



Yong Soon Min's *Defining Moments*: Gendered Space of Decolonization in the Pacific

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INTRODUCTION

Whereas women artists have participated in significant political movements during the contemporary era, their creative involvement in making politically directed art has received limited attention. By the late 1970s, postmodernism had become an important cultural manifestation. Feminist ideology was in the process of spreading around the globe. Women artists began to explore a multiplicity of issues in their work, focusing on class, gender, race, and sexuality. Concomitantly, they began to reveal these concerns in terms of their own vital needs. Within this context, Asian-American women were slowly becoming integrated into a largely white, male art world. Many chose to negotiate their political status in relation to indigenous communities, in addition to addressing global issues that included military dictatorships, racial discrimination, and other masculine privileges.

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One of the most significant Asian-American female artists, Yong Soon Min (b. 1953), has actively engaged in this movement. This study discusses Min's work and activities in the 1980s, during the early period of her career, when she took note of the political issues that centered around her identity in relation to the evolving communities of Korean and Asian-American artists in New York. Min noted what at the time were considered innovations focused on issues of identity, particularly in the so-called 1.5 generation of Korean Americans, a term applied to those born in Korea but raised in the United States.¹ Min considered herself "half home as an American and half home as Korean."² Throughout the 1990s, she developed experimental visual works incorporating her own complex identity involving social and political issues. This chapter will examine Min's work in the context of her Asian female identity as an integration of conflicts she experienced between her personal struggles and political authorities in Korea and the United States.

My focus is on one of Min's most significant works, *Defining Moments* (1992), which features six self-portraits of the artist covered with words and numbers symbolically representing historical links to her identity. The words and numbers directly refer to three historical events: (1) the student uprising of April 19, 1960, against the corruption of Korean President Syngman Rhee; (2) the Gwangju Democratic Movement under General Chun Doo-hwan (May 18, 1980), in which over 600 Korean citizens were killed by military troops; and (3) the violent outbreak of the Los Angeles riots (April 29, 1992) in response to the acquittal of white officers in the beating of Rodney King, instigated by distraught African Americans living close to the artist's neighborhood. Each of the six photographs, taken during this period, makes a connection with a historically defining moment and personal memory, all of which focus on race, cultural identity, and feminist representation. This chapter analyzes the background of the images and the artist's perspective of the media combined with an image/text as a means to interpret the extant political issues of the time.

AWARENESS OF IDENTITY AS A KOREAN AMERICAN

Yong Soon Min was born in Korea in 1953, toward the end of the Korean War. In 1960, at the age of seven, she immigrated with her mother and brother to Monterey, California, where they joined her father who had settled there earlier and was teaching Korean to American soldiers at a U.S. Army camp. Min's childhood memories are based on several complex

factors: (1) the division of her family after the Korean War, (2) her childhood immigration to the United States, and (3) her awareness of the omniscient presence of the U.S. Army in her country following the Korean War. These memories would eventually catalyze the essential core of her work, as she told the story of her childhood identity as Korean changing to Korean American.

There are three drawings from the middle of the 1980s that reveal these childhood memories: *American Friend* (1984), *Back of the Bus, 1953* (1985), and *Immigrant* (1985). These are based on memories related to a collection of family photos. The first drawing, *American Friend*, profoundly represents Min's feelings about America, although the subject is related to her father's relationship with the U.S. Army (Fig. 1).³ In the center of this drawing, an American officer sits while Koreans put on military uniforms around him. Three women are present who might be coworkers of Min's father. The drawing includes capital letters that spell out AMERICAN FRIEND placed at the bottom of the work and Hangeul texts on the right side that appear like a wall drawing. The phrase in capital letters is the title of the drawing, and the Hangeul text is a letter to an American friend that translates as follows:

Dear Friend! Upon our father's request from America, you were able to get our mother a job on the U.S. army base in Seoul which made it possible for her to support her kids during tough times following the war. Dear friend! Since our liberation from Japan, you have influenced our political leadership to support the autocrat Syngman Rhee, along with the military dictatorships of Park and Chun. In addition, you continued to share with us your economic and military strength. This included your valuable nuclear missiles! In fact, you gave us far more than we bargained for. How could we ever reciprocate?⁴

Min appreciated her American friend, who helped her family to lead a stable life in Korea. This work is based on a very personal story and extends into the political. The drawing shows Min's deep interest in her hybrid distinctiveness and keen responsiveness to the duplicity of U.S. foreign policy, which ensured Korean national security but also concealed the imperialist intentions of American neocolonial domination.

The second drawing, *Back of the Bus, 1953* (1985), references a photograph of Min's mother, who worked at a U.S. military base while taking care of her family (Fig. 1). The scene specifically recalls her mother's daily routine on the bus taking her to and from the base. According to the title,



Fig. 1 (Top) Yong Soon Min, *American Friend*, 1984. Mixed media, drawing on paper, 39 × 55 in. (Courtesy of the artist). (Bottom) Yong Soon Min, *Back of the Bus*, 1985. Mixed media, drawing on paper, 29 × 40 in. (Courtesy of the artist)

there are two parts: “Back of the Bus” presents her mother sitting at the back of the bus, and 1953 is the year the artist was born. At the bottom of her drawing, the artist inserted several profile images of herself juxtaposing her adult presence with the past memories of her mother. This drawing

reflects the artist's strong sense of identity as a Korean-American Woman related to the gazes of American soldiers. The work implies a socio-racial code that goes beyond personal memories of the past. Min has explained that this drawing reveals a "reflection on the U.S. military presence in Korea—interactions with American soldiers and their impact on the lives of Korean families," especially those who lived on or near the U.S. military bases.⁵

The last drawing, *Immigrant* (1985), presents a somewhat surreal image of a childhood portrait, showing the artist as if she were in her mother's womb. Given that her father had left Korea for America before she was born, Min was raised in the countryside by her grandparents. It is a memorable drawing of herself that recalls a childhood dream of family unification. *Immigrant* indicates her later life as an immigrant in the United States. On the other hand, the drawing represents her identity, her own roots, being born in Korea but raised in the United States, through the strong connection between her mother's body and her own.

In 1985, Min participated in the artist residency program at Yaddo in Saratoga Springs, New York, where she accomplished numerous drawings related to these issues. *Back of the Bus, 1953* and *Immigrant* were featured in the exhibition *Roots to Reality: Asian American in Transition* (from October 11 to November 24, 1985), sponsored by the Alliance for Asian American Art in New York.⁶ These works were also published in an art magazine, *East Wind* (1986), dealing with the political and cultural work of Asians in the United States. Through her drawing works in the 1980s, Min not only understood her individual identity, but also began to speak out on how external political and social forces surrounding individuals' lives affect their identities.

GROWING POLITICAL POINTS: CONNECTING WITH ASIAN-AMERICAN ARTISTS

Having completed her MFA at the University of California, Berkeley, Min moved to New York, where she was admitted to the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program (ISP) in 1981. The program included seminar leaders recruited from artists such as painters, filmmakers, video artists, musicians, dancers, sculptors, critics, art historians, and theorists, who opened a series of dialogues with the various participants.⁷ The program offered an important catalyst for developing a highly concentrated nexus of research, information, and networking. Throughout the program, Min was encouraged to develop important theoretical and critical concepts.

Moreover, she pursued a political direction for her artwork related to social issues. This was a continuation of her studies at UC Berkeley where she was introduced into a liberal atmosphere that included civil rights and anti-war protests.

Min was appointed the first administrative coordinator for the Asian American Arts Alliance (AAAA) in 1985, an umbrella organization for a diverse alliance of those within the Asian-American cultural workforce.⁸ Visual artists, writers, and performing artists provided a critical voice around issues of race and identity for the community. Min's distinctive role as an artist-coordinator proved valuable at the event *Roots to Reality: Asian American in Transition* (1985). It was the first annual multidisciplinary art festival of the AAAA in collaboration with the Henry Street Settlement. This multicultural event was accomplished through the collaboration of visual and performing artists of Asian-American descent. The following year, Min invited Binari, a cultural group that was synonymous with Young Koreans United (YKU), for a second event titled *Roots to Reality II: Alternative Visions* (1986).⁹ Min joined the group in 1986 and became deeply involved in Korean-American artist activism.

Soon after, YKU's influence was directly reflected in Min's work *Half Home* (1986). The work included a major installation at Soho 20 Gallery in New York, where Min carefully explored the identity of Koreans for the first time. The work begins with the word "Heartland," and goes through "Memory," "Mother Tongue," "History," and "Real Estate," ending with the phrase, "Half Motherland." The final part of the installation is set in the interior of a small prefabricated house likened to "Half Motherland." It is here that Min explores the question: "How much of me is Korean, and how much of me has changed? Or how much of me has become Americanized [...]"¹⁰ In this work, Min covered most of the installation with tracing paper; the veiled vision reflected the difficulty for immigrants like herself to find their own identities. This subject was extended to later works, which she developed in the 1990s.

Through Binari, Min associated with South Korean activists such as dancer Lee Aae Ju and artists like Kim Bong Joon and Kim Yong Tae who attended the Binari workshops.¹¹ These artists helped Min develop a deep understanding of *Minjung* art and the political situation under the Korean military dictatorship. In 1987, she produced a substantial essay on *Minjung* politics and art in Korea, titled "Min Joong."¹² In doing so, she not only acquired knowledge of Korean history, but also learned about *Minjung* art, a South Korean sociopolitical movement during the 1980s.

and 1990s.¹³ *Minjung* art is often translated as “people’s art,” culminating as an artistic response to the Gwangju people’s uprising and massacre in May 1980.¹⁴ *Minjung* means “common people” and includes political, socioeconomic, and culturally oppressed citizens such as women, ethnic minorities, the poor, factory workers, and farmers.¹⁵ The word started being used by activists and intellectuals in the 1980s as an alternative to the narrow and theoretical concept of the Marxist *proletariat*.¹⁶ Min began to pursue a radical view of history, whereby she came to approach Korean history critically, which became a turning point in her career.

The first comprehensive *Minjung* art exhibition, *Minjoong Art: A New Cultural Movement from Korea*, was held at Artists Space, 223 West Broadway, in SoHo, New York (from September 29 to November 5, 1988), and curated by Sung Wan-kyung and Um Hyuk.¹⁷ Their concept was to reveal the reality of the Korean government’s dictatorship by encouraging resistance against offensive controls intended to limit freedom in people’s everyday lives. The exhibition overlapped with the 1988 Seoul Olympics—which included a monumental, state-sponsored exhibition of contemporary Korean art in Seoul—as a statement contrasting the presumed power represented by the latter event.¹⁸ The New York *Minjung* art exhibition invited mainstream *Minjung* artists from Korea, including Byongsoo Cho, Oksang Lim, Junggu Lim, and Bulddong Choi. The most impressive work in the show was *Let Hanyol Live Again* (1987), a banner painting by Byongsoo Cho, which was hung on the facade of the gallery.¹⁹ The visual impact of the exhibition inspired a series of lively conversations with non-Korean critics and gave heightened awareness to the new, clearly provocative vision of Korean contemporary art.²⁰

Min connected with the work of *Minjung* artists in Korea. Through their works, she familiarized herself with experimental techniques based on woodblock prints, Korean traditional folk paintings, and wall hangings that corresponded to the identity of Korean artists resisting the influence of Western cultural hegemony. In an attempt to introduce Korean *Minjung* art to New York’s art scene, she reviewed the exhibition in comparison with other minority groups of Asian and Cuban artists in the mainstream of the New York art world. Her review, titled “Comparing the Contemporary Experiences of Asian American, South Korean, and Cuban Artists,” was published in *Artspiral* in 1989.²¹

During this fertile time in her career, Min joined the SEORO Korean Cultural Network of Korean-American visual artists, musicians, performers, and writers. Sung Ho Choi and Mo Bahc were the network’s central

figures; they organized informal study groups and finally founded the cultural group in 1990.²² They published a quarterly magazine, *SeoroSeoro* (*seoro* means “together”), from the fall of 1991 through the summer of 1994. The SEORO Korean Cultural Network organized forums and promoted networking among Korean-American artists and other minority groups outside mainstream American culture. One of their efforts resulted in the monumental exhibition *Across the Pacific: Contemporary Korean and Korean American Art* (from October 15, 1993, to January 9, 1994) at Queens Museum of Art.²³ It featured works of contemporary Korean artists working in Korea in conjunction with Korean-American artists’ work, the first time such an exhibition had been seen in the United States.²⁴ Min also participated in the exhibition as an artist. All her activities with the *Minjung* artists evoked her direction toward combining the sociopolitical subject with her identity.

Later, in 1990, she joined Godzilla: Asian American Art Network. The organization was formed to stimulate visibility and critical discourse for Asian-American artists, curators, and writers. Along with other members of Godzilla, Min was motivated to focus the discourse in ways that drew attention to issues such as institutional racism, Western imperialism, anti-Asian violence, and Asian gender representation. Margo Machida, a founding member, emphasized the self-identification and expression of “Asian American.” In her later book, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary*, she noted that this was a time when visual artists and cultural activists from diverse ethnic backgrounds throughout Asia produced art as an affirmation of their ethnic and racial pride.²⁵ Min’s feminist discourse as an Asian-American woman emphasized her marginalized position in the United States as a means of confirming her relationship to the motherland (Heart Land) as a central core in her art.

FEMINIST CONTEXT AS THE THIRD WORLD WOMAN

The question often arises as to how a woman describes herself today in comparison with how she might have described herself in the past. This resonates in the work of Min, whose focus on her awareness of her identity as an Asian-American woman has been an ongoing project throughout her career. Min began her self-search through representing herself in portrait photographs that include written texts. The inquiry in her works evolved in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Her two works *Make Me* (1989) and



Fig. 2 Yong Soon Min, *Make Me*, 1989. Black-and-white photography, photo-collages. (Courtesy of the artist)

Talking Herstory (1990) are distinguished accomplishments that clarify the integration of her photographic images and texts from this period (Fig. 2).²⁶ A close examination of these works is needed to understand her thought process and the gradual changes in her work over time.

Make Me comprises four parts, each of which contains black and white photographs with texts. The artist manipulates each photograph by splitting the image into two halves and rearranging them. She places a split female face—her self-portrait—at the center of the work. The texts, using cutout capital letters, are statements in reference to feminism: MODEL MINORITY, EXOTIC EMIGRANT, OBJECTIFIED OTHER, and ASSIMILATED ALIEN. The first image/text reveals a slightly smiling face matched with the phrase MODEL MINORITY, which refers to positive stereotypes of Asian Americans that uphold the ideal of the American dream.²⁷ From another point of view, Min's phrases are related to the prejudiced points of view of American popular media in the representation of East Asian women through exaggerated, exoticizing, and dehumanizing stereotypes such as the "China doll" or "dragon lady."²⁸

Min exemplifies these stereotypes of Asian-American women in two other works, including OBJECTIFIED OTHER and ASSIMILATED ALIEN. These words are consciously placed together with disjointed images of her face. In OBJECTIFIED OTHER, one side of her face reveals a closed eye, while on the other, she pulls her eye upward, exaggerating the slanted stereotype of the East Asian eye shape. In the last photograph, with the text ASSIMILATED ALIEN, she covers her left eye and mouth with her hands. These images suggest not seeing and not speaking against public harassment and objectification in individual relationships, inspired by her feelings of cultural alienation as an Asian immigrant living in American society.

Min's work intersects a point, which might be compared with a representative artist of second-wave feminism, Barbara Kruger, who is known for her layered photographs coupled with confrontational words or statements.²⁹ Kruger's *Untitled (Your Body Is a Battleground)* (1989) was made in the same year as Min's *Make Me*. There are several other common threads between the artists, for example, the split self-portraits and texts as a means to deliver powerful messages regarding feminism. These works especially explore the women's bodies with texts comprising issues related to identity, society, and gender. Min's keen and decisive works of this period formed a solid and enthusiastic foundation for her next steps.

Min's *Talking Herstory* (1990) is now part of the collection of the Department of Drawings and Prints at the Museum of Modern Art.³⁰ This work is a lithograph using old snapshots and images from newspapers and news magazines related to distinct political moments in Korean history as well as her family photographs taken in Korea. The artist's self-portrait in

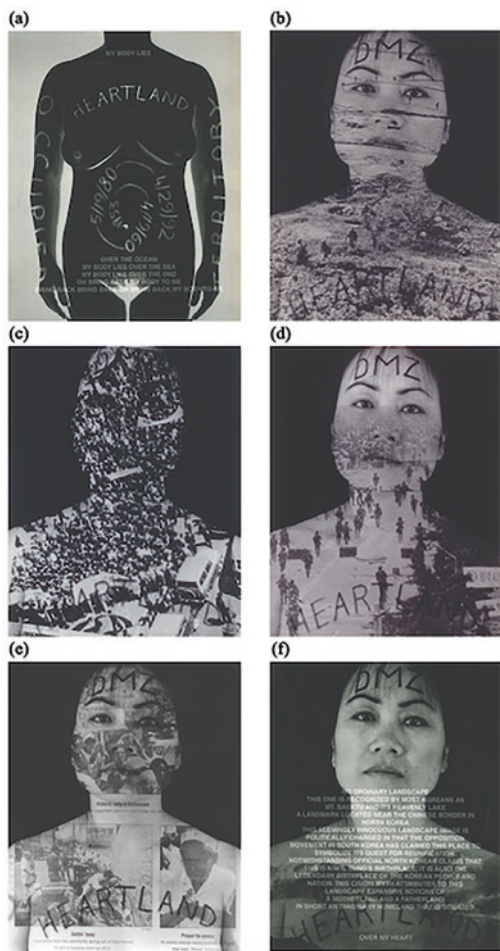
profile view is at the bottom of the work, with several collaged images scattered over it. These images are shown around the branches of her family tree, which is overlaid against a background of archival photos of the Allied leaders—Harry S. Truman, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin—who enforced Korea's division into North and South at the Potsdam Conference (from July 17 to August 2, 1945). These images are covered by a sheet of semi-transparent paper that makes them appear like traces of blurred memories, suggesting the manner in which politicians avoid clarity in reading and understanding history. The work implies a narrative between Min's family and Korean history under powerful political forces. After she immigrated to America at the age of seven, she gradually lost fluency in her native language; the photos represent a strong emotional attachment to her home country. Min stressed how the regional conflicts of the Cold War impacted individuals like herself. This work attempts to clarify the deep sorrow and horrific memories incited by ideological conflicts in Korean history.

BUILDING POLITICAL COMMENTS FROM PERSONAL LIFE

In this section, I explore *Defining Moments* (1992), one of Min's most influential works in the 1990s; it is composed of six silver gelatin prints (Fig. 3). As the title suggests, the work relates to the crucial and remarkable moments of a youthful Korean-American woman, offering a chronological projection of significant dates relating to the artist's own personal and political history. This serial work presents the dates with words overlaid on a representation of her body. The work has been displayed at various exhibitions.³¹

To summarize the background that informs *Defining Moments*, it is important to know the context of the time, specifically the sources Min believed were necessary for her work. Beyond her involvement in the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program (ISP) in 1981, Min interacted with Korean artists and other Asian immigrant groups in New York throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. She expanded her ability to come to terms with recent history and cultural identity and organized important events as an activist with other Asian-American artists. This period was when the artist's political awareness became strikingly evident. *Defining Moments* was produced in direct response to this political and cultural background.

Fig. 3 Yong Soon Min, *Defining Moments*, 1992. Black and white photos, each 20 × 16 in., all six with framing glass etched text. (Courtesy of the artist)



Another Asian woman artist, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, was active in New York in the early 1980s. Like Min, Cha had immigrated to the United States when she was young. Both graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, before moving to New York nearly at the same time, and both were interested in how to establish their identities as Korean-American women.³² When Min started interacting with other Asians in the city, Cha was actively working and gaining attention in the New York art

scene, enacting performances that highlighted texts relating to her body; however, there is no record of group activities or exhibitions in which Min and Cha participated together. Cha was tragically murdered in 1982; ten years later, following Cha's death, Min profoundly developed her idea for *Defining Moments*, which has parallels with Cha's book, *Dictée*.³³ The narrative involved two artists who accompanied the history and the times and were heading toward the same place.³⁴ The visual expression involving the artist's self-portrait and texts revealed a strong connection between the two artists.

The first work in the series provides the introduction and key points for its six photographs, appropriated images that include numbers (dates) and texts superimposed over the undressed body of the artist. Min's belly button is the starting point of the list of dates spiraling out across her torso: 1953—the year of both the artist's birth and the end of the Korean War. The dates 4/29/60, 5/19/80, and 4/29/92 are related to the third, fourth, and fifth works in the series, respectively. The words OCCUPIED and TERRITORY are inscribed on her forearms, indicating her physicality as the occupied territory she compares to both her own body and to the Korean political situation. On the other hand, HEART LAND, marked on her upper chest, is a symbolic expression that implies her deep compassion for the land of her birth. The emotional attachment leads to the following poetic verse strewn over the lower part of her belly: "My Body lies over the ocean / My Body lies over the sea / My Body lies over the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone] / Oh bring back My Body to Me."³⁵ While other Western feminist artists prefer to pursue the physical identity of women strictly through the female body, here Min's body is literally transformed into a visual language, used to proclaim political statements. The metaphor of the female body incorporates her motherland as a symbol of the invaded country, the place where all the political struggles happened.

The second photograph of the series represents U.S. soldiers scouting war-torn Korea during the Korean War (from June 25, 1950, to July 27, 1953). The third references one of the most significant democracy movements in 1960, the 4.19 Student Uprising that toppled the government of President Syngman Rhee.³⁶ The fourth photograph represents the military troops that oppressed citizen protests during the Gwangju Democratic Movement, in which over 600 Korean citizens were killed by Korean military troops. The Gwangju Democratic Movement gave birth to the national struggle for democracy in South Korea after decades of dictatorships following the Korean War. Given her association with *Minjung*

artists, Min learned about the suppression of freedom during the military dictatorship. Her intention was to express democracy through the use of photographic imagery and texts on the body.

In the fifth work, Min's body juxtaposes political articles about and photos of the Los Angeles riots in 1992, which had a direct impact on the small businesses of many Korean Americans located in South Central Los Angeles. Her criticism of these incidents, as witnessed by a Korean artist, paradoxically implies the adaptation of Koreans to American society, which, at the same time, regards them as outsiders. This work refers to Min's own experience of internal occupation by the traumatic history of racism in the United States.

GENDERED SPACE OF DECOLONIZATION

Defining Moments focuses on race, cultural identity, and feminist representation. The letters DMZ are inscribed on Min's forehead in the second to fifth photographs. The DMZ is a symbol of the tragic history of the division of Korea, caused by the traumatic history of the country in the context of the Cold War.³⁷ Min called herself "a baby of the cold war."³⁸ What does that mean?

This work might be understood as a decisive declaration of decolonization.³⁹ The artist confirms in her work that the female body is the place of this metaphorical declaration. As something that is objectified in the societies of both Korea and the United States, the female body is a territory occupied by imperialism. However, the work is not consistent with such a pessimistic interpretation. Min presents a different vision as an awakened feminist in this work. Here, she enacts the traumatic history of Korea marked by the occupations of foreign powers. Through this work, Min reveals how imperial interference can hurt a nation's history and an individual's life; however, this work can also be interpreted in connection with the artist's search for identity. The "demilitarized zone" does not belong anywhere in the reality of the division of the two Koreas; as it symbolizes the continuing history of division, Min's own political identity as a Korean living in the United States can be interpreted as an existence that does not belong to either North or South Korea. The DMZ on her forehead reminds us of the political tensions in the divided Korea, while comparing her naked body to the Korean land ultimately asks what country she is decolonizing as an Asian woman.

The word HEARTLAND is stenciled across her upper breast, further suggesting Min's strong nationalistic spirit. The same term appeared in an earlier work titled *Half Land* (1988), showing Min's deep-rooted connection with and compassion for her country. If the head represents reason and the heart represents love, is it possible that the DMZ might be the world of reason? If this may sound too much like a division enforced by masculine logic, HEARTLAND can be said to be the source of heart, mother, feminine power, and love.

Defining Moments is both a political declaration and a social statement. It contains postcolonial references to the history and development of democracy in Korea and to the negative impact of American imperialism on Korean society and democracy. The last images of *Defining Moments* present her hope for the future through the resolution of the ideological conflicts between North and South Korea, leading to reunification. The sixth and final work of the series shows an image of Mount Baekdu. Located on the border of North Korea and China, Mount Baekdu is the highest and most northern mountain in Korea. It is the mythical site of Korean spirituality and a symbol for Korean national identity. The image of Mount Baekdu signifies a unified Korea and expresses a yearning to reconcile the ideological conflicts between North and South, a strong nationalistic wish for the reunification of her country.

The image of Mount Baekdu indicates Min's deep engagement in *Minjung* ideology and highlights issues regarding the division and unification of the nation as the most urgent. The superimposing of an image of Mount Baekdu over the artist's body metaphorically aligns her corporeal presence with the mountain that Koreans find sacred. Now, the woman's body rises to another dimension—to the position of a witness and a victim of a historical scene. The woman's body becomes like a maternal goddess receiving the energy of Mount Baekdu. It is here that Min's work can be called an anti-colonial declaration. The female body—the gendered body—can accept every moment of history and lead that history. Eventually, her existence could become the goddess that sublimates the message of healing.

CONCLUSION

Yong Soon Min's *Defining Moments* is a political declaration and a social statement. It contains postcolonial references to the history and development of democracy in Korea and to the impact of American imperialism

on Korean society, and it presents issues related to race, cultural identity, and feminist representation. In the context of Min's Asian female identity, her work profoundly embraces the position of Third World female artistry. Min's postcolonial feminism resonates with Chandra Mohanty voicing the concerns of colonized women in her essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses."⁴⁰ Third World women are placed in their own particular historical and political contexts that incorporate a cultural perspective beyond that of the West. Given Mohanty's position regarding Third World women who have evolved from adverse historical and political conditions, Min's *Defining Moments* reveals thematic conflicts and fundamental issues in a work of art.

NOTES

1. Andrew Cheng, *1.5 Generation Korean Americans: Consonant and Vowel Production of Two Late Childhood Arrivals*, UC Berkeley Phonetics and Phonology Lab Annual Report (2018): 1. "Korean Americans can be grouped according to generational status, beginning with those who were born in Korea and immigrated to the United States (1st generation), and those whose parents were 1st generation and were born in the United States (2nd generation). Thereafter, successive generations of Korean Americans born and raised in the United States would take on additional numbers (3rd generation, 4th generation, etc.). However, there is an additional category distinct from the whole number generations: 1.5. Between first and second." https://escholarship.org/content/qt5k679575/qt5k679575_noSplash_07e629f02493656f88af3b6cb6ab4c78.pdf?t=plr0gt, accessed October 10, 2021.
2. Margo Machida, "SEEING 'YELLOW': Asians and the American Mirror." In Louis Young, ed., *The Decade Show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, exh. cat. (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, and The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1990), 124.
3. Penny F. Willgerodt, "Interview with Young Soon Min," *Ikon* #9 (Asian Women United, 1989): 78.

Min talked about the work *American Friend* (1985) in an interview with Penny F. Willgerodt; "My father had immigrated to the States a month before I was born, coinciding with the official resolution of the Korean War. A US army officer my father worked for during the war as a translator arranged for him to finish his college work in the States. This relationship

between my father and the US Army is the subject of a recent drawing sarcastically entitled *American Friend*.”

4. Kim Hyunjoo, “Art Portrait: Yong Soon Min and Interview,” *Journal of Contemporary Art*, issue #33 (April 2014):16. The original text was written in English by Yong Soon Min and then translated into Korean. Min wrote the translated text on her work. The Korean translation on the drawing reads: “관대한 친구여! 한국전쟁 때 우리 아버지를 알게 되어 친분을 맺은 후 미국 이민이란 길까지 터준 친구여! 아버지가 떠나신 후 우리 어머니를 서울 미군부대에 취직하게 도와준 친구여! 그래서 우리는 전쟁 직후의 어려움 속에서도 그럭저럭 생활을 했지. 친구여! 해방 후(?) 이승만 대통령이란 훌륭한 지도자를 우리에게 보내줬지. 또 박정희, 전두환 같은 군사 독재자를 대통령으로 세워 한국의 정치 발전을 이룩했지. 그러면서 한국을 군사, 경제적으로 돕느라 바빴지. 게다가 핵미사일이란 값진 선물까지도...이 모든 고마움을 어찌 다 모를까? 아마 우리가 그냥 앉아서 받기엔 너무 황송한 것들이라서...”
5. Young Soon Min, *East Wind: Politics and Culture of Asians in the U.S.* (spring/summer, 1986): 20–24.
6. The exhibition “Roots to Reality: Asian American in Transition” was a part of a festival of Asian American Visual and Performing Arts (AAAC), that was held from October 11 to November 24 in 1985, a collaboration between Henry St. Settlement and the Alliance for Asian American Arts and Culture.
7. To a great extent, the program’s vitality derives from the seminar leaders—the painters, filmmakers, video artists, musicians, dancers, sculptors, critics, art historians, and theorists, mostly based in New York, who come to the I.S.P. every week for a few hours of dialogue with all of the students. As a group, they represent a comprehensive cross-section of the intellectual and cultural community of New York in the last fifteen years. Individually, they have been highly important catalysts to the thinking and work processes of program participants.
8. The organization was established in New York City in 1983; the original name is the Alliance for Asian American Arts and Culture.
9. Young Koreans United (YKU) was formed in 1984 by Yoon Han Bong, who had been living in New York in exile because of being a leading activist involved in the 5.18 Uprising. Young Koreans United is a political organization with chapters in all the major cities in the United States. YKU strongly worked for the democracy movement in Korea and opposed U.S. military intervention in support of the military dictatorship. Min said, “YKU is politically aligned with the student and worker opposition movements of South Korea whose primary issues are reunification of North and South Korea, US troop withdrawal and self-determination for the Korean

peninsula. YKU is involved in educating Koreans living here, as well as the enormous foreign influences in most general public.” And “Binari represents the cultural arm of YKU. Its purpose is to keep the traditional Korean folk culture-what they consider the people’s culture-alive in the communities here. Binari has ongoing weekly workshops open to the Korean community.” See Penny F. Willgerodt, 82–83.

10. Betty Kano, “Four Northern California Artists: Hisako Hibi, Norine Nishimura, Yong Soon Min, and Miran Ahn.” *Feminist Studies* 19.3 (Fall 1993): 632.
11. Yookyong Choi, “Globalization and Ethnic Identity in the Art of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Yong Soon Min, and Nikki S. Lee” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2012), 114.
12. See Yong Soon Min, “Min Joong” *Art and Artists* (A Journal of the Foundation of the Community of Artists, June/July, 1987): 3, continued on page 16.
13. See Youngna Kim, *Modern and contemporary art in Korea: tradition, modernity, and identity* (Seoul and Elizabeth, NJ: Hollym, 2000), 52–61.
14. Tobias Lehmann, “Minjung Art Reconsidered: Art as a Means of Resistance,” *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society - Korea Branch*, Vol. 84, No.1 (2009): 73–74.
15. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women’s Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 120.
16. Sunyoung Park (ed), *Revisiting Minjung: New Perspectives on the Cultural History of 1980s Korea* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 2.
17. 민중 was transliterated as *Minjoong* in the show. However, recent researchers are using *Minjung*.
18. Douglas Gabriel, “From Seoul to the World: Minjung Art and Global Space During the 1988 Olympics,” *Journal of History of Modern Art* 11, no. 41 (June 2017): 188.
19. Douglas Gabriel, “From Seoul to the World, 187-188. Lee Han-yeol (1966–1987) was a university student struck by a tear gas grenade canister during a demonstration on 9 June 1987. Choe Byeong Soo depicted the historical scene on a huge piece of cloth as a realistic and concise painting work. The work referenced a new iconic *Minjung* art at the time.
20. Sohl Lee, “Exhibiting Minjung Art Abroad: Tokyo, New York, and Pyongyang at the Cold War’s Twilight.” in *Revisiting Minjung: New Perspectives on the Cultural History of 1980s South Korea*, ed. Sunyoung Park (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 114–115.
21. Yong Soon Min, Comparing the Contemporary Experiences of Asian American, South Korean, and Cuban Artists, *Artspiral*, no. 2 (1989): 12.

22. Kyunghye Pyun, "Civil Rights Movements for Minority Artists: A Note on the Archive of Korean-American Artists," *Shades of Time: An Exhibition from the Archive of Korean-American Artists, Part Two 1989–2001*, Kyunghye Pyun, ed. (New York: AHL Foundation, 2014), 15–17. Although Pyun mentions that "Yong Soon Min and Theresa Hakkyung Cha were also frequent participants," Cha was murdered on November 5, 1982, and the SEORO Korean Cultural Network was established in 1990. However, it is true that Cha, Min, and other Korean artists knew one another in the early 1980s. See Amei Wallach, "Art/Architecture; Theresa Cha: In Death, Lost And Found," *The New York Times* (April 20, 2003), <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/20/arts/art-architecture-theresa-cha-in-death-lost-and-found.html>, accessed November 21, 2021.
23. Soojung Hyun, "Korean-American Artists in New York in 1990s." *Coloring Time: An Exhibition from the Archive of Korean-American Artists, Part One (1955–1989)*, Kyunghye Pyun, ed. (New York: AHL Foundation, 2013), 30–31.
24. Alice Yang, "Looking for the identity of Korean Art," *Why Asia? Contemporary Asian and Asian American Art*, Jonathan Hay and Mimi Young, eds. (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), 65.
25. Margo Machida, *Unsettled visions: contemporary Asian American artists and the social imaginary* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), 25–26.
26. *Make Me* (1989) was shown in *The Decade Show: Framework of Identity in the 1980s* (1990), an exhibition presenting identity issues in the 1980s, which was a collaborative exhibition project organized by the Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem. *Talking Herstory* (1990) is in the collection of the Departments of Drawings and Prints of MoMA; this work was shown in *Thinking Print: Books to Billboards, 1980–1995* (Jun. 20–Sep.10. 1996).
27. Stacey J. Lee, *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth* (New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1996), 6–7. The positive stereotype of Asian Americans praises the work ethic, family values, and educational attainment of many Asians.
28. See Joey Lee. "East Asian 'China Doll' or 'Dragon Lady'?" *Bridges: An Undergraduate Journal of Contemporary Connections*, vol. 3 (2018).
29. The first wave was the Suffragists, and the second wave began in the late 1960s.
30. "Yong Soon Min, *Talking Herstory*, 1990," <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/66431>, accessed October 5, 2021.

31. The work has been displayed at exhibitions including *Bridge of No Return* at Art in General, NYC (1998); *The Korean War: Fifty Years Later* curated by Simon Taylor at the Museum of Guild Hall of East Hampton, NY (2000); *Still Present Pasts: Korean Americans and the Forgotten War* at Jewett Art Gallery, Wellesley College and Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center, Boston (2005); and *Shades of Time: An Exhibition from the Archive of Korean-American Artists, Part Two 1989-2001* at Queens Museum (2014).
32. Theresa Hak kyung Cha and Yong Soon Min took the same classes at Berkeley, where the Asian-American movement emerged and college student demonstrations led to the establishment of an ethnic studies program. See King-Kok Cheung, *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 174–176.
33. *Dictée* was published in 1982 and is the best-known work of the versatile and important Korean-American artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. A classic work of autobiography that transcends the self, *Dictée* is the story of several women: the Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon, Joan of Arc, Demeter and Persephone, Cha's mother Hyung Soon Huo (a Korean born in Manchuria to first-generation Korean exiles), and Cha herself, <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520261297/dictee>, accessed November 5, 2021.
34. Yookyoung Cho, 212. "While Cha and Min adopt different visual languages to express their concern about their hybrid identities, their works commonly feature the deep feelings of pain and loss associated both with the traumatic history of their home country and with their own experiences as immigrants."
35. These refer to "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean," a Scottish folk song of uncertain origin which may refer to mourning the death of a loved one.
36. The 4.19 Student Uprising, also called the April 19 Revolution, refers to the protest movement against the dictatorship of President Syngman Rhee in South Korea, which took place in April 1960. See Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun, A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 339–347.
37. The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) originated from the decision made by the United States to protect the 38th parallel on the Korean peninsula to hold back the advancing Soviet army at the end of World War II. After the Soviets boycotted the United Nations-supervised general elections, two separate political regimes were established in 1948, and the division of the country became permanent.
38. Young Soon Min, Biography, <https://www.yongsoonmin.com/biography/>, accessed October 5, 2021.

39. In the context of postcolonialism, she presented her work, *deCOLONIZATION* (1991), at the Bronx Museum of the Arts in 1991. This work was made prior to *Defining Moments*. The subject would eventually become representative of postcolonialism and the diaspora, specifically by a Third World, Korean-American female artist. See Calvin Reid's essay in the exhibition catalog. Calvin Reid, "Untitled." *International Critics' Choice* (1993), 21. Min used the words OCCUPIED and TERRITORIES in *deCOLONIZATION*.
40. Postcolonial feminist theory has generally been based on a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of social and political identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, etc.) might combine to create unique modes of discrimination. See Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 51–80.