

The Border Men

A Historical Memoir through
Comic-Based Transmedia Campaign
Targeting Polarized Young Generations
in South Korea

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COMMLDD 534: Final Proposal

Overview

To fully immerse oneself in the story, it is crucial to understand the historical backdrop of South Korea. The aftermath of President Park Chung-hee's assassination in 1979 unleashed a political turmoil that engulfed the nation. Under the leadership of military dictator Chun Doo-hwan, martial law was imposed, opposition leaders were arrested, universities were closed, and political activities were banned. The press was also suppressed, exacerbating the chaotic situation.

In response to this coup d'état, a democratic uprising emerged in Seoul in the spring of 1980, led by approximately 200,000 college students. The movement quickly spread across the country but was brutally crushed by the Korean military. One infamous episode within this series of events is the Gwangju Democratic Movement, which took place from May 18 to May 27. Pro-democracy protests escalated into an armed uprising as the South Korean government deployed the army to violently suppress the demonstrations. Gwangju citizens, in their resistance, took up arms, seizing control of large sections of the city. However, the army re-entered the city and quelled the uprising, resulting in an estimated hundreds of deaths and thousands of wounded. This tragic event is also known as the Gwangju Massacre.

During Chun Doo-hwan's military dictatorship, the South Korean government labeled the incident the "Gwangju Riot" and propagated the narrative that it was instigated by "communist sympathizers and rioters" with the support of North Korea. In 1997, May 18 was officially designated as a National Day of Commemoration for the massacre, and a national cemetery was established for the victims. Subsequent investigations confirmed the numerous atrocities committed by the military, and the Gwangju Uprising played a significant role in ultimately ending South Korea's dictatorship in 1987. In 2011, the documents related to the Gwangju Uprising were included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. However, in contemporary South Korean politics, conservative and far-right groups commonly deny the occurrence of the Gwangju Uprising, further polarizing perspectives on the event.

In May 2020, marking 40 years since the uprising, the independent May 18 Democratization Movement Truth Commission was established to investigate the crackdown and the military's use of force. Unfortunately, even with approximately 20,000 soldiers mobilized, hardly any of them admit to the facts or provide their personal accounts. As only a few courageous soldiers have come forward to reveal the truth and offer apologies to the families of the deceased or injured, the investigation has faced significant challenges, and the surviving participants of the movement continue to age without receiving proper compensation or even basic apologies.

At the same time, the collective trauma resulting from the Gwangju Uprising has left a lasting impact on Korean society. Many victims and even soldiers have experienced profound pain, leading to suicides. Meanwhile, the dictator and his party have not shown remorse and continue to live comfortable lives. This collective trauma and the polarizing perspectives surrounding the event persist and are transferred through

generations, exacerbating the divisions within society. As Marcel Proust aptly expressed, "We are healed from suffering only by experiencing it to the full." It is imperative that we address this issue properly and remember it for the sake of future generations.

Why now? The story of the Gwangju Uprising holds immense value and emotional depth. While there have been previous attempts in media to cover the event, they often fell short of accurately and comprehensively addressing its complexities due to political influences and biased views. The historical narrative remains entangled with ongoing polarizing dynamics, pitting left-wing revolutionary riots against democracy civil movements. This makes it challenging for the narrative to reach a broad audience, despite its significance and public interest. Starting from 2020, meaningful confessions from the soldiers are coming out to the public, promoting the proper investigation of the deeply involved perpetrators and recovering the fame of innocent victims. This year, in a surprising turn of events, the grandson of Chun Doo-hwan, Jamie Chun, issued an apology to the relatives of those killed in the brutal military crackdown of 1980. Given that 43 years have passed since the uprising, I firmly believe that this story must be thoroughly examined to quell the anger and pass on an accurate history to the next generation.

Campaign Goals

In this context, I propose a comic series accompanied by a transmedia campaign that aims to transcend the limitations of time, space, and subject matter. The overarching goals of the transmedia campaign are as follows:

1. Increase unbiased awareness of the Gwangju Uprising: The campaign aims to raise awareness about the historical event in a fair and impartial manner, ensuring that accurate information reaches a wide audience.
2. Properly investigate history: Rather than simply reiterating known facts, the campaign seeks to conduct a thorough investigation into the event, delving deeper into its complexities and shedding new light on the subject, to prevent the recurrence of such tragedies in the future.
3. Restore humanity and alleviate the polarization in society: The campaign aims to foster healing and reconciliation among all sides affected by the event, emphasizing the restoration of humanity and the addressing of social traumas.

Numerous historical events worldwide exhibit repetitive patterns, from the banality of evil demonstrated by Eichmann during the Nazi era, where ordinary individuals subordinated themselves to Hitler by claiming they were merely following orders and laws, to recent hardships faced by citizens in various regions. By genuinely understanding and learning from this historical event through appropriate mediums and societal learning practices, we, as global citizens, can glean valuable lessons.

What will be done? Through the medium of comics and transformative media, I aim to prompt readers to ponder essential questions:

- Why did the soldiers at that time obey those in power and open fire on their fellow citizens?
- What would a normal human being do in such a situation?
- How would one feel and act in those circumstances?
- Who should be held accountable, and what steps should we take to move forward?

Reference

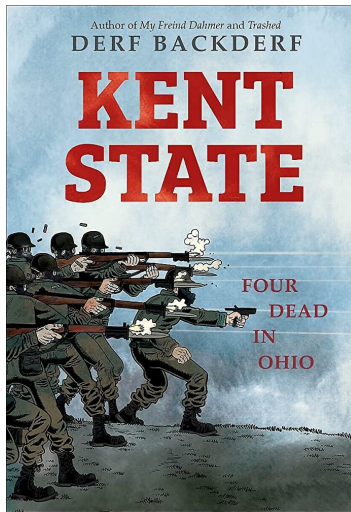
1. Content Reference: 26 Years



There was a fictional comic called "26 Years" that tackled this specific historical event, which was later adapted into a film. However, both the comic and the film took an emotional and provocative approach, incorporating implicit political perspectives. The story, based on a Webtoon, portrayed the brutal suppression by the dictatorial administration of the time. It followed the journey of five individuals who saw themselves as the primary victims of the massacre and devised a secret plan for revenge by assassinating the person responsible, symbolizing Chun.

Unfortunately, just ten days before filming was set to begin, investors withdrew their funding due to the controversial and politically sensitive content of the film. Speculation circulated that the pressure came from the conservative government. As a result, the production languished in pre-production limbo for nearly four years due to financial difficulties. However, the film received an outpouring of online donations from 15,000 individuals, totaling ₩700 million (US\$646,000), including contributions from celebrities. This crowdfunding campaign generated significant buzz and attracted the attention of deep-pocketed individuals, enabling the production to finally commence. In a show of gratitude, the ending credits of the film roll for over 10 minutes, listing the names of all 15,000 donors.

2. Subject Reference: Kent State Exploring History through Graphic Novels



Specific Examples are shown in Presentation Slides.

During my analysis, I found inspiration in the graphic novel "Kent State," which effectively utilized the comic medium to depict a historical event with meticulous research and a neutral tone. The novel achieved a remarkable level of audience identification and immersive engagement with the story. I aim to draw from this example and explore how it effectively conveyed the characters' stories while presenting accurate facts.

Story Summary

The story aims to redefine understanding of history through the gripping memoirs of two soldiers, forever changed by an event that shaped their lives. With a focus on captivating the socially and politically confused young generations with polarized viewpoints, the story unfolds unattended perspectives that might contribute to uncovering the hidden truth behind a significant historical moment.

Border Men is an immersive and emotionally gripping transmedia project that delves into the lives of two soldiers whose entire existence was transformed by the seismic events of the Gwangju incident. This project seeks to provide an all-encompassing and captivating narrative that intertwines the grand tapestry of history with personal, intimate anecdotes, offering a profound understanding of the complex political and military dynamics during this tumultuous period.

Breaking away from the conventional focus on victims, Border Men takes a unique approach by centering around two soldiers who found themselves straddling the delicate border between being perpetrators and victims. The first soldier, Kim Kyee Sam, a master sergeant stationed at Gwangju Prison, endured the burden of a divided family as his three siblings served in the citizen troop, leaving his mother torn between loyalty to her sons on opposing sides. Kim, publicly sharing his experiences only

recently, exposes the painful realities of being unable to reunite with his severely injured brothers, facing ostracism from his own community.

The second soldier, Shin Soon Yong, a major in the airborne troop, was stationed at Gwangju Station during the violent suppression of innocent citizens. Admitting his role in the tragic events, including the taking of lives and burying bodies, Shin's journey of remorse and redemption unfolds. As an official in the martial law army, he pays his respects and offers heartfelt apologies at the National May 18th Cemetery, deeply bowing before the spirits and victims of that fateful day.

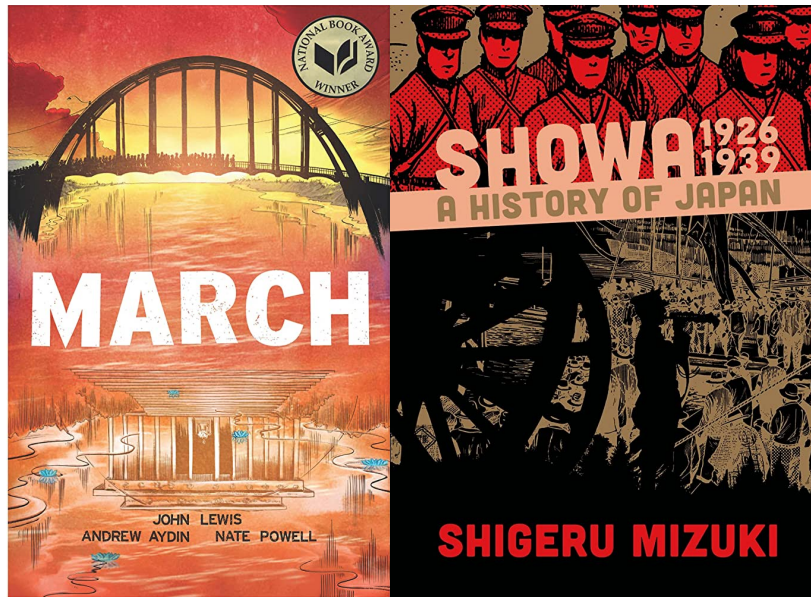
While these soldiers obeyed orders to wield their guns against their fellow citizens, their victimhood is revealed through the lens of manipulation and deception, believing they were protecting their nation from perceived North Korean infiltrators. It is within this nuanced context that they become known as the "border men," caught between conflicting identities.

In addition to the soldiers' memoirs, the story includes chapters dedicated to their present-day lives, shedding light on the enduring impact of the historical event. Acknowledging the inherent subjectivity of personal memoirs, an imaginary character in the third person perspective is introduced, drawing inspiration from the evocative style employed in "Showa." This character's portrayal remains grounded and authentic, allowing for a vivid and relatable connection with readers.

With a commitment to historical accuracy and political inclusivity, the narrative caters to both perspectives, ensuring a balanced exploration of the past. The story will be historically accurate and politically inclusive, catering to both perspectives. As author's involvement, the imaginary character will support the story while ensuring factual accuracy and maintaining a neutral tone through thorough research. Explanations and additional information will be provided outside the main narrative or in accompanying word balloons, allowing all characters to express their subjective perspectives freely.

Illustrations/Art Style

When it comes to the art style, I draw inspiration from two significant historical comic books, "March" by John Lewis and "Showa: A History of Japan" by Shigeru Mizuki. The illustrations will primarily be in black and white, with a mix of two different approaches for the background and characters.



Specific Examples are shown in Presentation Slides.

For the background scenes and the portrayal of the clear antagonist, Mr. Chun in this case, a realistic approach will be used. Delicate depictions of real locations and photographic illustrations of the dictator will help the audience understand the reality and serve as a reminder of what truly transpired. Following Scott McCloud's insights and the example set by "Showa," I will utilize aspect-to-aspect panels to convey the atmosphere of these locations and provide necessary historical explanations. Detailed explanations will be added to the panels as there are many historical details that require clarification.

On the other hand, the characters, primarily the soldiers, will be simplified. Simplification, as emphasized by Scott McCloud, works well for audience identification. To achieve this, abstract illustrations will be used, presenting soldiers collectively in terms of their appearance and behavior. Their dialogue will primarily consist of simple, everyday language. Additionally, the soldiers will appear similar to the civilian troops, even though they may be on opposing sides, similar to the approach taken in "Kent State." Their appearances and behaviors will not be distinct in such situations, although their values may differ. Shadows and black touches will occasionally obscure their features, and fewer words will be used, with intermittent close-up shots depicting their confusion and lack of individualized traits.

Webtoon

I propose using the webtoon format as it provides a detailed comic medium that effectively reaches the young generation. It offers accessibility, responsiveness, fact-checking, and engagement. While scrolling down, readers will have an automatic sidebar on the right side, providing information on when, where, who, and other specific details that enhance understanding and enable deeper exploration. Furthermore, word balloons will contain a star symbol indicating the need for additional background

knowledge or citations for accuracy. By clicking on the hyperlinked star, readers can access citations, official records, and further research to delve into comprehensive details. This approach also allows for cross-link promotions in future transmedia projects.

Specific Examples are shown in Presentation Slides.

Media Plan / Campaign

For the transmedia project with funding supported by a crowdfunding campaign, an extensive media plan will be implemented, inspired by Philips' coverage principles outlined in the book. The campaign will involve a series of documentaries that focus on finding and interviewing soldiers. Building on the soldier's perspectives depicted in the comic, the documentaries will explore their confessions and potential communication with victims. Soldiers who have already come forward to share their information and memories will be featured, embarking on a journey to locate other soldiers with whom they have memories. They will share their stories and circumstances, encouraging collective confession. Ultimately, they will visit Gwangju to seek out victims, confess, and ask for forgiveness.

In parallel with the documentary production, the campaign will utilize social media and its dedicated website for live coverage. Regular updates will be provided to generate public interest in the recreated perspectives and maintain a consistent connection with the comic. The campaign will also enlist the support of sponsors and celebrity advocates, encouraging them to post on social media to generate buzz. Additionally, one or two live streaming events featuring Jamie Chun, a prominent figure related to the subject, will be organized, aligning with the campaign's goals of confession and reconciliation.

The main marketing channels will include the campaign's official website, serving not only as a marketing tool but also as a comprehensive record and archive for research purposes. The audience will have the opportunity to upload user-generated content (UGC) and testimonials, as the project requires significant confessions and valuable statements for research. The website will also facilitate transparency in all gathered and confirmed information, as well as budget operations and financing efforts. Social media platforms will be utilized strategically to generate short-term social interest using celebrities and influencers, allowing for broad and rapid dissemination of information. Both the official website and social media channels will be vital and efficient methods for the success of the project.

Production Team

To successfully execute phase one of the transmedia campaign, which involves developing comics, a dedicated production team of approximately 40-50 professionals will be required. This team will include story creators, illustrators, and various other roles

necessary for comic production. Additionally, voluntary advocates and advisors may be involved, bringing the total number of individuals working on the project to over 100. While monetary sponsors are not the primary focus, the project will rely on extensive support in terms of communication, research, and diverse perspectives. Collaboration with the independent May 18 Democratization Movement Truth Commission and cooperation from Gwangju province are crucial. It is essential to prioritize the well-being and sensitivity of the victims and their families throughout the project.

Key Budget Items

The budget for the transmedia campaign will encompass several key items:

1. Story creator and illustrator fees: Estimated at \$30,000, this budget will cover the payment for the creation and illustration of 250 comic pages including the overall production fees. It is anticipated that advertising revenue will contribute to funding this expense as well.
2. Website development and management: Estimated at \$10,000, the cost associated with developing and maintaining the campaign's official website will be allocated accordingly.
3. Documentary production: Estimated at \$20,000, funds will be allocated for the production of the documentaries, including expenses related to filming, editing, and post-production.
4. Research Fees: Estimated at \$20,000, the cost to cover the extensive research with the help of history advisors and associated fees.
5. Contingency fund: Estimated at \$5,000, a contingency fund will be set aside to account for any unexpected expenses or additional requirements that may arise during the course of the project.

Timelines

The project timeline is outlined as follows:

0-3 months: Website development, creation of a comic proposal, initiation of crowdfunding, casting and gathering memories from featured soldiers, planning storytelling narratives through meetings, conducting historical research, hiring the production team for the comics and transmedia project.

3-9 months: Storyboarding, initiating marketing for the comic launch on websites and social media platforms, transmedia planning through meetings with featured soldiers and the independent May 18 Democratization Movement Truth Commission, identifying promising soldiers based on word-of-mouth recommendations for inclusion in the documentaries.

3-16 months: Comic book development, including writing, editing, and production processes.

6-12 months: Commencement of filming, ongoing research, and live coverage through social media and websites to maintain audience engagement.

12-16 months: Post-production activities, thorough fact-checking processes with input from historical and political advisors, meetings with sponsors and celebrity advocates to generate marketing buzz.

16 months: Comic book launch and final marketing push using social media and websites.

18-20 months: Release of the documentaries, archival of research data and footage on the website, planning for potential educational collaborations in the future.

Future Buildouts: Risks but Possibilities: Why Work?

While I acknowledge that there are inherent risks involved in tackling sensitive content that directly intersects with ongoing political issues and vested interests, it is crucial to recognize the importance of fostering a comprehensive understanding of modern history within a country. The absence of accessible educational resources and accurate archives leaves future generations confused and hinders the process of societal healing and progress. The time to address this gap is now. Moreover, there are numerous modern historical events in Korea that have yet to receive appropriate coverage. Through the medium of comics and a transmedia project, I intend to establish an educational curriculum that focuses on these events, catering to both the younger generation and the need to correct distorted perspectives among older generations.

This transmedia campaign holds the potential to be successful for several reasons. Firstly, by leveraging the power of comics and transmedia storytelling, we can engage a wide audience, particularly the young generation, in a medium that resonates with them. Comics have a unique ability to convey complex information in an accessible and visually captivating manner, making historical narratives more relatable and engaging.

Additionally, the transmedia approach allows for a multi-faceted exploration of the subject matter. By incorporating documentaries, live coverage through social media, and an interactive website, we create a comprehensive and immersive experience for the audience. The integration of different media channels enables us to reach a broader audience and maintain their interest throughout the campaign. Furthermore, the project's emphasis on transparency, accuracy, and fact-checking ensures the integrity of the information presented. By involving historians, political advisors, and stakeholders, we can provide a balanced and comprehensive account of the events, fostering credibility and trust among the audience. Finally, the ambition to not only address political aspects but also focus on humanitarian, resilient, and developmental perspectives sets this transmedia campaign apart. By promoting unity, empathy, and a shared vision for a cohesive society, we aim to move beyond polarization and create a compassionate and inclusive future.

In summary, this transmedia campaign offers the opportunity to bridge the knowledge gap in modern Korean history, instill critical understanding among the younger generation, and challenge distorted perspectives held by older generations. By utilizing various media channels, ensuring accuracy, and promoting a resilient and compassionate society, we have the potential to achieve our goals and contribute to a more informed and cohesive future.