

**Anarchism and Culture in Colonial Korea: *Minjung* Revolution, Mutual Aid, and the Appeal of Nature**

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**Abstract**

The anarchist movement in colonial Korea (1910–1945) has long been remembered either as a radical and violent chapter of national resistance or as a minor, utopian strand of the broader socialist movement. Both views have some grounding in historical reality, but they also invite neglect of the tremendous cultural influence that anarchist doctrines exerted over a rapidly modernizing colonial nation. Building on recent revisionary studies of anarchism in East Asia, this article traces the ways in which anarchist ideas—particularly Piotr Kropotkin’s theory of anarcho-communism—entered Korean culture via the transnational routes of Japan, China, and Russia and through a painstaking process of adaptation by local writers, poets, and other cultural operators. From Hō Munil’s utopian peasant novel, Hwang Sōgu’s ecopoetry, and Sin Ch’aeho’s revolutionary fantasy fiction, to Yu Ch’ijin’s theory of people’s theater, anarchism had a far more profound and diverse influence on modern Korean culture than has been previously recognized. A defining process in the politics of the 1920s was the ascendance of the term *minjung*, referring to the ethnonational Korean people. This article identifies popular revolt, mutual aid, and ethical naturalism as the three major themes of colonial anarchism that left an enduring legacy.

**Keywords:** anarchism, anarcho-communism, colonial Korea, Darwinism, ecopoetry, *minjung*, mutual aid, naturalism, Piotr Kropotkin, proletarian literature, socialism

The anarchist movement in colonial Korea (1910–1945) has long been remembered either as a radical and violent chapter of national resistance or as a minor, utopian strand of the broader socialist movement. Both views have some grounding in historical reality, but they are also reflections of the ways in which Marxism and nationalism—two of the most influential discourses of twentieth-century Korea—have systematically attempted to push anarchist ideology to the margins of political discourse. On the one hand, beginning in the mid-1920s, Marxist writers and activists took to condemning anarchism as a scientifically unfounded and unsophisticated political theory that was

best forgotten going forward. On the other hand, intellectuals in South Korea disavowed the doctrines of both anarchism and socialism after the 1948 division of the two Koreas amid the onset of the Cold War. As a consequence, for most Koreans, by midcentury anarchism had acquired the semblance of a doctrine that had little to offer for thinking about the present.

From a current historiographical perspective, the outcome is that we witness today a distorted memory, if not amnesia, of the very existence of an anarchist movement in colonial Korea.<sup>1</sup> Adding to the difficulties of historical recuperation is the fact that anarchists in colonial Korea did not maintain their own official organization or periodical and thus left only scattered records of their activities. This was not necessarily due to some “innate” repulsion to an organizational movement on the part of anarchists but rather the political repression of colonial Korean society. With most forms of political activity ruled out, especially since the 1927 enforcement of the Peace Preservation Law, by necessity anarchism came to assume a more cultural manifestation within the Korean peninsula than it did, comparatively, in Japan or Euro-America.

Facing up to the challenge of reconstructing early twentieth-century anarchist culture in East Asia, a few scholars in recent years have produced archivally rich works that draw an institutional and organizational picture of the many movements that composed it. In South Korea, Yi Horyong has contributed definitive studies on the intellectual and political history of the colonial anarchist movement (Yi H. 2001; 2015). In English-language scholarship, Dongyoun Hwang has published *Anarchism in Korea: Independence, Transnationalism, and the Question of National Development, 1919–1984*, which traces the far-flung transnational radical networks of Korean anarchist discourse and practice not just in Korea but across the entire East Asian region (D. Hwang 2016). Beyond Korean studies, Sho Konishi’s *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* offers an innovative historical reconstruction of modern Japanese anarchist culture complete with its transnational connections to Russia and Europe (Konishi 2013). These volumes have done much to renew and update our knowledge of early socialism in East Asia, and in so doing they laid the ground for research on many aspects of anarchist modernity.

Adding to these studies, and using textual analysis along with archives, I analyze here how three central themes of anarchist ideology came to be reflected in the works of writers, poets, and other cultural operators of colonial Korea: the themes of popular revolt, mutual aid, and nature as a source of ethical and political values. As my discussion will show, all three of these ideas featured prominently in the works of

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<sup>1</sup> An exception was the 1986 publication of the volume *A History of the Korean Anarchist Movement*, a translation of *Han’guk anak’ijūm undongsa* (1978) by Ha Ki-Rak (1912–1997). The author was a professor of philosophy who had become persuaded of anarchism while studying at Waseda University in Tokyo in the late 1930s. Another notable early publication was John Crump’s “Anarchism and Nationalism in East Asia,” which observed the only superficially contradictory coexistence of the anarchist ideal of local autonomy with anticolonial nationalism in Korea (Crump 1996). For a list of publications on Korean anarchism, see Vermeij (2015).

Russian anarchist thinker Piotr Kropotkin (1842–1921), whose theory of anarcho-communism enjoyed a broad influence throughout East Asia. My account will thus discuss how Kropotkin's views found representation across cultural fields, from Sin Ch'aeho's political fables, Hwang Sögu's and Kim Hyöngwön's nature poetry, Hö Ilmun's and Yi Kiyöng's peasant novels, Na Un'gyu's *New Tendency* (*sin'gyöngnyangp'a*) film, Yu Ch'ijin's *minjung* (common people) theater, to Na Kyöngsök's and Yöm Sangsöp's literary criticism.

This article is in part a follow-up to my 2015 monograph, *The Proletarian Wave: Literature and Leftist Culture in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945*. That volume includes a reconceptualization of anarchism in colonial Korea as an important precursor to Marxism and as an enduring left-wing alternative outlook. Since its publication, my own research as well as other new scholarship has convinced me that my previous assessment was, if anything, too conservative. It now seems to me that the ongoing rediscovery of early socialist thought may lead to profoundly revisionary insights into the historical role of anarchism in East Asia and in the world. As I will suggest in the conclusion, these insights may in their turn come of use in grasping the current political dynamics, at a time when anarchism is reviving as a counterhegemonic ideology amid the epidemic spread of populist politics in a vacuum left by the decline of Marxism and communism.

### **Anarchist Thought in Colonial Korea: Radical Politics and Kropotkin's Influence**

Like other contemporary cultural influences, the doctrines of anarchism were introduced to Korea through double translation via China and Japan, rather than directly from Britain, France, or Russia. Most of the classics of anarchist tradition did not receive a Korean translation until well into the twentieth century, but they were available early on in Japanese or Chinese editions. Moreover, Korean students and intellectuals who traveled abroad first discovered these radical doctrines and brought them to the peninsula. So, for instance, Sin Ch'aeho was initially exposed to Liang Qichao's *Collected Works from the Ice Drinker's Studio* (*Yinbingshi wenji*; 1903) and Kōtoku Shūsui's *Long Speech* (*Chzboközetsu*; 1905) while working as an editor for *Hwangsong sinmun* (Imperial capital gazette; 1898–1910) during the late 1900s (Yi H. 2001, 85). After his exile to China upon Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, Sin went to Shanghai and published the bilingual newspaper *Sin taehan* (New greater Korea; 1919–1920), in which he introduced anarchist ideas (D. Hwang 2016, 21). In another instance, Na Kyöngsök, who studied in Tokyo, espoused anarchism through his association with other Korean and Japanese anarcho-syndicalists such as Hasegawa Ichimatsu, Ōsugi Sakae, and Yokota Shōjirō, and he became active in the Fraternal Society of Koreans in Osaka (*Chösönin ch'inmokhoe*) between 1915 and 1918 (Yu S. 1997, 297–299). Na occasionally contributed to *Hakchigwang* (Light of learning; 1914–1930), a journal of Korean

students in Japan, and one of his articles focused on labor activism and advocated the general strike as a viable tactic for workers' struggles (Na 1915).<sup>2</sup>

This transnational and indirect path of dissemination determined the rough periodization of anarchist influence in Korea. Korean intellectuals had been exposed to anarchist ideas ever since their international explosion in the 1880s, primarily through imported books and newspaper reports on political developments in East Asia, Europe, and Russia. It was not until the 1910s, however, that they participated in organized activities—initially at overseas locations in China and Japan—and left written records of their thoughts. The heyday of anarchist ideology in colonial Korea thus fell between the mid-1910s and the mid-1920s, when the radical voices of young intellectuals who had been studying abroad became prevalent in domestic print culture.

A wave of new newspapers and magazines were launched in the early 1920s, upon the relaxation of colonial censorship after the nationwide popular uprisings of 1919 known as the March First Movement. The movement had two major intellectual consequences: the popularization of modern nationalism and the propagation of socialist doctrines, anarchism in particular, which resonated better with the historical experience than gradual reformism, then the mainstream of the Korean nationalist movement.<sup>3</sup> Several new periodicals contributed then to propagating anarchist ideas and works: *Asōng* (Our cry; 1921) by the Korean Youth Association (Chosŏn ch'ōngnyŏn yŏnhaphoe), *Kaebŏk* (Opening; 1920–1926) by members of the indigenous religious movement of Ch'ōndogyo, *Kongje* (Mutual aid; 1920–1921) by the Korean Workers Mutual Aid Association (Kongjehoe), *Sin saenghwal* (New life; 1922–1923), and *Yŏmyŏng* (Dawning light; 1925) published by leftists in Taegu. Also important were newspapers such as *Dong-a ilbo* (East Asia daily, 1920) and literary coterie journals like *Paekcho* (White tides; 1922–1923) and *P'yehŏ* (Ruins; 1921–1922), whose distinctive tenor was then known as “nihilist.”<sup>4</sup> During this period, “nihilism” (*hŏmujuji*) was often synonymous with “anarchism” (*mujŏngbujui*) in Korean public discourse because of the Russian nihilist movement, which had drawn its foundational inspiration from Mikhail Bakunin's anarchist ideas. These periodicals leaned simultaneously toward socialism and anticolonial nationalism, two stances that typically merged in the agitated social mood of post-uprising Korea.

The final, declining phase of anarchist influence in Korea came soon after, in the mid-1920s, when the hegemony of leftist and radical literary culture passed to a new generation of Marxism-inspired intellectuals. The watershed moment here was the founding in 1925 of the KAPF (Korea Artista Proleta Federacio; 1925–1935). Created under the aegis of the Comintern-endorsed Korean Communist Party, the new

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<sup>2</sup> Anarchism was also prominently featured in two other journals published by students in Japan: *Kūndae sajo* (Modern thought; 1916) and *Samgwang* (Three lights; 1919–1920). The first was devoted mostly to intellectual discussions; the second treated music and the arts.

<sup>3</sup> For the moderate nationalist movement, see Robinson (1988).

<sup>4</sup> For the lesser-known anarchist aspects of *Paekcho* and *P'yehŏ*, see Kim T'aekho (2015, 135–188).

association began in 1927 to enforce a rather strict Marxist agenda. This turn soon led to the expulsion of anarchist members such as Kim Hwasan and Kwŏn Kuhyŏn, who held dissenting views about the political goal of proletarian dictatorship and about the supposed necessity of subordinating artistic freedom to a common political cause.<sup>5</sup> These and other anarchist intellectuals continued to organize and publish literary works and essays into the 1930s, but their influence was diminished amid the local as well as the worldwide turn of radical activists in the direction of communism and Marxism.<sup>6</sup>

Kropotkin was by far the most popular anarchist thinker in Korea as well as East Asia. The Japanese translations of his works had been widely read among Korean students in Japan, and at some point they became available in Seoul, too, from bookstores that secretly sold socialist books.<sup>7</sup> One reason for Kropotkin's popularity was that some of his most important writings had been translated into Japanese by Ōsugi Sakae, the widely respected leader of labor activism, who had befriended and sympathized with Koreans in Japan. Also, Chinese socialists had favored Kropotkin's anarcho-communism and, as such, it had been passed on to Korean exiles and students in places such as Shanghai, Beijing, and Manchuria (D. Hwang 2016, 19–55). Of Kropotkin's works, the pamphlets *An Appeal to the Young* (1880) and *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902) were the most read and were repeatedly translated into Korean either in part or in their entirety.<sup>8</sup> In addition, excerpts of Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* as well as other works such as *Anarchist Morality, Fields, Factories, and Workshops*, and *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature* were introduced in the newspaper *Dong-a ilbo* and the magazine *Tonggwang* (Eastern light; 1926–1933).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For the anarchist-Marxist debates within the KAPF, see S. Park (2015, 61–63).

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of *Munyegwang* (Art and literature mania; 1928–1930), anarchists left few journals of their own. For a study of the late anarchist journal see Kim T'aekho (2009, 162–190).

<sup>7</sup> For the circulation of anarchist texts in Korea, see D. Hwang (2016, 91).

<sup>8</sup> For Kropotkin's translation and influence in East Asia, see Dirlik (1993, 154–156) and Crump (1983, 222–232). *An Appeal to the Young* was translated at least seven times by Koreans during the colonial era, starting with Kim Myŏngjin's partial translation (1920). See the list of different versions of the Korean translation in Kim Miji (2016, 178). According to this study, the entire pamphlet was never published during the colonial era due to censorship, but full Korean translations were made in Japan and China and circulated in the peninsula as well. *Mutual Aid* was published in book form in Sŏng In'gi's translation in 1948, but the work's arguments had already come to Koreans through Ōsugi's 1917 Japanese translation, Zhou Fohai's 1920 Chinese translation, and several public speeches, partial translations, and commentaries. Some of the earliest relevant publications include Sin Paegu (1921), Yi Sŏngt'ae (1922a; 1922b; 1922c), and Yun Chayŏng, "Sangho pujo yŏn'gu" (A study of *Mutual Aid*), published in *Asŏng* 3 and 4, 1921 (Yi Sŏngt'ae 1922c, 29). Also, Yamagawa Hitoshi's commentary on *Mutual Aid*, titled *Dōbutsu-kai no dōtoku* (Ethics in the animal world, 1908), had been particularly influential among Koreans (Cho 2005, 265–268; Pak Yangsin 2012, 136 and 151).

<sup>9</sup> For example, *The Conquest of Bread* was partly translated in Wŏnho ōjŏk (1929); *Anarchist Morality*, in Ilsong chŏngin (1931); *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*, in Pang Miae (1927); *Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature*, in Ryu Sŏ (1926). For a more detailed list, see Kim Miji (2016, 190–196). The latter two were written by Korean anarchists in China: Pang Miae was a feminine

Kropotkin's writings often featured passionate calls for popular revolution and an alternative cooperatist outlook on the social order. His revolutionary vision was in tune with the anti-authoritarian zeitgeist of the modern avant-gardes, but he went further to argue against "the capitalist feudality" that blocked the "scientific" progress of humanity toward a more egalitarian and communitarian utopia (Kropotkin 1880). Also important, Kropotkin inclusively posited that any conscientious person, regardless of class origin or occupation, could become the subject of revolutionary history-making. His arguments naturally appealed to many Koreans, who had just staged a large-scale popular protest against the colonial authorities and their attempt to legitimize imperial conquest as tutelage in modern capitalist civilization. Indeed, the popularity of Kropotkin's communism-tinged form of anarchy later facilitated the conversion of early anarchists such as Chŏng T'aesin, Song Yŏng, and Yi Kiyŏng to Marxism and Leninism.

Kropotkin's also buttressed his political vision with his reflections on Darwin's theory of evolution in *Mutual Aid*. Kropotkin criticized the "narrow Malthusian conception of competition between each and all," arguing that Darwin himself showed a "wider" understanding of his theory of "the survival of the fittest" in *The Descent of Man* (Kropotkin 1902). Whereas the struggle for existence would apply in the case of adverse circumstances, Kropotkin posited, between members of the same species competition would and should be replaced by mutual aid to ensure the species' continued prosperity. Those who are the fittest for survival are thus "not the physically strongest, nor the cunningest, but those who learn to combine so as mutually to support each other, strong and weak alike, for the welfare of the community." In insisting on mutual aid as a principle of biological and social evolution, Kropotkin was arguing against English writer Aldous Huxley's bleak view of human society as one caught in "the Hobbesian war of each against all" and also against French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idealization of the "primitive" nature as an antithesis of civilization. In their stead, he advocated what Brian Morris ([2004] 2018, 359) termed "ethical naturalism," in which human beings were believed to possess moral sentiments as their natural instinct for the species' survival. As we will see in the next section, many Korean intellectuals espoused Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid as a more benign and empowering alternative to the imperial logic of social Darwinism.

### **Popular Revolt as an Anarchist Trope in 1920s Korean Culture**

The idea of popular revolt resonated strongly with Korean activists in the years immediately following the 1919 nationwide uprisings against Japan. A defining process in the politics of the 1920s was the ascendance of the term *minjung*—referring to the ethnonational Korean people—which was initially a Japanese coinage (*minshū*) and later

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pseudonym used by a group of Korean anarchist students in China (Kim Miji 2016, 191), and Ryu Sŏ (Yu Kisŏk's pen name) was one of its members. For the activities in China, see D. Hwang (2016, 29–30).

gained traction within the local radical nationalist discourse of popular revolution.<sup>10</sup> As it had been intended in a Japanese context, the term referred to “common people” as distinct from the state or institutional authorities. In this sense, it was also akin to *heimin* (commoner) in Japanese political discourse, but within the colonial context of Korea, *minjung* assumed a stronger ethno-nationalist emphasis.<sup>11</sup> Korean intellectuals began to use the term as an affirmation of a manifest destiny for the disenfranchised people to become the rightful subjects of national history. So in a way, the suppressed memory of the 1919 uprisings, along with the consciousness-raising effort of *minjung* nationalism, found cultural expression through the anarchist literary theme of a spontaneous popular revolt.

One of the best-known literary representations of popular revolution in colonial Korea is contained in Sin Ch'aeho's *Battle of the Dragons* (*Ryong kwa ryong ūi taegyŏkchŏn*; ca. 1928).<sup>12</sup> Today, this fantastic fable provides fascinating insights into Sin's cosmopolitan and ideological orientation during his exile in China. At the heart of the story are two dragons who happen to be brothers. Miri (a native Korean term for “dragon”) is a well-adjusted, loyal servant of the Heavenly Emperor (*sangje*), whereas Dragon (*tŭraegon*), who grew up in “Greece and Rome” and always associated with “rebels and revolutionaries,” is a dissenter who defies “the binds of all religions and morals” and has also become “enthralled by nihilism” (Sin [1928] 2008, 13). In the narrative, Miri is charged with implementing a policy of colonization aimed at keeping humans (called the *minjung*) in a perpetual state of subjection to the Heavenly Emperor. This “harmonious” order is, however, thwarted by the “vile” Dragon, who incites the people into a revolution and a declaration of independence from the Heavenly Emperor. Interwoven with this main plot are poignant satires directed at everything from Christianity to monarchical tyranny and corrupted government. The story reaches a climax through an apocalyptic, all-encompassing vision of popular revolution:

The people killed Jesus, and soon after also other religious and moral preachers such as Confucius, Buddha, and Muhammad.... They burnt the political and legal textbooks that supported the rule of the elites, destroying government buildings, public offices, banks, and companies.... They completely rejected the past social institutions, and they declared that all earthly things belong to the people [*minjung*]. (Sin [1928] 2008, 14)

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<sup>10</sup> The term *minjung* was introduced to Korea in the late nineteenth century and became popular only in the early 1920s with the expansion of Korean-language publications. See Hŏ Su (2010)

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion of *heimin* in Konishi (2013, 23).

<sup>12</sup> The work was likely written shortly after Sin joined the Alliance of Oriental Anarchists (Tongbang mujŏngbu chuŭija yŏnmaeng), a Nanjing-based association of anarchist intellectuals from China, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Along with most of Sin's literary and critical production, the work went missing after the writer's death in prison in 1936. It was rediscovered and published in North Korea in the mid-1960s. For a detailed account of the historical circulation of the novel and his other works, see Kim Chuhyŏn (2007).

The story was written in a style reminiscent of oral storytelling and vernacular classic fiction, in deliberate avoidance of any direct reference to current political realities. Even so, the work was immediately recognizable for its anarchism-inspired political radicalism, and for that reason it could only have little or no public circulation in colonial Korea.

If exiled intellectuals such as Sin Ch'aeho and Kim San had a margin of freedom in publishing political materials, the pressure of censorship and threatened imprisonment was stronger in colonized Korea.<sup>13</sup> As mentioned earlier, the memory of the 1919 uprisings was suppressed by the colonial authorities and scarcely surfaced in Korean cultural texts until after the 1945 liberation. Around 1925, however, there emerged a new literary current of "hunger-and-murder stories," which replaced the introspective, sensitive modern intellectual, a frequent protagonist of earlier literature, with a working-class character or an impoverished intellectual.<sup>14</sup> These stories often shared a generic plot in which an ordinary protagonist is driven by material difficulties and persecution into committing crimes such as murder or arson. Stories such as Ch'oe Söhae's "Starvation and Murder" ("Kia wa saryuk"), Ch'öe Süngil's "Two Youths" ("Tu ch'ölmün saram"), Na Tohyang's "Samnyong the Mute" ("Pöngöri Samnyongi"), Song Yöng's "The Blast Furnace" ("Yonggwangno"), Yi Ilksang's "Fury" ("Kwangnan"), and Yi Kiyöng's "The Poor" ("Kananhan saramdül") collectively projected the image of grassroots Koreans as, again, the rebellious *minjung*. Their main characters—variably factory laborers, students, rural servants, prostitutes, and peasants—are shown plotting and acting out revolts against their oppressors—typically wealthy landlords, modern capitalists, and, at times, the Japanese (see S. Park 2006, 177).<sup>15</sup> Pak Yönghui, the founding chairman of the KAPF, coined this group of stories the term "New Tendency literature" (*sin'gyöngnyangp'a munhak*). He famously characterized the trend as a literature that gave priority to "outcry over form, reality over description, power over beauty, protest over compromise, and truth over exaggeration" (1925, 5).

New Tendency literature has long been regarded as an early socialist narrative form whose emotional excess and ideological immaturity would later be overcome by a more disciplined "proletarian literature" informed by Marx's historical materialist outlook on society and history. Yet underlying the momentous epistemological and thematic shift in modern Korean literature was not some amorphous socialist idea but a recognizable anarchist worldview, in which society was divided between the haves

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<sup>13</sup> In 1930, Kim published in Chinese "Strange Weapon" (Ch. "Qiguai de wuqi") in *Xin dongfang* (New East), which related the historical account of a group of Korean anarchists who resorted to violence. A Korean translation of the account, "Kimyohan mugui," was published in 1990 (Kim S. 1990). Its English translation will be included in See Kim and Wales (forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> For a character study of the protagonists of early modern Korean fiction, see Yang (2017).

<sup>15</sup> Some of these stories are available in translation. See Na Tohyang, "Samnyong the Mute," in S. Park (2010, 125–140), and Song Yöng, "The Blast Furnace," translated by Samuel Perry, in Hughes et al. (2013, 15–38).



(*yusanja*) and have-nots (*musanja*), that is, the ruling elites versus the politically and economically disenfranchised *minjung*.<sup>16</sup> It must be said that, historically, few of the writers of New Tendency literature were explicitly affiliated with anarchist organizations. The ascription of anarchist influence to this body of work is thus necessarily tentative and may have to be limited to what Barbara Epstein has termed a diffuse form of “anarchist sensibility” (2001).<sup>17</sup> Still, the timing and the plot pattern of New Tendency literature makes it likely that this body of literature was inspired by the works of Kropotkin and his cohorts.

This anarchist sensibility and the New Tendency narrative form were not strictly confined to literature; their influence extended also to the fields of film and theater. With the near-complete loss of the Korean film archive during World War II, when more than 140 films were materially destroyed to extract their silver, it is impossible today to reach any assessment of colonial film. Judging from what we know of the plot and a few remaining still photos, however, Na Un'gyu's legendary film *Arirang* (1926) was very much in line with New Tendency literature. The film told the story of Yöngjin, the son of a peasant, who goes insane “for an unknown reason”—which often connoted in the period's cultural discourse one's participation in the uprisings and the suffering of its aftermaths—while studying “philosophy” in Seoul. The young man finds no respite at his rural home, where his family is constantly harassed by a greedy landlord's agent. One of the surviving stills shows a close-up of the face and torso of a furious Yöngjin raising a sickle against the agent. Although today the film is often celebrated as a lost masterpiece of Korean national cinema, it appears to have emphasized the theme of class struggle over that of national unity, and it deployed the trope of increasing oppression culminating in revolt, which was by then familiar to audiences through the repeated replay of a similar scene in fictional works.<sup>18</sup>

Reconstructing the history of colonial leftist theater is no less difficult. Most theatrical plays were written and staged by nonprofessional actors in various labor, peasant, and youth organizations. Few of their transcripts survive today, but we do have a detailed record of the anarchist theater activity of Yu Ch'ijin, a major literary intellectual of the 1930s. While studying English literature at Rikkyo University in Tokyo, Yu read a Japanese translation of Romain Rolland's *People's Theater* (Fr. *Le Théâtre du peuple*; 1902), as well as works by Kropotkin and Bakunin, and he joined the activist anarchist theatrical group Kaihō gekijō led by Ōda Toyoji (Yu C. 1933; 1993, 86–87). He contributed to the group's staging of an adaptation of Upton Sinclair's *Boston*, which critiqued the American system of justice from a working-class perspective against the

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<sup>16</sup> In later Marxist discourse, “the proletariat” would be transliterated as *nodongja*. For the variable translations of “the proletariat” in colonial Korea, see S. Park (2015, 133–134).

<sup>17</sup> Epstein uses “anarchist sensibility” in reference to the popularity of anarchism more as a principle of anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism than as a political doctrine among the young radical activists of the anti-globalization movement.

<sup>18</sup> For a postnationalist reading of *Arirang* and its reception by colonial Koreans, see Kim Ryösil (2006, 88–118).

background of the execution of Italian-born American anarcho-syndicalists Sacco and Vanzetti (Yi Sang'u 2015, 56). Of Yu's own plays, most of which treated issues related to labor and poverty, *Cow (So)* (Yu C. 1935) in particular stands out for its adoption of a New Tendency narrative form. In it, two brothers plan to sell the family cow to raise funds for, respectively, a wedding and a migration to Manchuria. Their hopes are dashed, however, when the landlord's agent confiscates the animal to repay for the family's debts. After a sustained fight, the family attempts to appeal to court, only to find the litigation fee forbidding. Having lost the last resort, and upon learning that his bride-to-be is to be sold to Japan, the older brother sets the landlord's granary on fire. The play was first staged in Japan, where censorship was laxer, and when Yu brought it to the Korean stage, the act of arson at the end was somewhat incongruously replaced by a peasant festival (Yi Sang'u 1997, 75). Also likely but less documented was the influence of anarchism during the 1920s and 1930s on proletarian theatrical plays that were staged by amateur groups in provincial cities and villages, since anarchists were ever more invested in the rural peasant movement than Marxists were.<sup>19</sup>

Kropotkin's call for a popular revolt or revolution, which was translated into an anticolonial, more ethnocentric notion of *minjung* revolution in colonial Korea, found its cultural expression in the transmedia phenomenon of mid-1920s New Tendency. Although leftist literature developed in the direction of a Marxist proletarian literature past the mid-1920s, the impact of anarchism on colonial cultural modernity was more than merely transient. In fact, the popularity of New Tendency literature decidedly reoriented the colonial cultural mainstream to the left. Insofar as anarchism was at least partially responsible for bringing about this cultural phenomenon, we are poised today to reassess the historical legacy of anarchism beyond its received memory as a minor, immature strand of socialism. In the next section, we will examine the cultural repercussions of Kropotkin's ideal of mutual-aid cooperatism, the obverse side of the coin of popular revolution.

### **Mutual Aid and 1930s Peasant Literature**

Mutual-aid cooperatism, the ideal of a voluntary cooperative society based on an egalitarian federation of commune members, was Kropotkin's positive vision for a postrevolutionary anarcho-communist society. In the local Korean context, the ideal of cooperatism played an important social role. It was a foundational value that indirectly supported the creation of a number of workers' labor unions and peasants' mutual-aid cooperatives as a way of empowering the *minjung* in their struggle for economic survival. Indeed, the somewhat utopian ideals of cooperation and mutual aid became important ingredients in the period's anarchism-inspired activism in both urban and rural settings.

Kropotkin's ideal of mutual aid also provided an alternative vision within culture for the authors of peasant literature (*nongmin munhak*), which emerged as an

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<sup>19</sup> For a detailed history of independent leftist theater movements in colonial Korea, see An (2001).

important subcategory of the leftist literary movement in the early 1930s. The period's renewed attention to peasant literature was motivated by both the aggravating plight of local peasants in the wake of the 1929 Great Depression and the declared support by the Comintern for the idea of an agrarian revolution in East Asia. Moreover, leftist writers took up peasant literature in order to counter the elitist tendencies of so-called rural reform literature (*nongch'on munhak*), in which an urban intellectual would typically enlighten ignorant peasants and awaken them to the collective goal of nation-building, much in line with the colonial government's Rural Revitalization Campaign (*nongch'on chinhŭng undong*; 1932–1940).

Although the idea of mutual aid itself was not necessarily targeted at agrarian communities, it contributed to shaping many Korean writers' utopian imagination for peasant society, partly because it filled the discursive gap left by the Marxist preoccupation with the industrial proletariat. In addition, Kropotkin's ideal easily overlapped with the traditional Taoist and Confucian motif of self-sufficient farming villages as the basic foundation of a stable and harmonious society.

The ideals of cooperation and mutual aid found an effective literary representation in the works of Hŏ Munil, a member of the anarchist group Alliance of Freedom Arts (*Chayu yesul tongmaeng*; 1928–?) as well as one of the most productive writers in the genre of peasant literature. In Hŏ's "Autonomous Village" ("Chajuch'ŏn"; 1933), for example, a vision of an egalitarian farming community stands counter to a social order in which peasants are exploited by tyrannical landlords and their foremen. The story's protagonist is a returning young man called Han Ilmin, whose name can mean either "a commoner" or "the Korean people."<sup>20</sup> Han has been educated in Japan and has previously been politically active in Seoul. He now regrets his "[mistaken] addiction to Marxism," however, and rather subscribes to the indigenous egalitarian religion of Ch'ŏndogyo (Hŏ 1933, July 53–54).<sup>21</sup> Under his guidance, the village takes up communal farming and organizes institutions of mutual support such as a school (*nongmin hakkyo*) and a cooperative (*kongsaeng chohap*). The success of the five-year venture is signaled by the fact that "the tenant members could gradually pay off their debts to the landlord" and become independent farmers (Hŏ 1933, Aug. 57). As Kim T'aekho has noted, both religious and ideological inspirations formed the basis for Hŏ's writing of "Autonomous Village" (Kim T. 2009, 138–144). The anarchist imprint, however, lies in both the story's class-based outlook and the modern economic solutions for rural poverty that are therein entertained.

Yi Kiyŏng, another writer who had maintained close ties to rural society since the early 1920s, played a leading role in advancing the cause of peasant literature during the 1930s. Yi was the author of the novel *Hometown* (*Kohyang*; 1934), which was widely

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<sup>20</sup> The Chinese character *min* can ambiguously refer to either a single individual or a collective subject. I thank Yoon Sun Yang for this insight.

<sup>21</sup> The Ch'ŏndogyo religion grew out of the nineteenth-century doctrine of *Tonghak* (Eastern learning), which was itself an amalgam of Catholicism and the traditional religions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. On *Tonghak*, see Kallander (2013).

regarded as a milestone for peasant literature and to this day counts as the recognized masterpiece of the genre. Equal parts reportage fiction and collective novel, *Hometown* again tells the story of a peasant community whose members organize under the leadership of a student returnee from Japan.<sup>22</sup> At its center lies the revival of the institution of the *ture*, which used to be a traditional system of mutual support to which peasants could turn in the case of tenancy disputes, among others. Critics have seen the *ture* in *Hometown* as a nativist and antimodern trope, to which I have responded with a straightforwardly socialist interpretation (see Gabroussenko 2010, 88–91; S. Park 2015, 152–153). It now seems to me, however, that the theme of an autonomous mutual-aid cooperative rather marks *Hometown* specifically as anarchist. Although the novel was extensively imbued with a Marxist influence, Yi could arguably write it as he did only by relying on the anarchist lessons of mutual aid and cooperatist utopia, which enabled him to envision peasants as agents of social change. The Comintern had indeed declared in 1928 that the revolution in Korea would have to be agrarian rather than industrial, but it stopped short of contesting the Marxist priority of the industrial proletariat. Like Kropotkin, Yi plausibly alternately deployed Marxism and anarchism in his understanding and representation of early twentieth-century Korean society.<sup>23</sup>

We have so far examined the ways in which two central themes of Kropotkin's anarchist doctrines—popular revolt and mutual aid—had a shaping influence on the Korean literature of the 1920s and 1930s. By laying the ground for the New Tendency narrative form and by similarly encouraging new peasant literature, anarchism pioneered a *minjung*-oriented modern culture on the peninsula, thereby opening the way to an alternative, counterhegemonic approach to the modernization of political culture in Korea. The extent to which this approach differed from classical Marxism should not be overemphasized, but it is real nonetheless. Although Kropotkin's version of anarchism shared with Marxism a critique of the modern capitalist state and a class-based outlook, the Russian thinker departed from Marxism through his objection to authoritarianism and to all dictatorships, including that of the proletariat. This anti-authoritarian tenor was a big selling point for modern Korean intellectuals, who more than anything else resented the imposition of colonial authority over their country. As we will see in the next section, a third way in which the work of Kropotkin had an influence on Korean culture was via his ethical naturalism on the topics of civilization and evolution. In those areas, too, Kropotkin's views differed radically from those of both liberalism and Marxism, which makes it all the more rewarding to research their impact in colonial Korea.

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<sup>22</sup> For further analysis of the novel, see S. Park (2015, 147–156). For the theorization of the collective novel as a leftist literary form, see Foley (1993, 398–443).

<sup>23</sup> Yi Kiyŏng was a member of the Black Wave Society (Hŭktohoe; 1921–1923) but later joined the Marxists at the KAPF. For relevant biographical details and the anarchist influence on his early works, see Kim Chonghyŏn (2004) and Kim Hŭngsik (2005). The latter also notes that the use of *ture* in *Hometown* is a lasting effect of anarchism on Yi's fiction (2005, 33).

### **Ethical Naturalism and the Appeal of Nature**

If the New Tendency and an ideal of mutual aid were distinctive trends among modern Korean writers, another important theme of anarchist provenance was that of “naturalism,” understood as a view that first and foremost eulogizes the natural world as a source of life and vitality, and as the grounding for the ethical behavior that is necessary for both social and biological evolution. This theme was especially influential within poetry. In contrast to the social realist style of later KAPF writers, who often focused on the life of the proletariat in urban settings, earlier poets such as Hwang Sögu, Kim Söksong, and Kwön Kuhyön tended to mix political themes with a rich natural imagery and with a genuine interest in modern natural science.<sup>24</sup>

Like the other two themes, the naturalist themes in modern Korean literature had a formative precedent in Kropotkin’s work. Kropotkin was himself, by profession, a reputed geographer and geologist, and he maintained a lifetime interest in the modern natural sciences. Particularly influential was his theorization of anarchism as a political and philosophical response to the social Darwinist doctrines that were rampant in the middle of the nineteenth century. Like Darwin, Kropotkin too believed that humans are the products of an evolutionary process of natural selection. Social Darwinism, however, often relied on the concept of survival of the fittest to provide an ethical-political justification for colonization and other imperialist practices. The anarchist answer to that move was to argue that, within this framework, empathy, mutual support, and socialization are much more likely than competitiveness and individual ambition to promote survival. Kropotkin thus argued that, short of being something that distinguishes humans from the natural world, the idea of cooperation among members of a species is deeply ingrained in our biological nature as a trait that favors our survival. In *Mutual Aid*, for instance, Kropotkin wrote:

We may safely say that mutual aid is as much a law of animal life as mutual struggle, but that, as a factor of evolution, it most probably has

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<sup>24</sup> Both Hwang Sögu and Kim Söksong wrote poems in free verse, each taking inspiration from French symbolism and Walt Whitman’s writings on democracy. French symbolist poetry enjoyed broad popularity among international anarchist writers during the early 1920s. This phenomenon does not necessarily suggest an inherent connection between symbolism and anarchism; rather, both the aesthetic style and the radical doctrine were regarded as most “revolutionary” at that time, and radical intellectuals seem to have been drawn to both, as had been the case with many postrevolutionary symbolists in France during the late nineteenth century. See McGuinness (2015, 75–78). For a book-length study of Hwang’s life and poetry, see Chöng (2008). For a study of Kim’s life and works, including the reprints of his poetry, his partial translation of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, and his essay on *minjung munye* (people’s art), see Chu (2001). By contrast, Kwön Kuhyön, an anarchist poet of the late 1920s known by his pen name, Black Star (Hüksöng), preferred to use more people-friendly poetic forms, such as the traditional *sijo* and *kasa*, and *ch’angga* (song), a transitional hybrid form of traditional poetry and modern song. See his *Hükbang üi sönmul* (A gift from a black chamber; 1927), in Kwön (2008, 3–77).

a far greater importance, inasmuch as it favours the development of such habits and characters as insure the maintenance and further development of the species, together with the greatest amount of welfare and enjoyment of life for the individual, with the least waste of energy. (Kropotkin 1902)

This ethical naturalism allowed Kropotkin to dispense with a common justification for the authority of the state, namely, that state rule is made necessary by the brutal and dangerous quality of uncivilized life within the Hobbesian state of nature. By arguing that humans are naturally inclined to cooperative behavior, Kropotkin was defending their ability to organize their own communities from the ground up, without the need for a state authority.

In the East Asian context, Kropotkin's ethical naturalism encouraged anarchist intellectuals to take an interest in the new knowledge of modern natural science. As Konishi has shown in *Anarchist Modernity*, Japanese anarchists took to translating and writing on Darwin's evolutionary theory, Ilya Mechnikov's microbiology, and Jean-Henri Fabre's entomology (2013, 296–328). In Korea, added to the interest in Darwin was an intellectual fascination with Albert Einstein and his theory of relativity.<sup>25</sup> Einstein was then widely hailed as a symbol of democracy, as many students saw in him an ideal of radical scientific enlightenment that could ideally be transposed to the political realm.<sup>26</sup>

One of the clearest examples of the impact of Kropotkin's naturalism on modern Korean writers is Hwang Sögu's collection of poetry titled *Ode to Nature (Chayönsong; 1929)*. The volume contains 153 poems whose nature-themed titles include not only the natural symbols favored in traditional poetry, such as flowers, leaves, trees, and stars, but also those newly introduced by modern science such as the earth (*chigu*) and the solar system (*t'aeyanggye*). As is the case with other anarchism-inspired poets, Hwang's images of nature largely fall into two categories: images of a harmonious, utopian nature and those of a violent, revolutionary one. Although the poems in the volume feature a wide range of natural tropes, such as the moon, the stars, the wind, and the river, it is the sun, "a symbol of democracy" in contemporary anarchist discourse, that recurs most frequently (Kim H. [1925], 324). On the one hand, the nearest star is portrayed as the benevolent source of life on earth. The earth is variably represented as a cradle for all living beings that are "children of the sun," "a greenhouse" in which humans are the caretakers of life, and "a factory of the sun" whose product is "happiness."<sup>27</sup> The sun is thus seen as a godly being to which the people can appeal for

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<sup>25</sup> Einstein's theory of relativity was first introduced by the anarchist Na Kyöngsöök (1922). For the absence of Fabre's translation in colonial Korea and his surging popularity in postcolonial South Korea, see Kim Süngyeon (2013).

<sup>26</sup> For the political reception of Einstein in East Asia, China in particular, see Hu (2005).

<sup>27</sup> "Chigu saengmul" (Earth and every creature), "T'aeyang i kajigo innün kongjang" (A factory of the sun), and "Chigu wi üi singmul in'gandül" (Plants and humans on earth), in Hwang S. (2016, 31, 28, 32).

their sustenance.<sup>28</sup> In a different perspective, however, the sun also symbolizes “the burning soul of workers” and “a big dashing bomb to destroy the darkness,” by which the poet would willingly become consumed.<sup>29</sup> In one of Na Hyesok’s most celebrated woodblock works, a powerfully painted red sun symbolizes both vitality and the rising promise of revolt (see figure 1).<sup>30</sup> Images such as these at once reflect a Kropotkian idealization of nature, in which different species live in a harmony achieved by the selective process of evolution, and a conviction that evolution renders the anarcho-communist revolution inevitable, since the abolition of the modern capitalist state cannot but enhance the chances of survival of the human species.



Figure 1. Na Hyesok’s *Kaebyok* (Pioneer), July 1921. Source: Reprint from the *I Am Na Hyesok* Catalogue. Courtesy of the Suwon Museum.

<sup>28</sup> “Önũ mul ũi hasoyön” (A water drop’s appeal), in Hwang S. (2016, 127).

<sup>29</sup> “T’aeyang” (The sun) and “Nae tongmu t’aeyanga” (My friend the sun), in Hwang S. (2016, 29 and 27).

<sup>30</sup> For the anarchist influence on Na’s paintings, see Ku Chöngghwa (2010).

Hwang's nature poems also displayed an ethically and politically motivated interest in modern science, especially astronomy and physics, with the frequent evocation of planets, meteors, the universe, particles, and atoms. In "A Nihilist's View of Life and Earth" ("Hömuin ūi saengmulgwan kwa chigugwan"), for instance, the narrator contemplates various apocalyptic possibilities, including the return of an ice age, the cooling of the sun, a global earthquake, a collision with other planets, and "the explosion of an atomic bomb" (Hwang S. 2016, 57). Aside from a passion for scientism, such apocalyptic imaginations for the end of the "ugly" earth, or rather its present social reality, was the poet's oblique, metaphorical way of expressing his repressed subversive political desire at a time of intensifying surveillance and censorship.

In other cases, the appeal to physical nature was meant to provide support for a broader socialist view whose grounding was idealistically found in the rational order of nature. In a review essay on Einstein's theory of relativity, for example, Yi Chöngnyöl wrote that the theory confirmed our space-time to be continuous all the while being "in accordance with both our relative notion of space-time and the universal natural law" (Yi C. 1923, 64). The colonial writer thus interpreted Einstein's theory of general relativity almost as a scientific endorsement of a counterhegemonic view of modernity as well as a critique of global capitalist modernity. Like Hwang's cosmic poems, Yi's essay was illustrative of the Korean anarchists' ethically motivated interest in modern natural science. It was in science that these intellectuals thought they could find a theoretical support for their aspiration for alternate modernity.<sup>31</sup>

As Raymond Williams has written, "*Nature* is perhaps the most complex word in language" (Williams [1976] 1983, 219). Indeed, East Asia itself has enjoyed a long tradition of nature poems based on traditional philosophies such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. By the late nineteenth century, however, the Western romanticist cult of nature was introduced to the region, and the "natural poetry" (*chayönsi*) of the anarchist poets was something else still. If they were in agreement with the romantics in perceiving human beings as separate from nature, and even in regarding nature as antithetical to civilization, anarchist writers also mustered little pastoral nostalgia and, in its place, they mixed the eulogization of nature with an interest in modern natural science. Also distinctive was their sense of political commitment. In tune with New Tendency literature, anarchist poets, too, frequently featured *minjung* characters such as a peasant, a peddler, a prisoner, and a homeless person. These poets often relied on natural imagery to express their political stance, in the process yielding memorable metaphors such as Hwang's "ballistic sun," Yi Yuksa's

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<sup>31</sup> In 1920s East Asia, as Danian Hu (2005) documents in *China and Albert Einstein*, Einstein's name stood for both revolutionary science and radical democracy. It was Na Kyöngsök, an anarcho-syndicalist with a diploma from Tokyo Engineering High School, who serialized the first newspaper articles on Einstein's theory of relativity in *Dong-a ilbo* under the pseudonym Public Citizen (Kongmin). See Na Kyöngsök (1922). For analysis of these articles, see Kim Süngyeon (2012, 40–42).



“iron rainbow,” and Kim Hyöngwön’s “mute pebble.”<sup>32</sup> Like Kropotkin himself, Korean anarchists were at heart humanists rather than ecologists, in that they never advanced any advocacy for the exclusive sake of environmental protection. Still, their idealized approach to the natural world, which showed in their poetic celebration of nature, set them apart from other contemporaries and made them unlikely promoters of modern scientific knowledge.

## Conclusion

When anarchism landed on Korean shores in the early twentieth century, it entered a society that was under strain from both a compressed process of modernization and a recently imposed status of colonial subjection. These twin factors help explain both the ideological flexibility and the nationalist inflections of anarchism as it was received on the peninsula. Having abruptly transitioned from the Confucian monarchy to a colonial government, 1920s Korean intellectuals found themselves attracted to all sorts of anti-authoritarian ideologies. They thus joined the reading of anarchist texts with the appreciation of works such as Rousseau’s *Social Contract* and Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Moreover, anticolonial nationalism was from the start a central component of the anarchists’ ideological makeup. As critics have noted, there was a strong synergy in modern Korea between specific resistance to the colonial government and the more radical desire for a fundamental social revolution for the establishment of a cooperatist utopia (Crump 1996, 50; D. Hwang 2016, 1–6).

Aside from its affinity with nationalism, colonial Korean anarchism had its ideological complexity in that its mainstream version was Kropotkin’s anarcho-communism, which combined anarchist anti-authoritarianism with a Marxist critique of capitalism. This fact had crucial implications for both the historical trajectory of colonial anarchism and its subsequent retelling in Korean cultural history. Because Kropotkin’s writings had already integrated Marx’s critique of capitalism, their popularization paved the way for the later dissemination of Marxism. For this reason, many Korean anarchists, who were initially attracted to Kropotkin for his anticapitalism, experienced their later shift from anarchism to Marxism less as an ideological conversion than as a further radicalization. In Korea as well as elsewhere, however, anarchists never established a single aesthetic doctrine such as socialist realism, and no attempt seems to have been made to construct a canon of anarchist literature.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the general dismissal of anarchism during the Cold War era, these reasons have obstructed for long our appreciation of anarchism’s influence on modern Korea. It is only after departing from both the nationalist and the Soviet-centric interpretive paradigms, I believe, that we can recognize anarchism in its own right as the first transnational

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<sup>32</sup> Hwang Sögu, “Nae tongmu t’aeyang’a,” in Hwang S. (2016, 27); Yi Yuksa, “Chölichöng” (The summit; 1940) and Kim Hyöngwön, “Chagün tol üi norae” (A song of a pebble; 1921), in Chu (2001, 166).

<sup>33</sup> I thank Rossen Djagalov for his comment on this lack of an anarchist literary canon in world literature.

socialist culture that enabled Koreans to imagine a modernity alternative to that of imperialist capitalism.

In spite of the prominence of Kropotkin's anarcho-communist theories in colonial Korea, it would be a mistake to downplay the influence of other important strands of anarchism. In his 1923 report on contemporary Japanese thought, for instance, Hwang Sögu noted that "Japanese anarchism is an anti-authoritarian individualist thought based on those of [William] Godwin, [Pierre-Joseph] Proudhon, Stirner, Bakunin, and Kropotkin. That is to say, it gives priority to the individual before anything else. Although there are socialist anarchists like Proudhon, most Japanese anarchists are individualists like Stirner" (Hwang S. 1923, 35). The German anarchist Max Stirner's individualistic and nihilist amorality, in which established social institutions and values were seen as false illusions that prevent one's self-fulfillment, left some traces in the writings of Korean anarchists as well as in Hwang's own poetry (Leopold 2015). An individualist stance, however, was almost always expressed in fusion with social anarchism in Korea, possibly because Koreans' colonial condition made them more keenly aware of their own material constraints. Illustrative of this double-faced anarchism are Yöm Sangsöp's early writings. In "Double Liberation" ("Ijung haebang"), for instance, Yöm upheld the individualist ideal of delivering "the New Men of the New Age from the fetters of corrupted old morals" in order to liberate "youths from their...parents and elders, housewives from their husbands, individuals from...traditional customs...workers from their hard lives and chains of labor exploitation, and the people from the bonds of tyranny" (Yöm 1920, 5). Indeed, Yöm's later masterpiece, a 1924 novella titled *On the Eve of the Uprising* (Mansejön), would feature a Nietzschean, Stirnerian nihilist who transforms into an anti-imperialist nationalist after undergoing the experience of violence and repression at the hands of the colonial regime.<sup>34</sup> Recognizing the internal complexity of Korean anarchism enables us to understand, again, why we find in colonial journals the name of Kropotkin not only alongside the likes of Maxim Gorky, Vasili Eroshenko, and Leo Tolstoy, but also those of Henrik Ibsen, Walt Whitman, and Oscar Wilde, all of whom had a sympathy for libertarian individualism, if not anarchism.

Remarking upon the reasons why anarchism prevailed over Marxism as the most influential socialist doctrine throughout the world between the 1880s and the 1920s, Benedict Anderson has highlighted its utopian élan, its affirmation of the history-making agencies of peasants and agricultural laborers, and its internationalism (Anderson 2010, xv). As we have seen in this article, these reasons hold for the Korean case as well. The Kropotkian themes of mutual aid and cooperatism were particularly well received in Korea's rural contexts, and anarchism's utopian opposition to the state found its expression in the colonized intellectuals' antagonism toward the imperial regime.

Despite its relegation to prolonged historical oblivion in both North Korea and South Korea, the legacy of colonial anarchism is well alive today on the peninsula. In the

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<sup>34</sup> For an analysis of Yöm's novella, see S. Park (2015, 160–196).

postcolonial decades of the 1950s through the 1970s, South Korean anarchists toned down their radicalism under the government's anticommunist campaign, focusing instead on the rural revitalization movement and continuing their educational activism at the local level (D. Hwang 2016, 16). During the democratization movement of the 1980s, however, the term *minjung* resurfaced to become the preferred name for the masses disaffected with the militarist regime, although it was only in the post-democratization era that the anarchist origin of the terminology received public attention. As was the case in other countries, the contemporary Korean interest in anarchism arose in the wake of the apparent failure of the historical experiment of communism during the late 1980s, and it further intensified amid the traumatic repercussions of the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

The recent Korean scholarship on anarchism has its social counterpart in post-democratization activist efforts such as the cooperative movement (*hyöptong chohap*), the autonomous rural community movement (*chach'i kongdongch'e*), and radical environmentalism.<sup>35</sup> Considering that these phenomena grew partly in response to the financial difficulties caused by global economic crises, we may say that anarchism today has again become a counterhegemonic force in pursuit of an alternative modernity to the neoliberal capitalist order. Indeed, many people believe that capitalism, running into conservative populist backlashes, has bankrupted itself. Today, the crises we face call more than ever for globally coordinated countermeasures. Therefore, retracing the transnational history of classical anarchism, which advanced an eloquent critique of issues such as predatory capitalism and racial discrimination, can provide us with lessons from the past and a timely inspiration for the future.

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<sup>35</sup> For anarchist movements in today's South Korea, see Kim Söngguk et al. (2013). Also, the anarchist paradigm can be useful in the currently ongoing study of the grassroots rural revitalization movement of South Korea; see A. Park (2016).

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