

**COLONIAL KOREA'S PERSPECTIVES
AND LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF
THE FIRST WORLD WAR: A FOCUS ON
THE 1910S MAEIL SINBO AND SHINHAN
MINBO**

CHANG-DONG RYUEM, PhD student

Department of Korean Language and Literature

Yonsei University, Republic of Korea

#205 Chungsong-gwan, 1, Yonseidae-gil,

Heungeop-myeon, Wongi-si, Gangwondo, Republic of Korea

dongdong1015@yonsei.ac.kr

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1994-9288>

Abstract: This paper examines the reception and narrative appropriation of First World War in colonial Korea by analyzing serialized literary texts from two contemporaneous newspapers: the *Maeil Sinbo* and *Shinhan Minbo* (*The New Korea*). By comparing works such as *Guju Yeolgukji* in the *Maeil Sinbo* and *The Biggest Theatre in the World* and *Iron-Blooded Lovebirds* in *The New Korea*, the study reveals contrasting perspectives shaped by differing political and media environments. Serialized from 1914, *Guju Yeolgukji* initially conveyed the First World War through an entertainment-oriented lens, focusing on the ethnic tensions between Germanic and Slavic peoples. However, by 1915, its narrative shifted to the Battle of Qingdao, redirecting attention toward celebrating Japan's military achievements. The text makes no mention of any connection between the war and colonial Korea. In contrast, *The Biggest Theatre in the World* interprets the outbreak of the war as stemming from German ambition and Austrian vengeance, while highlighting the French people's will to resist aggression – thus offering a critical portrayal of the invading powers. Yet the work simultaneously laments the absence of

direct involvement by colonial Koreans, ultimately framing the war as a conflict among white European powers – a ‘foreign war.’ The subsequent serial *Iron-Blooded Lovebirds*, published between 1916 and 1917, returns to the Balkan Wars, one of the antecedents of First World War, and emphasizes the national spirit of the Serbian people. This shift reflects an emerging perspective that viewed the global war as an opportunity for the liberation of oppressed nations. This trajectory culminates in the subsequent work *Dongpo*, which envisions a future war for Korean independence, thereby extending the narrative toward an imagined postwar world order. The voice of hope and passion for the coming postwar world is vividly expressed in the poem *World Democracy* written by a Korean student who had participated in the war. After the end of First World War, the postwar world was imbued with a spirit of revolution. Korea’s March First Movement was situated within this global revolutionary current, and *Shinhan Minbo* referred to it as the ‘Korean Revolution’, aligning it with contemporaneous uprisings around the world. These past revolutions did not remain mere historical events; rather, they functioned as living memories that offered Korean independence activists new possibilities for political imagination and revolutionary praxis.

Keywords: First World War, *Maeil Sinbo*, *Shinhan Minbo (The New Korea)*, War Literature, Revolution.

제1차 세계대전에 대한 식민지 조선의 시선과 문학적 재현 연구: 1910년대 『매일신보』와 『신한민보』를 중심으로

초록: 이 논문은 제1차 세계대전(1914-1918)이 식민지 조선에 어떻게 수용되고 문학적으로 전유되었는지 살폈다. 이를 위해 1910년대 『매일신보』와 『신한민보』에 연재된 소설을 비교 분석하였다. 구체적인 작품은 『매일신보』의 작자미상의 「구주열국지」와 『신한민보』의 백일규의 「세계에 제일 큰 연극」, 홍언의 「철혈원앙」 등이다. 이 작품들은 서로 다른 정치적, 매체적 환경 속에서 상반된 시각을 보여준다. 1914년부터 연재된 「구주열국지」는 제1차 세계대전의 발발 원인을 게르만 민족과 슬라브 민족 간의 오랜 갈등으로 보며, 흥미 위주의 전쟁담을 서사화한다. 그러나 1915년부터 작품의 내용은 유럽의 전장이 아닌 아시아의 칭다오 전투를 그린다. 그러면서 주로 일본군의 위용을 선전하는 내용으로 변화한다. 이 작품은 제1차 세계대전을 서사화한 최초의 작품이지만, 전쟁과 식민지 조선의 관계는 언급되지 않는다. 반면 백일규의 「세계에 제일 큰 연극」은 전쟁의 원인을 사라예보 사건으로 인한 오스트리아의 복수심과 독일의 야욕으로 바라본다. 그러면서 이에 저항하는 프랑스 민중의 민족정신을 강조하고 있다. 그러나 동시에 전 세계가 주목하는 제1차 세계대전에 식민지 조선인들의 몫이 없음을 안타까워하며, 결국 이 전쟁을 유럽 백인들만의 전쟁으로 한정한다. 뒤이어 1916년에서 1917년까지 연재된 홍언의 「철혈원앙」은 제1차 세계대전의 전사(前史)인 발칸전쟁(1912-

1913)을 다루면서, 특히 세르비아 민족의 저항적 민족정신의 승리를 강조한다. 이는 세계대전의 한 원인을 세르비아를 비롯한 피억압 민족의 투쟁에서 찾는 새로운 시선을 보여준다. 이후 홍언은 후속작 「동포」에서 식민지 조선에서 벌어진 가상의 독립전쟁과 승리를 그린다. 이는 피억압 민족이 해방을 맞는 상상된 전후 세계의 질서를 통해 동시대 세계대전과 식민지 조선의 관계를 적극적으로 전유하는 것이다. 전후 세계가 다가오고 있음에 대한 희망과 열정에 찬 목소리는 참전한 한 유학생이 남긴 시 「세계 민주주의」에서 확연히 드러난다. 제1차 세계대전의 종전은 전 세계에 '혁명'의 분위기를 낳았다. 식민지 조선의 3.1 운동은 이 세계적 흐름 속에 위치한다. 특히 『신한민보』의 필진들은 3.1 운동을 '한국혁명', '대한혁명' 등으로 규정하고 전 세계의 혁명적 봉기와 견주었다. 식민지 조선인들은 전 세계의 혁명적 흐름 속에서 새로운 정치적 상상력과 가능성을 꿈꾸었다는 점에서, 과거의 혁명들은 살아있는 기억이었다.

키워드: 제1차 세계대전, 『매일신보』, 『신한민보』, 전쟁문학, 혁명

1. Introduction: Colonial Korean Literature in the Age of the First World War

Throughout history, human civilization has been marked by an unbroken succession of wars. War disrupts the established order of daily life and redefines the very conditions of human existence. Each war demarcates history into distinct periods of “before” and “after,” producing a rupture in the temporal continuum that separates pre-war from postwar eras. In this respect, human history may be understood as the history of war – or, more precisely, of postwar reconstruction. The institutional structures of modern society are grounded in the accumulated legacies of countless “postwar” moments. Among these, particular attention may be given to the First World War (1914–1918), which stands as one of the foundational events of modernity and the first truly modern total war.

Notably, Eric Hobsbawm regarded the First World War as the watershed dividing the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Similarly, the Hungarian historian Arnold Hauser observed that “the twentieth century begins after the First World War, that is, in the 1920s.” At the time, the war was often framed as a kind of holy war, encapsulated in the slogan “The War to End All Wars.” Yet alongside such rhetoric, anti-war sentiment emerged in response to the unprecedented scale of human sacrifice. In this respect, the First World War may be seen as an

event that simultaneously consummated and destabilized Western modernity.

In the aftermath of the First World War, Europe witnessed the collapse of empires and the consolidation of the nation-state system. Some have argued that the modern transformations set in motion by the French Revolution of 1789 found their realization in the war's end in 1918. At the same time, revolutionary movements erupted across the globe, spearheaded by the Russian Revolution during the war and subsequently spreading to former empires such as Germany and Hungary. Each revolution provoked a corresponding counter-revolution, yet these upheavals collectively marked the emergence of the first socialist federation in the 1920s. In this sense, the years around 1918–1919, the immediate 'postwar' era of the First World War, constituted a moment of profound upheaval standing at the threshold of the future.

The First World War was not merely a European phenomenon confined to the West. Its global impact on politics and the economy requires little elaboration. Japan's participation in the conflict, along with the mobilization of large numbers of Asian and African laborers as mercenaries, was particularly significant. In this sense, the war functioned as a "catalyst" for non-Western societies to enter an international order dominated by the West. (Kwon Bodurae, 권보드래 2011: 20) Colonial Korea, situated on the other side of the globe, was no exception. There, the First World War was introduced almost in real time under the name "Great European War" (구주대전), and contemporary intellectuals responded to it in diverse and complex ways. (Lee Tae-hun, 이태훈 2021; Kim dong-shik 김동식 2015; Choi Woo-seok, 최우석 2019; Moon Jun-ho, 문준호 2021)

This article examines contemporary perceptions of the First World War and its literary representations in both domestic and overseas newspapers during the 1910s. The focus is on two publications: the *Maeil Sinbo*, the official organ of the Japanese Governor-General of Korea, and the *Shinhan Minbo (The New Korea)*, the official newspaper of the Korean National Association published in the United States. Both newspapers offered near real-time coverage of the war from its outbreak, yet their divergent political and institutional orientations inevitably produced contrasting narratives.

As the colonial government's official mouthpiece, the *Maeil Sinbo* tended to emphasize sensationalism and propaganda extolling the might of the Japanese military. It repeatedly urged Koreans to remain calm and obedient to Japanese directives, insisting that the war in

Europe bore no relevance to colonial Korea. At the same time, it underscored the necessity of future Japanese military action against China in relation to the global conflict. In observing the war's progression, the *Maeil Sinbo* even projected the possibility of future hostilities developing into a racial confrontation between the “white” and “yellow” races.

By contrast, the *Shinhan Minbo* (*The New Korea*) framed the war through a nationalist lens, drawing parallels between the imperial aggressions of European powers and those of Japan. This perspective was closely tied to its identity as an ‘ethnic media’ with strong diaspora and nationalist orientations, serving the Korean community in the United States. (Chong Han-na, 정한나 2024: 58)

Most colonial Koreans did not directly experience the First World War, which was unfolding on the opposite side of the globe. Notably, however, during the war, both newspapers serialized historical novels based on European wartime events. These include the anonymously authored *Guju Yeolgukji* (「구주열국지」, August 14, 1914–March 11, 1915) in the *Maeil Sinbo*, and Baek Il-gyu's (백일규) *The Biggest Theatre in the World* (「세계에 제일 큰 연극」, May 13–July 8, 1915) and Hong Eon's (홍언) *Iron-Blooded Lovebirds* (「철혈원앙」, May 4, 1916–April 19, 1917) in the *Shinhan Minbo* (*The New Korea*). Each work reflects a distinct perspective on the contemporary First World War. To fully understand these differences, it is necessary to examine them in relation to the characteristics of the media in which they appeared and the specific periods during which they were serialized.

Moreover, the *Shinhan Minbo* (*The New Korea*), published overseas, responded actively to the end of the First World War and the revolutionary atmosphere that followed – a response largely absent in the *Maeil Sinbo*, the colonial government's official organ. This study also examines the *Shinhan Minbo*'s engagement with postwar society around 1918–1919. During this period, keywords such as “national self-determination,” “revolution,” and “democracy” appear prominently in its pages. In this context, it is worth revisiting the First World War as a formative moment in the contemporary world order and exploring one dimension of colonial Korean perceptions of the war.

2. Case of the Maeil Sinbo: Guju Yeolgukji

The Maeil Sinbo demonstrated considerable interest in the First World War from its outbreak, as evidenced by numerous special issues and extra editions. For example, the feature article “The Wars in Europe and the Security of the East” (「구주의 전란과 동양의 안위」, August 3–13, 1914) discussed the potential impact of the global conflict on East Asia, including colonial Korea. The article argued that the war would have little direct effect on Korea, urging the Korean population not to be unsettled and to faithfully follow Japanese directives.

The day after the conclusion of this feature article, the *Maeil Sinbo* began serializing a historical novel titled *Guju Yeolgukji*. Although the author of this novel remains unidentified today, the work demonstrates considerable understanding of global affairs and the histories of various nations, suggesting the need to infer both the author's background and the sources of historical information employed. The main narrative centers on the course of the First World War in Europe. In terms of subject matter and style, the novel can be classified as a historical-biographical work that continues the tradition of classical military tales. (Park Sung-ho, 박성호 2019: 94)

The novel's title, *Guju Yeolgukji*, indicates that the war in Europe was unlike the wars depicted in classical Eastern texts such as the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (삼국지), which are characterized by their entertainment value and lively narratives. By invoking the popular recognition of the *Three Kingdoms*, the title suggests that the narrative may adopt a similarly engaging and accessible structure. The novel also provides an extensive account of the causes of the war. In particular, it surveys the histories of key countries such as Austria and Serbia, analyzing the First World War as the culmination of accumulated interethnic conflicts arising from a series of preceding European wars.

Fairly speaking, the conflict is nothing more than a struggle between the “German” peoples, descended from German blood, and the “Slavic” peoples, descended from Russian blood. Accordingly, the Emperor of Austria faced numerous anxieties and difficulties and often found himself in precarious situations. Nevertheless, Austria, sharing the same lineage as Germany, maintained an inevitably close relationship with it. Meanwhile, a “tiger-like” Russia sharpened its claws, and on its flank lay Serbia, a “Slavic” nation roughly akin to Russia's nephew, leaving

Austria with no moment of security¹

(Maeil Sinbo Agust 14, 1914: 5)

The quotation emphasizes two main points. First, it highlights the longstanding conflict between the “German” and “Slavic” peoples within Europe. Second, it underscores the alliance and protector-protégé relationships among states sharing the same ethnic lineage. Regarding the latter, particularly the role of ethnically based alliances and protector-protégé relations in the outbreak of the First World War, see a recent study of Lee Young-su (이영수 2022). This perception of international affairs can be considered quite accurate for the period. In this context, *Guju Yeolgukji* does not advocate for either the Slavic or German side.

However, it clearly portrays Serbia as a nation that had been “abused” by neighboring countries, reflecting the fact that the immediate spark of the war – the assassination in Sarajevo – was rooted in Serbian nationalism. Approximately 20% of the novel’s total length is devoted to explaining the causes of the war. Subsequently, the narrative unfolds the wartime experiences of major powers such as Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and France, comprising roughly 50% of the total work.

However, after the serialization began in 1914, the narrative trajectory of *Guju Yeolgukji* underwent a noticeable shift in 1915. While the storyline up to 1914 was primarily set in Europe, from 1915 onward the narrative depicts battles between Japan and Germany against the backdrop of Qingdao. This represents a somewhat abrupt change. Such a shift is notable, as it reflects the evolving perception of the war within the work.

¹ “공평되히 말하면 독일 사람의 혈속을 받은 ‘게르만’ 민족과 러시아 사람의 혈속을 받은 ‘슬라브’ 민족이 서로 인종을 싸우는 싸움에서 지나지 못하는 일이라. 그러므로 오스트리아의 황제도 갖가지로 근심과 곤란을 겪은 일이 많고 위태한 지경도 많이 당하였으나, 오스트리아 같은 혈속을 받은 독일과 어찌할 수 없이 좋은 사이가 된지라. 뒤에는 호랑이 같은 러시아가 발톱을 갈고 옆으로는 ‘슬라브’의 혈속으로 러시아의 조카뻘쯤 되는 세르비아라 하는 가랑니가 붙어있는 고로 조금도 안심할 새가 없는 터이라.” (매일신보 Agust 14, 1914: 5)

The original orthography and spacing have been adjusted to conform to contemporary usage. In addition, Chinese-character-based transliterations of country names, such as “덕국” and “오디리,” have been modified for clarity and convenience.

Prior to this narrative shift, approximately one month earlier, *Guju Yeolgukji* had made the following remarks regarding the course of the global conflict and its designation.

In general, the term *Guju Yeolguk* refers to empires such as the United Kingdom, France, Russia, Austria, Belgium, and Serbia; with Japan's participation, it could even be described as a "Chronicle of Eastern and Western Powers." As a result, a great global war erupted, shaking the metaphorical "house of punishment." Fires raged in all directions, and smoke obscured the skies, making it a conflict unlike any witnessed since the creation of the world.²

(*Maeil Sinbo* November 25, 1914: 4)

Originally, *Guju Yeolgukji* focused solely on the European conflict. However, the narrative perception of the war shifted with Japan's entry into the conflict. At the outset, Japan maintained a stance of "neutrality" regarding the global war. Yet, following a request from its ally, the United Kingdom, Japan declared war on German forces stationed in Qingdao on August 23, 1914, and subsequently captured the city on November 7, 1914, achieving victory. The quotation above refers to Japan's participation approximately two weeks after this victory over Germany. In doing so, it emphasizes that the war was not confined to Europe but had become a truly global conflict, encompassing both East and West.

Following this implication, from 1915 onward, *Guju Yeolgukji* shifted its narrative setting from Europe to Qingdao. Just as the novel sought to understand the causes of the European war in terms of accumulated ethnic conflicts from previous wars, it approaches Japan's entry into the conflict in a similar manner. Before describing the battles between Germany and Japan, the narrative traces back twenty years to 1894. Over the course of nine installments, the novel discusses the First Sino-Japanese War and the Triple Intervention, providing historical and geopolitical context for the Shandong Peninsula, where Qingdao is located. The account emphasizes that, despite Japan's victory in the

² "대저 구주열국이라 함은 영국, 프랑스, 러시아, 오스트리아, 벨기에, 세르비아 등 제국인데 그 외에 일본도 참여하였으니 이는 동서양 열국지라 하여도 가할지라. 그러므로 인하여 세계의 큰 전쟁이 일어났고 이른바 벌의 집 흔들어 놓은 모양이 되어 사면팔방에서 불질이 일어나고 연기는 세계 하늘을 가려 천지개벽 이래로 처음 보는 싸움이라." (*매일신보* November 25, 1914: 4)

First Sino-Japanese War, German intervention prevented Japan from fully asserting its claims, forcing it to relinquish Qingdao unjustly. In this way, *Guju Yeolgukji* frames Japan's declaration of war against Germany as historically justified.

Whereas the European situation had previously been depicted as a confrontation between the 'Slavic' and 'German' peoples, the narrative subsequently frames the conflict as a racial struggle between 'Whites,' represented by Germany, and 'Yellows,' represented by Japan. In the battle scenes that follow, the Japanese forces are portrayed as just and competent, while the German forces are depicted as evil and inept. This perspective aligns with the *Maeil Sinbo*'s coverage of the global war. However, *Guju Yeolgukji*, which had devoted roughly 30% of its content to the exploits of the Japanese army, was suddenly discontinued on March 11, 1915. The absence of subsequent works addressing the First World War suggests a decline in the *Maeil Sinbo*'s interest in the conflict.

3. Case of the Shinhan Minbo (The New Korea)

The *Shinhan Minbo* (*The New Korea*), the official newspaper of the Korean National Association published in California, reported on the ongoing developments of the global war almost in real time, similar to the *Maeil Sinbo*. However, unlike the colonial government's organ, the *Shinhan Minbo* was a medium with a strongly nationalist character. In addition to factual reports on the European war, it published numerous commentaries that interpreted the conflict from a nationalist perspective.

As previously noted, the *Maeil Sinbo*'s *Guju Yeolgukji* attempted to narrativize the war almost immediately after its outbreak. In the case of the *Shinhan Minbo*, works addressing the European conflict appear somewhat later. Let us now turn to the cases of Baek Il-gyu and Hong Eon. Baek Il-gyu (1880–1962) and Hong Eon (1880–1951) were independence activists who played leading roles in the Korean American community at the time, as well as close friends. Both men had ties to Ahn Chang-ho (안창호) and were active in the Heungsadan (흥사단, Young Korean Academy), and each also served as editor-in-chief of *Shinhan Minbo*.

Baek Il-gyu, for instance, began serializing *The Biggest Theatre in the World* (May 13–July 8, 1915) roughly one year after the war's

onset. Here, the term “theatre” serves as a metaphor for the war. This work represents the first substantial effort to narrativize the First World War in the *Shinhan Minbo*.

The first half of the work focuses on the royal houses of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which declared war in the immediate aftermath of the Sarajevo assassination, while the latter half primarily depicts the French populace preparing to resist. In other words, the narrative divides the belligerents into the aggressor states in the first half and the resisting states in the second. In particular, the first half critically portrays the political ambitions of the German Emperor, whereas the French people’s consciousness of resistance in the latter half is depicted in a noble light.

At the same time, while narrativizing the outbreak of the First World War, the work also references past conflicts such as the Franco-Prussian War, similar to *Guju Yeolgukji*. However, whereas *Guju Yeolgukji* presents the accumulated confrontation between the “Slavic” and “German” peoples in a relatively objective manner, *The Biggest Theatre in the World* emphasizes the history of the resisting nation, France, and the French people’s consciousness of resistance. This emphasis reflects both the author’s perspective as a member of the colonial Korean diaspora and the strongly nationalist orientation of the *Shinhan Minbo*. In other words, the European war is understood through a comparison with the situation of the homeland under Japanese aggression. This provides insight into how a displaced intellectual from a colonized nation perceived contemporary European warfare.

While the work portrays the conflict through a dichotomous lens of aggressor and resisting nations and maintains a sympathetic view toward the resisting states, it simultaneously emphasizes that the European war is ultimately a “war of others.” In the introduction, the author laments the position of Koreans, who, despite the global population’s attention to the ongoing war, are unable to participate. In other words, the First World War has no direct relevance to colonial Korea. For the author, what truly matters is not the European conflict itself but the independence of colonized Korea.

Baek Il-gyu’s work reflects a perception of the First World War characterized by a state of “no alternative,” rooted in the condition of “impossibility of participation.” This arose from the impossibility of fulfilling the aspirations of an intellectual from a lost nation, who longed for resistance and independence of his homeland through the World War. In other words, colonial Koreans, while experiencing a sense of global “simultaneity” through the First World War, were at the

same time forced to despair over their “impossibility of participation.” Baek Il-gyu’s work ultimately remains unfinished. This absence of an ending itself reveals the author’s perception that no alternative or prospect could be derived from the World War.

However, Baek Il-gyu did not close his narrative with despair, but rather left it open-ended, a blank space. Readers could fill this blank ending with other possibilities through their own literary imagination. In fact, in the preface to his work, Baek Il-gyu wrote that the war had not yet reached its climax. He predicted that this climax would come in about three or four years. Considering that Baek Il-gyu serialized his work in 1915, it is easy to see that the climax he foresaw would fall around 1918–1919. This was the so-called postwar era. Might the climax he predicted have been the wave of declarations of revolution and the principle of national self-determination that swept the world in that era? And indeed, those voices resounded on the Korean peninsula in the cries of ‘Mansei’ during the March First Movement. Around this time, Baek Il-gyu devoted himself even more fully to the independence movement in the United States.

In sum, Baek Il-gyu’s work is an important case, as it represents the very first attempt within the *Shinhan Minbo* to narrativize the First World War. Yet because of the time of its publication, the work reveals little about the connections between colonial Korea and the war, or about imaginings of the postwar world. These aspects can be observed more fully in the case of Hong Eon, which we will turn to next.

The aspiration for the homeland’s resistance and independence in the context of the contemporary global conflict is even more actively reflected in Hong Eon’s work. In *Iron-Blooded Lovebirds* (May 4, 1916–April 19, 1917), Hong Eon narrativizes the Balkan Wars, which occurred immediately prior to the outbreak of the First World War. This work is notable for being both the longest and one of the most narratively sophisticated pieces serialized in the *Shinhan Minbo* during the 1910s.

The plot of the work unfolds as follows. The novel is set in Serbia, then under the rule of Turkey (the Ottoman Empire), during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). ‘Florence’, the daughter of a distinguished Serbian patriot, meets by chance and falls in love with ‘Marker’, a young man with a strong sense of justice. Soon after, Florence’s father is killed by Turkish troops, and Marker enlists as a soldier, leaving for the battlefield. Left behind in grief, Florence is one day visited by ‘Cora’, the daughter of a Serbian traitor. Cora declares that she wishes to atone for her father’s betrayal. Disguised as soldiers, Cora and

Florence head to the battlefield to fight for Serbia's independence.

There, Florence reunites with her beloved Marker, but in the heat of battle both Marker and Cora are struck down by enemy bullets. Even so, Florence leaves the fallen behind and, bearing the Serbian flag, rallies the troops with unshaken resolve for Serbia's victory and independence. The soldiers, watching Florence with her golden hair streaming as she waves the national flag, regard her as a veritable goddess of the battlefield. Inspired, the Serbian army drives back the enemy with tremendous force and wins the war. Though both Marker and Cora are taken immediately to the hospital, only Marker survives, while Cora dies. In conclusion, Florence and Marker marry, and they visit Cora's grave, bringing the story to a close.

Judging from this plot, the novel's title symbolizes the iron-blooded spirit of the Serbian people – their national consciousness and unyielding determination to resist oppression.

The central narrative focuses on the Second Balkan War, depicting the struggle and eventual victory of the Serbian people, who had long endured foreign domination. The First World War can thus be understood as a "Third Balkan War," following the successive First and Second Balkan Wars of 1912. In this sense, Hong interprets the contemporary global conflict through the lens of the Balkan Wars, presenting them as its underlying cause.

Just as Baek Il-gyu emphasized the spirit of resistance among the French people, Hong Eon highlighted the national consciousness and resistance of the Serbian people. This portrayal seems intended to inspire a sense of national identity among Korean readers. In other words, the brave Serbians depicted in Hong's work represent the very image of the colonized Koreans he hoped to see. Thus, the Serbians are not merely a fictional construct, but an archetype of an oppressed nation. Their resistance and victory serve to legitimize the "wars of independence" of other subjugated peoples. In the work, the history of Serbia and the valor of its people are depicted as follows.

Before the Balkan Wars, Serbia had long been under the dominion of the Ottoman Empire, suffering persistent oppression and abuse. Yet the government was too weak to resist, and though the people were filled with deep resentment, they were restrained by authority and could not openly express their anger or rebel. (...) The hatred toward the Ottomans grew ever deeper, and each person thought: since death is inevitable, let us meet it boldly. Let us not proceed cautiously, like a man groping for a woman in the dark, but rise with courage and strike

down the Ottoman forces with fearless valor.³

(*Shinhan Minbo*, May 11, 1916: 4)

Interest in the Balkan Wars is also evident in the reporting of the *Shinhan Minbo*. The fact that the Sarajevo assassination, which directly triggered the First World War, was carried out by a Serbian nationalist youth led to increased attention and sympathy toward the Balkans and Serbia in the newspaper. As one example, a special feature analyzing the causes of the war appeared immediately after the outbreak of the First World War. The article, titled “An Outline of the Causes of the European War” (「유럽 전쟁원인의 개략」, August 13–September 10, 1914), explained the situation of various European countries and, in particular, described Serbia as “a small Balkan country long subjected to the interference of the great powers.” The article conveys a sense of sympathy toward such a powerless, small nation, naturally evoking parallels with Korea on the opposite side of the globe, whose sovereignty had been taken by the Japanese Empire.

Within this context, the contemporary global conflict was interpreted as an opportunity for the resistance and independence of oppressed, small nations. Hong Eon emphasizes the courage and noble national spirit of the Serbians during the Balkan Wars in *Iron-Blooded Lovebirds* for precisely this reason. Contemporary Korean readers in the United States likely drew parallels between the situation of Serbia in the Balkans and that of their homeland on the Korean Peninsula. In particular, as the European Balkans were imagined as a space of resistance and liberation, the geopolitical characteristics of the Korean Peninsula could similarly be conceived positively as an ‘Eastern Balkans.’

However, the Balkans in Europe and the ‘Eastern Balkans,’ that is, the Korean Peninsula, existed in a “non-synchronous” temporal relationship despite being contemporaneous. In the former, oppressed

³ “발칸전쟁이 일어나기 전에 세르비아는 튀르키예국 세력 범위 안에 있어 그 학대와 유린을 당한 지 오랜지라. 그러나 정부의 힘이 약하여 능히 이를 항거치 못하였으며 인민은 심히 분하게 여기지마는 정부에 눌러 드러내놓고 시비하거나 배척하지 못하였더라. (...) 튀르키예에 대한 악감정은 더욱 깊어 사람마다 생각하기를 우리가 기위 죽을진대 시원하게 죽는 것이 가하니 어두운 밤에 새색시 더듬 듯하지 말고 한번 용맹스럽게 일어나 튀르키예국 사람을 도륙하자고” (*신한민보*, May 11, 1916: 4)

peoples could mount resistance on the stage of the World War, whereas in the latter, the population remained under colonial subjugation. Hong Eon demanded a radical transformation in this context. In his subsequent work, *Dongpo* (「동포」, August 30–December 20, 1917), published roughly four months later, he employed a highly political imagination. The narrative envisions an independent Korea victorious in a liberation war on the peninsula, which in turn subjugates Japan as a colony. The depiction of independence fighters, sailing aboard a ship bearing the name Yi Sun-sin (이순신), planting the Korean flag on the Japanese Imperial Palace, and concluding a treaty identical to the Eulsa Treaty (을사조약) represents an extreme manifestation of political imagination regarding the postwar world. This contrasts with Baek Il-gyu's approach around 1915, which scarcely attempted to envision the postwar world. Notably, when Hong Eon's two works were published in 1917, the course of the war was in flux due to developments such as the United States' entry into the conflict and the Russian Revolution.

Thus, *Iron-Blooded Lovebirds* depicts the Balkan Wars, the origin of the First World War, as a noble war of independence at a time when imagining the postwar world, while *Dongpo* dramatically envisions the independence struggle of colonial Korea within an imagined postwar world. However, although *Dongpo* enacts a narrative of resistance and independence for an oppressed nation, it simultaneously reveals a limitation in combining excessive exclusivist nationalism with colonialist impulses.

4. The Postwar World: The Legacy of 'Revolution' and 'Mansei'

Although the impact of the First World War on colonial Korea was by no means negligible, literary works that narrativized it are exceedingly rare. In this respect, the 1910s examples we have examined – *Guju Yeolgukji* in the *Maeil Sinbo* and *The Biggest Theatre in the World* and *Iron-Blooded Lovebirds* in *Shinhan Minbo* – represent particularly significant cases.

In short, *Guju Yeolgukji*, serialized from 1914, conveyed the First World War primarily as an engaging narrative centered on the conflict between the German and Slavic peoples, but from 1915 onward, the focus shifted to the Battle of Qingdao, praising Japan. This

work makes no reference whatsoever to any connection between the First World War and colonial Korea.

In contrast, *The Biggest Theatre in the World* interpreted the outbreak of the First World War in terms of German ambition and Austrian desire for revenge, while highlighting the French populace's resistance, thereby criticizing the aggressor nations. Yet the work laments the lack of direct involvement of colonial Koreans, ultimately perceiving the war as a European affair – a “war of others.”

From 1916 to 1917, *Iron-Blooded Lovebirds* revisited the Balkan Wars, a precursor to the First World War, emphasizing the national spirit of the Serbians. This reflects a perception of the contemporary global conflict as an opportunity for the liberation of oppressed peoples. The subsequent work, *Dongpo*, projected an imagined postwar world through the depiction of an independence war in colonial Korea. Each of these works is closely linked to the medium in which it was published and the international context at the time of serialization. Notably, Baek Il-gyu and Hong Eon were leading figures in the Korean diaspora and overseas independence activists. Their works vividly demonstrate how exiled intellectuals' perceptions of contemporary wars evolved – from a stage of “no alternatives” to the imaginative consideration of a postwar world.

As the First World War drew to a close and imaginations about the postwar world spread globally, responses to this phenomenon are more clearly observed in *Shinhan Minbo* than in *Maeil Sinbo*. The final example to be introduced is the poem “World Democracy,” (「세계 민주주의」) published on the front page of *Shinhan Minbo* on May 2, 1918. According to the article, the poem was composed by the student Cha Ui-seok (차의석), who participated in the war and left a record of his sentiments. Although he was not a professional poet, the article introduces the poem in a tone that highly praises his national spirit and sense of justice. The full text of the poem is as follows.

Come, Sam, let us go together,
To fight for justice,
To crush the foe,
To build a world of fairness.

O people of freedom, come join,
Those oppressed under tyrant rule,
Let them taste the joy of liberty,
And we shall destroy the power of the oppressors.

Chang-Dong RYUEM: Colonial Korea's Perspectives...

The Stars and Strips stands before me,
You are the guardian of freedom,
For human rights we shall strive,
And peace alone will guide our path.

Children of Belgium, Britain, and France,
I shall fight alongside you,
For the fate of the world rests with you,
Why should we shy from the battle?

I am but a soldier of a fallen nation,
Shall I hesitate to sacrifice?
Though my body be small,
For the world I shall give my all.

When the war ends and victory is won,
Thus shall world peace begin,
As Serbia and Poland return home,
My country, too, shall be free.⁴

(Cha Ui-seok, *Shinhan Minbo* May 5, 1918: 1)

One of the most salient features of contemporary responses to the World War was the recognition of the conflict as an opportunity to achieve “world peace.” Although the author identifies himself as a subject of a vanquished nation, he envisions that when Serbians and Poles ultimately regain their peace, his own homeland too will enter a world of freedom and peace. Colonial Korea, though unable to participate directly in the war, nevertheless embraced the grand cause of “the fate of the world,” thereby projecting its own passion and optimism onto the imagined postwar order. In this respect, the so-called “Balkan of the East” could imagine itself standing on equal footing with

⁴“샘아 같이 가자/ 정의 위해 싸우러/ 대적을 부서치고/ 공평을 건설하러// 자유의 사람들아 같이 가자/ 전제학정에 눌린 저들로/ 자유의 행복을 누리게 하고/ 폭군의 세력을 멸하리라// 별기가 내 앞에 섰구나/ 자유의 옹호자가 네요/ 인권을 위해 싸우리라/ 그는 오직 평화와 난도// 벨지엄, 브리튼, 프렌취 아이들아/ 내 너희들로 더불어 같이 싸워주마/ 세계운명이 너희들에게 있거니/ 무엇이 더 중하여 싸움을 마다할까// 나는 한 망국 패줄이라/ 희생하기 아까워할까/ 나의 몸이 비록 작으나/ 세계를 위해 드리리라// 전쟁 끝나고 승리 얻을 때/ 세계의 평화는 이로 시작이라/ 세르비아, 폴란드 사람 집으로 갈 때/ 내 나라 동반도 자유하리라” (차의석, *신한민보* May 5, 1918: 1)

the international community.

The poem's very title, "Democracy," underscores the rise of the term as a universal political system in the postwar era. The decision to foreground this notion was likely influenced by President Woodrow Wilson's principle of national self-determination, announced in January 1918. Yet, while the poem abounds in the hopeful fervor characteristic of the war's closing phase, it neither defines democracy nor offers concrete means for its realization. What might appear to be an empty rhetoric of democracy nevertheless invited colonial Koreans to dream of hope and to envision an as-yet unrealized future.

Toward the end of the First World War, the global vocabulary for imagining the postwar order coalesced largely around the competing languages of Lenin and Wilson – "national self-determination," "reconstruction," and "revolution." The *Shinhan Minbo* was among the first media outlets to introduce the principle of national self-determination to a Korean readership.

At the same time, the prolonged war had left European populations exhausted, and popular discontent mounted under the strain of severe economic hardship. Ultimately, on November 11, 1918, the German Revolution provided the decisive catalyst that brought to a close a war which had once seemed interminable. Immediately after the armistice, the *Shinhan Minbo*, in its November 21 issue, proclaimed the "Victory of Democracy." Seizing upon this historical moment, the paper forcefully argued that colonial Korea, too, must raise its voice before the world.

The revolutionary ferment was by no means confined to Germany. In Hungary, dissatisfaction with the dual monarchy and mounting demands for independence culminated in the proclamation of a republic under Mihály Károlyi at the end of 1918. Soon thereafter, on March 21, 1919, socialist forces led by Béla Kun declared the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The Hungarian Revolution marked the first successful revolution in Europe since the Russian Revolution of 1917. Nor was Hungary alone: between 1918 and 1919, revolutionary movements also erupted across Romania, Portugal, Poland, Egypt, India, Mexico, and Ireland. Observing this global chorus of revolutionary upheavals, the *Shinhan Minbo* expressed strong resonance, reporting almost daily on revolutionary struggles around the world through a wide array of articles.

At that very moment, the revolutionary fervor sweeping across the world found expression in colonial Korea through the resounding cries of the March First Movement. While the *Maeil Sinbo* dismissed

the uprising as a mere “disturbance,” newspapers abroad, including the *Shinhan Minbo*, referred to it as the “Korean Revolution” (한국혁명) or the “Daehan Revolution.” (대한혁명) Although the movement was undoubtedly shaped by the principle of national self-determination, it would be misleading to view this as a simple one-way influence. Rather, it illustrates how Koreans sought to live within the revolutionary era and simultaneously to claim solidarity with the global revolutions of their time.

Yet every revolution is accompanied by the resistance of counterrevolution. The German Revolution, which brought First World War to an end, ultimately failed, fueled by the resentment and hostility of soldiers returning from the front. Many of them placed the blame for defeat on radical socialists – an accusation that would later provide fertile ground for the rise of Nazism. Likewise, Hungary, which had proclaimed the first Soviet republic in Eastern Europe after Russia, achieved only a brief success before ultimately being defeated in wars with its neighboring states.

The cries of ‘Mansei’ likewise failed to bring about national independence and, in the end, were marked as a failure. The resulting “frustration” and “despair” even came to serve as key terms in describing the era that followed in the 1920s. Yet it must also be noted that many continued to discover new possibilities or to live through what might be called a “revolution after the revolution.” The contributors to *Shinhan Minbo* likewise did not relinquish the necessity and inevitability of a “Korean Revolution” well into the early 1920s. The political imagination that Hong Eon had articulated in his fiction, and Cha Ui-seok’s yearning for democracy as a universal principle of justice, were transformed within the “manse” revolution but nonetheless persisted with remarkable consistency.

Thus, the multitude of “revolutions” has receded into the past. Yet they continue to leave behind a range of possibilities and unresolved questions. The imaginative force that once envisioned the “after” and “beyond” from the vantage point of a historical “origin” of modern society, I would argue, still carries significant implications for the here and now.

Conflict of interest statement: The author has no conflict of interest to disclose.

Bibliography

- Baek, Il-gyu (백일규). *The Biggest Theatre in the World*. In *Shinhan Minbo*, May 13–July 8, 1915.
- Choi, Woo-seok (최우석). 2019. Colonial Korean Recognition of World War I and the March 1st Movement. In *SARIM, The Historical Journal*, No. 70 : 161–189.
- Chong, Han-na (정한나). 2024. How Does Ethnic Media Report on Compatriots' Disasters? In *Gubo Hakbo-The Journal of Korean Modern Literature*, No.36: 57-101.
- Guju Yeolgukji, In *Maeil Sinbo*, August 14, 1914–March 11, 1915.
- Hong, Eon (홍언). *Iron-Blooded Lovebirds*, In *Shinhan Minbo*, May 4, 1916–April 19, 1917.
- Hong, Eon (홍언). *Dongpo*, In *Shinhan Minbo*, August 30–December 20, 1917.
- KIM, Dong-Shik (김동식). 2015. Evolution, Belatedness and the First World War. In *한국학연구*, No. 37: 157–188.
- Kwon, Bodurae (권보드래). 2011. The Individualized Form of Modern Time and Space – The Concepts of Spirit, Life, Universe in 1910s Korea. In *CONCEPT AND COMMUNICATION*, No. 7: 5–34.
- Kwon, Bodurae (권보드래). 2019. *The night of March Frist*, Paju: Dolbegae.
- Lee, Tae-hun (이태훈). 2012. Attitudes and Perceptions about the First World War by Members of Joseon Society During the 1910s and 20s. In *The Review of Korean History*, No. 105: 187–228.
- Lee, Young-soo (이영수). 2022. A Study on the Origin of First World War: Focusing on the Patron-Client Relationship between States in the Balkans. PhD diss, Hansin University.
- Moon, Jun-ho (문준호). 2021. The Trend of the Maeil Shinbo (每日申報) Reports on the First World War: Outbreak of the War to the Exhortation for Asian Solidarity. In *Asia Review*, No. 21: 291–320.
- PARK, Sung-ho (박성호). 2019. A Study on Acceptance Aspects of Historical Facts in Historical and Biographical Novels, Especially by “Gujuryulgukji” Serialized in Maeilshinbo. In *Comparative Korean Studies*, Vol. 27 No. 2: 91–119.
- Ryuem, Chang-dong (염창동). 2024. The Appropriation of World War I in The New Korea(Shinhan-Minbo) in the 1910s from a Trans-War Historical Perspective). In *The Journal of Korean Fiction Research*, No. 96: 189–224.