

Yearning for Freedom in Sook Nyul Choi's *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*

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Yim, Seong Suk. "Yearning for Freedom in Sook Nyul Choi's *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*." *Studies in English Language & Literature* 44.3 (2018): 157-176. Owing to the legacy of Japanese Imperialism, Korea had a shameful past. When two nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki forced Japan to surrender unconditionally during the War in the Pacific in 1945, people in the United States suddenly felt compassion and sympathy for the Japanese due to the explosions and loss of life. Crucially though, internationally, few people are aware of Japanese colonialism and the atrocious acts committed against Koreans. *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* is a novel about the plight of Koreans during the period of Japanese colonial rule, and the Koreans peoples' yearning for freedom. This paper studies five symbolic icons representing the freedom, identity and pride of Korean traditional culture and history, and examines how the Korean traditional patriarchal system or family system disintegrated because of Japanese colonial imperialism. This paper outlines how the colonial period school curriculum yielded educational products promoting a transition to the communist ideologies of 'Mother Russia' without clearing away the vestiges of Japanese colonialism, and traces the journey of the heroine who comes to the South seeking for freedom from the Russian communists and the Town Reds in the North. (Chonbuk National University)

Key Words: Korean identity, Japanese colonialism, atrocious acts, Russian communism, freedom

I. Introduction

At the beginning of 2018, a vast number of people around the world began to pay attention to the Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang, South Korea. The

Opening Ceremony for the 2018 Winter Olympics in PyeongChang was broadcast around the world. In addition, broadcasting companies from every country gave a running commentary on the event. One correspondent of US broadcaster NBC made a comment, during Friday's opening ceremony, which sparked a flood of complaints from many Koreans on social media. The US broadcaster was forced to apologize because of the insult caused to Korean people after their representative stated that "Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made the trip to Korea for the Olympics representing Japan, a country which occupied Korea from 1910 to 1945. But every Korean will tell you that Japan is a cultural, technological and economic example that has been so important to their own transformation." NBC later retracted the statement, adding that "We understand the Korean people were insulted by these comments and we apologize" (Lee-CNN)¹. This incident is a result of the misconceptions that some people in other countries have, and a lack of knowledge pertaining to the historical background of relations between Korea and Japan. One South Korean Twitter user wrote, "Joshua Cooper Ramo should not speak for Koreans and obviously does not know any Korean either. Nobody will tell you we are thankful for Japan occupation and they are not an example"(Lee-CNN). Some in other countries might see the Japanese colonization as an innovative driving force that pushed Korean society forward. However, this notion is quite ridiculous considering the consequential division of the Korean peninsula by Russia and America in 1945, the year of liberation. Furthermore, Japan had ruthlessly exploited the Korean people and the country's national resources, by building a railway system during the colonial rule. Eventually, and partially due to these conditions, Korea was formally split into two parts, South and North, after experiencing the Korean War (1950-53).

Since then, the Koreans living in the South have made remarkable progress in various fields by toiling day and night, and through intelligently founded education systems. Korea bounced back once more, and has ranked outstanding in many

¹ News Pages of CNN and Korea Herald are not indicated.

different spheres including Politics, Economy, Education and Culture, with specific prominence in Art Cultures that stretch back to ancient times. Throughout history, many items found in Japanese culture and society first originated in Korea. In other words, Korea was transmitting a large number of products and new technologies into Japan. However, Korea did not embrace the advanced systems of different western cultures, modernity, or military policies at the time of the enlightenment; when the Joseon Dynasty developed into a modern form of state. Hence the Korean peninsula's difficult past is partially due to its early failure to adopt the advanced technical know-how to build weapons and a well-organized military system. Thus Korea had to undergo many hardships under the Japanese colonial rule.

When the Japanese started an aggressive war against other countries and attacked America's Pacific fleet at Hawaii's Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, the United States retaliated by detonating nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending the War in the Pacific in 1945. People in the States have often felt compassion and sympathy for the Japanese owing to the destruction caused by the dropping of nuclear bombs on these two Japanese cities. However a serious issue is² that not a lot of people in America, as well as those in other developed nations, are aware of Japanese colonialists committing atrocious acts such as the bloody massacre of innocent civilians, or the experiments using humans as guinea pigs conducted by Unit 731³. Namely, this proves that the western world has little understanding of the Japanese imperialism which Korea and China were closely involved with.

The writer, Sook Nyul Choi, who taught students for more than 20 years in the United States, realized that most American people did not yet fully understand the

² Tense in the sentence will be used as circumstances demand in the context.

³ Japanese World War II veterans recall the horrors of Unit 731. Former members of Unit 731, a Japanese military unit that conducted illegal human experiments during World War II, can be seen discussing the atrocities they committed in a video that was recently released. Coming just before the 69th anniversary of Japan's surrender on Aug. 15, the video has shed new light on the unit's past activities in northeast China's city of Harbin. They are telling history to a Chinese man who has been researching the unit for 16 years(New China TV).

relationship between Korea and Japan. This was the motivation for her to write her first novel *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* on the plight of Koreans, yearning for freedom, during the period of Japanese colonial rule. It is a largely autobiographical novel founded on the experiences that she went through during the period of the Japanese colonial rule when she was set free from oppression as Korea broke away from Japanese colonialism, and she came to the South seeking for freedom from Russian Communists and the Town Reds in the North.

Year of Impossible Goodbyes created a sensation and became a must-read English Literature text, for American's youth, as soon as it was published in 1991. The author was later asked to provide special lectures all across the United States.

This first focus of this study is to show five symbolic icons representing the freedom and pride of Korean traditional culture and history, which Choi intimated through her novel. The second purpose of this study is to highlight how the Korean traditional patriarchal system, or family system, disintegrated because of a compulsory manpower draft and the enforced sex slavery under Japanese rule; how the recipients of Colonial rulers' education were exposed to the same ways of political, economic, and cultural power which transitioned toward another colonization by 'Mother Russia' without clearing away the vestiges of Japanese colonialism; and how Sook-An and Inchun, her younger brother, cross over the 'line of death' between the South and the North, seeking for liberty from Russian communism ruling the North in *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*.

II. Symbols of Korean Culture

This section is primarily a discourse on five symbols representing the identity and pride of Korean culture handed down from generation to generation. It shows how the Japanese committed a grave error in annihilating the traditional culture, history, and identity of the Korean people by not permitting them to use their own language

and alphabet, Hangul, after the colonization of Korea. The extermination of the Korean language and alphabet, which would be able to go away in only dozens, was impossible from the start, as these intangible assets had been entrenched in the country's culture for the last five thousand years. Similarly, the Japanese would not have had the ability to govern Korea if they had not utilized their well-organized army system and advanced weapons. The effect of the Korean language extermination policy disappeared soon after the Japanese were forced to surrender in a crushing defeat to the United Nations forces. This shows that "In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to" (Tucker 488-9).

Year of Impossible Goodbyes begins in Spring of 1945, Korea's independence year. Spring is the first among the five symbolic icons of Korean culture in this chapter. Korea has four distinct climatic seasons, and a severe spell of cold weather was often likened to a severe ordeal which the ancient Koreans had suffered. Therefore, Spring naturally represents a solution to the problem just like a thaw in the cold weather. "The high mounds of snow in the corner of our yard had begun to melt"(1) because of the warmth of the Spring sun. Sook-An's grandfather thinks the Japanese colonial period is a harsh winter and hopes the Korean people might be in the raptures of happiness brought on by a real Spring. Here, Spring symbolizes forthcoming freedom from Japanese colonial rule and the independent state of Korea. For this reason, Sook-An's grandfather named his four grandsons' using the character which means 'Spring': the word, *Chun*. Grandfather is waiting for the real Spring of freedom. Therefore there is hope in his grandsons' names.

My oldest brother's name was Hanchun, meaning "Korean spring"; my second brother, Jaechun, was called "spring again"; my third brother, Hyunchun, the "wise spring"; and my youngest brother, Inchun, the "benevolent spring." Inchun was now almost seven, and a benevolent spring still had not come to our village.(2)

The second symbol is a Pine tree belonging to grandfather, in the front yard of

Sook-An's house. It represents the spirit of fidelity, patience, and politeness in Korean people, "It's dark green-needled branches emanating harmoniously from the trunk"(1) Sook-An's grandfather keeps strong fidelity like the pine tree he so loves. One day in June, Captain Narita, a Japanese police officer, gets angry at grandfather for writing in Chinese and Hangul(Korean alphabet). Grandfather was so ashamed that he did not resist the Japanese oppression that he never comes out of his room again and decides to throw his shoes away. Not much later, Captain Narita makes two young Japanese-trained Korean police chop down the pine tree. He knows that cutting the pine tree is the best way to punish grandfather. After this event occurs, Grandfather breathes his last breath without ever seeing the defeat of his adversaries two months later. During Grandfather's life, people in town called him "Patriot Grandfather"(3), yet he lost the meaning of fidelity, patience, and politeness due to lingering frustration after his pine tree was hacked to pieces. However, his philosophy had not changed. Before he died, he made Sook-An's mother show Sook-An and Inchun some pictures of long ago and he talked about his family story and the Korean identity that should be passed on to his grandchildren. This shows that "the goal of transmitting memory is to remember: when memory is passed on, the listener is obliged to pass it on. It becomes part of the concrete and accumulated family history. In this regard, the family members share a collective memory, which affects each person who hears and tells about the stories of their past"(Noh 122). What is important is how grandfather's clung to his original intent as a Korean longing for true liberty in the persecution of Japan.

"Your grandfather was a very important scholar. He passed all the government examinations. ... Under that special hat, your grandfather's hair was drawn into a small bun, called a topknot, on the top of his head. But when the Japanese occupied Korea, they gathered all the scholars in the town square and cut their topknots off. It was only hair, but to your grandfather and the other proud scholars, it was a symbol of their culture and identity." The Japanese wanted all Koreans to dress like them and speak only their language. Everything Korean was forbidden.(37)

Sook-An's mother explains the third, a topknot on the top of man's head, as a symbol of Korean culture, identity, pride and a tradition that had been handed down from generation to generation. Traditionally, a man could tie up a topknot on the top of his head only after marriage. The topknot was an emblem of adulthood. When a man was accused of a crime or treason in the Joseon Dynasty, that person could not have a topknot on his head and had to wind down his hair. Therefore a topknot on a man's head was part of national identity, and the preservation of culture and custom in Korea. In particular, Confucianists of the Joseon Dynasty had a great deal of pride in the top-knot tradition, and could never imagine having it cut down. Japanese colonialists tried to get rid of the long-standing tradition that Korean men should not cut their hair from cradle to grave, and attempted to break the pride of Korean men by cutting these important symbols. Sook-An's mother goes on to say that the Japanese did not cease in committing unremittably bad acts. Another prominent example was setting fire to villages at midnight to kill innocent people.

In the middle of the night, Japanese set fire to mother's house. The soldiers, ready with their guns and swords, waited outside people's homes and shot them as they came running out of their burning houses. There were massacres in all the small Korean settlements. (39-40)

This horrendous portrayal is one of the many atrocities committed by the Japanese and suggests why "the combat between native and settler takes the form of an armed"(Fanon 83). Unfortunately, Mother's family was burned to death while the Japanese set Korean's houses alight. Mother escaped to Manchuria of China, and met Father and Grandfather there. This leads us to understand that a lot of Korean people moved to China in order to do something on behalf of the 'Motherland'. For instance, one of the prominent patriots was Bong-gil Yun, a Korean independence activist in Shanghai of China. It is alleged that Chiang Kaishek(蔣介石)⁴ was deeply

⁴ He had influence with Chinese people as a China's top leader at that time.

touched by Yun, and he said that the Korean independence fighter was one patriotic man in a million Chinese. Chiang sent Yun's family a handwritten “*壯烈千秋*” - heroic patriot's deed of eternity -, after Yun was captured and suffered the last sanction of the Japanese colonialism in 1932. One could “watch the heroic resistance of a community partly formed out of colonial degradations, leading to a protracted armed and cultural conflict with the imperial powers”(Edward 229-230). It was a turning point in “the war of liberation, introduces into each man's consciousness, the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history”(Fanon 93). In this respect, we can find significant evidence that Koreans have national pride and strong cultural identity based on the real freedom of human dignity.

The fourth item, the Korean language and alphabet, symbolizes the spirit and intrinsic culture of the Korean people. Japanese imperialists had enforced a policy to annihilate the Korean language and alphabet. This ban was applied from elementary schools to universities as well as the whole of Korean society by “the assimilation policy”⁵ of the Japanese. Korean students were not permitted to speak Korean and were scolded heavily if Japanese teachers heard them in school.

In the meantime, Sook-An's family worked “to publish Korean independent newspaper in Hangul, Korean Letter. Grandfather had been active in the Korean independence movement”(38). Japanese soldiers captured grandfather because of it and he was put to torture in prison. Torturers maimed his toes all wrinkled, permanently removed his toenails and the five fingernails of his right hand.

Rather than laying down, this seditious act of violence committed by the Japanese, along with other such an acts of cruelty, forced Koreans to resist the Japanese in efforts towards Korean independence. Another prominent patriot was Gwan-sun Yu who, in her effort for the freedom of Korea, distributed smuggled copies of the Declaration of Independence and homemade Korean national flags. She died of injuries, caused by beatings and torture in prison, on Sept. 28, 1920.

⁵ Japanese aggressively forced Korean to assimilate to them under the Japanese colonialism.

Yu, Gwan-sun, a Korean Independence Activist Who Defied Japanese Rule when a call for peaceful protests came in spring 1919, a schoolgirl became the face of a nation's collective yearning for freedom ... "Even if my fingernails are torn out, my nose and ears are ripped apart, and my legs and arms are crushed, this physical pain does not compare to the pain of losing my nation." she wrote in prison. "my only remorse is not being able to do more than dedicating my life to my country" (The New York Times)⁶.

Like flies and using gruesome methods, the Japanese tortured or killed Koreans who were connected to the Korean independence movement. Koreans who "have rebelled against their colonial masters and suffered grievously for failure at the hands of the colonial police and the military"(Fanon 111).

Lastly, the Korean Tiger also denotes the significant culture and identity of Korea. In other words, the Tiger is a major symbol of the defence of Korea as a sovereign nation. Although there were a lot of hostile wars aggravated by neighbouring countries including Japan(especially Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592) and China(especially the Manchu war of 1636) in Korean history, the Korean people had always defeated foreign enemies and defended Korea. An official Garment and a Belt of the General had been embroidered with the White Tiger, and the fiercely defensive spirit of the Korean people that has continued on without ceasing up to now. In modern culture 'Soohorang' - a white tiger, became the mascot for the 2018 Olympic Games (PyeongChang), as well as 'Hodori' - a yellow tiger - who became the mascot of the 1988 Summer Olympics (Seoul). 'Soohorang' and 'Hodori' are somewhat sentimental nicknames, which come from the word 'Horangi', meaning 'tiger' in Korean.

Back in the period of Japanese imperialism, the Korean Tigers had to be faced with strength, much like the Korean people. Numerous Korean Tigers used to roam the mountains before the Japanese hunted them down with the desire to mount their

⁶ Since 1851, obituaries in The New York Times have been dominated by white men. Now, we're adding the stories of 15 remarkable women. Introducing Overlooked.

skins. Once again, we see that Korea was deprived of sovereign power by the Japanese. Aunt, who told of the traditional fairy tale in which the Korean Tiger symbolizes intrepidity and fighting gloriously for the country, earned the nickname of Aunt Tiger. Aunt Tiger told many wonderful Tiger's stories, including a sad story about "Mother Tiger who roamed the mountains in search of her cubs, not knowing they had been killed by hunters"(16). It seems that, in fact, this was the tale of her own babies who were taken and killed by the Japanese.

As her nickname 'Aunt Tiger' suggests, though she was likely very keen to punish the Japanese for killing her parents and babies and for taking the husband that she loved, she finds new purpose instead of seeking revenge against Japanese. In the latter part of the novel, she is willing to sacrifice her life to protect Sook-An's family and to help some people, who have so long yearned for real freedom, to flee from the Russian Communists and the Pink of the North. It shows that Aunt Tiger is rejuvenated "from her inferiority complex and from her despair and inaction; it makes her fearless and restores her self-respect"(Fanon 94). She is willing to sacrifice her life for their freedom.

III. A Compulsory Manpower Draft and Enforced Sex Slaves

Sook-An's house is enclosed by a low stone wall with the wooden gate which symbolizes that the house has become a refuge and fortress. However, the gate can not provide privacy or security for Koreans because "Japanese tromped in and out whenever they wanted to without so much as a knock"(6). Sook-An's three brothers were drafted and the sock girls, working inside the fence, were taken to the front by Japanese. In one instance, one of the sock girls was unceremoniously "grabbed and tossed onto the truck like a dead cat"(60) by Japanese soldiers. Therefore, "no one bothered to close it"(62) since then. This shows the power of the extreme asymmetry between the Koreans and the Japanese. The Koreans can not protect

themselves because they do not have a sovereign government.

An issue to mention regarding the Japanese is that they would stop at nothing to get their way, committing acts of barbarism and outrage against humanity. At the hand of the Japanese colonial government, many young Korean men were conscripted, and forced to do hard labor or to fight against Japanese enemies.

Sook-An's three older brothers and most of the other men in her town had been drafted, except Kisa, whose leg caused him to limp awkwardly. "As father's nephew, he tries very hard to fill my father's place and ... He wished that he could be working with my father in Manchuria in the Korean independence movement"(13). He is in "The process of the liberation of man, independently of the concrete situations in which he finds himself, include, and concern the whole of humanity ... This is one of the roots of the immense solidarity that unites the oppressed peoples to the exploited masses of the colonialist country"(Fanon 144).

After Korea gained its independence, many young Korean men returned from Japanese labor camps in conditions of great weakness and ill-health due to toilsome tasks, starvation, and abuse by Japanese Imperialists. The Japanese continuously harassed Koreans and gave them a hard time, discriminating between Koreans and Japanese. Some fell into the cruelty of fate and faced inevitable death. It is described as follows.

Unhi's two older brothers had been forced to dig ditches sixteen hours a day under the hot sun and the pouring rain. they survived on potato roots and some mixed grains. The Japanese soldiers often amused themselves by forcing the boys to drink their own urine ... We heard that both of Unhi's brothers had died ... I saw Unhi, Unhi's mother was wailing, and pounding her chest as if she wanted to die and join her sons. (95-96)

It implies "'In the context of power, an inequality' can be 'violent and corruptive'"(Park 274) system "produced by the political unconscious and exacerbated by the inequities of power"(Park 274). A large number of Koreans did

not come back home from Japanese wars. This insinuates that many young Korean people shed their blood for another country. However, among those who did return home, many young men and boys came home only to die. The greatest happiness to see their fathers or brothers again was just a moment and "The dreams of a happy future together in a free land are shattered"(96). The entire town is changed into a hospital and death sweeps through the whole town every day. It makes Mother wonder which is better - if her sons come back home or not. She does not wish to see them die at home, as any mother would. Again we see that the specter of Japanese imperialism has further disintegrated the traditional patriarchal system of Korea.

The atrocious acts of the Japanese colonialists did not only occur on Korean soil, as Korean women were drafted for Japanese military sexual slavery. Mother runs a factory making socks for Japanese soldiers. However, not only does Captain Narita refuse to pay the money for socks, but he also wants to prevent young women and girls from working in the factory. With an icy smile on his face, he camouflaging his real intentions says that he will take them for Japanese soldiers on the battlefields. Mother asks so humbly and desperately to have one more chance to increase the production of socks and not to take the girls to the front. Sook-An is surprised "how this scrawny little man could inspire such fear in my mother with just a few words"(53). Unfortunately, "Subjects of colonial rule should put their pride in their pocket with subdued obedience to imperial ideology"(Yun 18). Even if the sock girls know that they will become 'the Spirit Girls', they can not escape from Captain Narita because of their families at home. They are "like mice trapped in a dungeon of wildcats"(55). Aunt Tiger says like a mad woman,

They use us, they toy with us, and, one way or another. Our lives are worth no more than a fly's. 'A voluntary offering for the glory of the Emperor' ... How skillfully they lie, lie, lie! Those girls would rather die than be 'spirit girls' for the Emperor's soldiers. When I think of how many truck loads of girls they've taken to the front already ... I heard half of them killed themselves by jumping off the

speeding trucks rather than be locked in those latrines and used by those soldiers. Our poor girls! (56)

Young Korean women and girls would choose death rather than humiliation by going to the front in the name of volunteering for Japanese soldiers, and because they would not agree to fall so low as to become cheap sexual commodities. They could not subvert Japan's uninhibited sexual discourse in an inextricable maze to exacerbate the pain. "Some of them are not even fifteen, and the other ones have babies and have old grandparents at home to take care of"(59). In addition, one of the most atrocious cruelties would be "Footage showing Japanese troops killing women they forced into sexual slavery during World War Two ... was made public for the first time at an international conference on wartime sex slavery held in Seoul"(Arirang News)⁷. This is further evidence as to how the Japanese disintegrated the Korean traditional patriarchal system or family system.

IV. Freedom from the Education of Japan and Russian

Sook-An used to like studying with grandfather, reading and writing the Korean language, and learning about the ancient Korean Kingdoms or Chinese poetry, which were prohibited by Japanese policy in an attempt to obliterate the Korean nation. One day, Captain Narita's lieutenants gave a notice, at the elementary school, that Sook-An had to learn to become a loyal and obedient subject for Japanese victory. The Japanese did not see a Korean child as a human being or student, but they handled Korean children as little soldiers in school. This is represented clearly when Sook-An is at school, "she should be someone she does not want to be and she has to pretend"(73). She could not use the Korean language or even her Korean

⁷ For 19 seconds it shows part of a massacre on September 13th, 1944... in which 30 Korean girls were executed by Japanese troops in Tengchong, China.

name, because of the Japanese policy to annihilate the Korean Language and alphabet. She is reluctant to speak the Japanese language, Captain Narita says, because she is inwardly influenced by the nobility of grandfather's spirit as a Korean. She is forced to face Narita Sensei, Captain Narita's wife, as a homeroom teacher.

She knows to what extent Captain Narita is a brutal, merciless, and coldblooded person because she sees him committing rude acts whenever he comes by her house. She can easily guess what kind of person Narita Sensei is, especially because of her appearance, namely "Her icy glare resembled her husband's"(70). She has haughty eyes and a proud heart. Teacher, Narita Sensei makes first-grade students sing "Kimigayo" and swear an oath, "The Heavenly Emperor is too divine to be gazed upon by human eyes"(73), and she continuously explains that "The White Devils are losing the war. See how funny they look"(74). Whatever she does, the children should imitate her. She drives Korean students to be loyal and obedient subjects for Japanese from an early age. Sook-An should be careful not to get her family in trouble because Captain Narita can cut the rice ration to her family, or do even worse.

Narita Sensei does not allow young children to go to the restroom. Therefore, some of them urinate on the spot in the class. Sook-An sees a "puddle formed beneath their chairs and they have wet their pants"(75). Teacher, Narita Sensei, "who used to sell fish in Hokkaido"(68) of Japan, abuses the young children physically and mentally. She does not provide any of the positive effects of education. She also believes that the students in elementary school should be trained, prepared for war against white people, as little soldiers of Japanese Imperialism. When the principal said "Remember, when the White Devils come you, each must grab one, and stab them with the bamboo poles"(77), all of a sudden one of the boy students shouted, "Stop, stop, stop! Don't you know that we will stab you bastards first! We'll help the Americans destroy you all! You killers!"(80). Looking at the student shouting in this way, you could be forgiven for thinking that every student

has the same idea. However, the Japanese authorities do not forgive the student who resists them. The big boy student fell into Japanese clutches and immediately disappeared.

Finally, Korea became an Independent country in August of 1945. What kind of future can be anticipated by Sook-An's family in the independent state? The same style of Japanese education still exists at the Little Proletariat School, now under the Russian communist rule of the North. The adult, the recipient of Colonial rulers' education, gives the same method of education that they were subjected to, without changing the vestiges of Japanese schooling. It is clear that "The matter of colonialism exerts its negative or destructive influence on the whole society just like a ghost haunting at any time or anywhere, with no intention to disappear easily, though it officially was brought to an end"(Wang 61-2).

The only change is that the enemy is replaced by Capitalists in place of the White people, and they should become Labour Members for the Communist instead of becoming obedient subjects for the Japanese. She should be patient with the awful propaganda and the constant, harsh criticisms of the Capitalists. Sook-An is also forced to make the smaller children repeat her words just like Narita Sensei did before.

We, the young proletarian comrades, are important. We can save our grown-up comrades from being Capitalists and Imperialists. If we see any comrades, whether father or mother, not understanding Mother Russia, we must report them to our comrade leader. This is our duty to Mother Russia. The Capitalists are our enemy. The Imperialists are our enemy. Mother Russia is for people like us. One for all and all for one. We are all equal and it is our duty to secure this social paradise.(120)

Nothing has changed. The students should repeatedly recite and sing songs in praise of 'Mother Russia' as a substitute for Japan. What's far more terrifying is that "the Russians and the Town Reds are very skillful at getting information out of children"(112) about what their families are doing. Then, unexpectedly, people are

picked up by the communists they simply disappear. It is sad to say that Koreans were not only Japanese colonial subjects, but communists' subjects in the 1940s in the North.

However, those who gain the communist's credibility in the North can do anything that they want to do. For example, Kisa, Father, and Aunt Tiger are pretending to be communists. Hence, Kisa brought Sook-An's family tidings of her father and three older brothers. Father transported raw materials from the North and traded them for rice in the South. He met his three sons and sent them to the South. Now, he wants his family to escape from the North. Aunt Tiger gets Sook-An's family to do a work assignment at home, because they do not know when father will help them to escape to the South. As the days go by, they are afraid of not taking chances to escape from the North because of the Communists, who keep watch and give reports on the movement of people.

We were afraid of the Russians, but even more afraid of the converted Korean Communists, for they would surely report us. It was hard to tell who was a Pink. We couldn't take any chances.(114)

Furthermore, to Sook-An's family, some people pretend not to be 'Pink', trying to figure out people who will try to flee. Therefore they do not know who is a real Pink. For their plan to remain undiscovered, they are worn to a frazzle by hard, avoiding Pink suspicion and doubt. Red communists embody communist ideologies in the North and, as time goes by, the conditions for escape grow worse and worse. The same things happen under the rule of the Russians and Town Reds. Visits are limited and they need a passport to travel just like they did at the time of Japanese colonialism. People who want to travel can only have a passport issued by a Red communist.

Finally, they get the message from father who sends a precious gift of gold to be given to the best professional guide who can help his family cross the 38th Parallel. Kisa and Aunt Tiger can't go with them, because security is too tight to let them

flee. Therefore, Kisa and Aunt Tiger stay visible in the village for the time being in order to give Sook-An's family a chance to cross the border safely and to avoid getting caught only to be brought back to face the machine guns. Kisa promises that he and Aunt Tiger will follow soon after. However the final epilogue says that Sook-An never meets them again, because they were caught and killed by the Red Terror.

Nothing is more frightful than strangers who get involved in spy intrigue to survive in the political chaos of the North. Betrayed by the guide who works for the Russian soldiers as a double-agent, Sook-An and Inchun lost their mother on the way to the South. At the novel's very end, the old man with a broom and the old conductor who checks ticket in the train station, are the people who help them cross the 38th Parallel after going through all kinds of hardships. Good memories of her own grandfather make *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* begin with grandfather's story and end with the happy memory of the two old men who help her gain liberty.

V. Conclusion

Year of Impossible Goodbyes shows that the Koreans refused to assimilate to the Japanese policies during the Japanese colonial period, because Korea has had an outstanding cultural tradition, long history, and its own Korean Language and alphabet; all inspiring intense self-respect and pride. Hence, the Korean endured severe pain and suffering under the rule of Japanese imperialism.

In fact, there were many colonies across the five continents; in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the American Continent. The dominant discourse of colonialism was applied differently in the process of colonialization by each ruler. The Japanese colonial rule system was different from that of the United Kingdom, of France, Belgium, the Republic of Portugal, and Spain.

Among the many colonies, "The histories of African colonies have become a lot

of fiction books, movies, and papers.” Therefore it is not difficult to study discourse on issues of colonization or post colonization related to Africa in the domain of English Literature. Yet, there is not enough literature to study theses of Japan’s colonial occupation of Korea, though there are a lot of English books on this in the field of English Literature.

It is an undeniable fact that Korean literature is mostly for Koreans while Japanese literature is largely for Japanese. However, it is hard to say that this novel is just for Koreans. Similarly “African literature is not for African”(Elizabeth Costello 51), but for the people in other countries who might help them.

This novel by Sook Nyul Choi allegedly has a special message for Americans who have a misunderstood compassion and sympathy for the Japanese who were committing atrocious acts against the Koreans during the Japanese colonial period. A vast number of Korean people were in a miserable plight at that time, and this is not an old story. Similar acts of brutality occurred recently in Myanmar in 2017. “The Rohingya people of Myanmar have long been despised and persecuted as a Muslim minority in a majority-Buddhi’s country. And they are being slaughtered, a minimum of 6,700 Rohingya - including 730 children - were killed by shooting and other violence”(Korea Herald). This report reminds us of Japanese imperialism, which should be still taken it into consideration, and is not just a small matter.

Beginning in 2018, “Pope Francis is having cards printed and distributed showing a 1945 photo of victims, which shows a boy carrying his dead brother on his shoulders, of the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki”(Cullinane-CNN). The Pope has problematized nuclear weapons as a just cause to protect the earth and human beings. Citizens of the Earth might be very grateful for the Pope’s expressions of concern. However, we should not forget why the United States detonated atomic bombs on the two cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in Japan.

To come back to the point again, Korea and Japan have had an inextricable connection from the past to the present. Even today, despite Korea's independent status of more than 70 years, the special issue of ‘Japanese military sexual slavery’

during the Japanese colonial period is still tarring the relationship between Korea and Japan. The time has come for sincere apologies and tolerance between both countries. We, as human beings, should keep in mind that even the most seemingly trivial matter is still of the utmost importance, and should not be behind the top priority as a just cause.

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