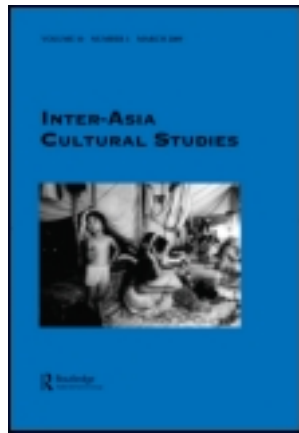


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Intellectual engagement under the conditions of the division system: an interview with Paik Nak-chung

Kuan-Hsing CHEN

The story of Changbi

Chen: This interview is a follow up of your one-week visit to Taiwan in May 2008. Having read some of your work in English and Chinese translations, I feel one thing that is unique about your long term practices is how you have based your intellectual work on the Changbi project, which started in 1966. I hope we can go back to that historical conjuncture. You have probably told the story many times, but in any event, to begin with, what were the specific historical conditions to create the journal?

Paik: In terms of Korean literature, 1966 was about the time when writers with critical consciousness or a sense of social commitment were looking for some kind of rallying point. Critical literature and critical art as a whole were almost entirely wiped out during the Korean War, and then began a very slow process of recovery after the Armistice of 1953. In 1960, we had the April Student's Revolution and a great outburst of critical energy. But then this was suppressed again by the military coup in 1961, and then, another slow process of recovery. By the mid 1960s, there was a feverous debate within the literary world about a more socially committed literature. Changbi reflected that kind of situation.

In terms of a larger history, this was a time when South Korea finally settled on a closer dependent relations with the US and Japan under Park Chung-Hee. There was a very strong opposition against the ROK-Japan normalization treaty in 1963 when Park Chung-Hee declared martial law and finally carried it through the following year.

Also, Korea began to send troops to Vietnam in 1966. So this was a period of turmoil and we were heading toward the clash over a constitutional amendment that allowed him a third presidential term. During his third term, in 1972, he abolished the constitution altogether and became lifetime president. So Changbi was a product of that kind of social context.

At the same time, I myself and some of my friends felt a need for some higher standards in literary magazines. At that time there were no literary quarterlies in Korea. There were two major literary monthlies and there was a magazine, *The World of Thought*, which was an omnibus magazine but with a very strong literary section. But, at that time, I felt a need that we should be more selective, and for that purpose the quarterly format was more suitable.

And then in my personal case, I was then teaching at Seoul National University, and to start a monthly magazine would have been a full-time job, so I couldn't have handled another full-time job as editor of a monthly. So these things sort of came together. Changbi started as a very small magazine, it's one of those literary reviews that a few writers got together to produce and then gradually expanded.

Chen: Can you give us more details on the kind of intellectual life in that moment? You mentioned that there was already a circle of writers and critics who would come together only in the context of creative work?

Paik: Well, I personally did not have much to do with the established literary world,

I had studied abroad and my major field was English rather than Korean literature, and, at that time, I had just returned to Korea a few years before. I had a few friends – writers, editors and so on. They helped me to put together the first issue. But in the literary world as a whole there was a debate going on at that time, about ‘literature of engagement’. Anything resembling such literature had been suppressed or discouraged since the Korean War, but this was being revived and, by the mid 1960s, there were both an impassioned defense of literature of engagement and a vehement attack on it.

I was generally in sympathy with the advocates of this literature, but my impression was that many of them were rather unsophisticated in literary terms, intent merely on advocating social justice and so on. So the line Changbi took was generally to defend that literature and to criticize those vilifying it and actually doing so in a political way, even though their slogan was ‘pure literature’ as against ‘contaminated political literature’. But those were really political people who sided with established political powers.

Chen: Was this as a work of a group of young Turks vis-à-vis the kind of literary establishment? Was that the scenario both in terms of criticism and creative work?

Paik: Well, you couldn’t say there was really a single group of young Turks gathering together. There were diverse groups, and there hardly was something like a Changbi group until the journal got well under way. But Changbi was able to grow because we had the credit not only for our sense of social commitment and independence from the literary establishment, but for insisting on higher standards. We managed to draw many new writers and also older writers who had been thirsting for a new outlet. Among the latter, I would include the poet Kim Su-Yŏng, who was in his 40s and a very well established writer, and who became an enthusiastic supporter and a close personal mentor and friend. But, as I say, there was no Changbi group of writers at the beginning.

Chen: Was it envisioned to be a platform, though with a specific agenda, advocating social commitment and quality literary works? At the center of concerns was literary production but, somehow the Changbi journal has evolved into something more than a literary journal.

Paik: From the start, we carried not only literary works but articles of social criticisms as well. Gradually this became a very important part of the journal, in a way more important as the years went on, because – as you know – the political situation deteriorated after Park Chung-Hee’s third term, and then in the 1970s there was the second and harsher phase of his dictatorship. There were very few outlets for really critical social pronouncements. In literature, too, it was in a sense easy at that time to recruit good writers, because a man like Hwang Suk-Young had really no other outlet, and he had to come to Changbi to get his stories printed.

Chen: On a more mundane level, I guess all the editors and publisher cared about were questions such as how was the journal circulated? Was that already a fully fledged publishing market? In our experience, we know about underground – or informal – distribution, but then you can’t collect money to continue the publication. What was the scenario?

Paik: No, this was circulated in a very regular way. When Changbi was first published, we didn’t have a publishing house, so what I did was to find a publisher to lend the imprint and to handle much of the production and distribution process. But it was a small company, so he would have a contract with a big distributing business. On the production side, everything before it went to the binder was taken care of by the editors in a collective way, such as manuscript editing, reading the proofs, and so on. I myself would often visit the printer’s shop, which luckily was situated near my house. But once the pages were printed, our publisher would take over. For the inaugural issue,

we printed 2000 copies. We sold more than 1000, which was not bad, and then eventually the rest were sold out. A few people wrote favorable reviews in the newspapers, so that helped too. As would happen with many journals, the inaugural issue sold pretty well and had a good impact, but things were more difficult with the second and third issues, and then the circulation gradually began to pick up from the first anniversary issue onwards. And then in the sixth issue, we started to serialize a novel by a completely new face, an author named Pang Yöng-Ung, and that was quite a success. The circulation jumped quite a bit, and never declined even after the serialization ended.

Chen: There are various lines we can take from here, but let me pick up the more obvious one. Changbi grew slowly, and looking back it has obviously been a successful story. To my own knowledge, it may well be the biggest independent quarterly journal in the world, circulating 15,000 to 20,000 copies. How would you explain its success? Has it been supported mainly by the readership? If so, you have had a relatively large readership supporting this project.

Paik: Yes, basically it is support from the readership, and in financial terms too. When we started, actually there were five people each contributing 10,000 Korean Won per month. And for the first several months it sort of covered the expense of basic production. But that could not continue for very long. Some stopped contributing after a few months. So basically this was supported by the readers. The circulation as I said jumped with number six.

Chen: Roughly, the jump was from 2000 to how many copies?

Paik: From less than 2000 to maybe 3 or 4000. Then even after the novel serialization was completed, it more or less maintained and steadily increased its circulation. But then, in 1969, I went back to Harvard to complete my PhD. At that time I made an

arrangement. The journal was to be published under its own imprint, although it wasn't a publishing house yet, and I found a patron to support the journal while I was away. This person, the owner of another publishing house, did help us a lot, but Changbi had many financial difficulties and even missed one issue. Do you know Yöm Mu-Ung, the literary critic? He took over the editorial work while I was away and he had a very hard time. Partly because the publisher who had promised full support became wary of the growing political risk of supporting this kind of magazine. We still used the office space provided by him. So I think the circulation shrank during that time, between 1969 and 1972. But in terms of the content of the journal, this was a very productive period. Hwang Suk-Young's novella *Strangers' Land* was published in its pages in 1971, for instance, and many other strong works and articles. Only they had a very difficult time paying these contributors.

After my return I negotiated with the publisher and he agreed to pay up, not in cash but in future printing and production expenses. Also I had some friends helping me to pay the arrears in contributor fees. So the financial situation improved. Then soon after my return, Park Chung-Hee's second *coup d'état* occurred in October. Changbi became really one of the few critical voices that still survived. In a way, our being a 'literary' magazine or a mainly literary magazine helped us to survive and evade immediate repressions. So that was a period when circulation grew very fast; it reached about 20,000.

Chen: Already at that time? The 1970s?

Paik: Yes, the 1970s. Actually that was the peak period of our influence because, as I say, there were few other outlets for critical voices, and no peers among literary or intellectual journals. Nowadays, we usually talk of 15,000 copies in print but in reality the actual sales remain well below 15,000, except that we have about 10,000 regular subscribers, whereas in the 1970s most of the copies were sold through bookstores

and so there was much less stability. But every time we suffered confiscations or arrest of editors or authors, our circulation would increase. It was this strong support by the readership and the citizenry that made our survival and growth possible.

Chen: Changbi has in a way become a model. For instance, some of us, on the editorial team of *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies*, keep asking ourselves, 'Why can't we be like Changbi?', in the sense that it can evolve from a journal into a publishing house. We are publishing books but not to the extent Changbi has. Part of it is that we are very aware that we don't have a good person who can manage it or have the sense of financing and so on. But as you mentioned, I would guess by the 1970s if you sell 20,000 copies, it's pretty much self-sustainable. Is it?

Paik: Yes, 20,000 copies would have been all right, if we hadn't periodically suffered from confiscations. In 1974 we established a publishing arm to the journal, started book publishing, and we did pretty well there too. Hwang Suk-Young's was the first collection to come out and sold pretty well. Then we published a collection by Lee Young-Hui, a former journalist who later became a professor of journalism, and wrote many really courageous articles about the Vietnam War and about Communist China, and this became a best-seller. At first the authorities didn't know what was going on, but each time they searched the lodgings of the leaders of student demonstrations, they would find a copy of this book. They caught on, so to speak, and when we published in 1978 another collection compiled by Lee Young-Hui of essays and reports on China, they decided to imprison him, and I, as the book's publisher, received a suspended sentence under the Anti-Communist Law. Anyway, we did pretty well in book publishing business, too, except again for periodic suppressions and confiscations. So even with a circulation of about 20,000 for the journal, and doing well in publishing books, we were constantly in financial diffi-

culties. But we managed. And we were paying our contributors, too.

Chen: Changbi has, throughout, remained a quarterly. Was there any thought to make it like, for instance, bi-monthly, more in tune with the rhythm of time?

Paik: Yes. There were some talk of that, but it had taken some time to familiarize our public with the notion of a quarterly. If we changed it to bi-monthly, that would have created new problems, for there was no bi-monthly at that time. And as for becoming a monthly, that would have taken larger capital and more manpower.

Chen: Some of us are aware of your managerial skill. Do you have anything to say about roughly the principle of managing this? Deciding when is the next step to move? Do you have a sense of market, for instance? Whether to print or not to print a book? What has been the principle?

Paik: Well, I don't know about my managerial skills. Even if I had them, I think the more important thing was the ability to persist through difficulties rather than any 'skills'. But I do pride myself on having picked some best-selling books. For instance, do you know Yu Hong-Jun, who is an art critic and art historian? When he started to serialize his essays or his reports on various cultural sites in Korea, after I read his very first installment, I asked him to give us the publishing rights. And it became a huge best-seller. But whether that's an ability or luck, it's hard to determine.

Chen: Looking from the outside, Changbi has established a way of operation, for instance handing over editorship to the younger generation. In a lot of other instances, we have seen just one editor controls the journal. This is not the case for Changbi.

Paik: Well, I think, in Changbi, our ways compromised between the two extremes, that is, neither one man taking complete control throughout the years, nor a

complete change of crew. To this day, I remain the registered editor of the journal and also I am still involved in discussions with our colleagues in setting the journal's direction; but control over the day-to-day operation of the journal, as well the entire book publishing part, has been taken over by my younger colleague Baik Young-Seo and other editors. I don't know if you have in Taiwan something equivalent to the officially registered editor of a journal. I understand they have to register a 'responsible editor' as well as the publisher, but in the English-speaking world, I don't think they have any notion of this. So I am the registered editor of the journal, and involve myself a bit more with its work than just meeting a legal requirement. But, as I say, Changbi has found a sort of compromise between giving complete rein to the editor who has stayed on for more than 40 years and getting rid of him in favor of younger editors.

Chen: I noticed several times in my interactions with Changbi that the editorial meeting takes place every week, which involves a lot of work for the editorial team. Is that always the case?

Paik: Well, we used to meet every week, but nowadays, two or three times a month. Changbi's move to Paju Book-city outside Seoul has contributed to the change, but development of the Internet has helped to fill the gap.

Chen: Let me take it to another level to locate Changbi in the wider intellectual or political world. Changbi seems to be an intellectual institution or even a block, promoting, for instance, the discourse of East Asia, among other things. It's taking the lead to inject a certain direction of the society or the world of thought, so to speak. It is now seen that Changbi is an intellectual group, was it the case in earlier days? So once you become an institution, like Tokyo's Iwanami, what has got lost in the process? Of course, Iwanami isn't like Changbi. Changbi is more 'cohesive', but not to the

extent to be an ideological political party, in the sense of rigidity. Nevertheless, there is cooperation and mutual support within the group. I guess lots of things have been discussed among the members, during the editorial meeting. Has this been the case over the 20 years or 30 years?

Paik: I think it has varied from period to period. During the 1970s, for instance, there was a very strong sense of solidarity among writers and cultural workers opposed to the Park Chung-Hee regime, and very lively discussions. Changbi was at the center as far as literary and cultural matters were concerned. Then Chun Doo-Hwan, after his *coup d'état* in 1980, closed down the journal as well. So Changbi, the journal, didn't have any more roles to play up to 1988. So our work had to turn to book publishing, including non-periodical omnibus volumes that we called *mooks*, a combination of magazine and book. I suppose for a book publishing house, Changbi was active in a way still more like a journal group rather than a book publisher. We did have internal discussions, but it was different in a sense that because we didn't have the journal, we couldn't directly and periodically communicate our opinion to the outside world. But the sense of cohesion as an oppositional cultural group remained strong.

Now, after the *Changbi Quarterly* was resumed in 1988, we did continue this kind of internal discussion. But I think in some ways less vigorously than in the 1970s or during the period when we didn't have the journal. Because all three of the journal's former editors, including myself and many others around us, went back to the universities, and a number of other journals were restored or newly launched, and they had freedom to say more or less what they had to say. So Changbi didn't enjoy that privileged position that it used to have. Of course, all along we made many attempts to reinvigorate our group, and we went at this effort in real earnest when we were approaching the 40th anniversary, which was January 2006. From about 2004 or 2005, we said we really had to make a new beginning, and the 40th

anniversary in 2006 would be a good time for it. We then conducted many focused discussions. We invited outside people to help us in our self-examinations. As a result of this kind of preparation, we were able to do certain important things in the year 2006. For one thing, we formally established this Segyo Institute, as a sister organ, although we had been conducting study sessions for a few years before that. We also made some changes in the editorial team, and as you know well, we also organized the first conference of East Asia Critical Journals. Another new project was to launch an online weekly commentary, chiefly on current affairs, which I think has managed to gain considerable public recognition and influence over the years. So I personally feel that, at this point, our internal discussion is livelier and more substantive than any time since the 1970s.

Chen: Let's take Iwanami again as a reference point. Iwanami becomes an establishment; it means younger ones would be unhappy with it since it is seen as monopolizing the intellectual discourses and agenda of debate. How would you respond? Is Changbi an establishment? To put it bluntly, in terms of the journal, how many progressive journals have survived to be a dominant site?

Paik: Well, is Changbi an establishment? I think the answer is yes and no. I mean, we obviously are the largest quarterly, have an established reputation, a substantial publishing business and an office building of our own (thanks to the 'Book-city' project), plus the Institute here. In that sense we are certainly an establishment. Many of our editorial members are established figures, in literary and academic worlds. But compared with, say, Iwanami or the Seikai magazine, I think we are still more or less outsiders in relation to the mainstream society. The Iwanami and Seikai groups aren't exactly dominant in Japan, either, but their connection with elite universities like the University of Tokyo would be much closer. Many of our editors are graduates of Seoul

National University, but they usually have failed to get a professorship there. And we are still very much in opposition to the major Korean dailies, not only in terms of politics, but, for instance, when a major daily like *Chosun Ilbo* awards literary prizes, our members are very rarely included in the jury. I guess Choi Won-Shik is about the only one who gets on board once in a while. We are still very much an oppositional group, in that sense, rather than an establishment.

Chen: Can I ask a more personal question? This is how I feel: you have been with Seoul National University as a professorial post, but your real identity is actually in Changbi, in the sense of commitment and investment of time and energy. In other words, Changbi is, if I may say it, your material basis to get most of the intellectual work done. Would this be fair?

Paik: That's the perception of people who know Changbi, because they usually wouldn't know about my activities as a professor of English literature at Seoul National. It is true that during all these years, I have felt most at home at Changbi, that's for sure. But I have invested quite a lot of time and energy – naturally because that's where my bread and butter came from, yet not just for the sake of earning my living – in teaching students, and in developing what I call a 'planetary approach' to literature, that is, a Korean person's reading and interpretation of English and Western literatures that would preserve his or her Korean subjectivity but not be a parochial Korean reading. My productivity as a scholar of English literature has been quite limited, in part because of my commitment to Changbi. Because of that, I think I can't complain when many people say that what I did was mainly through Changbi. But I hope to write more on English literature and publish more. And if this happens, I think people would realize that reading, teaching and writing about English and Western literatures has also been a very important part of my life.

Chen: If we put things in historical perspective, it seems that, to be an academic, teaching in the university nowadays is the only thing one does, and there is no outside to work with. But as a critical intellectual, one works with groups outside the academy, rather than as an isolated individual, which is what the academic is increasingly becoming.

Paik: I think I was lucky. I served at Seoul National University at a time when a professor didn't have to be all that professional. You could be something of a generalist and still could survive, and the administration wouldn't always push you to produce a certain amount that would be recognized on the international index or whatever. So I was able to spend much time on the journal, and also to engage in what could be called extra-curricular activities, and writing about subjects other than English literature. Unfortunately, that space has really shrunk in recent years. I don't deplore the fact that professional standards have become higher in the academia. It's that this kind of closed space is unfortunate for the university and for a society's intellectual life.

Chen: In a way, that's the whole problem, because the intellectual world also is shrinking, and a lot of work gets done in the university. Now the university's space for intellectual work is shrinking. Without that engagement with the outside world, academic work is disconnected with real life. One then observes the increasing disappearance of the critical world of thought. This is the crisis. And how to preserve the critical spaces in any spheres has become an urgent issue.

Paik: Yes, I think in that sense, Changbi really has much to do as sort of an oppositional space, and carry on the work that it used to do in the 1970s, although naturally not in the same manner. This time, the main problem is not political power as such, but this kind of shrinking of intellectual space throughout society, including the university. So we need to work as some kind of base outside the university system, although

utilizing the resources provided by the universities but not abiding by the rules imposed by the university system.

Division System

Chen: Can I now turn to the second set of questions? It is about the division system. After your visit, members of *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* formed a study group and panel on 'overcoming the division system' for the journal's 20th anniversary. So your visit did serve as a great inspiration to us. In particular, very early on, in the 1970s, you already placed Korea along the side of the 'Third World'. I personally think your work on the division system is a highly original contribution. Your work has challenged and exposed the limits of the existing critical thoughts – liberal, Marxist or otherwise. In my reading, the seeds of discourse on the division system were already there in the 1970s, but less emphasized. For example, when you read Hwang Suk-Young's work in the 1970s, your main concern of that moment was to 'restore democracy'. Then, later, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the issue of division slowly emerged, though not yet fully in place, and it was more theorized in the early 1990s. It was like a slowly emerging process, the notion of a division system was moved from the background to the forefront of your writing. Is this an accurate understanding? I guess the question to put to you is: moving through these years, how would you see the entire concern with the way the division system has evolved?

Paik: I must say I feel gratified that you find the seeds of the discourse of division system already in my literary criticism of the 1970s. Of course, overcoming division was one of the major concerns from the very beginning, and overcoming what I later call the 'division system' entailed the work for democratization in the South and the reconciliation and reunification of North and South. Also implied, as you said, was this attention to the Third World, but without falling into what I call the 'Third World-ism', that is,

privileging the Third World location and, in effect, really defending the interests of the Third World elite and intellectuals rather than the people of the Third World. This kind of attention to the Third World while criticizing the so-called 'Third World-ism' also prepared the way for the discourse of the division system, which is a global perspective not limited to the Korean Peninsula. There were these seeds. The immediate occasion for actually developing the notion came out of dissatisfaction with the prevalent discourse in the mid-1980s, whether Marxist, nationalist, or liberal; as you observed, I was sort of drawn into it half-heartedly and then had to keep on, because nobody else would take it up. I mean the more professionally trained social scientists wouldn't pay any attention to it, or if they ever did they would distort it or condescended to it as a fancy of a literary man.

Anyway, during the mid 1980s, there was a very vigorous debate in South Korea about 'social formation'. Actually, Changbi was very instrumental in giving life to this, it may even be said to have officially launched it in 1985. And the talk was mostly about class contradiction and national contradiction, and by national contradiction one usually meant contradiction between the Korean nation and outside forces, especially US imperialism. There were two major discourses, one of the class, and the other of imperialism. And all the debates within the radical circles – for the liberals didn't have much interest in 'contradictions' to begin with – about which one to stress more and how to combine these two. In my opinion we were not specifically addressing the reality of the divided Korean Peninsula. At first I just threw out the idea that why didn't we talk about the contradiction of division, as well as national and class contradictions? But then soon I discovered that talking about contradiction was really like stepping into a large quagmire, into an endless scholastic debate, fighting over terms like basic contradiction, major contradiction, minor contradictions and what not. So I shifted my argument by stopping the use of the term 'contradiction' to emphasize that we did

have this reality of division, and that because it has continued for so long, it has taken on a certain systematic nature, so why don't we look at this reality more systematically and holistically than we had done so far. Of course, we have to recognize the huge differences between the two societies, North Korea and South Korea, but at the same time we should be able to see the two together as a whole, as some kind of self-reproducing system. That's how the discourse of the division system came into being.

Chen: It was in the participation in the social formation debate that you were posing the question, to put the challenge on the entire knowledge condition, which is not equipped to analyze the two divisions as a whole. For instance, in the Marxist model, how do you analyze social formation if you have the 'two in one' in relation to base and superstructure? So how does that work? Social scientists did not seem to be able to respond?

Paik: That's right, that's what I've learned from bitter experiences over the years. At first I was sort of complaining, why did those social scientists better trained than myself not address this social reality? Especially after someone like me had thrown out this idea, why wouldn't they just at least take it up and examine it? But over the years I became more aware that, in a way, a typical man of social science couldn't adequately address this issue without himself bringing into question the nature of social science itself. And they are very reluctant to do this. And usually they don't even have the sense that there is a problem in the social science they had known and practiced.

Chen: To keep pushing this direction is really reflecting not only the Korean issue or knowledge as such but, in our part of world, how much it had been dominated by the, should I say, ideas and theories imported from outside of our experience, which then conditions our own possibility to analyze our own reality. I think the dilemma is still there with the larger intellectual world. The

problem is now how do we regroup ourselves? Changing historical conditions have become evident that someone like you or other intellectuals who have their original contribution precisely because they are facing our own reality. But then you would hit the limit of knowledge. For instance, taking up your division system, our next step is actually a logical one: how do we substantiate it in the Taiwan-mainland instance? How do we analyze it historically, how was it formed? I don't know how to frame the question in more precision. If you have the time or energy or you have a team of social scientists to work with to substantiate the conditions. Is it possible at all? Or which direction you would push?

Paik: Well, in a sense, it's something simple to do, or at least to start, regarding the division system in Korea. If you can free yourself from the preconceptions of existing social sciences, and also if you can put some distance between yourself and the requirements of the really globalized pressure to confine yourself to a specialized field, then you can start from anywhere you like. For example, start from literature or South Korean politics, from the issue of democracy, environmental questions, or whatever; and try to learn how the problems you face have been affected and in many ways aggravated by the nature of this peninsula's divided reality, in which two parts seem to be very much opposed but also form a part of a system that can mobilize many of the apparently opposing elements to sustain the system, to make so many things more difficult to solve on both sides. There's whole lot of research to do, and it's directly related to the question of praxis. But of course, not only is it difficult in practical terms to maintain independence from the requirements of a specific field of discipline, but it is also not that easy to free yourself from the assumptions of social science as such. It's a huge question.

Now in this area, I myself have found a great help in the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, especially in two aspects. One is his insistence that before doing any work

of social analysis, you should decide on the unit of analysis. This seems to be a self-evident proposition, but very few social scientists seem to bother to make that kind of examination, they just talk about 'society'. For Wallerstein, the basic unit of social analysis has to be the world-system, then you have to look at individual nations, societies or economies in that context. This notion is important to the discourse of division system in two ways. One, it reminds you that even if you extend your interest from South Korea to the whole Korean Peninsula, that is not enough, you have to think of the whole world-system and figure out what kind of place the so-called division system has within the world-system. You have to work out a global perspective. Also, the world-system analysis reinforces your instinctive feeling that in the situation of national division any analysis of South Korean reality comes up against the difficulty of defining the basic analytic unit. Insistence on the world-system as the basic unit helps not only to draw attention to the world-system itself, but to remind you that South Korea cannot be the basic unit, you have to think of other categories, such as the Korean Peninsula, the East Asian region and beyond. Also, Wallerstein has been developing this notion of 'unthinking social science' and reminding us how the assumptions in social science were formed in specific historical situations of 19th century-Europe. In order to free ourselves from them, I think a scholar has to confront works like Wallerstein's. It does not mean we have to follow him all the way, but at least you should be aware that such things have already been said and you have to come to terms with them.

Chen: Some members of the *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* group understand well that the 'division system' of the Korean Peninsula can't directly apply to the Taiwan cross-strait relation with the mainland. It's your way of posing and beginning to think through this issue that's inspiring. Because of the historical difficulty within the Taiwan instance and also in

mainland China, once the issue emerges it immediately becomes a moral-ethical issue, in terms of the entire history of the nation, and then there is no room for analysis. On the side of Taiwan, because of the struggle between independence and unification, either way is highly politicized to the extent of psychic trauma: if you are not part of this, you are part of that thing. It blocked any other intellectual possibility. Once the mode of thinking of the division system comes in, then you begin to think, you never thought about things that way, since on various levels, the elements of the system need to be overcome. It's not an 'either or' issue; then it opens up internally what other issues need to be discussed. For instance the two states are talking about how to end the diplomatic war, and if you see that as a part of the division system, then you can take the position and say 'yes, this needs to be done!' Rather than 'either or', it's a process to dismantle different elements of the system. In short, we feel much more inspired by your mode of thinking.

Paik: I feel very much moved and grateful that colleagues in Taiwan are taking so much interest in my notion of the division system. But I still think that it would probably need another term than 'division system' to apply to the cross-strait issue. There's certainly a division or partition, but one that has deeper historical roots than the division between North and South Korea, and a far greater disparity between the two parties. In addition, there is a greater geographical, physical insulation because of the Strait. But since the division or partition between Taiwan and the mainland has continued as long as it has, there are bound to be many phenomena that cry out for a more systematic analysis. And one of the really bad things about the division system's bad effects is, to use your expression, it makes people stop thinking about many important things. There is always a convenient excuse for not thinking and for going back to the fixed positions. For instance if you criticize things in South Korea, the immediate answer is, 'oh, if you

think so badly of South Korea, you must prefer North Korea, why don't you go and live there?' And in North Korea, one of the things that help the regime keep the people in line is the argument that we have to reunify the country, we have suffered so many difficulties because the country has been divided, the US imperialists preventing reunification, so we have to endure the hard times, drive out Americans and their South Korean lackeys and get the country reunified. It stops people from asking questions. If the notion of division system helps us to start thinking, whether in Korea or Taiwan, it's all to the good.

Now, about Taiwan, I have been thinking more about cross-strait relations since I came back from my visit there in May. One of the reasons why the term 'division system' is probably inappropriate is that you are bound to encounter oppositions from both sides, the kind of oppositions that you wouldn't find in Korea. For instance, there's the independence issue you have in Taiwan, and from Beijing's point of view the term wouldn't be acceptable because they consider the country was unified in 1945, with the victory of Chinese Communist Party over KMT, and Taiwan represents only the residual question of what to do with some of the defeated party that escaped and occupied an island province with the protection of the United States. It's a question of allowing secession or not, and obviously they cannot allow secession not only because of Taiwan itself but because of other regions in China.

If there's to be some kind of settlement between Taiwan and mainland China, each side has to understand the other side's position and accept whatever is absolutely unchangeable. I think, on Beijing's side, the insistence would be on at least the formal sovereignty of the PRC government. From Taiwan's point of view, they would insist on the right to be not completely taken over by the Chinese, not only for the sake of those aboriginal Taiwanese people who demand independence but for the sake of preserving that what most Taiwanese consider their legitimate accomplishments over the years,

including democratic values. Is there room for settlement that would accommodate both demands? Probably not right away, but possibly at some future point.

At the dinner party after the conference, one of the Taiwanese colleagues told me he got an idea from my talk as to what the Taiwanese should do, which is to *pretend* that Taiwan were Hong Kong, but in exchange for that pretence *remain* Taiwan, not become another Hong Kong. Well, that may be something to work for. At any rate, this points to the difference between the division system in Korea and the cross-strait relations. Economic and other civilian exchanges between the two Koreas remain far below the level of cross-strait contacts. But at least in Korea both sides agreed already in 1991, and their top leaders confirmed in 2000, that each party represented an equal and independent entity, even though the relationship between two Koreas should not be an international relation but 'a special, provisional relation while moving toward reunification,' and by 1991 both Koreas had joined the United Nations as two sovereign states. On that basis, they would form some kind of compound nation, with two independent states but loosely joined together with common rules for running the respective parts. And then gradually they may go to form a tighter confederation or even some sort of federation.

In China, the Beijing government would never agree that form of settlement, while most Taiwanese, whether aboriginal or not, would not agree to become a second Hong Kong. But I think they could perhaps gain real autonomy and virtual independence, if they could agree to call it not a confederation, but Taiwan as part of one China. At the present juncture, I think it's probably the mainland Chinese government that would be more reluctant to agree to this kind of formula, because of the pressure of other regional problems such as Tibet or Xinjiang, but if there's some change in the political atmosphere, I think that kind of formula, of pretending to be Hong Kong but being really Taiwan, might work out. And unless some such settlement is worked out, there

will always be some kind of diplomatic war going on, and neither Taiwan nor mainland China will be able to realize their full potential for development and for a humane and dignified life.

Chen: After your visit there have been certain discussions. The worry is whether professor's Paik's division system really implies reunification; reflecting back on the Taiwan-mainland context. That was the debate. But there were also other imaginings, not like Hong Kong, but Tibet, as a self-governing entity, autonomous, in other words, you choose your own leader. But how does that differ from 'one country and two states'?

Paik: Well, 'one country, two systems' is not 'one country and two states' but actually 'one country and two sets of institutions'. Anyway, as applied to Hong Kong, it allows a different system to exist in Hong Kong, but in a sense at the mercy of the Beijing government. They can really intervene any time. Of course they wouldn't easily abrogate the present arrangement; they don't change Hong Kong's system because of self-interest. But I am sure the Taiwanese would find that formula too risky to accept. As for Tibet, I don't know what kind of autonomy Tibet has now, but certainly it's not without problems.

Chen: But imagining Taiwan would be self-governing in that name, which would be accepted by the mainland side, and in reality you are governing yourself.

Paik: In China, this should be not so much an issue of unification but of the Chinese people's deciding what kind of society, or what kind of country they want to become. Whether they would become a country that is large-minded enough to allow real autonomy to Tibet and real autonomy or whatever other arrangements that most Taiwanese people can reasonably accept. And I think it would be important for the whole of East Asia, and obviously beyond that. What kind of society China becomes is really crucial for

all of us, and in a way, this applies to what Japan will do about Okinawa. I mean it will be crucial in deciding what kind of society Japan wants to become. If the Japanese choose to become the kind of society that can give a greater autonomy to Okinawa, then Japan would also become a society more tolerant to, let's say, Koreans, Ainus and so on.

Chen: The Taiwan problem is more difficult, because you can never reach an agreement between the independent fundamentalists and the rest. Let me come back to the question of the division system a little bit more. You're right to indicate that we'll need a term other than 'division system' to describe the Taiwan-mainland relation. I think as soon as we start doing research the proper term will perhaps emerge, which will be closer to the historical reality. When we compare the conditions with the Korean Peninsula, it's very obvious, in the Taiwan and mainland instance, the division started in the Japanese period, 1895–1945, even the trafficking among population was still there, and then intensified during the Cold War. So if we address that issue, whether you want to call it a division or not, it started from the earlier moment, rather than from the Cold War era. If you think in this way, what is also interesting is that, if you trace historically, the division system in the Korean Peninsula would not come into being without the prior moment of the Japanese occupation or colonization allowing that division to be in place later. So those were historical seeds that built into the formation of the Cold War. Because the Taiwan-mainland experience is different. In the Japanese occupation period, the people living in the Korean Peninsula were under one colonial regime, but in Taiwan-China this wasn't the case. Without taking into account this historical process you can't really address the specificity.

Paik: What was the situation like in Taiwan between 1945 and 1949?

Chen: In 1945 to 1949 it suddenly opened up, Taiwan was returned to the motherland,

then the KMT army arrived, 823 Artillery Bombardment in Kinmen, and the civil war. The period of 1945 to 1949 was an opening moment, in a way a liberating moment for Taiwanese people. And then, because of the Cold War, it closed down. The issue is very difficult to address in the Taiwan context, because the KMT regime could not even maintain power if there wasn't the US support. At the same time, the earlier history of Japanese colonialism really mattered; without the room to fully rethink the history, its ghost lingers and history never ends. We don't know yet how to fully address these issues historically, or systematically, but I guess going back to the history would be the first moment to be able to explain.

Back to the division system question: you talk about the division system, then eventually you were named as the representative from the non-governmental side to be involved in the North and South negotiation process. For you, personally, I imagine you would say, 'this shouldn't be my work, it should be somebody else to take up this role.' But somehow you had spoken too much of that, so people would say, 'you talk much about it, you do it.' Can you say something about this?

Paik: Well, I think it has been a very educational experience. As you said, I was thrown into this, because I had talked too much, too much about overcoming the division system, and also about the duty of intellectuals to practice what they preached. When they were enlarging this group for civilian exchanges among North, South and overseas Koreans, they couldn't find the proper person to represent it, because each potential candidate among those who had been actively involved up to that point would have some group adamantly opposed to that person, so they came looking for a new face who hadn't been involved and had few enemies, so to speak. That is how I was called upon, and I couldn't refuse. I don't regret that I made the decision. But my second term would be over by the end of January 2009, and I have stated that I shall not serve a third term. First, because I feel

my main work, as a writer and intellectual, has been too much neglected, and I have to get back to it. Secondly, I feel there is only so much one can do because of this asymmetry between South Korean and North Korean groups; that is, the South Korean group is, after all, a group that is independent from the state – we may not have much power and we may be divided among ourselves, with all sorts of internal problems, but still we are on our own. Under the North Korean system, this kind of independence of the citizen sector is not possible. We often find ourselves dealing with a counterpart who tends to act under the order of the party. Of course, even with that limitation, I think it's meaningful to keep this kind of encounter alive, but there is a very clear limit to what can be accomplished within this frame. I think it's the kind of work that people should take turns at, instead of one person sacrificing himself all the time. Especially when I have what I think is more important work to do, something that I can do better.

Chen: As you said, you want to come back to thinking and writing. One of the things struck me at least in reading your work in terms of, how should I say, mode of thinking, you always have a larger picture, you have the sense of totality to place all the analysis. Is it fair to say that mode of thinking has been a consistent methodology throughout your intellectual life?

Paik: I wouldn't really think of it as a methodology, but I have tried to obtain a larger picture. And if you find that I have to some extent succeeded, all I can say is I thank you very much.

Chen: You really have had a busy life, from the 1960s until now. And you never stop; even now you are going back to writing and thinking. What is the driving energy behind it?

Paik: Well, compared with some friends or colleagues of a similar age, I don't feel that I am really all that energetic, but I keep on trying, so it may look like exhibiting great energy. But I am not for instance an especially robust person. Compared to some friends, especially artist friends, I may show greater steadiness, and that may compensate for shortfalls of physical energy.

Chen: Thank you very, very much for the interview.

(Interviewed at Seoul, October 2008)

Special terms

Chosun Ilbou 朝鮮日報
Hwang Suk-Young 黃皙暎
Kim Su-Yŏng 金洙暎
Lee Young-Hui 李泳禧
literature of engagement 參與文學
Segyo Institute 細橋研究所

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