As we can see, the criteria by which An applied terms as “rightist” or “ultra-leftist” to a particular piece of art, were arbitrary and reflected the political fortunes of the authors rather than the literary qualities or ideological messages of their work. Indeed, the official terminology was merely a device which was skillfully used by An to achieve particular goals in political struggle – to eliminate his factional enemies and to back up his allies or sponsors.

This primarily political function of North Korean critique shaped the very particular code of behaviour of the people involved in this activity.

As we have seen, in the case of the campaign against Yi T’ae-jun North Korean critics demonstrated a stunning subjectivity and demagogic, and this was quite typical. If we look at the literary policy of the time we will notice that the approach of literary critics to the contemporary writers was permeated by obvious double standards. Different personalities in the North Korean literary world were judged according to different laws. For instance, the official recognition of “serious ideological mistakes” in the first edition of Yi Ki-yŏng’s novel Land led only to a friendly piece of advice to “re-work and improve” the novel, while the identification of at least similar “political mistakes” in Yi T’ae-jun’s short story “Tiger Grandma” led to the purge of the writer. The proletarian-born writer Yi Puk-myŏng was a frequent object of criticism for the poor artistic quality and deficient psychological depth of his novels, while the works of his boss, Han Sŏr-ya, which were at least equally “unpolished”, to borrow Myers’ expression, were invariably praised. Yet, the criticism of Yi Puk-myŏng’s novels for a “lack of emotionality” was delicate enough not to lead to any personal complications for the writer. At the same time, the claim of “excessive rationalism” in Kim Nam-ch’ŏn’s short story “Honey” developed into a heated political campaign, where the claim of “excessive rationalism” was eventually transformed into a verdict of “guilty” (“the writer looks at the struggle of our people with the eyes of an uninterested observer, a formalist and naturalist. This story serves the interests of Japanese and American imperialism”) and the short story eventually became a reason for the purge of its author, etc.

Most North Korean critics happened to belong to the same ex-KAPF faction, and thus acted in unison against the “enemies” of their faction. As a result, they demonstrated a startling uniformity in their perspectives which was surprising even against the background of the highly politicised North Korean literary world. Indeed, despite the pressure for conformity, there are discernible differences in style and artistic manner between, say, the similarly propagandistic works of Yi Ki-yŏng and those of

his inclination towards the wide use of concrete details in his poetical descriptions. The abundance of images like “deep dark night”, “the cold of night that penetrates the body to the very bones”, “his head is white because of endless suffering” etc beckons the reader to enter a world of sadness and distracts him from the struggle”. (See ibid., 30).


779 Hong Sun-ch’ŏl, “Munhak-e issŏsŏi tangsŏng-kwa kyeğūpsŏng” [Party Spirit and Class Consciousness in Literature], Chosŏn munhak, 1953, #10, 93.
Han Sŏr-ya, the most prominent North Korean novelists of the period. Yet it is practically impossible to discern private features in the works of the contemporary critics. Their attitudes, their arguments, their idiom were virtually identical. Even the most significant North Korean critics had no individual voices – each of them was part of a chorus, meant either to eulogize a chosen writer or molest another.

For this reason it makes little sense to analyse the activity of every critic of the period separately, as some scholars once did. It is probably pointless to stress for instance that “immediately after the war, Ôm Ho-sŏk attacked such writers as Yim Hwa, Yi T’ae-jun and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn”, or that “in the mid-1950s he took part in the critique of formalism” and that in the mid-1960s “his main interest became the creative problems of the image of the Great Leader in chuch’e literature”. All these trends in the particular critic’s activity were not the expressions of his personal “interests” or “inclinations” but were dictated by the changing official lines and approved topics of the campaigns. The personal opinions of the critic – if he had any – were of no importance.

This uniformity seems especially curious if we take into account the pre-Liberation differences between the would-be North Korean critics. Prior to 1945 An Ham-gwang was known as a respected intellectual with a moderate ideological position, while another future active member of the North Korean critical circle, Han Hyo was perceived as his antithesis – both in his arrogant personality and his radical leftist views. While An Ham-gwang was known as quite educated and an ambitious author, his future colleague Ôm Ho-sŏk was widely treated as quite an ignorant and timid rustic. Indeed, the pre-Liberation relations between these critics were also difficult. Yet these differences did not influence their behaviour under the new conditions of the Stalinist society, since they all shared one major quality which Chŏng Ryul colourfully defined as the “hot eagerness to keep looking upward”, i.e. to eagerly follow the slightest nod or wink of the authorities of the moment.

It is difficult to avoid raising the issue of morality when talking about the practice of North Korean literary criticism. Even allowing for all the compromises which were essential to one’s survival in the Stalinist public sphere, one cannot help but be astonished by the complete absence of moral principles which the North Korean critics demonstrated.

The famous jester of the North Korean literary world, the writer Yu Hang-rim, was not far from the truth when he wittingly joked: “An Ham-gwang is eager to crush the heads of his colleagues with a big hammer, just as the ancient Russian warriors crushed their Turkish enemies’ heads”. Contemporaries noted a similar “thirst for

780 Yi Myŏn-jae, Pukhan munhak sajŏn, 782.
781 See Chang Sa-sŏn, “An Ham-gwanggŭi haebang ihu hwaldong yŏngu”.
783 Interview with Chŏng Ryul, interview with Elena Davydova.
784 Pak Nam-su, Chŏk-ch’i 6 nyŏn-ŭi pukhan mundan, 109.
blood” in another prominent critic of Han’s faction, Han Hyo, from pre-Liberation times. These qualities could manifest themselves in different ways. Sometimes a critic would not be too squeamish and intercept a private letter of a rival to his mistress and read it aloud in all its intimate details before an assembled gathering of colleagues as a testimony to the “moral degradation” of the opponent (Chŏng Ryul recollects that one day Hong Sung-ch’ŏl, being widely known as a lecher himself, read aloud a love letter from Yi T’ae-jun to his mistress at a Party meeting). However, more often these attributes revealed themselves in the form of critical articles such as the following:

“In this poem the protagonist, an engine driver, is missing a mysterious girl who used to linger with him near the well by the railway. Now she has disappeared and only a broken ladle remains by the well. Though the author implies that the girl has gone to fight on the front, it is just a cunning trick. In fact, he is not thinking about the struggle but about the girl. The meaning of this so-called poem is very clear. This engine driver is definitely a crazed lecher. And the girl surely is a bitch. Who else would think about love at this juncture? He does not even know her name! And why on earth did he mention the broken ladle? It is nonsense. The influence of bourgeois ideology is apparent here.”

“In this novel the worker protagonist organises the crash of an enemy locomotive. Yet this episode was included not for the purpose of demonstrating the bravery of our workers but to satisfy the author’s unhealthy interest in the perverse scene of the crash. We can feel no sympathy for the hero, since the whole episode is depicted with coldly vicious objectivism”.

“Look how Yim Hwa depicts war-time Pyongyang: “I cannot look on these ruins of the beautiful city, my heart is in pain...Every inch of these streets is covered with the blood of our brothers”. So, Yim Hwa sees only ruins. He does not see the heroism and creative labour of our people. And for good reason! Only a nasty naturalist, a pessimist, a reactionary pacifist cannot see this... Or look at his other poem: “I have lost my old mother and sister, I have lost my lover at the hands of the enemy. Now I think only about revenge. I dream of giving my life for my country”. Why does he write so much about his personal suffering? Why did he not mention that it was a war of the Korean people with the American imperialists?”

The bellicose demagy of these articles might appear comical to today’s readers. However, it was aimed at striking down their opponents – and, indeed, they were stuck down, often quite literally.

785 Chang Sa-sŏn, “Hansŏng-ŭi haebang ijŏne pip’yŏng hwaldong yŏngu”.
786 Interview with Chŏng Ryul.
787 Kim Myŏng-su, “Purŭjyoa ideollokijŏk chanjaewa-waŭi t’ujaeng-ŭl wihayŏ” [For the Fight With the Remnants of Bourgeois Ideology], Munhak-ŭi chihyang, 80-81.
The ability to discard professed views virtually overnight can be listed as another essential quality for a surviving critic in North Korea. When the political winds changed the critics changed their views at a moment’s notice. In 1952 Ōm Ho-sŏk berated the traditional Korean novel Story About Ch’ungnyang (Chunghyanggŏn) for its “excessive eroticism” and its expression of “empty love craving”. In 1954, when the nationalistic mood began to dominate Pyongyang’s political arena, this same Ōm Ho-sŏk summoned the North Korean writers “to learn how to depict people’s feelings from our glorious classic Story About Ch’ungnyang”. Chŏng Ryul, who once published occasional critical materials in North Korean literary journals, recollects how one day An Ham-gwang advised him in a friendly manner to change his previous positive attitude towards Yi T’ae-jun. Both critics had earlier supported the author, but now, as An just happened to know, the Party line had changed: “We are not allowed to praise him now, don’t you know? You must act carefully.” An himself, indeed, acted very “carefully”: he showered verbal abuse and ideological labels (“nasty spy”, “traitor”, “empty-headed rustic” etc) on the writer whom he had lavishly praised just two years previously. The reverse shift (from denunciation to praise) was common as well. In 1948 An Ham-gwang, misjudging the political situation at the time, attacked Cho Kich’ŏn’s poem Paektusan, calling it “a failure”. However, in the articles written in subsequent years, when the political position of the poet became unchallengeable, An Ham-gwang eulogized the very same poem as “a great success.”

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790 See Ōm Ho-sŏk, “Munhak chakp’um-ŭi hyŏngsanghwae-e taehayŏ” [On Imagery in Literary Writings], in Ch’ŏngnyŏndulŭi wihan munhakron, 74; Ōm Ho-sŏk, Munye kibon, 64.

791 Ōm Ho-sŏk, “Munhak ch’angjake issŏsŏŭi chŏnhyŏngsŏngŭi munje” [The Problem of Revisionism in Literary Writings], in Munhak-ŭi chihyang, 159.

792 Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

793 It is interesting to compare the attitude in a couple of works by An Ham-gwang. In the article “8.15 haebang ihu sosŏl munhak-ŭi paljon kwajŏng” written in July 1950 he expresses total reverence for Yi T’ae-jun as “our talented novelist” (See An Ham-gwang “8.15 haebang ihu sosŏl munhak-ŭi paljon kwajŏng” [The Process of the Development of Fiction After 15 August 1945], in Yi Sŏn-yŏng et al (eds), Hyŏndaemunhakpip’yŏng charyo chip 2 (Ibukp’yŏn) [Collection of Contemporary North Korean Literary Critical Materials], Seoul: Taehaksa, 1993, 25, 43). This same attitude by An toward Yi T’ae-jun was later demonstrated in 1952. (See An Ham-gwang, “Munhak-ŭi kinŭng-kwa ponjil”, 36). In an article written in August 1951 An calls Yim Hwa one of the most distinguished poets of Korea. (See An Ham-gwang “Ssaunun Chosŏn-ŭi simunhak-i chegihanŭn chungyohan myŏttkjaji t’ŭkching” [A Few Important Characteristicsof the Poetry of the Fighting Korea], in Yi Sŏn-yŏng et al (eds), Hyŏndaemunhakpip’yŏng charyo chip (Ibukp’yŏn)2. 121, 123,137,138). Yet in an article written in 1954 An Ham-gwang refers the very same, but now doomed, Yim Hwa and Yi T’ae-jun with such rudeness that it leads us to doubt the pre-Liberation reputation of An Ham-gwang as a “well-educated person” (See An Ham-gwang, “Munhak-ŭi kyeuguspŏn”, 3-41).

All these patterns made a particular impact on North Korea’s literary atmosphere. So let us turn to the major dramatic events in the North Korean literary world in 1945-1960, and investigate the participation of North Korean critics in them.

1947, the “Únghyang incident”

The first event to reveal the political essence of North Korean criticism took place soon after Liberation, in 1947. It is known as the “Únghyang incident”. On 13-14 August 1946, just before the first anniversary of Liberation, the local chapter of the NKFLA in the eastern port city of Wŏnsan published the first North Korean anthology of poems Hidden Aroma (Únghyang) which included several new works by distinguished and young poets. Among the contributors were Pak Kyŏng-su, No Ryang-gŭn, Ku Sang, Sŏ Ch’ang-uk, Chŏng Ryul (who was a Red Army officer at the time) and a number of others. The anthology was conceived to celebrate the first anniversary of the Liberation of Korea by the Red Army and for that reason contained many poems on this topic. The verses written by Chŏng Ryul, for instance, were devoted to the landing of Soviet troops in Korea in August 1945. They described the thrill the author felt when he first stepped onto the land of his ancestors. Yet the content of the anthology was mixed – in all probability, the collection was intended to demonstrate the freedom and diversity that North Korean writers enjoyed under the benevolent protection of the new “people’s government”. The poets Ku Sang and Cho Yŏn-hyŏn, for instance, contributed poems on traditional lyrical and sentimental themes. The diversity can be seen in a few examples of the works included in the anthology:

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“Jumping, laughing and crying, miserable people
You are like croaking frogs
This year the leaves that died last year
Will not grow again,
O, my friend, my friend!
You used to write me so many letters,
But now you have disappeared somewhere.
The flower wind is blowing
In the morning you want to die,
In the evening you want to live
Even one day is hard to survive,
Black thunderclouds are low to the ground.
That genuineness that we have not yet been able to find,

795 Concerning this incident see: Ku Sang, Siwa salmūi not’ü [Notes on Poetry and Life], Seoul: Chayu munhaksya, 1988, 145-146; Yi Ki-bong, Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin, 186-198; Yi Myŏng-jae, Pukhan munhak sajŏn, 876-878.
796 Interview with Chŏng Ryul.
Where are you?  
We will probably find it there,  
Behind the next mountain".  
(By Cho Yŏn-hyŏn)

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Daybreak
"Where the sun is rising,  
A crow flies by.  
At the point where night and day meet,  
In a dark and scary back-street, as if in a den of debauchery,  
Long shadows are wandering about.  
In a while  
As soon as drumbeats loudly sound,  
A castle gate, covered with the moss of resentment,  
Breaks.  
On the road which is covered with poison, like a snake’s spine,  
A prophet is carrying a torch,  
Wake up, he cries  
Galloping on a white horse.  
The sound of hoofs,  
The sound of hoofs.  
Swords and spears are clinking,  
Wild horror is spreading about  
The loud cries of the people  
Sound so gloomy  
Even the bright rising sun  
Bleeds red blood from its mouth.  
What a beautiful smile of a dying man".  (By Ku Sang).

Indeed, the mood of these poems is far from panegyric. However, Chŏng Ryul is convinced that none of the contributors of this deliberately pro-Soviet publication harbored any political dissent or wished to voice any political protest. In fact, these gloomy lyrics reflected the established tradition of Korean literature with its fatalistic propensities. The same melancholic inclinations or "han" are easily detectable nowadays, for instance, in South Korean poetry. The verses seemed normal to the editors and contributors, thus none of them, including the “politically conscious” and Soviet-born Chŏng Ryul, considered it necessary to do anything about the verses.

Chŏng Ryul recollects that the book was lavishly decorated by the talented artist Yi Chung-sŏp and was a great success among the public. All three thousand copies

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797 Quoted in Han Hyo, “Saeroun simunhak-ŭi paljŏn” [The Development of New Poetry], in Yi Sŏn-yŏng et al (eds), Hyŏndaemunhak pip’yŏng charyo chip (ibukp’yŏn)2, 78-79.
798 Quoted in Ku Sang Siwa salmŭi not’u, 146-147.
were sold almost immediately, and Chŏng Ryul could not even get a spare copy for himself.\footnote{Interview with Chŏng Ryul.}

All the contributors shared a strong feeling of pride in the anthology.\footnote{Ku Sang, Siwa salmŭi not’ŭ, 145-146; Interview with Chŏng Ryul.} Yet soon, to borrow Ku Sang’s expression, “a lightening bolt descended from Pyongyang”. In early January 1947 all the North Korean newspapers published a resolution of the Executive Committee of the North Korean Federation of Literature and Art that prohibited the selling of Hidden Aroma. The resolution accused the anthology of “lacking ideology”, “scepticism”, “decadence”, “escapism”, “idle fantasy,” etc.\footnote{Ku Sang Siwa salmŭi not’ŭ, 154.} Instantly a group of “investigators” of the “incident” was sent to Wŏnsan. The group consisted of distinguished intellectuals such as Song Yong, Kim Sa-ryang and Ch’oe Myŏng-ik who enthusiastically supported the Party’s claim.\footnote{Yi Myŏng-jae, Pukhan munhak sajŏn, 876-878. Yi Ki-bong, Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin, 194.} At the first meeting with the contributors of the anthology, Song Yŏng launched personally abusive attacks on the writers, forcing them to conduct “self-criticism” in public.\footnote{Ku Sang, ibid. Quoted in Yi Ki-bong Puk-ŭi munhak-kwa yesurin, 194.} The poet Ku Sang later recalled this moment as extremely shameful and confusing: “I will never forget this feeling of frustration and unbearable pain that enveloped me that day when [after the meeting] I aimlessly strolled along the streets of Wŏnsan.”\footnote{“Sijip Ŭnhyang p’irhwa sakkŏn chŏnmalgi” [The Details of Ŭnhyang Incident], in Ku Sang munhak sŏnjip (Seoul, 1975) , 404. Quoted in Brian Myers, Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, 47.}

The bullied poet soon afterwards left Wŏnsan for South Korea where he eventually published his memoirs of the event. It was the irrationality and aggressiveness of the attack which struck him most: “It was all so self-important; no one could believe that just a few poems could cause such a fuss.”\footnote{Han Hyo, “Săeroun simunhak-e paljŏn”, 79.}

Indeed, the accusations which the North Korean critics levelled against the participants of “the incident” were patently aggressive. Han Hyo insisted that the above-quoted verse of Cho Yŏn-hyŏn was “slanderous” and “filled with decadent ideas meant to corrupt our people”. “Today when all our people are marching in single file in order to create a new life, this silly poet calls them “miserable”, stresses that “it is hard to live even for one day” – his purpose is definitely to imbue them with his damaging ideas. When he invites the readers to find genuineness “behind the next mountain”, he clearly tries to lure them from the new life of North Korea to some different life”.\footnote{Han Hyo, “Săeroun simunhak-e paljŏn”, 79.} Pak Chŏng-sik claims: “The authors of the anthology Hidden Aroma, under the influence of the false theory of “art for art’s sake,” stepped out with brazen propaganda for bourgeois ideas. Their goal was to contaminate the Korean people with the spirit of decadence and bourgeois individualism and to turn the Korean people into the slaves of
American imperialism. They tried to slander the democratic system of North Korea. They craved for the reconstruction of the old capitalist society.\textsuperscript{807} Sin Ku-hyŏn asserts that: "The collection of works Hidden Aroma and the anthology published later in Hamhŭng, adulated vulgar love. The enemies who published these subversive books meant to denigrate and slander the Korean people who at the moment are entering a new way of life, constructing a new social order.\textsuperscript{808}

Ku Sang later admitted that some of his poems, such as Daybreak, may indeed give reason to suspect his uneasy feelings towards the contemporary situation on the Korean peninsula, since its gloomy symbols and blurred images certainly did not indicate a cloudless happiness and enthusiasm of the writer. Yet the poet made it clear that no dissent was intended; he believed it was his hidden subconscious emotions and social fears which were accidentally revealed in the poem.\textsuperscript{809} Considering his memoirs were published in Seoul in a period of near-hysterical anti-Communism, we have every reason to believe that there were no "bourgeois" or "reactionary" intentions in Ku Sang’s poems of 1946.

Indeed, the attack probably appeared illogical to the participants in the project as well. If we compare the North Korean situation with the situation in literature and the arts in the early years of Soviet Russia, we will notice that in Russia the system of censorship developed much more gradually. The tightening of the ideological noose over literature was slow, and occurred incrementally. Between 1918 and 1932 there was an atmosphere of relatively free discussion; even works with explicit anti-Communist content could be occasionally published and discussed in the Soviet mass media. For instance, Veresaiev’s novel Deadlock (V tupike) which criticised the state security police Cheka, was published in 1923 – and became the topic of widespread discussion.\textsuperscript{810} In general, the artists of Soviet Russia had the opportunity to gradually adapt themselves to the new political demands, or reject them by choosing another activity (or country) instead.

In North Korea, on the contrary, the tough assault on the intellectuals came completely out of the blue; it was "a lightening bolt" indeed. Less than one year had passed since the establishment of the new regime, and the enthusiastic intellectuals were subjected to severe public castigation for unintentional ideological deviation. We might surmise that the reason for such a difference between the Soviet and North Korean attitudes lay in the different origins of both regimes. The gradual ideological transformation in the USSR was a natural result of the gradual self-development of Russian Communism. On the contrary, in North Korea the Communist regime was largely induced by extraneous Soviet forces, so the literary officials felt the urge to act according to the already well-established patterns of "advanced" Soviet culture. Thus,

\textsuperscript{807} Pak Chong-sik, Sovremennaiia koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdenia (formirovanie i stanovlenie sotsrealizma v koreiskoi literature po tvorchestvu Li Giena, 13.
\textsuperscript{808} Sin Ku-hyŏn, Koreiskaia literatura posle osvobozhdeniia, 6.
\textsuperscript{809} Ku Sang, Siva salmūi not’ā, 145-155.
\textsuperscript{810} E. Gromov, Stalin: vlast’ i iskusstvo, 48-209.
the seeming incomprehensibility of the “Únhyang incident” would appear more logical if we consider the North Korean literature of the time not as a separate, self-developing entity but as a part of the Soviet-dominated ideological/intellectual system. Soviet political campaigns against the writers Mikhail Zoschenko and Anna Akhmatova which occurred less than half a year earlier, in August 1946, probably persuaded Kim Ch’angman, the then ideological tsar of the regime, to launch a similar campaign in North Korea – tellingly, the North Korean official scholar Pak Chóng-sik mentioned “the positive influence” the above-cited Soviet resolution “About the magazines Zvezda and Leningrad” had allegedly made on North Korean policy towards the anthology Hidden Aroma.  

Indeed, both the Soviet and North Korean campaigns demonstrated a number of similarities even in their details. The accusations levelled against North Korean poets – “decadence”, “escapism”, and “scepticism” – were very much in tune with the accusations put forward against Akhmatova in the resolution of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party on 14 August, 1946: “She is a typical representative of apolitical poetry… Her verses are soaked with the spirit of pessimism and decadence, frozen in the shape of bourgeois aestheticism and “art for art’s sake” ideology that are harmful to the education of our youth and cannot be tolerated in our literature.”

The outcome of both the Soviet and Korean campaigns turned out to be relatively peaceful. Like the Soviet intellectuals, North Korean poets involved in the “Únhyang incident,” whilst being bullied were not seriously punished – unlike their less fortunate colleagues like Yim Hwa, Yi T’ae-jun or Kim Nam-ch’ŏn a few years later. This same soft approach could be seen in the USSR. Anna Akhmatova, who afterwards wrote two poems in honour of Stalin, was later re-admitted to the Writers’ Union. Chŏng Ryul, despite all the political accusations, soon became vice-chairman of the Korean Writer’s Union. Apart from the induced and humiliating “self-criticism,” no harm was done to the other participants of the anthology either.

However, the “Únhyang incident” had far-reaching consequences. It established a general pattern of Soviet-Stalinist type of literary “discussion” which presupposed that the “political correctness” of literary works is infinitely more important than their aesthetic value. In those days, this novel approach shocked many Korean intellectuals such as Kim Tong-ri, Cho Yŏn-hyŏn, and Yim Kŭng-chae.

Still, technically, North Korean criticism demonstrated some traits which differed from its Soviet prototype. One of these is a virtually unanimous conformism. Brian Myers, referring to the “incident” remarks: “there is no record of anyone voicing even token dissent.” Indeed, the “inspectors” sent to Wŏnsan despite the disparities in their previous ideological positions and personal inclinations (Song Yŏng was a fervent

811 Pak Chong-sik, Sovremennaja korejskaja literatura posle osvobozhdenija, 13.
813 Yi Myŏn-jae, Pukhan munhak sajŏn, 877.
814 Brian Myers, Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, 47.
proletarian writer while Ch’oe Myông-ik had been known previously as a mild and politically moderate person)\textsuperscript{815} both obediently performed the role of ideological prosecutors. In the USSR, in contrast, during the above-mentioned campaign of 1946 which was initiated and guided by Stalin himself, such intellectuals as Tikhonov and Prokofiev had the nerve to oppose the official decisions and made some cautious attempts to protect the scapegoats from the supreme wrath.\textsuperscript{816}

Another trait of North Korean criticism which the “Ünghyang incident” demonstrated was the brutal tone and harshness of the critics’ harangues. The rude approach of North Korean literary criticism, as well as the Chinese one,\textsuperscript{817} obviously has its roots in the Soviet critical tradition which used to treat the verbal abuse of an opponent as positive signs of the “proletarian candor” of an attacker. Yet, the offensiveness of the critics in the “incident” was patently beyond the pale of the Soviet tradition. Not only were the very expressions of the critics exceptionally rude (during the campaign prominent authors were routinely described as “this silly poet”, or a “worthless poet”)\textsuperscript{818} but, what was more important, all the content of the ill-fated anthology and all of its contributors were condemned without exception. No division was made between politically “correct” and “incorrect” works or authors. Another of Ku Sang’s verses, “Night” (“Pam”), was an innocuous lyrical depiction of the beauty of the night, but it was denounced together with the politically dubious “Daybreak”.\textsuperscript{819} Chŏng Ryul’s eulogies to the Red Army became a subject of the same political criticism as Cho Yŏn-hyŏn’s melancholic poem. Chŏng recollects some rhetorical questions posed by some critical articles at the time: “Why did Chŏng Ryul, the Soviet officer and a representative of the progressive country, even become involved in such a provocative, reactionary anti-Party anthology? How did this happen?” etc. It is obvious that the critic who was reproaching Chŏng Ryul for an alleged political slip did not even bother to read his particular poem.

The ferocity of these attacks vividly demonstrated the primarily political and punitive functions of criticism in North Korea. The literary criticism threatened and intimidated its targets and thus sought unquestioning conformity rather than explained, let alone discussed, the new rules and demands. And it was done precisely at the time when clarification was sorely needed. Brian Myers noted the “ignorance of party cultural policy” of even left-wingers in the North Korean intellectual world at the time.\textsuperscript{820} Yet none among the high-ranking literary officials took pains to explain to the confused intellectuals what was expected of them. Abuse and intimidation became the main tactic of literary criticism in North Korea – as was demonstrated soon afterward,  

\textsuperscript{815} Interview with Chŏng Ryul.
\textsuperscript{816} E. Gromov, Stalin: vlast’ i iskusstvo, 388, 390.
\textsuperscript{817} Li Hsiao-t’i, “Making a Name and a Culture for the Masses in Modern China”, East Asia Cultures Critique, 9.1 (2001), 55.
\textsuperscript{818} Han Hyo, “Saeroun simunhak-e paljŏn”, 79.
\textsuperscript{819} Ibid.,79-80.
\textsuperscript{820} Brian Myers, Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, 39.
in an “incident” with another collection of poetry, *Munjang Tokpon (Anthology of Writings).*

As for the *Hidden Aroma* incident itself, it was transformed step by step into a symbolic scarecrow which was used widely during the following campaigns of 1953-1960. Not surprisingly, the political manipulators of the period greatly exaggerated the significance of the small group of confused but left-leaning intellectuals who were the authors of *Hidden Aroma*. In the critical works of the period they were transformed into an eerie aggressive gathering of “reactionary poets” whose encroachments on the Republic could be stopped only by the enormous effort of “real Party writers”. The suppression of the group came to be officially represented as a “great success” of the North Korean Communists.

These same traits of North Korean criticism flourished a few years later when the intellectual world of North Korea was rife with bitter factional conflicts and Kim II Sung greatly strengthened his grip on power.

**First Factional Clashes**

In the second chapter of the present thesis we described one of the first conflicts in the North Korean literary world which could be seen as motivated by factional struggle – the hot argument over the *Paektusan (Paektu Mountain)* poem in 1948. This time a representative of the ex-KAPF faction, An Ham-gwang strove to push aside the Soviet-Korean poet Cho Ki-chŏn but failed and was pushed back himself instead. The overall outcome of the discussion turned out to be positively vegetarian in comparison to the bloody battles of later eras: the argument was not splashed across the pages of the newspapers, the punishments meted out to the losers were mild, the continuing relationships of the opponents remained stable and even friendly, etc. Nonetheless, the dispute over *Paektusan* set the pattern for future relentless factional confrontations where not only literary but also ideological issues were practically irrelevant to the political essence of the struggle. It is easy to notice that in the above-cited discussion over *Paektusan*, each side protected very earthly benefits and interests. An strove to demonstrate that his rival, being a stranger to Korean culture, could not stand for the interests of North Korean literature whose guides could only be the KAPF writers. Cho wished to push An aside by stressing his ideological ignorance while picturing himself and thus the Soviet Korean faction as the sole legitimate representative of progressive socialist ideology. Kim Ch’ang-man protected *Paektusan* in order to please his boss.

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821 Han Hyo, “Uri munhak-ŭi 10 nyŏn” [Ten Years of Our Literature], *Chosŏn munhak*, 1955, #6, 142-143.

822 Take, for example, the characteristic speech by Han Sŏr-ya, first published in *Chosŏn munhak* 1953, #10. (See Han Sŏr-ya, “Chŏnguk chakka yesulga taehoe-esŏ chinsulhan hansŏr-ya uiuŏnjangŭi pogo” [Report by Chairman Han Sŏr-ya Given at the All-Writers’ Congress], in Yi Sŏn-yŏng et al (eds), *Hyŏndaes munhak pip’ŏng charyo chip* 3, 23.

823 According to the account of Chŏng Ryul, both An and Cho continued to work together as colleagues; the whole episode was presented as a “mistake” of “comrade An”. (interview with Chŏng Ryul.)
Kim Il Sung – and also to avoid confrontation with the Soviets. No one actually tried to analyze the value of the poem in either aesthetic or ideological terms. Rather than raising professional issues, the whole discussion represented, in fact, a struggle for domination.

Scholars have often succumbed to the temptation to present the losers in North Korean factional battles as innocent victims or even heroic dissenters – since the winners of these battles hardly evoke much sympathy. A typical example of this approach is an article by Ch’oe Chae-bong entitled “An Ham-gwang, North Korean Critic with a Tragic Fate”, which represents An’s attack on Paektsusan as a heroic deed. According to the South Korean scholar, the critic allegedly stood up against the “exaggeration of the personal role of Kim Il Sung” in the poem, and thus, acted as a brave fighter against the incipient personality cult. 824

This claim is obviously not supported by hard evidence, since An Ham-gwang proved himself anything but an apostle of “creative freedom”. Just a few years later, in 1953-1957 the critic actively participated in the defamation campaign against “bourgeois remnants” in North Korean literature – in fact, against the personal opponents of his patron Han Sŏr-ya. One of the favorite labels An used for his political enemies such as Yi T’ae-jun, Kim Nam-ch’ŏn, Yim Hwa and others was their alleged propagation of the principles of the “pure art”, lack of Party Spirit and a vicious disloyalty to the Great Leader. 825

This same unscrupulousness can be found a few years later in the actions of the Soviet Korean faction against a supporter of Han Sŏr-ya’s faction, the famous dancer Ch’oe Sŏng-hŭi who was perhaps the only member of the North Korean art circles genuinely known internationally. Though not belonging to the history of literary criticism in a strict sense, this incident revealed much about the levers which moved the North Korean intellectual world and thus is worth retelling.

After the death of Cho Ki-ch’ŏn in 1951 and the gradual concentration of power in the hands of Kim Il Sung and his guerrilla faction, the position of the Soviet faction in literary affairs was weakened. In order to restore their previous standing the Soviet Koreans strove to eliminate, wherever possible, Han’s allies in the artistic sphere. In 1951 the object of their intrigue became Ch’oe Sŏng-hŭi – a dancer of international acclaim, a chairwoman of the Dancer’s Union, the wife of Han Sŏr-ya’s friend An Mak and a close acquaintance of Kim Il Sung himself. Yi Ch’ŏl-ju in his memoirs describes the situation in the following manner. 826 In August 1951 Ch’oe’s troupe won first prize at the East Berlin Youth Festival, and the 40-year-old actress triumphantly returned home to take part in a grandiose performance in Pyongyang’s Underground Theatre. However, the Propaganda Ministry was then dominated by Soviet Korean officials, and they made an attempt to cancel the performance. According to Chŏng Ryul’s

824 Ch’oe Chae-bong, “Pundan sidae piunūi p’yŏngnong ka An Ham-gwang” [An Ham-gwang, a North Korean Critic with a Tragic Fate], Hankyŏrye, 1998.06.16: 12.
826 Yi Ch’ŏl-ju, Puk-ŭi yesurin, 34-38.
testimony, they justified their actions because of an alleged “unsatisfactory level of political content” in the show.\footnote{827}

As Brian Myers notes, Ch’oe’s opponents cited Ch’oe’s dubious sexual reputation – they “apparently hoped that she would be too aware of her own vulnerability on this score to stand up to them”.\footnote{828} This consideration might have seemed reasonable to the Soviet Koreans, since Ch’oe’s frequent sexual escapades were, indeed, well-known among the Pyongyang elite. Yi Ch’öl-ju, being an independent observer here, describes Ch’oe disapprovingly as a libertine woman, the embodiment of notorious “Communist immorality” (and he is not forgiving of her unpleasant and impudent manners either).\footnote{829} However, her foes missed the major point – Ch’oe, being a determined, or by Yi Ch’öl-ju’s definition, “brazen” personality, did not hesitate to ask for protection from Kim II Sung himself. Kim obliged, and the Soviet Koreans were forced to retreat.

Ch’ong Ryul who had himself once enjoyed a romantic relationship with Ch’oe admits that this flamboyant beauty indeed frequently violated the accepted moral standards. In this respect she did not differ much from her male colleagues – according to Ch’ong Ryul’s account, practically every prominent writer or literary official in North Korea had a mistress, often several. But in a patriarchal society like North Korea or Soviet Russia, there was a clear difference between male and female standards of morality. However, Ch’ong Ryul insists that moral issues were irrelevant in Ch’oe’s case, since her professional activity and the performance were impeccable in both the ideological and artistic sense. Though Ch’ong Ryul’s opinion on this question may not be impartial, we have good reason to believe him, considering Ch’oe’s success at the East Berlin Festival and her international fame in the 1930s.

Again, in the intrigue against Ch’oe Sŭng-hŭi we see the substitution of artistic and ideological issues by personal and factional ones. The attackers, who in this case were Soviet Koreans, failed to care at all about the quality of the work they were assaulting. They paid scant attention to the health of the North Korean artistic enterprise which would be greatly impoverished with the removal of Ch’oe, one of a very small number of North Korean artists who enjoyed genuine popularity overseas. The petty political interests and political intrigue clearly dominated the conflict.

\textbf{Campaigns against Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn}

All these traits became fully fledged in the looming major attack of ex-KAPF faction members against Yi T’ae-jun, Kim Nam-ch’ŏn and Yim Hwa, three members of the Domestic faction and, simultaneously, backers of the Soviet Koreans. The intrigue aimed at a dual goal – to devoid the Soviet faction of their allies and to weaken the position of the Southerners. The second goal certainly formed a part of Kim II Sung’s grand strategy. Though his suspicions of the Domestic faction were mounting, a direct

\footnote{827} Interview with Ch’ong Ryul.
\footnote{828} Brian Myers, \textit{Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature}, 80.
\footnote{829} Yi Ch’ŏl-ju, \textit{Puk-ŭi yesurin}, 37-38.
assault on them was impossible until the end of the war since “the former Southerners had been instrumental in running the South Korean underground network of guerrilla bands and intelligence agents”. 830 Thus the initial steps were taken in the relatively peripheral cultural sphere.

In the previous chapter we have analysed the details of the critical accusations against Yi T’ae-jun. Now we shall investigate the political campaigns against the two other participants of this incident, Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn.

Both writers, once active members of the KAPF and after 1945 prominent officials of the NKFLA, enjoyed an unquestioned reputation as Communist activists. The introduction to the Russian translation of an anthology of North Korean poetry in 1950 described Yim Hwa in the following manner: “Yim Hwa is a fighting poet who devoted his whole life to the task of liberation of the Korean people from feudalism and imperialist aggressors. He is one of the founding fathers of the KAPF. He currently continues his struggle on the frontline, helping partisans in South Korea with his pen and gun. His poems are full of a belief in the victory of the young fighters for a new life for Korea”. 831 This praise could appear in the Soviet publication only with the endorsement of the Korean NKFLA. Indeed, in 1949 the North Korean critic An Ham-gwang in the Munhak yesul magazine mentioned Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn as “exemplary proletarian writers”. 832 Similar statements can be found at the time about Kim Nam-ch’ŏn – take, for example, an article by Yi Ki-yŏng “About Korean literature”, published in Russian translation in 1949 in the Soviet literary magazine Zvezda. In this article Yi Ki-yŏng, senior official representative of the North Korean literary establishment, introduces Kim Nam-ch’ŏn as “the distinguished proletarian writer” of pre-Liberation days, while he presents Yim Hwa’s post-Liberation poems as a “significant new achievement of North Korean literature”. 833

Meanwhile, the established reputation and actual accomplishments of the writers meant nothing when the positions of their sponsors, the Domestic faction, began to deteriorate. In 1952 both writers were exposed to the opening salvos of the critic Ôm Ho-sŏk who belonged to the faction of Han Sŏr-ya.

The pretext for the assault was Kim Nam-ch’ŏn’s short story “Honey” (“Kkul”) and the anthology of Yim Hwa entitled Where Are You Now? (Nŏ ŏnŭ gos-e innûnya) (1951). Before analysing Ôm’s critical attacks let us take a brief look at these two works. The content of Kim Nam-ch’ŏn’s short story appears rather straightforward and orthodox.

830 Andrei Lankov, From Stalin to Kim Il Sung, 92.
832 An Ham-gwang, “Kosanghan realizŭmŭi nonŭi-wa ch’angchak paliŏn tosangŭi munje” [Discussions over ‘High Realism’ and Questions of the Development of Creative Writing], Munhak yesul, 1949, # 10, 13.
A heroic border guard is wounded while on duty but persuades his comrade to leave him in order to complete their mission, while he himself prepares to die. Before his inevitable death, the young soldier sinks into lyrical thoughts and visions. Yet he does not die. An old peasant woman finds him and nurses him back to health with a simple medicine, honey, and restores his spirits with her sincere care and love. Thus the young soldier is ready to fight again.

This story, where the patriotic theme is intertwined with the lyrical, strongly mirrors Soviet war-time literature where writers inserted lyrical interludes to enliven the obligatory propagandistic rhetoric, and in particular, Novel About a Real Man (Povest’ o Nastoyaschem Cheloveke) by Boris Polevoi which was deemed exemplary in contemporary North Korea. The wounded protagonist of Polevoi’s novel was also left to the mercy of the rural Soviet people, and it was an old local woman who cured the exhausted hero by “simple medicine”, chicken soup. Also, Kim’s story also calls to mind numerous contemporary North Korean works such as Kim Sa-ryang’s “Kaya Harp” (“Kayagūm”) (1949) or Han Sŏr-ya’s “Soldiers’ Farewell” (“Ch’onbu’l”) (1950).  

The latter work, which also depicted a soldier in a lyrical mood while he was forced to rely on an old woman’s care, was frequently praised by Ōm Ho-sŏk. It is noteworthy that the emotional and sentimental passages in “Honey” by no means detract from the general uplifting message of the story. At the beginning of the story the dying soldier and his comrade think about their mission rather than about the physical survival of a particular individual, the People’s Army which the soldier represents is wholeheartedly supported by the ordinary Korean people (symbolically represented by the old peasant woman) and at the end the protagonist returns to the battlefield.

The verses of Yim Hwa, “Where Are You Now?” (“Nŏ önŏ gos-e innûnya”) (December 1950), “Carry, Wind!” (“Paramiyŏ chŏnhara”) (February 1951), “On My Blood That Coloured the White Snow Red” (“Hûnnunūl pulkke multûrin na-ûi p’i uie”) (March 1951) etc, which were written about the same time and were all included in the anthology Where Are You Now? (Nŏ önŏ gos-e innûnya) published in 1951, were also devoted to the war theme. This anthology enjoyed an extraordinary success among the reading public and soon became a model for young Korean poets. As Yi Ch’ŏl-ju testified, “It was a real success. The young writers rushed to emulate Yim Hwa’s

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834 Brian Myers, Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, 81.
835 As an example of such a critical tendency see Ōm Ho-sŏk, “Munhak paljŏn-ûi saeroun chingjo” [New signs of literary development], Munhak yesul, 1952, # 11, 95.
836 This motif was especially popular in the Soviet tradition of war literature. For example the theme of a terminally wounded soldier who holds back the whole guerrilla troop’s movement in Fadeev’s Devastation, considered to be an exemplary work of the ‘glorious Soviet literature’. The positive protagonist of the novel orders the doctor to poison Frolov in order to free the others. This work was officially prescribed for emulation in North Korea. See V. Ivanova, “Sovetskaia literatura v Koree: 1945-1955”, 187.
poetical style. They estimated the anthology to be a masterpiece, and there were no young men who did not know Yim Hwa’s verses by heart.”\textsuperscript{838} The critics, even those belonging to Han Sŏr-ya’s inner circle, also praised the anthology highly at first.\textsuperscript{839} As in the case of Kim Nam-ch’ŏn, the Soviet influence was traceable in Yim Hwa’s approach to the war theme. In the best examples of Soviet war poetry (written by Bergoltz, Simonov, Tvardovskii, or Isakovskii etc) the artistic approach to the war theme included not only the official leitmotif of heroism, but also themes of the numerous personal tragedies of separation from loved ones, the suffering and untimely death of young people, etc. This lyrical side of the Soviet literary tradition is certainly reflected in Yim Hwa’s poetry – as well as in the verses of many other contemporary Pyongyang writers, such as Kim Cho-gyu, Min Pyŏng-gyun, Yi Chŏn-gu, Yim Chŏn-suk or Ch’ŏn Se-pong.\textsuperscript{840}

However, this lyrical mood entails no passivity or subordination to the enemy. Look, for instance, at the characteristic stanzas of Yim Hwa’s poem, “Carry, Wind”.

“Carry, wind!
Carry our feelings to the people we love,
To the grey-haired people that we adore! ....
Carry, Wind!
To our mothers who day and night without sleeping
Crave for victory
Even more than for the return of their loving sons.
Carry Wind!
To our mothers who are loyal daughters of our land
Who with a deep desire for revenge
Fight for the death of our enemies, like soldiers.
Carry them our words.
Tell them to curse, not to cry!
Tell them to breathe fire and not to groan!
And a glorious day will come,
The sun will rise above the fields and forests and mountains!
The sun will come to every village, every town!
Your sons and daughters will return to the land
Which they are now missing so much,
They will return – without a doubt.
Carry these words to the mothers, O wind!”\textsuperscript{841}

Yim Hwa expresses here even more political consciousness than most Soviet poets of the war era. In the tradition of Soviet poetry on war the relationship of mother

\textsuperscript{838} Yi Ch’ŏl-ju, \textit{Puk-ŭi yesurin}, 93.

\textsuperscript{839} An Ham-gwang, “Ssaunŭn chosŏn-ŭi simunhak-i chegihanŭn chungyohan myŏtkkaji t’ŭkchong”, 121, 123.


\textsuperscript{841} \textit{Yim Hwa chŏnjip}, 333, 336.
and child is usually presented as a contradiction between the mother as a troubled apolitical caregiver and the son (or daughter) as a bold fearless fighter, a hero-in-the-making. It is virtually impossible to find in Soviet literature the image of a mother as a staunch fighter who "craves for victory even more than for the return of their loving sons".  

"Carry, Wind" is typical of Yim Hwa's verse. The other poems included in the above-mentioned anthology also combine lyrical moods such as sadness at the separation of father and child ("Where Are You Now?")”, admiration for the beauty of Korea's nature ("Seoul" ("Sŏul") (July 1950), recollections of a loving family ("The Native Land I have Never Seen" ("Hanbŏndo pon il-i ōpsnŭn kohyang ttang-e")) (August 1950) etc., with propagandistic messages of righteous hatred for the enemy or loyalty to Marshal Kim and to the Communist ideology. The latter themes are expressed very strictly and unambiguously. For instance, in the poem "Where Are You Now" which is dedicated to his daughter Hyeran, the poet expresses his readiness to "obey the order of the dearest Leader and not to give the enemy an inch of Korean land".  

Thus, in the ideological sense the works of Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn did not represent anything uncommon, let alone dissenting. Yet soon these works became the target of severe attacks. These attacks reflected the waning fortunes of the Domestic faction at large which in 1951-1952 was chosen by Kim Il Sung as the first target of his purge campaign.  

The first tentative encroachment on the reputation of the writers which can be found in the available material took place in early 1952. On the 20th of January, Ôm Ho-sŏk published a large work entitled Munye Kibon [The Basis of Literature and the Arts]. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first book to refer to Kim Nam-ch’ŏn by name in connection with the "harmful tendency of naturalism and formalism".  

The very notion of “bourgeois formalism and naturalism” were not new to North Korean criticism. After the “Ŭnhyang incident”, vague admonitions to follow the Party line and not to be carried away by “incorrect” bourgeois trends appeared from time to time in North Korean criticism, mostly as a reflection of contemporary Soviet critical tendencies and with no specific personal references. These notions visibly reflected the Soviet official harangues against “formalism” and “bourgeois tendencies” which increased just prior to Stalin’s death. Yet Ôm’s work was atypical because it applied these terminological scarecrows of “bourgeois trends” not to the customary scapegoats, such as distant “bourgeois writers” of pre-Liberation Korea or capitalist countries, or  

842 Take, for instance, the popular wartime poem by Olga Berggolts “Pervoe pis’mo na Kamu” [The First Letter to Kamal], with the most typical of Soviet images – the maternal protagonist thinks exclusively about the health of her daughter who is left in the besieged Leningrad, while the daughter is protecting the city and pays no attention to herself. (See Olga Berggolts, Stihi [Poems], Moscow: Gosliizdat, 1962, 224).

843 Yim Hwa chŏnji, 321.

844 Look, for instance, at the article of An Ham-gwang, “Kosanghan realizŭmŭi nonŭi-wa ch’angchak paljŏn tosangŭi munje”, 11-12.
“Seoul puppets”, or even the unfortunate participants of the old “Unhyang incident”, but to contemporary writers who still enjoyed a high official standing.

At first glance, Om’s work does not appear to be overtly offensive. It began with the still obligatory obeisance to the “great literature of the Soviet Union” and invitations to imitate it, and it is laced with the customary quotations from Lenin, Gorky and Stalin. As in most contemporary critical works, it also referred to the “evil” bourgeois values of the capitalist world – namely, “naturalism”, “formalism” and “art for art’s sake” principles and, once again, harangued the contributors to the Unhyang anthology. Then, however, the unusual began – Om Ho-sŏk addressed some of his reproof at the works of contemporary North Korean writers, along with the customary praise for their endeavours and achievements. These reprimands, being very polite and friendly in form, concerned the writers of the different factions, including his own. Yet Om made it clear that the rare shortcomings of some particular literary works were rooted in “bourgeois remnants” extraneous to the “glorious new culture” of North Korea.

The first critical remarks, respectful and cautious, referred to writers close to Han Sŏr-ya’s faction. Om Ho-sŏk, as we have mentioned above, criticised the agrarian novel Land by Yi Ki-yŏng for the excessive “love relationships of the heroes” and stressed some trivial formal shortcomings in the works of Hwang Kŏn and Yi Puk-myŏng, both of whom belonged to the KAPF faction. He even managed to spot a minor blemish in a novel written by his mighty boss Han Sŏr-ya called “Jackals” (“Sŭngnyangi”) (1951). His concerns were articulated as follows: “At the end of the story the awakening political consciousness of the maternal protagonist could be seen as a little exaggerated and embellished. Yet this is the most splendid story Han has ever written”. Considering the fact that the maternal protagonist does not demonstrate any “political consciousness” at all except for a lone phrase addressed to the American enemies, “Just you wait and see! Not all Koreans have died”, the argument of the critic sounds more like a compliment than a reprimand.

Kim Nam-ch’ŏn’s “Honey” appeared to be just one of many works mentioned in the lengthy article. Yet, the critic devoted a greater amount of space to his transgressions. At first Om Ho-sŏk referred to the writer and his work in respectful terms. But the praise was followed by a significant claim: “Unfortunately, this story is the product not of a strong love or passion, but more the outcome of cold and distant contemplation.” What the writer really needed to do in the future, Om insisted, was to invest more emotion in his writings. “Though we cannot call Honey completely non-realist or naturalist, the danger of objectivism should not be overlooked”. Om stressed

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845 Om Ho-sŏk, Munye kibon, 64.
846 Ibid., 178.
847 See the translation of this novel of Han Sŏr-ya in the book of Brian Myers, Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, 157-187.
that “The work would be excellent had Kim Nam-ch’ŏn been able to develop the private image of the old peasant woman in the story into something more typical.”

Ôm’s remarks on “Honey”, not supported by any examples or quotations, appeared completely arbitrary. Such assertions could be applied to any piece of art, since there is hardly any given way to prove whether a particular work has been inspired by love and emotion or by “cold contemplation”. Similarly, any given protagonist could be dismissed as “atypical”, since it depends on what tendency, in the opinion of a critic, he or she must typify. It is noteworthy that unlike the cases of the ex-KAPF writers, to Kim Nam-ch’ŏn Ôm applies the terms “naturalism” and “objectivism”, words which had already acquired strong politicised overtones. However, this critical article failed to attract any protest or discussion. Ôm’s disapproving comments on Kim Nam-ch’ŏn’s work, as well as the above-mentioned cases of Han Sŏr-ya’s, Yi Ki-yŏng’s or Hwang Kŏn’s novels, were mingled with excessive compliments and for this reason could easily be ignored. The critique of “Honey” was generously compensated for by constant advice such as “The work could be wonderful if not…” and praise of Kim Nam-ch’ŏn’s previous works, such as his pre-Liberation big novel Big River (Taeha).

As positive examples of completely flawless contemporary works, Ôm Ho-sŏk cites the verses of Cho Ki-ch’ŏn and Yim Hwa (“Pyongyang”, “Seoul”, “The Native Land That I Have Never Seen”, “Where Are You Now”, “On My Blood that Coloured the Snow Red”). It is worth remembering, however, that in less than one year Ôm, along with the other critics of Han’s group, would criticize these same poems of Yim Hwa, finding in them a host of serious shortcomings.

I have already mentioned that the North Korean critics tended to act in unison, attacking the same targets and using the same labels against their opponents. The campaign against “formalism” and “naturalism” was a typical example. As if by signal, in January 1952 the North Korean literary magazines published a few works which revealed the “danger of formalism and naturalism”: An Ham-gwang’s “1951 nyŏn duo munhak ch’angjo-ŭi sŏnggwa-wa chŏnman” (“The successes and Prospects of Our Literature in 1951”) in Inmin, 1952, #1 and Sin Ko-song’s “Yŏngŭk-e issŏso hyŏnsikjuŭi mit chayŏnjuŭiŏk chanjaewa-ŭi t’ujaeng” (“The Fight with the Remnants of Formalism and Naturalism in North Korean Drama”) in Munhak yesul, 1952, #1. Both works were written by critics from the KAPF faction and broached the subject

Ôm Ho-Sŏk, Munye kibon, 151, 154.

Ibid., 210.


According to Chŏng Ryul, Sin Ko-song was the director of one of Pyongyang’s theatres, as well as playwright and critic who was popular among the actors and his acquaintances. Sin was
with similar politeness and obliqueness. In addition, An’s article contained the usual acknowledgements of the merits of the Soviet-Korean faction and Yim Hwa.

However, the next publication of Ōm Ho-sŏk revealed a significant change in the atmosphere. His article “The fight with the remnants of formalism and naturalism in our literature” (“Uri munhak-e issŏsŏ chayŏnjuŭi-wa hyŏngsikjuŭi chanjae-waŭi t’u’jaeng”), published on January 17, 1952 in Nodong Sinmun raised much stronger feelings. Its publication not in a literary magazine but in the official newspaper, also carried additional significance: everything, which appeared in Nodong Sinmun, was seen as the voice of the Party and had an undeniable official quality.

The very title of Ōm’s article sounded militant – and the same was true of the content as well. The author claimed that the offences of formalism and naturalism had been typical of the “pure literature” of pre-Liberation Korea, and the KAPF writers were the only heroes who had sternly opposed these harmful tendencies. Yet, according to his argument, formalism and naturalism managed to survive in the DPRK as well. These tendencies allegedly emerged in the contemporary writing of liberated Korea. Ōm Ho-sŏk quoted the words of “Marshal Kim” who stated, “Only after we destroy naturalism, can we achieve real success in our literature of realism”. Even after such inspiring words, the author indignantly claims, there are some Korean literati who harboured ill-intentions and ignored Kim Il Sung’s admonitions. As examples of such “insidious trends” Ōm cited the verse “Where Are You Now” and others, while he presented the short story “Honey” as an illustration of “incorrect” tendencies in prose.

The formulations of the indictments are of particular interest. In fact what Ōm accused the writers of was the detailed substantiality of their narration (which he treated as naturalism) and the elaborateness of their artistic technique (which he passed off as formalism). Instead of simple short sentences, Ōm opines that “some writers” use decadently complicated ones. “Many writers and poets now indulge their own narrow artistic inclinations and methods and over-stress insignificant details of the narration. In fact they turn their works into a training ground for their formalistic exercises”.

Generally, the article was written in a vague and repetitive manner. Though concrete works were analysed, no names were mentioned. No personal abuse or politically threatening labels, so common in North Korean critical discourse, were used at this stage. The criticism of the particular pieces took the form of quite oblique and veiled expressions, such as “It would be a slight exaggeration to consider that these harmful tendencies have been overcome in our literature. We have ample grounds to claim that they are still present in the short story ‘Honey’”. Still, the political message of the article was clear. The author once again stated that the KAPF was the sole representative of the “authentic” realism in colonial Korea – and thus the ex-KAPF faction, being its only true heir, was entitled to define the norms of literature in North

never active in the political campaigns and strove to avoid confrontation. Yet, belonging to the KAPF faction and being a writer with a high profile, Sin sometimes could not avoid participation in the sectarian struggles. This is one example of such participation. (Interview with Chŏng Ryul).
Korea. Secondly, by quoting Kim II Sung, Ōm claimed support for his attack from the supreme authority. And thirdly, the line of argument, in spite of stylistic shortcomings, was chosen very cleverly: in the article Ōm tried to deprive Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn of their trump card. Representing the stylistic elaboration of their literature as vicious formalism and decadent naturalism, he singled out and vilified the qualities which won the works of Kim Nam-ch'ŏn and Yim Hwa both a popularity among the reading public and the respect of their colleagues. Their works were preferred to Han Sŏr-ya’s primitive writings because of their relative sophistication. But this sophistication was not to be considered a positive attribute anymore: from now on, it could be presented as a nasty sin, “formalism”.

The Soviet Korean faction immediately grasped the significance of the message and struck back with a sarcastic article by Ki Sŏk-pok, also published in Nodon Sinmun (28 February and 1 March 1952). Ki Sŏk-pok, a prominent Soviet-Korean journalist, did not enjoy the same reputation as members of Han’s machine, but he was sufficiently prominent to meet the challenge. The tone of Ki’s article was harsh and more personal. This member of the Soviet faction attacked his rival from the familiar position of his supposed ideological superiority as a “truer” bearer of the authentic Communist knowledge and experience. He stressed Ōm’s poor knowledge of the relevant terminology. According to Ki Sŏk-pok, Ōm misunderstood the difference between naturalism and realism. The most important thing in socialist realism, Ki stressed, was the writer’s duty to write about concrete reality in real terms and not invent it. This was a reference to the episode Ōm considered “naturalistic” in “Honey” – when the dying soldier is left by his comrade and becomes engulfed in his melancholic thoughts. Ki claims that in reality such episodes were inescapable during wartime.

Like his opponent, Ki Sŏk-pok tried to appeal to the supreme authority, Kim II Sung himself. Ki stated that Ōm also distorted the “true attitude” of Marshal Kim toward literary criticism and disobeyed his instructions. While Marshal Kim said that “criticism must encourage the writers, and guarantee good quality literature”, not destroy it, Ōm did just the contrary. Though he had the official right to look through literary works before they were published in order to correct them, Ōm did not do this; instead, he persecuted talented writers and abused them with an aggressive terminological barrage. All his accusations testify to the fact, Ki claimed, that he did not even read the works properly. Ōm’s intentions were vicious, Ki concluded, since he not only abused the individuals, but also tried to weaken Communist literature which was “bravely struggling with the enemy”. Ki Sŏk-pok supported his inventive with numerous examples of the Soviet practice and theory of literary matters.

The logic of Ki Sŏk-pok’s commentary differed little from Ōm Ho-sŏk’s own reasoning. Both articles have little to do with literature. Both authors attempt to slander each other by any means available, both appealed to the authorities for support, both accused their opponent of harbouring vicious anti-Party intentions and even disloyalty to the regime, etc.
This factional clash soon developed into a major discussion which is described in Yi Ch’oł-ju’s memoirs. According to his account, most of the contemporary writers supported the position of Ki Sŏk-pok, since all agreed that Ŭm had launched the attack in order to destroy his colleagues and further increase the power of the KAPF faction. The North Korean writers were very wary of the possible extrapolation of Ŭm Ho-sŏk’s tactics to other opponents of the ex-KAPF activists. “Of course, ‘Honey’ was not completely flawless. But most of the writers agreed that it was impossible to write in accordance with Ŭm Ho-sŏk’s unreasonable demands. Ŭm insinuated that by depicting the soldier who abandoned his wounded comrade, Kim Nam-ch’ŏn abused the lofty feeling of fighting comradeship. Of course, Ŭm was just flattering the Party. As for the accusation of the “excessively lyrical thoughts” before death or the “cheap sentimentalism” which, Ŭm claimed, the Communist protagonist should not allow himself, Yi Ch’oł-ju stressed that “it is just normal human psychology. Ki Sŏk-pok was completely correct when he affirmed that such episodes were unavoidable on the battlefield”. Yi Ch’oł-ju pinpointed the inner motives of Ŭm’s attacks: “What Ŭm wanted to say is that the protagonist on his very deathbed must glorify the Party and Kim Il Sung, not think about himself... In fact this statement is nothing but shameless flattery of the Party.”852 Yi Ch’oł-ju noted that the attack on Kim Nam-ch’ŏn had nothing to do with the objective search for truth: “If the wounded soldier had continued to fulfil his duty and died, Ŭm would probably blame Kim Nam-ch’ŏn for that outcome [as well].”853

With respect to the verses of Yim Hwa, Yi Ch’oł-ju admitted that he did not read all the poems from the anthology, only some parts of them. Yet Yi Ch’oł-ju was convinced that “Yim Hwa was an executive of the Communist Party and a distinguished writer who upheld the revolutionary tradition. There was no reason for him to write a reactionary poem... Besides, he himself, from time immemorial, had fervently opposed ‘pure lyrical’ poetry”. Ŭm’s accusations of the “unreality” or “non-typicality” of Yim’s maternal heroine whose son was on the frontier and who worried about him, Yi Ch’oł-ju dismissed as absurd.854

Ki Sŏk-pok’s prompt response, which was supported by most North Korean writers, temporarily cleared the atmosphere. The accused writers, instead of being suppressed, felt themselves the focus of everyone’s attention and, according to Yi Ch’oł-ju, “behaved quite confidently”.855 Han’s faction was forced to back off. For about a year the KAPF faction maintained a low profile, generally avoiding accusatory tones. In the article “Our literature in the period of the war for the liberation of the motherland” (“Choguk haebang chŏnjaeng sigi-ŭi uri munhak”) published in Inmin, Ŭm Ho Sŏk again cited Yim Hwa among other “patriotic poets”. In the article he failed

852 Yi Ch’oł-ju, Puk-ŭi yesurin, 92, 93.
853 Ibid., 92.
854 Ibid., 94.
855 Ibid., 95.
to mention any other political “offenders” in the North Korean literary world.\(^{856}\) Ki Sŏk-pok, as if he intended to encourage this change in Ôm Ho-sŏk, published a short article in the same Inmin magazine. The article had the almost identical title, “War for the liberation of the motherland and our literature” and expressed support for Ôm’s positive evaluation of Yim Hwa. Also, probably for the sake of balance, Ki Sŏk-pok praised some writers from Han Sor-ya’s faction such as Yi Puk-myŏng, Yi Ki-yŏng, Hong Sun-ch’ŏl, Song Yŏng and Han Sŏr-ya himself. However, in the article Ki Sŏk-pok focused on the recently deceased Cho Ki-ch’ŏn, who had belonged to the Soviet faction, apparently in order to represent him as a patriarch of North Korean literature.\(^{857}\)

The works of the other members of Han Sŏr-ya’s inner circle written in late 1952 and early 1953 demonstrated a similar lack of militancy. In an article published in Munhak yesul in June 1952, Han Hyo approvingly mentions Kim Nam-ch’ŏn and Yim Hwa as the exemplary representatives of progressive KAPF literature.\(^{858}\) In the collection of articles Ch’ôngnyŏndit-ŭl wihan munhakron [Literary Theory for the Youth] (1952) which included the works of the most distinguished of Han’s faction members – An Ham-gwang, Ôm Ho-sŏk and Han Hyo – we can find only a few vague references to naturalism (in fact to “the danger of naturalism”)\(^{859}\), or carefully worded notions about “the necessity to depict heroes dialectically”, not as solo heroes, as “our writers sometimes do”,\(^{860}\) or oblique sentiments about “some writers who do not pay enough attention to the connection of the hero with reality”\(^{861}\) etc. Yet all these ideas were presented in a very vague form, with neither the writers’ names nor their works openly referred to. What is noteworthy about Ôm Ho-sŏk’s article which was published in this work, is the excessively eulogistic terms which the author used to praise Yim Hwa. Unlike the work of his KAPF colleague Han Hyo (published in the same work) who merely made positive mention of Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn several times and referred to them as the founding fathers of the KAPF and “the most talented writers of our day.”\(^{862}\) Ôm Ho-sŏk brazenly adulated the very poet whom he had recently subjected to the most severe harangues. Ôm Ho-sŏk compares the “beautiful images” of Yim Hwa’s verses with that of Shakespeare, and describes Yim Hwa’s war poems in the most flattering terms: “These perfect verses depict the beautiful experiences of the

\(^{856}\) Ôm Ho-sŏk, “Choguk haebang chŏnjaeng sigi-ŭi uri munhak” [Our Literature in the Period of the War for the Liberation of the Motherland ], in Yi Sŏn-yŏng et al (eds), Hyŏndaemunhak pip’yŏng charyo chip (ibuksip’yŏn) 2, 185-208.

\(^{857}\) Ki Sŏk-pok, “Choguk haebang chŏnjaeng-kwa uri munhak” [War for the Liberation of the Motherland and Our Literature], in Yi Sŏn-yŏng et al (eds), Hyŏndaemunhak pip’yŏng charyo chip (ibaekp’yŏn) 2, 223-240.

\(^{858}\) Han Hyo, “Chosŏn munhwa-e issŏso sahoejuŭi reallijum-ŭi palsaeng chokŏn-kwa kŭ paljŏne issŏsŏŭi chet’ŭkching” [The Conditions for the Emergence of Socialist Realism in Korean Literature and the Characteristics of its Development], Munhak yesul, 1952, #6, 89.

\(^{859}\) An Ham-gwang, “Munhak-ŭi kinŭng-kwa ponjil”, 48-54.

\(^{860}\) Ôm Ho-sŏk, “Munhak chak’ŭm-ŭi hyŏngsanhwa-e tachayŏ”, 86, 90.

\(^{861}\) Han Hyo, “Sahoejuŭi reallijum-kwa chosŏn munhak,” 200.

\(^{862}\) Ibid., 170, 185,197.
poet... Despite the hatred a soldier feels towards the enemy, the protagonist is steady as a rock or iron and is unable to forget the villagers from his hometown, his mother and the years of his childhood. The wind inspires his song and his strong feelings... As well as Cho Ki-ch’ŏn, Yim Hwa recollects the past. But it is not Korea's past; it is his own past. His lyrical poem depicts the brilliant reality of life” etc. ⑧ It is hard to believe that the poem, described by Ōm in such a complimentary way, is the same “Carry, Wind” which had been subjected to Ōm’s scolding just a few months before!

Thus the situation appeared to ease considerably. Yet this relaxation was only temporary. Clear signs of new threatening clouds emerged in Ōm Ho-Sŏk's article, “New Traits in the Development of Literature” (“Munhak paljŏn-ŭi saeroun chingjo”) published in November 1952, where among other casual and oblique remarks, the scarecrow of “formalism” emerged again. This time Ōm included some other writers on his blacklist of “formalists” (in fact these were personalities close to Han Sŏr-ya – Pak Un-gŏl and Cho Pyŏk-am) but in general his critical statements were relatively polite. The article mentioned no Soviet Koreans or non-KAPF Southerners negatively. However, the re-opening of the discussion was a sign of things to come. Among other numerous “positive” examples, the article surprisingly failed to mention Yim Hwa; an ominous sign after all the compliments Ōm had lavished on him just a few months previously. Indeed, a change was in the air.

The new attack on Yim Hwa was prompted by a dramatic reversal of political fortunes in the upper reaches of the Pyongyang government. The major sponsors and protectors of Yim Hwa, the officials from the Domestic faction, were on the verge of a fall. According to Scalapino and Lee, in autumn 1952 Yim Hwa was the first Southerner to be arrested. He was soon followed by his friend Kim Nam-ch’ŏn. ⑧④ However, newly available archive materials which Dr. Andrei Lankov has generously granted me access to contradict this version. The record of a conversation between the First Secretary of the Soviet embassy in Pyongyang Vasjukevitch V.A. and the secretary of the Central Committee of the KWP Pak Ch’ang-ok on April 4, 1953 indirectly demonstrates that the actual arrests of the Southerners did not begin before the late winter or early spring of 1953. ⑧⑤ As I have already mentioned, Dr. Lankov explains this fact by the importance of the personal contacts between the Domestic faction and the South Korean Communist underground. These connections were of some importance during the ongoing war – but with peace in sight their importance had diminished. Herein lies the presumed reason for the relative neutrality of the article dated 15 September 1952 – in all probability, until that time Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn had not been arrested or officially accused. Brian Myers, quoting Scalapino and Lee, claims that “the immediate pretext for Yim’s arrest was his poem which included

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⑧ ⑤ Scalapino and Lee, Communist in Korea, 438.

⑧ ⑥ Beseda pervogo secretarja posol’stva SSSR v KNDR Vasiukevicha V.A. s sekretarem TsK TPK Pak Changokom. [ Record of the talk by the first secretary of the embassy of the USSR in DPRK V.A. Vasjukevich with the secretary of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers’ Party Pak Ch’ang-ok]. Now kept in the personal archive of Dr. Andrei Lankov.
the words: “forests were put to fire/ Houses were burned/If Stalin came to Korea/ there would not be a house in which to put him up for the night”. After that, as Scalapino and Lee state, “Kim Il Sung immediately had Yim Hwa arrested for “anti-Communist thoughts” 866 This version might be intriguing, but it is not particularly convincing. The above-cited poem, while probably involved in the process, can hardly serve as the only piece of “evidence”. It certainly does not justify the serious accusations which were levelled at the poet during the show trial of the Southerners in August 1953. These accusations included planning a coup, sabotaging the Communist movement in the South, co-operating with the Japanese police during the occupation and espionage on behalf of the United States. 867

The Fifth Plenum of the KWP Central Committee on 15 December 1952, where Kim Il Sung made a speech denouncing “anti-party elements” and “factionalists,” became a signal for the critics to intensify their attacks on those colleagues who had been associated with the doomed Southerners. Yet Han’s people had to be careful not to cross the line since Kim’s harangues – while obviously directed against the Domestic faction – did not mention particular names yet. Brian Myers, relying on Scalapino and Lee, claims that until February 1953 when Pak Hông-yông was arrested, both Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ôn “were referred to vaguely as ‘reactionary elements’” 868 in the critical works. According to Dr. Lankov’s archive materials, the timing is slightly different – in April 1953 Pak had been only dismissed from his high official positions of Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers, but not yet arrested.

The above-cited work of Han Hyo, “Korean Literature in Struggle With Naturalism” (“Chayónjuûi-rûl pandaehanûn t’ujaeng-e issôsôûi chosôn munhak”) which was serialized in Munhak yesul from January to April 1953, may indirectly indicate that the attack against the Domestic faction began in earnest around March 1953. This work, especially when read as one piece as it has been recently republished in South Korea in an anthology of North Korean critical materials 869, demonstrated a striking lack of integrity: its first and last parts are vastly different in approach to the same literary figures. In the part published in January 1953 Yim Hwa, along with the “correct” writers, is politely referred to as “comrade Yim Hwa” who is nonetheless accused of some “theoretical mistakes” 870, while the March and April issues of the same article were filled with fierce political accusations against “Yim Hwa” (no longer referred to as a “comrade”) and these accusations were expressed in the rudest forms imaginable. The content of these sections also strikingly contradicted the works which this same Han Hyo had written just one year before – the above-cited “Socialist

866 Scalapino and Lee, Communism in Korea, 438.
867 A. Lankov, From Stalin to Kim Il Sung, 95.
868 Brian Myers, Han Sôr-ya and North Korean Literature, 85.
870 Ibid., 419-420.
Realism and Korean Literature”,871 “The New Successes of Our Literature”872 and “The Conditions for the Emergence of Socialist Realism in Korean Literature and the Characteristics of Its Development”873. If in those works Han Hyo referred to Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ón as the founding fathers of the KAPF and the most distinguished contemporary writers in Korea, in 1953 he jumped to opposite conclusions. He compared Yim Hwa with the renegade KAPF members Kim Ki-jin and Pak Yong-huí who had openly denounced the KAPF before Liberation (the former was arrested during a brief Communist occupation of Seoul in 1950, received a death sentence but miraculously survived the execution). Referring to some pre-Liberation critical works of the writer, Han Hyo stated:

“Yim Hwa completely supported the reactionary anti-realist position of Kim Ki-jin and... took the course of revising socialist realism. This was a deliberate reactionary attempt to halt the progressive ideological course of KAPF literature, which served the needs of proletarian readers. Yim Hwa’s term “social” in the context of literature was in fact a reactionary façade, which covered his actual eagerness to disarm us in the face of the enemy. And we will not excuse this.”874

What indeed Han Hyo was “not going to excuse” (apart from the sorry political fate of Yim Hwa) was the dissatisfaction with the aesthetic quality of the KAPF writings that Yim Hwa openly expressed in his pre-Liberation critical articles. The poor artistic quality and low popularity of the overall KAPF output were widely accepted at the time by the KAPF members themselves – and seen as major problems.875 This predicament was also not for the first time since Liberation kept secret in Pyongyang. Take a look, for instance, at a phrase in the article which Han Hyo himself wrote in 1952: “Artistically this young KAPF literature was of extremely poor quality. Despite the high creative will of the writers, they failed to find the proper forms and style”.876 Nonetheless, in less than one year, Han Hyo began to deny vigorously the existence of the problem. In one of his old works Yim Hwa urged his colleagues not to repeat the mistakes of the RAPP, an early Soviet ultra-leftist literary organization, which was once dismissed by Stalin and was the Soviet prototype of the KAPF (the names of both organisations are similar – the Korean/Russian Association of Proletarian Writers), and not to indulge in pure ideology. In 1953 Han Hyo attacked these statements: “It is completely senseless to talk about any mistakes of the KAPF and its literature...If, as Yim Hwa claims, the KAPF allegedly made RAPP-like mistakes, how can he explain

871 Han Hyo, “Sahoejuŭi reallijūm-kwa chosŏn munhak”.
873 Han Hyo, “Chosŏn munhwae issŏso sahoejuŭi reallijūm-ŭi palsaeng chokŏn-kwa kŭ paljŏne issŏsŏ-ŭi che t’ŭkching”, Munhak yesul, 1952, #6, 89.
874 Han Hyo, “Chayŏnjuŭi-rŭl pandaehanŭn t’ujaeng-e issŏsŏ-ŭi chosŏn munhak”, 438.
875 Brian Myers, Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, 22.
876 Han Hyo, “Sahoejuŭi reallijūm-kwa chosŏn munhak”, 170.
the undeniable artistic success of the KAPF literature?" 877 According to the recollections of Chŏng Ryul, from about that time onwards the fact that initially the KAPF was supposed to be a Korean version of the RAPP (which, as North Korean writers widely knew was condemned as an “ultra-leftist group” in the USSR) began to be systematically downplayed in North Korea.

When in 1953 Kim Il Sung unleashed his attack on the rival Domestic faction, the KAPF faction, led by Kim’s dauntless supporter Han Sŏr-ya, used the opportunity to inflict a deadly blow on its rivals and position itself as the sole representative of the “true” proletarian spirit. Indeed, from 1953 the KAPF faction members began to be promoted by any and every means, including the most blatant falsifications. 878 However, Kim Il Sung, a prudent tactician, preferred to destroy his rivals one by one. While the crusade against the Domestic faction was launched in 1953, the time was not yet ripe for an offensive against another potentially dangerous group – the Soviet faction. As one might expect, the North Korean critics took this political situation into account and behaved accordingly: in an article written in January-April 1953 Han Hyo mentioned Ki Sŏk-pok, a Soviet Korean, in very positive terms – as a colleague in the righteous fight against the “reactionary writers of South Korea” who allegedly promoted “cosmopolitanism” as an “ideological weapon of the American aggressors” (“cosmopolitanism” was another meaningless but convenient label borrowed wholesale from the contemporary USSR). 879

Despite this praise of the Soviet Korean Ki Sŏk-pok, Kim Nam-ch’ŏn, whom Ki tried to defend, was doomed as a Southerner – and this had nothing to do with his aesthetic views or writing style. Han Hyo, unlike Ôm Ho-sŏk with his cautious remarks in early 1952, was much more talkative on the subject: “It seems as if the writer of this work observes our gigantic reality from some aloof position somewhere ‘high above’, but refuses to enter the world of the deep feelings of our people. It looks like he observes the reality through some mediating position, and in that way, through his subjective feelings he tries to reflect the images of the people in his literature”. This “anti-people”, “reactionary” position, this abominable “fear and hatred of reality”, Han Hyo stresses, had its beginning in the pre-Liberation reactionary tendencies of Kim Nam-ch’ŏn. 880 Yim Hwa was viciously wrong, Han Hyo proclaims, when he, describing the KAPF’s history, equated Kim Nam-ch’ŏn’s pre-Liberation work Big River (Taeha) with the works of the real heroes of the KAPF such as Han Sŏr-ya’s “Tower” (“T’ap”) and Yi Ki-yŏng’s Spring (Pom) (of course Han Sŏr-ya’s loving descriptions of the caring and fearless Japanese soldiers did not prevent the official critic from counting “Tower” among the beacons of revolutionary literature). 881 Han Hyo deftly managed to forget the fact that he himself, as well as another cog in “Han’s

877 Han Hyo, “Chayŏnujuĩ-rŭl pandaehanun t’ujaeng-e issŏsŏ-ui chosŏn munhak”, 442.
878 Interview with Chŏng Ryul.
879 Han Hyo, “Chayŏnujuĩ-rŭl pandaehanun t’ujaeng-e issŏsŏ-ui chosŏn munhak”, 504.
880 Ibid., 497-498.
881 Ibid., 467.
machine” Ōm Ho-sŏk, just one year previously had published exactly the same high estimations of Kim Nam-ch’ŏn’s work. As Brian Myers noted, “during the 1950s it became ritual to subject a purged man’s oeuvre, including the works that had hitherto enjoyed official praise, to this kind of categorical execration”. 882 What gave this ritual a macabre quality was that praise and execration was often pronounced by the same critic – and within the space of a year or two.

On the whole, as we can see, Han Hyo did not bother to support his “it looks/seems like” passages with any quotation from “Honey” or any of the other berated writings. Convincing evidence was not a matter of concern to him, unlike the modulation of his accusatory tone. Indeed, the modulation of his scorn towards his soon-to-be-purged colleagues virtually constituted the field of competition among the members of the KAPF faction – especially after Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn were prosecuted in August 1953. Borrowing Brian Myers expression, the “victory dance” 883 over Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn’s bodies began. Simultaneously, Yi T’ae-jun became the subject of critical attacks – as is discussed in a previous chapter.

One of the most vigorous “dancers” was Hong Sung-ch’ŏl, who is commonly referred to as a person whose extreme vulgarity and immorality set him apart even from the unscrupulous members of Han’s inner circle. 884 The arrest of Kim Nam-ch’ŏn left the position of secretary of the KFLA vacant (after the First Congress of Writers and Artists transformed itself into the Writers’ Union), and the intervention of its chairman Han Sŏr-ya granted this post to the unpopular figure of Hong Sung-ch’ŏl, Han’s obedient crony. 885

The fact that this person, known before Liberation as a Japanophile mining agent and who after Liberation emerged with declamatory verses glorifying the new regime, 886 makes his righteous diatribes against Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn especially interesting. Here are some quotations from one of his “critical materials”:

“Soon after Liberation Yim Hwa wrote the article ‘Conception of the National Literature’ in which he stated that ‘the remnants of feudalism and Japanese militarism’ tend to be the most important obstacle for contemporary Korean literature... The real meaning of this statement is clear. What Yim Hwa in fact wants is to destroy the socialist realist literature and to substitute it with bourgeois literature. The dirty traitor of the Korean people and nasty defector from the KAPF, Yim Hwa, understands that he cannot deserve the forgiveness of the Korean people and of the writers of the KAPF. So he just strives to oppose the literature which serves the people... He viciously denies

882 Brian Myers, Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, 109-110.
883 Ibid., 109.
884 Interview with Chŏng-Ryul; Yi Ch’ŏl-ju, Puk-ŭi yesurin, 184, Pak Nam-su, Chŏk-ch’i 6 nyŏn-ŭi pukhan mundan, 118-119.
885 Brian Myers, Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, 86.
886 Ibid., 86.
the tendency of realism in our literature and zealously works towards the distortion of the principle of socialist realism." 887

"Casting aside his last piece of human shame, in 1952 Yim Hwa published his false work "Korean literature" where he presented himself as the creator of Korean literature. He arrogantly tried to cover his sins of turning the KAPF over to the hands of the Japanese police and excuse his nasty behaviour. He estimated the role of the KAPF maliciously as low, he kills the tradition of socialist realism in Korean literature. 888"

"Kim Nam-ch'o'n is a spiteful traitor to the KAPF. His pre-Liberation works are all about the life of drunkards and kisaeng, they are all empty and full of moral degradation. His post-Liberation works are very few, but they are also nasty, because they paralyse the fighting will of the Korean people...In his 'Honey' Kim Nam-ch'o'n merely observes the fight of the Korean people with an air of aloofness, as if it was something distant and irrelevant. This work serves the interests of the American imperialists." 889

Hong’s more prominent colleagues were not slow to follow his lead. They not only invented more and more epithets for their fallen rivals, but also continued their search for new, brighter colours and similes to present the KAPF as the embodiment of every conceivable virtue – and of course, not caring a token about the plausibility of any of their statements. Take, for instance, a short quotation from Ôm Ho-sôk’s article “The question of the image of the working class and the theory of beauty” (1953) which contains at least three distortions of reality in one paragraph: “All the heroes of the KAPF writers are progressive workers... distinguished proletarian works such as Yi Gi-yông’s “Paper Factory”, Han Sôr-ya’s “Prime of Youth”... The KAPF writers did not destroy their brushes under the pressure of the Japanese” 890. The author was certainly unconcerned that any contemporary who was a witness to the KAPF era could point to the obvious inconsistencies in his claims such as: 1) there were practically no proletarian heroes in the works of the KAPF writers; most of their protagonists were intellectuals; 2) “Prime of Youth” was nothing but a harmless love story written in Han’s apostasy period; in 1937 Han even felt compelled to apologise before his readers for its “emptiness”; 3) the KAPF writers did not “destroy their brushes” – all of them with varying degrees of enthusiasm collaborated with the Japanese colonial authorities in the late 1930s and early 1940s. 891 Ôm’s statements about “villains” are equally false and heavily politicised:

"Before Liberation Kim Nam-ch'o'n, being armed with a reactionary ideology, embodied it in some dull, ordinary images which he tried to insinuate onto the Korean people. Animal instincts and bourgeois decadence, conscious hatred of the working class and their achievements were typical of his writings".

887 Hong Sun-ch’ôl, “Munhak-e issôsôi tangsông-kwa kyegeûpsông”, 86.
888 Ibid., 88.
889 Ibid., 92-93.
890 Ôm Ho-sôk, “Nodong kyegeûp-ûi hyôngsang-kwa mihaksang-ûi myôttkaji munjae”, 120.
891 Brian Myers, Han Sôr-ya and North Korean Literature, 20-25, 29.
“Yim Hwa wrote reactionary works that extolled the sadness and depicted the fight of the Korean working class as pointless”.

“It is not accidental that there is pessimism in the demeanor of Kim Nam-ch’ŏn and Yim Hwa. They just do not see the reason for optimism. Everyone knows that pessimism permeates all the writings of Yim Hwa, an American spy. It is even unnecessary to explain this. But the worst thing is that the pessimism of this insignificant whinger comes not from his nature - it is not the result of a melancholic mind or a part of his literary style. It is a part of his reactionary bourgeois ideas".892

These statements are amazing for the casual ease with which the author applies the terms “pessimism” or “decadence” to his doomed colleagues, while the same epithets were equally applicable to any Korean pre-Liberation writer, including the much praised “proletarian writers” Yi Ki-yŏng or Han Sŏr-ya. The falsity of the description of past events is also startling. This falsity should have been apparent to any contemporary North Korean writer or educated reader who had lived through the events themselves and were certain to remember that the allegedly “dull” pre-Liberation writings of Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏng had enjoyed a degree of popularity which far exceeded that of Han Sŏr-ya’s works. What is even more remarkable in Ôm’s work is the formulation of his critical comments. The hysterical, personally abusive expressions like “insignificant whinger”, “American spy”, “spiteful traitor”, “bourgeois decadent” or “animal instincts” which were applied to longstanding colleagues indicated that North Korean literary criticism had split with literature and the arts and had openly turned into an instrument of political punishment and witch-hunting.

Though in 1953 both writers were purged along with other members of theDomestic faction and disappeared from the cultural scene, the story did not end there. In 1955 the attacks on the disgraced Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn took another form. Now that Kim Il Sung could launch an open attack against the Soviet Koreans,893 the promoters of the anti-Soviet Korean campaign combined the figures of both writers into a colourful picture of large-scale conspiracy and treason which had allegedly engulfed the KWP and the innocent North Korean people.

Although Andrei Lankov argues that early signs of the impending attack on the Soviet Koreans can be traced to as early as 1954,894 Chŏng Ryul recalls the fact that the first assault on the Soviet Koreans in late 1955 came as a complete surprise. In all probability, the Soviet Koreans failed to notice the ominous signs of the campaign against their allies Yim Hwa, Yi T’ae-jun and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn, considering it to be a purely literary matter, somewhat akin to the attacks on Akhmatova and Zoschenko in the USSR in the late 1940s. In summer 1955, just before the purges began, Chŏng Ryul who was then one of the most prominent Soviet Korean writers and literary officials,

892 Ôm Ho-sŏk, “Nodong kyegŭp-ŭi hyŏngsang-kwa mihaksang-ŭi myŏttkaji munjac”, 122, 124.
894 Ibid., 47.
was sufficiently relaxed to undertake an entertaining trip to the USSR with a group of Korean artists, in order to participate in the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Liberation of Korea. During the Korean group’s performances he met with his Soviet friends, including Akhatova and Gitovitch, who at the time were both actively engaged in translating Korean poetry. Yet as soon as he returned to Pyongyang his boss, Hŏ Ch’ŏng-suk, the minister for culture and propaganda, warned him that “the Soviet Koreans got into real trouble”. Indeed, the troubles had begun. “As early as August, Kim Il Sung ordered the collection of information critical of the Soviet Korean unofficial leader, Pak Ch’ang-ok, the chairman of the State Planning Committee”. In late October 1955 Chŏng Ryul and a few other high-ranking Soviet Korean officials (Pak Ch’ang-ok, Chŏng Dong-hyŏk, Pak Yong-bin etc) were summoned to the personal office of Kim Il Sung no less, where all the members of the Politburo were gathered. There the first accusations were made. The formal charge sounded something like “the ill-intentioned propagation of South Korean literature and art, the vicious implantation of foreign artistic standards and agitation for the reactionary writers of the past”. In Chŏng Ryul’s words, this simply meant translation of Soviet literature into Korean, an activity in which Soviet Koreans were indeed active - along with the promotion of old Korean literature, such as Kim So-wŏl’s poetry.

Han Sŏr-ya became one of the most zealous prosecutors in the case. He accused the Soviet Koreans of being “too friendly with Yim Hwa, Yi T’a-e-jun and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn” while “despising the real proletarian (i.e. ex-KAPF) writers”. Han publicly recalled one episode which had allegedly occurred a few years earlier, when Chŏng Ryul refused to translate one of Han’s novels into Russian. Han ascribed the reluctance to Chŏng’s loathing of him and of the whole “truly revolutionary” literature of the KAPF. Chŏng Ryul tried to explain that, being a native speaker of Korean not Russian, he specialised in translation from Russian into Korean, not vice versa and that he never did Korean-Russian translations. However, his remarks were in vain – Han, who knew no foreign languages himself and scarcely understood the specifics of a translators’ work, never forgave Chŏng Ryul. The story repeated itself just a few months later with the chief editor of New Korea magazine (an overseas North Korean foreign-language propaganda monthly) Song Chin-p’a, who “was accused of being hostile towards Han Sŏr-ya, a writer, who was then the minister of education; allegedly, Song Chin-p’a had been reluctant to publish Han Sŏr-ya’s novel Taedonggang”. Notice again that none of the participants of either episode dared question the quality of Han Sŏr-ya’s works, or the suitability of his works for translation into foreign languages in order to represent North Korean literature abroad. Nobody asked why Russian translators of Han’s stories, being the most detached in this respect, found it necessary to “adapt” (actually rewrite) the works of Han Sŏr-ya before presenting them

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895 Ibid., 49.
896 Interview with Chŏng Ryul.
897 Andrei Lankov, “Kim Il Sung’s Campaign Against the Soviet Faction in Late 1955 and the Birth of Chuch’e”, 48. The transcription of Song Chin-p’a’s name has been corrected in accordance with an oral communication from Dr. Lankov.
to the Soviet readership.\textsuperscript{898} These questions were not matters of concern – the whole situation was discussed in terms of “friendliness”/“unfriendliness”. Once again, the literary politics had nothing to do with the quality of the literature itself.

During this October meeting, Kim Il Sung openly supported Han’s claims to supreme control over literary matters. He accused the Soviet Koreans of constantly interacting with Yim Hwa, Yi T’ae-jun and Kim Nam-ch’ön to the detriment of contacts with the members of Han Sŏr-ya’s group. Chŏng Ryul admitted his friendship with the doomed writers, saying that they, indeed, often met and talked about literature and the arts. At this juncture Kim Il Sung interrupted indignantly: “I ordered Pak Ch’ang-ok to support the KAPF writers, the real proletarians in our literature. Did he inform you about this Party decision?” Chŏng Ryul responded that he had heard of this opinion, but never perceived it as an order. As a result, in the final document drafted by the meeting, according to Chŏng Ryul, it was stated that “the Soviet Koreans, being guided by personal antipathy, viciously ignored the order of Kim Il Sung.”

This meeting lifted the remaining restrictions which limited Han Sŏr-ya’s attempts to establish complete personal domination over North Korean literature. In Chŏng Ryul’s estimation, “it was the point after which the most shameless public promotion of the KAPF was launched”.\textsuperscript{899} Indeed, the era of KAPF domination began in 1956 and lasted for the following seven or eight years – until the purge of Han Sŏr-ya led to a new re-writing of Korean literary history. Though the official campaign against the Soviet Korean officials was launched later, in December 1955,\textsuperscript{900} in the estimation of Chŏng Ryul late October 1955 became the moment when Han finally managed to annihilate all his rivals and achieve an unchallenged domination of North Korean literary politics.

From then on the Soviet Koreans were subjected to constant and increasingly humiliating public criticism. The most representative example of this situation was the famous speech which Kim Il Sung delivered on 28 December 1955 at the conference of KWP agitators and propagandists. In his speech the Great Leader berated the Soviet Koreans for their numerous “political mistakes”, and in particular for their alleged arrogant negligence towards the “truly Korean proletarian writers”. He stated: “When I asked Pak Ch’ang-ok and his adherents why they stood against the KAPF they answered that there had been traitors in the KAPF’s ranks. Does this mean that the KAPF, whose core constituted such brilliant writers as Han Sŏr-ya and Yi Ki-yŏng, was a senseless organisation? We must highly value these people’s accomplishments in struggle, we must allow them to play a major role in our literature”.\textsuperscript{901}

\textsuperscript{898} Brian Myers, \textit{Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature}, 70, 100.

\textsuperscript{899} Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

\textsuperscript{900} Andrei Lankov, “Kim Il Sung’s Campaign Against the Soviet Faction in Late 1955 and the Birth of Chu’ch’ŏ”, 49.

\textsuperscript{901} Kim Il Sung, \textit{Sasang saop-esô kyojofuül-wa hyŏngsikjuül-ül t’oejihogo chuł-e-rül hwangnip hal te taehayô}, 4-5.
Unlike Yi Ki-yŏng who, despite being frequently eulogized as a classic KAPF member, kept a low profile during this campaign, Han Sŏr-ya enthusiastically initiated the attacks against his now doomed rivals. He incorporated the names of Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn into a new picture of treason and subversion, which now came to include the Soviet Koreans as well. Han’s standing was boosted by the impressive image of a far-reaching web of treason whose encroachments Han and his loyal revolutionary fellows from the KAPF had bravely resisted.

We might look, for instance, how the situation was presented in one of Han Sŏr-ya’s speeches, published in Chosŏn munhak, 1956, #2:

“The purge of the treasonous clique does not mean an end to our ideological struggle. The problem is that there are people who have conspired with the reactionary bourgeois ideas of the accomplices of the clique of Pak Hŏn-yŏng and Yi Sŏng-yŏp, Yim Hwa, Kim Nam-ch’ŏn and Yi T’aech’ŏn. In the spheres of literature and art these people stood against the correct policy of our Party and were largely responsible for the situation whereby the venom of incorrect ideology, which was seeded by the clique of Yim Hwa and Yi T’aech’ŏn, was not eradicated completely.

The first example was Ho Ka-i (a top Party bureaucrat and leader of the Soviet Koreans until 1953 – T.G.), who promoted sectarian anti-Party activity and supported the clique of Yim Hwa in order to satisfy his craving for power and expand his influence on the ideological frontiers of literature and art. Then, after the death of Ho ka-i, it was comrades Pak Ch’ang-ok and Pak Yŏng-bin who did not enforce the essential Party line on the eradication of the evil influence of Ho ka-i and the clique of Pak Hŏng-yŏng and Yi Sŏng-yŏp, but instead continued Ho Ka-i’s strategy of sectarian bureaucraticism. The others were comrades Ki Sŏk-pok, Chŏn Tong-hyŏk and Chŏng Ryul, who caused enormous damage to the Party when instead of encouraging the Party’s policy in literature and the arts and on the propaganda front, supported bourgeois reactionary ideas. Those comrades ideologically conspired with Yim Hwa, Yi T’aech’ŏn and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn, undertook anti-Party actions, attacking writers who were truly loyal to the Party while encouraging Yim Hwa, Yi T’aech’ŏn and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn.”

At the same time, the speech also lavished generous praise on the KAPF.

For several months afterwards the image of a dangerous bunch of treasonous outsiders who strove to destroy the “truly progressive” literature was constantly invoked in the leading literary magazine Chosŏn munhak. In the March issue, 1956 they published an article, “The Reactionary Essence of Yi T’aech’ŏn’s Literature” where the purged Soviet Koreans were presented as the vicious supporters of the “reactionary

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902 Interview with Chŏng Ryul.

903 Han Sŏr-ya, ”Pyongyangsi tang kwanha munhak yesul sŏnjŏn ch’ulp’an pumun yŏlsŏngja hoeui-esŏ Han Sŏr-ya tongji-ŭi pogo” [The Speech of Comrade Han Sŏr-ya Given at a Meeting of Activists in the Spheres of Literature, the Arts, Propaganda and Publishing Under the Leadership of the Pyongyang Party Committee], Chosŏn munhak, 1956, #2, 201.
writer”.⁹⁰⁴ As a contrast, in the same issue the magazine published an article which extolled Han Sŏr-ya’s new novel Taedonggang.⁹⁰⁵ In April 1956, the same magazine published an article by Han Sŏr-ya under the revealing title “Our Literature and Arts Which Are Developing According to the Cultural Policy of Our Party”, where Han virtually repeated his accusations against the Soviet Koreans which he had made in the above-cited article printed in the February issue of Chosŏn munhak.⁹⁰⁶ In the May 1956 issue appeared an article by Yun Si-ch’ŏl, “The Poison of the Reactionary Literature That Slandered the Korean People (Based on the Post-Liberation Works of Kim Nam-ch’ŏn)” which was full of extremely harsh abuse of the writer as well as his alleged “accomplices”, the Soviet Koreans.⁹⁰⁷

Yet beginning from the June issue of Chosŏn munhak, all accusations of the Soviet Koreans in connection with the doomed writers suddenly ceased. Though “the victory dance” over Yim Hwa, Kim Nam-ch’ŏn and Yi T’ae-jun continued, the Soviet Koreans were temporarily excluded from the scene. As Andrei Lankov demonstrated in his book, around March 1956 for some political reason the ongoing anti-Soviet Korean campaign was cooled down, and the February issues of Nodong Sinmun in 1956 reflected this trend quite quickly.⁹⁰⁸ The literary magazine responded a little more slowly – presumably because it took more time to transform an accepted manuscript into printed text. Yet the unsuccessful coup attempt launched by the Soviet and Yan’an factions in August 1956⁹⁰⁹ saw a revival of this briefly abandoned campaign about treacherous activity instigated by outsiders against the “truly proletarian literature”. In 1957 this list of unmasked villains was supplemented by another member, Hong Sun-ch’ŏl, previously known as a close crony of Han Sŏr-ya and a long-term enemy of the Soviet Koreans. As we have already mentioned, Hong was extremely unpopular with his colleagues, mostly because of his extraordinary philandering and rudeness. Hong’s behaviour and abuse of power in his influential secretarial post in the Writers’ Union became a reason for his demotion and expulsion from the Writers’ Union in 1957.⁹¹⁰ Yet officially his case was tied to the doomed trio (Yim-Kim-Yi) and the Soviet Koreans. Han Sŏr-ya, striving to distance himself from the now compromising

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⁹⁰⁴ Œm Ho-sŏk, “Yi T’ae-jun-ŭi munhak-ŭi pandongjŏk chŏngch’e” [The Reactionary Essence of Yi T’ae-jun’s Literature], Chosŏn munhak , #3, 1956, 160-161.


⁹⁰⁷ Yun Si-ch’ŏl, “Inmin-ŭl pibanghan pandong munhak-ŭi tokso (Kim Nam-ch’ŏn 8.15 haebanghu chak’um-ŭl chungsim-ŭro)” [The Poison of the Reactionary Literature that Slandered the Korean People (Based on the Post-Liberation Works of Kim Nam-ch’ŏn)], Chosŏn munhak, 1956, #5, 142, 146.

⁹⁰⁸ Andrei Lankov, “Kim II Sung against the Soviet Faction”, 56.

⁹⁰⁹ Andrei Lankov, From Stalin to Kim II Sung, 154-193.

⁹¹⁰ Brian Myers, Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, 110-111.
connection with his supporter, in one of his speeches announced that Hong had only pretended to be a KAPF collaborator; in fact, he “prospered” under Soviet Korean patronage as a “typical reactionary, anti-Party element” who in co-operation with Yim Hwa, Yi T’ae-jun and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn propagated vicious bourgeois ideas.\textsuperscript{911}

These major events in the early history of North Korean literary criticism were reflected in other, more peripheral episodes, such as the critical attacks against Ch’oe Myōng-ik which occurred around the same time.\textsuperscript{912} The demagogic logic of the offensives against this respected writer differed little from the above-cited cases. This leads us to suspect that Ch’oe’s only fault was his close friendship with the doomed Yi T’ae-jun.\textsuperscript{913} In any case, Ch’oe was relatively lucky. To my knowledge he was not purged, although he disappeared from the literary scene in the 1960s.

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The political campaigns of the 1950s vividly demonstrated that the actual essence of the North Korean critics’ activity was not the examination of the works of a particular writer but rather the announcement of the position of officials in regard to him or her. One should not take at face value any of their critical estimations. Quite often the same critic produced diametrically opposite evaluations of the same work within the space of one or two years. A work lauded now could be subjected to the most humiliating criticism a few years later if the political fortunes of its author began to wane. In most cases political fortunes were determined not even by the conflicts within the literary bureaucracy but by clashes within the North Korean power structure. The purge of the South Korean (or “Domestic”) faction in 1952-1953 meant the downfall of writers associated with it. The purge of the Soviet Korean bureaucrats led to the expulsion of the Soviet Korean writers from the officially approved North Korean literature. In all these cases, the critics acted not as judges but as executioners who carried out pre-determined sentences.

This pattern proved to be self-reproducing. There is some irony in the fact that the mighty Han Sŏr-ya, the initiator of many purges and whose top position at first seemed unshakable, eventually fell victim to a similar campaign. In 1962 it was his turn to be accused of “traditionalism” and “liberalism” and subsequently purged. Though Han’s demotion was probably welcomed by many of his colleagues, this purge, like the above-mentioned campaign against Hong Sun-ch’ŏl, was anything but a triumph of justice. Just like the cases of Yim Hwa and Kim Nam-ch’ŏn, the campaign against Han Sŏr-ya in 1962 did not result from any objective critical assessment of his literary (or even ideological) deficiencies, but was an outcome of successful manipulations arranged by Han’s long-term rival Kim Ch’ang-man (who in turn was also eventually purged in the mid-1960s). It was conducted much in the same vein as the campaigns

\textsuperscript{911} Han Sŏr-ya, “Uri munhak-ŭi saeroun ch’angjakchŏk angyang-ŭl wihayŏ” [For a New Raise in Creativity of Our Literature], Chosŏn munhak, 1957, #12, 17-19.

\textsuperscript{912} Look, for instance, at the article by Kim Myŏng-su, “Purŭjoa ideorogiŏk chanjae-waŭi t’ujaeng-ŭl wihayŏ” [For the Fight With the Remnants of Bourgeois Ideology], in Munhak chihyang, 45-55.

\textsuperscript{913} Interview with Chŏng Ryul.
which Han himself waged against his enemies: with outbursts of rude rhetoric and the wide use of essentially meaningless pseudo-political labels (the above-mentioned "traditionalism" and "liberalism" being the most prominent). Once again it was not literature which was at stake but a lucrative place in the official bureaucracy — and the ability to control one's colleagues.

Yet, in general in the 1960s the noisy political campaigns in the North Korean literary world began to wane. This was a reflection of the general political situation in the country, which became quite stable after Kim Il Sung had destroyed his rivals one by one and won absolute political superiority. As a logical result of the end of the faction-based system in politics, the factions in the literary world disappeared as well. To make the North Korean literary world even more evenhanded, in the 1960s top DPRK's politicians strongly encouraged so-called "collective authorship", a system according to which all literary writings were claimed to be products of some unnamed "creative collectives" with no individual writer's name being attached to work. The new situation presupposed neither personal fame nor a public fall from grace for a particular author. All the conflicts in the North Korean literary world, if there were any, were henceforth to be hidden from public view. Under these circumstances, North Korean critics as attested watchdogs of factional interests and public executioners of political rivals, also lost their significance.
Conclusion: “Soldiers on the Ideological Front” Vs. “Engineers of the Human Soul”

From its inception, North Korean literature demonstrated not only obvious similarities with its acknowledged Soviet prototype but also a number of particular traits which set it apart from the practice and traditions accepted in the Soviet Union. Let us summarize these commonalities and specifics of North Korean literature in comparison with its Soviet prototype.

At the time of the inception of the Communist regime in North Korea, Korea had no established Communist intellectual tradition. Though the colonial period was marked by the emergence of leftist rhetoric in Korean literature and the arts, even the leftist Korean intellectuals could scarcely be defined as thoroughly Communist. The writings of supposedly “proletarian” Korean writers mostly reflected the general social concerns of contemporary Korean literature: anti-modernist, anti-urban lamentations over the “lost paradise” of the traditional rural way of life and, at the same time, over the backwardness of the country, disappointment about the alleged moral degradation of Korean society, grief about the powerlessness of sensitive intellectuals etc. As we have seen from the examples of Yi Ki-yōng and Yi T’ae-jun who are normally perceived as typical representatives of formally opposite camps in the North Korean intellectual world, a “proletarian writer” and a “purist” respectively, the commonalities in their pre-Liberation writings were more obvious than differences. It is notable that the formal adherence to the radical program of the KAPF barely changed the values of Yi Ki-yōng who, despite announcing himself a “proletarian writer”, largely remained a “peasant writer”, predisposed to traditionalist sentiment and a gross idealization of pre-modern rural life.

It is also important that in the late 1930s and early 1940s practically every Korean writer of significance was somehow involved in collaboration with the colonial power and the self-proclaimed “proletarian writers” of the KAPF were no exception. This organization proved to be too weak to challenge the pressures of the colonial regime.

Thus the pre-Liberation Korean literary world had neither a comprehensive canon of leftist beliefs nor the experience of acting in accordance with the steady program of an influential political organization. Under these circumstances it was only logical that the new-born North Korean Communist regime, in order to create its own “engineers of the human soul”, decided to “learn from the Soviets” and adopted the theory and practice of Soviet “socialist realism” as a political and artistic strategy. The Soviets, pursuing their own political objectives, eagerly provided support and practical guidance to their “younger brothers in socialism”. Through various channels of influence and especially via orchestrated excursions, large-scale translations of Soviet literature and the activity of Soviet Koreans as living carriers of Soviet values, the Stalinist principles of “socialist realism” permeated the North Korean literary and political world. The Soviet Stalinist model prescribed, first of all, the mode of behavior of an officially recognized writer, presented the forms of official control over intellectuals and promoted some artistic images and sets of social idylls which corresponded with the general propagandistic idea of a “socialist paradise”.

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The Soviet-modeled “socialist realist” way of arranging literature and the arts was successfully introduced to the DPRK in 1945-1950. The Soviet clichés, artistic images and “socialist paradise” idylls were quickly absorbed into the North Korean discourse and adjusted, with some alterations, to the cultural traditions and perspectives of North Korea. This impact proved to be a lasting one. Even the eventual deterioration of Pyongyang’s relations with Moscow from the late 1950s failed to eradicate these visions from North Korean culture. Probably the only initial political pattern which did not survive the process was the ritualistic presentation of the Soviet Union as a leader of the Communist world and the portrayal of Moscow-Pyongyang relations according to the “teacher/apprentice” model. Instead, after the early 1960s it was replaced by an ethnocentric picture in which North Korea appeared as the sole exemplar to be emulated by an admiring world.

The North Korean literary world also incorporated the Soviet methods of strict control over intellectuals and evolved its own additional techniques: distribution of obligatory topics, implementation of “production plans”, mandatory tours of the writers to industrial sites, “brigade methods” in creative writings, etc. With the help of these methods, the North Korean literary cadre was successfully transformed into yet another example of literary “engineers of the human soul” or, for that matter, “soldiers on the cultural front”, with all the relevant ramifications of this phenomenon. In recent decades there have been a number of attempts to present some victims of the North Korean literary struggle as hidden dissenters who tried to challenge the official political line. Such an approach might be tempting, but our research does not support it. The degree of ideological dissent in the North Korean literary world was close to zero, and from its inception North Korean literature appeared to be remarkably homogeneous in terms of ideological/Party loyalties. If we look at the post-Liberation experiences of the three authors analyzed above who belonged to rival political factions of the North Korean literary world (Cho Ki-ch’ŏn (Soviet Korean), Yi Ki-yŏng (the KAPF), Yi T’ae-jun (Domestic)), it is difficult for us to find in them any ideological variance whatsoever. All these writers eagerly responded to the contemporary Party demands be it eulogizing the land reform or vilifying the “American imperialists”, took pride in their newly established utilitarian role of educating the people in Party spirit and enjoyed material affluence corresponding to their high social status.

Thus, for all practical purposes, we may say that the basic social function of the newly born North Korean literature did not differ much from its prototype, the Soviet literature of Stalin’s “socialist realism” era. Yet, the literary politics in the DPRK and the USSR revealed some profound disparities, which were rooted in the different political situations and traditions in each country.

Considering the specifics of the North Korean literary world, Brian Myers perceptively referred to a “patrimonial functioning of cultural apparatus” in the DPRK as a part of the general patrimonial bureaucratic tradition where “the first loyalty is to the boss, not to official ideology”. A miscalculation of this factor could lead to serious complications for an intellectual involved in creative writing. Yi Ki-yŏng, who

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914 Brian Myers, Han Sŏr-ya and North Korean Literature, 151-152.
took at face value the official demand "to extirpate the feudal concept" from liberated Korean society, tried to apply this to the gender issues in *Land*, but failed: the tenets of the official ideology came into contradiction with the more traditionalist vision of the Great Leader. Needless to say, Kim II Sung's approach prevailed, and this turn of events led to the rewriting of the novel in a more patriarchal and ethnocentric spirit.

The patrimonial approach to cultural politics in the DPRK was seriously complicated by factionalism, also a part of the long-term political tradition of Korea. Under the patrimonial conditions prevailing in the DPRK literary world, an intellectual not just had to follow the orders of his or her superior, but had to choose such a person carefully – not an easy task in an era of political turmoil when a number of rival factions struggled for power. Very often the orders and approaches advocated by various persons of authority contradicted each other, and these contradictions reflected not their different visions of literary politics, but primarily, their factional or personal considerations. The roots of this struggle seldom if ever lay in the literary sphere *per se*, since conflicts in this area usually reflected the more general competition and ongoing power struggle in the world of Party politics. In the uneasy and ever-changing situation of the late 1940s and early 1950s, even the shrewdest officials occasionally miscalculated. Thus the critic An Ham-gwang in 1948 found himself in a dangerous situation when he followed the orders of his ex-KAPF faction superior and tried to eliminate the Soviet Korean Cho Ki-ch'ŏn from the North Korean literary scene by criticizing his poem *Paektusan*. This action clashed with the interests of Kim II Sung who was charmed by *Paektusan* 's brazen personal eulogies of himself and did not want to jeopardize the still vital relations with his Soviet patrons.

The third North Korean peculiarity was the special role of the literary critics. Their role was completely transmogrified from their initial function as literary analysts into the role of "political executioners". Rather than considering the literary and/or ideological qualities of particular works, the North Korean critics eulogized or vilified them according to changes in the political fortunes of the country's officialdom. These allegedly "critical articles" normally emerged in clusters mirroring each other: the appearance of one abusive work was usually a sign that a wide defamation campaign would be launched against a particular writer who was singled out due to his factional affiliations.

In the present dissertation we have seen how these factors influenced the situation in North Korean literature, giving rise to a number of negative features: lack of objectivity as well as high arbitrariness and double-standard evaluations of literary writings. Despite the fact that there were no ideological deviations whatsoever in the post-Liberation works of Yim Hwa, Yi T'a-e-jun and Kim Nam-ch'ŏn, these writings were condemned as "reactionary". The official criticism singled out certain trends in the pre-Liberation works of these authors (the passive suffering of heroes, grief, melancholic moods, etc). While these traits were indeed present in the earlier works of the accused writers, they were also common features of the Korean literature of the colonial era. The same features were common in works of such widely praised "pillars of socialist realism" as Han Sŏr-ya and Yi Ki-yŏng, but for these two literary dignitaries these trends were either ignored or even praised as positive signs of their
anti-Japanese disposition. In the case of the “unlucky trio” meanwhile, these same traits were treated as signs of their immanent “bourgeois” and “reactionary” inclinations. The unlucky writers were castigated because they were associated with the losing side of the factional conflict (Soviet Koreans or Domestic Communists).

The evaluations of the artistic quality of a particular literary piece were permeated with similar double standards. The artistic credentials of Yim Hwa and Yi T’ae-jun’s writings were self-evident, as evidenced by their genuine popularity among both the reading public and literary circles in the pre-Liberation period. But these achievements were either ignored or brazenly denied by their “political executioners”. At the same time, the unpolished works of KAPF writers, which enjoyed no popularity whatsoever, were extolled as literary masterpieces.

Thus, neither ideological appropriateness nor artistic quality in a particular literary piece served as significant criteria when a piece was evaluated by the North Korean literary critics. Instead, the political standing of its author or his/her closeness to the “correct” group or person in authority became the matter of primary concern.

For our purposes it will be useful to compare the North Korean peculiarities with the state of affairs in Stalin’s USSR. Though the situation in Stalinist Soviet literature was also far from relaxed, it appears that it was ruled by more objective, or, at least, by more predictable dictums. This was a reflection of the different political situation in the USSR and, paradoxically, of the more active involvement of the Soviet dictator in artistic matters.

It is a well-known fact that in Stalin’s USSR, literature was under the control and patronage of the Soviet “Great Leader”. Stalin was greatly inspired by the model of Tsarist Russia and in literary matters he often followed the old pattern of the tsar who acted as the “supreme censor” – to the extent that he, like the Russian tsar Nicholas I, often took pains to analyze personally some literary works and offered technical advice to the authors.\textsuperscript{915} In addition to these political considerations there may have been personal reasons for this involvement: Stalin, a promising poet in his youth, enjoyed high-quality literature and arts. Kim Il Sung, on the contrary, showed no personal interest in literature and was never known as an avid reader.

Stalin’s guidance in literary matters, however, could hardly be defined as patrimonial. The Soviet “father of socialist realism” established a set of taboos and norms for Soviet authors. The norms could change according to the political situation,\textsuperscript{916} but in general these prescriptions were commonly known and usually

\textsuperscript{915} For accounts of Stalin’s involvement in literary matters see the memoirs of D. Babichenko, Pisateli i tsenzory. Sovetskaia literatura 1940 godov pod politicheskim kontrolom ZK [Writers and Censors. Soviet Literature of the 1940s Under the Political Control of the Central Committee], Moscow: Rossia molodaia, 1994; I. Erenburg, Ludi, gody, zhizn’ [People, Years and Life], Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1961; K. Simonov, Glastami cheloveka moego pokoleniia; or E. Bulgakova, Dnevnik Eleny Bulgakovoi [Diary of Elena Bulgakova], Moscow: Knizhnaja palata, 1990.

\textsuperscript{916} Take for example the following typical comment by Stalin regarding two poems of Bezymenskyi: “There is nothing petty-bourgeois or anti-Party in these poems. Both poems may
predictable. A violator would be immediately spotted, punished and/or forced to correct his “mistakes”, no matter what position he/she held in the official hierarchy at the time. Even the most established Soviet writers such as Erenburg, Fadeev or Sholokhov at various times were forced to “improve” their works which were deemed to deviate from the established set of requirements. Neither personal considerations nor other secondary preferences played a major role in the evaluation of a particular author. The political campaigns against intellectuals in Stalinist USSR were aimed mainly at unorthodox literary writings whose authors somehow dissented from the common ideological norms or prescriptions, the critical campaign against Zoschenko and Akhmatova in 1946 being quite typical in this regard.

Stalin often demonstrated exemplary objectivity while judging writers and his personal sympathies to a particular intellectual were hardly relevant when it came to value a piece of literature. No matter how he personally disliked D. Bednyi, he supported the poet as “necessary” until the moment his works started to contradict the resurrected “Russian idea” of Stalinist literature and the arts.917 On the other hand, Stalin could sympathize with Mikhail Bulgakov, but it did not help the publication of the works of this writer whose activity was too obviously incongruent with the ideological norms of the time. Unlike the DPRK literary world where ideological considerations faded before the caprice of a superior, the situation in the Soviet literature and arts was perhaps fairer. In the USSR it is hard to imagine a situation such as the “Ünhyang incident”, where all the writings in the ill-fated anthology were equally scolded, despite the obvious differences in their ideological messages and artistic imagery – just in order to pursue a certain political goal. Thus the functioning of the Soviet cultural management could hardly be called patrimonial: the rules were meant to be mandatory for everybody.

Unlike the situation in the DPRK, in the USSR the attacks on politically deviant intellectuals were seldom driven by factional considerations. Factionalism in literary affairs barely existed, and all attempts to create coalitions inside the Soviet Writers’ Union were spotted and promptly suppressed by Stalin or his trusted lieutenants.918 As far as we can judge, the situation in China was similar to the Soviet one – D.E. Pollard for instance identified a set of particular common taboos in Chinese literature of the Cultural Revolution period.919

The literary critics in the USSR were less prominent, with their activities mainly confined to their professional function as literary analysts. Soviet literary critics maintained a low profile in purely political matters – in some estimations even too

be viewed as exemplary pieces of proletarian art for the present moment [TG’s emphasis] (Quoted in E. Gromov, Stalin: Vlast’ i iskusstvo, 78).


918 E. Gromov, Stalin: vlast’ i iskusstvo, 104, 146-159.

Stalin, who kept vigilant personal control over literary matters in the Soviet Union, did not trust intellectuals enough to let them interfere in the substantial matter of ideological control. The purges and defamation campaigns against dissenting artists in Soviet Russia were initiated exclusively by the Party leaders and conducted by representatives of the Party’s Central Committee, such as Zhdanov, or through anonymous editorials in the Party organ Pravda and public speeches by Party officials. The notorious campaign against Akhmatova and Zoschenko can be cited as a typical example. Literary critics played no greater part in the campaign than other “representatives of the indignant masses” – workers, peasants or intellectuals, who signed “letters of protest” written by Party committees or delivered speeches at pre-arranged political meetings. The critics in the USSR merely supported the accusations which were initially levelled by members of the Party bureaucracy, while in North Korea critical publications usually signalled the beginning of purges.

Indeed, on the rare occasions when Soviet literary critics tried to assume more influence over literary politics, they were stopped. The initiative in this area belonged to the party bureaucracy alone, and the Party machinery ensured that nobody would arrogate its rights. As a typical example one might cite the fates of two notorious literary organisations: Proletcult (Proletarian Culture) and RAPP (the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) which launched a number of witch-hunts in the 1920s. Among their victims were the best Russian writers of the era including V. Mayakovskii, S. Esenin, and M. Bulgakov. Yet these organisations were widely perceived as extremist and had neither monopoly of judgment nor the unconditional support of the Party’s leadership. Though the RAPP leaders tried to present themselves as full representatives of the Party and emphasized their closeness to the Soviet nomenclature, they were never officially recognized in that capacity. The attempts of these radical groups to usurp supreme power in the literary world and even challenge the Party’s authority proved to be short-lived. Both organisations were eventually disbanded by the Communist authorities (Proletcult in the mid-1920s and RAPP in 1932) and then the Party bureaucracy established its supreme control over literary matters in Russia.

So, if we compare the Soviet “engineers of the human soul” with the North Korean “soldiers on the cultural front” we will notice significant differences in the way their activities were conducted. The creative activity of the “engineers” was, indeed, seriously restricted by ideological regulations and aesthetic taboos. Yet, these

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920 See the resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Soviet Communist Party of Bolsheviks (VKPb) of 1940, “About Literary Critique and Bibliography” which states that “nowadays literary criticism does not influence enough the development of Soviet literature” (O partiinoi i sovetskoi pechati [About Party and Soviet press], Moscow: Pravda, 1954, 488).

921 E. Gromov, Stalin: vlast’ i iskusstvo, 308.

922 Ibid., 146, 308, 313.

923 Rezolutsiya TsK VKP (b) “O perestroike literaturno hudozhestvennykh organizatsii” [Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks “About the reconstruction of literary and artistic organizations”], Pravda, 1932, 24 April:1.
regulations were mostly self-evident and predictable, and some free space was left for a writer to express himself/herself. In comparison, the activity of the "soldiers" was subjected primarily not to common restrictions but to the chaotic whim of the political situation which could in an instant alter the status of a particular work or the fate of a writer.

An unfortunate consequence of this political situation was the steep decline in quality of North Korean literature, since North Korean writers had to concentrate more on factional relationships and jockeying for official positions rather than on their professional performances - under the circumstances quite an understandable strategy. It could also be suggested that many writers may have become reluctant to sharpen their literary abilities or demonstrate any special talents for fear of rising above the mediocre - and in particular rising above the level of Han Sŏr-ya whose position as living classic and omnipotent literary boss had been cemented by the campaigns of 1953-1956.

North Korean writers may even have found artistic refinements to be somehow incompatible with the necessity to propagate the constricted Party line. Indeed, any excessive "decorating of the knife's handle" could turn into a dangerous pastime when a writer became involved in any propagandistic activities in a Stalinist society. As an American scholar of Chinese literature T.A. Hsia pointed out, even if a writer remains a sincere devotee of the Communist ideology, his dedication to art inevitably leads him astray from the strict ideological instructions. Analyzing the cases of the remarkable Chinese Communist novelists Chou Li-po, Wu Ch’iang, Yang Mo and others, whose works, much like Sholokhov’s, though intended to be propagandistic also had many other, sometimes anti-Communist layers. Hsia made the following perceptive remark:

"When a writer persists in reducing his personal study of life to words he is deviating from ideology... His narration which, by the force of political reality, has to satisfy the demands of ideology, but which, owing to his own ambition, has now also to satisfy the demands of art, will eventually burst out of the bounds of the formula within which he would otherwise live happily. He has swallowed a monster, which is art. His book will be kicking with the life beyond the control of ideology." 924

Established North Korean writers might instinctively feel this danger, and the unique political environment in their literary arena strongly discouraged them to "swallow a monster which is art". So, they preferred to produce writings of dull images, stereotyped storylines and lifeless language, but live happily ever after. The near complete absence of reader attention to these writings in South Korea, despite the leftist sympathies of young South Korean intellectuals, is obvious proof of this literature’s artistic deficiency.

However an important caveat is necessary here: I would like to stress that all of the above is applicable only to the official literature. We have no information about underground literature, which in some forms possibly exists in North Korea despite the

rigid control. As for the fate of North Korean culture as a whole, we should mention that the remarkable drop in the quality of officially recognized writing did not irreversibly desolate the North Korean cultural soil. Among other invigorating cultural sources one may mention the translated works of Russian, Western and Chinese literature, which though prohibited in the mid-1960s, have since the early 1980s begun to appear again in DPRK bookshops. Meanwhile pre-modern Korean literature, which has remained at least partially available throughout DPRK history, has also been a great source of education, entertainment and even hope to the longsuffering North Korean reader.
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