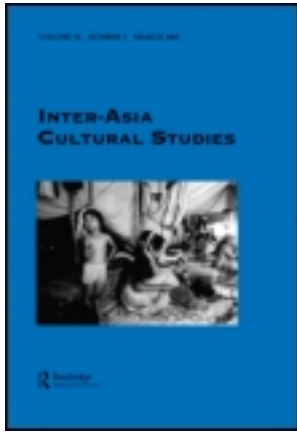


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Kuan-Hsing Chen

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## Paik Nak-chung's theory of overcoming 'division system': rethinking the China-Taiwan relation with reference to the two Koreas

Kuan-Hsing CHEN

No truth can be called a genuine truth unless it is realized in daily life. (Paik Nak-chung 2005: 19)

### Introduction

In 1988, when cross-strait interactions were re-initiated, the independent-left journal *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* (hereafter *Taishe*) launched its first publication. At that time, leftist intellectuals in Taiwan were either still mired in sorting out how to understand the Cultural Revolution, or angered by the capitalist turn of the 'socialist mother land', or busily involved in the heated moment of social and political movements. We did not have a real understanding of the post-war conditions of the mainland. Ten years later, cross-strait relations had become a major issue confronting Taiwanese society. In the summer of 1997, the editorial collective of the journal organized its first trip to Beijing and Shanghai. That was the first instance where the group began to concern itself with the cross-strait relations. After the visit, individual members have established friendships with the mainland's critical circle, but as a group we did not have clear views and a coherent position on the cross-strait relation. However, since 2000, after Chen Shui-Bian took power, *Taishe* was no longer able to escape but forced to seriously take up the issue, since Chen's regime had provoked dangerous responses from the mainland side in order to manipulate social contradiction within Taiwanese society and escalate the crisis in the Taiwan Strait. But how to overcome the state-centered, political-party

dominated framework? To think of the problems of the 'two banks' ('liang-an', the two sides across the Strait) has always been a difficult bottle-neck to break through. We knew clearly that without a new mode of analysis, which will be able to cut closely into the historical reality, all we have to say will fall simply into the reproduction of the 'independence versus unification' framework, or worse, a blunt position taking.

In early 2008, to prepare for Professor Paik Nak-chung's visit to Taiwan, members of *Taishe* studied his English writings and essays available in Chinese translation, with a purpose to work towards a panel presentation for the 20th anniversary meeting of the journal. To our surprise, all members of the study group were very taken by Professor Paik's theory of the 'division system'. Intuitively, we felt the theory was very close to the discursive-political space that we hope to open up. Engaging in long-term theoretical work, we fully understand that conditions between the Korean Peninsular and the Taiwan Strait were very different. We further agreed with Professor Paik's insistence that the 'division system' was formulated to address the historically specific condition of the North and South Korea, which cannot be carelessly applied to other instances. Nevertheless, it did not mean that the Korean experiences cannot be referred to or served as inspirations for us to think about relations between Taiwan and mainland China.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, in *Taishe's* 20th anniversary conference, the panel was organized with the title 'Overcoming Division System' and presented in the form of a team work to start to tackle questions

emerging in the Strait relations on different levels from different angles.

We highly respect Professor Paik's work and cannot simply instrumentalize his thoughts. The task of this essay is a limited attempt to understand the theory of the division system by returning it to the historical process of the transformation of Professor Paik's thought. Only in historicizing his work can we relieve the anxiety of reductionism and build the basis to begin to analyze the cross-strait relation with reference to the Korean peninsula.

Paik's theory of the division system is not a systematic construction modeled on conventional social theory. It has to do with his understanding of literature, his world view and his notion of the Third World that are organically and immanently connected with each other. The next section of this essay traces the background and basis of his earlier thoughts. The third rediscovers the driving force behind the gradual emergence of thoughts on the division system. The fourth concentrates on the main propositions of the division system theory. The final section comes to the preliminary thoughts on the cross-strait relations.

Several clarifications are in order before I proceed. First, I do not have the ability to read all Paik's important works in Korean and cannot possibly have full understanding of his thoughts emerging in the past half century. I could only try to partially comprehend the formation and trajectories of his theory of division system through selective readings of his essays published in English and some in Chinese translations.

Second, readers may be curious about how Professor Paik is politically positioned in South Korea. To my knowledge, due to their emphasis on the national question over the past 40 years and their adoption of the division system as a theoretical framework for political thoughts since the 1990s, the *Creation and Criticism* (hereafter Changbi) group, represented by Paik Nak-chung, Choi Wonchi and Baik Youngseo are labeled as nationalist left by Korean progressive forces. But this labeling does not do justice to the complexity of political reality. Patient

readers will slowly discover that Paik and his colleagues have a very strong tendency towards internationalism, Third Worldism and critical East Asian regionalism. My own long-term interactions with core members of Changbi come to the understanding that they are not close-minded nationalists at all. To use Paik's own words, the movement they are pushing is national but not nationalistic. Perhaps a fair understanding is that, born in 1938, Paik Nak-chung grew up with the experience of the Second World War, decolonization from Japan and the Korean War; he witnessed the split of the North and South Koreans and lived under the government of military dictatorship. For that generation of intellectuals, anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism are fundamental to nationalism. How to evolve from colony, war, and poverty, to move towards the building of a modern society and democratic country, and to achieve national unity and the dignity of independence is a shared sentiment and desire. This was, in fact, the common mental condition of Third World critical intellectuals born before and growing up after the War. This is the assumption needed to properly understand that generation. To adopt theoretically and politically the correct gesture, produced from the present conditions of knowledge in order to face that era is not going to take us very far to fully grasp the roots of their lives. Such is also the case in Taiwan. The younger generation finds it difficult to understand why leading leftist intellectual Chen Yingzhen, born in 1937, could have become a Chinese nationalist; but returning them to their time, it is understandable as to how natural it is to be appealed by national sentiment. Asking them to be rid of what they grew up with and to live with the mood of our time would not be very sensible. It is our problem, not theirs. But what really makes Professor Paik stand out is that, over the past half century, he has constantly updated his concerns, renewed his thought and redirected his discourse in response to the changing conditions of time to come close to a new historical reality. This toughness and persistence will eventually receive the highest regard.

### National literatures and Third World imagination

In 1966, the journal *Creation and Criticism* (*Changbi*) was launched. At that time, when Paik Nak-chung became the founding editor of the journal, he was only 28 years old and had just begun his academic career as a lecturer in the English Department at the Seoul National University. During the past 40 some years, the journal positioned itself outside the institution to operate in the social space, and *Changbi* has not only become the major platform to promote South Korean national literatures in tune with the democratic movement of the times, but has also evolved into a leading publishing house. *Changbi* has continued to reposition and recreate itself to catch up with changing historical conditions.<sup>2</sup> Its circulation is over 15,000 copies per issue, one of the largest independent quarterly journals in the world. For anyone who knows about the political economy of the East Asian journal market, it is not difficult to understand the important location the journal has occupied in the critical circle of thoughts. My own understanding is that this close-to-miraculous circulation number has to do with Paik's ability to 'manage' intellectually as well as practically. Our purpose to start with *Changbi* is to foreground the independent nature of Paik Nak-chung's thought. Although his long term teaching position has been with the English Department at Seoul National University, his major social and political participation has been played out through *Changbi*. In the academy, he is seen as a productive scholar who has made original contributions to literary studies; in *Changbi*, he is a much respected writer, critic, editor, publisher and critical intellectual. From the publication of high quality essays in English, one realizes that he could have easily become an internationally well-known scholar if he has chosen to publish in English, especially given his breath of knowledge. But it seems that Paik has made the decision to devote his entire intellectual life to his beloved home country.

Under the authoritarian era of the 1960s, when space for critical thought was extremely limited, literary creative work and criticism became the most effective means to promote and disseminate critical thought as well as to intervene in social issues. In this sense, South Korean conditions were similar to that of Taiwan's native-soil literature movement in the 1960s and 1970s, except that 'national literature' was the umbrella term for Paik Nak-chung's camp to lead the frontline of battle in thought. From the present point of view, especially in Taiwan, 'national' (*min-zu*) is a troublesome term. But 'national literature' seemed to be a natural name in the Korean context of the 1970s to denote the literature of the Korean people. What then exactly is national literature?

In an important essay, 'For the purpose of establishing the concept of national literature' (1974),<sup>3</sup> Paik openly laid out his considerations. At that time, a wave of movement on national culture and national literature was mobilized by the state to return to tradition and to carry forward the essence of the Korean nation; a similar movement was agitated by the KMT state in Taiwan in the 1970s as an anti-communist campaign to counter the Cultural Revolution as well as in the 1990s in the form of a 'total movement for community building'. Standing on the opposing side, Paik sensitively suggested that the notion of national literature cannot simply be given away to the state, and therefore should intervene to put forward different agendas. He argues that the standpoint of the national literature lies in

the survival of the nation and is the result of a crisis consciousness when majority of the nation's welfare are seriously threatened, and the correct attitude to face national crisis becomes the determining factor for the healthy development of the national literature... In this sense, the concept of national literature has radically historical character. (Paik 1998a: 211)

That is to say, national literature is to confront the present historical conditions

and therefore cannot possibly be an a-historical adoption of nationalist essence. To use contemporary language, national literature should not be understood in essentialist terms as transhistorical and unchanging for 5000 years, or to recollect and put all the classical literature on one platform, but to take up its mission to confront and overcome the crisis when a national crisis emerges in specific historical conjuncture. Here, 'national crisis' and 'fundamentally historical characters' in reality refer to the crisis since the Japanese imperialist invasion and the present the reality of the splitting of the nation into North and South.<sup>4</sup> To avoid the too-sensitive term 'split', Paik adopts the analogy from economics to differentiate nation from citizen (or national) in order to make the point that, under the system of world capitalism, national economy in relation to national subject is a secondary concept; nation is a larger entity than nationals. 'To insist on the purity of the economic concept is to ignore the threat confronting the autonomy of the national economy. Similarly, to ignore the concept of the nation literature will result in consequence and challenge for the survival and dignity of the nation' (Paik 1998a: 212). In other words, simply using 'South Korean' national economy as a unity of analysis is partial and biased, since it cannot accurately describe the national crisis in the entire Korean peninsula as a whole. It is here one could locate the drafting plan for the articulation of the 'division system' brewing in Paik's early thought.<sup>5</sup>

If national literature is to deal with national crisis, it follows that the demand for literary work to be close to people's life will be close to so-called realism. This question has emerged in this important essay and would be further developed in Paik's late writing. But at the same time, he insists that literary work driven by national crisis should never be reduced to being a political instrument, rather, literature close to reality will be highly 'advanced'. Why is this? Paik's positioning of national literature as anti-colonial has to do with his understanding of Western classics. For instance, he

thinks that well-known writers such as Kafka and Camus could not really radically critique western colonialism, because if they did it without considering the consequences they lived in they would be isolated from their own societies, and therefore, 'their critique of colonialism stays on the surface or on the (minor) side' (Paik 1998a: 222). On the other hand, 'to breathe with minjung (the people), critique of colonial rule of the Japanese empire has become the most valuable part in our tradition. How lucky the Korean poets like Wanhai Han Yunlung are, though they lived in extremely painful conditions' (Paik 1998a: 222). What Paik is getting at is that the colonized's painful historical experiences are real and the artists share it with, and are supported by, their own people, whereas the writings of uncolonized well-known Western authors, without having the same experience and position cannot be so penetrating. In this sense, Korean poets under Japanese colonization could share the pains expressed through their work with their own suffering people, and in this sense, they are lucky. But Paik takes one step further to suggest that to simply critique imperialism does not constitute the most advanced nature of a world class literature,

because meaningful critique is not only a struggle with powerful forces from the outside, but also a struggle with the self. One has to have profound intellectual training and emotional training so that one could consciously or unconsciously detect and critique within one's own nation those forces catered to colonial rule, and furthermore to be able to distinguish and defeat feudal spirit and comprador consciousness deeply rooted inside one's own soul. (Paik 1998a: 223)

That is, national literature is only possible with deep consciousness of critical self-reflection. Anti-feudalism is to overcome the conservative nature of the national self; anti-imperialism (and anti-comprador) is to establish subject consciousness. Such a double mission is in reality highly difficult, since coloniality and modernity are



competing and conflicting interpellations. To use the experiences in Taiwan and mainland China to understand this point, to establish critical subjectivity, between the call for a return to traditionalism and the call for anti-tradition's radical westernization, is a highly fragile project since not enough basis has been built and experiences accumulated; therefore one has to walk on ice to move forward, only to maintain such tension in order for subjectivity to be established and national literature to establish its most advanced form. With this assumption, Korean national literature is synonymous with modern literature. It was formed through anti-Japanese invasion, at the same time to oppose feudal conservatism of the aristocracy, since national literature cannot be based on aristocracy or on moving away from people's life. Paik further strongly suggests that national literature cannot escape political reality to hide in a nostalgic past: 'the real national literature is to oppose anything sentimentalist or even strategically resort to revivalism. It cannot fall into nationalist quintessentialism (*guo cui pai*)' (Paik 1998a: 244). Paik's long term anti-nationalist quintessentialist position and anti-comprador wholesale westernization are grounded in the attempt to build a modern Korean subjectivity. It is here that his position is in tune with the May Fourth spirit exemplified by Lu Xun, that is 'to confront enemy both front and rear', a condition common to the Third World intellectual life.

I want to emphasize that the question on the advanced nature of national literature is not discussed within the confinement of the Korean nation. In his 1974 essay, 'How to view modern literature', Paik connects national literature with the Third World literature and pinpoints the latter's vanguardness. He traces back 20th century literature and criticism to position D.H. Lawrence as the expression of the ultimate crisis in Western literature, after which there was no way out. But Third World literature is not conditioned by this genealogy and has produced literature beyond the limit. He

cites Chilean poet Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) as an example to show that literature in Western Europe falls into the dilemma between realism and anti-realism, but super-realism produced in Latin America does not have such baggage and works closer to social reality and people's life. Similarly, Black American literature has also developed a new trajectory to the extent of transforming the existing terrain of American literature. That is, different subject positions and historical experiences provide the potential to break through the impasse, 'because it may well be easier for outsiders of the West to experience, recognize and to move away from it. In other words, aren't the Third World writers, as most of the common people who experienced the invasion and inhumanness of Western civilization as a concrete historical fact, able to create works transcend the limit of Western literature without sacrificing one's concern for the daily reality of one's own society, or to sacrifice the sense of solidarity with the people of one's own nation? This is exactly the reason why Third World literature has become truly the vanguard in world literature, including Western literature' (Paik 1998a: 249). In Paik's mind, Third World literature is a part of world literature, and it is the objective historical conditions that put Third World literature in the vanguard position. But at best, this is only a potential possibility. He reminds us, 'late developing countries must cultivate their own ability, enabling their subjectivities to cope with the domination of advanced industrial societies centered around Western Europe; in the depth of the adapting process, there hides a danger of late developing countries who *volunteer to be recruited* into the ruling regime of the advanced countries' (Paik 1998a: 249; emphasis added). Here, Paik is warning us an ambivalent sentiment or, one may say, a more realistic attitude: on the one hand, in order to survive, we will need to cope with the structure and rules of the game defined and set by the capitalist advanced countries; on the other hand, we also must have the subject consciousness to overcome the limits of the system, so as to

look for new directions of the world. 'Adapting to ... overcoming' has hereafter become crucial in Paik's methodology of thought. The articulation of the subject-consciousness position is both 'Korean' and that of the Third World. This is a strategic position with a consideration of the entire world. It is also what the radical critique of his position has targeted, since 'adapting' means acceptance of given reality, not a total negation.

Paik Nak-chung's identification with the Third World is a lifelong commitment. Even up to his recent writing, he still uses the Third World to position Korea.<sup>6</sup> Where are his intellectual sources of the Third World coming from? Several sources surfaced from reading Paik's works. First, in the 1960s and 1970s, world system theory was internationally influential in progressive academia. Second, it originated from his literary training; in Seoul, he was among the first generation teaching Black American literature, which was different from European literature. Third, it has to do with Korea's own historical experience as a colony. Although postcolonial studies only began to be prominent in the American academy in the 1980s and 1990s, he published work like 'Conrad's literature and colonialism' early in 1969. With the common experience of decolonization and the sense of solidarity, the Third World is an obvious coordinate for identification. In the concluding part of the 'How to view modern literature', Paik praises Fanon's 'On national culture' as a source of inspiration:

To move away from colonial conditions is not simply a political and military question, but it also means to overcome the reproduction of in-human and discriminatory culture produced under colonial rule. For those who are immersed in western cultural influence, it has become an arduous task to not to simply fall into revitalism and primitivism, but to rediscover the solidarity with the people... (Paik 1998a: 252)

For Paik, the relevance of Fanon is not limited to the analysis of colonialism, nor to his participation in political struggle, but

'his very existence as a subject to claim that the Third World's ongoing struggle is to create a new human history cannot but bring inspiration and encouragement for Korean literature' (Paik 1998a: 252). From his attitude toward Fanon, one finds Paik's position that the imaginary Third World solidarity has become an important source of mental support since 1970s.<sup>7</sup> And precisely because the Third World is a symbolic and imaginary resource, inside and outside one's existence simultaneously, it finds much more wider understanding of the nation, breaking away from the nationalist enclosure. (In relation to Korea, why did the notion of the Third World never enter the horizon of critical circle in Taiwan? Is the later tendency of Taiwanese nationalist closure to do with the absence of the imaginary Third World? These are the issues worthy pondering over.) 'Only by recognizing the historic aspects of the colonial ruling class of the modern Western European society as well as actively participating in the people's anti-colonialism struggle, such accomplishment can be achieved. It will not only invariably create a whole new historical outcome for the colonial intellectuals themselves, but also for the whole human race, including westerners' (Paik 1998a: 252).

If the discussion above sketches some aspects of Paik's thought emerging in the 1970s, part of his major work done in the 1980s was to substantiate these claims in the domain of literary theory. The deepening of his thought on national literature was achieved through responses to challenges coming from different positions and to the changing historical conditions. The 1985 essay, 'On modernism, further discussion' was a debate about modernism and post-modern literary theory to defend the meaningfulness and practices of realism in contemporary Korea and the Third World. The 1986 essay, 'Work, practice and truth – to work for the enhancement of the science and practice of the theory of the national literature', is an argument that artistic and scientific nature of the national literature cannot be compromised for the reality of national

and *minjung* movement. 'The *minjung* nature and artistic nature of national literature', published also in 1986, is in dialogue with Marxist theory in the tide of rising leftist movement, which highlights that national literature is nothing but *minjung* literature; it also insists that the artistic nature of literature cannot be sacrificed for the service of class movement. The 1990 essay, 'National literature and realism', takes up again the claim that Third World realism is the most advanced form of literature and rejects modernism and postmodernism with this standpoint, and while facing new circumstances and starting to have contact with North Korea, rethinks the theory of socialist realism. Other than theoretical works, Paik continued with his literary criticisms, including discussion on Western literature and Korea's national literature.<sup>8</sup> Owing to my limited knowledge, I'm unable to fully grasp the discussion on literary and art theories or literary criticism. I await capable colleagues to deal with this part.

In summary, Paik's theory of national literature is based upon the assumption of a national crisis, which begun in the Japanese colonial era and continued through the division of the North and South. Congruent with the anti-colonial nationalist project, but with a strong sense of solidarity with the Third World, this has, since the 1970s, become the primary backbone of his thought.

### Confronting 'division': breaking the limits of knowledge

One characteristic of Paik's thought is its embeddedness in its time. His theory of the division system has been gradually formed in the movements of the epochal transformation. It was only in the 1990s that his theory came into sharp focus; before that, his discourses were dispersed in different contexts. We will have to move into these contexts to identify flashes and elements of the emerging problematic of the division system.

On many occasions, Paik has stated clearly that to theorize the division system should be the task for intellectually more

prepared people (i.e. those who have a background in social science, history or philosophy), definitely not someone trained in literature.<sup>9</sup> Having waited and not heard a response for a more qualified person to take up the urgent task, he could not but force himself to continue the discussion. We cannot overlook and let go such a phenomenon. It really reveals the problems of the condition of knowledge. In Korea (and also in Taiwan), the intellectual world is bound by the existing (transplanted) mode of knowledge, and is often not equipped with readymade analytics to account for the specificity of experiences grounded in local history. It is precisely in this sense that Paik's theory of the division system has the creative potential to break through the limits of knowledge. The conditions of knowledge in Korea are shared in other parts of the Third World. When (imported) modes of knowledge cannot properly analyze our own social realities, we often hear the argument that the realities themselves are too local to have universal value and hence are easily being skipped over; or it is often considered a political question, which has nothing to do with knowledge. The opportunity to insist on its relevance to go on thinking and then to break through the existing structure of knowledge is lost in this process. I personally take this to be at the center of the intellectual problems in our part of the world.

The 1975 essay on 'The current stage of the national literature' had already begun to put forward the concept of the division without elaboration. It was written to echo historian Kang Man-Gil's discussion on 'historiography in the era of the split'. But at that time, Paik saw that the urgent task for Korean national history was to 'restore democracy and to realize the unity of the national territory' (Paik 1998a: 6). For instance, in his analysis, Paik reads Hwang Sok-Yong's important novel *The Chronicle of a Man Named Han* (1972)<sup>10</sup> on the loss of individual lives due to the separation of the North and South in terms of the problematic of the restoring democracy and sees this as the keynote of the national literature in the



1970s. The real momentum for the intellectual background of formulating the theory of the division system emerged in the debate on the social formation of Korean society. The representative work is the 1985 essay on 'The new stage for *minjung*-national literature' (in Paik 1998a), which can be taken as a renewal of the position in facing the new situation after the 1975 essay.

From the title of the essay, one could sense that this wave of challenge came from the peak moment of the *minjung* movement in the 1980s. In the South Korean context, the 'class' movement was a taboo term due to postwar anti-communist ideology; if used, the movement could be quickly discredited and therefore *minjung* (people) was a preferred term to nuance the left-leaning class movement. When the term *minjung* began to be utilized, Paik questioned the ambiguity of its denotation (Paik 1998a: 63). But now, written in the mid 1980s, the essay tries to articulate together the national with the *minjung* movement. In clarifying the two terms, we may be able to find the clue to see the emerging problematic. Paik's argument was with Chong Chang-Yol. Chong's 'Nationalism of *minjung*' first positions *minjung* as governed classes and from this angle to trace historically the transformation of nationalist consciousness through the Lee Dynasty, Japanese colonial regime to the modern era. Paik argues that *minjung* is a complex formation and cannot be reduced to the governed classes. The question he then poses is what is a commonly understood capitalist society from Korean society in both the colonial era and the era of the division? According to Chong's framework, in an advanced capitalist society, the superstructure corresponds to the base structure, which forms the social totality; but correspondence does not exist for a society in colonial status, and therefore is exceptional in human history. Paik disagrees with Chong's adoption of a theoretical model to explain reality, especially using the experiences of the Western capitalist society to measure colony. For Paik, it is a 'fallacy of formalism'. The issue at stake is: how to analyze the class positions within the totality

of social formation in the articulation of the colony and its sovereign colonial motherland? Under this premise, what is the relation between *minjung*, classes and the nation? Finally, locating the problematic in the postwar condition of the division, how can the two societies be discussed in the totality of the nation?

Please slow down to ponder these questions, which are not so easy to answer. If we simply use a Marxian model of base and superstructure to analyze the relations and modes of production on the level of the base structure, how do we describe it when the two societies are combined together? This question has not only to do with analytical knowledge, but also implies a strategic move when analysis is done: 'Needless to say, from the starting point of the present moment in history, the existence of this joint entity has to do with great work of national unification, but to achieve unification we will have to move through different lives of classes and strata so as to fully realize their real power. It follows then, today where can we find the maximal to unify this power and to make it grow in the logic of life?' (Paik 1998a: 68). It is in dialogue with Marxian analytical framework that the limits of knowledge in the critical circle are highlighted. In other words, Marxist class analysis was created to account for modern society of Western European capitalism and its analytical boundary is basically targeted at 'one country', which cannot be directly adopted to explain the complexity of the colony, nor can it properly deal with the modern society of non-European countries; for instance, how do we analyze the leftover population of the 'untouchable' in postwar Korean society within the framework of class analysis? Can those societies, predominantly made of peasantry, be analyzed by directly adopting Marxism, which takes industrial societies as its dominant frame of reference? More importantly, how do we proceed to analyze two divided societies when they are put into one single conceptual framework? Especially when the two divided societies used to be one entity for a thousand years, and only now are facing

one century of political separation, how can the analysis be done? In short, if the assumption is to account for the social reality in a real context but not to fit into existing theory, then we obviously run into the obstacle of knowledge. The same challenge confronting the intellectual circles in Taiwan and China is to analyze historically the divided societies as one entity changing from an integrated unity, through Japanese colonization, to postwar division.

The persistent tension is further radicalized in the 1988 essay on 'The present day national literature and national movement' as Paik takes up the emerging opportunity to push forward the reunification project. A context needs to be reminded: although the June 1987 Great Struggle could not overthrow Chun Doo-Hwan's military regime, it did in turn gain more space for a liberal democracy, in that the taboo issue over the two Koreas can now be openly discussed. It was in this new context that national literature and the national unification movement enter the frontline for public debate, and therefore, unlike the previous era during high political pressure, discourses can now be staged without having to circle around. This essay was written explicitly in dialogue with class movement activists and Marxist political economists. Paik raises the issue from the side of national literature: 'It is often said that the basic contradiction for modern Korean society is class contradiction, and national contradiction is primary contradiction. But how can the division be properly explained without a hesitant sense of relief?' (Paik 1998a: 108). Put differently, in debating whether national division is a basic or primary contradiction for Korean society, a series of theoretical questions surface: can the division between the South and North be apprehended from the perspective of 'two countries'? Is division the internal contradiction or a complex of both internal and external contradictions? How can the totality of social structure be conceptualized? Within the conditions of division, is it possible to move toward a higher level of democratization and national autonomy?

In this entangled set of difficult questions, Paik is forced to begin to clarify and delineate the problematic of the division.

By examining postwar experiences of the 'partial state', Paik locates the division of the North and South Korea as the type where two societies either belong to socialism or capitalism in the Cold War split, but he also identifies differences (Paik 1998a: 113). With reference to East and West Germany, the Korean Peninsula went through the prior moment of history of being colonized; this is a crucial point in that both Germany and Japan were former colonizers, but after the defeat, unlike Germany, Japan was not divided and colonies were returned. In contrast with the division between Taiwan and Mainland China, the size of each entity is greatly incompatible, and in the prior historical moment, the mainland was split by multiple foreign forces but never fully colonized. These differences make Korean experiences unique. Through comparisons, Paik maintains that the urgent intellectual task is to theorize 'how this new contradiction of the division is reproduced through internal and external contradictions for each of the North and South, and contribute to the reproduction of contradiction as a whole' (Paik 1998a: 113). At this stage Paik's theoretical formulation of the concept of the 'division system' was not yet fully in place, but as a crucial component, the reproductive and regenerating function of contradiction of the division (i.e. internal contradiction for each, mutually functioning as external contradiction, and external contradiction for the peninsular as a whole) has already been sensitively introduced. Only later, when the more adequate analytical concept appears to integrate relevant components into the framework, would the issue of reproduction become more comprehensible. In other words, the importance of this essay is expressed in the methodological level of thought: the Korean peninsula as a whole entity for analysis has come into the picture. The remaining difficult question is: how is it possible to analyze two societies (which had become increasingly different) as a whole without falling

into the theory of 'two countries'? Paik knows the difficult intellectual challenge is severe but cannot escape from it (just as for us living in Taiwan who know the necessity to think about the cross-strait relation but greatly lack sufficient knowledge of the postwar mainland). Paik's own words express the complex sentiment: 'It is already a difficult task to fully research South Korean society, not to mention the lack of necessary materials and the pressure of being voluntarily arrested. At the same time to do research on North Korea is extremely limited in the freedom of expression. Now you know how difficult it can be, but can we not do it!' (Paik 1998a: 114). It is with this strong inner passion that the task to theorize the division system is put on the intellectual agenda.

One year after the publication of the 1988 'The present day national literature and national movement', the 'division system' has become a key word in the essay 'Unification movement and literature'. With the division system as an analytical vocabulary, Paik begins to define the problematic even more sharply: the fundamental contradiction of the division system does not exist between the political regimes of North and South Korea, but 'between the division system and the people of both North and South' (Paik 1998a: 21). From this formulation, Paik's enunciative position has become clear: he speaks from the location of the people of the two Koreas to expose the points of contradiction. Such a formulation further implies that the people from two Koreas are the subject to overcome the division system. Once again, in dialogue with a social scientist, who maintains that concepts such as division or unification do not exist in the basic literature of social sciences and the movement to overcome the division system should be excluded from the scientific thought, Paik argues that such claim is a result of the fact that intellectual work 'has not touched our lives in the era of division and the concrete reality of the division society' (Paik 1998a: 121). With this question in mind, he is now equipped with an analytical eye to read literature. In the 1970s, Paik read

the aforementioned novel, *The Chronicle of a Man Named Han* (by Hwang Sok-Yong), in terms of 'restoring democracy', and now in this 1989 essay, he reads Hwang's *Weapon of the Shadow* in different ways. *Weapon of the Shadow* is a story describing how Koreans are incorporated into the Vietnam War. Utilizing this text, Paik teases out the basic differences between the Korean division and that of the North and South Vietnam: the Vietnam War is a continuation of the anti-colonial movement and a national liberation struggle to expel the invasion of foreign forces, whereas in the case of Korea the intervention of foreign forces (although not directly controlling state apparatus) are the main factor in the division. In Paik's reading, Hwang brings the anti-US, anti-imperialist questions into the agenda of overcoming the division system movement. The other development in this essay is to include North Korea (and the people living in Yanbian, the border of China) in the horizon of national literature, although there is a clear gap in his account, as he is not as confident as in his knowledge of the South Korean literature. Such an effort to learn the conditions of North Korean literature, however, is in itself an intellectual practice to overcome the division. In his closing remarks, Paik writes, 'Even in historically unprecedented rigidity embedded in the brutally killing mood of the division, the North and the South separately created shocking miracle to the world to overcome this previously unheard division system, our unification movement cannot succeed unless it is equally an unprecedentedly creative movement' (Paik 1998a: 153). Paik knows the future is going to be really rough, but has to hold his breath to move forward.

This section, in sum, attempts to present how, from the mid 1970s to the late 1980s, the notion of 'division' existed organically in the background of Paik's thought and was then slowly pushed to the front. I do not have the ability to objectively describe the changing conditions of the larger environment, nor can I sufficiently convey nuanced shifts, mental ups and downs, in this period of Paik's intellectual life. But in

reading his work closely, I could deeply feel that Paik is not one of those theorists who can simply close the door to think abstractly, but someone who participates in the pulse of the society he lives in and breathes with the rhythm of his time. At the same time, he values the necessity of engaging in intellectual debates, without which one cannot follow closely the structural shift of history and cannot generate the lively energy in thought. By the late 1980s, Paik had moved beyond the understanding of the priority of 'restoring democracy' of the 1970s to the realization that the limits and prospects of South Korean democratic movements cannot be separated from the division system issue; division and democracy are now gaining equally high ground, which is for him a readjustment of the directions for the movement of thought. This is his most original insight but also the most controversial part.

### **Theory of overcoming the division system**

Having traced the trajectories of its formation, we are more prepared to discuss the theory of the division system. In the 1990s, Paik did more substantial work in theorizing the division system, including several important essays written in English published in *New Left Review*, *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* and *Interventions*.<sup>11</sup> In 'South Korea: unification and the democratic challenge' (Paik 1993a), Paik points out that the formation of the division system has become the alibi for political leaders in both North and South Korea to mutually use each other to justify and strengthen their authoritarian power. Since the later period of the Rhee Syungman regime (of the late 1950s), except for 'advancing military power to recover the North', unification has been a prohibited discussion topic. Later, when the social call for integration became stronger and stronger, Park Chung-Hee (of the South) and Kim Il-Sung (of the North) were forced to sign the 1972 Joint Communiqué; but Park utilized it to consolidate his own power to the extent that he made himself a lifetime president, whereas Kim seized the

opportunity to revise the socialist constitution to strengthen his own power. Further, both sides exploited the popular psychic fear of being annexed by the other to reproduce the legitimacy of authoritarian governmentality. Similar instances also occurred in 1989 when Roh Tae-Woo abused his power to announce a state of emergency to voluntarily arrest dissidents. These scenarios are also familiar in Taiwan's authoritarian regime to arrest political dissidents in the name of anti-communism or national security, or, in other contexts, preventing communist invasion, and therefore the need to consolidate leadership became the rhetoric for oppression. Simply put, the existence of the division system has been the best weapon to suppress democratic forces, and therefore, to reinforce division has become the consensus without having to be negotiated by both regimes.

To stress that the division system did not come into existence overnight, Paik discussed the historical process with reference to the historical background of the Vietnamese and German experiences. He sees the division in Vietnam as originating from the means of war by the US to take the colonizer's position of France, and therefore the Vietnam War is a continuity of the anti-colonial movement, with the result that US lost the war and the North and South united. The German instance reflected the local division under the global structure of the Cold War; when one side lost its strength, the division quickly collapsed: the strong West unified the weak East. Paik goes on to argue that although the Cold War was a major factor for the division to take shape in the Korean Peninsula, the main force was the US global strategy, which was formed long before the Cold War. The end of the Korean War was the landmark for the division, with the North strongly backed by the communist camp led by the USSR and China, and the South supported by the capitalist bloc led by the US and Japan. After the War, because the two strongly antagonistic states were shaping their own societies in communist or capitalist ideology, systematic differences were gradually built up and

expressed in national, inter-bloc and intra-peninsular conflicts (Paik 1993a: 78), which were interwoven with internal social contradictions, such as class and gender. For instance, the militarization of society enhances the power of patriarchy, and South Korea's anti-communist national policy contributed to the severe suppression of democratic movements such as the worker's struggle. Paik therefore maintains that to overcome the division is the necessary assumption of the democratic movement (Paik 1993a: 79).

Among all the essays, 'In order to make it a daily life movement of overcoming division system' (Paik 2005) is perhaps the most clearly articulated statement. With some hesitation to 'graphically' visualize the division system, Paik gives us a descriptive account of his theory. The system is composed of three interlocking dynamic relations: the world system, the division system and the social system of each of the two societies. Made up from the social systems of the two Koreas, the division system is an integral part of the world system. Among the three open systems, there exists two different specific relations; the specificities of relations are contingent upon the changing historical conditions (Paik 2005: 24). The capitalist world system corresponds to the subsystem of South Korean society, which is made up of different capitalist institutions, which cannot be self-sufficient, and its operation has been linked with the world system at a higher level. The most controversial part is, Paik argues, that the socialist system of North Korea is neither autonomous nor independent from the world capitalist economy, but it is through the latter's superstructure (modern inter-state system) that connections are established. In other words, in Paik's picture, the capitalist world system is the base structure of the globe, whereas the network of inter-state relations, made up by national states (e.g. the United Nations), is the superstructure. Moreover, neither North nor South Koreas are self-complete systems, and therefore, one should avoid reductionist understanding to simply equate South

Korea as a capitalist society and the North as a socialist one. But the structure of division system, cutting across the two societies and encompassing the entire Korean Peninsula, functions effectively to mobilize conflict, hostility and mutual fear, and in turn reproduce and solidify the division system itself.

Paik goes further to point out that the conditions and ways in which the two Koreas participate in the world system are not voluntary but mediating via the division system. When the tension of the system increases, the more likely it is the world system can exercise power in it. To understand this, once again, in terms of the cross-strait relations, especially on the inter-state level of the world system, it means that when the relation across the straits deteriorates more, other states (big or small) have more chance to take advantage of it, because the two states would compete for international support. Paik argues, 'the operation of the "system" of either North or South cannot be adequately explicated without the concept of the "division system" as a middle term. This is not merely an epistemological matter; it is also a matter of praxis in that on the Korean peninsula, any effective movement is inconceivable in separation from the task of overcoming the division system, whether the movement in question aims at reunification or at amelioration within the bounds of a divided half, or at reform or revolutionary transformation of the world-system on a larger scale' (Paik 2005: 26). In other words, it is through the division system as an analytical concept that we are able to see the moving field of operation, either in part or as a whole; at the same time, only in arriving at this point of understanding does the division system itself become an object to be overcome. The Korean nation can acquire a fair subject position in the world system only by dismantling the division system. In Paik's analysis, it has also become clear that overcoming the division system is not an internal and domestic problem within the Korean peninsula, but also a movement to reform and transform the world system, and practices in Korea can be



a starting point to issue a breakthrough. It is here that the movement to overcome the division system can make an important contribution to the world.

As mentioned earlier, 'national security' was utilized by the state to sabotage democracy, to prolong the regime and to strengthen military power, and to reproduce the division system itself. In the Korean context, because of the tragic suffering experienced in the Korean War and because, unlike the Taiwan-mainland relation where the Taiwan Straits provide a space of separation, the two Koreas are physically connected, 'national security' becomes less an ideological maneuvering but an important material and mental basis for the formation of the division system. It results in a peculiar phenomenon: hardliners on both sides hate each other but at the same time mutually cooperate with each other, forming a subtle symbiotic relation to jointly sustain the division. Of course, this would be an embarrassing situation if one considers how the mighty power of the Korean nationalism would shoulder the accusation of allowing a foreign power (i.e. the US) to put military forces all over one's national territory, especially as is widely claimed that this is already the end of the Cold War. That the Six-party Talk has become the site for struggle in international politics further reveals the powerful effect of the division system. It, on the one hand, allows various foreign forces to come in, and on the other hand, weakens the opposing strength of the two Koreas inside the division system. The tension of contradiction between these two tendencies is nakedly expressed.

What is, then, Paik's proposed strategy to overcome this gigantic division system formed in the past half century?

Paik warns from the very beginning that, although the theory of division system presupposes the two blocks of interests (one is the benefited of the system and the other is the Korean *minjung* who are the victims), one cannot quickly jump into a populist position seeing the two regimes as the enemies; just as *minjung's* interests on each

side are varied, and with state as a converging site of political forces, the interests of the two regimes are also different. Activists and subjects of the movement to overcome the division system will have to locate themselves in the concrete conditions to be sensitive to the changing shape of the field of forces and then to push forward the project for the interest of *minjung*. He suggests that this is like a 'plural equation with two states and a people which is both one and two' (Paik 2005: 29). This equation includes the forces of the world system, and therefore one cannot overlook the presence of international powers (such as the US, China, Japan and USSR) in this dynamic field, and also one would have to weigh the interests and differences among them in order to decide how to tilt the direction of the movement. Paik cites the US as an example, suggesting that the US is least threatened in this dynamic, as long as the capitalist system is not radically challenged; therefore, the movement does not have to over-demonize the US, but has to understand it objectively as a factor to be taken into account in the force field of international powers.

Paik fully recognizes the immense difficulty involved in the overcoming division system movement where *minjung* is conceived as the subject, not only because people in the North and the South Koreas are mutually ignorant about conditions of their counterpart, but also because when the movement is fused in daily life in the foreseeable future, the gap will become even larger. Here, he relies on instinctual optimism:

The theory of division system, therefore, envisions an alliance between the peoples of the two Koreas around the common goal of a reunification that would maximize popular initiatives in their own lives, even while people on each side pursue separate agenda for internal reform or transformation as their immediate task. Thus they may start with different tasks, but their movements are bound to converge in one big stream toward the middle-term goal of overcoming the division system and the long-term one of transforming

the world-system, for their different short-term agendas are basically derived from the operation of the same world-system and mediated by the peninsula-wide division system. (Paik 2005: 31–32)

Like any other social scientific projection towards the future, Paik's futurist forecast is the most challenged part of his theory. People across the Taiwan Strait have been interacting for the past 20 years, but the gap is still unbridgeable. Although in their own society they each may hold a critical attitude towards the state, they trust their own regime far more than the counterpart. How to form a trans-border alliance among the people is the most challenging obstacle. Regarding questions as such, Paik's hope lies in people's experience in dealing with a concrete crisis, such as the fact that the South Korean people's helping hands are actively mobilized in responding to the food shortage crisis in the North; such humanist acts will enhance mutual trust and collaboration. Indeed, a similar experience happened to the Sichuan's earthquake crisis, when people in Taiwan actively donated resources to help their counterparts on the mainland; in the process, it has recreated the opportunity to establish more friendly relations.

The theory of ODS (Overcoming Division System) cannot avoid taking on the imagination of the future state structure, including how to treat the two existing states. Paik's theory posits that the states are the key players in upholding the division system and therefore the objects to be overcome. But from *minjung's* point of view, the movement cannot possibly support a military conquest as a means for one state to annex the other; therefore, the movement needs to constantly empower the people to the extent that they will over-watch the interests of the two regimes themselves to prevent the state from taking military action. Since peaceful coexistence is the prerequisite, Paik proposes that the loose form of a compound state<sup>12</sup> to compose a federation or confederation is a more realistic vision. And in fact, both the 1991 Joint Communiqué and the 2000 Joint Declaration

after the summit of the two Kims are moving towards this direction (Paik 2005: 33–34). To him, a confederation is clearly a transitional stage; the specific direction for constituting an acceptable and workable political form is something that cannot be planned a priori and has to be discussed in the process. But only in creating new forms of a federal state that actively responds to the people's demand and wins their consent can the end of the division be ultimately realized. In the postscript of this important essay, Paik returns to his position as a literary critic, mobilizing a metaphor to describe the two Korea's relation:

If, for instance, we adopted the metaphor of a married couple, then reunification needed to be viewed not as a fresh union of two innocent youths, but a re-union of an old couple who had quarreled and separated for a long time, leading different lives and perhaps even having other love affairs, but now finally trying to re-establish their relationship after coming to a belated realization that this kind of separated life would no longer do. (Paik 2005: 71).

This rich metaphor offers rich analysis on different levels. The extra-marital affairs can be communism or capitalism. The heated quarrels occurred when both were too young and insistent to understand each other's difference. But the key is whether both sides have finally realized that the relation is not finished and there is still a strong emotional desire to come back together. If so, the rational calculation of interests is not going to work, nor is the need for a ritual ceremony to marry again the rule to follow. Having been divorced for a long time, the two can always cohabit without being legally married again, or can live together in a flexible mode of life. In a 2004 public lecture, Paik gave his profound expression:

I suggest that we change the concept of unification to be rid of the rigid notion of the singular nation-state for 'complete unification'. We need to have a realistically new idea to enter the 'first stage of unification' while making sure

the North and South find an entry point to discuss between the confederation and low level federation. In other words, we will need to set aside the issue of what is unification and when will it happen. Instead, we move into many workable parts to peacefully create the interaction between the North and South and more substantial forms of unification. If, perhaps there will be a day, when the North and South suddenly agree to say, 'Oh, the unification is already there. Why don't we declare unification to the world?' This, I would say, is our own distinct way of unification.<sup>13</sup>

Simply put, Paik is for a unification process that is gradual and coexistent, not the German or Vietnam mode (i.e. a stronger side takes over the other); freer interaction between people on both sides will defuse hostility and move towards reconciliation. Such form of unification is more substantial. The voluntary process of interaction itself may create a new form of unification. The form of political system, not invented in theory to serve as guidelines, will emerge organically in the mechanism of real interaction between the two sides. Bringing the issue of unification back into the ODS problem, Paik reminds us time and again that the real contribution of ODS far exceeds the limited meaning of national unification: 'unification of the Korean peninsula has to be conceptualized not so much as national reunification *per se* as the abolition of the division system as a crucial subset of the world system (Paik 2000: 73). That is, the goal for dismantling the division system far exceeds the commonly conceived meaning of unification movement.

As a realistic materialist, Paik takes the economic question seriously to suggest that, to overcome the division system, South Korea has to maintain competitiveness in the global economy to win over *minjung's* support. He fully recognizes that the factors (such as low wages, long working hours, or the heavy reliance on the American military and financial support) for fast economic growth in the postwar era no longer exist. How to maintain a strong competitiveness

becomes a central precondition to dismantle the division system. At the same time, the evacuation of the system within the boundary of the Korean peninsula is a big step towards building a better society; in the context of the entire world, it is also a stride towards transforming the capitalist world system. He thinks that the existence of the division system has not only prevented North Korea from becoming a truly socialist country, but also South Korea from becoming a true liberal democracy, and although both sides claim they are, the gap with reality is huge. More importantly, at this moment of history when the ideas of the free market and liberal democracy have been challenged and have lost credibility, in the reintegration process Koreans will need to search for alternative forms of democracy and economy that would work best in Korean peninsula (Paik 2005: 74-75). In short, ODS would also necessarily mean overcoming the existing imaginations of freedom, democracy, market, and socialism through the interactions and fusions of the two different societies to create new forms and logics. For Paik, this is the potential contribution to the world the Korean nation can make.

Paik knows that a movement cannot be realized simply by a theorist's own imagination. The second half of the essay is a dialogue with three major social movements (worker's, women's and environmental) to forge the necessary connections between their concerns and the problematic of the division system. He hopes to persuade activists to bring the ODS into the agenda of their own movement and to mobilize public consciousness to participate actively in their own daily life practices. It is certainly difficult for us to evaluate whether individual movement groups have accepted Paik's persuasion, partly because each group has its own priority of concern. Unless the larger pressure reaches an unbearable level, forcing various social movements to come together to overcome crisis, it would be difficult for the ODS movement to find common ground to unify diverse social forces.

This essay so far has traced through the formation of ODS theory in Paik Nak-chung's thoughts. Let me now try to sum up the theory in my own language. The birth of the division system in the Korean peninsula was a result of the political history of the region and has its own formation process. The immediate watershed was the Korean War, which has been the landmark for the formation of the Cold War in East Asia. The longer process has to do with the global history of colonial imperialism, in which the Cold War can be seen as an extension and the US replaces the hegemonic position of the Japanese empire to enter East Asia. If one sees this history as one single process, then the formation of the division system has to be traced back to the initial moment of Japanese colonialism in Korean peninsula. The process before and after the Second World War cannot be analytically divided. To put it crudely, the corrupt feudal monarchy and the invasion of Japanese imperialism were the two intersection preconditions leading to the later division of the Korean nation in the 1940s. The loss of the Korean national sovereignty and subjectivity during the 40 years of Japan's colonial rule was the precondition at the end of the Second World War. It was precisely the moment when Japan was defeated and withdrew from the peninsula so that the Korean people could entertain the notion of rebuilding the nation, but as their force was not strong enough to resist international powers from the outside, the US and USSR found the opportunity to intervene, just like an already injured person who is too weak to defend themselves. In this regard, the ODS necessarily means re-examining the historical relations between the feudal system, pre-war colonialism and post-war neocolonial imperialism. Overshadowed by world history, the division system on the Korean peninsula is made up of three interpenetrating, mutually conditioning, deterrent arrangements: the world system, the division system and the two societies. Changing power relations in the world system (including capitalist and inter-state systems) will directly reshape the balance of power in the division system itself (such as

the fall of Socialist bloc around the end of the 1980s weakened Russian's strength and gave rise to Chinese influence, or the rising Japan in the 1970s and China in the 1990s changed the US's strategic alliance relation). At the center of social formation, the two state machines' (including military confrontation, national security, ideological education, etc) internal shifts of dynamics (such as the change of regime in South Korea, the substitution of new state leadership in the North, and the increase of the South's economic power) directly influence the shape of the division system. Although the division system itself is constantly changing, just as its relations with the world system and the two social systems are also shifting, it has become structurally self-autonomous, forming a self-reproducing mechanism. Because of the existence of the division system, the autonomy and subjectivity of the two Koreas (in the East Asia region or in the world system) are very limited. In contrast to a non-divided society, it has to rely more on external forces or has created more chances for foreign power to intervene; because of the relatively incomplete sovereign power, it therefore has to suffer from the damage of national dignity, such as allowing US military bases stationed within national territory. South Korea has one of the world's largest anti-American movements, but at the same time may well be the territory that is most open to Americanization; in pursuit of American modernity as a point of measurement, the South may in turn discriminate against the backwardness of the North. Such a contradiction is a result of the division. If it took a long time for the division system to be formed and its effects are deeply inscribed on the popular psyche, then the ODS movement cannot resolve the problem only on the visible level but has to echo Paik's call to work on the level of social subjectivity to become daily life practices, since *minjung* themselves are supposed to be the subject of the movement.

### Rethinking cross-strait relations

Paik himself has argued that the concept of the division system is created to grasp the

conditions of the Korean peninsula and is not applicable to other instances, such as the situation of Taiwan and mainland China. The physical sizes of the two Koreas are approximately the same and their strengths relatively equivalent, whereas the differential scale between Taiwan and China is huge and is close to the category of the 'partial state' (Paik 1998a: 113). Moreover,

[F]rom the PRC's point of view, Taiwan represents not so much a division like that on Korean Peninsula, but a sort of unfinished business after China was effectively unified in 1949 with the defeat of Chiang Kai-Shek's forces by the Chinese communists. So certainly this is not a genuine division of roughly equal contestants. (Paik 2008: 212)

Paik's view on the unequal relation between Taiwan and China is crucial here. It reminds us that although we need to insist on treating both sides equally in dealing with cross-strait issues, we cannot fantasize that the map and size of Taiwan can be arbitrarily expanded to infinity. However, the cross-strait relation does not belong to the partition type, such as India and Pakistan, or Malaysia and Singapore. In these two cases, the two sides agree to be separate and mutually recognize each other as a political entity to enter the inter-state system, whereas in the postwar era, both CCP and KMT refuse to be separate, and both insist on one China and claim to represent the entire China. But it is precisely due to the differences in the strength and size, as well as long-term separation, that the competition in the inter-state system has been particularly severe in the form of either/or, life and death relations, which has created the opportunity for the international power to take advantage. During the DPP regime (2000–2008), the 'consensus' that used to exist between the two sides (KMT and CCP) no longer worked, and the separatist direction of movement has revitalized the 'pro America, anti-communist' tendency, which had been weakened by the waning Cold War. Indeed, what theoretical concept can be more accurate than the division system to describe the long-term formed mechanism to reproduce

antagonism between Taiwan and mainland China? If, as Paik has suggested, all local historical experiences are unique and cannot be fully explained by a simple theoretical model, then perhaps it is through inter-referencing Paik's theory of ODS that the problem of the Taiwan Strait will emerge in a clearer form to generate more productive knowledge.

How, then, can Paik's theory of ODS, referring specifically to the Korean peninsula, be useful in rethinking the cross-strait relations?

The crucial methodological principle of ODS theory is to analyze the two Koreas on the peninsula as a totality. In this regard, discussions of the cross-strait relation would have to pay attention to the separate conditions of each side, the relation between the two and the historical process as a whole. This mode of thinking is analytically important since it is close to the real historical process, but difficult to carry out, for it presupposes that the analyst has already acquired proper understanding about the historical conditions of both sides so that the substantial relation in history can be established. Intellectually unprepared to fully grasp the postwar history of mainland China, I can only offer the following discussion built more on the understanding of the Taiwan side.

If the beginning point of division between the two Koreas can be located at the end of the Korean War in 1953, then the starting point for the separation between Taiwan and mainland China must be pinpointed in 1895, when Taiwan was ceded after the Sino-Japanese War, which is 60 years longer than the two Koreas, and by now the separation has exceeded one century. Long-term division has created alienating effects for living subjects. In addition, the two Koreas are divided by the invisible line of the 38th degree, whereas the Taiwan Strait creates a physically separated geographical space. Temporal and spatial factors make the divisions across the Strait deeper and more complex, and not conducive for integration. Although, in both instances, the division must be traced back



to the colonial rule of the Japanese empire, the experiences are inherently different. Koreans were not divided under the Japanese rule, whereas Taiwan became a Japanese colony while the mainland was never under Japan's rule and fell into the fate of a semi-colony on the edge to be split up by international powers. Different historical experiences contributed to the ethnic conflicts in postwar Taiwan and have intensified the difficulty for mutual understanding. Paik has pointed out that Japanese rule in the Korean peninsula was far harsher than in Taiwan, which in part reinforces Korea's stronger drive for national unification (Paik 2008), whereas instances like the Nanjing massacre have been inscribed in the popular memory of the mainland Chinese, and shaped the strong national hatred towards Japan. In other words, the pre-war historical experiences as well as the different understanding of these events in Taiwan and the mainland have become the important elements preconditioning the postwar division (Chen 2006). Such a condition does not apply to the two Koreas. Further, during the Cold War confrontation, there was no space for South Korea and Taiwan to openly discuss the complex of Japanese colonialism before the 1990s, whereas in mainland China and North Korea, the Japanese imperialist invasion has always been a key question in modern history of the nation. Such overt differences mean that, intellectually, if the two sides across the Strait have the desire to overcome the division, the pre-war Japan's rule in Taiwan and the history of the anti-Japanese war in the mainland will need to be re-examined and shared, and cannot be skipped over by simplistic nationalist historiography. That is, if modern history produced in the mainland has focused on the eight years of Sino-Japanese war rather than the earlier one in 1895, and Taiwan does not have proper understanding of the eight-year war, the understanding of the formation of the division will continue to be discrepant. Similarly, the issue of 'US imperialism in East Asia' is fundamentally disagreed on by the two sides across the Strait. The Kwangju event of 1980 has begun

to build an understanding that the Korean division has to be understood in relation to the US hegemony in the global structure of the Cold War, whereas postwar Taiwan had never had a larger scale of cultural and intellectual movement to challenge the legitimacy of US intervention in both KMT and CCP regimes. In sum, how to intellectually overcome the existing divergent understandings of modern history (official or otherwise) is crucial. The production of alternative histories will have to be set not only in the background of the modern history of China, but will have to be methodologically placed in the dynamic field of world and regional history, so that the result will not fall into the set pattern of Sino-centrism or Taiwan-centrism.

Directly connected with the issue of reconstructing history is how to carry out research on the historical formation of the division across the Strait. The question is not so much whether the concept of division is applicable to the cross-strait relation, but whether there has been a systemic build up of an opposing and antagonistic system effectively operating on the levels of local societies, the two states, interstate and capitalist world systems. This question is worth debating and investigating. If the answer is positive, then historical research must be carried out, and, perhaps, a more refined analytical concept closer to the reality of the cross-strait relation will emerge in the process. My own view is that the corresponding echoes and functions of the Korean division system Paik constructs can be found in the Taiwan-mainland counterpart. Moreover, looking back, we cannot explain these formations of the postwar pro-US/anti-communist regime in Taiwan and the pro-Soviet/anti-capitalist regime in the mainland without referring to the reality of division. The long-term formed social personalities continue to exist, expressed in the form of utter distrust in human relations, and have not been dissolved in Taiwan's democratization process; these effects cut deeply in the social body beyond the boundary of the state structure. On the inter-state level, the two states have competed in the

international arena. From postwar until the present, 'dollar (bribery) diplomacy' has been commonly deployed on both sides. The Papua New Guinea scandal of 2008 (of buying diplomatic relations) and President Chen Sui-Bian's abuse of a secret diplomacy fund are salient examples. If we count in the national defense budget, which has generated the most severe confrontation between the two states, in dealing with the US military industry mediated by Washington, the picture of the existence of something like the division system becomes very clear. In other words, an analytical notion like the division system is needed to integrate different mechanisms and forces at work so that the operating logics of the division can be identified. And it will be more possible to sort out who in this process are the victims or beneficiaries, and who are the potential allies for the ODS movement. In short, the notion of the division system has analytical value and explanatory power, and has strategic implication for the movement.

Undoubtedly, Paik's theory of ODS is strongly motivated for national unification in the Korean peninsula, and is directly related to the national and nationalism question. This may not be a serious problem in the instance of the two Koreas, and perhaps less an issue for mainland China, but may trigger huge anxiety and doubts in the context of Taiwan, where an emotionally heated debate on integration or separation has dominated the political scene for the past 20 years. The difference between the two Koreas and the mainland-Taiwan relationship is that there is an unbridgeable disagreement in Taiwan over the national question. And the most touchy issue is whether the discussion on ODS will necessarily point towards unification. My own understanding is that the ODS movement refers to something much larger than, and cannot be reduced to, the unification movement. It includes issues such as the demilitarization and anti-fascist tendencies within local societies, the right of free travel and migration, and critique of imperialism and capitalism. But it does not mean the unification and independence issue can be evaded. What needs to be emphasized is that

the discussion on unification versus independence cannot stand on its own, but has to be located in the debate about social right and the project for overcoming imperialism and capitalism. Only by doing so can the unification versus independence issue reach a wider horizon of analysis. The assumption of the debate is to fully recognize that both unification and independence must be a process, not an end in itself; it should be seen as a step towards social autonomy, deimperialization and liberation from the exploitation of capitalism. In other words, once Paik's theory of ODS is employed analytically in the context of the cross-strait relations, it does not assume a teleology for unification. Even if it has the potential to move toward unification, it is for the purpose of reconciliation between people across the Strait. ODS is a form and means but not the ultimate end. To state the least, the issue over unification versus independence has to be relativized, not absolutized; it needs to move from regarding the controversy as something sacred to something historical and realistic. Once again, it may well be the case that Paik's own account assumes a subjective will for a unified Korea, but holding such assumption to be the only agenda in the context of cross-strait relations is reductionist and essentialist, in that it narrows the complexity of the issue and adopts a statist line of thinking that evades an entire spectrum of issues. In a different context, I have pointed out that the cross-strait issue does have to do with the national sentiment, but cannot be only that, and it has to be placed within the vision of the integration of the Asian region as a whole; and Asia's move toward independence and autonomy is a move towards regional peace as an integral part of the global balance of power (Chen 2010).

'Unification versus independence' is an emotionally charged issue and therefore it is difficult to initiate public debate, not to mention the fact that it has become rigidified as a moral issue in the process of political mobilization for the past 30 years in Taiwan. But as critical intellectuals, we have to find ways to deal with the problem. My own

personal experience of moving around in different parts of the neighboring Asia tells me that Taiwan independence does not have popular support. Without having to consider whether independence will trigger warfare, what needs to be seriously considered is whether Taiwan wants to isolate itself from the region. Is this isolation beneficial for the people living on the island? Anyone who is familiar with the logic of the inter-state system would know that Taiwan needs the support from the CCP state to join the United Nations. If that is the direction to go, Taiwan will have to reconcile with China and win over the support from the public and the state. In the past 20 years, the KMT and DPP regimes' agitation of the movement to join the UN has become money diplomacy in exchange for nothing but pure psychological satisfaction. In reality, it has made a fool of the public, and worse it effectively reinforces competition and antagonism across the Strait to intensify the power of the division system. It is self-cheating and self-defeating. Conversely, is maintaining the status quo the best way? The status quo is to accept the existing condition and does not seek changes; it will prolong the problems. Paik has observed that the Korean division system is shaking now, although the interaction between people of the two Koreas has yet happened. For the Taiwan-China counterpart, the system is changing more rapidly, marked by direct flights across the Taiwan Strait in 2008, ending the suspension of such flights over the past 60 years. Therefore, pro status quo is not the strategic choice for the ODS movement. Standing along the side of the *minjung*, we will need to more actively propose agendas to push the movement forward. Such agendas would include making clear to the public that if the huge amount of national budgets that used to be allocated for opposing 'the other side' (such as defense, military, information and secret diplomacy) can now be shifted towards the economic livelihood of the people and social welfare, people's living conditions can be meaningfully improved, while the reliance on the division system can be gradually weakened.

If the subject of the ODS movement is *minjung*, not as an abstract theoretical category but has concrete historical attribution, then it necessarily relates back to the 'national' question. When Paik uses the term nation (*minzu*) there seems to be no controversy. It refers to the Korean people fostered by the history of the Korean peninsula; nation does not imply a flat nationality but a subject group with a depth of history. When the term is used in the mainland and Taiwan, the question becomes complicated. When Paik delivered talks in Taiwan, he took special note that 'national literature' (*minzu wenxue*) in the mainland means the literature of the minorities and the way he uses this term is roughly equivalent to 'Chinese literature' or 'Taiwanese literature'. That is to say, under the framework of a modern nation-state, China is in reality composed of many nations (*minzu*), and '*zhunghua minzu*' (Chinese nation) is the umbrella term to integrate Han and other minorities; at the same time, the term is inaccurate because the Han nation in the historical process has mixed with other nations.<sup>14</sup> Nation (*minzu*) is the product of modern world history. When deployed in the Third World, East Asia and Chinese context, nation cannot be de-linked with the history of imperialism. The national liberation movement referred to the colonized subject's attempt to liberate from imperialism in the form of an independent nation-state. In the process, ethnic nationalism has also become the mobilizing strategy to grab state power, and therefore critical intellectuals are very cautious of nationalism and even afraid of talking about the national question. In postwar Taiwan, we were first intimidated by KMT's Chinese nationalist indoctrination and later frustrated by the disaster of ethnic politics brought by the DPP Taiwanese nationalism. We are thus conditioned by these negative historical experiences of nationalism to the extent of having to abandon the subject position of the 'nation' to combat it. This is what Chao Kang calls 'subject without history',<sup>15</sup> or to use Paik's expression, because of the negative emotional feeling, we hand over the

'nation' to the political regimes. In effect, we have happily become cosmopolitan with no national identity! The first step to overcome the division system is to overcome our own negative feelings against the nation and nationalism. Rather than moving away from it, we need to fully recognize the historical existence of the nation and shoulder the negative effects that come with it so as to reclaim the post-national subject position of being Chinese with a historical depth. This position is not an idealized or moralized one, but one that is capable of embodying history while problematizing the notion of Chinese to constantly rethink who we are. We will have to reconnect with the modern critical intellectual tradition, exemplified by Lu Xun of the 1920s, in order to enrich the depth of the problematics. We are highly aware that this adoption of the Chinese identity is a response to the contradictions produced by the Taiwan Independence movement and DPP's de-sinicization movement.

Born, brought up and now working in Taiwan, we consider the construction of Taiwan identity to be a legitimate task. Our own intellectual work and emotional lives have partaken in the nativist and democratic movements. Although we are highly suspicious of the development of Taiwan's democracy on the level of partisan politics, we are very proud of the autonomous social forces and the lively energy of the society we have helped cultivate and now live in. What we cannot agree is to pit the Taiwanese against Chinese identity and force people to make an either/or choice. It is a-historical to exclude Chinese identity from the notion of Taiwanese. Placed in a longer historical period, the formation of modern Taiwan and modern history cannot be properly explained if they are disconnected from China. When any political movement starts to attack others' cultural identity in order to consolidate its own power, it has become exclusionary politics. Part of the energy of the 2006 Red-shirt Movement was precisely to resist the constant insults to one's own identity.

Chinese identity is not simply a domestic issue to Taiwan, but one that cannot be

evaded in the cross-strait relation. To return to the historical process, searching for a common identity is a step towards the ODS movement among the *minjung* and even paving the way for the future integration of the region. For those of us living in Taiwan, in particular after the experience of the Republic of China being expelled from the UN in the 1970s, to be 'self-reliant' has been the sentiment and mode of existence. The merit is a strong sense of autonomy (e.g. Taiwan's movement and NGO sectors never relied on foreign funding); the weakness is self-righteousness, losing the ability to think for others. Oftentimes, it mutilates the 'Taiwan subject consciousness' to mean 'I can do whatever I want to do,' otherwise it means the absence of subjectivity, and worse, it is to condemn the opponent as a traitor of Taiwan. This widely diffused consciousness is extremely destructive to Taiwan. But if we seriously want to overcome the division across the Strait, we will need to learn the real conditions of mainland China, and should not adopt the cultivated habit of jumping to judgment in the same way we treat things and events in Taiwan. If we are able to understand the reality of the other side, we in turn may better understand ourselves.

The interaction between two societies will help but is not equivalent to the reconciliation among people across the Strait. In this process, the state does play an important role due to its structural position. Therefore, the interaction between the ODS movement and the state is a necessary process. As Paik honestly puts it,

To push forth such an agenda is the task of the intellectuals, artists and activists. For policy makers in the narrow sense of the word, it is enough if they show dedication and professionalism in their endeavors for economic recovery. As for political leaders, it will be remarkable enough if they remember to stress – supposing they keep doing so to the end – 'democracy' alongside 'the market economy'; and even more so if they have visions as well for the reconciliation and reunification of the two

Koreas. However, in view of the fact that realities, not his or her personal wish, are what move a political leader, the future of countless human beings, including Koreans, will obviously depend upon how far our practice for overcoming the division system can deepen, and how widely that project may become rooted in people's lives. (Paik 2005: 8)

Paik's statement was made in the context of the 1997 financial crisis. At that point, he must have not been able to imagine that the dramatic Summit between the two Kims would take place in 2000, not to mention that he himself would move to the front stage and become the chief representative of the '*minjian*' (non-official popular realm) (Chen 2003) to implement the June 15 Declaration. My own guess is that Paik once again must have thought that there were candidates better than himself to do this work, just as he thought there were better prepared social scientists to articulate the theory of the division system. Taking up the leading position in the ODS movement, he has perhaps run the risk of being criticized for working too closely with the state.

It is not the purpose of this essay to propose action plans for ODS. I can only offer preliminary thoughts here. Paik's theory is grounded in *minjian*, and takes *minjung* as the subject of the movement. Paik's position echoes the political position of 'popular democracy' which I and other intellectuals developed in the 1980s. Popular democracy theory does not neglect the existence of the state, but would not suggest that the reconciliation across the Strait is completely the responsibility of the state, especially in places such as Taiwan and South Korea, where the so-called democratic transition has created all kinds of impasses, and the partisan considerations for self-interest among all political parties are highly suspicious. Therefore, to expand substantial interactions among people and to limit the intervention and interference from the state is a realistic proposal at the present moment. For instance, direct flights

across the Strait is a crucial breakthrough, not only in bringing convenience to people's daily lives, but also in its potential to speed up mutual understanding. If the change of the regime would lead the state to consider the suspension of the direct flights, it will necessarily draw strong public resentment. Therefore, popular interaction will restrict the regime's chance and legitimacy to disrupt the ongoing practice of direct flights. Concretely speaking, the DPP as a political party will have to readjust its direction to come up with a more realistic policy in dealing with the mainland and to compete with KMT. Otherwise, DPP will only be a negative force and will be counterproductive to Taiwan's political development. In my own view, the major problem is that outside the state and political party there is no public forum similar to the one established between North and South Korea after the June 15 Declaration. How to establish a public forum with credibility to convey diverse views of *minjung* is a necessary direction in which to move.

Paik's theory emphasizes the necessity of making the project of reconciliation a part of daily life in order to form a movement of larger scale. In a way, the daily life reconciliation movement is already taking place across the Strait. We will need to produce public discourse on the meaning of interactions that are happening now and to increase people's awareness of being the subject of ODS movement themselves so that they would more actively learn about the life experiences of the mainland brides in our communities (through cross-strait marriage) before they came to Taiwan, or try to understand with goodwill the hardship of peasant workers in mainland China's major cities as seen on Taiwan's TV, and to keep away from politicians who like to incite hatred among people. These directions are potential soils for nurturing reconciliation.

Let me end the essay with a real sentiment. Thinking about the cross-strait relation through Paik's theory, I feel rather embarrassed. There are huge intellectual populations in Taiwan and the mainland,



but no individual or group has put forward a similar analytical framework with equal intellectual intensity, not to mention the desire to address the issue to higher levels on regional peace or overcoming the world capitalist system. Such a visionary thinker of breath of mind does not exist in contemporary Chinese intellectual circles. ODS is a political and intellectual project. It situates itself in *minjian* and goes beyond the traditional political thinking that aims at the state. The very existence of the theory exposes how the issue of cross-strait relation has been addressed and confined by the statist framework, and how we, as critical intellectuals, have not fulfilled our responsibility. With ODS theory as analytical framework to base our thoughts, actors will not fall behind the steps of the political regimes and parties. Once the analysis is made clear as to the reproductive function of the division system, and the purpose is clearly to dismantle it, we know when and on what issue we will support or oppose the policy formulation of the state. For instances, we will support ending the diplomatic wars and the removal of the missiles deployed in the coastal area of the mainland; we oppose the Taiwanese media's stigmatization of tourists from the mainland, and the state's foolish policy of not acknowledging the mainland's education diploma. In the past, without a visionary intellectual project, we could only follow and would always fall behind the political situations. With the vision of the ODS we can work actively and become the subject of the movement. I take this to be the foremost inspiration from the theory of ODS.

I personally hope critical circles in both Taiwan and the mainland will work together to be concerned with our common historical problems and to start the action by overcoming the intellectual division system of knowledge.

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Because this essay is an integral part of the five papers presented by the 'Overcoming "Division System"' group at the 20th anniversary conference for the journal *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* in 2008, it should therefore be read alongside the other essays. See, in particular, Chao (2009), Chu (2009), Ning (2009), and Zheng (2009).

### Notes

1. Taiwan's leading leftist writer Chen Yingzhen (1989) was the first one inspired by Paik's notion of division in the Chinese-speaking world, when he visited Seoul and reproduced a reportage on the wide range of social, cultural and political movements in South Korea in late 1980s.
2. For a brief account of the history and project of the journal, see Kim (2001).
3. Unless noted, most of the essays discussed here are based on the volume of Chinese translation. See Paik (1998a).
4. 'Division' was the term Professor Paik started to use during this period. It appeared as early as 1975 in 'The current stage of national literature'. Although in the Chinese translation of the article, the term was translated as 'split', the translator's note explained that 'the original term in all of the articles is division' (Paik 1998a: 6).
5. In his first talk when he visited Taiwan on May, 2008, Paik Nak-chung accurately distinguished the difference between *minjok munhak* and *kookmin munhak* (both are translated as 'national literature' in English). The latter uses nation as a unit. For example, South and North Korea has their *kookmin munhak* respectively, whereas *minjok munhak* encompasses the whole Korean race.
6. See Paik (2008).
7. Paik Nak-chung's other discussions on Third World include 'Korean literature and Third World literature' (1978), 'Third World literature and *mingjung* literature' (1979) and 'Viewpoint on Third World literature' (1982). These items are included in his publication list. See Paik (1998a: 593-603).

8. About literary criticism, please see the third part of Paik (1998a), including chapters such as 'Understanding western classic novels by subjective stance' and 'Zen poetry and realism', and so on.
9. See 'Contemporary national literature and national movement' (Paik 1998a: 108) or Paik (2005: 8).
10. I rely on the 1988 translation in Chinese (Hwang 1988). For other representative work available in Chinese translation, see (Hwang 2002, 2006).
11. See Paik (1993a, 1993b, 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1998b, 2000).
12. For a more detailed account of the compound state, see Baik (2008, 2009).
13. See the Chinese translation of the 'The Korean Peninsula and Peace of Northeastern Asia during June 15 era', in Baik and Chen (2010).
14. On this part, see Zheng (2009).
15. See Chao (2009).

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### Author's biography

Kuan-Hsing Chen teaches in the Institute for Social Research and Cultural Studies, National Chiao Tung University, Taiwan. His most recent publication is *Asia as Method: Towards Deimperialization* (Duke University Press, 2010).

**Contact address:** Center for Asia-Pacific/Cultural Studies, National Chiao Tung University, 1001, University Road, Hsinchu, Taiwan.