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Uncovering Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn: The Ruins of Modernization and Everyday Life

Hisup Shin

By November 2004, Seoul's Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn reclamation project had advanced into its final stage of construction and landscaping. A remarkable feat of advanced urbanization in which the natural environment and commercialism coexist, the project offers a felicitous, symbolic conclusion to the tumultuous, often dehumanizing paths of the nation's modernization that left behind trails of devastation and misery. This curative view of the project is informed by a sustained effort of nationalist historiography to promote a potential for cultural creativity and social progress in the formation of modern Korea's self-identity. This essay argues, however, that such an approach fails to take into account a sense of ambivalence lodged in the restoration project, which reflects the contentious site of the everyday in which Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn's drastic change is translated into job loss, business relocation, and changing opportunities. This article draws attention to varying images of rubbish or rubbish salvaging that are often inextricably linked to different phases of the area's modernization. These images bear out the material or practical realities of modernization devoid of a tendency of nationalist historiography for "self-inflated" story-telling. Such an unassuming observation of the region's changing façade brings to light the challenging aspect of the everyday in coping with adverse circumstances of modernization. Attention is given to different types of "rubbish discourse" set in Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn and its immediate localities. Using these discursive types as loops of meaning to interweave, the article offers an interdisciplinary insight into the tension between modernization and everyday life.

In launching the ambitious project to uncover Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn, a stream that flows through downtown Seoul but has been buried under inner-city motorways and a string of massive concrete complexes for more than four decades, the Seoul Metropolitan Government is brimming with confidence and determination, a mood that well captures the city's readiness to settle old scores with the contentious paths of South Korea's modernization. Since its announcement, first

made by Mayor Yi Myŏng-bak at his inauguration in the summer of 2002, the project has been beleaguered by a number of concerns shared among administrators and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including the heavy costs of building green zones as well as facilities for leisure and public hygiene along the stream. Drowning out such concerns, however, is talk of moral obligation aimed at recuperating and expanding the natural environment of the nation's capital and inserting it into the evolving patterns of urbanization. A statement signed by one hundred leading members of various professions and organizations underscores this point:

The restoration of Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn reflects an overwhelming and viable demand for a culture of regeneration, not destruction. This event marks a major paradigm shift that bolsters the importance of the natural environment and organic life that have long been eclipsed by an ignorant desire for industrialization.¹

This certainly suggests an advanced stage of modernization in which technologies and nature coexist.

Equally important is a renewed interest in the region's history cut across by turbulent phases of industrialization. Resonating with the theme and logic of regeneration, the statement above also calls for a revival of some of the region's architectural remains dating back to the premodern Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), ideally wed as it is into the recreated bio-friendly environment:

To this end, there should be, first of all, a thorough investigation and cataloguing of all the historic and cultural artifacts around Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn and the surrounding areas. Kwang'ong Bridge and Sup'yo Bridge should also be restored to their original condition. Regrettably, we remember that the building of Kŭmhwa Elevated Road three decades ago led to the relocation of Tongnip Mun [Independence Gate], an ill-advised, uncultured instance of city planning that prompted criticism from both in and outside the nation.²

Broadly speaking, such a view illustrates a restorative rationale shared by many Koreans in coming to terms with the nation's modern history, a series of sweeping, forced sociopolitical as well as technological events of modernization that often uprooted traditions and cultural belongingness. As the city's main axis running from west to east, Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn often served as a backdrop to an onslaught of tumultuous social and environmental changes that altered the lives of many urban inhabitants. The most drastic and extensive was the covering of the stream itself, which continued, if unsteadily, over the turbulent decades of Korea's modern history that saw the nation's colonization (1910) and liberation (1945), followed by division into two Koreas (1948) and a bloody three-year war (1950–1953), and, finally, in South Korea, a succession of military regimes. First, the covering was an expedient sanitary measure to put an end to the stream's chronic flooding during spells of torrential summer rain. The flooding of cramped living quarters used to cause outbreaks of typhoid fever and other

waterborne illnesses. By extending reinforced concrete roads over its entire ten-kilometer watercourse, this project was not just intended as a sanitary measure, but, on a more ambitious note, laid the ground for a sweeping urban transformation. Entering a phase of relentless modernization by the late 1960s, the city churned out, in a relatively short period, a string of commercial compounds, high-rise buildings, apartment complexes, and an elevated intercity expressway, dramatically reshaping the contours of the Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn area as the symbol of a "rising technological Korea." However, it quickly became evident that the region's façade of progress and wealth concealed within it growing signs of conflict. The sweeping transformation, first of all, wiped out its extensive slum areas, directly contributing to the ghettoization of Seoul's other localities newly occupied by those who were evicted. While thriving on the nation's tireless push for industrial wealth, small textile shops mushrooming along the stream also became notorious for condoning excessive overwork and deplorable labor conditions, an issue that often found an outlet for protest in works of art and literature, as well as in the labor movement.³ Equally serious, a number of cultural artifacts located along the stream, some dating back to the fifteenth century, were left unprotected and were damaged, illustrating the project's historical shortsightedness and further deepening the sense of displacement shared among many Koreans who were caught in the maelstrom of modernization.⁴

In ridding the region of such traces of poorly implemented modernization, the Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn reclamation is, I suggest, not only a revival of urban memories prior to industrialization, embodied in the relics of the Yi dynasty, but also, to borrow Michel de Certeau's notion of memory, an act of "intervention" that evokes the sense of historical continuity that lays claim to the futurity of an ethical, bio-friendly city.⁵ A prelude to the current restoration effort can be found in the Seventh International Architectural Exhibition of the Biennale di Venezia in 2000, where the Korean pavilion showcased the layout of old Seoul. The model was aimed at highlighting "the ethical and environmental considerations which shaped the design of the city," an image of the past that counterpoises "all of the malaises of the modern Asian megalopolis; including urban fatigue, high density construction, pollution, lack of coherent planning, absence of cultural infrastructure, lack of green zones and communal amenity spaces such as parks, and an overall disregard for the environment."⁶ Thus, restoring the vestiges of premodern Seoul can be seen as an architectural embodiment of the cultural origin that proposes an alternative trajectory of modernization sympathetic to men and nature. Revealingly, Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn lies at the heart of this revisionist vision. The exhibition presents the view that "the ethical right of free movement and re-integrat[ing] into the city" can be achieved "through the *re-establishment* of the old city as a fundamentally pedestrian, river-side city, uncovering Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn at its core."⁷

In no small measure, this concern for cultural origin and its alternative

outlook bespeaks a growing, challenging sense of self-reflexivity in the way Korean people evoke nationalist consciousness in relating the nation's modern history. As reflected in nationalist scholarship, narrating modern history has been a consistent effort to recuperate what are considered "authentic" modes of Korean identity that can promote the potential for cultural creativity and democratic egalitarianism. In fact, the history of modern Korea is often narrated with a view to bearing the formation and evolution of nationalist discourses aimed at illustrating the notion of *minjok* and the strategies of the *minjok* movement.⁸ This task calls foremost for a dialectical process whereby the ethnic or cultural "sharedness" of Koreans (*minjok*) is viewed as a historical construct that can be deployed to counterpoise repressive hegemonic forces.⁹ Underlying this strong demand for a reinterpretation of history is an overarching perception that the epoch-making trajectories of modernization and nation building were set off and maneuvered by a succession of foreign imperialist encroachments.

Thus in an effort to oppose the earlier patterns of modernization, the reclamation of the inner-city stream projects a historical and social reflexivity in which the Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn region is recast as an imaginary construct, one that not only emphasizes all the painful memories of degradation and spiritual malaise, but, more importantly, channels them into a symbolic act of historical overcoming. In outlining this imaginary construct, no period has been given more attention as a historical backdrop than that of colonial occupation from 1910 to 1945, when the country's full-blown entry into the modern world was initiated and exploited by Japan's imperial regime.¹⁰ A typical example of such an imaginary figuration can be found in a recent newspaper article plugging a television documentary that deals with Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn's modern history. In charging the colonial administration with exploiting native resources for modernization, the headline of the article imagines the pristine quality of the stream, "Japan Spoiled Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn's Crystal Stream":

The colonial Government-General embarked on the project of covering the river. The project was intended for the effective transportation of military equipment, part of a grand imperialist plan to use the Korean peninsula as a military base for invading China. The so-called "great Kyŏngsŏng plan" included the laying of underground rails and elevated vehicular passages above the river.¹¹

In contrast to the image of the headline, however, the stream served as one of the capital city's main sewage canals from as early as the fifteenth century, collecting and carrying out of the city all types of domestic waste:

As a stream serving the needs of everyday life, it was only natural that Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn would become polluted. In the absence of alternative waste dumps, all waste from everyday life, including feces, entered Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn. Even dead bodies were dumped into the stream. Moreover, Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn was not always filled with water when it did not rain. As a result, the waste piled up on the riverbed, creating a foul odor.¹²

In addition, throughout the Chosŏn dynasty, the stream was subject to repeated modifications—straightening the main waterway, constructing and improving the riverbank, dredging, and so forth—for the smooth conveyance of waste, a sanitary measure to cope with the steady increase in population and chronic flooding. Seen in this light, it is apparent that the “crystal” stream the article refers to stands for a kind of spiritual or ethnic vitality of the nation, as well as the city, prior to Japanese-led modernization, a rhetorical association that is nevertheless crucial in channeling the current self-reflexive revisionist approach to urbanization in nationalist terms. Only several months into this two-year-long project, we are already seeing a range of images and opinions hinging on similar types of figural association or symbolic transference of meaning, ones in which the restoration project lends itself to evolving patterns of modern Korean selfhood.¹³

Such figurative patterns are also transferred into a recent interest in the river's garbage, one that strikes a chord on the self-reflexive tenor of the restoration project. Still in its opening phase, scrutiny into the untouched detritus deposited at the bottom of the stream promises valuable information regarding the lives of ordinary Seoulites who dwelled along Ch'onggyech'ŏn. The headline of another recent article in the *Chosun Daily* reads “Ch'onggyech'ŏn becomes the launch pad for ‘garbage archaeology,’” a phrase that well captures the upbeat mood of those who are involved in what is surely an uncharted region of archaeology in Korea.¹⁴ While the complete inventory and its systematic analysis will have to wait, we are already glimpsing confusing yet intriguing piles of rubbish, mostly of domestic origin. Their findings, which include such items as *hwat'u* cards, fruit knives, shards of porcelain, cow bones, and the like, are, according to the excavation team, “all valuable pieces of evidence that offer an overview of common daily existence in post-1950 Seoul.”¹⁵ In accounting for no fewer than fifty pieces of cow bones collected at various points of the stream, for instance, the excavation team traces their origin to the many meat and bone soup stands and restaurants that dotted the stream before it was covered.¹⁶ This speculation is convincing, fitting with the once-common practice of dumping food debris into what was and still remains the main canal integrated into Seoul's underground arterial sewerage. At a time when the Ch'onggyech'ŏn region was the hub of mushrooming hovels and sheds for a steady inflow of unskilled, migrant laborers from all over the country, dumping household waste was the primary cause of water contamination. In keeping with the current effort to salvage the neglected past and insert it as an integral part of the city's evolving structure, garbage archaeology thus evokes a lively interest in the traces of everyday life that were largely informed by different phases of modernization. In particular, at a time when the concept and desire of modernization is being recast for a “self-reflexive” society, the rubbish dig is inevitably charged with a sym-

bolic undertone of remembrance that not only unearths but also heals the painful memories of poverty and dehumanization.

However, the fragmentary inconsequentiality of rubbish also has a disruptive potential, laden as it is with multifaceted traces of use and abuse, which may exceed the “established” history of modernization.¹⁷ The point of our interest lies in the tension brought on by the storytelling of rubbish, whose residual materiality, in all its obscured purposes and symbols, adumbrates the shifting contours of practical adjustments in coping with the alterations made to the region. It is this tension that is duly noted by William Rathje and Cullen Murphy as the underlying concept of garbage archaeology:

Garbage, then, represents physical fact, not mythology. It underscores a point that cannot be too greatly emphasized: Our private worlds consist essentially of two realities—mental reality, which encompasses beliefs, attitudes, and ideas, and material reality, which is the picture embodied in the physical record. The study of garbage reminds us that it is a rare person in whom mental and material realities completely coincide. Indeed, for the most part, the pair exist in a state of tension, if not open conflict.¹⁸

Rubbish throws our self-inflated projections and retrospections into the realm of the everyday in its “unostentatious” patterns, a kind of reversed conversion that would discredit, to no small extent, the regime of derivative signs and values in which human constructs—say, merchandise or a building—are said to operate in a modern society.¹⁹ Furthermore, this insight alludes to the possibility of extending the challenging aspect of “garbage studies” to the present, where it can offer a critical account of the self-important, collective tone that the current self-reflexive phase of modernization has decisively taken: “Would we ourselves recognize our story when it is told, or will our garbage tell tales about us that we as yet do not suspect?”²⁰

Resources for this critical venture can be found in the demolition work that the city is currently carrying out on the Ch’ŏnggyech’ŏn site, work that generates a lot of rubbish both literally and metaphorically. The city began to dismantle Ch’ŏnggyech’ŏnno, a 5.6-km stretch of road that was built over the stream, and tear down a number of concrete structures, yet another sweeping urban transformation that turned the former, albeit tarnished, glory of the city into a massive rubble of disassembled concrete blocks and steel beams and girders. More importantly, a large number of small machinery and tool shops, foundries, flea markets, and snack and small-goods kiosks huddled together along Ch’ŏnggyech’ŏnno and its tangled threadlike byways are to share a similar fate of imminent demolition or relocation. Machine and tool shops, crucial to the image of the Ch’ŏnggyech’ŏn region as the city’s commercial hub in the earlier decades of modernization, thrived on the high turnover of the nation’s industry sectors but are now facing a looming relocation that will inevitably break a tight-knit network of joint supply and manufacturing that is essential

for their businesses. In an interview with *Ohmynews*, a celebrated on-line daily in Korea, Yi Yong-jin, owner of a small machinery shop, bitterly expressed a sense of impending doom in the following terms:

We are supposed to accept the city's relocation plan, which will inevitably hurt our business. There is nothing else to do now but wait for the city's eviction notice. . . . *Take a good look at the way I will perish in the next two years. This will be the history of Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn.*²¹

The history of Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn that he is alluding to marks a suggestive contrast to the restorative rationale that pervades the broad spectrum of perception and knowledge regarding the region. In underscoring his own precarious future as part of the region's dynamic temporality, Yi is ironically suggesting that Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn is an unfinished story, or even one whose denouement is unforeseeable, thus jarring with the felicitous conclusion of environmental or historical reclamation that the current project envisions. Underlying this view is the sense of animation lodged in his "perishable" future, a rubbish-like condition of displacement. In fact, such a contrasting momentum can be detected among many who are facing a similar fate of marginalization. *Majimak konggan* (the last remaining place), a timely collection of interviews with more than a dozen people whose means of living were severely hit by the restoration work, repeatedly bears witness to their survivalist instincts and strategies that are, according to its editor, "always attuned to the changing fortunes of their lives."²²

As if to evince sympathetic affinity with this contrasting momentum, one of the most vibrant flea markets in Seoul, 37,000 square meters of concatenated shops and stalls that trade everything from cheap utensils to brand-name electronics, is formed almost at the western end of the watery course. The Hwanghaktong flea market's humble origins date back to the early 1950s when the Korean peninsula was beset by a three-year civil war; refugees from the north first settled in the region and started to sell whatever they could get their hands on, from discarded or used goods to basic necessities smuggled out of American military bases.²³ The flea market continued to experience ups and downs through the vagaries of urban planning and administrations.²⁴ However, it is still sustained by the considerable number of objects being junked daily in Seoul.²⁵ Especially intriguing is how this perishable junk, in the hands of the region's skillful secondhand dealers, crosses over into the regime of redeeming value, one that is wrought by human ingenuity in salvaging its worth. In another recent interview included in *Majimak konggan*, Kim Yong-bŏm, a secondhand trader, while explaining his business prospects after the restoration of Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn, evokes the sense of wonder in recycling:

I don't want to buy new products. I get drawn to junk. I spend my time in a rundown warehouse, poring over all types of junk, and wondering how I will make use of them and renovate them or even change their shapes. It's great fun.²⁶

Stripped of signs of manufactured desire or symbolic value in a Baudrillardian sense of the term, the wear and tear of rubbish evokes, Kim suggests, a sense of liveliness that anticipates human ingenuity in devising its applicability to the everyday context. Here attention should be given to the sharpening perception of the everyday that is brought to bear on a shifting web of social or cultural circumstances and adjustments in which rubbish can emerge as a useful or meaningful object. Concurrently arising in this field of practicality is a resilient mode of selfhood that is bound up in the very act of interpreting and living the everyday in all its varying moments and tasks.²⁷ This theoretical insight is intended to propose a significant change in perspective, which questions the cognitive tone of self-reflexivity that underlies the Ch'önggyech'ön restoration.²⁸ First, it affords a decentralizing view of modern urbanization that eludes any attempt to grasp the ultimate meaning or significance of the city, one that reflects, in Scott Lash and John Urry's words, "aesthetic or hermeneutic reflexivity":

Aesthetic reflexivity is instantiated in an increasing number of spheres of everyday life. . . . [It] is embodied in the contemporary sense of time—in a widespread refusal of both clock time and any sort of utilitarian calculation of temporal organization. Aesthetic or hermeneutic reflexivity is embodied in the background assumptions, in the unarticulated practices in which meaning is routinely created in 'new' communities—in subcultures, in imagined communities and in the 'invented communities' of, for example, ecological or other late twentieth century social movements.²⁹

In our context, the "new communities" or "aesthetic/hermeneutic reflexivity" does not necessarily refer to an advanced phase of modernization marked out by some linear model of progress.³⁰ Rather, these notions stem from the practical concerns and strategies that are constituted in negotiation with forces of modernization, a range of unique responses that reflect a resilient, fluid mode of selfhood that latches onto and appropriates social and technological transformations—here, of course, embodied by recycling.³¹ Second, "aesthetic/hermeneutic reflexivity" facilitates an alternative image of modernization, one that alludes to drastic, adverse circumstances of social-cultural and technological change as a backdrop to the vigorous growth of the everyday in which their "original" meanings or intents are continuously recast. Seen from this perspective, Yi Yong-jin's voicing of unpredictable futurity and Kim Yong-böm's keen perception for recycling both intriguingly embody the resounding sense of irony that rubbish, in both its literal and metaphorical senses, adds to the continuing paths of the city's urbanization. Lingering at the outskirts of the perception that Seoul is now coming full circle in its history—a vantage point that affords the sweeping view of modernization in all its successive phases—rubbish is a sticking point, whose abject fate or unpredictable momentum jars with the sanitized and self-reflexive image of the modern city. Thus, as reflected in the earlier remark made by Yi Yong-jin, the overall tone of the everyday is of ironic

laughter and parody, concealed as it is within an apparent conformity to the rules of urban transformation.

In fact, Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn often lends itself to a unique locus of literary imagination in which adverse circumstances of urbanization are evoked to outline the everyday overlaid with skills for survival and their creative social implications. The region's potential for such a challenging aesthetic (aesthetic/hermeneutic reflexivity) was first tapped into by Pak T'ae-wŏn in his novel *Ch'ŏnbyŏn p'unggyŏng* (Scenes at the Riverside, 1936)—when the region was stricken with poverty, a typical outcome of the lopsided patterns of colonial modernization that mainly favored areas for Japanese settlers. In accounting for the novel as a unique achievement in the history of modern Korean literature, Im Hwa highlights the way the narrative is “overlaid with a sense of great empathy with the everyday world.” Thus, “local customs and manners” (*p'ungsok*) reflected in the everyday do not merely mirror the world outside, but bear out the writer's “spiritual kinship as the necessary ingredient of the narrative.”³² On the one hand, the projection of sympathetic kinship can be viewed as an extension of the popular literary tendency for revealing spiritual as well as economic impoverishment in realistic, often diagnostic terms, an approach that was brought on by “the sharpening awareness of Korean writers that the colonial rule failed to engender anything positive; on the contrary, the nation steadily sank into the mire of poverty and spiritual abjection because of it.”³³

On the other hand, it is far too simplistic to say that Pak T'ae-wŏn's sympathy only gravitates toward gloom and wretchedness. Employed as “the ingredient of the narrative,” it organizes an ensemble of challenging narrative and figural arrangements in dealing with the bewildering forces of modernization. Such a contrasting response largely stems from the cultural modernist outlook shared among the young writers of the 1930s, which drew attention to the multifaceted features of urbanization. Railways, urban transportation (trams and cars), radio broadcasts, and a broader circulation of manufactured goods all gave rise to an unprecedented diversification of the way people related to their neighbors and milieus.³⁴ In elucidating and defending the emergence of urban sensibilities among his contemporary writers, Ch'oe Chae-sŏ argues that

The city has all the attractions of modern life, while it is also beleaguered with frantic pace, massive collectivity, behavioral indifference, and threatening verticality. Such complex urban conditions fascinate contemporary writers. For this reason, I cannot subscribe to the opinion that the city is only commercial, self-indulgent, and decadent, and hence inappropriate as a literary subject. Such a superficial and self-deceptive view should not deter Korean writers from opening up to the realities of the modern city.³⁵

This observation suggests a path of literary creativity moving beyond the narrow view of Korean urban realities as the negative corollary of colonial ex-

plotation. In an effort to take stock of this double-edged colonial urbanization, Pak T'ae-wŏn's *Ch'ŏnbyŏn p'unggyŏng* constructs what can be seen as Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn's versatile patterns of the everyday, vividly reflected in the way his characters appropriate as well as adapt themselves to the alterations that are added to the region. Crucial to this narrative venture, I will argue, is the image of rubbish and recycling that captures the contrasting momentum of the everyday.

At its outset, the novel offers a kaleidoscopic view of a small riverside community, concatenating and navigating different threads and rhythms of urban professions, habits, skills, views, speech patterns, and the like into a mosaic-like pattern. Without central crises or events, this labor of narrative tapestry is a phenomenal outgrowth of the vision of spontaneous reciprocity that the writer first carefully inserted into his main character's isolated, sickly psychic landscape in his previous *Sosŏlga Kubossi ūi iril* (One Day of Kubo, the Novelist, 1934).³⁶ Consider, for example, the structurally striking opening section wrought by moving blocks of conversations exchanged among women, who come out to do their laundry at a riverside wash, one of the most important nodes in the story at which disparate or colliding views and activities crisscross. Gossip and rumors, mostly about economic adversity and moral dilemmas fallen on neighbors, emerge as the starting point of the ensuing narrative; yet constantly merging with different anecdotes and opinions, and accompanying the chorus-like response of mutual sympathy and laughter, these stories claim no particular individual jurisdiction. One such topic is the economic downturn of a shoemaker's family (*sinjŏnjip*), reflecting the general hardship of traditional crafts that are unable to hold ground against the growing manufacturing of inexpensive clothing and footwear. Nevertheless, pasted onto the rich fabric of freely circulating colloquial speech, the sense of impending doom elicits a succession of compensatory comments and jokes that bears out the unique sense of their communal existence and moral judgments. The unbroken, shifting sequence of communication in this opening chapter permits for our sample here only an abrupt cut into the text, wherein the manager of the riverside wash, who happens to pass by, suddenly hijacks the conversation with the remark below. This retort is directed at an allegedly mistaken opinion regarding the financial condition of the shoemaker's family:

What do you mean they are okay! Without considering other facts, just look how he [the shoemaker] is treating his mistress now. When he first took her in some ten years ago, he could afford to put her in a rented house. Four or five years later, he moves her to a different house on a miserly monthly loan, then into a rented room. Then she recently had to move in with his family, living with his own wife and family! Doesn't this prove anything to you? I also heard that his house and shop are now both in a bank mortgage and his debt running up to several thousand *whan*. (p. 18)

Evident here is the Confucian patriarchal order as the yardstick of family finance, namely, that any sign of weakening of this authority suggests a parallel decline

of economic status. For the cause of this sorry predicament, it is soon alleged that the business of traditional footwear craft has been severely hampered by the introduction of superior and cheaper Japanese rubber shoes. However, this opinion soon makes way for an astute remark that well-informed management strategies could have prevented the downward spiral. Especially among the laundresses, whose common interest unflinchingly lies with domestic issues and disputes, attention shifts onto what they consider proper and decent in the way the shoemaker treats his wife despite his having a mistress. This observation is then used as the backdrop in casting a disparaging light on Mr. Min, another wealthy man in the neighborhood, who spends every night in his paramour's abode. It becomes obvious that unpredictable economic realities, the starting point of the story, are being reconstituted with respect to specific interests and standpoints held by different commentators. Of course, there is nothing particularly forward-looking about their concerns, some of which, as seen above, are deeply entrenched in premodern Confucian prejudices. Rather, the narrative is more concerned with capturing the resilient, spontaneous frame of social reciprocity that cultivates knowledge and strategies of adjustment in coping with such unstable social circumstances. Another significant point is that this interactive frame, despite the outdated notions and opinions that traverse it, is essentially urban, since it is wrought by, and attuned to, the altering conditions of modern colonial Seoul and contains accordingly the emerging sense of anonymity and social tolerance. Several chapters later, the flight to the countryside of the financially crushed shoemaker's family is described; yet the sadness of the incident is markedly minimal, since it is viewed primarily as part of a continuing urban transformation:

The whole family, including that brother-in-law who still remained a bachelor, made their quiet, inconspicuous exit from the town, where they had lived for the last twenty years. Despite the common knowledge that they had been ready for an impending departure as the business showed no sign of picking up, the neighbors took the news with some difficulty. But that was it. As they reached Kwanggyo Terminal and got up on a bus bound for Kangwha, the city's defeated looked, at least to unconcerned eyes, no different from other passengers perhaps on a business trip. If truth be told, there were not many in the neighborhood who saw them on the day of departure. Only a handful of customers in the barbershop watched the family speedily picking their way out of the riverside street into an adjacent thoroughfare, thanks to the barber's boy assistant who had spotted them. No small details of change in the neighborhood ever escaped the child's inquisitive eye. It took only a short while before their shoe shop was turned into a tavern, and sometime after that, the neighbors discovered a sign for rooms to let hung on their house. (pp. 67–68)

In this way, what vividly comes across in the novel is the incessant drive of communal reciprocity, which pastes any new event or rumor into a sweeping expanse of urban outlook. Fittingly enough, the lodging house soon becomes a point of entry that allows newcomers into the riverside neighborhood (p. 125).

Furthermore, to return to the essay's main point about rubbish, we should

note how this resilient frame of daily patterns takes on a challenging tone of modernization by cashing in on concrete images of salvaging, images that, in my view, accentuate the versatile dimension of the urban everyday under an increasing sway of topographical and instrumental rationalization. Consider, for instance, a chapter titled “Scenes on the Days of Rainy Spells,” which relates the risky efforts to salvage objects from the rapidly swelling stream. Described as a “sporting event” held annually during incessant spells of summer showers, this episode of rubbish picking involving the entire community both as spectators and players momentarily suspends various individual concerns and worries:

“There, there! Here they come!” Thus the spectators started to cheer for the “players,” as two or three planks first popped up in the upper stream, speeding down, perhaps broken off from a wooden fence that must’ve come from Samch’ongdong or the Udae region, after it had been swept by the torrential rain. Ch’il-sōng’s father, Jōm-nyong, and Yong-dol began running along the muddy streets on both sides of the swelling waters. One had to obtain great dexterity in using a long stick to catch and draw in the planks from the treacherous currents. If one managed to navigate them to an edge of the stream, he would find another obstacle: the task of pulling them up to the riverbank the height of which was not insignificant. Any false move in haste could easily drop the booty back into the water, which would then naturally become the object of another salvaging competition further down the stream. *A few moments later, a broken dried gourd shell and a shabby fedora popped up, racing down, shortly followed by a wooden tangerine packaging case and a metal box. Each time the onlookers spotted something in the currents, they all gave out a cry of wonder for no particular reason, “Wow!”* (p. 186; emphasis added)

First of all, in its historical context, this dismal scene of scavenging implicitly bears out the biased formation of post-1920s colonial Seoul that sets the Ch’ōnggyech’ōn as the dividing line separating the economically and technologically backward native communities in the north (*bukch’on*) from their prosperous southern counterparts inhabited by Japanese settlers (*namch’on*). Adding to this segregationist cityscape is the further hint of social hierarchy within the native territory itself, drawing the borders between the residential areas in the foothills of Inwang Mountain in the northwest of Seoul, where the remaining rich families of the premodern *yangban* class still remained (Samch’ongdong and the like), and the ghetto-like neighborhoods that rapidly expanded in the extreme western and eastern regions of the city (Ch’ōngnyangni, Wangsimni, and so on).³⁷ In other words, it is difficult not to sense the writer’s nuanced allusion to economic or cultural division as the topographical underpinning of modern Seoul, layered as it is into this scene of salvaging in which every “player” has his eye on some “valuable” piece of garbage washed up from the affluent upstream locality, a scene of economic degradation that has little relevance to Japanese settlers on the other side of the stream. More importantly, however, we should notice that such scrutiny into the topographical backdrop falls short of taking stock of the unvarnished vigor accompanying the “sporting event,”

which is accentuated by the unlikely sense of “wonder” that wretched objects are said to evoke among the neighbors. I would argue that this unique narrative tone is pitched against the lopsided frame of colonial modernization, opening up a kind of experiential space in which rubbish can be inserted into the spectrum of everyday life. In particular, emphasis should be laid on the engaging field of symbolic or cultural interpretation in which the act of salvaging, in the broad sense of the term, challenges the meaning of the word “modern,” the way it is consolidated by a range of trendy products and images in biased terms.

The “broken dried gourd shell,” “shabby fedora,” “wooden tangerine packaging case,” and “metal box” are dilapidated objects that lack the glossy theatricality of modern style that the new merchandise flaunts. For instance, standing in polar opposition, there is a derby worn by a rich, pretentious owner of a textile shop, an image combined with his gold watch that secures the labeling of “modern gentleman” (*sinsa*) assigned to him by the neighbors. Cast for a leisurely daily walk along the river on his way to and from his prosperous shop, this man of chic attire fits in with the popular image of modern man, increasingly associated with Western clothing and cultural bearing, as often depicted in cultural magazines and advertisements.³⁸ In the story, he is thus referred to simply as the “middle-aged modern gentleman” (*chungnyŏn sinsa*). However, this labeling is not without ambivalence, especially in the eyes of Chae-bong, a clever boy assistant working in a neighborhood barbershop, whose astute gaze often detects contradictions and flaws underneath the façade of modern outlooks and images:

It was amusing to see the middle-aged modern gentleman wearing his favorite derby and setting out for a stroll, especially when he would proudly take out a ‘precious’ 18-carat gold pocket watch as if he secretly wished to be noticed for its value. But for [Chae-bong] who learned from his customers that the watch was only about 5 carats fine, the man’s pretensions for respectability and refined taste were quite a farce. . . . As far as the boy observed, the derby was never securely pulled over the gentleman’s head. Rather, the hat precariously perched on it while he was walking about. The boy felt certain that a gust of wind would surely blow it off the head. In fact, he secretly hoped to see it happen. (pp. 35–36)

The ambivalence lodged in the cultural inscription of the derby culminates in the final episode in the novel in which the wind eventually throws the hat into the murky river, quickly exposing the “modern gentleman” to the jokes and laughter of the spectators, who include beggars and children:

The derby had the misfortune to choose for its landing the murky stream that was just beginning to thaw after the early morning chill formed a brittle covering of ice. A beggar with a burn mark on his face quickly came out from under the bridge and recovered it, alas streaked with the dark foul water, which had a strong stench. The modern gentleman seemed hesitating; his face turned red when his eyes met those of the crowd. Then in an effort to regain respectability, he resumed his stern face, gave out a roaring dry cough, and left the place with his favorite hat uncollected. . . .

The amused spectators still remained on the riverside, this time watching with great interest the tramp who was now wearing the hat cocked at a sloping angle and mimicking Charlie Chaplin. The daytime sun now felt pleasantly warm for many, who realized that the first day of spring would come in only a few days. (pp. 347–48)

The soiled derby clearly illustrates the tarnished image of the modern gentleman exposed to public derision, not hostile but endowed with a flair for agile wit and jollity. In discrediting the privileged codes of modern style, the everyday here asserts its aesthetic/hermeneutic reflexivity, to use Lash and Urry's term once again, that ironically appropriates yet another modern image, namely, a popular western filmic icon, as a site for recasting the meaning of the hat. Here, the derby is no longer the dazzling image of modernism, but a "trashy" prop for mimicking Chaplin's comic gait, the outcome of a spontaneous act of value conversion that largely reflects the patterns of the everyday in the story. Cast with a penchant for humor, this episode spells out a unique, challenging means of relating to a world that has become prejudiced and alienating, embodied in daily practices and strategies that blend newly introduced objects and images—not only a derby but also "knickerbockers" (p. 124) and a "scarf" (p. 126), among others—into a kind of cultural bricolage, a cognitive balancing act that can interweave cultural inexperience or inadequacy, poverty, laughter, and parody in the uninterrupted flow of the everyday. Note how the episode ends with the crowd's ordinary awareness of seasonal change, an all-too-familiar, almost oblivious perception that nevertheless gives rise to the sense of the region's enduring life.

Equally intriguing is the way such a shifting trajectory of modern objects or images evokes the earlier scene of the salvaging "game" as the crucial imaginary underpinning of the story. The altered image of the derby above throws light on the scavenging scene, since the act of spontaneous adaptation lodged in the former spells out the mysterious sense of "wonder" that the flotsam is said to evoke in the keen eyes of the scavengers. Seen from this angle, the "shabby fedora" found among the items of rubbish running down the water is not a casual addition, but a brilliant stroke of narrative arrangement that foreshadows a similar fate of salvaging or adjustment that awaits another hat in mint, ostentatious condition. What is resoundingly clear in both cases is the significance of Ch'onggyech'ön as a spatial backdrop in which the popular image of modernization crosses over into its opposite spectrum, a site for value salvaging and conversion that sets in relief the hermeneutic frame of the everyday. In a way analogous to Ch'onggyech'ön, which carries wretched objects in random concatenation, the narrative activates the unpredictable but continuous momentum of the everyday in which modern images and knowledge are subsumed by a series of figural and linguistic crossings. Hence, the narrative often enacts the constant intermixing of the outmoded and the new, or the familiar and the unfamiliar as a way of inserting the sense of wonder into the narrative, as, for

example, envisaged in the overlapping of the recyclable objects in the river and the wondrous exclamation of the spectators, or the image of Charlie Chaplin as the object of entertainment through the mimicking of the “under-the-bridge” tramp. Without any noticeable features—notice how the stream, including the riverside wash, while providing a loosely defined spatial backdrop to the narrative, rarely lends itself to specific descriptions—Ch'önggyech'ön is an intriguing embodiment of an amorphous, shifting hermeneutic frame that is internalized in the activities and enduring resourcefulness of the region's poor inhabitants. Thus, the stream seems to manifest itself without being seen, murmuring in the background of all the trivial, indistinct moments of everyday life unfolding in the region.

At a time when Ch'önggyech'ön is fast becoming the hub of yet another comprehensive urban framework in Seoul, the enduring tribute paid to Pak T'aewön's *Ch'önbyön punggyöng* as a major modernist novel is charged with topical resonance unprecedented in its history of critical appraisals and discussions. Written almost seventy years ago, the novel's insight into the resilient urban everyday has now taken on an almost visionary tone, one that bears witness to the enduring optimism and ironic laughter that continues to outline the shared ethos of the region's inhabitants today. Ironically enough, standing in opposition to the earlier-quoted remark by Yi Yong-jin regarding the uncovering of the stream, the rumor of an impending covering of the river faced the fictional community of the 1930s, here first uttered by the owner of the riverside wash in apprehension of his unknown fate:

“Besides, rumor has it that Ch'önggyech'ön will be covered for hygiene or something. . . . If it happens, the summer income from the riverside wash will be as good as nothing.”

Smoking his pipe, Ch'il-söng's father glanced at the river and replied, “Nonsense! How on earth could they possibly cover a stream that is this wide? No way.”

“The government can cover the Nodül River, if they want to. I am telling you, they will do it sooner or later. I am hearing the rumor more often. . . .”

.....

“It would surely drive us all to starvation. I've got to think of something, but without money or special skills. . . . A real problem, I am telling you.” (pp. 144–45)

What is analogous in both cases is that the river's shifting contours—whether covered or uncovered—lend themselves to an opportunity for engendering animating signs of life, plugged as they are into the urban everyday.

NOTES

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1. “The Press Announcement of a Statement Calling for a Coherent Approach to the Ch'önggyech'ön Stream Restoration adopted by 100 Leaders of All Sectors.” *Chosun.Com*, Apr. 9, 2003 (<http://chosun.com>).

2. “The Press Announcement of a Statement Calling for a Coherent Approach to the Ch’onggyech’ŏn Stream Restoration.”

3. The symbolic foundation of labor protest was set by Chŏn T’ae-il, a Ch’onggyech’ŏn textile worker, who immolated himself on Nov. 13, 1970, in protest of the worsening working conditions—overwork, underage labor, and the like—in the region’s small factories and sweatshops. His death unleashed storms of protest that contributed to the organizing and strengthening of various labor unions in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite strict rules of censorship implemented by South Korea’s military regimes, Chŏn T’ae-il’s life and death also inspired many novelists and poets in their dealing with the bleak side of the nation’s modernization. For further details, see <http://www.juntaeil.org>, a Web site run by the Chŏn T’ae-il Memorial Society.

4. When the construction work to cover the river restarted in 1958 after almost a decade of political turmoil and civil war, Kwangt’onggyo and Sup’yogyo, two famous bridges of old Seoul, which often served as sites for folk festivals such as bridge stomping and kite flying, proved to be a hindrance. Already damaged through the laying of drainage pipes during the colonial years, the remnants of the Kwangt’onggyo Bridge were buried along with the river under the newly built road in 1958. The Sup’yogyo Bridge, on the other hand, was removed to Changch’ungdan Park in 1959 for preservation. For further details regarding these and other cultural artifacts and their fate under the city’s sweeping urbanization, see “History and Heritage of Ch’onggyech’ŏn,” *Seoul Culture and Tourism* (Cultural Affairs Division, Seoul Metropolitan Government; http://www.visitseoul.net/english_new/index.htm).

5. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 86.

6. “Exhibition Scheme of Korean Pavilion,” 7th International Architectural Exhibition in Venice Biennale 2000, *Korean Pavilion* (<http://www.korean-pavilion.or.kr/00pavilion/exhib.htm>).

7. “Exhibition Scheme of Korean Pavilion.”

8. While informed by different theoretical insights and opinions, the majority of works on the history of modern Korea deal with the field of nationalist discourses constructed around the term *minjok*. Two relatively recent titles in English include Michael Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920–1925* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), and Henry H. Em, “Nationalist Discourse in Modern Korea: Minjok as a Democratic Imaginary,” Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1995.

9. In illustrating the notion of *minjok* in a contemporary context, literary and cultural critic Paek Nak-ch’ŏng devised the term *pundan ch’eje* (system of division). Far from falling into the danger of nationalist exclusiveness, *pundan ch’eje* draws attention to the shifting currents of international/regional political and ideological forces that produce political and social realities in two Koreas, a contentious backdrop that continues to inform the way *minjok* and its strategies are deployed. For instance, Paek’s *Hüindöllinün pundan ch’eje* (Seoul: Ch’angjak kwa Pip’yŏngsa, 1998), features a range of issues including feminism, the Korean diaspora, and environmentalism as the emerging arena for further consideration and strategies to broaden the Korean nationalist movement into an international alliance.

10. The fragmented and traumatic contours of modernization under colonialism and their enduring negative impacts have been most consistently treated by nationalist scholarship in South Korea following the nation’s liberation in 1945. Noteworthy examples include Son Chŏng-mok’s influential study of the formation of urbanism, *Ilche kangjŏngi toshwakwajŏng yŏn’gu* (Seoul: Ilchisa, 1996).

11. “Japan Spoiled Ch'önggyech'ön's Crystal Stream,” *Chosun.Com*, July 18, 2002 (<http://chosun.com>).

12. “History and Heritage of Ch'önggyech'ön.”

13. This rubric of symbolic association constitutes what Benedict Anderson called “national imagination,” a kind of interpretative horizon bound by assumptions of allegorical as well as spatial-temporal fixity. For further details, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 22–36.

14. “The Ch'önggyech'ön Stream Becomes the Launch Pad for Garbage Archaeology,” *Chosun.Com*, Oct. 6, 2003 (<http://chosun.com>). The unique methodological outlook of this burgeoning branch of archaeology and its contribution to cultural materialism was first famously articulated by William Rathje and Cullen Murphy in *Rubbish!: The Archaeology of Garbage* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), based on decades of field work.

15. “The Ch'önggyech'ön Excavation, an Overview of Common Daily Existence,” *Chosun.Com*, Nov. 26, 2003 (<http://chosun.com>).

16. “The Ch'önggyech'ön Excavation.”

17. In validating the relevance of garbage archaeology to modern consumerist society, William Rathje and Cullen Murphy lay emphasis on the possibility of drawing a historical discourse alternative to its established counterparts that are largely, to use their term, “self-aggrandizing advertisements.” To contrast with such a historicist tendency for self-justification, garbage, they argue, “is not an assertion but a physical fact—and thus sometimes serve as a useful corrective.” See Rathje and Murphy, *Rubbish!*, 11–12.

18. Rathje and Murphy, *Rubbish!*, 12–13.

19. Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), 200.

20. Rathje and Murphy, *Rubbish!*, 11.

21. “Take a Good Look at the Way I Will Perish,” *Ohmynews*, Nov. 2, 2003 (<http://www.ohmynews.com>); emphasis added.

22. Kim Sun-ch'ön, ed., *Majimak konggan: Ch'önggyech'ön saramdül üi Sam üi kirok* (Seoul: Sam i Poinün Ch'ang, 2004), 17.

23. Jin Yang-kyo, “The Hwanghaktong Flea Market,” in *Ch'önggyech'ön: Sikan, changso, saram*, ed. Söulhak Yön'guso (Seoul: Söulhak Yön'guso, 2001), 161–203.

24. Antique trading in the region, for instance, has a fluctuating history that parallels shifting national and urban policies and administrations. Its origin dates back to the Saemül movement of the 1970s, a sweeping movement to modernize local communities. Modernization for many in the undeveloped countryside meant discarding traditional handmade household items such as wooden bowls, troughs, and utensils, and these items quickly found themselves in Hwanghaktong as valuable antiques newly packaged by merchants. In the early 1980s, however, when South Korea was chosen to host the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Olympiad, its government decided to relocate their business to other districts, since it feared that Hwanghaktong's unglamorous buildings and shops would be an embarrassment to many foreigners who would come to buy antique goods. As a result, the vibrant local scenes of antique trading tailed off to an unimpressive cluster of only about ten shops continuing their business. To fill the void left by the antique merchants, then came secondhand dealers in varying types of merchandise from used clocks to household appliances. For more details, see Jin, “The Hwanghaktong Flea Market,” 161–203.

25. Consumption facilitated by shifting patterns of technological development devises a potentially fertile ground for recycling, since consumers throw away whatever no longer satisfies their increasingly fickle taste and demands. In keeping with the vagaries of personalization or “fads,” merchandise takes on a multitude of stylistic variations extending beyond what is deemed technologically or materially necessary—often reflected in design, color, or even intricate layers of packaging, all of which turn obsolete as fast as they first articulate the consumers’ unique style.

26. Kim Sun-ch’ôn, *Majimak konggan*, 81–82.

27. This notion of the everyday, disclosed by the ingenious aspect of recycling, is loosely based on Heidegger’s “equipmental totality,” a world of complex practical concerns and interrelations with which the existential sense of being is inextricably bound up. For further discussion, see Stephen Mulhall’s *Heidegger and Being and Time* (London: Routledge, 1996), 46–59.

28. Cognitive self-reflexivity, according to Lash and Urry, assumes “a subject-object relationship of the self to itself and the social world.” See Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 5.

29. Lash and Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space*, 6.

30. In Lash and Urry, two contrasting types of self-reflexivity—namely, cognitive and aesthetic/hermeneutic—are used primarily to evince the linear path of progress that moves from the earlier Fordist modes of organized capitalism to the contemporary global order that is defined by “a structure of flows, a de-centered set of economics of signs in space.” See *Economies of Signs and Space*, 1–11.

31. I should mention that the type of recycling I am referring to is a kind of existential one based on individual reflections and revisions, rather than a large-scale management and industry that is currently in full swing in South Korea, prompted as it is by the decisive shift of environmentalism to accommodate globalist standards.

32. Im Hwa, “Ch’ônbyôn p’unggyōng P’yōng,” in *Pangmun*, vol. 6 (1939).

33. Kim Yun-Sik and Kim Hyün, *Han’guk munhaksa* (Seoul: Minūmsa, 1973), 184. For instance, the brutal realities of greed and sexual violence in Ch’ae Man-sik’s *T’angnyu* (Murky water, 1937) or the psychological deterioration of an intellectual tormented by social and sexual frustrations in Yi Sang’s *Nalgae* (Wings, 1936) cannot be adequately grasped without taking into account the political and ideological order of colonialism as their underlying reality.

34. It should be pointed out that this double-edged aspect of modernization in colonial Korea became the focal point of recent revisionist scholarship (both in South Korea and abroad) in drawing various shades of modern experience, which had been occluded from nationalist historiography. Among the works that best illustrate this new current are Kim Jin-song’s *Sōul e ttanssūhol ūl hōhara: hyōndaesōng ūi hyōngsōng* (Seoul: Hyōnsil Munhwa Yōn’gu, 1999) and Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, ed., *Colonial Modernity in Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999).

35. Ch’oe Chae-sō, *Munhak kwa chisōng* (Seoul: Inmunsa, 1938), 281–82.

36. In *Sosōlga Kubossi ūi iril*, Kubo’s artistic sensitivity is shaped by a privileged notion of selfhood that asserts its dominion by opposing anything that is deemed disagreeable. Thus, the continuing show of Kubo’s neurotic angst—ranging from an extreme concern with personal hygiene and health to a convulsive, dystopian view of Seoul as the city of the diseased and the impoverished—reaches a point of Cartesian nonsensical hyperbole, whereby the discriminating system of social and clinical diagnosis itself is cast in doubt as a symptom of a psychical disorder: “Suddenly, with a sheer force of conviction, Kubo began to imagine that everyone in the world is suffering from psychical disorders, including the people in this bar. Flights of idea, delusion of grandeur,

nymphomania, jealousy, satyriasis, compulsive lying, antisocial personality etc. . . . Then, it occurred to him that his preoccupation with diagnosis also made him a sort of obsessive compulsive. He started to laugh” (pp. 74–75). This intellectual crisis finds its way out by moving in an opposite direction of dialogue and laughter, in which the obsessive cataloguing of the urban inhabitants becomes an object of parody. In the company of jovial bar waitresses, surely one of his many objectionable sites in Seoul—that of poverty and prostitution—Kubo’s purview of mental or social anomalies is recast to pave way for jokes and linguistic play.

37. Led by the Government-General, urban reform programs, including public hygiene, road pavement, and the effective disposal of domestic waste were well under way by the mid-twenties, but continued to occlude native *pukch'on*, as, for example, testified by an article published in *Kyŏngsŏng* (1924), in which the condition of Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn is mentioned in following terms: “The building of the Yongsan water supply system that cost four hundred thousand wŏn covered so far only its southern part, and the laying of the Ch'ŏnggyech'ŏn drainage, estimated to cost one million six hundred thousand wŏn, extended to the south of Yŏkch'on sub-channel, but began dealing with the north of An'guk-dong only recently.” For a detailed study of the increasing division between *namch'on* and *pukch'on* and its impact on the native living conditions, see Son Chŏng-mok, *Ilche Kangjŏngi tosihwakwajŏng Yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ilchisa, 1996), 360–84.

38. The gradual softening of combative nationalist sentiment under Japan’s selective censorship in the 1920s and 1930s gave way to a dramatic expansion of the culture industry (popular magazines, music, fashion, films, and so forth), through which the behavioral and linguistic lexicon of modern outlooks and technologies continued to filter into the fabric of Korean life. Hence, there were many trials and errors in seeking to outline the “proper” modes of interpretation and style with which people were trying to give voice to their newly acquired sense of individuality and social awareness. In an article titled “Symbol of Decadence” published in *Pyŏlgŏngon* (1927), a newly launched magazine covering a wide range of contemporary cultural issues, Ch'oe Hak-song, a cultural critic, related a number of negative connotations assigned to the term “modern,” which was used to mark the shift in fashion and cultural codes: “While beleaguered by half-baked criticisms and muddled opinions, ‘modern girl,’ it is truthful to say, brings to mind the piano and moving pictures, and ‘modern boy,’ *gisaeng* compounds and theaters. In my view, the term modern girl compromises the beauty of female virtue, as it looms in connection with trendy and alluring types who go to dancehalls like actresses. Likewise its male counterpart rarely imparts any suggestion of morally resolute character; instead it prefigures flippancy and sexual frankness in the pursuit of the opposite sex. . . . Some even show little scruples in pronouncing modern as ‘*mott'oen*’ [morally unbecoming] in vernacular Korean, to suggest moral impropriety.” For an elaboration of the impact of the Japanese cultural policy (*Bunka Seiji*) on the changing scenes of the nationalist movement and modern experience, see Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism*, 79–156. The above excerpt appears in Kim Jin-song’s *Sŏul e ttanssŭhol ūl hŏhara*, 328.