

*A Letter to Glenn D. Paige on his 92<sup>nd</sup> Birthday*

Bangkok, Thailand

June 28, 2021

Dear Glenn,

I must tell you that I have missed you very much these days, perhaps because I have been watching a Korean Drama Series on Netflix due in part to the Covid 19 pandemic effect. On its surface, *Heaven's Garden* is a dramatic family story of a woman who was betrayed by her husband, whom her father objected to from the very beginning, and could no longer cope with life in Seoul any more. So she left Seoul with her two young daughters, the graceful and thoughtful thirteen year-old, who is not her own but her husband's with his other wife who disowned this child, and her very own adorable and determined six-year old for a village life in the picturesque mountainous farm in Gangwon-do province, some 107 km from the capital city. There she and her little daughters have to lead a complicated life with suspicious villagers and her estranged father Jung Boo Sik, the hero of the story. Like you, I haven't really watched any modern Korean series before. But I will just say that I have been hooked on this 2011-2012 Korean drama series once I laid eyes on it.

But then why does *Heaven's Garden* make me miss you so very much?

I think behind the façade of modern Korean family lives, this is the Korean story where lives of the youngest generations have been shaped by those before them, going back to their grandparents in their sixties and seventies who have all been traumatized by the 1954-1955 Korean War. Let me illustrate with the story of the series hero, Jung Boo Sik .

When the Korean War broke out, Boo Sik's brother joined the South Korean army and since Boo Sik was only 14 then, he was exempted yet he tagged along. On that very day, a woman in the same village by the name So Pal Bok was getting married. During the wedding ceremony, her groom was also taken away by the army to fight in the war. Along the way, Boo Sik's brother disappeared. Sometime later, he and the groom faced a North Korean soldier in a forest. The guy wanted to take the little food Boo Sik was eating from him. Telling young Boo Sik to run away, the groom died protecting the boy from the North Korean soldier's bullet. When Boo Sik returned home, his mother asked why his brother did not come back. Since then his mother always prayed for the return of Boo Sik's brother, leaving him in the grips of sorrow wondering why his mother did

not appreciate that it was he was alive and came back to her. Boo Sik spent his life searching and waiting for his missing brother's return from North Korea in vain. In addition, he has spent much time in his life taking care of the bride So Pal Bok whose groom was taken away to war, who now lives with an orphan whom she adopts as her own, without telling her that her groom was killed saving him. For sixty years, he could not muster enough courage to tell the truth to the woman until she lost her memory and died. All through the years, Boo Sik's wife and son had left him while his divorced daughter resented him because of the way he seems to privilege others' needs in lives than his own family. And all this time, Boo Sik never explains.

I think Boo Sik suffered from a complex trauma of a survivor's guilt regarding his missing brother which led to a feeling that his mother did not love him. Moreover, he also felt responsible for the death of So Pal Bok's groom who died saving him while he ran away. *Heaven's Garden* shows how extremely difficult it has been for anyone to delicately negotiate one's life with those h/she loves to live in a family of three generations touched by the curse of war and deeply polarized violence that has torn societies

asunder, be it Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, or the partition of India, among others.

If I understand you correctly, Glenn, when you issued the clarion call of “No More Killing”, you had the shadow of Korean War in the back of your mind because of your direct experience in it. That was why throughout the years you had also worked so hard for Korean reunification. In this sense, “No More Killing” was your precious gift to the world because not only does war kill, but it cuts deep into human relationship for generations to come, at times without the victims themselves knowing why.

But now you know why I have missed you a lot these days. What would it have been like if I could sit and watch *Heaven's Garden* with you? I am sure I could have learned much more not only about the Korean story but also about the secrets of garden in heaven where war and killing is no more.

Ha'o nui wau ia'oe , Aloha my teacher,

Chaiwat Satha-Anand