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a supposed “left-ideology-dominated monopolistic market of publishing companies.” Though apparently not as strong in Korea as in other parts of the world, fascists are regaining momentum by invoking the past. If we find ourselves facing the same situation as Yeol and Fumiko did, we have to take up the challenge and repeat history, better, double or nothing, once again.

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In this movie, it seems Yeol represents the role of the memory keeper. This begs the question: remembering for whom and why? As we have seen, anarchists have sometimes been ignored and sometimes remembered, for good and for ill, portrayed negatively and now positively. Let's not get distracted. Let's remember for ourselves, in order to pursue our objectives, and take advantage of whatever opportunities the situation presents.

Now, imagine yourself part of a broad international anarchist movement. You are in the belly of the beast, at the center of an empire. At your sides are comrades from diverse origins, displaced people and immigrants. A catastrophic natural disaster takes place, unfolding into a social disaster. A massive social upheaval, something you and your comrades have plotted and waited for so long, seems just around the corner. However, to your surprise, the social upheaval is transformed into a mass movement of bigotry and fascism and genocidal acts are carried out around you. This genocidal mob is after you but so are the authorities, trying to find a scapegoat.

Sounds familiar? That is the kind of situation Yeol and Fumiko found themselves in a hundred years ago. Arguably, the anarchist movement was stronger then than it has ever been since, at least in East Asia. Now, after a slump of decades, it's coming back. Of course, all of this depends on how you define anarchism, how you gauge strength and understand diversity and resilience. Nevertheless, it is also valuable to notice how movements ebb and flow and how history evolves as it repeats itself.

History is a hot topic these days here in Asia. The government that was toppled here in the spring had gambled on a project to revise the school history curriculum, a risky business sure to provoke a massive reaction and polarization. This was accompanied by a populist right-wing movement pushing for nationalization against

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supposedly abducted by North Korean forces and lived more than 20 more years in North Korea, of which we know almost nothing.

miko constantly destabilize their adversaries. However, ultimately, this strategy of using the courts to shed light on atrocities is limited and can easily be confused with liberalism—note, once again, the recurring theme of seeking the gaze of the media and the "international" community, which is to say, the Western community. We cannot see anarchism clearly through the lens of legal proceedings. The movie reminds of the recent movement to shed light on the "Seweol-ho" ferry incident, or the "9/11 Truth" movement alleging a cover-up in the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. The truth is never simple or easy to reveal; nor would doing so necessarily lead to positive social change. Anarchists must communicate, yes, but our actions must not be limited to speech represented in institutions like the court and the media.

Shortly after her death sentence was transmuted to a life sentence, Fumiko Kaneko died in prison, officially from suicide. When she received the letter announcing the imperial pardon, she tore it up in anger, and made it clear to the authorities that she had no intention of letting anyone else determine her fate. She wrote to her judge that it was ridiculous to try to force a person to live when she does not wish to—that is to say, to serve a life sentence in prison. She believed that life in itself has no value except as a choice in front of death: that it is affirmed through its negation. Yeol may have agreed with her, but he made the opposite choice: despite learning of the suicide of his lover and comrade, despite there being no sign that either the regime or his imprisonment would ever come to an end, he survived more than 20 years in prison. His captors harassed him by telling him to live long and forgotten.

Yeol came out of jail when the Japanese empire collapsed. The movie ends without mention of his intriguing life after his release.[2]

[2] I know from other sources that he wrote about the danger of the Cold War and the division of Korea. I do not know if he was still an anarchist then, when he supported the creation of the South Korean state and its right-wing anti-communist pro-USA leadership. When the Korean War broke out, he was

This year, several major films from South Korea depict rebels or outright anarchists. *Okja* portrays the Animal Liberation Front; *Anarchist from Colony* tells the story of Park Yeol and Fumiko Kaneko, two anarchist nihilists who have become national heroes in Korea; *A Taxi Driver* dramatizes the Gwanju uprising of 1980. Why are anarchists suddenly appearing in Korean cinema? What's the context behind these films? And how can they inform how we frame our own narratives in a time of resurgent nationalism and unrest?

South Korea, 2017. The new year arrived with a surge of demonstrations expressing disgust at the state of the nation. "Is this a/our country?" went a popular slogan. The state apparatus played for time by starting the impeachment process. Aspiring politicians worked hard to frame the events as a "democratic revolution" (what an oxymoron!) and the massive demonstrations were pacified, accepting the authority of the police and the ordinary violence of daily life under this system. Then, pro-regime reactionaries gained momentum fighting with the police in the name of law and order and patriotism. Nevertheless, perhaps fearing that the ruling order was becoming too unstable, the court announced the impeachment of the president, who is now facing charges. Elections took place, raising a new government to power.

Things are back to normal, it seems. However, the theater screens have been filled with more revolt than usual. Indeed, this summer, at the theater in my small Korean town, among the few movies presented, I could watch back-to-back two Korean movies featuring anarchists in the spotlight, preceded by a preview for yet another movie about the Gwangju uprising.

What's going on? This is out of the ordinary. It probably reflects something happening in the popular consciousness on some level, but I see no anarchist surge in the streets. What do we do when anarchism is more visible on the screens than in the streets, when

it is recuperated by production companies with budgets that dwarf our scant resources? To begin to answer these difficult questions, though I am hardly an expert on Korean cinema, I'll try to situate these recent movies in context to see what they reveal about how anarchism is perceived here today. As anarchism and nationalism have historically been closely intertwined in Korea, this also brings me to discuss nation as narration.

Okja

Okja portrays the relationship between a young Korean and a pig, which is interrupted by a multinational corporation and one of its enemies, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). Over a decade ago, the same director released *The Host,* (2006), which explored the themes of state negligence and deception and of rebellion through direct action. It was followed in 2014 by a large-scale international production, *Snowpiercer*, that depicts a rebellion in a futuristic dystopian class society. Okja is a continuation on these themes of rebellion—and also the result of expanding Korean international cultural production.

The relationship between the ALF and anarchism is not explicit in the movie, but the depiction of the ALF, though somewhat contradictory, points in an anarchist direction. The movie shows sympathy for a group engaged in anonymous illegal direct action and emphasizes how this could spread in a decentralized way. It's refreshing and funny to see a young Korean employee turn his precarious conditions against his boss when he refuses to chase the ALF truck, pointing out that, unlike his boss, he has no insurance benefits—and thus no reason to endanger himself for the sake of "his" company. As revealed in the last scene (hidden after the credits), he eventually joins the ALF. This scene depicts the spreading of rebellion: as the activists put on their black masks, a bystander

sacrificed herself for her husband and his nation. Anyone who honestly undertakes to learn about her will see just the opposite: she lived to the fullest for no one other than herself. She can certainly upset the narrative of the submissive and passive women. See *Treacherous Women from Imperial Japan; Patriarchal Fictions, Patricidal Fantasies.*

Though the Korean movie title for *Anarchist from Colony* is "Yeol Park," the name of her male comrade, this is likely a trick. Many have argued that the movie makes Fumiko into the main protagonist. At least, the actress attracted much attention by performing very well. Contrary to my expectations, based on reading her writings, of Fumiko as extremely angry and serious, the actress brought out a contrasting lightness in her character. The words spoken in the court scenes are for the most part the exact words that were used by Yeol and Fumiko. Indeed, by going through with their trial, they made sure their words were recorded and diffused widely. At the time, their trial and their especially defiant stance generated much attention. Furthermore, Fumiko used her time in prison to write her memoirs, answering the question "what made me what I am?" Her writings (in English, *The Prison Memoirs of a Japanese Woman*) have been re-edited and she enjoys a renewed popularity with the recent release of the movie. Coinciding with the recent boom of feminism in Korea, Fumiko is a bomb, inspiring to many.

I liked that the movie brings out the rebellious, irreverent, and joyful side of anarchy. However, here again, it seems we end up with anarchism lite, liberal anarchism—though this may be an inescapable consequence of making a movie that focuses almost exclusively on a court case.

It is nice to see people ridiculing the justice system and using it in ways not expected by the authorities. For example, Park gains some important concessions by threatening to forgo his right to a trial and going on hunger strike, recognizing that the authorities need the trial to take place to legitimize their rule. By taking the offensive on a level not expected by the authorities, Yeol and Fu-

of democracy. This is still very much a problem; the critique of democracy is necessary and timely here.

Nevertheless, of all the "Korean" anarchists I know, the story of Yeol Park and Kaneko Fumiko has the greatest potential to upset the standard nationalist narrative. First of all, at least in some of their writings, they made their nihilism explicit, rejecting all ideologies and nations. Secondly, they were part of a minority within the resistance. Although it has been argued that until the mid-1920s in East Asia, anarchism was the dominant current of socialism, later anarchists were violently attacked by authoritarians of all stripes and became isolated and forgotten. This pattern played out in many different parts of the world. Even among anarchists, the majority being of a more communist tendancy, Yeol and Fumiko's individual and nihilist anarchism was a minority.

In the recent movies and especially in *Anarchist from Colony,* it is interesting to see these differences and conflicts within the resistance movement portrayed. In the movie, we see Yeol and his comrades demanding accountability and confronting another member of the independence movement. The latter, a person of greater social status, looks down upon them, demanding to know the name of their party. Yeol hesitates and asks his friend about their name. The friend says "Yesterday, our name was 'Patriots' but today we are the 'Kick Your Ass Party.'" This response shows that they do not care about the name or the status of their organization. Indeed, they have used a great diversity of names for their organizations and publications. The name used in the movie refers just to the place, a kind of restaurant, where they hang out; it is a play on words recuperating an insult thrown at them.

The last and perhaps most important way that their story that can upset the standard nationalist narrative is their obvious internationalism. Yeol was ethnically Korean, but he lived in Japan, struggling alongside Japanese comrades. Fumiko, even though she was raised in Korea, was not an ethnic Korean. Many, including Fumiko's lawyer, have tried to paint her as a virtuous women that

who is initially shocked to realize she is surrounded by them is then comforted by being offered a mask too.

However, the viewers might get a contradictory impression of the ALF as a standard hierarchical membership organization in the scene where someone from the group ("the leader") authoritatively expels another and claims ownership of the ALF name. We never see another cell of the ALF throughout the movie, either. The question of how to preserve "our" integrity (at different levels ranging from affinity groups to leaderless decentralized movements) is already a complex one and this movie might confuse it more for people, making ALF activists appear strict and purist. We also see activists struggling over questions of dietary choice, non-violence, and consent.

The ALF is portrayed as a crew of friendly, silly, utopian youth from the West. Though they include a Korean-American (who makes mistakes due to misadjustment to both cultures), the rest of them are all white Westerners operating in English without apparent ties in Korea. The movie makes translation into an important theme. The plot revolves around a mistranslation but this event is also followed immediately by a deliberate mistranslation in the subtitles (something that can only be noticed by someone speaking both languages). The English subtitle for the spoken Korean "My name is Koo Soon-Bum" is "How is my Korean? Learn English, Mija. It opens new doors." The ALF leader that kicks his Korean-American comrade out of the organization because of his deceiving translation does so saying "Translation *is* sacred." Later, the translator makes a return with a tattoo on his arm saying "Translations *are* sacred."

In *Okja* as in other recent movies, we are presented with anarchism lite: the anarchists fight creatively against the authorities to create a better world, yet in the end the chief object of their "direct" action is to reveal some evil to the public eye. The ALF is not shown directly incapacitating corporations, only attacking their image. The corporation's leadership is shown in a conflict about

the management of their image. In the end, the boss who is concerned about presenting a greenwashed and multicultural façade is replaced by her sister, who rejects this approach in favor of the "traditional" corporate approach to profiting through brute force.

A Taxi Driver

This movie is set during the Gwangju Uprising of May 1980, a weeks-long insurrection that chased the authorities out of the South Korean city of Gwangju and created a commune that has inspired resistance throughout the dark years since.

I would like to explore an idea with you, dear comrades. For me, it can be strategically useful to make a distinction between a "nation" (i.e., a people, a tribe, a group) on one hand and nationalism and statism on the other. What if we understood a nation basically as a collective identity built upon a narrative—in other words, as a story?

This storytelling involves crucial historical or mythical events. It is a complex process, with different voices and different versions of the story competing with and responding to each other. It is constantly reproduced, challenged, and modified by a variety of forces. The forces that compete to build and control the state and dominate society (or, for that matter, the whole world through capitalism) try to shape this narrative in a way that is advantageous to them. Perhaps we anarchists also aim at building some kind of collective power and for that purpose need some form of identity—not centralized but nevertheless somehow consistent? If so, we might intervene better on this terrain if we consider which events are emphasized and which are ignored, by whom, and how.

With this objective in mind, let us look at *A Taxi Driver* and this year's other major film about rebellion, *Anarchist from Colony.*

The events of May 1980 in Gwangju appear of crucial importance if we are to resonate with people here in Korea. After be-

but one must bear in mind how it relates to the marketing of "original" individual and global consumer identities and politics. Understanding it as an identity label with these narratives in mind, "anarchist" appears to many as a spectacular ideal far out of reach of ordinary mortals. Many good people I know will not identify themselves as anarchists because they feel unworthy of the title or consider it too exotic or ideological. Eschewing labels is fine, but when this means that they do not engage in outreach or organizing, either, it turns out that the movie version of the anarchist has served to inoculate the population against real-life anarchism.

At best, when they show anarchists' contradictions and imperfections, some of these films might help some people understand that anarchists are people like themselves. For that reason, humor is a great tool and an important aspect of anarchy.

To cite an example of such contradictions, in *Anarchist from Colony,* we witness Yeol acting without pridefulness, calling himself a dog—yet later, in court, he insists on speaking Korean and, with Fumiko, on being dressed up like the king and queen of Korea. Bear in mind that these are self-professed nihilists. It is also funny because this costume is traditionally worn by common people only the day of their wedding. Their comrades joke that they turned their trial into their wedding.

When anarchists are represented in state-building narratives, their anarchism is toned down in favor of their nationalism, and this nationalism is used to foster a tacit approval of the reigning nation-state. This translation/deformation is possible because of confusion induced by the concept of nationalism (which has a very positive connotation in Korea). Nationalism can involve a stance against a specific ethnic oppression and an affinity among the oppressed toward collective liberation, but it also comes with an implicit assumption that this liberation will take the form of a new and democratic state. Indeed, many of the self-proclaimed Korean anarchists of the past, having never experienced democracy, seemed to be unclear about the issue, believing in some form

A hundred years ago, anarchists in the entire Northeast Asia region—Korea, Japan, and China, including connections with Russia—played a major role in the resistance to Japanese colonialism. This presents a difficulty for any narrative about Korean state-building that seeks to conceal the role of anarchists in the events. Furthermore, in the South, where anti-communism has been of central importance to the state, anarchists' clear opposition to state-communism makes them appealing to common people in general, but also as targets to be integrated into state-building narratives. Numerous anarchists are revered by the state and society in general, appearing in textbooks and public monuments as heroes and martyrs for the nation. Yeol Park and Fumiko Kaneko, the anarchist protagonists of *Anarchist from Colony,* are among them.

There are other reasons anarchists have been attractive to filmmakers lately, which can be both an advantage and an obstacle to the spread of anarchism. In contrast with the boredom of daily life under capitalism, movie anarchists often stand out for being active—but this activity is spectacular and aggressive in superficial ways (think guns and bombs). The action movie genre demands this: in a short time, the film must remove spectators from their daily lives and get their bodies pumping adrenaline. Unfortunately, this image could overshadow the diverse forms that anarchism can take in everyday life, especially the aspects involving attention, creativity, and care.

Refreshingly, in the movie *Dongju,* an anarchist freedom fighter encourages Dongju (criticized for his apolitical individualism) to "Keep on writing poems while I keep fighting with the gun." A related problematic aspect of the recent notoriety of anarchists comes of them being fashionable, being exceptional yet somehow well-adjusted characters. This is something like conformist anti-conformism: in the movies, the anarchists are often savvy, sexy, and bold characters who also blend in and navigate perfectly well in cosmopolitan settings in their society. This is all well and good,

ing censored for a decade by the authorities, these events were re-presented by the democratic "opposition" that got into office at the end of the 1990s. When the "conservatives" got back into government, they kept commemorating the events but in a toned down way. On May 18, 2017, with the new government "born of the candlelight revolution," the commemoration resumed its previous scale and tone. Which politician does or does not sing along with the uprising's "anthem" became the focus of attention.

Other movies have made these events their setting, including May 18/Magnificient Vacation and A Petal. Both share a kind of narration that focuses on individuals involved in a drama. *A Taxi Driver* is based on the real experience of an actual taxi driver who accidentally got involved in the course of driving a foreign journalist around—note again how much importance is given to the Western media gaze.

What seems to be missing in these movies (which I haven't seen) is a view of the commune born through these events, a glimpse at how people self-organized and strategized. What seems to be needed is a way to compellingly tell a story, going beyond documentary and fiction, that makes things personal yet not in the usual atomized and static sense. Of course, different movies can serve different purposes—some to remember, some to analyze, some focusing on a micro-level, some on a macro-level.

Anarchist from Colony

This movie is set during the period that comprises the foundation of the nation building narrative for the Korean state, not to mention a whole Korean historical movie genre: the era of Japanese colonialism that began at the opening of the 20th century and lasted until the end of the World War II. This period has served this function since the establishment of the current Korean state—but I'd be

curious to know how the role of anarchists in this narrative has changed over the years.

Anarchists have played an important role in the narrative for some time now. Over a decade ago, a movie entitled *Anarchists* was released, depicting anarchist resistance in the aforementioned era. Anarchist ideas hardly appeared in that action movie, except in the form of assassination attempts against the colonial authorities. However, in the last few years, several successful movies have appeared depicting resistance at that time, involving a variety of protagonists of diverse visions, genders, and ethnicities, including anarchist characters: Assassination, The Age of Shadows, and Dongju, to name three examples. The first two are action and spy thrillers, whereas the last one, Dongju, by the same director as *Anarchist from Colony,* deals with the more complex themes of individualism, art, and resistance.

Both the North Korean and South Korean states compete to present themselves as the heirs of the resistance (i.e., independence) movement under Japanese colonialism and the reincarnation of the Korean nation in a modern democratic form. In this regard, one could say that the South Korean state occupies a disadvantageous position compared to the North Korean regime, in that South Korea is in an indirect military alliance with Japan (through the USA) against North Korea.

There are contradictory tensions within the public over this subject. On one hand, there's widespread support for military defense against North Korea; on the other hand, the close alliance with the USA and Japan is very controversial. Lately, as is common regarding small, uninhabited islands in the seas bordering the east coast of Asia, there is a territorial dispute, in this case between Korea and Japan. The South Korean state boasts of taking a hard line to defend Korean territory and there is a citizens' movement about taking pride in these islands, that could also be seen as nothing more than big rocks. There has been a widespread discontent about the lenient way that the most recent governments have dealt with

contentious issues with Japan regarding historical recognition and reparations related to sex trade during colonial times.

In Japan too, an extreme-right (some say fascist) government has recently returned to power, accompanied by a xenophobic movement. There are many ethnic Koreans and Chinese living in Japan with a complex and changing citizenship status.[1]

State relations between China and Japan are also worsening, as are relations between South Korea and China. (Indeed, even North Korea may be on worsening terms with China.) Although the two countries share geographic proximity and historic and economic ties, and a considerable number of Chinese immigrants live in South Korea, many (South) Koreans subjectively feel estranged from China, and hostility towards its government. Lately, a punk event has taken place in different countries including participants from across Asia (mainly from Japan, Taiwan, China, and South Korea), but it, too, was torn by conflicts having to do with gender, race, history, and subcultural politics. To me, all of this contrasts with what seems like a greater degree of internationalism in the resistance movements during the era portrayed in *Anarchist From Colony.*

[1] The Japanese government has always been basically right-wing in terms of political ideology, while its economic policy was generally developmentalist and protectionist toward its industry and functioned to create a welfare state for its population. Since the 1980s, it has made a gradual turn toward neoliberalism; the rise of extreme-right wing politicians coincided with this trend. This genealogy culminates with Shinzo Abe. His first term as prime minister in was short lived due to scandals and health issues, but he came back in 2012, after the Democrat who took power in 2009 lost public confidence with a series of political mismanagements and missteps, the principal of which, in the public eye, was a wishy-washy stance toward the nuclear power after the Fukushima disaster. Abe not only denies the atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army but glorifies what they have done in Asia, making him an ultra-nationalist and revisionist. His rise to power coincided with a deluge of neo-racism originating on internet bulletin boards. In the few years since the mid-2000s, racists began to stage threatening street demonstrations targeting ethnic minorities and nationalities, especially Korean and Chinese people.