Cha's "battered body was found dumped in a parking lot" and that it would take an additional five years for Cha's killer to be tried and sentenced (Wallach).

Yet despite Cha being well known within the New York art community, little publicity was given to her death. Critics such as author Cathy Park Hong theorized that the lack of coverage was due to media bias against Asian American's. Hong criticized the U.S. media in her book *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (2020) specifically citing Cha's murder as an example of such bias. Though her death was largely overlooked by mainstream media, her art and poetry saw a resurgence in popularity in the early 2000s when *Dictee* received an official reprint. *Dictee* would become the focal point of Cha's art, a combination of media which "conflates her mother's past with the stories of martyrs" (Wallach). In 1980, Cha was already in the process of writing *Dictee* and it would take two years for her to complete this project. A combination of prose, poetry, and photography *Dictee* told Cha's story of Korea. In it she speaks about childhood memories she inherited from previous generations, and muses about the importance of Korea to her. Posthumously, *Dictee* would reach the No. 5 spot on the paperback best-seller list from independent publishers in New York (Salztstein).

In this thesis I define *Dictee* as a textual based art book, due to the mixed media. Cha combines poetry and prose alongside photographs, medical charts, and Chinese calligraphy to showcase the complexity of Korean history. Cha utilizes French and English alongside Korean to emphasize the language loss Korea faced under Japanese oppression, and her own experience immigrating to the United States. The majority of prose, poems, and images in the book at untitled, but Cha divides *Dictee* into nine sections, each named after an Ancient Greek muse: "Clio – History", "Calliope – Epic Poetry", "Urania – Astronomy", "Melpomene – Tragedy", "Erato – Love Poetry", "Elitere – Lyric Poetry", "Thalia – Comedy", "Terpsichore – Choral Dance", and "Polymnia – Sacred Poetry". The artistic methods Cha uses require the reader to work to understand her words, further emphasizing to the audience the difficulty of immigration.

Language shifts happen unexpectedly, and images are inserted without context asking the reader to pause over each page to analyze what is happening.

The way Cha uses ecopoetics in *Dictee* takes inspiration from historical Korean poets usage of the eco. Cha takes the traditional method of using nature and natural elements as a metaphor for people and politics and twists it to work in combination with her own voice. She uses the eco as a descriptor, using it to "invent anew, expressions, for *this* experience, for this *outcome*" (Cha 32). The eco for Cha is a way to create a visual for readers to view her unique experience. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, ecopoetics have been used historically in Korea, and Cha's interpretation of it acts as a method of recovery. By taking on a skill utilized in previous generations, such as in Buddhist monks works or Yi Sang's (1910-1937), Cha adds a new usage of the eco. That is, to "resurrect it all now…to confess to relive the same folly. To name it now so as not to repeat history in oblivion" (33). With the ultimate goal of "extract[ing] each fragment by each fragment from the word…that will not repeat history in oblivion" (Cha 33). She uses the eco as a method of description, articulating experiences and feelings in a way her audience can understand without having personal experience. She narrates her mother's experience in Manchuria, directly addressing her mother and her feelings regarding having to flee Korea to escape Japanese military violence. Cha brings in comparisons between the present and the past to emphasize the cycle of violence within Korea.

For example, "Clio – History" opens with an image and a short epitaph. The image is of Yu Guan Soon (1903-1920), a Korean independence activist known for her involvement in the March First Movement. Yu, a student during the Japanese Occupation, smuggled a copy of the Declaration of Independence, written by poet Choe Nam-san (1890-1957) and signed by thirty-three "cultural and religious leaders" (Kang), to her village outside of Seoul. Her efforts in

spreading the Declaration of Independence helped start the March First Movement – thousands of, mostly peaceful, protests which happened across Korea but were violently suppressed by the Japanese Occupational government (Wells). Yu Guan Soon's actions were critical in inspiring future independence work and helped liberate Korea from the Japanese. She was imprisoned, tortured, and executed by the Japanese in 1920 (Kang). Yu exemplifies the endurance of Korean culture – preserving through incredibly difficult times. At the same time, Cha uses Yu as a means of conveying the lasting damage done to the environment.

In "Clio – History", Cha works to establish Yu as not only an agent of independence but as an avenue to explore the environmental impact of colonialism and war. Having her image and epitaph be the first to be read establishes the tone of *Dictee*:

"YU GUAN SOON

BIRTH: By Lunar Calendar, 15, March 1903

DEATH: 12, October, 1920. 8:20 A.M

She is born of one mother and one father."

This epigraph is an important opening for *Dictee.* Memorializing the life and death of one key independence activist killed by the Japanese government, Cha is immediately drawing attention to the very violent nature of the Japanese Occupation. Cha also uses this moment to compare herself with Yu to reinforce the idea that Yu was not an outlier affected by Japanese persecution, but an everyday reality. Both Cha and Yu had siblings, were outspoken in their criticism of the Japanese Occupation, and both were college educated (Kang). By placing Yu at the beginning of *Dictee*, Cha shows how she not only respects and admires Yu but also sees herself. Both Cha and Yu witnessed the widespread oppression and violence that happened under Japanese rule; Cha

witnessed the dictatorships that followed the removal of the Japanese but were still highly oppressive and Yu personally witnessed the Occupation's effects on Korea. The two women were both greatly affected by the Occupation and worked to express their frustration and trauma outwardly. Yu worked as an activist while Cha utilized art. But Cha feels that if their positions were reversed, she would have taken Yu's place as an activist. If Cha had remained in Korea, she too could have been the next Yu, and if Yu had been displaced to the United States, she may have become Cha.

"Clio – History" is the first instance where the eco is brought into the conversation in *Dictee*. In this section Cha utilizes ecopoetics as a tool of description, wherein nature assists her in intensifying the emotion she wishes the audience to experience "ecognosis" – "like knowing, but more like letting be known. It is something like coexisting" (Morton 5). Ecognosis, meaning the inherent understanding of the relationship mankind has with the environment, that it is humans who depend on the environment for providing the resources needed to live (Morton). Cha achieves this feeling through using the natural world, comprised of both the human body and elements of the earth, i.e., vegetation, weather, and animals, and is used throughout *Dictee* as vehicles for emotional communication. Cha relies on these elements to descriptively portray feelings, providing a visual example of the invisible. Such as on page thirty-seven where Cha describes the "beauty" of the martyrs and how they evoke the "beauty from seasonal decay" (37). Their deaths, though tragic, nourish the future of Korea like fallen leaves in autumn. Their bodies decay, but their causes and aspirations fuel the next generation of activists. Hope is not lost when Yu dies, it fertilizes the next generation to "seed, germ, sprout" (Cha 38). Here the eco is utilized to invoke a feeling of hope and perseverance.

In this section we also see how Cha utilizes the concept of postmemory with the combination of her and her mother's memories forcing her to come "face to face with the memory, it misses. It's missing" (Cha 37). The postmemory is the inherited memories Cha has gained from her mother which have become so vivid that she experiences them as her own (Hirsch). The second-generation experience Cha has of surviving the Japanese Occupation impacts her perception of the eco. Cha's mother, Hyung Soon Huo (Friedrich 25) worked as a teacher in Manchuria where her family had settled in a vain attempt to escape the Japanese Occupation (Cha 49). However, Hyung Soon Huo and the other teachers were required to "speak in Japanese to each other" despite "all the teachers [being] Korean" (Cha 49). Cha relies on the eco as a means of communication with the audience, transferring her perception of the memories she inherits from her mother onto the audience. Much like Yu's actions bringing revolutionary hope, Cha's mother's memories "seed, germ, sprout" (Cha 38) connect her to her culture. At the same time, her postmemories connect Cha to the traumatic experience of "longing in the face of the lost" (38) causing her to mourn culture that have been permanently lost due to the Japanese Occupation. Cha details how her mother was "tri-lingual", speaking Korean, Japanese, and Chinese, and that "the tongue that is forbidden is your own mother tongue" (45). The trauma of being prevented from speaking one's native language passed down to Cha, who had to learn English in order to adapt to the culture of the United States, and who found, much like her mother, that speaking in her "mother tongue is [her] refuge" (45). The cycle of the Korean language only being able to be safely spoken in the household is passed from mother to daughter.

"Clio - History" is also where Cha establishes the cycle of repetition. Cha parallels her mother's experiences with her own, highlighting how despite time and different countries, they experienced similar traumas. Both Cha and her mother were forced to learn another language to

be able to survive, and both found speaking Korean when at home to be a refuge. Cha also related herself to Yu Guan Soon, whose political ideals mirrored hers. She saw herself in Yu and saw Korea in Yu. What happened to Yu was not a unique moment, but the everyday consequence of living under an oppressive government. The message of independence must be "transmitted through, by the same means, the same channel without distinction the content is delivered in the same style: the word" (Cha 33). Regardless of the culture, an oppressed nation seeks out liberation through the spoken and written words and Yu smuggled the Declaration of Independence into her village where she spoke and inspired her neighbors to join in the March First Movement. Cha notes that the "accounts [of Korea] are about (one more) distant land, like (any other) distant land, without any discernable features in the narrative, (all the same) distant like any other" (33). History repeats itself, the Occupation of Korea mirrors that of the colonial civilizing missions performed by the West over centuries, wherein the culture, language, and religion were all replaced with the invading nations. While Cha acknowledges the endless cycle of invasion and oppression, Cha wants to make the story of Korea to feel personal to the audience, to make them understand how "our country, even with 5,000 years of history, has lost it to the Japanese" (28). There are no unique experiences, rather, for Cha, history is constantly "reproducing, multiplying itself" (Cha 37) across cultures.

While the experience of surviving the Japanese Occupation and the Korean War are not universal, Cha still manages to make survivorship personal to the audience. In "Calliope – Epic Poetry" centers around Hyung Soon Huo's early life in Manchuria. By centering this section of *Dictee* around her mother's childhood, Cha's reader witnesses what it was like to grow up during the Japanese Occupation. The readers share her mother's experiences. "Calliope – Epic Poetry" opens with Cha directly addressing her mother: "Mother, you are eighteen years old" (45). The

use of "you" throughout this section pulls the reader into taking on Cha's mother's experience, directly putting them in the memories of living through the Japanese Occupation. Cha utilizes her mother's memories to build the connection between the audience and the eco – underscoring the importance the eco plays in Korean culture.

Cha opens "Calliope – Epic Poetry" with her mother "suffer[ing] the knowledge of having to leave" (Cha 45) her homeland. She goes on to describe Manchuria as a place where "the hearts of the people are measured by the size of the land" (Cha 45), meaning that despite the harsh weather conditions of Manchuria and the despair of being forcefully displaced, the community still works together. The community depends on one another and the land to survive. Without the land, the village Cha's mother grew up in cannot exist. They rely on the expansive valleys to farm and work, far away from the violence occurring on the peninsula. Yet, regulations issued by the Japanese, and later the arrival of the Chinese military and the North Korean army, make survival there difficult. To make life more bearable, Cha's mother sings an *aegukga* (46) – a term meaning any song which "expresses love for one's country" (Ministry of Interior and Safety), though has become synonymous with the Korean National Anthem – to remember not only her native language, but her ability to resist. Through the act of singing Cha's mother is temporarily able to reclaim the land as Korea, with her voice spreading Korean culture to the environment and making "birds are [the] mouthpieces…for the message" (Cha 48) of resistance. Hyung Soon Huo voice spreads to the birds who "scatter the words" (Cha 48) of preserving their culture through small acts of resistance in Manchuria. Cha says her mother "know[s] how to wait" (46) and feels that the oppression by the Japanese government will eventually end. Hyung Soon Huo believes that she will eventually be able to return to the peninsula and freely speak her language, not be limited to the privacy of her own home.

The very act of singing this song, even in the privacy of one's home, was forbidden during the Japanese Occupation, thus Cha's mother's singing is an act of rebellion. Koreans were expected to speak in Japanese, yet Cha's mother's mother tongue carries "the mark of the red above the mark of the blue below, heaven and earth," (Cha 46) – the *taegeuk* the national symbol of Korea. Singing the *aegukga* means that despite everything, Japan was not able to take her heritage from her. Korea is still a part of Cha's mother, branded into her language which she uses to resist colonization. Yet, it's not easy. For example, when her mother goes on to become a teacher in Manchuria she must speak to her students in Japanese because the Korean language is against the law. She must teach them to "speak their name in Korean as well as how they would in Japanese" (Cha 49). Cha's mothers singing ends the "drought to the extensions of spells, words, noise" (50) holding fast to the Korean culture even under threat of colonial punishment.

In addition, the act of singing brings Cha's mother closer to her culture. The *aegukga* acts as an "ebb and flow of echo" (47), with Cha's mother "echoing" the traditions of her ancestors as an act of resistance. This resistance is implied to be natural. Her singing resistance is a hidden way to "plant the words to the moon you send word through the wind" and that by living in Manchuria her "words are given birth" by the "sky and by water" (Cha 48). Even the animals are participating in ensuring the Korean language is not forgotten with "birds [who] are mouthpieces wear the ghost veil for the seed of message" (Cha 48). The wildlife of Manchuria are just as anxious to break free from Japanese control. The *aegukga* becomes an avenue of connection between Cha's mother and the environment, with the song being mimicked by the birds and carried to other villages being oppressed. It is as if the very environment works alongside Cha's mother to protest the Japanese Occupation.

Prior to the Japanese Occupation, Korea had a restorative approach to environmental resources. The Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897) had limited the cutting of pine (the primary lumber used in buildings and ships in Korea) to ensure a sustainable system of growing and obtaining lumber (J.S. Lee 42). However, in the Japanese government's priority of turning Korea into Japan, they shifted the economic focus towards the industrial and in doing so altered the "national myth of restoration" (Chung 28). During and after the Japanese Occupation, development took priority over sustaining natural resources. Forests cut for lumber were not replanted as they were during the Joseon Dynasty (J.S. Lee). Factories took precedence over farms, and the more urban spaces grew the less room there would be for nature to coexist alongside the people. It was not simply a shift in economy, but method of division meant to further distance Korean culture from Japan's idealization of a Korean colony (Tizzard). In their efforts to eliminate Korean culture Cha describes how the Japanese would "force their speech upon you and direct your speech only to them" (Cha 50) in their mission colonize the peninsula. Cha's mother's simple act of resistance, of speaking her native tongue, mimics the activism referenced earlier by Yu Guan Soon, and Cha's mother will also "come back to your one mother to your one father" (Cha 53). The landscape has been permanently changed by the policies pushed during the Japanese Occupation, and the continuation of said policies throughout the dictatorship years pushed traditional practices further from the public. The culture becomes "filtered edited through progress and westernization" (Cha 57).

Cha end's "Calliope – Epic Poetry" with describing the impact the environment her mother grew up had in shaping her as a person. Cha uses the plant life cycle as a method of considering the "composition of the body, taking into consideration from conception, the soil, the seed, amount of light and water necessary, the geneology [sic]" (58) as a way of connecting her

mother's development with the environment. All of what she witnessed and experienced contributed to how her mother turned out but also is representative of how Koreans viewed themselves: as native to the peninsula as the plants they use to survive (Chung).

Following this section, Cha alters the format of *Dictee.* "Urania - Astronomy" opens with and image of a traditional Chinese acupuncture chart followed by Cha's experience having her blood drawn in a doctor's office. Cha writes poetry in French on the left page with the English translation on the right. She then incorporates more traditional poetry alongside her experimental prose and photography, mixing in French alongside English as well. The impact of this shift in language is to make the reader question his or her understanding. It is *assumed* that on the right side is the translation of the left, but in order to be sure Cha is not writing two separate poems alongside each other the reader must put forth the work to translate themselves. The doubt the reader feels seeing the two languages is intentional – Cha uses this to express the "failed translation" she holds as a "second-generation daughter…hold[ing] the memory with which she has been entrusted" (Hirsch 93). Cha relies on her own language to invoke her mother's experiences where she is continuously attempting to understand. But she recognizes the fundamental difference in language: her mother faced the attempts to eliminate her language, while Cha must adopt an additional language in order to express hers safely.

This idea is further echoed in the opening lines: "I heard the swans / in the rain" (Cha 67) which Cha uses as a metaphor for hearing and speaking Korean as a child. The rain is English, the primary language used in the United States, and the swans represents Korean – only heard by Cha within her own home and often drowned out by the presence of English media. Swans, typically associated with innocence and purity in Western culture, represent the naivety Cha had as a child regarding language. "Swans. Speech. Memory" (Cha 67) she continues, repeating her

message of Korean language existing primarily in her memories. The swans, beautiful and elegant, are rarely heard over the rain. Yet, even when swans are pushed out of their environment, they are still swans – which is the same message Cha pushes regarding her mother's displacement in Manchuria. Despite being separated from her homeland and culture, Cha's mother remained Korean and incorporated her cultural beliefs into her new life.

"Urania - Astronomy" continues Cha's exploration of postmemory, exploring the impact language has had on identity. Cha expands on how the landscape contributed to her mother's ability to retain her culture in an oppressive environment, often mirroring Cha's own experiences. The division between her own memories and those she has inherited from her mother seems to blur as she ages throughout *Dictee*. In "Calliope – Epic Poetry", which is centered around her mother's experience growing up in Japanese controlled Manchuria, not only is Cha struggling with her own childhood memories, but those of her mother. For example, Cha grapples with the loss of language alongside her mother, where their language is "heard, not at all" (67) in their country. Speech is "re membered from dream" where it "diminishes itself" (Cha 69). Much of Cha's own experience with her culture is centered around the loss of language: in her mother being forced to learn Japanese and forget Korean, and Cha's immigration to the United States where learning English was required of her to succeed in life. Though the loss of language was for different reasons, Cha still experiences a disconnect from her native language. The trauma of being displaced has been passed from mother to daughter, with Cha feeling that her language is "remnants. Missing…never the same. Absent" (69) from her life. Cha has inherited Hyung Soon Huo's memory of the Korean language being limited to only the private household. Though the Japanese Occupation has ended, the aftershocks have spread to the next generation who still experience the trauma of being afraid to participate in their own culture.

Cha's complicated relationship with language expanded in 1962 when her family immigrated to the United States (Bolling). There, Cha had to learn English to be able to attend school and fit in with her peers – mirroring the same experience her mother had when she moved to Manchuria. The act of speech is a memory which transcends generations, and Cha homes in on the mirrored existence of her childhood and that of her mother's with both having little opportunity to speak their native tongue. The association of language with nature only further emphasizes this idea; the culture of Korea, or at least Cha's interpretation, viewed themselves as part of the natural order of the world. Japan's attempts at eliminating their language and culture disrupted the natural order of the Korean Peninsula. Once again, language is considered a part of the body: "tongue inside the mouth inside / the throat inside / the lung organ alone. The only organ" (Cha 67), much like how Cha's mother's tongue was marked in the previous section. Identity and the body are intertwined, they are "all assembled as one. Just one" (Cha 67) and are inseparable. The body, identity, and language are integrated together in a way that cannot be separated naturally– thus the attempts at colonization by the Japanese government are viewed as acting against the natural order.

Cha then moves to emphasize how the disruption to language negatively impacted the natural world. The connection Korean culture holds between the people and the environment means that taking away an important aspect of the culture away means taking away an important part of the ecosystem. In this case, Cha highlights the negative effects taking away language had on the Korean people. She continues to describe speech in "Urania - Astronomy" as if it were a process in a machine: "Stop. Start. Starts. / Contractions. Noise. Semblance of noise" (75). The process of speech is mechanical, the tongue, vocal cords, and mouth working together to create sounds which we have assigned meaning to. Cha breaks down the process of speech to represent

how, at the core of it, it is all around society. Sound is created by insects, animals, and even weather. Human beings are just another iteration of the natural world – capable of the same method of communication which the rest of the environment uses.

Cha "remembers" language through her mother's memories – the idea of language being liberating comes from her mother's experiences. Language is "re membered from dream" (Cha 69), an explicit reference to Toni Morrison's theory of "rememory" used in her 1987 novel *Beloved*. *Beloved's* plot centers around Sethe, a woman who fled from a Southern plantation to escape slavery, and her children who grow up without experiencing the same trauma. Sethe's daughter, Denver, must work to heal the trauma that has been passed down to her by Sethe, and end the "rememory" cycle of pain that has resulted from such trauma. *Rememory* is "a form of 'transportation', a descent through…a 'time tunnel of history' into the world of the dead" (Hirsch 83). Rememory for Morrison is a way to describe how slavery generationally affected a mother who had escaped slavery and a daughter who never did. The traumatic experience of Sethe, the mother, continuously impacted how her daughter, Denver, interpreted the world and the relationships she had with the people around her. Cha experiences a form of "rememory" called "postmemory" which was developed by Marianne Hirsch based on her research on the effects of the Holocaust on 1.5 and 2nd generation survivors. It is applicable to Cha because she herself is a 1.5 generation survivor of the Korean War (1950-1953) and was raised by survivors of the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945). Her parents, particularly her mother, passed their memories onto Cha as she grew up and over time these memories became her own.

Cha's memories about her mother's life in Manchuria are highly detailed, with her describing the way children would greet her mother at the train station as if she had witnessed it herself. This is because, in a way, Cha has witnessed it. The postmemory is the inherited

traumatic memories passed from parents to children, a concept which is based in Toni Morrison's "rememory". Dr. Marianne Hirsch expanded rememory in her theory of postmemory, as a "memory that, communicated through bodily symptoms, becomes a form of repetition and reenactment" (Hirsch 82 & 83). The 're' in rememory is used by Morrison to convey "not just the threat, but the certainty of repetition 'It will happen again'" (Hirsch 84). The passing of memory also means the passing on of trauma, compounding the trauma experienced by the postmemory generation. For Cha, this is represented through "language itself depend[ing] on a fundamental and irreparable breech" (Hirsch "The Mother/Daughter Plot" 52). Cha represents the passing of postmemories from her mother to her through utilizing language as a means of connection. In this instance language becomes an "act of transfer" transforming "history into memory…to be shared across individuals and generations" (Hirsch 31). The transfer stems from the "bleed" of "loss of family, home, of a sense of belonging and safety" (Hirsch 34). Cha communicates these feelings through her poetry, using the languages she speaks to translate to the audience the trauma of the postmemory.

Cha moves from her mother's memories to her own experiences in Korea in "Melpomene - Tragedy". Her own memories reveal a sterile environment with curated gardens and skyscrapers, contrasting sharply with her mother's memories of Manchuria. Here, the cycle of trauma becomes clear with Cha's "desire to be marked, and thus to repeat [her] mother's trauma" (Hirsch 81) to understand and heal the trauma passed down to her. To heal from the traumatic memories which have been passed down to her, Cha wishes to relive them to find ways to heal and move forward. Yet, she realizes that the environment of Korea no longer supports this. The industrialization of Korea has taken away the wild landscapes and replaced them with manmade gardens which do not reflect her mother's years living in remote Manchuria. Instead, Cha is

reminded of the violence post-Korean War during the dictatorships when children walk by in school uniforms the same "white residue of gas" (Cha 85). The city is a place Cha has associated with violence, and it does not provide enough room for nature to coexist and help her heal from the postmemories of the Japanese Occupation.

Cha opens "Melpomene - Tragedy" with a moment of relaxation, reclining in a chair in a room overlooking a garden, yet the scene is sterile. The garden is not the wild fields her mother experienced in Manchuria but "the trees in perfect symmetry" (Cha 79) creating a sterile tone. Unlike "Calliope – Epic Poetry", Cha's first mention of nature is within a controlled setting. Here, Cha uses this to represent the growth and innovation that has occurred in Korea in the years her family has been gone. Cities across the country have grown, skyscrapers have been built, and Korea has been prioritizing an economy that competes internationally. So, the garden is being used to represent that. Having "the trees in perfect symmetry" (Cha 79) shows how Korea has departed from their dependence on agriculture, to creating their own "natural" scenes to enjoy. This is further emphasized through "the correct season the correct forecast" (Cha 79) showing how even the weather is seemingly under human control. Cha wishes to relive her mother's trauma, "to be marked" (Hirsch 81), but is unable to. The environment is not the same as it was for her mother, she cannot experience the hardships her mother faced in a remote village in Manchuria when she lounges in a manmade garden in the city. This pocket of nature is false; it is not at all representative of the real ecosystems beyond the concrete. Her desire to relive her mother's memories to heal is prevented due to mankind.

Yet, as Cha points out "Melpomene - Tragedy", mankind has developed a false sense of being able to control their environment. There is a persistent belief that "control of the natural environment, understood [is] a god-given right in western culture" (Estok 207-208), a belief

which did not initially exist within Korea. Cha's description of Korea shows that "the more control we seem to have over the natural environment, the less we actually have" (Estok 208). She presents a world where "the air is made visible with smoke it grows it spreads without control" (Cha 82), showing how pollution from industrialization has made it difficult to live. The air is no longer refreshing to breathe but causes Cha panic, reminding her of the chaos of protests and skirmishes that she witnessed as a child. Despite industrial growth Cha sees Korea as "inside the same struggle seeking the same destination" (Cha 81), a society still grappling with being "severed in Two" (Cha 81) from the war. It is the cycle of repetitions presented in a different format. The Japanese Occupation is over, but the people are still processing the consequences. Cha, despite not living in Korea for many years at this point, is thrust back into the past because of their growth. "The sky is a haze" Cha writes and how it reminds her of the "gas smoke" (82) she witnessed during student protests as a child. Cha sees the city years after she is forced to leave and sees that in its attempts to innovate, it has not been able to conquer the natural world. Instead, by having a lack of nature within the city, mankind suffers from its own creations.

The traumatic cycle continues in "Melpomene – Tragedy" which shows how Cha's return to Korea revives traumatic memories from her childhood, and those of her mothers. She is stuck in a loop of re-witnessing the violence of their childhoods. She "step[s] among them the blood that will not erase with the rain on the pavement that was walked upon like the stones where they fell" (Cha 82). Instead of experiencing the Korea of the future – in a very literal sense, as Cha has only seen Korean immediately post-Occupation and during the war, and 18 years later (83) – yet it is still the same. For all the changes the Korean government has worked to better the country, it is still the same place. The sidewalks may be different, but "the blood" (Cha 82) remains. The compactness of the city causes Cha to recall a specific memory, where her older

brother and mother are engaged in a heated argument about him joining a student demonstration. Cha's mother is physically trying to stop him from leaving their house, and above the yelling them "you can hear the gunshots. They are directed at anyone" (Cha 83). The demonstrations notoriously ended in some type of violence, usually with students being "caught and beaten with sticks, and for others, shot, remassed [sic], and carted off" (Cha 83). There are no gunshots in the present, yet Cha is surrounded by loud voices, smoke, and people forcefully reminding her of how the student demonstrations looked.

Cha reveals that her brother did in fact attend the demonstration despite her mother's best efforts. As Cha and her family grieved her brother, so did the natural world. On the day of his death "it rained. It rained for several days. It rained more and more times" (85). Even with the rain washing most evidence of the demonstration away, Cha's neighbors claimed that his "blood stains still… The stone pavement stained where you fell still remains dark" (85). Even eighteen years later, the stain still exists (Cha 85). She is "left here in this memory still fresh, still new" (Cha 85), the memory closely existing alongside her present reality. Nearly two decades later, surrounded by a city that had undergone radical physical and political changes, Cha is "back so precisely now exact to the hour to the day to the season in the smoke mist" (85). The air pollution that affects Korea in the modern day as a result of its factories and industrial businesses has thrust Cha back to the day of her brother's murder. The environmental change that occurred in her absence directly led to the traumatic resurgence of the memories surrounding her brother's death. Cha uses "Melpomene – Tragedy" to shift her focus from using natural elements to describe how Korean people are part of the environmental cycle to humans recreating natural phenomenon which causes them pain.

"Erato – Love Poetry" once again alters the format Cha has established. Instead of simply prose or poetry, Cha separates her prose across two pages mimicking a diptych – "two corresponding panels joined together" (Meyer). Cha separates her writing, forcing the reader to examine both pages in quick succession and leaving large chunks of the page blank. One page describes the actions of an unnamed woman, while the other page describes key environmental elements: "columns. White. Stone. Abrasive and worn" (Cha 95). Once again, Cha approaches something made by man with clinical detachment – there is none of the warmth or vividness that is associated with nature from the first section. She describes a video of a woman mouthing words silently, "she shapes her lips accordingly, gently she blows whos and whys and whats" (Cha 99). It is a section built entirely around translating the experience of having to grapple with a new language. For Cha, this represents two distinct experiences. First, the experience of her parents who were forced to learn Japanese and abandon their native language. Second, the experience of immigrating to a new country and having to learn their language to fit in. Language is a core aspect of identity, something that Cha has established as "being home. Being who you are" (46) and that the tongue is marked with "heaven and earth, taigeuk" (46). Speech is a natural part of identity as Cha has established and is integral to the connection between humanity and the environment.

The woman's identity is revealed: Thérèse Martin, a Catholic saint nicknamed "Little Flower of God" (Society of the Little Flower) and who Cha uses to reconnect the audience with nature. Nature is once again used as a descriptive, with Martin's tears mirroring "water is dripping into the stone well from the bark of the tree" (Cha 104). Her very tears are a force of nature. Cha specifically questions Martin's closeness with nature, if her association with nature is due to her saintliness or because she is a woman. Martin "cannot disturb the atmosphere" and she

"yields space and in her speech" (Cha 104). She is subservient to the environment around her. Yet, Martin is not the only woman placing the environment first: Cha is as well. Cha joins Martin in "waiting and knowing to wait…in the silence through the pines, the hills" (106), in participating in the subservience to nature. Cha channels Martin to convey this message and then insert herself following in her footsteps. Again, an instance of repetition. Martin died in 1897 thirteen years before Japan would begin its occupation, while Cha is writing *Dictee* in the 1980s. But the two women are paralleled much like Cha pointed out with Yu Guan Soon.

The femininity Cha centers "Erato – Love Poetry" on extends to the role women play within heteronormative relationships. Mother and lover are parts traditionally associated with women. Both involved a level of subservience Cha has already alluded to previously. Motherhood plays an important role in the natural world. It brings life, it is life – Mother Earth, being a popular phrase – and is critical for the survival of any society. However, Cha points out that motherhood is not entirely selfless: "Mother you who take the child from your back to your breast you who unbare your breast to the child her hunger is your own the child takes away your pain with your nourishment" (109). Here, Cha directly tells the reader that motherhood is just as much for the mother's benefit as it is in the world. The child "takes away your pain" (Cha 109) when the mother can provide food. It is the cycle of life. The mother provides the food and love needed for a child to grow into a successful adult, but in turn, the child provides an escape from the painful reality of the world. It is a symbiotic relationship unlike the next line: "Mother you you who take the husband from your back to your breast you who unbare your breast to the husband his hunger your own the husband takes away your pain with his nourishment." Here, the relationship is unbalanced. The woman does both the providing and the protecting, feeding the husband from her breast but also carrying him on her back. "She took whatever he would give

her because he gave her so little" (Cha 110), something which goes against the natural order. Across the animal kingdom, partners take equal roles in their courtships. Birds present beautiful feathers and build elaborate nests, wolves bring meals to their dens, and fish create protective spaces for their young to be born in. But Cha points out that humans break this tradition - especially in regards to Korean culture. Women's roles in Korea have historically been very traditional with them being expected to be a mother, cook, maid, and, ultimately, subservient to the male of the house. There existed an idea that "she deserved so little. Being wife" and that this dynamic was "how it was. How it had been" (Cha 110). The woman was "his wife his possession" (Cha 111) and thus their dynamic went against the order of the natural world. There was no equality between the two as he "touches her with his rank" (Cha 111) instead of as a partner. The mother is not viewed as a full person, but an object meant to fulfill a specific role in the household.

Abruptly, Cha shifts topics as she transitions to "Elitere – Lyric Poetry". Once more, the recurring nature of events repeating is brought back into the conversation. "Recurring upon itself without / the knowledge of / its absent view" (Cha 125) nature repeats itself endlessly. The sun rises, and sets, and this repeats regardless of weather or time or human intervention. Cha then praises "fruit as they are. Water in glass as beads rise to the rim" (Cha 124), implying that as fruit can coexist in nature so should humans. Cha uses the fruit to convey the idea that humans are not separate from their environment, they exist in the shadows along with the darkness. They are an element of the world, not in control of it. The fruit and glass show that nature persists in seemingly man-controlled environments. It is not mankind being described; it is fruit and water which both exist outside the boundaries of human control. The scene of a bowl of fruit and a glass of water existing in a room is one that is repeated endlessly across time and culture –

regardless of mankind's innovation, fruit will exist and so will water, the containers of them can be manipulated but they themselves will always exist. They are unaware of other iterations of them, and they do not care. Knowledge of other fruits does not impact their existence or their role in nature. They are "seen and void. Void of view. / Inside outside. As if never" (Cha 126), utterly unchanged regardless of if they are placed inside human abodes or left on their own in nature.

Yet, according to Cha humanity attempts at erasing certain moments of time. Due to negative associations, they "pull [them] by the very root, the very / possible vagueness they may evoke" (Cha 128) in a desperate attempt to keep these times from affecting them. Cha has witnessed Korea doing the same: in the National Museum of Korea[4] there are three expansive levels cataloging the entirety of the Korean Peninsula. As one moves up the levels they learn about prehistoric times and the earliest of civilizations, with the third and final floor covering the most recent times. It goes all the way up to the present day, yet there is no direct mention of the Japanese Occupation. It is not until one is exiting the exhibit where a small TV screen is placed on the wall beside the exit which contains a soundless slideshow of information about the Occupation. Thirty-five years of history simplified into a single slideshow because the memories of that time are still so intense, so negative, and impactful that it is preferable to have to mentioned as little as possible. These memories of the Japanese Occupation are ones the Korean people would prefer to "not to see" (Cha 128). Instead, they demolish Occupation government buildings and are "reconstructing step by step" (Cha 129). But at the same time, they are "forgetting nothing / leaving out nothing" (Cha 129) through their small method of preservation.

[4] This was the case in 2022 when I visited the museum.

"Thalia – Comedy" homes in on the concept of memory. It features scenes from Cha's life, seemingly mundane moments that have been immortalized on paper. Yet even these moments provide insight into her world. She describes her perfume as "odorless gladiolas white chrysanthemums white / scents against white sheets" (Cha 144), revealing that even an object as common as perfume is seemingly affected by race. Cha is still the 'other' even when in the comfort of her own home. But, despite this, the memories of the past can be "redeemed through a future and a past" (Cha 145) meaning that only by facing the past head on will the future be able to truly move on. Yet, Cha does not feel that this is how Korea is handling itself post-Occupation. She writes: "You remain dismembered with the belief that magnolia blooms white even on seemingly dead branches and you wait. You remain apart from the congregation" (155). These lines reveal Cha's interpretation on Korea's handling of the past. It has largely tried to ignore the past and focus on moving forward, yet that does not address the impacts still around. Individuals like Cha are still reliving their past because of the unresolved nature of their trauma. The "Earth is dark. Darker" (Cha 159) and only through focusing on healing can society heal from the past. The life cycle requires the sun to provide important nutrients to the environment, so Korea must face their past head-on to truly grow.

In summation, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha utilizes the eco throughout *Dictee* as a method of description and recovery. She uses the eco to describe the complex feelings and experiences resulting from being a 2nd generation survivor of the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953). The eco connects Cha's understanding of her culture with the trauma done to it by the Japanese colonization, and her use of it works as an act of healing. She explores the inherited memories from her mother and how they have impacted her throughout her

lifetime. These memories being explored through the eco help heal Cha and end the cycle of trauma resulting from decades of violence.

Consuming the Past: Suji Kwock Kim on Food and Trauma

"We're not alone" says poet Suji Kwock Kim (b. 1969) about the estimated ten million 이산가족 (*ee-san-gajok),* "separated families" spread across the Korean Peninsula (S.K. Kim, "No End / to the End) in the aftermath of the Korean War (1950-1953). Kim's is one such separated family. Her great-grandparents were forcibly separated from their siblings who remained in North Korea when the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was created on July 27, 1953 (Koh 67). These families have been permanently split, unable to see or contact loved ones for many years. Thus, Kim comes from a long line of *shilhyangmin*, "displaced persons" (Koh 1), individuals made to leave the North during the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and unable to return to the North following the creation of the DMZ in 1953. Her maternal great-grandfather, Kim Yoon-Kyung, founded the Korean Language Society (조선어학회) during the Occupation and was imprisoned for it (S.K. Kim "*Notes From the Divided Country*" 73). Later, he became a dean of the prestigious Yonsei University in Seoul where he is immortalized with a statue (S.K. Kim "*Notes From the Divided Country*" 73). Kim's relationship with her family formed her perception of the world around her, influencing her relationship with the environment around her.

Notes From the Divided Country, published in 2003, is the culmination of Kim's experience grappling with her identity and Korean culture post-Japanese Occupation and Korean War. Kim centers much of her poetry around the intimate moments, particularly of her mother in

the family kitchen preparing food and exploring the impact of the eco on a personal level. Traditional Korean cuisine depends on vegetables, and through eating them one consumes the eco and Kim perceives this as an act of unification – further connecting the individual to the environment they exist in. Kim uses her poetry as both a means of expression and a way to process the intergenerational trauma from her mother's experiences – much in the way Cha explored her mother's memories of Manchuria during the Japanese Occupation. However, instead of investigating her mother's relationship with culture and her environment as Cha did, Kim looks at how the kitchen acts as a space of processing with cooking (food aka the eco) as a restorative practice. Kim's focus on the kitchen allows for an intimate view of the private lives of Korean Americans, and show the impacts of colonialism even within the home. The eco extends to the food consumed – the *banchan* prepared for meals, and process of preparing cabbages for fermentation.

In particular, Kim's mother influenced her perception of food and the environment, intrinsically connecting them together in a way that can be seen throughout her poetry. Her background in attending Seoul National University, Yonsei University, where she was a Fulbright Scholar, Yale University, the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and Stanford University where she was a Wallace Stegner Fellow (Academy of American Poets) helped her build the necessary skills to develop her work. Her first poetry book, *Notes From the Divided Country,* received the Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of Poets in 2002. Kim has also translated poetry by Ko Un, a poet heavily inspired by his life as a Buddhist monk and later political dissident which saw him imprisoned and tortured repeatedly until his final release in 1980 (*Ko Un | Smith College*). Kim's writings are centered around dealing with living as a member of the postmemory generation and exploring her relationship with her culture. She interprets the world around her through its

association with food, examining the parallels between the environment and what she consumes. The landscape, in her words, reflects in the traditional Korean cuisine.

Much of Suji Kwock Kim's poems in *Notes From the Divided Country* centers on her family and their relationship with traditional Korean food, exploring the role nature has played in "alternative perspectives of the ties between human and nonhuman life" (K. Chung 18). "Generation" is the opening poem and, here, at the very beginning, Kim utilizes ecopoetics to set the tone for the rest of the book. Kim uses the eco in two ways, first as a descriptor, as Cha had used it, and as a method of drawing a comparison between the eco and the human. Also, like Cha, Kim uses the eco as a method of description in order to convey her feelings to the audience. She writes: "Once I was nothing: once we were one" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* 3). Here, Kim speaks on how the Occupation (1910-1945) created many of the rifts that led to the Korean War and the division of the North from the South. She uses "we" to encapsulate both the people and the land, highlighting how the physical division resulted in the cultural division that separates the North from the South. *Notes From the Divided Country* centers around Kim's personal experience living in both Korea and the United States and the impact her cultural heritage has had on her everyday life.

The eco is expanded on by Kim by exploring the connections between culture and food, She continues to explore how identity and the environment within Korean culture, as previously established by Cha, is inherently intertwined to the point where they are unable to be separated. This can be seen even in politics as recent as 2018, wherein South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un met during a summit and planted a pine tree to serve "as a symbol of not only a peaceful future but also a common past…a powerful reminder of shared roots" (Fedman 3). The land is tied into cultural identity, and the division of the peninsula

affected both the people and the land. Instead of one culture evolving over the decades it is two cultures slowly becoming distinct from one another due to the effects of the Occupation. The physical landscape shows the relationship between Korean identity and nature. Kim's poetry highlights how the perception of identity and nature extends to food. Kim develops the idea that identity can be attached through the consuming of the environment – of food.

Ultimately, Kim uses food as a symbol in her poetry as a means of processing the decades of trauma created by the Japanese and the division of the peninsula. She utilizes ecopoetics as means of working through that trauma and reconnecting with her cultural roots. Drawing on Buddhist influences and the inherent appreciation for the natural world, Kim details the ongoing cycle of processing and healing happening among Koreans. Using food, Kim points to the many connections between consumption of food and appreciation of nature throughout the generations and what healing looks like going forward. She utilizes food as a means to depict the way traumatic memories are 'cooked' by the parent and 'consumed' by the child. The 'nutritional value' of the food – i.e., the impact these memories have had – on the child ultimately influence their perspective of their own culture. Kim, in particular, views the division between North and South Korea as especially tragic, with her mother's cherished memories of her hometown permanently rooted across the DMZ and the traumatic experiences of wartime violence associated with the South.

Kim's poem "Generation" explores the precedent Cha had set by describing the human body as intimately connected to the environment. Kim looks at how birth signals an initial separation from the eco, and how she had to determine her own relationship with nature as she grew since she was no longer umbilically attached to the eco. Then, in the poems "Middle Kingdom" and "Translations from the Mother Tongue", Kim focus on the kitchen and growing

up, highlighting how from a young age Korean Americans are taught to be grateful for the food they eat and where it came from. Kim ends "Montage with Neon, Bok Choi, Gasoline, Lovers & Strangers," with the line "may you never remember & may you never forget" (line 73). This line is a warning to the world around her that though she wishes for younger generations to never experience the horrors of having your society dismantled, it is equally important that the memories from that time are not forgotten. Society can rebuild and grow, much like vegetation, but there will always be traces of what has happened.

Kim and the eco exist together "in the unborn world" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 2) a world untouched by the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953). They will experience violence and tragedy together and also learn how to handle their trauma together. That is, both Kim and the Korean landscape must heal from the trauma of the Korean War. In the case of the landscape, the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the North from the South is still infested with landmines and damage from battles (Kwon 70). The eco is not just being used as a means of making the experiences of her past viable to the audience as Cha used it, but also being used to show how closely Korean identity correlates to the environment. Kim's use of ecopoetics works to "more firmly embed them [the Korean people] in their physical and material surroundings, revealing relationships often taken for granted" (Fedman 6). Here, the eco joins Kim exploring their shared trauma and they must work together to process their trauma and move forward.

In "Generation", Kim describes the human body using natural elements, not as a means of simple description but as a reinforcer that Korean culture cannot exist without the environment. The act of being born through the "labyrinth of mother's body" (S.K Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 36) is what introduces Kim to her culture. By existing inside of

her mother, she becomes "attached" to eco literally, and her birth is a physical departure from it. Kim's birth is a violent separation from the eco, where she states she was "plucked…from my mother's body like fruit from a tree" (S.K. Kim 63). Kim believes she has been taken away from the environment and she must remake her relationship as she grows. Kim views the body as a culmination of the natural world and describes it with phrases such as "nerve-forests", "vein-rivers", "island of glands", and "cliffs of bone" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* lines 37, 39, 40, 46). Kim intends these to be more than a descriptor, a metaphor of how Korean cultures views the eco. Kim's approach of ecopoetics mimics that of contemporary environmental humanities studies to "de-center human actors as more firmly embed them in their physical and material surroundings, revealing relationships often taken for granted" (Fedman 6). The environment is integral to the creation and sustainability of their culture, and the human body is an extension of this.

The nature of being born, where Kim is "Plucked me from my mother's body like fruit torn from a tree" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 63), signifies how she perceives the relationship between her culture and the eco. Kim's birth signifies a separation from the eco, no longer intimately intertwined. Her leaving her mother's body means that she is the one having to discover her own relationship with nature instead of relying upon the relationship her mother had – i.e., developing her "post-pastoral", meaning contemporary work exploring the eco in ways that differ from historical tradition, perspective of the world around her (K. Chung 20). The "womb-cave" made Kim "a grave of flesh" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* lines 51 and 52), separating her from her mother's body but inserting her fully into a world dependent on the environment. She and the eco "didn't want to be born" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 25), they wanted to exist together in harmony. Birth meant

that Kim would have to redefine her relationship with nature, and rediscover how integral it is for her. Kim recognizes the "internal" way eco affects Korean culture (Heise 637).

In addition, Kim uses *Notes From the Divided Country* as a method of "reground[ing] human cultures in natural systems" (Heise 505) of which one way is through eating traditional Korean cuisine. Kim's "regrounding" method centers on exploring the way culture and environment interact in food – a literal interpretation of the "internal" examination of nature's relationship with humanity that Ursula K. Heise explores. As Heise notes, much of ecocriticism has been centered around post-coloniality and the effect Western thinking has had on Eastern cultures (638). Korea has been working to restructure its society in the wake of intensive colonialism and subsequent years of war, and Kim points out how reconnecting with nature works to heal the wounds left behind. She particularly examines food, as the kitchen remained one of the few places Korean culture could thrive under the oppressive Japanese Occupation. Here, the kitchen becomes a place where a "reconceptualization of modernist notions of human psychological identity and political subjecthood" can occur (Heise 506). Kim's usage of the eco works to "redefine the human subject" (Heise 507) in relation to the natural environment. She works to establish the parallel nature humanity has with the eco, and that they are not separate but actually work together to create Korean culture. Thus, Kim asserts that food is not just a form of sustenance but also as a site of ecological memory.

Kim feels that she is connected to the eco. It is part of her, intimately, and not just a cultural perspective. She sees the eco as a part of her, and so the eco experiences the world alongside of her. She and the eco listen to "human breathing" (line 4) and ideas "coming and going like bamboo leaves hissing in wind" (line 5). The act of existence – breathing and thinking – are likened to natural elements and the negative "doubts" come from manmade "swarming

reconnaissance planes" interrupting the "forest of sleep" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 6). Kim associates the positivity of life and creation to nature, while the negativity of doubt is attributed to mankind. Mankind is the one who has tainted the natural world, harming it in similar ways to how the Japanese Occupation and Korean War affected the people. For example, in "Generation" she flees from the "benzene rain" and "clouds of jet fuel" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 22), attempting to escape the effects of industrialization. But, much like the post memories Kim has inherited, the environment is unable to easily rid itself of what has been done to it. The Japanese drank "the wine of *one flesh*" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 16) in their mission to turn Korea into an example colony for future colonial civilizing missions. They attempted to strip what made Korean culture unique and insert their own, to create a monoculture. Yet, Kim continuously highlights how the environment and Korean culture exist together, wherein the Occupation would have to destroy parts of the environment to full erase their culture – much like they attempted to do with Cheonggyecheon Stream.

Kim's experience with the eco involves a physical process – the making of food. The poem "Translations From the Mother Tongue" opens with "*1. Khimjahng"* - the labor-intensive process of preparing napa cabbages, radishes, and other vegetables for fermentation (Chosun Daily). Again, Kim shows the reader that the kitchen is not an inherently happy place and that her mother is essentially very lonely. In this poem, her mother labors over preparing the many vegetables and pastes needed to make *kimchi* that would last the family for the rest of the year. Her mother's "fingers slowly blister, stain / meanwhile your mouth waters, starved for the taste / of home, not wanting to wait until winter seasons" (S.K.Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* lines 15-17). It is meant to be done together, and in large enough batches to last an entire family

over the months. Typically, this process is done as a family with all members participating in washing, chopping, mixing pastes, and preparing the containers the *kimchi* would be stored in together. But in "Translations from the Mother Tongue" Mother Kim is performing all these tasks alone "without your sisters, an ocean away, or your mother, long dead," (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* lines 8-9). Mother Kim prepares everything alone, with not even Kim beside her to assist in the process. Instead of the labor being divided among family and friends, Kim's mother must undertake each step alone. Kim writes: "To scour and peel mugwort piled in bamboo creels" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 2). Mother Kim engages in a tradition centered around environment. The ingredients she uses to create food for her family are commonplace within Korea, and vegetation such as bamboo is a sustainable source for both food and building material (Xinzhang 422). But the isolation of Mother Kim during her process mimics the isolation of the rural villages during the Occupation. She alone can uphold her cultural traditions and Kim's poetry stresses how her mother works through her trauma in the act of cooking.

Yet, although she sees how lonely and traumatized her mother is as she cooks, Kim still views this solitary process of cooking with appreciation. It is clear in her descriptions of *khimjahng,* the process of making *kimchi*, that Kim not only values the work her mother is putting into them, but she also finds value in the vegetables themselves. Here Kim connects the Buddhist of appreciating and valuing what the earth provides them. This notion continues to linger in Kim's perception of *khimjahng* and how she describes the preparation which she details extensively – she watches her mother "scrub, rinse, chop, wring" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 6) the cabbage before "smear[ing] shreds of wild radish, bracken or scallion / with chili, skinned anchovies, garlic crushed to pith" (S.K. Kim lines 11-12) on each

leaf. It is a laborious job – cleaning the cabbages, mixing the *gochujang* paste together, and preparing the containers to hold it. Thus, Kim holds a special reverence for the making of kimchi. While it can be argued that she values *khimjahng* because of her mother, it is more apparent that its cultural value and the inherent appreciation of nature stemming from the creation of *banchan* is what Kim truly values. The dishes depend entirely on what can be grown, and a metabolic process that happens naturally. The cultural practice of *khimjahng* works in tandem with the natural world, and though the making of *kimchi* is a lonely process, Kim is not truly alone because the eco is with her.

Khimjahng holds a special place of reverence for both Kim and her mother. Mother Kim longs for the Korea of her own mother's childhood, where *khimjahng* retained the communal quality which connected family and neighbors together as they created batches of food that would sustain all of them for the next year. Her "mouth waters, starved for the taste," (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 16) of not just the result of the *kimchi*, but for the community the occupation had so greatly disrupted. Mother Kim has "hunger in these rhythms / if not happiness," (S.K.Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* lines 9-10), chopping "crisp cabbage" (S.K.Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 10) and smearing them with "shreds of wild radish, bracken or scallion / with chili, skinned anchovies, garlic crushed to pith" (S.K.Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* lines 11-12). Mother Kim performing *khimjahng* alone represents the isolation many Koreans experienced during the occupation.

Khimjahng involves fermentation, a method of food preservation which involves a breaking down of enzymes. One must "steep them in the element that destroys and saves" (S.K.Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 24) to create such a core component of Korean cuisine. Kim uses the *kimchi* to represent the Korean people, and the fermentation that occurs

shows the harm done by the Japanese. Fermentation breaks down glucose catabolically, producing smaller units of proteins that become the perfect environment for select bacteria. This breakdown ensures the preservation of the *kimchi* causing it to last several months. Kim likens the breakdown of protein in *kimchi* to the systematic suppression of the Korean people, and how despite the efforts made to eradicate all traces of their culture, they persevered. The result is that modern day Koreans are extremely proud of their heritage and culture because of the actions of the Japanese government. The Japanese Occupation attempted to "destroy" the Korean culture, yet their attempts had the reverse effect of inspiring the Korean people to "save" their way of life even under immense oppression. The occupational government implemented strategies to suppress and destroy Korean culture, many of which were violent and left the Korean people living in fear during their everyday existence (Goldman). However, the people resisted these efforts by passing on the knowledge of traditional recipes and practices to the next generation within their homes. They essentially "fermented" their culture, preserving it for future generations Therefore, the Japanese were never able to fully eliminate Korean culture. Ironically, the occupation enforced a mindset of preservation that is still visible today. The Japanese occupation attempted to break down Korean culture, yet the Korean people were able to revitalize and literally consume their culture. The *khimjang* allows for the people to consume the eco, and in turn their culture, creating a continuous cycle of fermentation.

Kim continues to explore how cooking and the eco are connected in "Translations from the Mother Tongue" where she details how the Korean culture managed to survive such intense oppression through traditional female work, i.e., food preparation. *Khimjahng* especially exemplifies this concept. Hours of work set aside to prepare vegetables for fermentation to last the family for months. Kim focuses on her mother's memory of *khimjahng* which would have

occurred during the Occupation but also occurs in the United States. Not only is it a repetitive experience of physically participating in their culture, but it is one her mother has two distinct emotions associated with it. Pre-immigration Mother Kim saw *khimjahng* as an act of community, bonding both the people and the environment, while post-immigration viewed it as lonely with no one to participate in the activity with. Mother Kim revisits memories of Occupied Korea alongside the modern-day existence within the United States, and how the preparation of *kimchi* continuously reminds her of the past.

Kim highlights the cycle of memory that exists within *khimjahng.* The audience is provided a glimpse into the life of a rural village outside of Seoul where appreciation for nature is even more apparent – and also an area in which the Occupational government struggled to fully control and limit their participation in Korean traditions. *Khimjahng* remained a common practice in the rural countryside with growing and selling vegetables being the primary economy. Thus, *banchan*, side dishes, remained an integral part of the Korean diet even as the Occupation attempted to suppress the culture (S.S.J. Lee 202).

Beyond her utilization of *Khimjahng,* Kim also uses other references to food in her poems to show her readers the relationship between Korean cuisine, the eco, and generational memory. For example, in her poem "Translations From the Mother Tongue", Kim's mother is seen preparing a *banchan,* which are the multitude of side dishes largely made up of seasoned or fermented vegetables, that accompany the average Korean meal also provide important nutrients that ensure healthy living (S.S.J. Lee 202). Kim's mother prepares *kimchi*, the most iconic Korean *banchan.* These *banchan* dishes are largely thought to be the result of Buddhist influence during the Three Kingdoms period, between 18 BC to 660 AD (Fabrique). This time saw the monarchies adopting Buddhism as their core religion and creating many of their laws and

ordinances around the religion (Buswell 48). This included the monarchy pushing its citizens to limit their meat consumption (Buswell 48), resulting in many Korean families developing alternative dishes to go along with their rice. The addition of these dishes became standard practice and are no longer simply about maintaining Buddhist practices.

Here in the rural villages, street hawkers sell "soup boiled with sea-bracken, / shark fins, dried squid, ginseng roots in pickling jars," (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* lines 32-33) specially prepared for the celebration of a birth (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 26). While these foods seem unusual to a Western audience, within the culture of Korea these foods represent the respect and joy they have towards the addition to the community. These foods typically fall under the category of *yaksikdongwan* – a concept wherein "health is maintained by a combination of food and medical treatment" (Asakura104). Foods such as seawood and ginseng were believed to hold medicinal properties, and they would frequently be sold during a celebration. On top of that "soup boiled with sea-bracken" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 32) is a meal traditionally given to new mothers to help them recover (Yang). Then, the child eats it on their birthday as a way of appreciating the risk their mother took bringing them into the world (Yang). This description of the food being peddled showcases how Korean culture fosters an appreciation for the natural world down to the food they consume.

Kim's use of the eco really stands out in the way that she relates traditional foods to the memories of the mountain her mother grew up on in Korea. Paektu Mountain, the area in which her mother was raised, holds a special place of value to Kim. Located on the border between North Korea and China, Paektu Mountain symbolizes a place Kim's mother is unable to return to and where Kim is unable to visit. She describes the mountain in the same way that she has describes food - by highlighting the plant life. Paektu is not described as tall or imposing, it is not

presented as a towering being that watches over the villages along its base; instead its “crags [are] grizzled with pine, rock maple, / black walnut, their burred and scabrous spines,” (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* lines 47-48) and the gingko trees scattered about are likened to “cabbage chopped and scummed with pepper” (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 50). She also refers to *kimchi* and its bright colors of gingko leaves in the fall compared to their coniferous counterparts that remain green all year which mirrors the way cabbage turns from green to reddish orange during the *kimchi* fermentation process. Kim uses eco imagery to connect traditional Korean foods with the landscape surrounding Paektu Mountain, transforming them into symbols of memory.

The very environment has gingko trees, much like *kimchi*, seemingly “stocked in clay vessels, rocked into the soil like seeds,” (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 51) paralleling the way *kimchi* jars are buried in the cool earth to ferment and later “dug up in spring, soured, spiced, / to nourish and to burn,” (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* lines 52-53). Korean culture developed based on the ecosystems of the peninsula. Traditional *kimchi* jars, called *onggi* (J.H. Lee), are typically dark brown earthenware jars that are buried to allow the earth to naturally maintain the ideal temperature for the *kimchi* fermentation process. These jars continue to be used by individuals in rural areas as it saves space within their kitchen for *kimchi* and other fermented foods and sauces. Though Kim does not explicitly mention it, the *onggi* itself mirrors the appearance of pinecones. Both are ovoid, both are shades of brown, and both can be found on the ground (J.H. Lee). Kim uses the parallels between the making of *kimchi* and its storage to show how ingrained the appreciation of nature and culture is in Korean society. The natural world cannot be separated from the culture, they go hand in hand as representatives of Korean society. Even the vessels used as storage for food mimic the environment within Korea.

These jars represent the way nature is intrinsically tied within the culture, and Kim's direct comparisons highlight how, once again, food is the culture's tie to the eco.

Despite the intertwined nature of her mother's experience with food and nature, Kim still felt "othered" by not growing up with the same experiences. In "Montage with Neon, Bok Choi, Gasoline, Lovers & Strangers," Kim finally inserts herself into the narrative. The focus shifts from the impact of being raised by her mother and her mother's trauma onto Kim's personal experience in Korea. She separates herself from the people around her, detailing her own experiences like an outside observer. The less than personal nature of her descriptions shows Kim's own trauma – the trauma of being the outsider. There is the guilt of not experiencing the violence her mother saw, much in the same way Cha felt about her mother's trauma, but also of living separate from her native culture. Becoming an American citizen meant spending years away from Korea and immersing herself in an entirely different culture. She felt "othered" in both cultures.

Yet her feeling of otherness is briefly alleviated during the Buddha's Birthday celebration in Seoul and she is immersed in the culture, surrounded by "ten million red blue green silver gold," (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 6) lanterns strung above the streets. These lanterns represented "one for every spirit," (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 9) lost during the occupation and the destruction of families during the forced division of North and South Korea. These lanterns form a "River of Heaven" (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 16) above the crowds and memorial statues in Itaewon. However, this is not a depressing moment for Kim as she is drunk on being able to experience Korean culture firsthand as well as participating in the festivities.

Kim speculates on the lives of the street hawkers selling "*chamae* & bok choi," (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 47), of fisherman cleaning "cuttlefish & squid / stripping copper carp," (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* lines 48-49), and of artisan vendors selling everything from "charred silkworms, broiled sparrows," (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 53) to traditional medicine involving "crushed bees, snake bile, ground deer antler, chrysanthemum root," (S.K. Kim *Notes From the Divided Country* line 57). Her description of their goods invokes a strong sensory reaction from the audience - the scent of earthy roots, the shouts of vendors calling out their products, and crowded streets pressing against one's shoulders. Not only is Kim setting the scene, but she is also bringing the audience into her memory. She brings them along to each of the vendors she remembers. Yet, most notably, every vendor is selling something taken from nature, meaning that even during a more contemporary time natural goods are still highly desired by the people. Consuming traditional food and fresh seafood while also buying traditional medicine that could be added to soups and teas to make them even healthier, once again shows how deeply the concept of *Yaksikdongwon* is ingrained in the Korean diet. Despite the advancements in modern medicine, traditional practices are still just as common.

Kim mirrors the way Cha utilizes the eco using it as a description for the men playing Go "with hair the color of scallion root," (line 64) in the street and if they were old enough to "have stolen overcoats & shoes from corpses," (line 66) during the Korean War. Survivor testimony from the Korean War is a relatively new concept. Under the dictatorships following the occupation, information and discussion surrounding the events of the war were suppressed by the Korean governments. It was done to foster a new future; however, it resulted in the formation of

a postmemory generation who has to learn about the war through secondary sources instead of survivors (Koh 2).

This postmemory generation, of which Kim is a part of, "deal with the themes of the Korean War and the history of ideological conflicts not merely to recover the historical 'truth' of the Korean War, but also… [the ways] historical materials are consistently explored, understood, and even obliterated" (Koh 3). Kim imagines the past of the men playing Go because she has no personal frame of reference for how the Korean War personally affected families. She only has the historical knowledge the government allowed to spread, and the memories of her mother. Yet, Kim's simple description of the men's hair, "the color of scallion root" (S.K. Kim line 64), implies the commonalities that these men share as survivors of war. Scallions are frequently used in Korean cooking; it is a staple ingredient. The men being described through a common cooking ingredient tells the audience that they are not the remnants of a far-off generation – but that their experiences still apply to the contemporary age. The men are old enough to remember when the country was still recovering from the Occupation and how it transitioned into decades of dictatorships before becoming a republic during the 1980s.

Though these men are happily enjoying the festivities on Buddha's birthday, they are fully aware that a few decades earlier this would have been an impossibility. Under the occupation any Korean traditions were banned, and following the Korean War political instability meant that large scale celebrations were heavily policed. But the men undergo the same process as *khimjahng* wherein their youth takes the place of the fresh produce, and by the end of their lives they have become something entirely different. The trauma of the Korean War led to the development of the men Kim sees around her, all of whom survived the war by adapting to the violence around them – fermenting themselves in a turbulent society. Kim notes

that these men “whose spirits could not be broken,” (line 67) witnessed the repeating cycle of regeneration echoed across the natural world. After destruction, there will always be growth. Such as a forest fire - the fire may scorch the earth and destroy existing life, but soon new vegetation will grow and new animals will move in unaware of the previous tragedy. It is the cycle of *khimjahng* repeated every year regardless of weather or politics. The trees produce fruit, and flowers bloom, and vegetables meant to be used in *banchan* are grown across the country. Everything repeats in a never-ending cycle of life - humans are merely an additional cog in the natural order.

Kim’s poetry focuses on the intricate nature of mankind and its connection to the eco in Korean culture and especially the food. She explores the personal nature of cooking and how it plays into the Korean culture’s relationship with the environment. Her mother’s experience making *kimchi* acts as a way for Kim to process the trauma that has been passed down to her, and a way for her connect further with her culture. She uses food as a means of connection, connecting the human body with the environment. Through consummation, Kim is able to connect herself with the environment around her – regrounding her to the relationship she had with the eco prior to her birth. “We’re not alone” Kim states, cementing her perception that the human is intertwined with the eco (S.K. Kim, “No End / to the End). They exist side by side, experiencing trauma and healing together. Kim not only works to heal herself of the trauma passed down to her by her mother but works to heal the eco as well.

Confronting the West: The Poetry of Franny Choi

Franny Choi's 2022 poetry book, *The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On,* centers on the relationship the Korean landscape has with trauma recovery. Her work is connected to history and the trauma of the Korean land. In particular, the fact that, by the end of the Korean War (1950-1953), thousands of landmines were left behind in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) making the environment inhabitable to humans. Choi's poems confront this violence and mirror the way the traumatized Korean public have been able to re-utilize landscapes harmed by war and the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and turn them from the uninhabitable to the habitable. Throughout *The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On* she explicitly references the damage done to the land, and in turn, to the people. But she also gives voice to wildlife, an integral part of the eco that has been overlooked in favor of progress involving "an ethical system necessarily excludes nonsentient entities from ethical considerability" (Estok 207). The value the United States government placed on the ecosystems of Korea relied entirely on what they were able to benefit from – the concerns of animal species, flora, and pollution were not important enough to warrant consideration. Thus, Choi's work highlights the environmental impact that war and colonialism had on the people, flora and fauna of the Korean Peninsula in the mid-to late 20th century. This chapter analyzes Choi's poetry which asserts that healing from the trauma of the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953) requires Koreans to recognize and repair the environmental destruction left for the Korean public to navigate.

The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On is the third poetry book by Franny Choi. Published in 2022, it explores themes of identity after colonization and the importance of

the landscape in culture. It is divided into five sections with a total of forty-five poems. Sections one and two tackle Choi's interpretation of her identity and culture. Focusing on the experiences of her family and herself, she writes about the hardships they experienced. Section three largely focuses on the environment. Here, she writes about the importance landscapes play in Korean culture and the environmental impact of colonialism. The final section is the shortest with only four poems.

"The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On" is also the name of the opening poem and makes clear Choi's perspective of the impact of United States involvement in Korea with the line "before the apocalypse, there was the apocalypse of boats" (line 1). She starts with the history of the U.S., preparing the audience to hear her list of their offenses which she has called "apocalypses." The first "apocalypse" Choi refers to is a key is about how climate change makes the world inhospitable to humans in the future and is a key theme in the book. The second "apocalypse" she references occurs in the past: the Age of Discovery, early 1400's to 1600's. The West tends to view the Age of Discovery very positively due to the economic advantages that occurred – trade, land, and access to new crops (Frankopan 361). Yet, this also marks the beginning of a pattern of belief which was counter to traditional Korean values of nature. This is because, according to Estok, nations had "an ethically dubious endorsement of a hierarchy of life that places more developed forms of sentience at the top, less developed forms of sentience toward the bottom, and the lack of sentience simply beyond considerability" (207). Choi specifically references the beginning of the colonization across the globe by Europe and the U.S. in her work, all of which inspired Japan's forceful occupation of Korea wherein the culture, language, and religions were systematically oppressed from 1910-1945. It is a strong opening,

making it clear that Choi will be critiquing the effects colonization had and continues to have on Korean culture.

The first instance of how Choi utilizes the eco is in "The World Keeps Ending. and the World Goes On" opening with the line "boats making corpses / bloom like algae on the shore" (Choi lines 2-3). Here, the boats have taken prisoners – implied to be enslaved peoples from Africa – who have drowned during their transatlantic journey. Her poem describes how their bodies wash onto the shore "like algae," creating an image that refers to the scale of forced displacement and death that occurred during the Transatlantic Slave Trade (*Transatlantic Slave Trade | Slavery and Remembrance*). The journey across the ocean was hard, with enslaved people having to endure harsh conditions just to be continuously subjected to mental and physical trauma once they reached the shore. However, Choi also implies with this line through relating human bodies to algae, that the deaths that resulted from the Transatlantic Slave Trade were inevitable. Much like algae being naturally found in the ocean, death follows colonization. These people were only a fraction of victims of humanity's desire to progress and grow. Choi's decision to utilize the eco here is important. It connects her idea of landscape being as impacted by colonization as humans. The dead replace a typical part of the environment, altering the existing ecosystem due to the actions of the colonizers.

Choi continues to point out the ways in which the West's influence negatively impacted Korean culture in the same poem with the lines: "before the apocalypse, there was the apocalypse / of the bombed mosque" (lines 3-4). Here, she focuses on the damage inflicted on the landscape, channeling the Korean experience of having to adapt to a radically changed environment instead of the "United States [which] tends to hold up an ideal of landscapes untouched by human beings" (Heise 507). This is not a perspective shared by Korea, with the

DMZ still being a landscape that remains infested with landmines. The post-colonial nature of Korean society means that working to repair the environmental damage resulting from decades of violence is a priority for maintaining quality of life. Korean society has had to deal with "the apocalypse of the leaving, and the having left" (Choi line 5) – i.e., the abandoned ordinances left behind during the war and rebuilding their society. Choi, especially, is unable to view the environment in the same way as American culture, because she "feel[s] wounded by the Demilitarized Zone" as if "the wound were still raw" (Chu 191). She recognizes that the damage from Western involvement in Korea is still being worked through.

The "apocalypse of planes" (Choi line 8) and boats is only part of the influence the West has had according to Choi. These modes of transportation allowed connection with other countries but also provided new avenues for war. Violence is no longer contained solely on land, meaning that ordinary citizens had to live in fear of an attack at any moment. Though ships had been used for military purposes for centuries with the first recorded instance happening as early as 1275 BC[5], aviation was a recent development. The adaption of airplanes during World War I[6] to carry bombs meant that destruction could happen at any time and place – regardless of whether military forces were stationed there (Maksel). The Korean Peninsula would have been particularly at risk of bombing by airplanes, as United States military forces were limited in how they were able to gain access to the land during the Korean War. To the north was the borders of China and Russia, neither of which were sympathetic to the West and China had already chosen to side with the newly formed North Korean military. Besides access through seaports, planes were the only other method for United States military to both combat the North Korean forces

[5] 1275-1205 BC the Battles of Alashiya took place off the coast of Cyprus (Parpas).
[6] The first use of war planes was in 1911, when Captain Carlo Piazza used a Blériot XI to spy on enemy positions during the Italo-Turkish War from 1911-1912 (Maksel).

and bring their troops to assist (Tizzard). But Choi is not just referencing the West's involvement in the Korean War. She is also highlighting the very long history Western societies have had with war itself. Both the usage of planes and ships in war had long been used by Western cultures before they became involved in Korea.

Choi then provides examples of the environmental impact from the West, particularly the United States, has had on the Korean environment. She utilizes ecopoetics here to emphasize the negative impact Western society has had on Korea and writes: "the apocalypse of pipelines legislating their way through sacred water" (line 9) and "radioactive rain" (line 17). Both are references to the pollution in Korea that has resulted from greed from the United States and the pattern of the U.S. taking advantage of other cultures. This goes against Korea's "national myth of restoration and ecological continuity" (Chung 28). Instead of working to restore places previously harmed by war or pollution as Korea does, the United States has a pattern of exploiting ecological resources for their benefit.

One such example of said pattern is the "pipelines" (line 9) Choi references. The pipeline is an explicit reference to the 2016 to 2017 Dakota Access Pipeline protests, also known as the Standing Rock Protests, which involved Native American communities coming together to protest an oil pipeline which would run through their drinking water (Liu). It was a pipeline that most certainly would have led to their drinking supply becoming polluted, resulting in sickness and potentially death to those who had consumed it. Besides the health concerns of the pipeline, as Choi also states, it would run through sacred burial grounds (Liu). The United States government's desire for oil overrode its responsibilities of ensuring its people are properly protected. The pipeline contaminating the water supply for the North Dakota tribes would not solely be limited to that location but would spread through the water table to other parts of the

United States. Contaminated water also plays a role in Choi's "radioactive rain" line (17). Improper disposal of pollution and run off from nuclear power and waste plants can lead to these pollutants entering the water cycle – evaporation of ground water followed by precipitation, which has no method of prevention. The most well-known example of rain which has been affected in this way is the "black rain" of Nagasaki and Hiroshima following the 1945 nuclear bombings perpetrated by the United States. However, Choi is referencing an incident in 2000 wherein toxic chemicals were dumped on an American military base into the sewage system – leading to the introduction of formaldehyde to the Han River (Kirk). Choi's uses the pipeline as an example of how the United States has systematically exploited natural resources, including ones on its own land, and this pattern extended onto the Korean Peninsula during the Korean War (1950-1953).

This goes back to how Choi and other Korean poets view the separation of the Koreas – the "border fence / apocalypse" (line13). Despite being second-generation Korean Americans, the impact of the Korean environment is still incredibly strong. It plays into the postmemory aspect of writing which Cha, Kim, and Choi have all experienced. Though Choi did not grow up in the area affected by the DMZ, she most likely would have experienced her parents' memories of a Korea prior to the division. These "'memories' of han" would lead Choi and other artists to feel deeply connected to the landscape and feel that its division of the Korean Peninsula was a "wound still raw, as though the DMZ had carved her own body in half" (Chu 191). The United States is directly responsible for such a division[7]. Part of the DMZ is still referred to as the

[7] July 27, 1953 the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed. It required both South and North Korea to cease all violent activities and act as a temporary peace agreement until an official one was created (S.J.Y. Kim 288).

"Kansas Line" – a term American troops used to refer to the area before the division (Kwon et al. 67).

Colonialism has embedded itself deep into Korean culture, such as the concept of "han". These "memories of han" (Chu 191) refer to a concept which originated during the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) as a way to explain the "a collective feeling of oppression and isolation in the face of insurmountable odds…It connotes aspects of lament and unavenged justice" (Shim 253). Han originated in coloniality and was often used by the Japanese to justify the attitudes the Korean people had to their occupation – similarly, it can be compared with the "stoic Indian" stereotype present within the United States (Delgado). Both the "stoicism" of Native Americans and the "han" of Koreans represented their people's way of "coping with being made to feel less-than" (Delgado). Choi uses her poetry as a means of working through her trauma, expressing the "han" she feels when thinking about the Korean landscape.

But the environmental damage that Choi testifies to in her poetry is not new to her. She "was born from an apocalypse" (Choi line 18) and knows that "the apocalypse began / when Columbus praised God and lowered his anchor" (Choi line 19-20). The destructive trend the West has become known for in their desire for progress began far before the United States was even founded. Columbus' journeys to North America and the Caribbean from 1491 to 1504 resulted in the exploitation, enslavement, and genocide of the indigenous populations (Tinker and Freeland). The West's need to divide "a continent into cutlets" (Choi lines 20-21) has resulted in the widespread damage seen in Korea. It was Europe's colonial civilizing missions in Africa and the America's which inspired Japan to occupy Korea, which in turn led to the division of the peninsula during the Korean War. Here the eco is the primary damaged party. It is Choi's belief that "by the time the apocalypse began, the world had already ended" (line 22), and that

the environmental destruction Korea saw was inevitable because of this. The Western world had already established a pattern of destroying environments in the pursuit of riches regardless of indigenous populations wellbeing. Choi's poetry highlights that the environmental devastation Korea has experienced is not an isolated incident, but instead the result of Western civilizations long history of colonialism and exploitation which prioritized the West's economic benefit over Korea's need for coexistence.

This cycle of destruction Choi details in "The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On" results in an "ending world" (line 23-24) which confronts the repercussions of the previous apocalypse – i.e., colonization. Yet, this current world still benefits from the previous apocalypse's actions with the convenience of modern life. She writes that the convenience of being able to order "Greek coffees" (Choi line 24) and simply tossing the disposable cup in the trash often overrides society's need for sustainable environment. According to her, the "apocalypse" currently impacting the world is one of convenience. Value is placed on the availability of products, a system of life set in motion by the previous apocalypse of colonialism and capitalism.

The poem ends with the lines "the apocalypse remembered, our dear, beloved apocalypse – it drifted / slowly from the trees all around us, so loud we finally stopped hearing it" (lines 26-27). The "dear, beloved" apocalypse of today works against having a sustainable world – the availability of using cheap products made of plastic or other manufactured materials is far more appealing than having to work to use more sustainable products. It comes down to work, according to Choi. To be sustainable effort must be put forth to make convenience work alongside protecting the environment. Otherwise, this distances humans from the ecosystem they inhabit. It creates a "human sphere" that "empties human life of the significance it had

derived from living in and with nature" (Heise 507). The value of having a clean environment becomes a distant concern when the luxury of convenience provides immediate relief. Society has "stopped hearing" (Choi line 26) the protests of the environment.

This "human sphere" manifests in Choi's poetry, as she explores how in Korean society "Korean people were misleadingly compelled to believe that environmental destruction was none but an inevitable byproduct of development and security" (Sin 121). The distance between humanity and the eco has only grown with the United States' growing involvement with Korean society; its presence in Korean economy, culture, and the continued existence of the DMZ plays a large role in the internalization of "othering" the eco. Choi believes that the West's presence in Korea continues to damage the landscape, even when the United States government and military are not physically present. Choi emphasizes that the current state of Korean society's focus on convenience and struggle to restore damaged environments is the direct result of Western ideas and involvement. The trend of "violence against human and nature is most often associated with the rapid industrialization enacted under authoritarian governments during the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's" which can be traced back to its roots in American culture (Chung 21. The pattern the U.S. had set regarding treating the environment as disposable was adopted by the dictators of Korea in their efforts to modernize the peninsula – despite their culture's beliefs. This form of colonization became internalized in Korean culture, wherein the idea of development has become associated with destruction. Choi uses her poetry to explore the damage this mindset has had on the Korean landscape.

In Choi's eyes, the desire of the West to have "power and control" leads to the "looting and plundering of animal and nonanimal resources" (Estok 208). The environment and the creatures that live there never have an opportunity to fight back. However, in "Wildlife" Choi

brings in an alternate reality: one where instead of a wildfire consuming the environment, wildlife is instead consuming mankind. Choi provides the animals an opportunity to fight back against the human society plaguing them – working in tandem with the vegetation to coordinate an offensive attack. Here, the eco is used to represent the damage humanity has done to the environment in a different, potentially more threatening, light. Climate change and nuclear fallout are two examples of the effect humanity has had on the environment, yet despite the very real threat they pose humans tend to distance themselves from them. Both seem much farther away than humanity expects. In "Wildlife" Choi creates a clear image of retaliation with creatures well known to humans. Essentially, she creates a much more tangible example of the damage done to the environment simply by reversing the roles. Wherein nuclear fallout is difficult to imagine because there is no historical basis for it, at least not for the West, the idea of common animals turning against mankind manages to strike a nerve.

In "Wildlife", Choi takes the human and gives it to the animal by reversing the understanding of verbiage. For example, "They say the blast was triggered" (Choi line 1) is the opening line referencing the human action of bombing. It references the infamous nuclear mushroom photographs resulting from the Bikini Atoll Nuclear Testing from 1946 to 1958 (Shun'ya and Loh). Instead of a detonation of a nuclear bomb, this blast is triggered "by a passenger pigeon's ghostly / coo" (Choi 1-2). Choi chose the passenger pigeon purposefully – a species of bird which officially became extinct in 1914 when the last known individual died, yet mere decades before in the 1870s this species numbered in the billions in North America (Rich 4). The passenger pigeon was a keystone species, meaning an entire ecosystem depended on its presence, diet, and relationships with other flora and fauna. The consequences of a "rapid extinction of a keystone species" are not fully known, yet scientists have been able to track a

"disruption of the forest regeneration cycle and significant declines in forest health" (Rich 4) as a result of the extinction. Having the passenger pigeon act as the trigger for the "blast" is significant: it signals the consequences of mankind's actions on the environment finally affecting humanity. Choi uses the passenger pigeon as a form of evidence of the history of harm perpetrated by the United States.

The passenger pigeon acts as a catalyst for the blast Choi describes, with the species destruction representing the ripple effect of damage which follows the United States government industrial pursuits. The signal from the pigeons goes "over the oil fields" (Choi line 2) ensuring the first people to be affected by the explosion would be those actively damaging the environment. The "grasses stiffened, / shot up a warning scent" (Choi lines 2-3) as a result creating a domino effect of reactions. Beginning with insects, beetles and earthworms, spread the reaction of the blast across their different ecosystems. Similar to what Choi writes about in "The World Keeps Ending, and the World Goes On", the beetle represents the "apocalypse of planes" (Choi line 8) with the threat of violence coming through the air and the earthworms representing the "apocalypse of boats" (Choi line 1) due to groundwater. Yet, she asserts that these creatures are overlooked by mankind. It is not until "a thin hoof cracked / open a patch of earth" (Choi lines 5-6) where mankind begins to realize something has gone terribly wrong. It plays into the U.S. ideology of "associate[ing] wilderness with the supernatural" (Hillard 691) by having the dead come back to life to terrorize the living. By this point, the damage has become visible, it is too late to reverse it. The first example of something truly gone wrong is this "last-born caribou, the one / who'd gotten separated from the herd and gutted by flies" (Choi lines 6-7) coming back to life. The extinct passenger pigeon's signal has brought back the dead to begin the assault on the living. The consequences of mankind's violence against the eco have resulted in unnatural

effects “calling forth” (Choi line 8) to retaliate. The ecosystem fights back against mankind, punishing them for the violence inflicted upon them. Choi’s choice here changes the stereotypical narrative of the earth being complacent, instead she shows the possibility of the earth choosing to react in the same manner as humanity.

The traditional narrative continues to be twisted, by Choi portraying nuclear radiation not as an end to life but as a method of resurrection and revenge. Choi details how the blast effects escalate with “flesh and fur remapping onto bones” (Choi line 9) mirroring the effects of nuclear radiation on DNA. Radioisotopes released by radioactive waste such as Plutonium-239 can become lodged “in organs, bones, and tissue, irradiating them completely” (Stawkowski 2) resulting in genetic defects and cancer. Once again, Choi reverses the trope. Instead of blast altering DNA to cause death, it remakes DNA to bring back those who have died. It is an image meant to strike fear in the reader – an undead animal who is presumably unkillable hunting down humanity for its crimes against them. The caribou brings with it “pine martens and black-footed ferrets” (Choi line 10) who have “regathered their bones from the soil” (Choi line 11). These animals take joy in being brought back, “stretching their newborn necks towards the sun’s familiar laugh” (Choi line 12) and are reentering an environment that clearly wants them back as well. The sun itself is joyous for their return while mankind lives in fear of the undead. Choi questions what death represents, offering up an alternative perspective. Death is a natural part of the life cycle, and Choi examines the way death is not truly final – life can still be found after an organism passes away.

In “Wildlife” Choi continues to underscore the severity of mankind’s effect on animal populations by naming specific species who have been pushed nearly or to extinction through overhunting and habitat destruction. The first being the soft-shelled turtle “whose humble jaws

birthed / ponds and marshes with each exhale" (Choi line 15) yet is often the target of hunters for their meat. These turtles are often considered a delicacy, and though are a protected species, are still being farmed in China, Korea, and Japan for their meat (Davies). The turtle passes the message of the blast onto the whooping crane (Choi line 15), yet another animal pushed to the brink of extinction through unregulated hunting ("Grus Americana | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service"). The message is then passed to the whales in the ocean, the final example of overhunting and human greed Choi utilizes. These animals are explicitly used by Choi to show the scale of animals who have been meaninglessly killed because of mankind's greed – no animal, regardless of size, is safe from the violence of humanity. It is critical here that they are the messengers for the blast. These three species were hunted for food, not because humans lacked access to food, but because they found they enjoyed these animals in particular. It shows mankind's greed, their need to destroy in order to possess simply because they can which violates the natural order of life. In the ecosystem these animals come from, creatures live and die according to the needs of survival.

The whales not only pass the message of the blast onto other sea creatures but devolve back "into their old forms from the clouds overhead" (Choi line 18), representing the return to a balanced ecosystem unaffected by mankind's exploitation. Yet, Choi does not describe them as dinosaurs or some earlier iteration of their evolutionary journey. Instead, she shows them flying just as they are, "blubbery gods" (Choi line 19), "casting a great gray shadow over the baseball fields, every parking lot / and highway" (Choi line 21-22). Their flight mirrors the effect of airplanes, whose shadows can be seen every day. But instead of carrying passengers to other places and expending gasoline into the environment the whales are carrying the message of the blast into other ecosystems. They act as both the messenger and the message – their very flight

shows mankind the consequences of their actions while also communicating to different species the approaching rebellion.

"The earth remembered, rejoiced / with its remembering" (Choi line 23-24) and welcoming the dawn of a new age. Surviving through the Industrial Revolution, one of the first examples of mass pollution without environmental concern, the earth is tired of being left to deal with destruction in the name of human greed. Even as the world so clearly devolves around them, humans still work to "drag up the earth's black blood" (Choi line 24) instead of addressing any of the problems around them. Profits come before survival. But the earth rebels for the first time:

"spouted forth bees,

butterflies, short-horned lizards, plovers and prickly pears, grizzilies,

snakes, owls of all feather and shape, shrews, sturgeon, each drop

of oil renouncing its war draft and returning to its oldest name" (Choi lines 25-28)

This burst of life erupts from oil spigots – furthering emphasizing the cycle of life and death, with fauna being birth from fossil fuel made from the ancient dead. It is fighting back against the exploitation of its resources and no longer willing to be subjected to the constant destruction humans inflict upon it. The blast reverses the oil itself, turning it from a fossil fuel into the animals which created it to continue launching its attack against humanity. It is "the opposite of death" (Choi line 30) recreating life from "just the earth" (Choi line 31).

"Wildlife" ends with the earth reclaiming itself and taking away the resources humans have been exploiting for centuries. Oil is turned back into the animals whose fossils created it,

extinct animals come back to life to spread the message of rebellion, and humans fall victim to the animals they pushed out of their habitats. The entirety of the poem is Choi's graphic perspective of how to reclaim her Korean culture: through taking accountability and restoring damaged landscapes to what they were before. The DMZ currently acts as a military buffer-zone between the North and South, yet strides have been made to turn sections of it into a nature preserve. Despite the unexploded ordinances still littering the land, animals such as the black-footed marten have reclaimed the area and been able to thrive (H.R. Kim). The creation of this nature preserve has allowed the South Korean government to shift the image of DMZ, slowly changing it from a zone of war, death, and division to an "idyllic…allegedly safe and neutral site" (Kwon et al. 78). But of course, this image is incorrect. The DMZ is still an active military zone with thousands of still undiscovered landmines. Yet even though the area is not habitable for humans, nature has reclaimed the area. It is a successful nature preserve because the animals and ecosystem have adapted to the damage inflicted onto the land.

Choi views this reclamation by the earth an inevitability. At the end of the apocalypse, the earth will always win. It will outlast humanity, and it does not need humanity to function. She expands on this idea in "In The Aftermath of The Unforgivable, I Raise My Doomed, Green Head". Choi calls out how rapidly "atrocity fractals (like ferns)" (line 1) among humans. It spreads rapidly and thrives in every climate, much like ferns and their ability to exist wherever there is moisture. Violence "fractals. It itself [sic]" (Choi line 3), a continuous cycle that has no real end. War is inherently retaliatory violence with each battle, bombing, and attack centered around the actions of the other side. The DMZ exists because of the never-ending nature of violence: instead of coming to a true peace, or uniting once again, North and South Korea exist in an uneasy stalemate ensuring the possibility of war looms over their citizens heads at any

given moment. Choi comes from the perspective of never-ending violence. Technically, the Korean War is still ongoing as the Korean Armistice Agreement of 1953 only asks that both sides "suspend open hostilities, arrange the release and reparation of prisoners of war and establish a separation of forces" (United Nations Command).

"No war ever ends" (line 7) Choi continues in "In The Aftermath of The Unforgivable, I Raise My Doomed, Green Head", explicitly referencing the Korean War but also all wars across the globe. The point her is not just the constant threat of war between North and South Korea, but the trauma of war that lasts generations. Here is the postmemory aspect re-entering Choi's work. Though she herself did not live through the war, the experiences of her parents and grandparents have been passed down to her. It shows that the "conventional understanding of place as relatively fixed and immobile" is not always accurate, and in the case of the Korean diaspora views "place" as part of an understanding community (Kwon et al. 87). Though the DMZ exists as a physical reminder of the trauma her family underwent, and the estimated 489 years needed to be rid of all remaining landmines shows the extent of the traumatic memories (Kwon et al. 79). It is not just about restoring one section of Korean landscape to heal generational wounds but healing the largest wound of Korea – the cut that divides the nation and separates families. War spreads and "makes new sisters" (Choi line 9) affecting other countries and further muddying the reasoning behind armed conflicts.

Choi ends "In The Aftermath of The Unforgivable, I Raise My Doomed, Green Head" with the lines:

"Someday we'll lie in dirt.

With mouths and mushrooms, the earth

will accept our apology" (lines 13-15).

Powerfully, Choi states that the only true way for the earth to finally reclaim itself is through the death of humanity. Only then will the cycle of destruction and exploitation finally end. The apocalypse of mankind will only stop through its own death, caused by itself. Then, the earth will be able to adapt to the damage done to it without facing constant violence. Currently, "humans' willingness to assume a categorical difference between themselves and other kinds of animals" (Heise 640) prevents humanity from recognizing the earth's need to adapt. Society has not given the earth enough time to adapt to the damage being done, and only in areas like the DMZ where it is purposely set aside has nature been able to restore and adjust itself.

Choi's poetry utilizes ecopoetics as a means of describing the importance of recovering the Korean landscape to heal past traumas. She details the ways in which Westerners have "assume[d] a categorical difference between themselves and other kinds of animals [which] enables discrimination against other persons" (Heise 640). Choi's poetry highlights the mindset Westerners have created which allows them to see the eco as an "other", much in the same way the Japanese Occupation worked to establish Korean as "other". This "othering" promotes a cycle of abuse, repeating and becoming worse unless Korea can return to its pre-colonized state. Through giving the eco an active voice in poems such as "Wildlife" and allowing nature to re-write a narrative of "nature as an opponent" (Estok 209) wherein nature is purposefully enacting violence instead of mankind interpreting nature's existence as a challenge. The West's involvement in East Asia has created the idea of destruction equaling progress to take root, continuing to separate modern Korean culture from its traditions as the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) had previously set in motion. To restore the pre-Occupation culture of Korea, Choi advocates for a restoration of the land itself. Through healing the land, the people can reconnect

with nature and rediscover the value their culture has historically placed in maintaining a sustainable environment. Part of this is that Choi believes that through the eco, she can call the United States to take accountability for polluting Korea throughout the Korean War and after. She calls to action the Korean culture to return to its cultural roots and continue the cycle of "restoration and ecological continuity" (Chung 28) laid out by their ancestors.

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In this thesis I have explored the works of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982), Suji Kwock Kim (b. 1969), and Franny Choi (b. 1989) which are testimonies to the lingering harm of the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953) continues to effect Korean Americans. They express their experiences through the eco in their poetry. The fauna and flora they use are manifestations of their healing process – each representing the unique experience of coming from generations of survivors, and the emotions associated with inheriting their parents' memories. Their emotions can be clearly seen in the tone of their works, with each author existing in a separate stage of grief as they process the memories that have been handed down. Their works explores the deep rooted trauma of survival and reflect the varying ways that they have utilized ecopoetics as a method of restoration and healing.

Cha set the trend of using the eco among contemporary Korean American poets by using it as a means of description. She works to describe her mother's experiences in Manchuria, using the birds who sing alongside her mother's secret usage of Korean language. Cha has been separated the eco her parents were connected to – not only through immigration to the United States, but through the continued development of South Korean which irrevocable changed the landscape of her childhood. She inserts the idea that the environment itself supports her mother's small resistances, that the land suffers alongside the Korean people. Kim follows this idea,

describing Paektu Mountain in connection with her childhood kitchen. She brings the eco into a conversation on food, likening the culinary process her mother used everyday as a means of processing the traumatic experiences of her youth. Kim provides a platform for the eco, equalizing its status with mankind. Her distance from Korea has only expanded – the DMZ acting a division between her ancestral home in North Korea, and her immigration pushing her further way. Choi expands on this idea by giving voice directly to the eco; in her poetry the eco can respond to the violence that has been inflicted upon it from the Japanese Occupation and the Korean War. Specifically, she targets the West's involvement in damaging the Korean landscape. As the only one of the poets to have been born in the United States, Choi has never experienced the Korean landscape in the way Cha and Kim did. However, she has come to recognize the pattern of destruction left by the United States' government regarding ecosystems globally. She uses her writing to criticize the lack of opportunity to explore her ancestral home in the way Cha and Kim were able to and criticizes the continued lack of addressing the damage. Each poet uses the eco in connection with expression – detailing the complex ways their postmemories have continued to affect them throughout their lives.

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