

Sinchon massacre during the korean war (according to a book the guest) book revie...

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Koreans during their rich history, unfortunately, many times had to uphold their independence from the enemy invasions and friendly embrace of powerful neighbors. Korean War, which was the first open conflict between USSR and America, was a bloody conflict that for a long time concealed terrible crimes against humanity. We will raise the pages of the Korean War, see its preconditions and consequences. The paper's main argument is to examine the historical elements of the book *The Guest*, written by Hwang Sok-yong, and to analyze the conditions of the Sinchon Massacre. We will discuss Hwang's description of the deep causes and more immediate triggers of the Sinchon Massacre, and the division of the Korean Peninsula. Hwang Sok-yong used to write about war and peace. These topics were his favorite to narrate his stories. He was born in the South Korea and being a child saw the times of occupation of his country. To understand the preconditions of his books, readers should understand the history of Korean Peninsula. Hwang Sok-Yong in his book 'The Guest' provided clear information about terrible crimes against humanity caused during the Korean War. The information in the book is based on the facts, data and images that the author found during the research in his hometown. There were people, who could remember the events. He gave the names and in the narrative manner presented all the terror that happened to the civilians in the Sinchon district. Charles R. Larson from the *Worldview* magazine told that "The majesty of Hwang Sok-Yong's compelling story resides in its telling. Hwang is unflinching in his determination to understand his country's past and the tragic events that broke his country in two" (Hwang, 2005, 3).

Let's determine the historical ground of the events. In the 19th century,

Korea conducted the policy of isolation. It led to a prolonged stagnation in the development of the country. Korea eventually lost the ability to protect its independence. In the 20th century, the country was invaded by aggressive Japan. The Koreans found themselves in the position of minority citizens in their own country, which the Japanese conquerors ruthlessly exploited and attempted to make an integral part of the Empire, forcibly introducing Japanese lifestyle, Japanese language and culture. Released in 1945 by the Soviet army, Korea should have become a unified state. In fact, in 1950 the United States and Soviet Union divided Korean Peninsula in two zones of influence (Brady, 2000, 35). They formed a communistic North Korea and South Korea with the new born capitalism. It was a war between two completely different ideologies for the hegemony in the world politics. Unfortunately, Korean Peninsula happened to be their battlefield. The United Nations supported the Republic of Korea, while dictatorships in China and USSR supported the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Deane, 1999, 99-100). When the war ended, the countries that took part in it didn't resolve the case like other military conflicts. The war that killed millions of human lives, ended almost in vain: at the time of the cease-fire, the warring parties turned to be at the same positions as they were at the beginning of the war. Korea still represents two different political systems. Juristically, both countries are in the state of war. There was any peace treaty signed. Moreover, the war that took place in a long 1950 did not help to unite the country and resolve the conflict. Signed in 1953 treaty established economic and trade relations among the parts of the conflict and should have guarantee peace. There is still a demilitarized zone along the line of the 38th

parallel. Both ideological systems provided different policies. They had the significant influence at the situation in the Sinchon district, as the one that situated near the border.

In recent years with the development of right to speak in the South Korea, people have known that in that war, there were numerous facts of massacres on both sides of the conflict. The most resonant happened in Sinchon.

Nowadays, it makes part of the North Korea. Hwang Sok-yong in the historical novel *The Guest* described that terrible mass killing of civil people.

During the war, more than 35, 000 civilian people were murdered in that district. The massacre took place in a period from October till December 1950. The real stories from those days were thoroughly hidden (Kang, 1993,

231). There are only some facts that allow us to rebuild the picture of the events. Many historical sources provide specific information with data and images, but they have different points of view. Some of them support the idea, that the massacre that took place in the region was a result of a social struggle between two ideological systems: Koreans that supported

Communist ideology and those, who were Christians. Others prove that the mass death of people was caused by the American occupation and mass

killings of civilian people in Sinchon by American troops. There are many valid historical facts that prove the last version. The direct American

participation in hostilities was reversed the course of the war, when

controlled by Syngman Rhee troops remained only a small foothold in the

southeast of the Korean Peninsula. Stepping from the beachhead, American,

South Korean and alliance's troops assembled under the UN flag, marched to

Pyongyang and further to the North (Brady, 2000, 44). It is also known that

both sides of the conflict used all possibilities and even the worst methods. Massacres of the civilian population, killings and torture of prisoners of war were common. In the American combatants that suffered from guerrilla attacks, it became customary to open fire on any civilians that appear near military positions. Many historians denounce America to be guilty in a Sinchon Massacre. Many facts during the Korean War indicate at the American murders. There are lists of massacres done to the civil population of the North and South Korea by communist regime and so-called democratic countries. According to them, air forces of the United States rained down on North Korea continued indiscriminate bombing, destroyed everything, including schools and hospitals and killing countless civilians. For 3 years of war, America dropped on average 18 bombs on every square kilometer of the North Korean side of the peninsula. All the towns and villages of North Korea turned into ashes, so that some of the American pilots felt a sort of disappointment that there was nothing to destroy. In the temporarily occupied parts of North Korea, American villains in an orderly and systematically way were killing civilians. According to Perni, American aviation, which became a true hero of the war, indiscriminately bombed military and civilian targets, using unprecedented napalm, which regarded as weapon of mass destruction. Hwang Sok-Yong writes that usual people were shot, hanged, buried alive (Sok-Yong, 92-95). They were thrown with stones at the neck in the water, burned at the stake, hanged on trees upside down. Sinchon district during a 52-day occupation had 35380 of the victims in that brutal massacre (Perni, 2005, 74). The quantity corresponded to one quarter of the population of the district. There were more than 16200 children,

elderly and women among the dead (Perni, 2005, 74). The United States used the bacteriological and chemical weapons. They spread germs of smallpox, the peddlers of hemorrhagic fever and typhus on the territory of North Korea during the temporary occupation. From January to March 1952, the United States throughout a massive bacteriological bomb and used chemical weapons in over 400 locations in North Korea.

According to the annotation to the book, "The Guest is essentially a shamanistic exorcism, designed to relieve the agony of those, who survived and appease the spirits of those, who were sacrificed on the altar of cultural imperialism half a century ago" (Hwang, 2005, 4). It is clear that the title of the book reflected the main idea to show the times of the war. The book contains a lot of bloody scenes without any shadow of exaggeration. The description of the events is based on true stories and memories of eyewitnesses, those who passed the agony and hell. The book provides vivid characters based on the autobiographical elements of the author. It provides terrifically important information that the massacre in Sinchon had been caused by the struggle between Communist and Christian people in Korea. In the Chapter 5, Hwang wrote about this reason: "That November, scores of students and Christians died in Sinŭiju, protesting against the Communist Party and Soviet authority" (Hwang, 2005, 92). This fact makes the United States of America innocent in those mass killings. However, in June 2001, in Manhattan, New York, there was organized the Korean International Court over the war crimes. According to the international conventions, respecting peace, human rights and the very existence of the nation, the American Army during the Korean War was recognized guilty in the inhuman murders.

Can we therefore conclude that America was absolutely or partially right, when General MacArthur took with blood the Korean peninsula, trying to clear it from the Communist contagion? Besides, the Hwang's book provided more reasons of the big amount of deaths in the region. It was the time of the land reform in the Korea during the spread class struggle in a society. At that time, soon after the liberation from Japan occupation, there were numerous riots in Pyongyang. The struggle between atheist Communists and Christians led to fights and controversies in the society. There were protests and arrests of those who supported religion and considered new laws repressive and those who supported the Communist regime and battled against churches. Hwang described those times on the example of Korean youth from 50's. They were full of hopes to build a new country for the better future. New land reforms conducted by the Communist party took away the lands that were in the possession of families for hundred years. It claimed crucial resonance between people, because of "land reform had to be implemented using blind confiscation and blind distribution" (Hwang, 2005, 97).

Hwang's declaration is different from the general opinion. He claimed a lot of questions from the both Koreas. For example, Perni's book reflects the traditional view on the issue, as well as the book of So Kang. Kang provided historical sources and images from the events, where readers can see faces, uniform of the American troops and other details of the events (Kang, 1993, 231). According to the historian Deane, "the worst American atrocity was probably the massacre of citizens of Wonsan" (Deane, 1999, 102). The author describes all the mistakes of the American commands and troops on

the Korean Peninsula. His book also provides the images and interviews with the victims of the massacre. Besides according to the American reports, provided by Deane, the territories occupied by Americans represented “ a mass in cluttered ruins” (Deane, 1999, 102).

In South Korea after the war entrenched hard authoritarian regime, dependent on the United States, because democratic mode was not able to consolidate society demoralized in that military conflict. Disasters of war and post-war time paved the way for spontaneous generation of strong opposition, which by all means fought for democracy, national independence, and a withdrawal of American troops and the peaceful unification of Korea. Economic development has spurred the process of democratization of the state authority, which gradually overcame the past problems. An allegiance from the United States opened the Koreans access to world markets, advanced technology and credit resources. Using these capabilities, hard-working and talented South Korean people created the Republic of Korea, which it is so far. The North Korean State was formed on the standard model of popular democracy in countries in the sphere of Soviet influence after the Second World War. However, the North Korea till today has not recognized the agreement with its conditions. The author of the book *The Guest* wrote that “ It was a chilling experience to be so reminded that despite the collapse of the Cold War infrastructure, our small peninsula is still bound by the delicate chains of war” (Hwang, 2005, 4).

Maybe, Americans called the Korean War a forgotten war, because it was the first time they actually lost. Americans before had in majorly supported the aggressive politics of their government, because it used to win. That war

turned to be an awful mistake. The worst it became when people heard the voice of Korea, that wanted to establish justice over thousands of killed and murdered in those years. Many families in those four years of terror lost their relatives, friends and neighbors. Nowadays, divided by the demilitarized border they are united by the sadness of lost. According to Hwang, “ The scars of our war and the ghosts of the Cold War still mar the Korean peninsula” (Hwang, 2005, 5). The participants of great conflicts of the 20th century were making good and evil. They were not able to divide them and calculate the consequences of what they were doing. As a result of the correspondence trial the government of the military forces of the United States, all Defense Ministers, Commanders of troops and their associates were recognized guilty and responsible for the Korean War and unleashed massive killing of civilians. The moral winner in that war should be declared the people of both Koreas, which went through the confrontation with giant war machines of the United States and the Soviet Union. They used to live with the losses of the years of war. The only thing they need is to know the truth about the events.

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