

Yoshikawa Eiji's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and Its Ethical Values in South Korea

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Abstract: After the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression broke out, the Japanese historical novelist Yoshikawa Eiji visited China several times as a member of the civil affairs unit attached to the Imperial Japanese Army. Upon his return, Yoshikawa serialized his version of the fourteenth century Chinese novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in *Trade News from Home and Abroad*. His *Three Kingdoms* was almost simultaneously serialized in *Kyung-sung Daily News* in Korea and became a huge success among Korean readers. More than faithfully translating the original, Yoshikawa incorporated the Confucian value of loyalty along with the colonial ethic of patriotism to the Japanese empire while retelling this Chinese classic in a modern style. When placed in its historical context, Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* could be read as an ethical text of the warmongering state. Despite its colonial origin, Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* was very popular in South Korea until the 1980s. Park's dictatorship inadvertently provided a timely nurturing backdrop for Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms*. In particular, the ethical values manifested in his novel, such as loyalty, self-sacrifice, and patriotism, were embraced and nurtured by Park Chung-hee's military regime. Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* is certainly not as widely read in Korea anymore. However, its long-lasting popularity in the twentieth century reminds us that the militaristic code of ethics is deeply rooted in Korean culture and society.

Keywords: Yoshikawa Eiji; *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*; Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression; ethics; Park Chung-hee

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标题：吉川英治《三国志》在韩国的伦理价值

内容摘要：日本侵华战争爆发后，日本历史小说家、军属文员吉川英治访问了中国。归国后，他翻译并在日本报纸上连载了 14 世纪的中国小说《三国演义》。这部小说同时也在当时的韩国《京城日报》上连载，在朝鲜战争之后的韩国读者中十分受欢迎。吉川英治并非忠实、完整地翻译了《三国演义》，而是以现代方式对中国古典进行了“二次创作”，借此鼓吹自己的爱国之心，同时植入儒家哲学中的“忠”、“义”、“名誉”等价值观。纵观历史脉络，可将吉川英治的《三国志》看作战时体制下的伦理文献。即便如此，在 20 世纪 80 年代，这部小说在有被殖民经历的韩国仍旧颇具人气，这是因为吉川英治的《三国志》为维持当时朴正熙的独裁政权提供了多样的理念支持。尤其是这部作品所展现出的“忠诚”、“自我牺牲”、“爱国心”等价值观，成为了朴正熙维持军事政权的重要支撑。如今吉川英治的这部《三国志》并不像朴正熙独裁期间被广泛阅读，但它在 20 世纪时的长久人气使军国主义伦理纲领在韩国文化中根深蒂固。

关键词：吉川英治；《三国志》；日本侵华战争；伦理；朴正熙

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Introduction: *Three Kingdoms* and Its Popularity in Korea

The fourteenth century Chinese historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* began to be widely read in Chosŏn Korea during the reign of King Sŏnjo (1567-1608). Diverse classes of people, from the King to the commoners, read and enjoyed it greatly. After the Japanese invasions of Korea (1592-98), vernacular Korean editions of *Three Kingdoms* became so popular that many Koreans, regardless of gender and age, could recite admired quotes from the novel from memory. For ordinary readers, *Three Kingdoms* might merely be an entertaining and pleasing literary work. However, its popularity might have been a product of political situations. For example, the Imjin War (1592-98) provided a momentum to the spread of *Three Kingdoms* in Chosŏn, as military officers from Ming China established and left behind many Guan Yu shrines. The worship of Guan Yu was alien to Chosŏn people. However, when commoners found Guan Yu to be a god of wealth, worshipping him as a folk deity became a popular practice. In addition, the kings of late Chosŏn promoted Guan Yu shrines in an attempt to strengthen their royal authority, which eventually contributed to *Three Kingdoms*' popularity. The

Manchu-led Qing invasion in 1636 left a deep psychological scar which the late Chosŏn society struggled to overcome. Grand Prince Bongmin, sent to Qing as a hostage, later became King Hyojong (1619-59) and insisted on taking revenge.

Loyal to the Ming Dynasty of the Han people, he was an avid reader of *Three Kingdoms*—one should be reminded that in the novel Shu Han is considered the legitimate successor of the Han Dynasty. The King's anti-Qing sentiment together with his patronage legitimized the ethical implications of *Three Kingdoms*, such as the state ideology and Confucian values of loyalty and filial piety. With commercial publishing becoming more prevalent during the late Chosŏn period, Koreans also made their own versions of *Three Kingdoms* by adapting individual popular episodes or adding new episodes to the story. The most well-known examples are the "Seoul woodblock edition of *Three Kingdoms*, book 3" (which portrays Zhao Zilong as the protagonist) and the "Chŏnju woodblock edition of *Three Kingdoms*, book 2" (which features the ugly wife of Zhuge Liang as the protagonist). These kinds of rewritings gained lasting popularity and were in circulation until the early twentieth century.

In the early twentieth century, different versions of *Three Kingdoms* were available to the Korean public. It is a wonder that about 350 known versions have survived to this day. The way people consumed and understood *Three Kingdoms* in the early twentieth century varied greatly. Some enjoyed it in old movable-type editions passed on by previous generations, while others visited a local market to find a *pansori* [musical storytelling] singer of *Song of Red Cliffs*. But for modern educated Koreans it became customary to read *Three Kingdoms* in its serialized versions in newspapers. With serialized fiction surging in popularity during the Japanese colonial rule (1910-45), *Three Kingdoms* was serialized in multiple newspapers. The most popular version was the one written by Japanese historical novelist Yoshikawa Eiji. Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* was serialized in Japan's *Trade News from Home and Abroad* and almost simultaneously in *Kyungsung Daily News* (the official bulletin of the Government General of Korea) from September 20, 1939, to September 14, 1943. In spite of many available Korean versions of *Three Kingdoms* in the modern era, Yoshikawa Eiji's *Three Kingdoms* was widely read and reproduced by Koreans even after the nation's independence from Japan.

The first complete Korean translation of Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* by Sŏ In'guk's was published in 1952. Since then, about seventy-seven different versions of Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* have been produced in Korea (Inha 4). As is well known, Yoshikawa Eiji retold the story in his own fashion, reflecting the wartime culture of the era in which it was written. Despite its colonial origin, until the late

1980s, many Koreans regarded Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* as the most authentic text, without actually knowing the author's name and understanding the revisions made by him. Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* was often abridged and adapted depending upon the target audience or for commercial purposes. In particular, the majority of Korean animated and manga versions of *Three Kingdoms* were based, in varying degrees, on Yoshikawa's retelling. Most Korean translators did not reveal that they referred to Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms*, and they probably did not even feel the need to do so, which is not surprising, given that Korea did not join the Universal Copyright Convention until 1987. The popularity of Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* in Korea lasted for more than three decades. It was the most widely read version of *Three Kingdoms* in Korea until the Korean novelist Yi Mun-yol published his best-selling adaptation in 1988.

As the first modern adaptation for Korean readers, the popularity of Yoshikawa Eiji's *Three Kingdoms* is not solely attributed to its modern style. While contextualizing Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* in its historical and cultural background, this paper argues that the ethical code in Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* strongly echoed Park Chung-hee's military regime. As John Lie points out "the conventional Chosŏn-Confucian attitude had slighted the military, but the Park regime exalted it. The military came to serve as something of a finishing school for South Korean masculinity" (79). Masculinity is constructed in the network of social and hierarchical power; in loyally serving the state, a man honors his parents, and proves his masculinity. Loyalty and filial piety are two fundamental ethical values in East Asian countries. Many absolute monarchies in East Asia promoted these core values to enhance their governance over people. Park's dictatorial government greatly emphasized loyalty over filial piety not only for political stability but also for military service and economic development. In addition, Park's regime was always in preparation for war against North Korea and communism. Given all of the above, it is no wonder that Yoshikawa's jingoistic rewriting of *Three Kingdoms* could reverberate favorably with Korean readers for such a long time.

Yoshikawa Eiji's *Three Kingdoms* and Modern Korean Readers

In the late Chosŏn Dynasty, *Three Kingdoms* was translated and distributed through various media, most of which were based on the Mao Zonggang edition. After Korea's independence from Japan, Yoshikawa Eiji's *Three Kingdoms* remained arguably the most popular version for more than three decades. It was (re)translated, abridged, adapted, and reinterpreted for various audiences. During the time in which Yoshikawa Eiji's *Three Kingdoms* was being serialized in *Kyungsung Daily News*,

Han Yong-un, a Buddhist poet and religious leader, also serialized *Three Kingdoms* in *Chosŏn Daily News*, from November 1, 1939, to August 10, 1940. Han was at the forefront of Korea's independence movement, being one of the thirty-three national representatives of the March First Movement in 1919. *Chosŏn Daily News* was the national gazette of the Korean people when most of the press came under complete control of the Japanese colonial government that had just put forward the slogan, "Japan and Korea are one entity." Regardless of his high reputation as a national leader, Han's translation never enjoyed a wide readership in Korea.

Among many reasons for the success of Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms*, the primary one might be its readability. Here, readability means the quality of being legible when difficult classical Chinese-style sentences are rewritten in easy-to-understand words. In a way, modern Korean readers with a certain level of modern education could no longer bear to read the Mao Zonggang edition. The newly established modern education system, which became popular among Koreans in the 1920s, and the breakdown of the traditional social classes, nurtured a new generation of readers with a different sensibility. In particular, their experience of modern western literature changed their expectations from the way in which a story is told, or a series of events are portrayed. In *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Karatani Kōjin argues:

In premodern Japanese painting, somehow there is a deficiency in the "sense of depth." In other words, it lacks perspective. Perspective is not originally natural, though it appears to be natural because we have already become used to images with perspective.... The same can be said about literature—feeling "depth" is not due to reality, perception, or consciousness, but is due to the assemblage of perspective in modern literature. Because we do not realize the fact that modern literature's assemblage underwent transformations, we come to see perspective as a deepening of "life" or the "inside." Premodern literature's lack of depth does not mean that the authors in the past were not aware of depth. It simply reveals that they did not own the assemblage that makes readers feel "depth." (181)

Faithful to the original in terms of narrative construction, Han Yong-un successfully translated (and paraphrased) the difficult Chinese expressions in the Mao Zonggang edition. Nevertheless, in Han's *Three Kingdoms*, the continuity of time and space is hard to trace, even within a single chapter; one episode is often followed by another completely different one. The focus of the narrative switches suddenly with the use

of too many connecting words, such as *ch'asöl* [besides] or *kaksöl* [without further ado]—both of which signal a narrative change in Korean. All these problems add to the reader's confusion, or significantly reduce its readability for modern Koreans. No matter how well the battle scenes are described in Han's translation, readers would find the overall narrative hard to follow or concentrate upon. As Karatani Kōjin argues, premodern versions lack the “sense of depth” or “perspective” that are naturally granted in modern Western novels (181). Contemporary Western novelists, such as James Joyce and Marcel Proust, already challenged the rules of perspective with multiple perspectives: “the two most innovative novelists of the period transformed the stage of modern literature from a series of fixed settings in a homogeneous space into a multitude of qualitatively different spaces” (Kern 149). However, such modernist innovation was neither expected nor sought after yet by Korean readers and writers. For them, the primary concern was the realistic principle of narrative, or narrative realism.

Yoshikawa Eiji's *Three Kingdoms* was written and meant to be read with perspective. As Stephen Kern argues in *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*, “[t]he depiction of space in painting reflects the values and fundamental conceptual categories of a culture” (140). Paintings based on perspective create the illusion that one can enter into them. Such illusions can be impaired if the perspective is unstable. The rules of perspective have governed the Western world for more than four hundred years. For the modern reader, the Mao Zonggang edition was a painting without perspective. As if he was able to perceive this sensibility, Yoshikawa Eiji wrote in his preface to *Three Kingdoms*, “[i]nstead of creating a simplified translation or an abridgment, I attempted to write it in the form of the newspaper novel that is suitable for a long narrative” (vol.1 4). Yoshikawa was very conscious of his modern medium. Unlike HanYong-un, he subdivided the chapters, and restructured the order of events to improve the novel's realism as well as enhance the reader's understanding and make reading pleasurable.

In this modern rendition, all the narrative events unfold with a focus on the principal characters. And through the use of the third-person omniscient viewpoint, the narrative bends itself around the characters and eventually merges with them. For example, the Mao Zonggang edition presents the Yellow Scarves as follows: “At last, people under the sky began to harbor rebellious thoughts, and thieves arose like swarms of bees. At this time in Julu Commandery, three brothers lived: the oldest was named Zhang Jue, the second Zhang Bao, and the youngest Zhang Liang” (2). This narration reads like a history book rather than a novel. In Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms*, the same scene is reconstructed in the form of a dialogue between two

characters. Ma Yuanyi, a member of the Yellow Scarves, captures Liu Bei and persuades him to join his gang:

With the intent of inciting the hearts of the young men who are eager to achieve glory and honor, Ma Yuanyi began to explain at length the prospects of the times.

“Men with narrow vision think that we are overly tormenting the commoners, but there is a considerable number of areas where people worship our great general-in-chief, Zhang Jue, as a god.”

After setting this forth as his premise, he first explained the origin of the Yellow Scarves. “About ten years before this time, there was an unknown scholar named Zhang Jue, who was a man from Julu Commandery.” (vol.1 37-8)

Korean readers of the 1930s relentlessly criticized stereotypical characters, supernatural episodes, and moral teachings in fictional stories (Kwōn 206). For them, modern novels had to be true to life in their depiction of an individual, mind, and action. Yoshikawa’s characters share with us their ways of thinking and speaking. The narrative provides the perspective of the characters. Accordingly, this allows readers to identify with the characters and get involved in the reading process. Eventually, it creates the illusion for the readers that they are in the novel with the legendary characters.

Another reason for the popularity of Yoshikawa Eiji’s *Three Kingdoms* lies in the way it caters to the secular interests of the common readers. Yoshikawa invented the episodes of romance and adventure to please modern readers. One of the most representative examples is Liu Bei’s romance with Hong Furong at the beginning of the novel:

Before long, the beauty, the niece of Liu Hui, stood prettily beneath the moon. In the vicinity, there were no shadows of trees—only the night dew glistened like scattered jewels on the broad expanse of grass. Just then, another figure suddenly appeared on the pear blossom path. It was a young man who had been hiding among the blossoms.

“Oh, Xuande (Liu Bei).”

“Miss Furong.”

Both of them looked at the other’s face, and they smiled together. Furong’s white teeth were truly beautiful.

The two approached one another.

“So, you were able to come out here?”

Xuande said, “Yes.”

Furong trembled as she bowed her head. (Yoshikawa, vol. 1 263)

This romantic episode cannot be found in any previous versions of *Three Kingdoms*. Such episodes made Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* more popular, while not interrupting the main narrative of *Three Kingdoms*.

Incidentally, Yoshikawa Eiji also removed superfluous or mysterious episodes, and provided his own explanations to maintain the logic of the narrative. At the Battle of Red Cliffs, also known as the Battle of Chibi, Zhuge Liang assures Zhou Yu that he will make the southeast wind blow. The Mao Zonggang edition does not provide any reasonable explanation for this, apart from the following mysterious comment: “For the disease, it is good to remove the wind. But now since the wind would cure the disease, three days of wind are better than seven-year-old mugwort” (1995 401). In order to rationalize Zhuge Liang's supernatural power, Yoshikawa added the following explanation:

But this was something that Zhuge Liang (Kongming) alone was confident about in his heart. During winter of each year, in December, due to the relationship between the tide and the southern temperatures, the south wind blows irregularly, and so people forget, for one or two days, that it is winter. This anomaly was called the trade winds in astronomical terms by later generations. However, this year, the trade winds had not yet arrived. Zhuge Liang had lived for a long time in Longzhong, and he paid careful attention to the weather each year. There had not yet been one year without the trade winds. Therefore, he was confident that, in a short while, this phenomenon would definitely occur as well. (vol.5 254)

The enlightened modern reader detested unrealistic stories that could be reasonably explained. Yoshikawa's explanation demystified the mysteriousness inherent in the premodern *Three Kingdoms*, and, in doing so, it heightened the reader's level of engagement with the story.

Yoshikawa Eiji's *Three Kingdoms* and Wartime Ethics

Three Kingdoms illustrates important ethical values through numerous acts of bravery, cowardice, treachery, honor, and loyalty. In “Towards an Ethical Literary

Criticism” Nie Zhenzhao claims that “literature is fundamentally an expression of ethic” (85). Yoshikawa Eiji’s *Three Kingdoms*, born in the era of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, strongly furthers the wartime ethics of the Japanese Empire through its portrayal of the main characters. Japan had presented its “theory of East Asian order” as soon as the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (1937) broke out, and it constructed a system of general mobilization for itself and its colonial societies, such as Korea and Taiwan. As a part of these efforts, the Order for the General Mobilization of Citizen’s Minds was issued. Japanese bookstores began to sell books printed to further this agenda. Chinese classics, such as *Journey to the West*, *Water Margin*, and *Three Kingdoms*, were used as a means to promote interest in China while also instilling war awareness. Upon the outbreak of the War, Yoshikawa Eiji followed soldiers into the field in North China as a special correspondent for Japan’s *Daily News*. The following year, he received an order from Japan’s Cabinet Intelligence Agency to visit China several times as a member of the civil affairs unit attached to the army. His war experiences permeated into his version of the *Three Kingdoms*.

In rewriting *Three Kingdoms*, the portrayal of Cao Cao is a controversial issue because it can greatly change the reader’s understanding of the story. In his translation, Han Yong-un supported the Shu-Han dynasty since it continued the legitimate Han dynasty founded by the honorable Liu Bei. For colonial Korean readers, Han’s sympathy towards Shu-Han was seen as an attempt to advance nationalism, as Cao Cao (who seized control of the country by manipulating the young emperor of the Han Dynasty) became a symbol of Japanese imperialism. For the subjugated people of the colony, Liu Bei was more than a legitimate heir to the dynasty. He was a virtuous and righteous hero who would save the nation from the grip of the cruel and merciless tyrant, Cao Cao. In this sense, Han Yong-un’s *Three Kingdoms* not only brought comfort to oppressed Koreans but also contributed to instilling a national consciousness. However, unlike Han, Yoshikawa subtly rewrote the novel to present a more favorable depiction of Cao Cao. In his version, Cao Cao is not just a villain but as a magnificent anti-hero. For Yoshikawa, Cao Cao was not only an enlightened ruler with great scholarly interests, but a true leader who had to make difficult decisions during wartime. The positive depiction justified Cao Cao’s usurping of the throne as a necessary act in a chaotic era. And if one contextualized Yoshikawa’s portrayal of Cao Cao in the context of the War, his writing grants a strong sense of moral legitimacy to Japan’s invasive war against China.

Yoshikawa Eiji’s *Three Kingdoms* has many commentaries that inspire and justify Japan’s expansionist ambitions. In many places in the novel, he encouraged

Japanese or colonized Koreans under the wartime system to participate in the war by promoting interest in China:

Our ancestors used to say, if you do not cry after reading this memorial for war, you are not a man. He [Zhuge Liang] was definitely an Asian.... I hope this book can be of any help for readers to have better understanding and interest in the Chinese people, suffering from war and political conflicts that are all rooted in the same origin. (Yoshikawa, vol.7 101)

More importantly, Yoshikawa created episodes that instill a sense of loyalty and patriotism. His version begins with a now famous tea episode. Liu Bei brings home a rare tea as a gift for his mother with the money he earns by selling straw shoes and mats. On his way home, he is attacked by the Yellow Scarves gang and is robbed of the tea and a treasured sword that has been passed down in his family for generations. However, with the help of Zhang Fei, Liu Bei is able to recover the stolen tea and sword. As a token of his gratitude, Liu Bei gives the sword to Zhang Fei and returns home. Liu Bei's mother is happy to receive the tea but becomes furious upon learning that Liu Bei has given the sword to Zhang Fei. She then throws the tea into the river and scolds Liu Bei:

Have you already forgotten, Bei? Your father and grandfather made straw shoes and wove mats like you and ended their lives in vain while hiding among the native commoners. But if we trace back to your earlier ancestors, we have the very blood of Liu Sheng, Prince Jing of Zhongshan of the Han Dynasty. Beyond any doubt, you are the great-great-grandson of Emperor Jing. The blood of emperors and kings who once unified this China is flowing through your veins. The sword can serve as a fine proof of this. (89)

Here, the tea is a symbol of filial piety. Liu Bei risks his life to recover it for his mother. However, his mother, without considering the circumstances, throws it into the river and then tells him the history of the sword, a symbol of loyalty, and emphasizes that the blood of the emperor who unified China flows through his veins. Due to this event, Liu Bei realizes the future course of his life, and commits himself to rectifying a chaotic world.

The values of loyalty and patriotism run through Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms*. Another example is Yoshikawa's depiction of Diaochan. In previous versions of *Three Kingdoms*, Diaochan is usually described as a somewhat contradictory

character; on the one hand, she is a patriot who contributes to the killing of Dong Zhuo; on the other hand, she is a weak and selfish woman who tries to prevent Lü Bu from going to war after she becomes his concubine. Her resentment toward the Han royal family makes readers uncomfortable, and her eventual disappearance in the middle of the story raises unwelcome curiosity. In contrast, the Diaochan in Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* is a loyal war heroine. After Dong Zhuo dies, she moves to Chang'an with Lü Bu, and tragically commits suicide in a small pavilion in Lü Bu's house. In this scene, Yoshikawa added a monologue of Diaochan:

They say that a woman's skin is delicate,
 But if she holds a sword instead of a mirror,
 The sword gives her a strong sense of justice.
 I thus willingly enter the briar patch.
 To repay the graces of my parents and forebears
 And to say that this is also done for the country,
 I set aside my musical instruments, and in my dancing hand I hide a
 dagger as I approach the king of the beasts.
 At last I present the cups of poison and drink to the left and right until the
 last cup makes me fall to the ground.
 I hear—even now in this dying ear—
 The joy of peace being sung by the people of Chang'an,
 The beautiful sound of a heavenly bird calling me. (Yoshikawa, vol.2 137-
 38)

This poem reveals Diaochan's ethical decision-making for the sake of her country. After passing through various upheavals, she finally makes the right decision. Her sacrifice embodies her loyalty for her country. For readers living in a wartime country, Diaochan could easily be an ethical role model to follow for the sake of the country.

While presenting the ethical conflicts between good and evil, Yoshikawa Eiji's version also inspired anti-communism, or hostility toward the Communist Party of China. Professor Sō Kyōngsik, a second-generation Korean Japanese, confessed that in his reading of Yoshikawa's version he found the following implications:

Due to the threat of Liu Bei's military forces, Liu Zhang of Shu faces a crisis over the existence of his state. He requests assistance from Zhang Lu of Hanzhong. Yoshikawa Eiji portrays this passage with expressions such as

“imploing the aggressionist state [Hanzhong] based on dangerous ideology...” However, though I do not know how, it occurred to me after I became a university student that these expressions felt odd compared to the dignified writing style that runs like water through Yoshikawa Eiji's *Three Kingdoms*. Of course, those expressions imply that Hanzhong is a country devoted to the heretical teachings of the Way of the Five Pecks of Rice, and to Zhang Luis, the leader of this sect. However, Japan was falling into an inescapable quagmire from the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression to the Pacific War, and if one examines those expressions in the context of the period, it can be said that Yoshikawa Eiji had the “Soviet alliance” in mind. If one begins to read Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* in this way, the entirety of Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* would naturally interlock with its historical background. (96)

The “Soviet alliance” that Sō Kyōngsik refers to is to the Chinese Soviet Republic established in the Jiangxi area in 1931. The Chinese Soviet Republic expanded at a rapid pace until 1934. However, as the Chinese Nationalist Party (also known as the Kuomintang) launched a full-scale assault on the Communist Party, the Red Army of the Communist Party of China was forced to take one of the longest marches in the history of warfare, during which Mao Zedong emerged as the leader of the party. As soon as the Japanese army's invasion of China became imminent, anti-Japanese sentiment spread throughout China. In 1935, the Communist Party presented its August 1 Declaration calling upon the people to resist Japan, and proposed cooperation with the Chinese Nationalist Party. In declining this call for collaboration, Chiang Kai-shek of the Chinese Nationalist Party showed himself to be more dedicated toward the anticommunist civil war than on the Japanese army invading China's northern region. This led to the Xi'an Incident of 1936; Chiang was under house arrest by his subordinate generals Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng. After two weeks of negotiation, Chiang Kai-shek agreed to a collaboration between the Chinese Nationalist Party and the Communist Party to repel the Japanese invasion. And Mao Zedong's Red Army was reorganized into the Eighth Route Army of the National Revolutionary Army within the structure of the Chinese military forces headed by the Chinese Nationalist Party. Thus, the Second United Front (1937-41) was formally established in 1937.

In light of these historical circumstances, Zhang Lu could easily be compared to the Communist Party, and Liu Zhang to Chiang Kai-shek. Yoshikawa Eiji spontaneously criticized Liu Zhang's idea to request assistance from Hanzhong's

Zhang Lu: “Just as one cannot substitute one’s belly with one’s back, if one cries out in appeal and requests assistance from a country that aims at a dangerous and ideological invasion, this comes from the worst-case policy of a distressed mind” (vol.6 233). People who read these remarks would not have missed the insinuation that the Chinese Nationalist Party joined hands with the Communist Party to fight against Japan.

Yoshikawa Eiji’s *Three Kingdoms* and Park Chung-hee’s Military Regime

As discussed earlier, Yoshikawa Eiji’s *Three Kingdoms* reflects the warmongering culture that flourished during the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. Under the rule of Japan, Korea was transformed into a barracks society. Japan’s general mobilization, which aimed to reorganize the home front, forced Korean civilians to fully participate war preparations. The social system, culture, and economy of Korea had to undergo a radical military reorganization. Military culture, the organizational culture pertaining to the army during the wartime period, permeated everyday life to the degree it became a way of understanding the history and culture of Korean society. The influence of the colonial period persisted long after Korea’s independence, because of the Korean War (1950-53) and subsequent Park Chunghee’s military regime.

In Korea, the military culture, emphasizing loyalty, obedience, self-sacrifice, and patriotism, was greatly strengthened by anti-communism. As Shin pointed out, “South Korea has been in a paranoid condition because it has had to define the nation as an anticommunist country. Ferocious ‘Red Hunting’ has demonized the communist North, whilst also threatening South Koreans” (367). After the Korean War, three army generals served as presidents of Korea. Two of them came to power after a military coup. It is well known that former president Park Chung-hee was a commissioned officer of the Imperial Army of Manchukuo. In 1965, he signed the controversial treaty that normalized Korean relations with Japan. Park Chung-hee heavily relied on nationalism and anti-communism to justify his dictatorship and to hide his turncoat career. The Park Chung-hee government endeavored to build up strong armed forces to fight against North Korea. More importantly, it created its own unique version of the general mobilization, often dubbed as the New Community Movement. Given that Korea was bound by such a political landscape and history, it is no wonder the Korean Cold War culture tends to be jingoistic and authoritarian. In his retelling of *Three Kingdoms*, Yoshikawa Eiji emphasized loyalty, patriotism, and self-sacrifice. These values were also heavily promoted by Park’s government for the nation’s spiritual armament. In particular, the importance

of loyalty cannot be overstated. Along with repression, loyalty is an important instrument to produce power for a dictatorship. In the middle of the 1960s, the Park Chung-hee government launched a number of consecration programs for the famed Admiral Yi Sun-sin (1545-98) of the Chosŏn Dynasty, also known as the Lord of Loyalty and Chivalry.¹ His regime transformed Yi Sun-sin's shrine, Hyeonchungsa, into a national holy ground which government officials, military and naval officers, and students were required visit to show their respect. They also built Yi Sun-sin's statues and monuments all over the country. Among them, the most well-known is the one located at the Sejongno, Gwanghwamun plaza in Seoul, erected in 1968.

This seventeen-meter statue in the heart of Seoul symbolizes the military nature of the Park Chung-hee government well. The Korean historian Shin Chae-ho serialized his Yi Sun-sin biography in the *Daehan Maeil Sinbo* in 1908. Admiral Yi Sun-sin was already a well-known historic figure in the early twentieth-century Korea. He was a national hero embodying the ideal form of the nation, and President Park appropriated this iconic name in a number of ways. He emphasized the admiral's farsightedness that predicted Japan's invasions, arguing that Korea needed such sagacious talent for economic development. Yi Sun-sin was also a perfect example that the nation had to emulate in its fight against North Korea.

Park regime's military culture can be found in the realm of education as well. President Park Jung-hee announced the South Korean Charter of National Education in 1968. This charter described the duties and responsibilities of every Korean student as follows:

We were born into this land charged with the historic mission to revitalize our nation. This is our moment to establish a self-reliant posture at home and contribute to the common prosperity of mankind globally by rekindling the illustrious spirit of our forefathers... Realizing that a nation grows through creativity and cooperation and that individual growth is grounded in the prosperity of the nation, we shall do our best to fulfill the responsibility and duty attendant upon our freedom and rights, and to raise the national consciousness to participate and serve in building our nation. The love of country and fellow countrymen, together with the spirit of democracy that resists communism, paves the way for our survival, and lays the ground for

1 For more details about the Park Chung-hee government's cultural policy on traditional cultural heritage, see Jeon, Jae Ho, "The Making of National Defense Heroes and Government Policy Towards Traditional Cultural Heritage during the Park Chung-hee Regime." *Critical Review of History*, vol. 5 (2012): 113-140.

realizing the ideals of the free world.¹

The Charter was taken very seriously in Korean society. Students were forced to memorize it, and were often physically punished if they failed to answer correctly. As John P. Synott noted: “For a quarter of a century, the National Charter has embodied the central values of Korean education, and its text has been recited extensively and embedded in the memory of every child who has passed through a Korean school at any level” (35). The ways this Charter was put into practice in schools was shadowed by the Imperial Rescript on Education signed by Emperor Meiji of Japan in 1890, and a series of the Chosŏn educational ordinances released from 1911 to 1943. Despite its colonial nature, the Charter greatly affected Korean education: “Students were taught to place more value on the authority of the country than on individual rights” (Choi 175). Along with military drill education mandated in high schools and universities in 1969, the Charter relentlessly encouraged the Koreans to serve the nation-state. In doing so, it instilled the nation with an ideology justifying the dictatorship under the guise of loyalty to the state (Oh 208).

The Charter remained a crucial instrument for educational policies and philosophies until the early 1990s. It exemplified how Korean governments used education and the school system to mobilize the nation in its program of national militarization and economic modernization. During Park Chung-hee’s reign between 1961 and 1979, twenty-five versions of Yoshikawa Eiji’s *Three Kingdoms* were published and widely circulated. Most Korean males encountered at least a version of Yoshikawa’s *Three Kingdoms*. They joined the military, were discharged from their service, and then participated in President Park’s projects of modern nation-building. The military culture of Imperial Japan is one of the most enduringly haunting aspects of the past, which flourished in Park’s regime. Given these historical circumstances, it is not surprising to see that Yoshikawa’s *Three Kingdoms* thrived in Korean society for so long.

Conclusion: Yoshikawa Eiji’s *Three Kingdoms* and Its Disquieting Legacy in Korea

Three Kingdoms is embedded in Korea’s day-to-day life. This is a country captivated by the story of legendary war heroes. All generations, from children to adults, enjoy *Three Kingdoms* through various media such as comics, games, novels, and movies. Even Koreans who have never read the work are familiar with the main characters, such as Liu Bei, Guan Yu, Zhang Fei, and Zhuge Liang. Until the late 1980s, many Koreans regarded Yoshikawa Eiji’s *Three Kingdoms* as the most authentic version

1 Translation of the Charter was provided by the Park Chung Hee Presidential Museum.

of the text. For what reasons did Koreans become so engrossed in this Japanese rendition of *Three Kingdoms*? This paper highlights that Yoshikawa Eiji's version was the first modern retelling of this Chinese classic for modern Korean readers. More importantly, it strongly reflected the warmongering culture and values of Imperial Japan. Despite its colonial roots, Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* became a beloved classic for Koreans in the post-colonial period. In so many ways, Korea is still tied to its colonial past. Revisiting Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* to excavate its historical and cultural backgrounds ranging from the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression to the Park Chung-hee regime unveils that a set of ethical values, such as loyalty, self-sacrifice, and patriotism, is deeply rooted in Korean culture and society. After Park Chung-hee's death, Korea witnessed a number of regime changes that often sparked a tectonic shift in culture and society, not to mention politics and the economy. However, despite all of these radical changes, the military culture of Korean society, dating back to the colonial era, has never disappeared from Korean history. In retrospect, these interpretations seem reductionistic to some extent. But, on the other hand, they reveal that we are often blind to the root causes of conservative Korean culture by fixating on the symptoms and constantly reacting to the latest outrage, and thus fail to correctly diagnose it.

Nowadays, many modern versions of *Three Kingdoms*, that not only have enhanced readability but also great entertainment value, are available to Koreans. Yoshikawa's *Three Kingdoms* is certainly not as widely read in Korea anymore. However, there is no doubt about the unfaltering influence of *Three Kingdoms* in Korea. Since 1988, Yi Mun-yol's *Three Kingdoms* alone has sold more than twenty-eight million copies. Yi's success inspired other famous Korean writers, such as novelists Hwang Sok-yong, Jang Jung-il, and Kim Hong-shin (to name a few), to translate and rewrite *Three Kingdoms*. And not surprisingly, their versions also became best-selling books of their era. *Three Kingdoms* connects generations across the country, while imbuing a strong ethical bond. While revisiting Yoshikawa Eiji's *Three Kingdoms*, one cannot but wonder at the ethical values of *Three Kingdoms* in a postmodern democratic society, in which individuals are more capable of shaping their own identities outside the boundaries prescribed for them by the state.

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