

Dreaming of an Intact Home Front: Erasing Female Subjectivity through Popular Media Representations of the Vietnam War

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This article examines illusions of an intact home front during and after Korea's participation in the Vietnam War, with reference to the film *Yeongja's Heydays* (1975) and a women's magazine feature article on a Vietnam War veteran's wife. These illusions facilitate the framing of both middle- and low-class women within a popular cultural archetype passed down from the film *Madame Freedom* (1956). The "Vietnam Boom" yielded materialistic gains on the home front under the Park Chung Hee regime. Contrasting this abrupt affluence, media representations continually reproduced the "dangerous woman" image to legitimize gender and class hierarchies. Two themes emerged: sexual objectification of lower-class women and containment of middle-class women's economic authority and empowerment. I argue that subordinating women in cultural texts obliterates the Vietnam War trauma and renders women a convenient scapegoat for Korea's volatile socioeconomic problems. Both narratives further imply another stereotype, namely that of deception and betrayal among women. Transforming naïve, chaste Yeongja first into a rebellious, self-destructive, disabled prostitute then into an ideal housewife offers Changsu, the other protagonist in the film, a vicarious proxy for healing his war wounds. This is a key difference between the film and the original novel on which it was based. Meanwhile, the adultery and economic loss of the Vietnam War veteran's wife are portrayed as the promiscuity and economic inability of a materialistic housewife, underscoring men's moral integrity and hard work.

Keywords: Vietnam War, postwar South Korean women, female chastity, women's magazines, *Yeongja's Heydays* (*Yeongja ui jeonseong sidae*)

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