

# Reading National Heroes from Fantasy: Shin Chae-ho's "The Dream Heaven"

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Up to the present, the writings of Shin Chae-ho (1880-1936) have been evaluated by dualism. His historical writings, often recognized as the symbol of national identity and the spirit of independence, have been hailed for their contribution to the anti-Japanese movement during the colonial period (1910-1945), whereas his literary works received aesthetically low appreciation due to their political aspects, that is, their use of narrative as a tool for promoting national identity. This dualism, however, provides an important reason for revisiting Shin's literary writings; they contain important clues to understanding his historical perspectives, which are singular in the formation of religious and spiritual nationalism before and during the colonial period. Beyond a dichotomy of literature and history, this paper aims to examine the comprehensive structure between narrative and ideology where the discourse of the people forms that of national characteristics. Through a close reading of Shin's fiction, "The Dream Heaven" (*Kkum Haneul*), I will explore the images of national heroes in their connection with the historical formation of the concept of new people in the discourse of the invented tradition.

*Keywords: New People (shin min), social Darwinism, religious nationalism, collective identity, metahistory*

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## Introduction

The nation emerged in the name of people, but the people who mandated the nation would have to be remade to serve as their own sovereign. The

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making/remaking of the people is the political expression of the temporal problem: the metaphysics of History as the evolution of the same.  
(Duara: 32)

The concept of the people has always been in the process of being molded rather than in a fixed context. It is not difficult to observe changes, whether sudden or gradual, in the meaning of the people in East Asian countries when they exerted themselves to build a nation-state, inspired by European expansionism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Importing the system of constitutional monarchy from European countries, Japan struggled to demarcate the rights of the people, which distinguished themselves from the traditional imperial subjects (Maruyama 1992). Chinese intellectuals, such as Liang Qichao, also had to mull over a new type of people who could shoulder the nation's destiny and make constant progress in the racial battle with the advanced West (Tang 1996). Korea, located between China and Japan, traditional and modern empires, respectively, was not an exception; she had to develop her own idea of the people and link it to the issue of sovereignty in order to build a nation-state as a political barrier against the international vortex of imperialism.

Then, who was it that recognized the importance of the discourse of people and provided a systematic understanding of it as an effort to construct a nation-state in Korea? That is the starting point of this research and the reason that one needs to pay attention to Shin Chae-ho (1880-1936) and his writings. Born into a family of the yangban aristocracy and given a traditional Confucian education in the state academy, Sungkyunkwan, and yet, he devoted his life to creating a discourse of new people (*shin min*) and establishing them as a subject in his modern national histories, discarding the idea of the masses as a hidden subject in the court-centered records. Additionally, he played an important role in enlightening the people by contributing editorials to the Korea Daily News (*Daehan Maeil Sinbo*). When Korea was annexed by Japan, he was exiled to Manchuria and proposed an armed fight against the Japanese imperial armies.<sup>1</sup>

His writings include nationalist histories, essays and fictions; however, he is more known as a historian than a fiction writer. "A New Reading of History" (*Doksa Sillon*, 1908) and *Early History of Korea (Joseon Sanggosa*, 1931-1932) are regarded as major contributions to the formation of a Korean identity and as

1. This paragraph is the summarization of the chapters 1 and 2 of Shin Yong-ha's *Shinchaehoui Sahoe Sasang Yeongu* (A Study on Shin Chae-ho's Social Ideologies).

symbols of the anti-Japanese movement during the colonial period (1910-1945) (Shin 1984; Kim 1995). Meanwhile, his fiction has been placed in the periphery of literary history. "The Dream Heaven" (*Kkum Haneul*, 1916?) and "A Hot Fight between a Dragon and a Dragon" (*Yonggwa Yongui Daegyekjeon*, 1920s-1930s?) receive aesthetically low appreciation thanks to their fantastic settings and political objectives, that is, using narrative as a tool for promoting national identity (Cho 1979; Kim 1980). Without understanding his fiction, however, it is difficult to trace conceptual changes in his discourse of the people from new people to national heroes.

"The Dream Heaven" is a journey to meet national heroes of the past.<sup>2</sup> Not only do the battles of the secular world continue to occur in the heavenly world but also the discipline of *yagyuk kangsik* (the stronger prey upon the weaker) continues to prevail. Despite (and through the effective use of) the fantastic setting of a dream, the narrator stimulates ordinary people to follow the examples of heroes of the past so that each one of them can be a national hero of the present.

In pursuing a more vivid picture of national heroes, this paper presents a close reading of Shin's fantasy, "The Dream Heaven." Yet, it will not simply follow the topics and themes represented in the main stream of the story. Rather, images of national heroes and the distinctive literary settings for their embodiment will be examined in the extension of the formative history of the concept of the new people. In order to do this, I will demonstrate the trajectories from the first images of the new people, which were projected through the writings of those who first contacted the West, to Shin's reflection on national heroes.

I argue that multi-layered times and spaces in the dream of a journey to heaven and hell played a substantial role to link the interior and exterior of the story and made natural the conversion of the loyalty of heroes of the past into the patriotism to *minjok* (the nation) in the present. Showing the continuity of collective identity in the images of past national heroes, Shin succeeds in combining various dynastic histories as one comprehensive national narrative. In these comprehensive social efforts to institutionalize the concept and the entity of people, I believe, not only the nation-state, but also modern literature was construct-

2. The word "*Kkum Haneul*" is coined by Shin Chae-ho. *Kkum* means a dream, and *haneul* heaven or sky. If the combination of these two common nouns makes sense, it should be "*Kkum sogeui haneul*" or "*Kkumeseo bon haneul*," (Heaven in a dream or the heaven that is seen in a dream). At first, I translated the title as "Heaven in a Dream"; however, it lost the provocation and freshness of the original title. Hence, I changed it to "The Dream Heaven."

ed, changed, and maintained.

## From New People to National Heroes

In late nineteenth century China and Korea, a discourse of enlightenment (*gae-hwa*), which had emerged in reaction to the rapid modernization of the West and Japan, brought up the issue of ‘new people’ to reformist intellectuals who were on the track of social Darwinism.<sup>3</sup> Liang Qichao (1873-1929) who coined the term, new people (*xinmin*; Kor. *shin min*), for example, attempted to find the causes of China’s slow development from its nationality. On the basis of the concept of ‘survival of the fittest,’ which was borrowed from social Darwinian thinkers, he criticized Confucianism as an unfitting ideology in modern society. He contended that Chinese people in previous ages did not pay attention to social evolution; and hence, China became weak in the battle of survival with other countries.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, he continued to argue that new people should be created to carry on the responsibility of saving and civilizing the country.

The situation in Korea was not much different from that of China. An editorial in the *Daehan Maeil Sinbo* (Korea Daily News), for instance, signaled an immediate call for a new people. Here the new people are described as subjects who hold new knowledge and who can be counted on for the survival of the country:

3. In fact, when Charles Darwin published his evolutionary ideas, he did not observe that the concept of evolution in nature is necessarily applicable to human society because he thought that “the ethical process is in opposition to the principle of the cosmic process” (Pusey 1983: 110, 237). Nevertheless, his evolutionary ideas were positively adopted by Spencer and Huxley, and once they were incorporated into society, they started to offer “racism with what looked like a powerful set of ‘scientific’ reasons for keeping out or even, as it turned out, expelling and murdering strangers” (Hobsbawm 1992: 108).
4. Liang strongly rebukes the Chinese people who do not have patriotism, but a slave mentality; who are so ignorant that not many intellectuals are available to expand the national wealth and ‘evolve’ the nation; and who are so cowardly and weak in the face of such severe and intense ‘competition for survival’ that the neighboring countries always keep an eye on the profits of China; “吾國民愛國之心，此諸歐西日本殊覺薄弱焉，此實不能為諱者也，而愛國之心薄弱，實為積弱之最大根源；二曰(吾國民)愚昧…其能知政學之本源，考人群之修理，而求所以富強吾國‘進化’吾種之道者，殆不滿百數十人也；(吾國民)怯懦…處今日‘生存競爭’最劇最烈，百虎眈眈，萬鬼環瞰之世界，而爾然偷息，酣然偃臥，高語仁義，甯非羞耶”(Liang Qichao 1926: 23, 28, and 31) [translation mine].

Our 20 million compatriots, throwing blame on each other, are heading toward self-destruction. On whom can our country rely to insure its survival? What we intend to achieve with the new people is to renew ourselves. Our government is called on to renew politics and our people to renew their knowledge. We must renew ourselves by our own efforts without waiting for others to come to help us renew ourselves... If we renew ourselves, we can expect a new system and new politics. (*Daehan Maeil Sinbo*, July 5, 1910)<sup>5</sup>

The initiation and popularization of a discourse of new people based on the discourse of civilization and social Darwinism can be traced back to Yu Kil-jun's (1856-1914) *Seoyu Gyeonmun* (Observations on a Journey to the West). In his famous book published in 1895, he says that "Enlightenment is [a status in which] every human affair in the world reaches its extreme good and beauty" (395). Providing three stages of enlightenment and linking them to three types of people, he states that "the enlightened is a person who investigates and manages the world affairs, and constantly makes progress of himself"; the semi-enlightened is a person who has completely opposite behaviors to the former; and the unenlightened is a person who does not know the scope of the world thanks to his/her barbarian status (396). In sum, it is believed that a civilized country is on the track of linear progress, and this progress is achieved by a new people who are enlightened through self-progress or cultivation. Generally, civilized countries like England and the US were regarded as the models of the nation-state.

The advent of the concept of new people *ipso facto* is closely related to the creation of a mental sphere with a telos, which is shared by the society in a homogeneous and egalitarian way. This argument does not mean that pre-modern society was operated by dull-witted functionalists. In traditional Joseon, an abstract world existed, at least, in the mind of the *yangban* aristocrats as a replica of the Chinese cultural center. Their dispositions of finding and appreciating the Way (Kor. *to*, Chi. *tao*) in the calligraphy and pictures in black and white indicate that their *habitus* was closer to the world of abstraction and discipline rather than the world of practicality.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, this Confucian world of abstraction

5. "Korea Urgently Need New People"; recited from Lee Gwang-rin (May, 1978: 42).

6. *Habitus* is a part of Bourdieu's theory of practice. It is a kind of flexible structure of dispositions, located in individuals and the society, which functions to differentiate the dominant class from the other. The introduction of the concept of *habitus* is a counteraction against the Marxist eco-

does not go beyond the boundaries of status-distinctions. The *yangban*'s pursuit and appreciation of morality and self-cultivation could not be juxtaposed with the practical minds of the lower classes, which put more stress on the various means for living and for survival.

The new discourse of enlightenment was one that functioned to *flatten out* this social disparity of mental spheres. It created a new domain of knowledge, including geology, sociology, politics and natural sciences, and divided the holder of knowledge from knowledge itself so that knowledge could be shared by anyone who was educated regardless of his social status. With the introduction of new domains of knowledge, not only *yangban* but also commoners were able to learn. In addition, this learning practice was encouraged by social Darwinism, which justified the idea of continual progress based on competition of knowledge and civilization. The concept of the accumulation of knowledge, not the cultivation of morality, began to be shared by society as a necessary ethos for the new people.<sup>7</sup>

The most influential book in the creation of the social mental sphere was the aforementioned *Observations on a Journey to the West*. In her essay, Kim Hyeon-ju insists that Yu "aims to conceive even the Western mind and spirit" through the "systematic understanding of knowledge" (Kim 2002: 213). According to her, he introduced a scientific language, taxonomy, quantification, and diagrams to enumerate and describe new encyclopedic discoveries that he encountered in the West. As she suggests, such scientific epistemology, which

conomic determinism and its rigid structuralism. For more detailed information, refer to Bourdieu (1977).

7. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that Yu's way of understanding Western civilization is not so sophisticated. His project of enlightening people is based on a vague interdependent relationship between a people and a country. For example, he said, "each nation obtains its name on the whole gamut of social gatherings, and a person can secure his [social] base only by leaning on the structure as a nation" (Yu: 323). In this sentence, it is questionable as to whether Yu's *guk* (a country or nation) refers to the meaning of a modern nation-state or if his concept of people corresponds to an individual or citizen. While using various expressions about a man, such as *in* (人), *min* (民), *inmin* (人民), or *beomin* (凡人), Yu argues that his duty is to pay loyalty to the nation; "if he is negligent in loyalty to the nation, it means that he does not perform his duty as a *min*" (325). He naively assumes that when the people are enlightened, the country will be naturally and automatically converted into a nation-state, and loyalty to the ruler will be shifted to patriotism to the nation. In short, his encyclopedic knowledge and its various domains contributed to opening the eyes of Korean intellectuals to world affairs and yet, he does not seem to fully understand how to institutionalize people and relate them to the structure of the nation.

illustrates the "centerless" relations of nature, humans, and nations, shifts Korea's political and cultural locus from China to the rest of the world, and in doing so, provides an ideal model of the nation based on its sovereignty guaranteed by international law (215-220). Yu's book, in short, inscribed the mental sphere of society with the Western sense of discipline, civilization, and social progress as an unavoidable path to reach the nation-state.

Meanwhile, the discourse of social Darwinism, to which Yu Kil-jun resorted for the mass-enlightenment, did not only have a positive aspect for the idea of self-strengthening (*jagang*), but also an indelible mark of defeatism. The logic of social Darwinism, without much emphasis on the standard of the 'fit' and 'unfit' in the discipline of the survival of the fittest, starts with a unilateral inferiority of one party and justifies the superior's future control over the inferior. In the passage below, for example, Chang Chi-yeon, a strong nationalist at the turn of the twentieth century, talks about the survival of the fittest, foreign intervention, and self-strengthening ideology in one consecutive stream, endorsing Korea's weakness.

Alas! Our sacred nation is now deprived of any hope for its own protection for the first time in its 4,000 year-history. Foreseeable is its downfall and disappearance. That the stronger wins and the weaker loses is a self-evident truth of the world. That the inferior, the ignorant, the isolated, and the weaker are destined to defeat and downfall, succumbing to the superior, the untied, and the stronger is the law of natural selection... If our people exert themselves further while reflecting on their being fettered and enslaved, discard all their chronic mental disease, cease their indulgence in jealousy, and remove their habit of relying on others and their idleness, and instead, rise up with patriotism and unite themselves to serve the common good, they will surely achieve the task of strengthening themselves.<sup>8</sup>

The big sigh with which Chang starts his speech is an expression of shame and agony, and a sense of inferiority that Korea is a weaker state than other nations. He assumes that a slave mentality, indulgence, and reliance on others caused the country to be placed in the situation of "downfall and disappearance." This self-

8. Chang Chi-yeon, "Safeguarding the Nation Will Be Possible after Forming Organizations," *Daehan Chaganghoe Weolbo* 5 (November 25, 1908); recited from Lee Gwang-rin (1978: 44)

criticism is truly an appropriate logical beginning for promoting self-strengthening and patriotism. Nevertheless, he, while rebuking the slave mentality of Koreans, at the same time, accepts the social Darwinian proposition of the survival of the stronger as a “self-evident truth of the world.” This form of double admission (of Korea’s inferiority and social Darwinian logic) became combined to produce an idea that Korea should be protected by other countries, for she is weak. As Andrea Schmid, a historian of Korean nationalist discourse, suggests, such nationalist self-criticism was eventually co-opted by the Japanese colonial policies (Schmid 2002).<sup>9</sup>

Ironically enough, however, the actual advance toward the construction of the nation-state was set after the Protectorate Treaty with Japan in 1905. Shin Chae-ho found nationalism as an alternative for the discourse of civilization based on social Darwinism, which endangered the destiny of the country by consolidating the notion that civilized, powerful nations could rule weak countries. In his fascinating and provocative book, Andre Schmid contends that Shin’s nationalism is geared to the particularity of Korea in contrast to the universality of the “civilization and enlightenment” (*munmyeong gaehwa*) ideas and that it provides the objective *minjok* (the ethnic nation) and its history as two important components for such particularity (171-198). He also argues that Shin, by combining the two elements to create a national genealogy, successfully expanded the concept of family to the national level. From *jokbo*, family genealogy, for instance, Shin “extracted a mode of narrating time and transposed it onto the nation” (186). In short, as Shin says, a nation is “a collective unity of families, and a history is a genealogy of the people” (Shin 1908b).<sup>10</sup>

As there is the originator in the family or clan record, so there is in the nation. In Shin’s nationalism, Schmid sees that Dangun, the mythical figure, plays the role of primogenitor of the nation and provides the departure point for national narration, and that martial heroes of the past and their loyalty to the country serves to distinguish the nation from other ethnic groups. In other words, Shin’s *minjok*-centered ideology is the singular synchronization of the purity of the bloodline, the consecration of war heroes as a means of protecting Korean spirits, and the exceptionality of national history, which embodies Korea as a country capable of greatness.

As Schmid pointed out, the movement for the construction of the nation-state

9. In “Epilogue.”

10. Hereafter translations of Shin’s writings are mine.



is triggered by the introduction of the discourse of knowledge (Schmid: 23-54). Without the prior experience of horizontal expansion of knowledge, which Yu's book brought forth, and the spread of social Darwinian discourse and its power to hierarchize the universalization of the concept of modernity, Shin could by no means understand the mechanism of the nation-state. Three conceptual components of the nation-state mentioned above—an imagined pure bloodline for the nation as an organic body, warriors of the past who are garnished as national heroes, and history which has a *telos* to advance toward the aim of nation-building—are the apparatuses Shin mobilized for the *gungmin* of the lost nation.

Such creation of national knowledge has close linkage with the discourse of the people. In particular, Shin's discourse of the people shows a distinctive conceptual trajectory from new people to heroes. Accepting the necessity of new people in constructing the *minjok*-centered country, he dislodged the concept of subjects from the traditional monarchy system. He says:

Is it possible to be disloyal to a king? Since he is the sovereignty of the nation, those who pay loyalty to the country are naturally those who pay loyalty to the king. Meanwhile, if the interests of the ruler and country are not compatible, we have to follow the nation and discard the king. (Shin 1909)

Shin was never confused in selecting terms for the nation and its people; his "state" refers to the nation-state (*minjok gukga*) and his "people" to citizen (*gungmin*) or compatriots (*dongpo*). No people "serving the great or superior countries" (*sadae juuija*) are allowed in his state. Subsequently, he linked his concept of *gungmin* to that of national heroes (*minjokjeok yeongung*) and said:

Heroes are the sacred gods and the world is a stage for them... The two letters of "*yeongung*" are the exquisite name designated for heroes, just as "tiger" is for wild beasts, and "hawk" is for wild birds. What kind of a person can deserve to have this exquisite name?... Only if a person's knowledge surpasses that of others, and his spirit (*gigae*) prevails in the world... then he can be called a hero...(Shin 1908c)

As seen above, Shin's heroes are like guarding gods that can serve the country with eminent knowledge and spirit. Selecting the martial heroes of the past and rediscovering them as national heroes, I believe, Shin attempted to imbue the

masses with pride and confidence that Korea could someday redeem its sovereignty at a time when Japanese protectorate and annexation treaties of Korea (in 1905 and 1910 respectively) castrated the material form of the nation-state. This spiritual and religious nationalism was the only means and hope left for citizens who had lost their country. His short stories reflect such individuals who dream of building the nation-state through the guide of protecting deities.

### “The Dream Heaven” and Images of National Heroes

“The Dream Heaven” (Kkum Haneul) is one of Shin Chae-ho’s posthumously published short stories. In fact, it did not appear before the public until the early 1970s, which was considerably after death of Shin Chae-ho. Due to this time lapse, there has been a debate as to whether or not he wrote this story, and if so, when, and how it became open to the public. Yet, recently, a consensus has been reached on some points: It is now held that Shin himself wrote this fiction in 1916.<sup>11</sup> Pertaining to the originality of the material, until currently, it was believed in South Korea that the 1972 Munhak Sasang edition was the original. Meanwhile, Kim Pyeong-min working in China argues that the South Korean version of Kkum Haneul lost a considerable amount of words, compared to the North’s version. He also contends that the original manuscript was discovered in the early 1960s and published in the North in 1966, which preceded the South Korean version (Kim 1995: 361-368). Accepting Kim’s argument, this paper refers to the North Korean edition of “The Dream Heaven” as the primary material for research.

“The Dream Heaven” is a record of a dream, which is an incomplete journey to the protection of guksu (national essence) through adventures experienced in heaven and hell.<sup>12</sup> One day in 1907, Hannom<sup>13</sup> the protagonist, happened to

11. Some scholars argued that “The Dream Heaven” was written in 1910 when Shin first settled in Manchuria. Meanwhile, other scholars, including Kim Yeong-min, argued that it was written in 1916, for it is said so in the preface to the story and secondly, given that 1910 is the year when Shin moved to China, it is not persuasive to assume that he was writing a fantasy while struggling to settle down in new surroundings (Kim 1997: 318-320).
12. “Incomplete” means literally not finished. “*Miwanseong Yugo*” (the incomplete manuscript) is marked at the end of the story.
13. The term, Hannom, has multi-faceted meanings. Han in Korean means one (*hana*), big or huge (e.g., *hankyere*), as well as a sentiment of grief or deploring; and hence, it could be interpreted as one ordinary person or a person who has a big perspective or who has a deep grief

watch a brutal battle in heaven, sitting on a big petal of a rose of Sharon.<sup>14</sup>

[I]t is not the wars that can be read in Eastern or Western histories. Warriors do not have weapons in their arms; yet, when they ‘crack, crack’ open their mouths, fire and water came out with swords and arrows... when the wounded is beheaded, his arms are fighting, and if arms disappear, then legs are fighting. This is the clash that will end when all of the flesh and bone of one of the parties is completely destroyed. In a few hours and a few minutes, corpses pile up to a thousand *li*,... sparkled blood colors even the sky red.

It was a heavenly version of the Battle of Salsu where Eulji Mundeok of Goguryeo Korea defeated the Yangdi of Sui China and his million troops in A.D. 612. Told by Eulji Mundeok that a struggle is a principle of the universe and the fight of the secular world continues to occur in the heavenly world, Hannom, with his other avatar-like friends<sup>15</sup>, moved to other historic battlefields. His colleagues, however, were discouraged by various temptations and harsh experiences, and eventually, only Hannom was able to reach the other battle fields.

The battle at which he arrived is a heavenly version of the Imjin War of 1592 (a.k.a. Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592 or Hideyoshi's Invasion of Korea in 1592). At this battle, Hannom attempted to stab Toyotomi

for his colonized country. Given that one of the Shin Chae-ho's pen names is Hannom, it could refer to himself as well.

14. The Rose of Sharon is the national flower of Korea. Yet, it is still unclear when it started to be recognized as such. According to Kang Hui-an (1417-1464)'s *Yanghwa Sorok* (A Small Record about Raising Flowers), it seems that even in the Joseon dynasty, *mokgeun* (an ancient name of the Rose of Sharon) was believed to be connected to Dangun. It says, “only after Dangun founded the nation, did *mokgeunhwa* begin to appear; that is why China always called our country [Korea] *geunyeok*” (瑾域, an area where the Rose of Sharon grows); Kang Hui-an 1973: 151). Shin Chae-ho might have read this book and deliberately attempted to use the Rose of Sharon to symbolically refer to a place where the offspring of Dangun are living together. In this sense, the illusionary dream of Hannom is more strongly attached to reality and history.
15. Different embodiments of the protagonist Hannom. When he moves to the battle fields, he is accompanied by six individual entities, which come from East, West, South, North, heaven and earth, and which are physically the same as Hannom. They go through different temptations and sufferings.

Hideyoshi (1537-98), the Japanese shogun who led the war, with a sword that the celestial voice gave to him. Then, Hideyoshi suddenly turned into a beautiful woman whose attractiveness caused Hannom to drop the weapon. Due to his hesitation to kill the national enemy, he fell into hell. Kang Kam-ch'an (948-1031), the general at the battle of Gwiju who fought against the Khitan army in 1018 and who became the warden of hell, explained to him that the heaviest crime in both the secular and heavenly worlds was a crime against the nation, guiding him to the hells designed for numerous felonies. Enlightened by Kang's preaching and tours of hell, Hannom went up to heaven (*nim nara*) to meet the national heroes who had now become the chosen people of the gods. Surprised at the dirt piled up in heaven, meanwhile, Hannom hoped to see a band of Doryeong, the historic young male group trained for time of war, which was the only hope for sweeping the heavenly world. However, the gate-keeper requested tears of love from Hannom for his country and his compatriots, while demanding tears of rage against his enemies.

As seen above, Hannom's long journey to heaven and hell clearly articulates the importance of history in the protection of the national spirit. Shin provides examples of national heroes and battles they participated in, for example, General Eulji of the Battle of Salsu, to draw the attention of readers. Such emphasis on history is put forward even in the introduction to the story. Shin says:

(2) Since [I am] not a free person, I let the pen move freely, instead: In this story, I talk to flowers that smell better than beautiful women; meet sages and heroes of the past whom I dream of everyday; and also become a right arm or left arm [of my body] and become an avatar. Although there are poetic and mythic [elements], which are far from reality [in this story], historical events of which I make examples are that which I write after referring to *Gogi (Old Book)*<sup>16</sup>, *Samguk Sagi (History of the Three Kingdoms)*, *Samguk Yusa (Memorabilia of Three Kingdoms)*, *Goryeosa (History of Goryeo)*, *Guangshi*<sup>17</sup>, and *Yishi*<sup>18</sup>. Readers, please read them

16. It could be translated as a general noun, which refers to a record of ancient history; yet, I would like to see it as a proper noun, *Old Book*, which is quoted as the original source for the Dangun myth in *Samguk Yusa*. For more detailed information, see Iryon (1972: 32).

17. In Korean, Gwangsa (廣史): I was not able to find the reference for this book.

separately, do not read them together. (Shin 1966: 32)

Though Shin writes a fantasy, twisting materials from historical events, he expects readers to extract only historical truth and authenticity from the fictional settings of the story. This statement indicates a seemingly apparent idea that he focuses only on histories while discarding literary aspects of the story. In my understanding, however, he utilizes literary devices to bring his histories to the surface from the interior of the text. This view is supported by his belief in the force of fiction as a stirrer of popular sentiments, which was influenced by Liang Qichao's view on various forms of aesthetic power.<sup>19</sup> Shin says:

If [fictional] books bring seminal Zeitgeist in vigorous expressions, a hundred people will hail when a hundred people gather together; a thousand will applause when a thousand people hear; they will even shed tears or will not be able to stop the feeling of rising energy if the thoughts and spirits, when they are written on a paper, deliver miserable or happy stories to the reader... Therefore, it is natural to say, "fiction is the soul of the nation."<sup>20</sup>

Subscribing to an ability to move audiences with literature, he must have hoped to arouse national spirit and pride through the introduction of heroes of the past. What kind of literary setting, then, was applied to combine nation-centered histories that had a strong appeal to the reader? It seems that it was the protagonist's dream.

In the long road to heaven and hell, Hannom's dream functions as a resonant

18. In Korean, Yeoksa (釋史): A Chinese history that delineates the beginning of the world to the Chin Dynasty; Morohashi (1989: 1198).
19. Liang argues that fiction has four kinds of aesthetic power saying, "the first power is called thurification (薰). It is like entering a cloud of smoke and being thurified by it, or like touching ink or vermilion and being tinted by it... The second power is known as immersion (浸)... [It] refers to the process in which a reader is so engrossed in a novel that it causes him to assimilate himself with its content... The third power is that of stimulation (刺)... [The effects] of stimulation are that they are able to suddenly evoke in the reader strange feelings over which he has no control... The fourth power is that of lifting (提)... [Because of its power], all readers of novels often feel that they have entered a state of self-transformation and that they themselves have become the principal characters once they become engrossed in them" (Liang 1902; in Denton 1996: 76-78).
20. Shin Chae-ho, "Geungeum Gungmun Soseol Jejau Jui" (Attention to the Writers of Vernacular Fiction) in *Daehan Maeil Sinbo*, July 8, 1908.

and subordinate place to the actual world. As Eulji Mundeok says, “the spiritual world is a shadow of the secular world,” the story of the spiritual world located in Hannom’s dream becomes dependent upon that of the real world, which is history (Shin 1966: 37). Due to this dependency, “if a war does not cease in the secular world, it continues in the spiritual world... a master in the secular world is a master in the spiritual world and a slave in the secular world is also a slave in the heavenly world” (Shin 1966: 37). In other words, Hannom’s dream is a place where the spiritual and secular worlds are closely linked together and simultaneously a place where readers can peep into the heavenly version of the bloody wars of history.

Nevertheless, in the situation where the story of an actual world does not exist as the counterpart of the heavenly world, the dream itself becomes the reality of the world. In that sense, history—a narrative of the actual world—becomes History, the record of the unconscious collective memories of the Han (韓, Korean) people. In this short story, history exists as a textual priori, which provides a backdrop of imaginary war stories in heaven. Putting it in a different way, the semantic dependency between the story of the secular world (history) and that of the heavenly world (fantasy) is subverted by the structure of the dream; Hannom’s dream incorporates various histories of the past (reality) within itself. In this sense, his dream can be said to be located beyond the boundaries of histories. That is to say, his dream is a meta-history or History on which mass-subjects are centered.

In this field of History, fragments of time are juxtaposed against and interconnected by multi-layers of the past, present, and future on the basic frame of linear progress. For example, Hannom, a contemporary ordinary person living in the early twentieth century, met Eulji Mundeok, a famous hero of the Salsu battle with Sui China in 612, and Kang Kam-ch’an, a warrior of the eleventh century. Various battles of different dynasties in the past are repeated over and over as one comprehensive national fight against other ethnic groups in the present, and are projected toward the future as meaningful resources for the inculcation of the nationhood of Korea.

At the same time, however, time in this story follows a linear stream from the past to the present. The temporal mark (like a landmark in a map) in this time-frame is Dangun, the mythical primogenitor of Korea who allegedly existed more than four thousand years ago. Shin Chae-ho used the year of Dangun’s founding of Ancient Joseon (*dangi*) as the “timemark” of narratives in and out of “The Dream Heaven.” Inside the story, the timemark is used to calculate the

difference in years between Hannom and Eulji Mundeok, and externally, it indicates the moment when Shin Chae-ho wrote the short story. In other words, by the application of *dangi*, the interior of "The Dream Heaven", is connected to its exterior, that is, the situation in which Korea became the protectorate of Japan. Consequently, wars fought long ago against other ethnic groups, such as those found in China and Japan, become open-ended to the present. The protagonist Hannom, a self-represented figure of the author Shin Chae-ho, plays a role as an agent to enlighten readers in rediscovering their nationhood in bygone war stories.

The purpose of creating this timeframe like "the Moebius Strip," in which the interior time of the plot is linked to the exterior time of the reader, is to generate a sense of the "national self." It is molded by two different processes: One is the expansion of the self to the national level, and the other is the confrontation of the national self against others.

In "The Dream Heaven," Hannom experiences the expansion of himself due to his strong emotional attachment to famous national heroes and their spirits of sacrifice to the country. When Hannom first met General Eulji Mundeok after having watched the first battle in heaven, Hannom asked the general how to address him. The general said that he preferred to be called "*seonbae*," meaning a senior in an office or school, who is experienced and skillfully advanced, or a person similar to an elder brother. In this short story, the latter is more pertinent since Eulji Mundeok introduced himself as a bearer of martial spirits (*musa hon*) handed down from Dangun. Experiencing the expansion of this imaginary bloodline from Dangun, Hannom feels that the general is "as kind and affectionate as a friend or family," even though he is a person from two thousand years ago (36). Dangun, who played an important role in linking the time between the interior and exterior of the story in the previous passage, is also salient here as the provider of horizontal comradeship to the members of "imagined communities."

In understanding the expansion of the Self is as important as the introduction of Dangun is in bringing heroes into the story. Shin embraces warriors such as Yeon Gaesomun, Eulji Mundeok, and Yang Man-ch'un who saved the country in battle with other ethnic groups in the pre-modern period, and praises them for their voluntary sacrifices to the country. In the story, he sets General Eulji Mundeok as a celestial warrior (*cheon'gwan*) and General Kang Kam-ch'an as a warden of hell (*sunok saja*). Having two important guardians of heaven and hell say that patriotism is the duty of the people, Shin implies that patriotism is the

truth regardless of time and space. At the same time, he indirectly argues that those who fulfill this duty can share horizontal comradeship with other people, just as Hannom, with the same patriotism of Eulji Mundeok, became his friend or family despite a two thousand year age difference and the disparity in social status.<sup>21</sup>

In this sense, a hero depicted in the story is not an individual whose excellence in power and strength serves only his family or his community, rather he is a *representative* individual of the nation who is supposed to save the lost country. In the introduction to the biography of General Eulji, Shin says:

How much benefit or loss is it to him if the person [a hero] is recorded in history or not? Yet, given that the territory of a country is a place consecrated by his sacrifice, a nation is that which his blood protects, his spirits are lofty like the mountains, and his grace and benevolence are wide like the sea, how can the country obtain nationhood when its people neglect their heroes?<sup>22</sup>

As seen above, Shin centers a hero on national identity. There is no “I” existing alone in the relationship with a hero. “I” could be Shin himself, or the reader of his book. In short, the self is expanded as “we” through the egalitarian comradeship based on patriotism shared by national heroes. Even in the fantastic journeys through heaven and hell, he realistically searched for heroes who could be moral examples to his readers. In this sense, it is understandable why a hero’s personal accomplishment or his romantic affairs with beautiful girls are not described in the story. Providing examples of patriotic heroes, Shin attempts to integrate every single one of the people (in history of past and current readers) into the nation by expanding the self to the national Self and converting various histories into one nationalist History. A hero is the Subject that gravitates toward the essence of the national spirits and in this sense, the basic theme of “The

21. This expansion of the self based on patriotism is well illustrated in Shin’s essay, “Keun nawa jageun na” (Macroscopic and Microscopic Selves) in *Daehan Maeil Sinbo* (Korean Daily News), Korean edition, September 16-17, 1908. He says, “If I shed tears for the country, not only the eyes that shed tears are part of myself, but also those who are shedding tears for the country are a part of myself; If I spit blood for my country, not only my internal organs of spitting blood are the part of myself, but also those who spit worthy blood are a part of myself...”

22. Shin Chae-ho, *Eulji Mundeok* (1900) in Yi Chae-son (1975: 56-57).



Dream Heaven," that is, a road to find the national essence (*guksu*), can be said to be a road to meet national heroes.

Due to its centripetal force, nevertheless, the creation of the national Self does not allow internal conflicts or individual desires, but instead, promotes the Self's confrontation with Others. In "The Dream Heaven," interestingly, they are depicted by the internal division of Hannom's body. From General Eulji Mundeok we hear that "only a fight [and nothing else] exists in human beings; if one wins the battle, he will live, and if not, he will die." Hannom accepts a fight as an unavoidable affair in human life (33). When he thinks of a fight, he feels a strange change in his body:

A benumbed right hand gradually stretches out, and its end is unseen. Each finger of the hand becomes one hand and stretches out again; the hand gives birth to a finger, and the finger gives birth to a hand; a son produces a grandson, and grandson produces a great grandchild... Like the right hand, the left hand produces thousands of offspring. As hands attached to the right hand hold blue flags and hands attached to the left hand grab black flags, the two parties of hands fight each other (39).

Watching this spectacle, the rose of Sharon says that the fight within oneself is not a fight but a suicide and that a fight should be a confrontation with others. This scene clearly illustrates Shin's organic nationalism. On the assumption that other ethnic groups are completely different races, this ideology desires cooperation amongst the same ethnic group to face other species. Or, putting it conversely, in order to acquire the collective identity of the self, confrontation with others is necessary. In this situation, the patriotism exemplified by heroic warriors is a necessary nucleus for collective identity. Such cooperation molded by collective identity looks natural and ordinary. On the contrary, it requires no small scale abandonment of desires and feelings by members of the national community. In particular, when the world is defined by the "history of the self's fights with others" (*a wa pia wau tujaeng*), the pressure for giving up personal desires reaches its peak. As Hannom fell into hell because he was not able to kill Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the chief warrior of the other "race" who evoked the Imjin War of 1592 and who now turned into a beautiful woman, the warden of the hell, reprimanded him by saying that:

A religionist is not a man of religion when he has a love other than reli-

gion in his mind; and a patriot is not a man of patriotism when he has a love other than patriotism in his mind... [Accordingly,] if you love your country and liquor as well, then you might forget your country in liquor; and if you love your country and a beautiful woman, then you might forget your country due to the woman (54).

Through Warden Kang's voice, Shin argues that true patriotism requires the sacrifice of personal emotions and possessions. Given that patriotism is the duty of the *gungmin* (citizen) from Shin's point of view, those who fail to perform the duty are excluded from membership in "the imagined community" of Korea. Shin regards them as *jageun na*, or the microscopic self of the national self, and harshly criticizes such for their selfishness.(Shin 1908a) In other words, Shin's concept of the new people, which consists of the imaginary bloodline from mythical Dangun, immaculate patriotism to the nation, and shared fellowship with other compatriots, does not approve of the individuality of various people. On the verge of the extinction of the Korean race, it seems obvious that Shin did not leave much margin for considering issues of gender and individuality.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

Until recently, Shin Chae-ho was recognized as a historian rather than a fiction writer. His modern histories, the symbol of the anti-Japanese movement during the colonial period (1910-1945), have received great applause for their contribution to create a spirit of independence, whereas his literary works received aesthetically low appreciation due to their teleological and political aspects, which used narrative as a tool for promoting national identity.

On the assumption that his literature should receive due respect, I have closely read Shin's short fiction, "The Dream Heaven," and attempted to find a linkage between the ongoing discussion of people and the images of national heroes in his fiction. In search of the formation of the concept of the new people during the enlightenment period, I briefly examined the intellectual streams from Yu Gil-jun. His book, *Observations on a Journey to the West*, which introduced encyclopedic knowledge and Western taxonomy, contributed to forming a con-

23. Refer to Ko (2001) and Yim and Sakai (2003) for more detailed discussion on the issues of gender and individuality, which is excluded from Shin's discourse of the nation.

ceptual grid in the social mental sphere. I argued that this newly-introduced knowledge had an impact on Korean society in a way that separated the holder of knowledge from the traditional classes, so that every member of society could learn when they were educated to do so. Additionally, the introduction of social Darwinian discourses, which brought not only a racial nucleus to unite against the other ethnic groups, but also recognition of material and mental weakness of Korea, also influenced Korean intellectuals to find a new type of a human being for the construction of national identity.

Through extension of these intellectual streams of discussion of the new people, I examined the images of heroes in Shin Chae-ho's "The Dream Heaven." They are nationalistic in a sense that they are morally exemplified heroes of past dynasties; however, they do not have a close relationship of loyalty to the ruler but, instead to that of *nara* (the nation). The images of heroes also reveal a trait of "synecdoche," given that they are not the heroes of pursuing personal wealth and reputation but the holders of a collective identity and morality (White 1973).

In examining fictional settings that made his nation-centered history look natural in embodying the national characteristic of heroes, I argue that fantastic times and spaces constructed in the dream of a journey connected the interior and exterior of the story and placed the historical past into the ongoing political events in reality. In other words, Shin created metahistory in fiction to conflate various dynastic narratives as one comprehensive history from Dangun. In this fictional setting of metahistory, the equality shared by the present self and heroes of the past is easily converted into the horizontal expansion of comradeship, which provides a powerful nucleus for integrating the "imagined community."

One thing that I have not covered in this paper is the narrative perspective of this fiction. Elsewhere in my footnotes, I mentioned that the protagonist Hannom has various meanings, which could be interpreted as one person, an ordinary person, a deploring person, and Shin Chae-ho himself since one of his pen names is Hannom. To what extent can we see this fiction as Shin's self-representative story? Can we interpret Hannom's journey to heaven and hell, which is understood as a passionate resolution to understand the way of loving and saving the country, as an "unhomely" and open-ended journey to look back upon Shin Chae-ho's life as an exile? I would like to invite further discussion on this project to find a self-representative voice in Shin's writings.

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